
'this is what I want for myself and for my people'

Common ground

Power

Lankelly Chase

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Who we are

‘...and so we would create a stronger, better, more equal, caring, simple, loving, warm kind of humanity’.

Lankelly Chase is providing resources to support the wisdom and capability of local people as they collaborate to change the ‘way things are done’ in five places around England so that they are more equitable, inclusive and just. When we say ‘we’ in this paper, we mean the loose community of changemakers involved in this work.

We’re not focused on predetermined outcomes but on changing the conditions in the places - the written and unwritten rules, the prevailing mindsets and the assumptions about what happens and why. We want to change how people and organisations relate to each other, who gets to make decisions, on what terms and with what evidence.

We use the ‘System Behaviours’, co-created by hundreds of people, as a guide to what better, healthier ways of doing things might look like (and to guide our actions in the day to day).

They’re not set in stone but this is what they say about Power and for now, this is what we are aiming at:

Power is shared, and equality of voice actively promoted

We can all play our fullest role in creating an effective system. Unequal distribution of power, including structural inequality, is continually challenged.

Decision-making is devolved

People closest to a complex situation are free to use their initiative to engage and take responsibility for their own change.

Accountability is mutual

People are encouraged to be accountable to each other and our actions without fear of failure and judgement. (System improvements are driven by accountability to the people being ‘served’).



We are united by a concern about the harms and pressures being heaped on those already subject to marginalisation. We share a broad vision of thriving places that work for everyone.’

This paper explains more about what power means to us, what we think needs to change and some stories about how we are approaching that change work in practice.

Our academic learning partner, Northumbria University, provides a commentary on what they are seeing, whether positive change is emerging and the implications of different practices and approaches.

Readers should not expect a neat and unified view – we are different people taking different approaches and we have different starting points and perspectives. We see this as a strength. Nevertheless, there is coherence to this work. We are united by a concern about the harms and pressures being heaped on those already subject to marginalisation. We share a broad vision of thriving places that work for everyone.

We also do not have all the answers and our view is inevitably limited and partial. However, we do feel we have important learning to share. More than anything we want to encourage others, resource holders and local people, to try different ways of doing things.



Intro duction

**/ what power
means to us**

**Greater Manchester Systems Changers
Paul Connery, Karen Crompton,
Afshan D'souza-Lodhi, Carrina Gaffney,
Matt Kidd, Rose Ssali**

Place-based systems change can feel like you're untangling a knotted ball of wool. You start tugging on a thread without really knowing how it will unravel if it unravels at all. There are moments when the ball of wool is so knotted that it feels like it might have actually got even more tangled, but then the knot gives, and the ball unravels a bit more. Or at least, that's what it often feels like being part of the Greater Manchester Systems Changers core team.

We are all involved in different work in GM and elsewhere to unravel and untangle the binding knot of oppressive systems, which are, at their worst, old-fashioned, white-male, patriarchal and hierarchical. Our role when we come together as the core team is to pay constant attention to who might be questioning and dismantling systems perpetuating disadvantage and who is looking to heal, reimagine and renew systems so that all people can live with dignity and opportunity in supportive communities. Where and how is this happening? How can we get behind them? How can we best use Lankelly's resources to support this?

Power is crucial to unpacking how unhealthy systems can become healthier. Who has it, who doesn't? Who wants it, who doesn't? Is the intention to have power over or power with? What are the intended and unintended consequences of power poorly or well utilised? These are just some of the questions we reflect on regularly.



Place-based systems change can feel like you're untangling a knotted ball of wool.

People who find themselves in more 'senior' positions have the most power in traditional systems. Yet they are often the least affected by the decisions they make. Too often we see the people who are most affected being brought in to rubber-stamp decisions around resources that have already been made. Instead, we need to ensure that the people most affected by decisions (i.e. people in communities) are central to the decision-making.

For us, place-based systems change means this - ensuring people who have been marginalised are at the heart of the work, that they have agency and can dictate the terms of their own involvement. As a local core team stewarding foundation resources, this means we have to constantly think about who is not in the room and who we might have missed. No one should be excluded, even if it is unintentional. It is important that we are in place only temporarily as decision makers ourselves, we don't want power to solidify around us.

We must also be flexible. As we connect with new people and multiple perspectives, we need to spot unhealthy power dynamics, listen to doubts and concerns and adjust our course accordingly. We need to be open-hearted and listen to criticism without feeling fragile or blaming and without feeling undermined. This is what makes this work messy, unpredictable and sometimes hard. In fact, we are often surprised at how uncomfortable this work can feel. Not everyone wants to give up power, and many people don't want things to change as they have a lot invested in the status quo. Sometimes it just seems too difficult to imagine how to transition to a more just and equitable system. Things have been this way for a long time, and sometimes people - including us - get stuck. When people feel unsure and uncertain, they revert back to type, and it is easy for a system to snap back on itself. In this way, a complex system continues as it always has done. Part of our work then becomes about supporting people to understand the power dynamics at play and helping them break unhealthy cycles.



More and more people recognise that the traditional system is broken, and that it needs to change radically.



Not everyone wants to give up power, and many people don't want things to change as they have a lot invested in the status quo. Sometimes it just seems too difficult to imagine how to transition to a more just and equitable system. Things have been this way for a long time, and sometimes people - including us - get stuck.

We recently did some work with local policymakers who felt stuck within the system. They found it hard to be creative, let alone to feel like they had the power to do something different. This is what traditional systems do, and it makes people frustrated. The system itself is the problem. Even without input, it will keep on motorising on. Flipping the power imbalance creates the conditions for something new to emerge.

Despite all of these challenges, it does feel like more and more people recognise that the traditional system is broken, and that it needs to change radically. This gives us hope. People are coming together to work out what to do differently and even admitting that they don't know what to do.

Changing where power sits is critical to all the work we do. We haven't got all the answers, we're learning as we go along. We hope you can join us on this journey.

Stories from our work



If you are considering how to approach work to change the way things are done in your area or context, you might find these stories and insights from members of our community useful.


Though we have put the spotlight on particular initiatives, they are each part of wider networks of interconnected local action.




Greater Manchester Narratives Lab

Felipe Viveros,
Culture Hack Labs
and Conrad Bower,
The Meteor

 **Where:**
Greater Manchester

 **What:**
Work to collectively identify the narratives in GM that we most wanted to shift and to find creative ways to reframe them.

 **Who:**
15 local activists, Culture Hack Labs, The Meteor, Whose Knowledge?

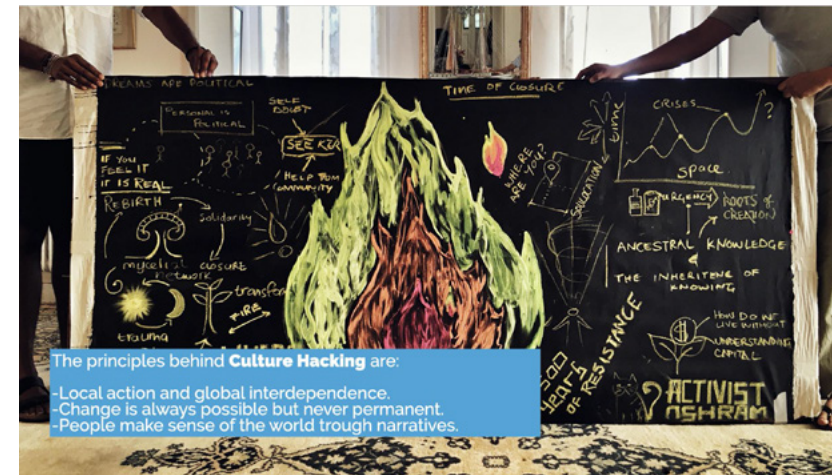


Narrative work is essentially about shifting power dynamics, and we do that by centering the voices of marginalised communities, listening to the silenced voices.'

The work

Felipe - Narrative work is essentially about shifting power dynamics, and we do that by centering the voices of marginalised communities, listening to the silenced voices. We aim to capture stories that are complex and tangled in nature using a carrier bag, for carrying, collecting and telling the 'stuff' of living', paraphrasing Ursula Le Guin.

For us at Culture Hack Labs that has been our focus, to 'gather' and co-develop narratives and frames with frontline communities defending life and protecting their territories. From Brazil to Mexico and from Cape Town to the UK.



Greater Manchester has a rich history of industrial revolution and colonialism, and also became the home of many communities in the diaspora. And we were precisely one of them, a diasporic media collective hacking narratives of oppression and disconnect, of systemic racism and despair. And so with the incredible support of our friends at Whose Knowledge?, a fantastic feminist collective working on epistemic justice and decolonising the internet, we launched our latest experiment, 'The Greater Manchester Narratives Lab'.

Human beings are guided by stories. We make sense of the world through stories. For instance Brexit dominated the conversation in the UK for a long time. After that came Covid. Both of them are stories told from a particular angle, with some variations of course; creating a dominant narrative. Mainstream media holds the ability and expertise to control and harness language in order to shape those stories in a particular way.

Dominant narratives tend to come from a single perspective: white, heteronormative, often centering fear and separation—generating dystopian visions of the future. How can we co-create narratives that centre many ways of knowing and being, that centre solidarity and the stories of the beautiful alternatives?

We began the Greater Manchester Narratives Lab by mapping the unsung heroes in our communities and the knowledge in the room. Within the group there was such a multiplicity of perspectives and issue areas, and so collectively we had to figure out what the entry points were, what were the intersecting narratives that we most wanted to shift. Then came the fun part, which is to find creative ways to reframe and intervene in dominant narratives.

When we listen carefully to 'our' stories instead of those perpetuated by the mainstream we realise how all oppression is connected, how our struggles are shared with so many others. By centering and amplifying diverse voices and multiple perspectives we learn the power of our own voices and narratives, and discover remarkable stories of solidarity and social justice that resonate with so many others and seed hope in times of despair.

If narrative work with a political lens was a part of the mainstream, a very different reality would exist. We are bound by stories and who tells which stories matters. "It matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with."

Conrad - Challenging dominant narratives is one of the main aims of The Meteor, an independent co-operative media organisation which I am a founding member of, and journalist with. The Meteor has a stated goal of promoting social, economic, and environmental justice.

The opportunity to work and learn with Culture Hack Labs, Whose Knowledge? and the group of experienced activists from Greater Manchester, was one I was pleased to take up for its potential to improve my understanding of the use of narrative, and provide ways to counter detrimental dominant ones pervasive in society.

Narratives have always played a part in shaping society and political discourse, but the development of the silicon revolution and the growth of social media has amplified their effects, creating increasing polarisation. Narratives often become deeply embedded in a person's psyche; they form an important part of their world view, the values they hold and who they are. Challenging these embedded narratives therefore threatens to undermine the person and may be opposed vigorously. From my limited experience of the escalating culture wars on social media, it appears that much of the abuse/discourse that occurs there is either attacking or defending a narrative rather than specific facts or events.

Changing the hearts and minds of people with embedded detrimental narratives is difficult work, and for some such as the hardened far-right extremist, it may be near impossible. But for those who still value reason and possess empathy, telling counter-narrative stories in the right way can change hearts and minds, which is why this work is so important.

I love Wikipedia, it is a beautiful example of the good information technology can do to benefit humanity, amid many bad examples. As Whose Knowledge? pointed out it does have problems in the limited diversity of its editors (who are mainly white, male and from affluent countries).

Taking part in the project and receiving advice from Whose Knowledge? enabled me to edit the Wikipedia page for Edith Rigby, a Preston-born suffragette. I added a more nuanced description of her use of arson to further the cause of women's suffrage. My edit is now the one visible on Edith's page. This was a very rewarding experience and one I may not have had if I had not taken part in this project. One of the reasons I was able to commit the time was the funding that came with it.

This is a big challenge for all civic minded activity, where more affluent and privileged people have the time and resources which enable them to commit. To increase diversity in the many spheres of social action, training, time and resources need to be provided for people who may be working all hours to put food on the table and keep a roof over their heads.

Radical Knowledgers of GM Narratives Lab:

Thank you

for all you are and what you do!



Everyone who took part in this project has gone back to their work creating positive change across Greater Manchester with a greater understanding of narratives and how they can be successfully challenged. At The Meteor we have undertaken a reporting project called 'Creating Radical Change' which is reporting on change makers across the UK, which we hope will provide a resource and inspiration for people across GM who believe we need to make progress towards a more just society.

Everyone needs to have a greater understanding of the importance of narrative in shaping society.

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Parent Power

Emma Anderson,
Oxford Hub



Where:

Blackbird Leys in Oxford



What:

Parent Power supports a network of families who are keen to lead change in their own lives and communities.



Who:

15 families, African Families in the UK, Oxford Hub



Parents have a wealth of knowledge and assets within themselves and their networks. Parents can make change for themselves and other families when they are well organised and have access to resources.'

The work

Structural inequality and intergenerational marginalisation mean that a child's future social and economic outcomes are closely linked to their parents'. However, as a society, it can often seem more urgent – as well as more straightforward – to focus on children. They are seen as innocent and blameless; the state must keep them from harm.

The combination of high profile child deaths and serious case reviews, along with austerity and cuts to statutory children's services have left a child protection system that is focused on assessments of risk and exercising of statutory powers over families rather than an appreciation of individual parent selfhood and the complexity of families' lives.

Parent Power, a collaboration between Oxford Hub and African Families in the UK, with support from Lankelly Chase, has been working to change this. Focusing on the Blackbird Leys area of Oxford, Parent Power aims to shift power to parents at an individual and community level so they can make change for themselves, their children and other parents. Parents support other parents to lead change in their own lives and participate in their community.

There's a reason that the name draws attention to power. The relationships between families and the systems in place to protect children (schools, charities and social services) are infused with unequal power dynamics. The conventional approach of statutory services involves having power over parents, managing risk by ensuring that parents are complying with an agency-led process – one that is often poorly explained to them. This is evident in interactions between individuals too, with power dynamics between individual professionals and parents often leaving parents feeling marginalised and disempowered, rather than more confident, better resourced and more able to keep their children safe.



The relationships between families and the systems in place to protect children (schools, charities and social services) are infused with unequal power dynamics.'



Individual and Community Power

Parent Power is working to shift these power dynamics at an individual and community level:

Individual power - Parents should have voice, choice and agency about decisions affecting them and their children. They should choose what they want to change about their lives and how that change happens.

Community power - Parents have a wealth of knowledge and assets within themselves and their networks. Parents can make change for themselves and other families when they are well organised and have access to resources. This might mean services which are designed by parents, for the benefit of parents or having direct access to funding for them to set up their own projects. Parent Power can also help parents realise their power as a collective in affecting change. When parents come together, effectively, they can make their voice heard, change services or create more opportunities for children and families.

It is really important to think about power in these two different ways - solely focusing on individual power misses the opportunity to build more collective approaches. Parents acting together can change mindsets and perspectives for agencies, and change the ways in which they interact with families.

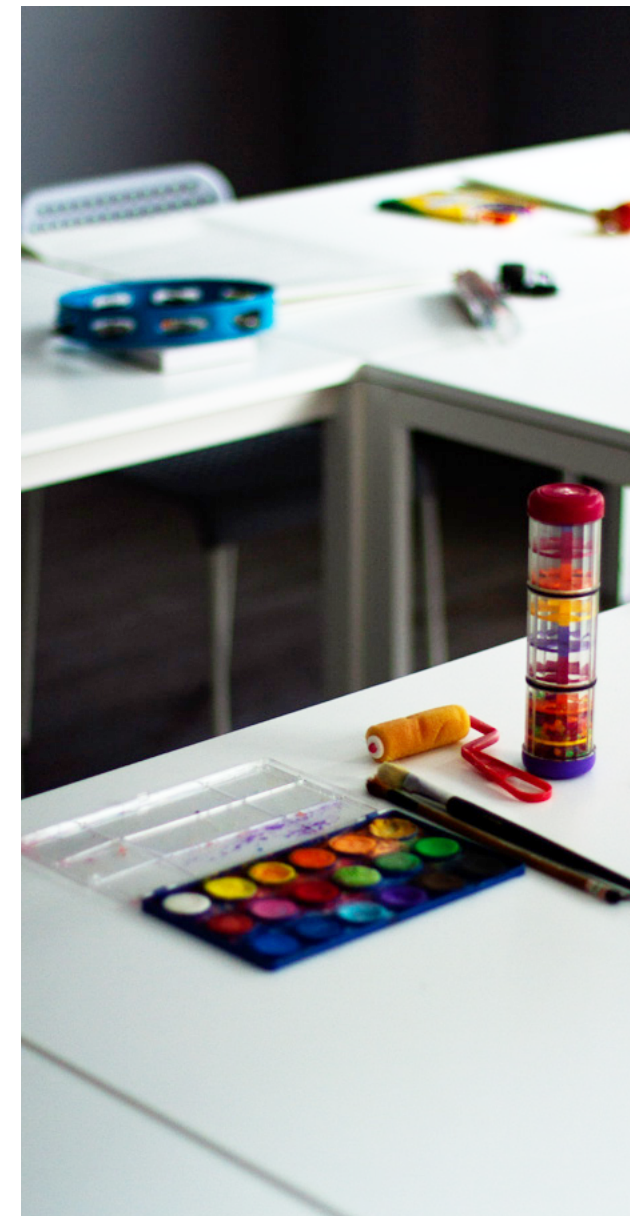


Parents acting together can change mindsets and perspectives for agencies, and change the ways in which they interact with families.'

Decision-making Power

One of the ways in which Parent Power is shifting power to parents is through the way it works. Parents with lived experience of using services are fully involved in its design and implementation. They design how Parent Power works, what it focuses on, how we speak about it and who we collaborate with. Parents are employed and trained to support other parents, in Parent Peer Supporter roles.

This approach is essential to role model some of the changes that we want to see in the system, for everyone to see parents as resourceful and able to drive change for their families and in their communities. In practice, this may involve connecting a family to an early years group, helping a group of mums study to pass their driving theory test, being there for a mum who has social services involved in her life or working together to make the leisure centre more accessible to local families. At the heart of this work is not what the parents are doing, but how they are doing it: in a way that builds power for themselves and their communities. This is transformational for their children's future outcomes and wellbeing.



Advice and tips

We have tested this approach in a specific geographical area with a specific group of people so not all of our learning will be relevant. However, some things we have learnt are:

Having parents with lived experience of statutory services in leadership roles, with the right support at the right time, leads to creativity, innovation and more trusted relationships in the community

Staff who are in roles where they are regularly drawing on their lived experiences should have regular support and supervision.

A diverse range of parents involved in the design is important to ensure that communications and opportunities are accessible and interesting to a range of residents and parents from different backgrounds.

Working in collaboration with other agencies such as schools, local authorities and other charitable groups leads to greater outreach and deeper understanding of the views in the community and opportunities to influence others to try doing things differently

Having a physical space in the community for parents to use and for members to create connections has been hugely beneficial

Strategy and plans can be emerging - we can learn as we go along. This allows for more opportunity for collaboration with others and genuine leadership from parents who get involved throughout the process.

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Devolving decision making over foundation resources

Cathy Stancer,
Lankelly Chase



Where:

Gateshead and
Greater Manchester



What:

Locally-based decision making over Lankelly's resources



Who:

Greater Manchester Systems Changers - Paul Connery, Karen Crompton (Lankelly Chase), Afshan D'souza-Lodhi, Carrina Gaffney (Lankelly Chase), Matt Kidd (Creative Inclusion/Our Agency), Rose Ssali (Support and Action Women's Network)
Gateshead Coordination Team - Andy Crosbie (CIA CIC), Joe Doran (Lankelly Chase), Steph Downey (Gateshead Council), Rich Gibbons (Transmit Enterprise), Lisa Goodwin (Connected Voice), Vikas Kumar (GemArts), Abby Taylor (CIA CIC), Lucy Zwolinska (Gateshead Poverty Truth Commission/South West Tyneside Methodist Church)



It does feel symbolically important though. It is a statement that it is not 'our' money. It is money that belongs to the mission.'

The work

'Decision making is devolved' is one of the system behaviours we try and live by, and which we think characterises the change we want to see. It's an aspect of shifting power in practice.

Decisions about the way Lankelly's resources are used are now made by locally-based groups in two places – Gateshead and Greater Manchester. This includes decisions about individual grants (shall we commit resources to this or that thing?) as well as deciding how to focus Lankelly's resources in a strategic way (what are we building towards here? what action do we need to take? what budget is required?)



Lankelly colleagues are still members of these groups but not majority members. In one respect this is a small change. Funding decisions at Lankelly are already made by small internal groups, many of which have external members. It does feel symbolically important though. It is a statement that it is not 'our' money. It is money that belongs to the mission. It is also our attempt to acknowledge honestly that we at Lankelly don't have the local and contextual knowledge to figure out what needs to happen in Gateshead, Greater Manchester, York, Barking and Dagenham or Oxford to support transformational change. It also reflects our belief that it is not right that a small group of (mainly) middle class London-based foundation staff are the gatekeepers and controllers of the resource.

So, we have the Core Team in GM (GM Systems Changers) and the Coordination Team in Gateshead. They include people from the established voluntary sector, churches, community groups, the arts and creative industries and local authorities.

Challenges

We know this is devolved decision making version 1.0. The groups locally are still close (in some ways) in proximity and experience to the Lankelly team - they're mainly professionals for example. The exciting thing is that all involved agree this is the case. There is continual engagement with the questions of 'who is missing?', 'what's next?' and 'how can we go further?' In fact, the existing decision-making groups feel some of their legitimacy comes from the fact that they are self-consciously temporary.

We're not just trying to create a local mini-Lankelly. In Gateshead, for example, 'snowball' or 'chain' recruitment has been used to find and resource 'bridge builders' as the next intake into the decision making group. These are people outside organisations who are active changemakers in their communities and who are further away from established/traditional power structures.

There are pros and cons to any action we take, and always unintended consequences. Devolving decision making to local people instinctively feels 'righter' but it is the case that people involved locally have sometimes felt burdened and exposed. They don't have the job security and support we inside Lankelly do. We think this probably tells us something useful about the role of a foundation - perhaps it's our job to shoulder as much of that burden as possible so people locally feel free and have the support they need to do the work and make the decisions that move the mission forward.



We're not just trying to create a local mini-Lankelly.

It also calls into question more widely how people in Lankelly's networks are resourced and supported. Should we take it for granted that those of us who happen to be inside Lankelly have much better terms and conditions than those outside it?

We at Lankelly also recognise we have not escaped entanglement in systems that perpetuate oppression and injustice just by taking this step. In fact, "there is an implicit presumption that it is the legitimate prerogative for charitable foundations - as inheritors of private wealth - to devolve powers at their behest." (Max French, Northumbria University)



Some things we've learned about how to do this

We have definitely learned that attention needs to be paid to the healthy and equitable functioning of the decision making groups. This really equates to (lots of) time tending the roots in terms of relationships, shared vision and purpose, and everyone's thoughts and feelings about what it means to be in the decision making position.

Lankelly colleagues talk about leaning in and leaning out - not dominating but also being open about our opinions, experience and knowledge, and supporting the groups to feel they have the permission space to make bold decisions. How to be, as the representative of the foundation, requires a lot of emotional intelligence and continual reflection and recalibration. It's very different from being a traditional grants officer. Space to reflect on this as we go along is important.

If this practice was the norm...

The way resources flow from resource holders like Lankelly, other foundations and statutory agencies would fundamentally change. Decisions would be made much more locally/contextually and would be better informed as a result. People closest to a locality or issue would work together to steward resources to support the kind of change they want to see.

If this kind of practice was further developed, spread and normalised, it would be difficult to imagine foundations as they are now existing. Lankelly itself would be a network rather than an institution. Perhaps that is what needs to happen next...

Cathy Stancer

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SAWN (Support and Action Women's Network) Climate Sisters



Where:

Greater Manchester



What:

From local to international - our journey to bring our voices and experience from Greater Manchester to COP26



Who:

Audrey, Carol, Fola, Joy, Joyce, Julie, Lillian, MaryAnne, Mercy, Naemy, Norah, Rose, Ruth and many other women



We empower and build a sisterhood. We're a force to be reckoned with.'

The work

We train, educate, and provide services that meet the specific needs of Black African women in Oldham. We believe in a fairer, cleaner environment that welcomes women to the table of life as equals.

SAWN has been going since 2007. We started out as a group of women who are in a new country, trying to find out where the markets are, where we can buy our own food, how to access services, why we can't access some services. So that's how we started - just a group. Then, in 2009, we made it official and started doing some real advocacy work. Coming together, trying in the best way possible to tackle the systems of injustice that we saw. We've been going ever since.

Twenty-three of us went to COP26 in Glasgow.

A conversation

Rose - The journey always starts with conversations, it always starts with meeting people. I was approached by sisters from WEN (Women's Environmental Network). From that conversation, we got to talk about the different issues and that's when Kate from WEN said, "well, there's this project we could do together".

That's how we ended up there. Just to see what can we do on our own little patch in our own little way. Because at the end of the day, that's what matters. What can you do just to create that impact? What can you do to change where you are? So that's how the journey started.



So for me, it's about how systems have to change so that our voices as women, as people from the Global South, are heard'

How did it relate to issues of power for you?

Joy - When we eventually got to Glasgow, I observed a different dynamic to power. I then saw what it was like when you have people sat up there speaking for you. And they did a good job trying to speak for us, trying to fight for us.... But I saw how it still is not effective enough.

We were in the Green Zone. And there were about five lovely women sat on the panel speaking. However, none of them were African. We have a lot of things we wanted to ask, a lot of things we wanted to say. We wanted to be heard directly. I thought, we could do a little bit more by having the minority on the panel, where you can hear them directly and hear their voice, as opposed to someone speaking for them.

How did it relate to issues of power for you?

Julie - We were all very excited to go to Glasgow to be heard and be seen. I knew there would be the Blue Zone and the Green Zone. But when we got there, it became very clear what those zones were for - to separate the big leaders, the decision makers, from the 'common people' who have no say. The Green Zone was exciting, there were so many exhibitions on how to change the disaster that's looming

But there was very little representation from the Blue Zone to come and see these projects and actually see how they can be applied in our societies and communities to change the direction this planet is going. And there's a lot of talk about carbon zero 2030 but what does that mean? When the leaders are talking about it and they are not actually connecting with the people who are supposed to implement those strategies....

I also noticed there was very little representation of the Global South and the Global South suffers the most from climate change. So we felt let down that we actually couldn't meet with these people and connect with them and share our views. In Glasgow, we kind of felt like wallpaper. And at some point we even felt invisible. We wondered, is this like unconscious bias, or was it wilful?

But by the time we left, we felt like we had connected with sisters from Birmingham, from Glasgow and the rest of the UK.

Audrey - Going right back to the beginning, when the project was started. I think people thought “well, who am I to be involved in this?” Climate change is far too big for us to think about.... And when you're not in the best of places anyway, when you're struggling with immigration issues, with housing issues, with all the issues that people face every day, climate change is something that is so far, far away.

So first, we looked at who we are, what we are, and we are a group of powerful women. And we use that collective power. And I learned from the project that, yes, climate change is a massive, massive issue that affects each and every one of us, and it probably affects the poorest of people more. And we are part of that.

So we started thinking about ourselves and power that we didn't have, and power that we did have, and how we harness that power; the amplification of our voices...

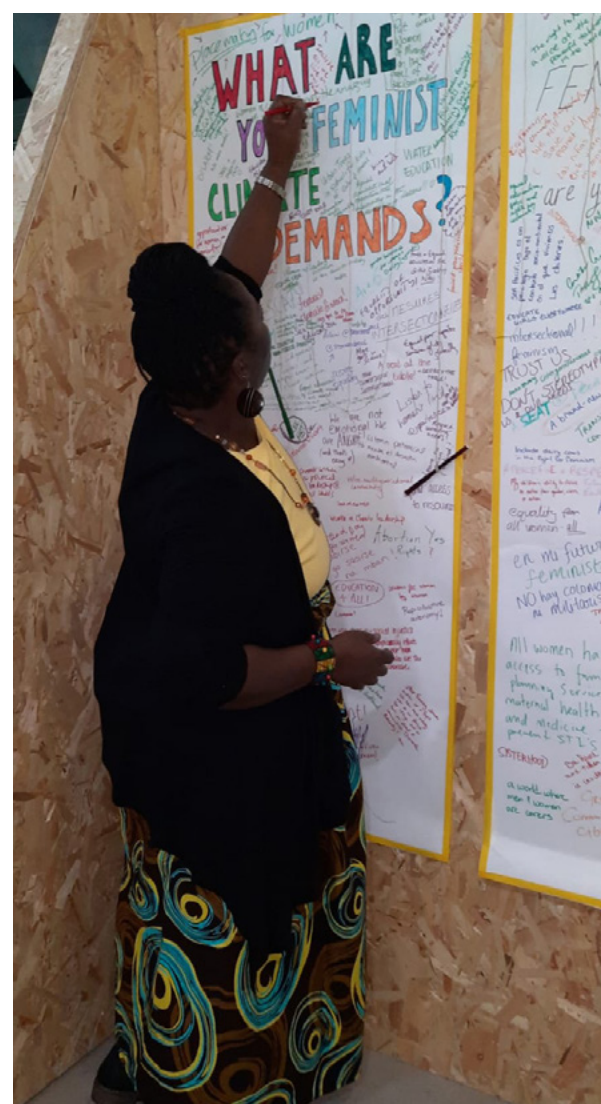


Rose - At first everybody felt silly. Everybody was nervous. But we learned, that we're a force to be reckoned with. I don't think we understood before that we have the power to make a difference. And I think we do know that now through what we've done, and what we hope to do in the future. It was amazing.

For me, when it comes to power. I left more powerful than I went. We were able, as little as we are, to join our projects and link them with sisters in the Global South. For me, that is more powerful than the Blue Zone..

We come from countries that are run by dictators. The dictator in my country was a dictator since I was 13. I'm now 46. There is no hope of him leaving until he's very old. That's how our take on power is informed. We are used to organising and relying on our own power.

So we want to work on what we can change. What can we use because that's what's been sent to us? How can we make lemonade out of lemons rather than waiting for the people in the Blue Zone to sort everything out.



Carol - Leading up to COP, I was thinking about the systems that are keeping people from marginalised communities out of having the opportunity to talk about issues that affect them. So for me, it's about how systems have to change so that our voices as women, as people from the Global South, are heard.

Ruth - For me, power in this particular situation is about taking responsibility. Because as Rose was saying, most of us, we come from nations that have leaders who are dictators. And all the time it is like 'what is the government doing?' Through the project that we did, it gave me a certain sort of responsibility. And I felt so powerful, because while we are waiting for these leaders who are not doing anything, I mean, for so many years, we're not seeing any change. It gives me joy to know that we can also be powerful in our own way and make a change, make a difference...

Mercy - I was with my sisters on the journey and afterwards the kids, the children that I work with, they were very curious. The future is in their hands. We can all do our little bit for our planet, and not only rely on or wait for the 'leaders' before things are done.

Fola - When we talk of power, as women, those who try and bring us down should always realise that we are always there, around the world, in terms of care. What I mean is when there is no care in anything, it's not going to work. If we're talking about climate change now, what's important is the passion you have for it, the care you have for it. If that care is not brought to whatever it is that they are planning, it won't work. So when we talk of power, you know, it's important to understand how women will go to extra lengths for whatever it is in front of them. Caring is power.



What advice would you offer to others?

Rose – There is power in coming together. We are from different nations. But we are sisters. We have sisters from Malawi, and Nigeria. We have sisters from Oldham. We have sisters from Namibia. We have sisters from Kenya. We have sisters from Uganda, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Tanzania, Burundi, and Jamaica.

We have only met here in this country. We didn't know each other before. But now come and see how powerful we are. We suffocate people with love, people almost die of love when they are in our space.

So for me, what I want to encourage other people out there who might be reading this - you can't do things alone, you need each other, you need sisters. And then not just stopping there but acting on your knowledge and that togetherness. For me, it's the most powerful thing in the world.

Joy – yes, it's all about knowing people who you can connect with, and then of course, acting on it. But another thing that I would also want to advise anyone is, knowledge is definitely power. So, find a way to carry on learning, it doesn't have to be in the four walls of a school. Telling yourself that there's a lot you don't know helps you to open up to wanting to know, and in the process you become more aware of things that are happening around you. It also helps you become more aware of what can I do in my own little way. So, do not stop learning in any way that you can.

Also, don't stop talking! Say, hey, I'm here! I need someone to hear me, I need someone to recognise that I'm here. I need someone to listen to me. We don't stop talking because when the opportunity finally arises for you to be able to speak out loud, then you're able to say 'This is what I've learned. This is what I've come to understand. And this is what I want for myself and for my people'.

And also showing love all the time where you can. Don't let people change this. And I'll give you a very good example. When we arrived in Glasgow nobody gave us hospitality, no one recognised our arrival. We're just standing about for hours. But if the tables turned around again, we will still show love. Love opens up a platform for the other person to learn, it lets them see what they've done. And it also gives you an open mind as well. When you carry on loving, you will learn. So for me three things - don't stop learning, don't stop speaking out and carry on loving no matter what.

Audrey - The biggest point of learning I would give to everybody is that together we are better. Collectively, we are stronger. So it's about being together. And being caring, being kind, being loving, but also being loud, and being proud of who you are and where you've come from. So be caring, be loving. Be loud, be proud. And from that you'll get energy, innovation and action.



Julie – I would say my advice is being open to connecting to people, being open to networking. So we have to learn to seek out the people who are decision makers and have our say, whether they ignore us now, at one point they will listen. Lankelly met Rose at an event where she was speaking up and challenging the status quo and challenging the system. Lankelly heard her and because of that we're all here today. That's a great lesson for me, because it means if we speak up in the right audience, and we say the things that we need to say it doesn't matter what everybody else is saying, we don't have to go with the flow we can be like the salmon swimming against the flow. That then means our voice is heard.

We know change starts with the self. And from the self, we connect, and we become a collective and we move the change or move systems and we heal ourselves.

Women are the mothers of the community, we nurture the community, and we are also the most affected by climate change. And, and we underlined this in Glasgow, in every community, from India, to Africa, to Europe, to America, it's the women that carry the pains, the birthing of destinies. We suffer domestic violence. We suffer marginalisation, we are blocked in the digital space. And not only am I a woman, I'm a Black woman. We know change starts with the self. And from the self, we connect, and we become a collective and we move the change or move systems and we heal ourselves.



It is good to be the best listener first. Because there will be lots of ideas coming to you.'

Fola - I would advise to be the best listener in the room. It is good to be the best listener first. Because there will be lots of ideas coming to you. The best thing you can do is to listen to different voices, particularly from marginalised groups. You will understand how they have done it before, or you will understand they have ideas that they want to develop, or you can come together and collaborate.

What would the world look like if the power rested with women like you?

Rose – For me, it would be a world where mistakes will happen, many things will happen, but they will come from a place of nurturing and care because that's what women are. We are the biggest caregivers. We are the givers of life.

Audrey - This is me with my dreaming hat on – Rose would be in charge. Rose would be leading. In Number 10, and number 11, she could do both, not a problem! She could do that part-time and she would run SAWN the other half of the day! If Rose was in charge, equality would be the norm. We wouldn't have court cases where women are fighting for equality of pay. We would have women with a voice that was heard, listened to and respected. And we wouldn't have Rose going to meetings with statutory organisations about funding as the token Black person. She'd be there because she's knowledgeable, because she's got connections, because she's embedded in the community and because she knows what the community needs. But 'she' is all of the SAWN-ettes, we are the roots.

Fola – for me it will be a very joyful world. For me, when it comes to finances, we would have more for the social sector because that is most important. That is where the joy comes from. We will focus more on care, we will focus more on housing.

Carol - For me, it will be about the systems changing that keep the marginalised voices not heard. So it will be really good for the systems to change so that our voices as people from the Global South, as people from marginalised communities can be heard. That would be a good hope for the future.

Joy - it's not that there won't be arguments and there will be some of the things that we have now, they will happen. However, for me, the approach that women would take to tackle the issues will not be from the side of ego and power tussles. The approach to things will be such that there will be fairness. All of the issues that are being ignored will no longer be ignored. If women are in power, promises will be made and promises will be fulfilled. Because even if a woman who is in charge is not fulfilling the promises, the women underneath her are not scared to call her to action. Women are good at that, they will call you out!

Julie – wow, it would be such a beautiful world to live in. We as humans would understand that we are actually connected as a collective, with a shared vision, even if we are individuals. We would work together as a people that respects the planet we live on, and respect each other as humans. There would be nothing like racism, we are just all human beings. Also, every single human being is born from a woman. And so we women would never discriminate against men because they are our sons, fathers and brothers. And so we would create a stronger, better, more equal, caring, simple, loving, warm, kind of humanity. I believe we would have leaders who are open to communication, to collaboration, leaders who are allowing others to speak up and to enable effective change. Politics would be all about the human being thriving on the planet and the environment would be cleaner, it'd be greener. And I'm sure there's no such thing as a life without challenges. But the challenges would be handled because we would be working on our strengths as opposed to marginalising those we consider weak.

So we would live in a world where we see a change that we have built together. It will be beautiful.



Mama Rose sees you, she is not bothered about the things you can't do, she will encourage you on the things that you can do.

Mercy - if we have women like Mama Rose - she empowers you, she sees you, she is not bothered about the things you can't do, she will encourage you on the things that you can do. Everybody will be able to achieve their potential.

sawn.org.uk/climate-change-cop26/

Teams and Dunston Inquiry

Anya Bonner, CIA CIC,
Christine Frazer, Teams and
Dunston Medical Practice,
Lucy Zwolinska, South West
Tyneside Methodist Church



Where:

Gateshead



What:

Local control of
philanthropic resources,
guided by the question
'how can we continue to
build capacity in the heart
of this community?'



Who:

Age UK Gateshead,
Ballinger Charitable Trust,
CIA CIC, National Lottery
Community Fund, South
West Tyneside Methodist
Church, Teams and
Dunston Medical Practice



Power was shifting.
The community was
exercising agency
over its own destiny..

The work

The River Team flows through the village of Dunston, where it enters The Tyne. In the 19th century, you'd find a thriving settlement on the banks of the river with a ropery, chemical plant, gas works, staiths and flour mill. Today, in the communities now known as Teams and Dunston, the heavy industry is gone. This has led to high unemployment, poverty and all the social and economic difficulties that come with huge upheaval and change, exacerbated by over a decade of austerity.

It was into this context that the Teams and Dunston Inquiry was born. The inquiry asked this fundamental question; how can we continue to build capacity in the heart of this community? Funded by the National Lottery, the Ballinger Trust and Lankelly Chase, it began by employing a local resident who had a lead role as a volunteer during the pandemic.

Enter Christine Frazer:

As a Community Worker, Christine's role is two-fold. Firstly, she joins in with and helps to catalyse the work that community members are already doing to support one another.

Christine's second role, along with two other colleagues, Anya and Lucy, is to devolve decision-making around how a pot of money assigned to the inquiry can be spent by the community for the community.



We're not saying
that philanthropy is
inherently bad, but
it does not create
capacity within
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to take collective
action.

Of course, as the team running the inquiry, we hold a great deal of power. The very fact that we've set parameters about how we want to spend this money (that we want the community to do it), is an exertion of power, albeit one that is attempting to devolve power. We've decided on this particular parameter because we find it so tempting to spend the inquiry's money on the needs we are seeing on a daily and weekly basis. It would be so simple to buy food for those in poverty. Or pay for people's gas and electricity. Maybe even to offer a business loan to the woman who personifies community spirit through her struggling business. But doing so would be philanthropy – that would be us deciding what to spend the money on based on needs that happen to present themselves to us. That is closer to existing power dynamics than we are aiming to achieve. We're not saying that philanthropy is inherently bad, but it does not create capacity within communities to identify solutions to their problems and to take collective action. Instead, we're trying to share our power by ensuring that every step that we take is guided by what we are hearing and learning about Teams and Dunston.

We have begun the process of engaging with people through deep listening. This has been through Christine's community work and through a month-long community festival designed to create opportunities to talk with a wide range of people about their own passions for their community. These forms of listening have unveiled issues including men's mental health, a lack of resources for young people, addiction, and a lack of green spaces. We hope to take these emerging issues and support coalitions of community members to rally around and decide collectively how to tackle them.

Challenges

In many ways, we're very early on in this process. But already the very intention to devolve decision-making over money to the community seems to have challenged the status quo of how power is held in Gateshead. We've already experienced resistance from those in more traditional positions of power. One councillor approached the group and challenged the question we had been asking at inquiry events: What is strong and wrong in your community? They did not like the phrasing of the question because "there is nothing wrong." Two local charities were left annoyed when we were unable to match fund grants to them with the money that had been made available with the inquiry.



We do not want to create further competition or division within communities.



Those experiencing poverty are best placed to make decisions about how to address it.

Some things we've learned about how to do this

As we navigate these ruffled feathers, we've learnt that it's best to be transparent about what we're trying to do. Primarily, this means being transparent about how we're planning to spend the money (inviting the community to decide how to do so), and also, what we're not doing.

We are clear that we're not doing participatory grant making.

We hear often how devolving decision-making to communities means asking residents to sit on a panel and make decisions about a pot of money that local groups compete for. For us, this is merely shifting an existing power dynamic closer to the community. We do not want to create further competition or division within communities. We want to find new and exciting ways of bringing people together around common passions.



It is this model of 'build relationship first, spend later' that seems to be disrupting the status quo of how power is held. Because fundamentally this isn't about money, it's about power. We're hoping that by shifting what power we can to the heart of communities we'll redress the disadvantages that an imbalance of power creates. We also believe that those experiencing poverty are best placed to make decisions about how to address it. This is complex, challenging and sometimes antagonistic work, but we can't recommend it enough.

If you'd like to have a chat about what we're up to or ask any questions, let's have a cuppa. Drop us an email. We are:

Christine Frazer: christine.frazer@nhs.net

Anya Bonner: anya@ciacic.com

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A Commentary

are we seeing
the change we
want to see?

Max French and Amy Wheatman,
Northumbria University (learning
partners to Lankelly's place-based work)

Power has been an ongoing and central theme of the place-based work supported by Lankelly. Looking back at earlier research in 2020, at this time it was argued that the system acts to maintain power structures and there is a fear of change.

‘Complex and challenging with very high levels of ego and power. Slight undercurrent of fighting for power and money. A lot around resource. So, I think that there are lots of heightened emotions and fear actually.’ (when asked to describe the existing system; interview, taken from learning synthesis report 2020)

Looking at the theme of power more recently, there seem to be examples of structures to shift power across the work. Participatory grantmaking methodologies have been explored to facilitate the leadership of people with lived experience. There were tensions that needed to be navigated with this approach, for example, a reluctance from some to give up or take power depending on personal experience. Learning from this process led to more time being built into participatory grantmaking methods to explore what the approach meant and identify tools to support equality of voice

‘For those that didn’t have power they also struggled initially to get very quickly into “well, actually, I can take power and design this”’ (Interview, 2021)’

The relationship between power and resources has emerged throughout the work with the ongoing exploration of how to properly remunerate individuals’ time for participating in decision making (complicated by labyrinthine benefits rules). Likewise, devolving control of resources to locally-based groups in places has shifted where power is held.

This has been an iterative process, firstly shifting power from Lankelly’s trustees to the staff and then a further devolution to locally based teams where Lankelly Chase hold a minority say in decisions. Potential risks have been associated with this. Greater autonomy can be experienced as a burden by local associates and actors, with the potential to harm local relationships with partner organisations.

‘I found that very difficult, that’s what I’m saying because I’ve never had that kind of power before...so when it came to [making decisions]...it didn’t feel like power. For me, it felt like a burden so I didn’t feel powerful. It just felt like a burden. I felt burdened to share something that was not enough. That’s how I felt.’ (Interview 2021)

This emphasised the need for stewardship of the process, and perhaps the benefit of Lankelly Chase holding administrative responsibilities to provide opportunities for generative and innovative conversations to be held. As former power holders, Lankelly Chase staff also felt tensions around what their role might look like moving forward.

A consciousness around when to step into power and share insights was often a judgement call and there were examples of greater criticality and equality of voice amongst locality teams as relationships developed. Locality-based teams were also mindful of emergent power structures and the potential for silos to be formed or for them to become gatekeepers of resources. Structures for learning and criticality, transparency and a sense of a temporariness of membership were tools which were identified as being able to guard against this.

There were also signs of the benefits of financial decisions being based in place. Through participatory methods and local decision-making teams, there was a greater understanding of the specific needs of the community.

‘But I think, I mean, the advantage is, I suppose, that we, I think, came up with something that was much closer to what is needed...’ (Interview 2021)

This enabled groups and people on the ‘fringes’ of the system; underrepresented communities, to be reached. By increasing participation, a more diverse range of perspectives was brought in, which not only supported more innovative discussions but also developed the whole place-based programme work as a learning system. By shifting power, this led to better funding relationships that were based upon mutual trust, challenging the traditional perceptions of funders with the hope of spreading this approach wider to influence other funders’ behaviour.

‘...There’s a hierarchy that we perpetuate as like we are the funders and they are the funded organisations therefore we have to behave and act a certain way and we can’t be in a conversation with them, you can’t have a cuppa with them and talk to them in a particular way. I found that really interesting but that sort of like shift in dynamic as well.’ (Interview 2021)

Thoughts to end with

Paul Connery, Karen
Crompton, Afshan
D'souza-Lodhi, Carrina
Gaffney, Matt Kidd,
Rose Ssali

Our vision for the future is that power that was once concentrated in the wrong places, in institutions and hierarchies, would instead be held within communities.

Power would be based there, forcing institutions (if they still exist) to come to them. Decision-making about resources would happen there.

Funding would be more open and shared more widely and we'd have lots of different devolved decision-making structures. There would be more fluidity and less hierarchy, and every process would begin and end with learning. This would mean there would be a constant state of adaptation. The system, for it to work effectively, can never be fixed. It has to be flexible.



'This future is not so distant. We all have a part to play.'



Whether it's challenging the traditional structures or bringing a friend with you to meetings, or sharing practices, or even sharing concerns, we can all help change the system.

Let us leave you with this. Imagine a round table with commissioners, funders, frontline workers, the voluntary sector, the community sector and more importantly the people most affected by the system. Imagine an additional empty chair at that table, to remind us of those who are not in the room. Imagine we have a process that allows each and every one of us around that table to equally hold power, to make decisions together. Where every one of our ideas are valued, where each one of us is respected. Wouldn't that be beautiful?

Lankelly Chase

2022