

Learning Review

CR Stocks-Rankin

Relationships



First

Introduction

In order to evaluate the learning at this first stage of the Relationships First project, an understanding of the project's core aim is needed. How does the project describe itself?

The aim of this exploratory demonstration project is to enable young people and members of the workforce in Falkirk to design leaving care services that privilege love and relationships at the heart of leaving care service provision. (Relationships First Project Plan, p3)

The Relationships First project was initiated as “demonstration project”, but what does this term really mean? Based on the interviews with Relationships First team members, the demonstration nature of this project seems to be enabling team members to be the change they'd like to see in Falkirk Council and their wider community.

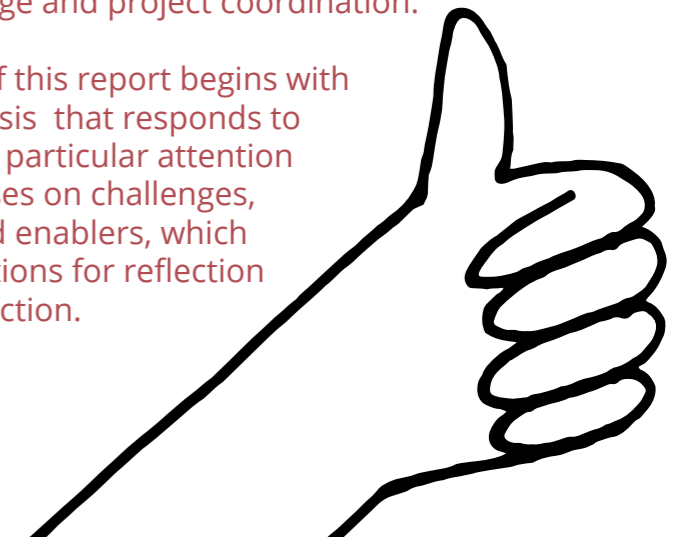
In the following pages, insights are offered from across the Relationships First team which answer the following questions:

- **Impacts**
What is changing for people involved in the Relationships First project?
- **Drivers for change**
What processes have supported people to make changes?

Why focus on impacts? Team members have outlined a range of impacts at this early stage of the project, so the report presents evidence on the learning that team members have been doing and the way the project is changing mindsets and supporting the development of strong relationships.

Why focus on drivers for change? The impacts that team members described are dependent on the process – on how the project is being delivered. The core drivers for changes that members described are: the time for preparation, the combination of different kinds of knowledge and project coordination.

As this is a learning review, each section of this report begins with a set of questions and then includes analysis that responds to those questions. The learning review pays particular attention to the features of this project. It also focuses on challenges, which offer opportunities for learning, and enablers, which show the strengths of the project. Suggestions for reflection and action are made at the end of each section.



Executive Summary

What changes have occurred for team members?

- **Learning** about the care system, leadership, co-design, Falkirk Council and its readiness for change.
- **Personal changes:** deep personal reflection leading to a changed mindset and changed behaviours.
- **Relationship changes:** meaningful development of trust with others in the project team leading to strong working relationships, and even family-like connections.

What does the evidence tell us about this demonstration project?

There seems to be an assumption in the Relationships First project that in order to change the system, people need to change themselves and their relationships. Team members in the Relationships First project described changing their own mindsets and behaviours, as well as their way of connecting with others.

In this way, team members are moving beyond just imagining new possibilities and opportunities for change, beyond the way 'things have always' been done, and beyond the 'hidden rules' of relationships as they exist today. They are moving into a living example of how things can be. To the evaluator, this movement seems to be crux of a "demonstration project".

An experiential learning process helps reveal some of the deep tensions in any system. As one team member put it: *"If the people on this project can work together, then it shows that hopefully, the Council as a whole could work better towards helping care leavers feel love" (Public Servant 2).*

In order to achieve that ideal of 'working together' – the analysis suggests that that the teams have had to grapple with questions of readiness, representation, translation across different ways of speaking, emotional ups and downs, questions about the nature of the relationships that are forming (family, friend, colleague?). Where there have been challenges, there are have also been great strengths. The diversity of the group, the tools such as the working together agreement and WhatsApp, the space for reflection and, of course, the commitment to social change which each of the team have brought with them.

How can the insights in this report be used?

- Monitor project progress
- Support adaptation and improvement
- Analysed as part of a final evaluation of the project
- Model a culture of learning and transparency for others in the sector who wish to learn from this project

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Impacts

What changes have occurred for team members?

- **Learning** about the care system, leadership, co-design, Falkirk Council and its readiness for change.
- **Personal changes:** deep personal reflection leading to a changed mindset and changed behaviours.
- **Relationship changes:** meaningful development of trust with others in the project team leading to strong working relationships, and even family-like connections.

Team members have been learning about themselves, their own assumptions and mindset, the role that they take up in groups, and to clarify the vision they have for change. This learning is crucial to the success of the project, which depends on collaboration, group working, and co-design as methods.

The learning that team members shared was rich in emotion and very reflective. This indicates to team members were taking part in a change process – in something that was changing them as people and changing their perspectives.



Impact: Learning

Learning seems to have had the following features

→ Learning about the **system**, i.e. legislation and policy, the organisation of services, the experiences of people who have accessed care.



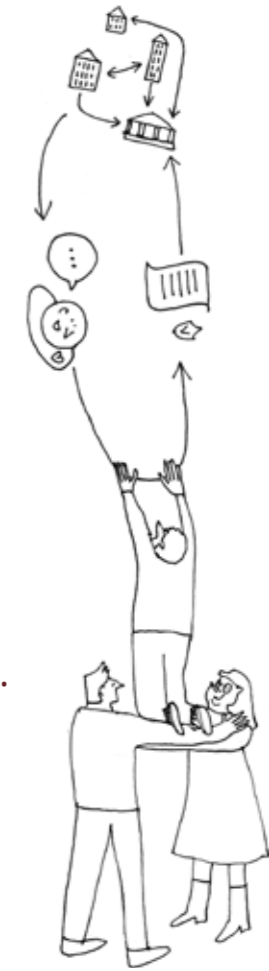
→ Learning about the **tools** that can change the system.



→ Learning about **one's self** and **one's capacity** to make change.



→ Learning about groups and **how people come together** to make change.

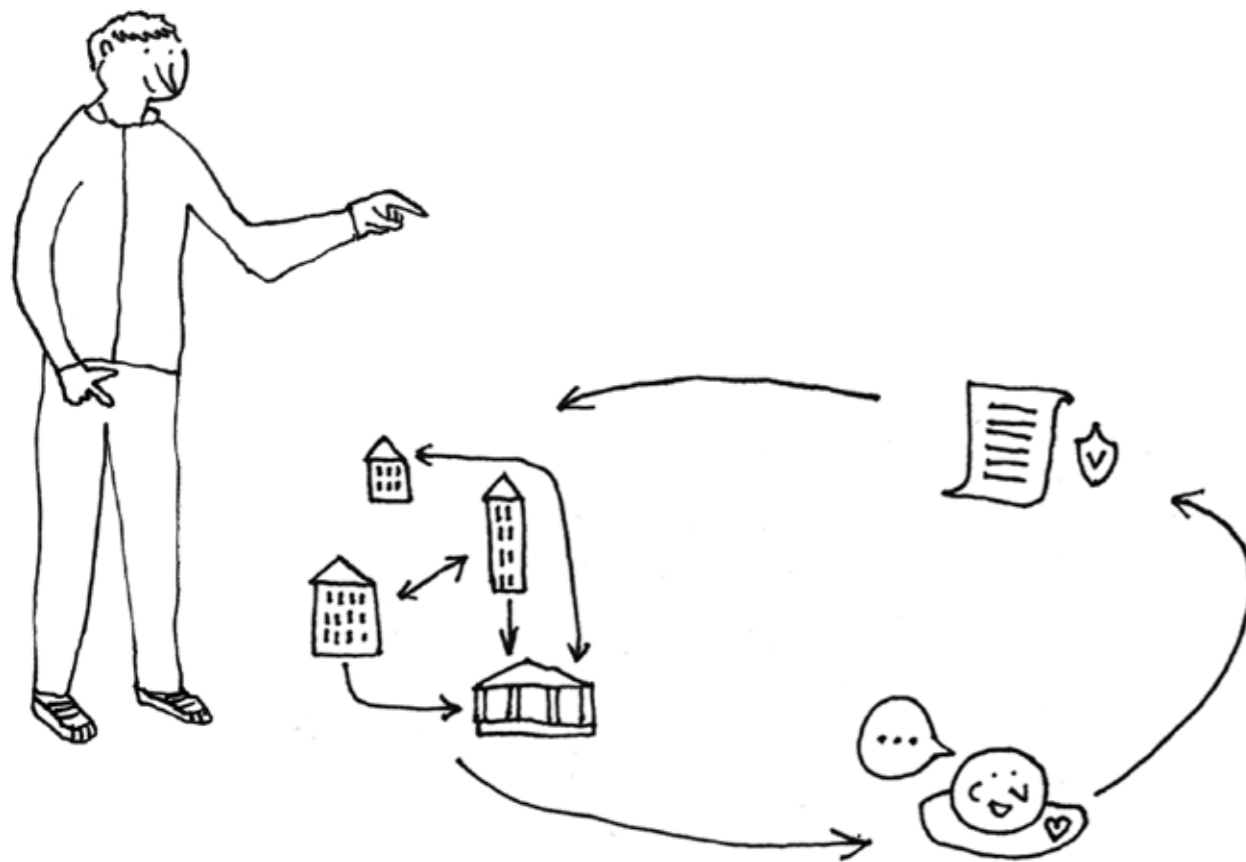


→ A challenge for learning has been the **emotional work** that members do.



→ Learning is enabled by **reflection**

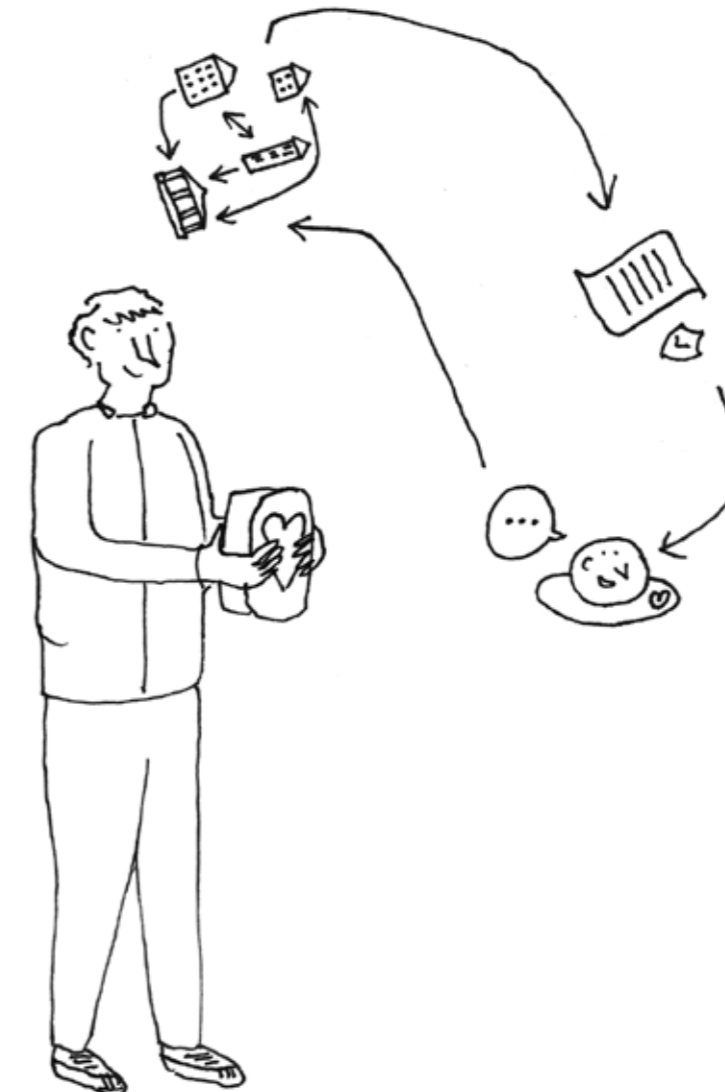




Learning about the System

Team members talked explicitly about the formal inputs they've had on the project and the insights they have taken away.

We've learnt about the different experiences in care ... kinship, foster care, residential, adoption. GIRFEC, the getting it right for every child. The extended responsibility up to 26 years of age. Which was changed from the law in 2014. Then there's this systems thing within the Council itself. Somebody actually called it silo working. Where you've got little pockets of people working on different things. But nobody ever seems to join the dots to bring it together. (Public Servant 5)



Learning about tools

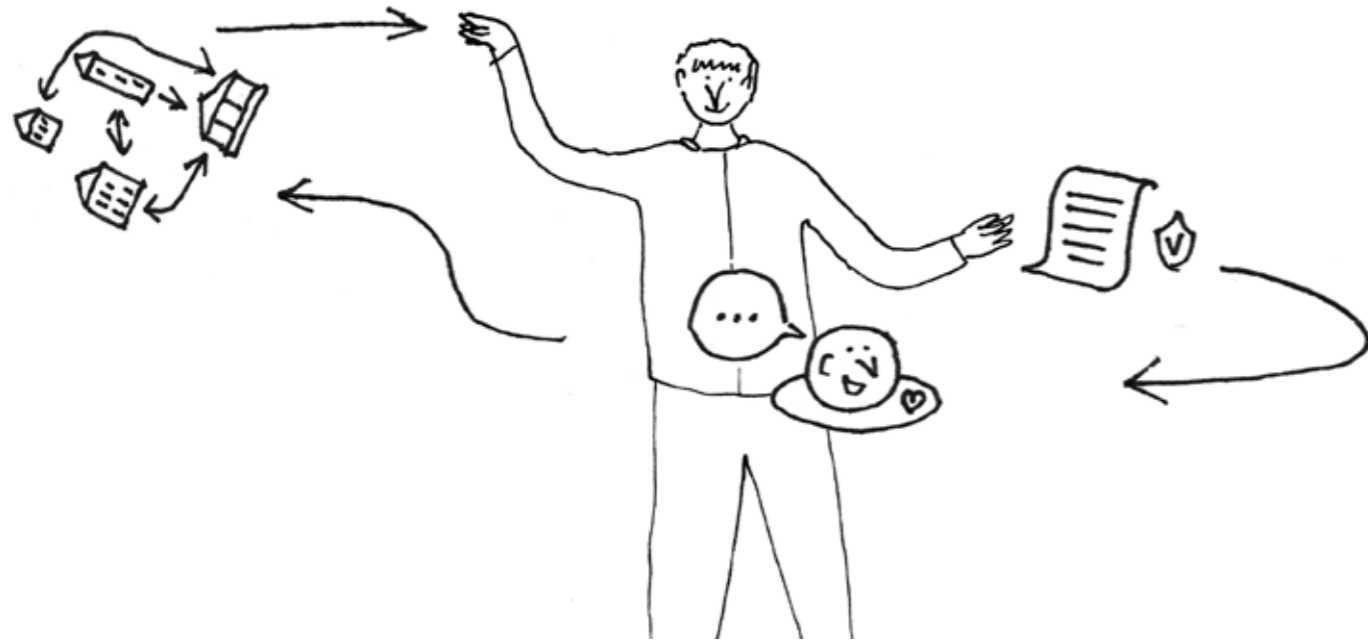
Team members talked about the tools they were gaining for changing the system, including leadership skills and service design.

We're trying to change the old stereotypes of the Council, and trying to put things forward. And this is where Relationships First comes in, because it's a Council of the future project. It's how can we change something that may not be working to its potential, and see if we can come up with a different way. See if we can push forward. And that's obviously why we're doing leadership systems and service design. (Public Servant 4)

Learning about one's self and one's capacity to change

Others talked about how the project was giving them new insight into the roles they take up and way they to relate to other people:

We got told we were going to do a quiz. It's about if someone was to show love to you, what would it be? Would it be gifts, would it be this, would it be that?. We also did what type of person are you? Are you an advocate, are you a follower? That kind of thing. We did that before and mine came out as an advocate and then my love languages tie in perfectly with it. It's exactly what somebody who's more got an advocate personality would need. (Citizen 5)



Learning about oneself can sometimes lead to "changing" oneself. For some team members, there has been substantial learning and personal development, particularly around and their role within groups:

I've been learning. And it's actually been helping me a lot, because it's actually helping me in other things in my life. One of the biggest things I've been working on since being part of this group is trying to stop myself from overtalking and letting other people talk. (Citizen 4)

Learning about group dynamics

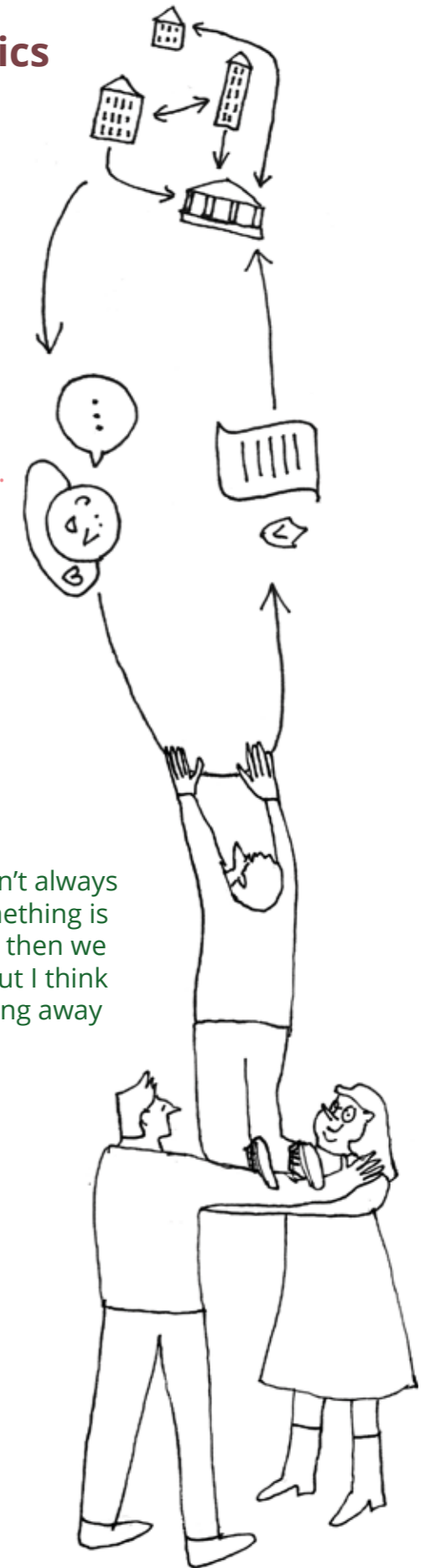
Learning about group dynamics and role has been important learning for another team member who also talked about learning when to "talk" and "when to open up".

It's definitely shown me how to treat other people ... I've learned to self-control. I've learned to think of other people's feelings. I've learned that personally and I've learned that I'm not alone when it comes to being alone, if that makes sense. So I've learned loads here, really deep things over the year. Like when to talk, when to open up. I've learned about emotion. (Citizen 1)

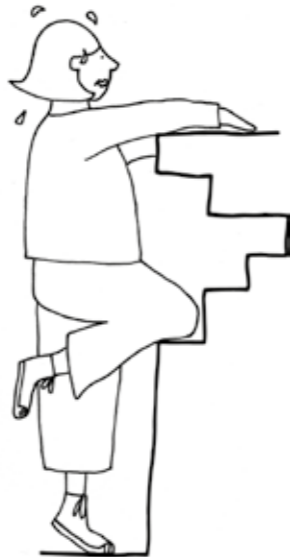
Learning about oneself and one's role in group dynamics has been a feature for the Public Servant team as well. One Public Servant describes a very similar journey in terms of understanding the power of their voice and the need to ensure that a diversity of voices is heard:

Me opening my mouth before I think doesn't always work. And people keeping quiet when something is important and should have been said, and then we don't know about it later, wouldn't work. But I think we're doing pretty good. I think we're coming away with a good feeling. (Public Servant 4)

It is clear from the interviews that team members are gaining tremendous insights into the ways that groups form, build trust, work through difference and conflict. Whilst these insights came through in the interviews, team members did not tend to speak of this knowledge as formal learning. Instead, the word learning was used to describe formal inputs on service design or leadership. And yet, learning about one's self and one's role in groups was one of the most powerful insights to come from these interviews.



Challenge for learning: Emotional labour



The learning that team members are doing is leading to personal insights and even an effort to develop ones' behaviours and role within groups. There an emotional cost to some of this work. As one Citizen described the experience of sharing stories and talking about specific care experiences:

It was emotional on all of us, a few of us cried (Citizen 5).

For Public Servants, the emotional work can also have an element of responsibility:

There was a massive fear as to how I was going to cope, and how I was going to work. I didn't want to let them 'the Citizen Team' down. I don't like to start something and then have to walk away" (Public Servant 5).

In the view of one Public Servant, emotions are needed for connection:

I absolutely believe that in order for there to be trust, you have to connect with a person on an emotional level" (Public Servant 10).

Doing this emotional work can be very rich, and lead to personal growth and interpersonal connection, but it can also raise painful memories. The work of connecting with oneself, and with others, emotionally, seems to be a crucial part of the Relationships First project.

Suggestion 1: *Can the Relationships First explore different ways of processing emotion, e.g. through theatre, dance, art?*

Enabler for learning: Reflection



The group seems to be working through its approach to emotional labour. Reflection is, at the moment, the core way that people are processing emotions:

There has been a big emphasis on reflection. We've done that religiously every session. We also have a Post-It note board at the end of each session of what went well, what could we do better. So we're constantly reflecting on every session. It has changed the mindset of the whole group. And being more mindful about things and taking a step back and analysing what happened ... How do I feel about that? What can I do? Can I take this forward? Do I really want to take that forward? (Public Servant 9)

Everyone on the project could identify moments of facilitated reflection. Many team members described reflecting on the project in their own time as well. Reflection was considered a valuable tool for most people in the project. But team members also described the time it takes to reflect and make sense of the experiences as being an unexpected element of the project.

Suggestion 2: *Learning is happening in ways that are easy to talk about, but it's also happening in ways that people don't yet have words to describe. It will be important for this project, which is iterative in nature, to continue to capture learning as it emerges.*

Impact: Changed mindsets

Changed mindset seems to have had the following features



→ Changing **perceptions** about the diversity of care experiences and that many factors affect the care system.



→ Changing mindset through **adopting more non-judgemental approaches** to other people and their circumstances.



→ Changing mindset around **one's role and purpose**.



→ A challenge for changing mindsets is a **uncertainty**.



→ Changing mindset has been enabled by the **combination of personal and professional experience** on this project.

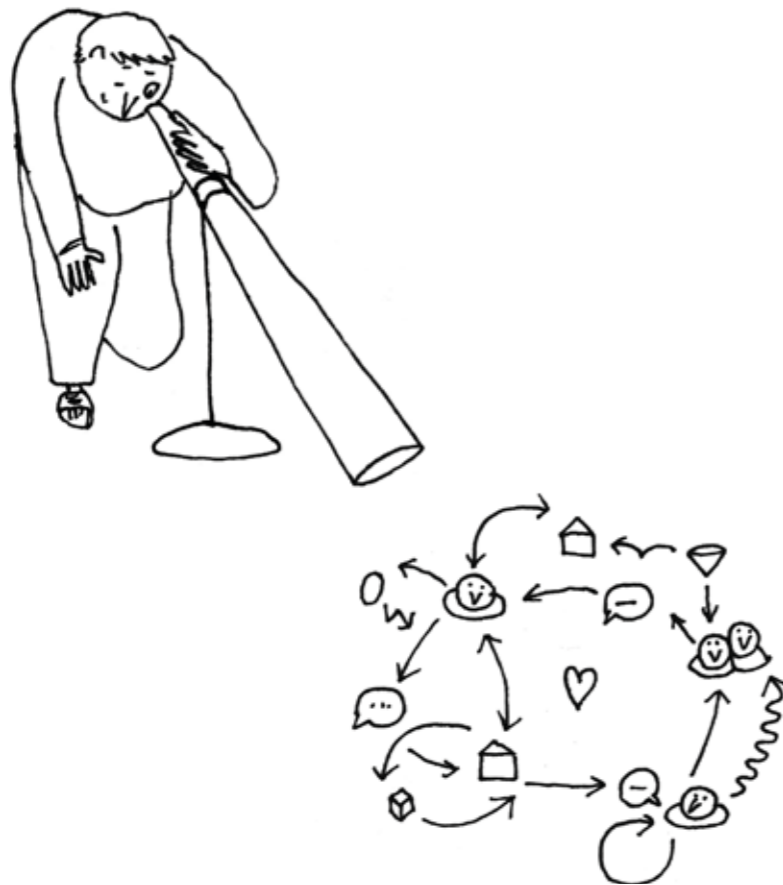
Perceptions

Team members talked about their own changing mindsets: For one Citizen, the project has broadened their understanding of the care system, something that they felt they knew quite well.

Because I hadn't really thought about the whole relationship side of things until this whole group came. I've learned so much stuff. Like it's actually been quite interesting. I'm learning so much about myself. I used to say oh I knew everything. I've been in care ... I know everything. I know all the rules. I used to say that sort of thing. Now, it's like I know a little but know what I think I'm thinking a little bit too. So it's been quite interesting. (Citizen 1)

For some team members, their learning has "emboldened" them and helped them to feel more secure in their own professional practice around the importance of building relationships:

I think since I've done the project, I'm probably a bit more emboldened in it and clear with people who are not feeling how I feel ... One of the managers is on board, the other one is stuck in how he works so we need to be pushing him. I'm quite confident in doing that. (Public Servant 3)



Adopting more non-judgemental approaches

For others, there has been a shift in perspective and a change in the way they look at their relationships and the circumstances of other people:

My life's totally changing as well, because you're looking at all these people, you're seeing different types of things, and you're actually having to think more. So, even just walking around the streets and you see somebody ... you're making a judgement on somebody. But instead of me doing that, I'm actually trying to think of somebody's background. Why are they there? What happened to make them there? Where is the help for them? Was it lack of help that led them to that situation in the first place? And could that all have been prevented? And it's just every time I do something now, I'm just trying to think of the other side of the coin, and to think of both sides. (Public Servant 5)

For this team member, changing mindset is the most significant outcome of the work so far. That change is leading to a desire to support others to change their mindsets as well:

I think it's changing people's mindsets. That's my biggest thing that I can bring back to my team. It's trying to give people a chance, and not to be as judgmental and to think about the different backgrounds of people as well, that's what I've learned. (Public Servant 5)



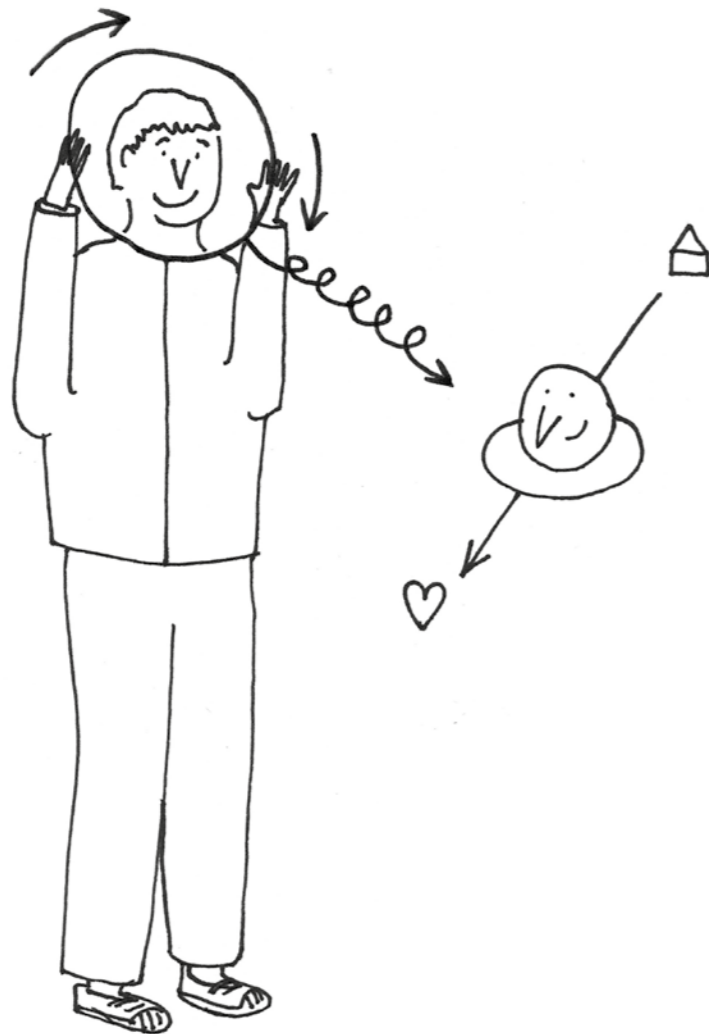
One's role and purpose

Another way the Relationships First project has supported team members to change their mindsets is by helping people to focus on what's important about their work and role:

I've never realised what makes the job rewarding for me is the bit when I'm going out and speaking to people and I don't think I really ever reflected on that until I did this project. (Public Servant 8)

Changing one's self, one's mindset, is leading to personal development for many on the project, as this insight reflects:

I feel like I've been held in a for a while, and this is helping me blossom as a person as well as in the project. (Public Servant 2)



Challenge for changed mindset: Lack of clarity

For some team members, one of the challenges of being involved in the Relationships First project is the "to-ing and fro-ing" around the project plan and time commitment required:



I think the training sessions we've had that have been within work time that's been totally fine from my point of view. My manager's been quite supportive of that and I'm just able to go and do that. Evening and weekend sessions we've had a bit of, not so much the evening ones but the weekend ones we had a bit of to-ing and fro-ing as to what days we were doing that over the last couple of weekends, and that was a bit tricky because I'm Monday to Friday, nine to five so there was weekend plans in place already and it's like, hmm I really want to be there but I can't because you know, I can't back out. And there was a bit of to-ing and fro-ing on dates which was a bit tricky. (Public Servant 1)

This "to-ing and fro-ing" reflects the emergent nature of the project. A strength of emergent processes is that there are responsive. But the lack of clarity can also be stressful and inhibit some of the deep changes that could occur for people:

From day one it was very relaxed and fluid, and I liked that at first until it started becoming an issue. Like three or four weeks in when you actually had things to do and things start having a meaning behind them, that's when it started becoming an issue ... The issue is that because of all the side tracking and because of all the un-organisation, some of the things have actually no meaning to them at all, we never mention them again. The thing is if you do something and you never mention it again and there's no meaning behind it and you really don't know why you're doing it, it won't stick to your head. (Citizen 4)

There may be different levels of comfort with emergent processes within the Relationships First project. For those who flourish in these environments, learning will be easier. For those who find them a challenge, learning may not be able to occur.

Suggestion 3: Relationships First project to explore the team's comfort with emergence and develop strategies to support people who find this way of working a particular challenge.

Enabler for changing mindsets: Blurring of professional and personal



For the Public Servant team, there are clearly professional roles which have been brought into the Relationships First project. As the project has progressed, there have been some very deep personal reflections for the Public Servant team about power and privilege, about their own assumptions, about their need for a change in their own life. This has made the project personal.

There is a sense that everyone has a personal driver there to ensure that ... Or maybe not driver. Maybe a personal motivator. And when I say personal, it might not be that it's been a life experience that they've lived. But I get the feeling that there's something that has touched them in their life, be it someone else's story or some thing they saw or heard that is motivating them to be a part of this team. (Public Servant 10)

For some members of the Citizen Team, there is a sense that they have brought a high level of professionalisation and expertise to the project, gained through years of volunteering, activism and paid work as care experienced young people:

Volunteering is more like a hobby to me rather than something that I just do. If folk ask me what do I like doing, I'm like, volunteering. (Citizen 7)

This sense of professionalisation of care experience is echoed by another Citizen:

I've spent a lot of my life doing lots of volunteering in groups. I'm part of Champions Board. I do volunteering with the Children's Hearing System for Scotland. And I also do volunteering with the Fostering and Adoption team within Falkirk. (Citizen 4)

As others in the group build up their expertise, this professionalisation of 'care experience' is likely to continue. Citizens and Public Servant Team are all taking up teaching and learning roles. Everyone has expertise, and people are finding ways to share that expertise across to the wider group.

Suggestion 4: *Team members are all taking up teaching and learning roles. How do those roles feel? What helps people to be at their best when they are 'teaching' and when they are 'learning'.*

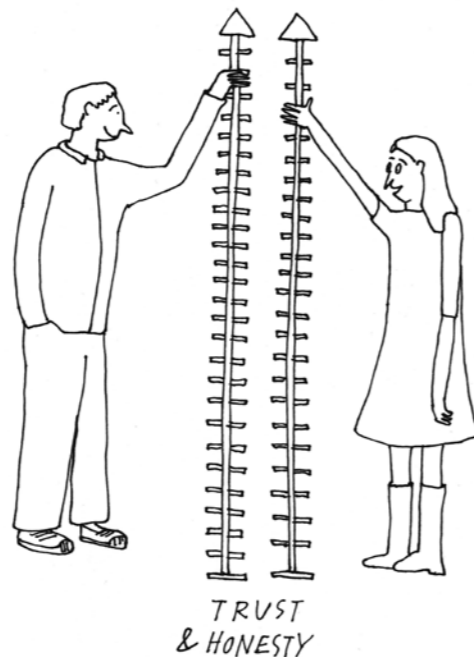
Impact: Relationships and Connection

Building relationships seems to have had the following features

→ Relationships are formed through **good connection** and a sense of feeling valued.



→ Relationships that are forming involve high levels of **honesty and trust**.



→ Some people view the new relationships as a **family**.



→ A challenge for relationships is the **different views about the quality** of these relationships. Family? Or work?



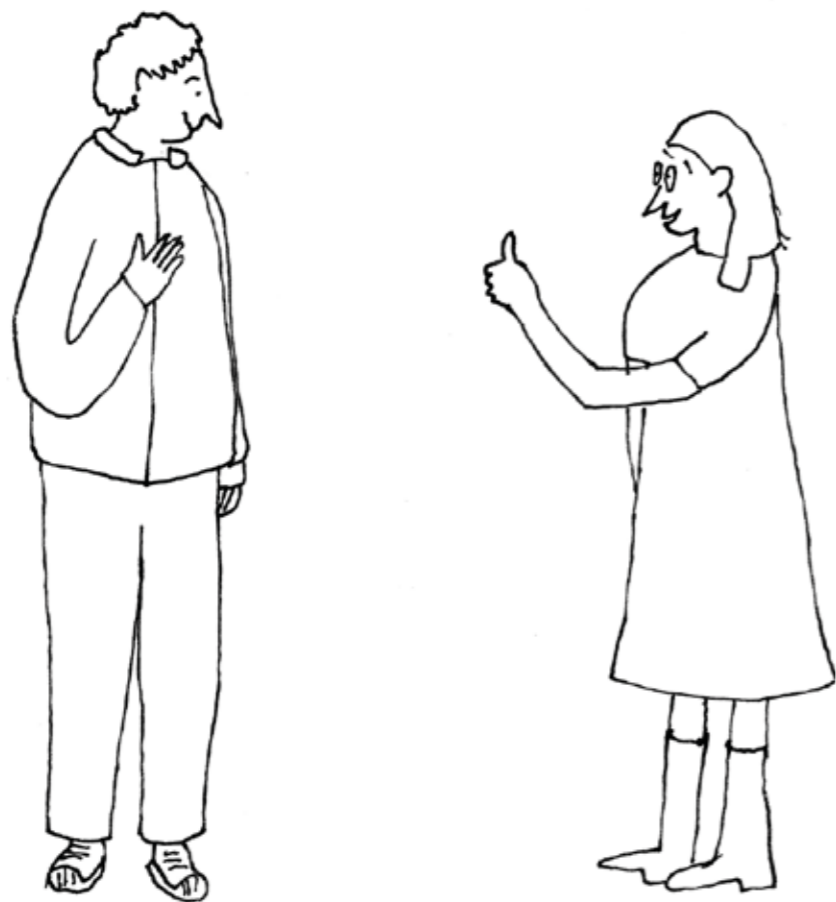
→ Enablers for good connection is the **Working Together Agreement** and **WhatsApp Group**.

Good connection

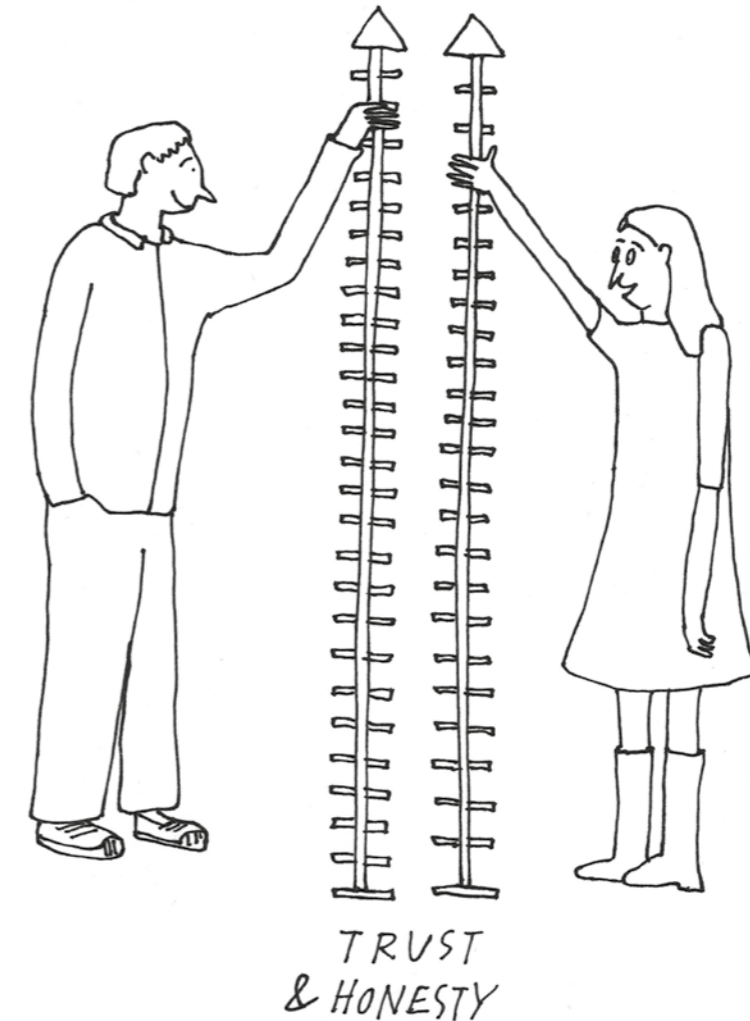
Relationships on this project seem to begin with a sense of 'good connection'. For one team member, connection means: *Being seen without having to say anything.* (Citizen 2). Connection for another team member means: *Everyone's opinion matters, everybody's valued. Every day that I go there, someone's like how are you? And they've remembered things I've told them before.* (Public Servant 2)

For the Citizen Team, this sense of connection was very important to some members particularly if they felt that they have limited number of other relationships or support in their life. One Citizen talked about a sense of isolation: *I don't have people my life.* (Citizen 3). Whilst others talked about the need for more support within their existing relationships.

For some, the Relationships First project seems to be creating connection that was otherwise missing. The depth of connection for some team members was described in rich detail: *We have all grown a massive connection with each other. Like it's actually been overwhelming at times how strong the bond has actually got. And I never really had friendships like that so it's quite, I quite like it.* (Citizen 1)



Honesty and trust



Connection has also occurred for the Public Servant team. One of the team members describes the level of honesty that exists in the group, and their ability to have disagreements and work through them.

We can actually say we disagree without upsetting anybody. Because we've been able to have those jokes and those personal comments that are fun. And that means that when we have to say something serious, people understand that you are their friend ... We can listen to people's thoughts and ideas, and go with it or say, no, I think it's rubbish. Which is an important thing. It's very important that we need to be able to do that. (Public Servant 4)

The quality of these relationships seems to be very high as people seem to be making deep, heartfelt, connections with one another.

Family

For the Citizen Team, one of the key impacts has been their relationships with one another. The Citizen team spoke extensively about their sensitivity to the idea of trust and the desire for relationships that last.

Within this context, one of the most significant findings to emerge is the sense that for some Citizens, the relationships they are forming resemble a family:

What it's done is it's given us the network. So, we've been helping each other out. But actually, that's going to be the ripple effect onto other young people. So, two of the young people haven't left care yet. They're in continuing care. So, even though they don't have the relationships, they know that [we] have been through the whole however many house moves as adults, and had to work out how to do gas, electrical, all that stuff. And know that they would phone us ... That was my biggest problem leaving care was that I was dumped in a house and didn't have that support network. So, I didn't know who to pick up the phone to and phone when my electricity went out or whatever. I didn't have that, so I don't know. Maybe that is a success in the project, on the basis that we've made the networks, and then we've been able to share things with each other. (Citizen 4)



The use of the word “family” was used by almost all of the Citizen Team in describing their group. But the nature of this family that the Citizens have created is not yet clear. Is this a group of siblings? Are there parents in the group? Are people acting as peers, rather than family members? What expectations does the group have that the family will continue on beyond the end of the project? Despite these questions, there is a very real – and very rich – group dynamic that has emerged.

Challenge in how relationships are formed: Family or work?



For the majority of the Citizen Team, the relationships they've formed as part of this project have the quality of a “family”. As one of the Citizen team put it: “We're all like a family ... You know, a family that we've not had, like, that. It's good though ... You don't need to be blood to be family” (Citizen 3). Another Citizen echoed this sentiment: “I think the young people are like a family, the citizen group is like a family” (Citizen 7). When I asked what the word ‘family’ meant, one Citizen responded: “It means belonging, communication, respect, trust” (Citizen 7). For another Citizen, there was a view that even the facilitators are part of the family: “They're the mamas. They are. Without them we wouldn't be complete” (Citizen 3).

But not everyone agrees. For other Citizens, there is a sense that the project is both work, and something deeper: “It can be both. I mean it's like a family at work sometimes, but yes, there's work involved” (Citizen 5). Another Citizen described the project as “work”, but also said that they “would do it without the pay” (Citizen 2). But there are some who clearly view the project as “work” and have an expectation that a particular kind of work will take place in the group:

For me it does feel like going to a job, yes ... But the thing is when you're in work you've still got to get on with the work. Here they're so flexible with their schedule that we don't stay on task. They're really leaning towards the responsive part and really not leaning towards the staying on task part. (Citizen 6)

There is clearly a dominant perspective about the nature of the Citizen Team as a family. But this dynamic raises questions for those in the group who don't see it this way. This dynamic also raises questions about what unspoken expectations might be at work in the project about the nature of the family dynamic.

Suggestion 5: Can the team explore what it means to form a sibling relationships with other care leavers? Can the formal care system do more to support care-experienced young people to form sibling like relationships with one another?

Enabler for how relationships are formed: Working Together Agreement + WhatsApp Group



One of the enablers for both the Citizen Team and the Public Servant team has been the creation of a set of clear expectations about the group:

One of the first things we did is a working together agreement and I thought 'they really mean it when they want different people's views and opinions'. If you don't have to have the views that they're looking for, it's safe to say them. Or 'I don't understand what that is' or 'I've had an assumption and that's been changed'. I feel as though everybody has space to be themselves. (Public Servant 8)

The importance of boundaries and knowing what to expect has helped the Citizen Group as well, particularly around confidentiality. As one Citizen says: "What is said in this group stays in this group ... What you say in the group, stays in the group. So, it's like that's safe, you know. It's the safe zone" (Citizen 3).

Another enabler for relationships has been the use of a WhatsApp group. Citizens and Public Servants alike talked about the value of the online communication:

We've built this trust with each other. So, if someone needed, like, even not on group days, like, if someone was feeling sad, they can message each other, you know. So, we've got a group chat. So, we always check up on each other. So it's not just that we're talking in a group, we're talking all the time. (Citizen 3)

The sense of support through online communication was also true for the Public Servant team:

We've all got a WhatsApp group now and I feel like if I was worried about something or didn't know something, I could put a question on there and I wouldn't be judged. It would be answered or somebody else would say actually, I feel like that. We're all supporting each other. (Public Servant 2)

Suggestion 6: *In this project work, which by definition begins and ends? Or is it a family, which by definition continues, through generations? What are the team's associations (positive and negative) with 'projects' and 'families'?*

What's driving these changes?

As a demonstration project, the process of the Relationships First project has a significant role to play in the impacts that team members are experiencing.

Team members described three core drivers for the changes they are experienced. First, the importance of time for **preparation**. Second, the diversity of knowledge, **life experience and personal experience**, which is being shared as part of the project. Third, the role of **coordination** to ensure that the project will make wider changes on the care system.

The drivers for change that team members described are emotional and reflexive, which is in keeping with the change process that people are experiencing.



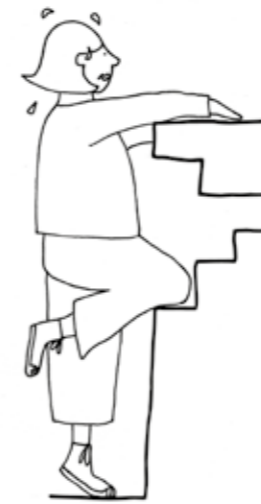
Driver: Time for preparation

Time for preparation has the following features

→ For the Public Servants, preparation was focused on ensuring that the workforce representatives had **sufficient knowledge** of the care system, the kinds of experiences that can occur within the care system and in the transitions into and out of that system of support.



→ For the Citizen Team, preparation seems to have been focused on **confidence building** for the team, to ensure that Citizens were comfortable, and prepared, to bring their knowledge of the care system into the work with the Public Servants.



→ A challenge for preparation has been the **different levels of readiness** for group members.



→ An enabler for preparation has been **strong motivation** amongst team members and **good beginning**.

Sufficient knowledge

Most team members were able to identify the purpose of that the design of the first phase was to ensure that both groups were 'ready' to work together. As one of the members of the Citizen Team put it: "The purpose of that was just basically to get us prepared for working with the workforce group and easing us in" (Citizen 6).

But what does preparation mean? For some, there was an initial sense that the preparation phase could help with emotional preparation: "Emotionally, I didn't know if I would be ready for something like that. Because it was going to be quite a personal journey as well, as anything else that you were going to go on, too" (Public Servant 5).



The preparation was also thought to be useful helping people to understand the system:

I think it's been ingenious the way they've got us into this system, they've got us thinking about things and then researching it ... Now we're at the stage where we are just going to start putting ideas together, seeing what we've got and see where we go from now and I just think it's quite exciting. (Public Servant 2)

Confidence building

Other preparation work has included training on the care system, talks about the experience of care, workshops on leadership and service design. The format of this preparation work has included formal inputs as well as informal down time (lunches and coffee breaks, etc.) where team members can build connections with one another.



The time spent on this first phase of the project was described by most team members as a "preparation" phase, in which Citizens and Public Servants worked separately in order to "ease" them into working within each other. There were discussions about "readiness" in both groups and a strong sense that the preparation was needed so that all members were able to meaningfully work with one another.

Challenge for preparation: Readiness



Most team members identified this as a preparatory phase, but some felt the need for preparation more than others.

Well, we needed time to let ourselves open up and find out about the project, and we've learned so much that I think it's just been the perfect timing, because obviously we've done, like, the weekend training, and then we spoke about our stories. I don't think anybody would have said their stories, like, we didn't know [the Public Servants] at the time. But with us all coming together, I think it's the right time. (Citizen 3).

There was agreement that, as a group, the preparation was needed in order for all members to have the confidence to work with the Public Servant team: "It gets us more confident for some people in the group, more confident about the project, so getting our heads around that" (Citizen 7). And yet, for this team member, the preparation time may have had an unintended consequence of highlighting the differences between the two groups:

I could have come together straightaway. I don't think we need the dynamic or the difference of people saying we're different, if that makes sense. Obviously, we are different. So, there's people that are care experienced and there's people that work within Falkirk Council. So, there is a big difference. But actually, I think it's highlighted the difference for me. (Citizen 4)

Most of the Public Servant team seemed to feel that the time and focus on preparation was necessary, though even they were unprepared for the depth of work they would do to get ready:

So, I was maybe not prepared for the depth of training that we would have, but now at this stage that we are at, I'm glad we've had that, because at every stage I've questioned my own perceptions of things, I've questioned the way things are. It makes you really curious. Now when we've come together, we've been totally ready to come together. (Public Servant 2)

The tension between the 'readiness' of some individuals and the need for time and preparatory work for others may be a feature of co-productive or group work where there is a diversity of need, capacity or interest which can affect the collective abilities of the team. In this instance, it was broadly agreed that the time for separate work was necessary.

Enabler for preparation: Strong motivation and participation in change process

For the Public Servant Team, the rationale for getting involved in the project tended to come from three drivers – an individual's own, often personal, commitment to social justice and social change, a desire for personal growth and their involvement in existing organisational change within the Council.

The rationale for the Citizen Team was similar. Both groups share a commitment to social justice and change. Both groups include people already involved in change agent activity – e.g. Change Agent Network or Champions Network. For the Citizen Team, this is reflected in the number of the people who are also on the Falkirk Champions Board.

Another motivator for the Citizens who are involved in Relationships First is their connection to the staff member who invited them to attend. Strong relationships with this professional – and trust – seemed to be an important enabler for a number of people in this group.



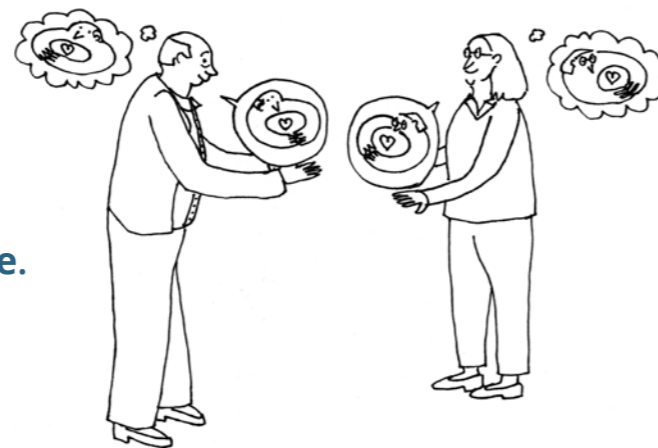
Suggestion 7: The preparation phase seems have created a strong, separate, group identity amongst Public Servants and Citizens. Does some element of these separate groups need to be maintained? Or should they end?

Driver: Different kinds of knowledge

The knowledge base of this group is a core driver for the learning that is occurring.

Knowledge has the following features on this project

→ The knowledge and experience that people brought to this project is based on their **life experience**.



→ Many people in the project have knowledge which is rooted in **lived experience** of the care system, kinship care, and are carers themselves.



→ Public Servants and the Coordination Crew are bringing **practice-based knowledge**.



→ A challenge for using this knowledge is the issue of **representation**.

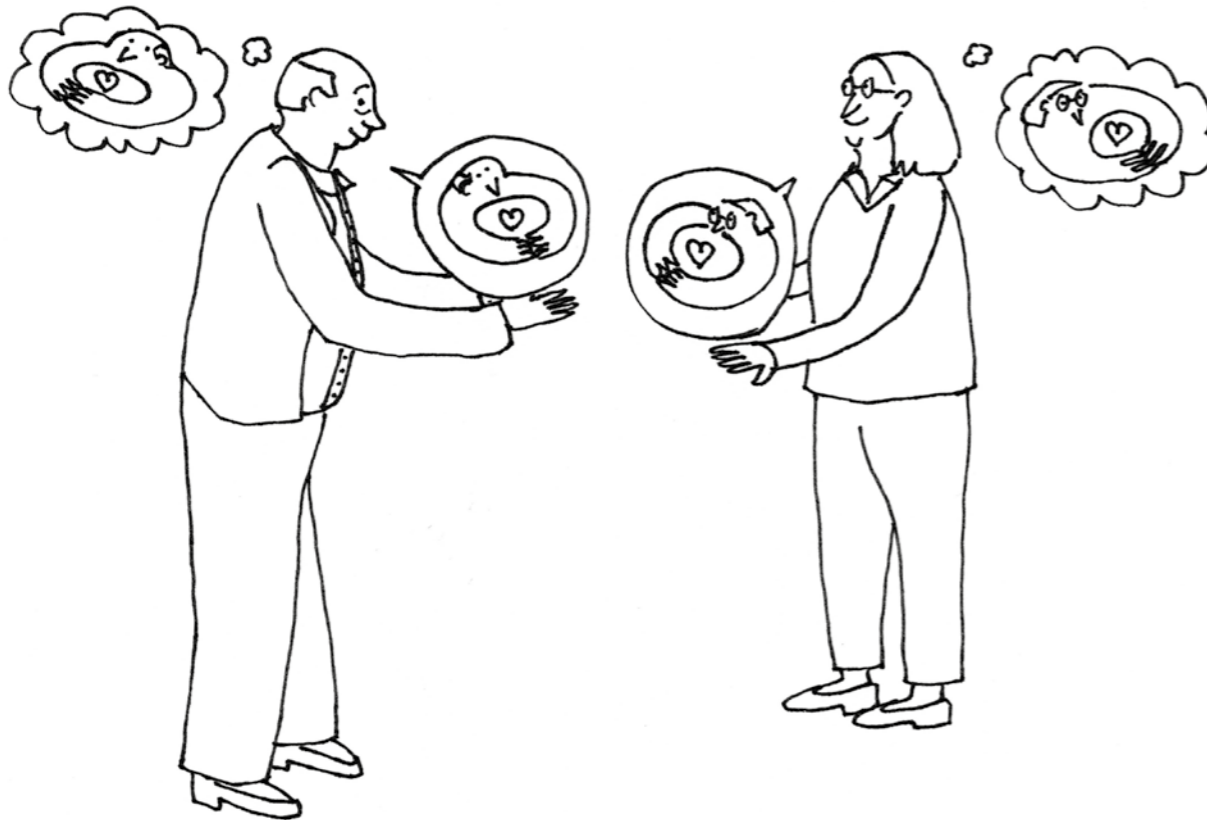


→ Enablers for using this knowledge is **translation and the diversity of the group**.



Life experience

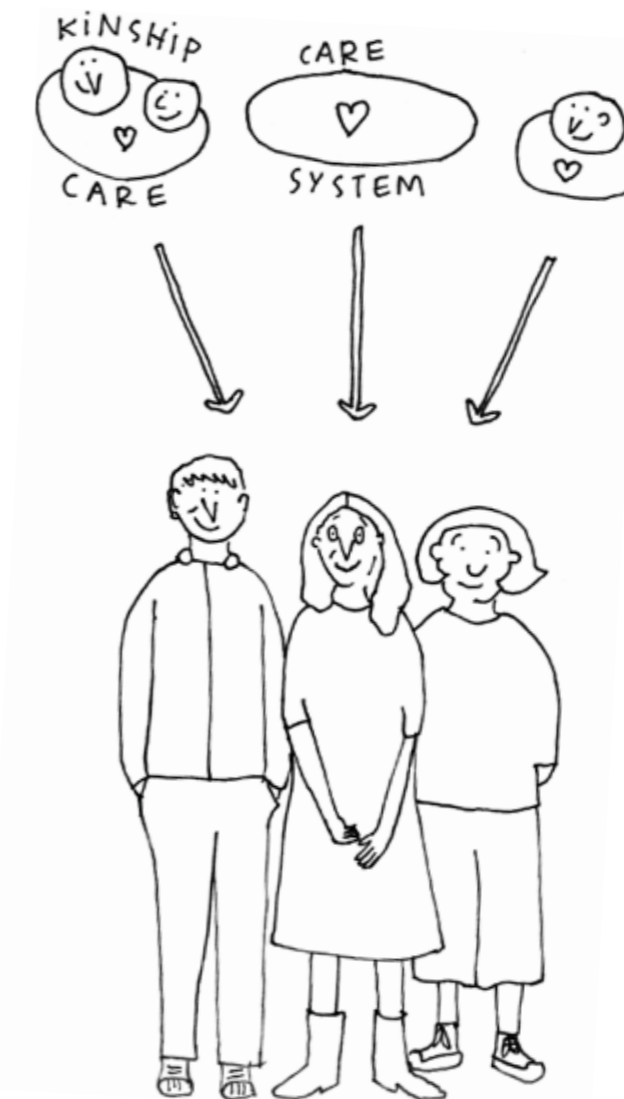
Knowledge and expertise is complex in this project. Both the Citizen Team and the Public Servant team have gained knowledge through their personal and professional experience.



The Public Servant team bring with them experiential knowledge about the Council and its way of working. The Public Servants in this team worked in areas across the council from the library to housing services, transport to education, residential care to information services. Public Servants also have an understanding of the way the Council operates. For example, “performance indicators that we need to meet” (Public servant 1). Having an understanding of the way that the everyday work and business of the Council is structured is an important form of knowledge, often called practice wisdom.

Lived experience

Citizens have a range of experiences with the care system – each one different from another person’s. Some of the differences are based on relationships and pathways into and out of care. Other differences are reflected in the age of group members and the legislation and policy that was in place at the time they entered into or left care. As one Citizen put it, young people in the project bring with them an “expertise” of the care system and the way it has worked or not worked for them.



We’re already the experts within the field, because if you go through the care system that experience is yours. So, you’re already an expert in what you’ve been through because all the workforce haven’t been through that. Yes, they might have experienced that and they might have supported young people through it with their jobs or something, but they don’t have the same understanding of what it is. (Citizen 7)

Practice-based knowledge

There may be an assumption that knowledge of the care system would be largely held by the Citizen Team, and that the Public Servant Team would take up the role of 'learner'. Whilst this is true to some extent, the reality is that both groups have insights into the experience of care – some directly through their own life experience and others through the experience of their family members.

Members of both groups also have experiences of challenging life events, trauma and needing support. As one Public Servant put it: "We've all got issues. We've all had a level of trauma. We've all had a wee bit of depression. We've all had mental health issues (Public Servant 5). Another Public Servant talked about their experience as a professional with a history of hardship as a young person. Professional knowledge and lived experience do not always sit easily together: "It's hardest to tell people my background. I would be unemployed. Do you know what I mean? So I'm no daft. There are people who would actually use that against me" (Public Servant 6).



For Public Servants and Citizens alike, there was a deep understanding of vulnerability and trauma. Individuals shared these experiences in the interview as a way of acknowledging their commitment to changing the care system.

Most people talked about their knowledge as something that was accumulated experientially – through challenging life experiences, the experience of work and learning to do one's job well, and the experience of positive relationships and support. This is a powerful insight for the Relationships First project which makes use of formal training within the context of an experiential learning process.

Challenge for knowledge use: Representation

Not everyone within the Citizen Team has found the group to be a place where their voice is heard: "my mentality and the way I think is the polar opposite to the entire group (Citizen 6). The sense of "being the odd one out" (Citizen 6) is echoed by another team member who talked about the experience of seeing someone change their view in the group: "and then that person totally changed what they said because they felt uncomfortable" (Citizen 2). For this team member, there was a strong conviction that group members should be free to express their views: "I don't want anyone to change what they said, that's not right" (Citizen 2).

This tension around representation is mirrored by an insight from the Public Servant team:

There's quite a few dominant voices within our group. What I have noticed since the groups came together, they have settled down slightly. There's more of a chance for everybody to get their voice heard. But definitely initially I did get quite frustrated at times that what I was saying wasn't being listened to or I just couldn't get what I wanted to say across because by the time I did, the topic of conversation had maybe moved on. (Public Servant 9)

The challenge for these team members is around representation. For these individuals, there was a sense that their views, or the views of others, might be subsumed within a group narrative that didn't reflect the diversity of the group. Their concerns raise questions about how the Relationships First project can work with the insights that come from lived experience and practice wisdom in a way that is generalisable enough for others to understand and robust enough to reflect the diversity of the group's views and understanding.

Making decisions as a group is challenging – even when people feel their voice has been heard. As one Public Servant put it, there can be "surprises" with the way that certain issues or issues take priority in a group discussion:

There're a few things that completely surprised me on Sunday. Things like everybody had said one particular thing would be a good thing. But then, when we did what's important, the one thing that everybody said would be a good thing, wasn't classed as important. The one thing that for me, in my head, seemed the perfect solution, didn't come out as important. And that was unusual. I didn't expect that. (Public Servant 4)

Suggestion 8: Could the idea of representativeness be explored? Perhaps an explicit discussion and agreement amongst the group could help make decisions around 'what is representative' more transparent.

Challenge for knowledge use: Translation

There are some members of the group who have taken on a translation role for the group:

I see myself as a leader of some sort. I try and make that everyone's on the same wavelength and if no one gets anything then I explain it to them as best I can. Because sometimes if it's a professional talking the young people are like, I don't know what you're saying to me. And then I'll be like, right, I'll translate it for you. (Citizen 7)

This translation work has a purpose. For one member of the Citizen Team, translation was used to communicate needs or experiences of the group to the group's facilitators:

If someone comes in and says something. So, say, [one young person] came and said blah, blah, blah, to me. I would then be, Janet, Gayle, blah, blah, blah, said, blah, blah, blah. And that's just the way I am. Just say it and get straight to the point. (Citizen 4)

Translators, by definition, speak more than one language and may be a much needed go-between to help stabilise meaning. In this case, team members voiced a need to translate between the everyday speech of young people and the more "academic" and professional language forms of the project facilitators.

The role of translation has been informal at this stage. But translation may be necessary for knowledge and information to flow easily – both within the project and out into the Council and wider system. As one Public Servant put it, "translation" will be needed to help shift the culture of her workplace from a transactional approach to a more relational approach:

The people that I work with know how passionate I am about stuff. But I think translating that elsewhere, because it's so regimented like you should be here and doing that, I wanted to step out of that box and show there's no reason why we can't... We keep talking in the project about going that extra mile. I feel like everything I do when there's somebody at my work, I try to do that. And I feel like this project is just upping the ante a little bit. (Public Servant 2)

Suggestion 9: Is translation a necessary part of any communication process? Is it worth making that translation work more transparent? Could different people practice taking on that role?

Enabler for knowledge use: Diversity of group members



Most team members talked about the value of having a diverse group of people involved in the project. For the Public Servants, there was a sense that the range of professional backgrounds and roles was a particular asset to the project:

Everyone else just came from all over the council, from housing to IT. It was a huge spread. I think it's been really good, because sometimes, people can be a bit jaded with what they've had to put up with over the years. And it's nice to have a fresh mix to get a different aspect. (Public Servant 3)

This diversity is also present in the Citizen Team who are different ages and have experienced different legislative frameworks affecting their entitlements to care. But entitlement and legislation and rights – though they are meant to be standardised – can be applied in different ways. As one Citizen put it, there are differences of experience even for those people whose care has been organised under the same legislation:

And there's one girl in the group and it makes me so angry. She's the same age as me. We were both under the same legislation and we both walked in at the same time. And I've still got Through Care after care and she's not, and that winds me up so bad. I'm like I didn't get that. It's actually unfair. (Citizen 1)

Legislation is only one of the factors affecting people's experience of the care system. There are a range of personal experiences within the group which affect people's experience of care and their current connections and relationships. As described elsewhere, team members are carers, professionals, volunteers and parents – and these roles extend to the Public Servants as much as they do to the Citizen Team.

Suggestion 10: The project involves a highly experiential learning process, many people in the group are drawing on their own experience, both professional and personal. How do different kinds of experience blend together in the learning process?

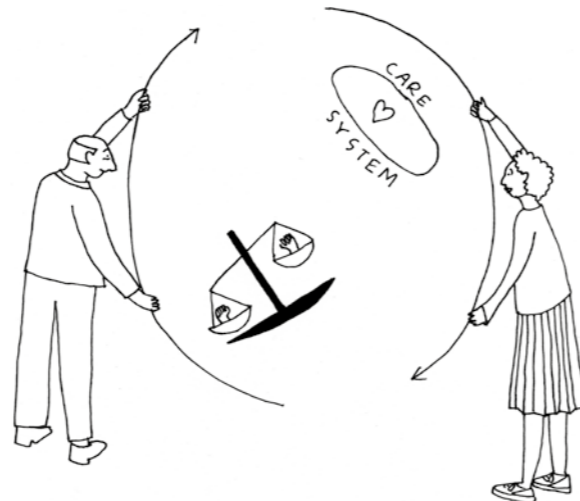
Driver 3: Coordination

Coordination has the following features on this project:

→ **Coordination** has an instrumental role to play in facilitating, responding to need, planning ahead, securing strategic support and communicating about the project.



→ Members of the Coordination Crew, like the rest of the project's membership, are **motivated by a strong commitment to changing the care system, and changing power imbalances.**



→ Coordination involves a **focus on the day-to-day** project delivery as well as a future focus on **project completion and wider impact** on the Council.



→ A challenge for coordination is **balancing responsiveness** and **'sticking to the plan'**.



→ An enabler for coordination is the ability to **communicate the value of experiential learning.**



Coordination

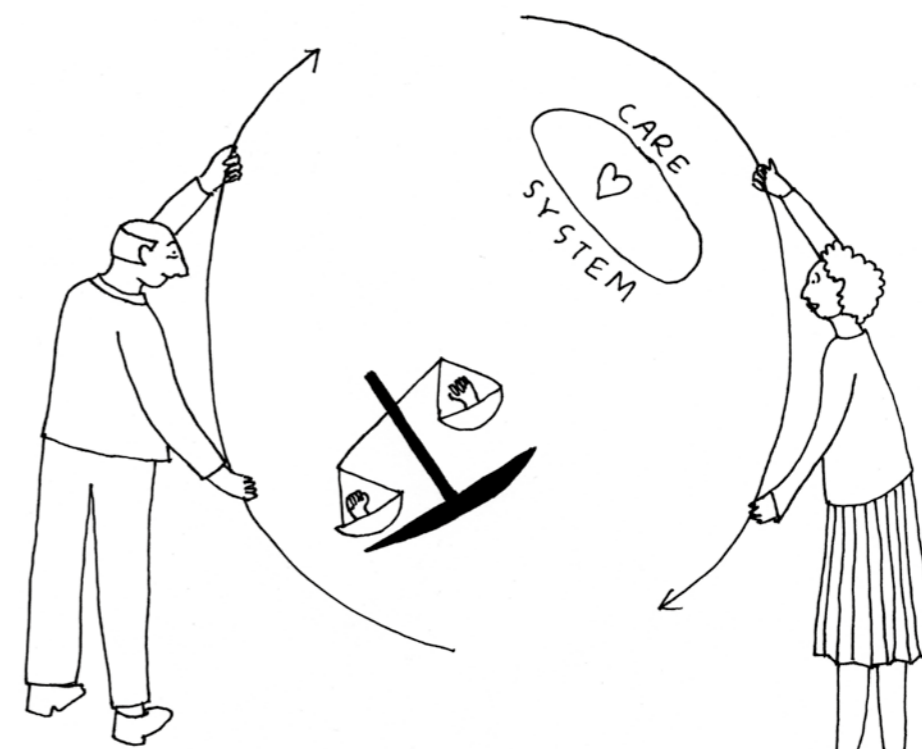


Most of the Coordination Crew have a formal role as facilitators and project leads. The insights from the Coordination Crew reveal some of the challenges for leadership and coordination when there are a range of changes occurring at one time within a system, as well as the strength that comes from a strong conviction and vision for improved services and support.

Like their team members, the Coordination Crew were motivated by a desire for change: a change in power dynamics, a change in approach for the Council, a desire to be part of the change that is happening so that it reflects the needs of young people and the needs of the workforce who support them. Changing power dynamics, through co-design and co-production, was an important motivator for some members wanting to get involved:

I was particularly interested in the project, thinking about how we can actually get young people involved in working alongside public sector employees. To think about how you can change the whole basis of power, and the way that power should be shared across. And that as young people were able to take back some of the power, or perceived power, then what changes they could actually make to the way services were delivered. (Coordination Crew 2)

Motivated by strong commitment



Whilst the Coordination Crew are motivated by changing the power dynamics between Public Servants and Citizens, they are also conscious of their own power, and even powerlessness, within the system. All four members of the Coordination Crew that were interviewed talked about austerity and increasing budget cuts.

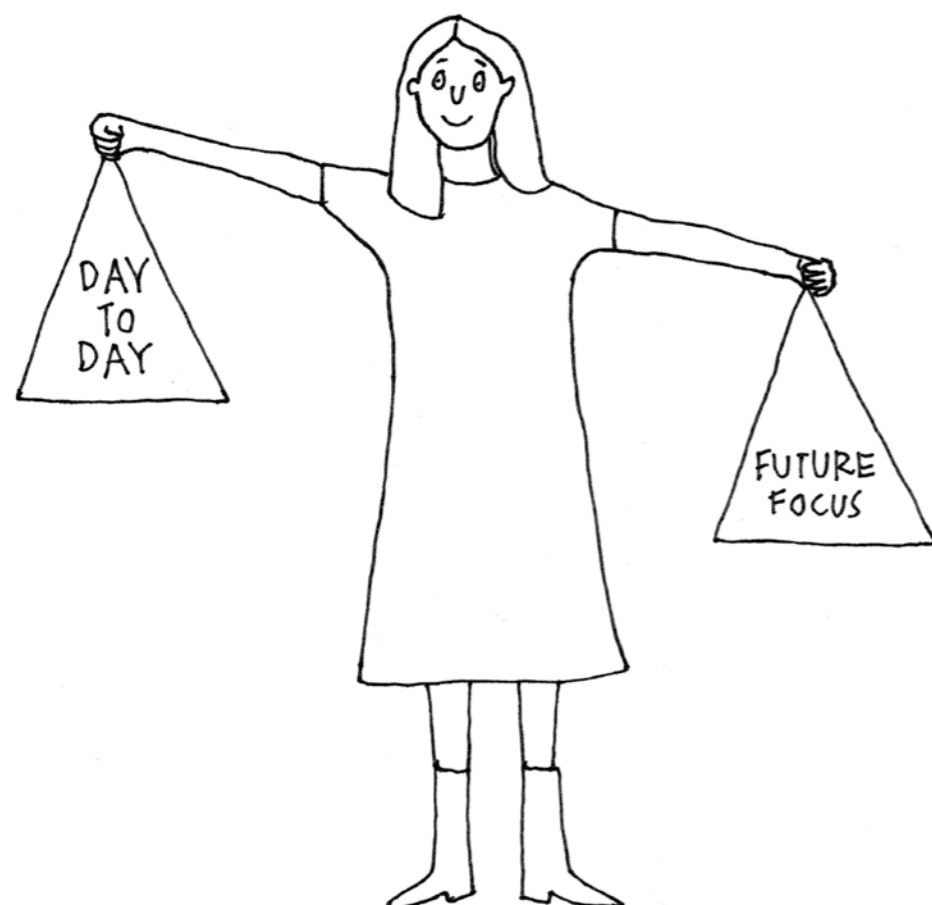
It's about making change, a change in practice. And really just being part of something that's making that change. Because we're in, our services are in crisis. That is the fact of the matter. We're in crisis, and we need to be looking at doing things differently. And I've always been a person who is interested in being part of that, rather than having it done to me. So that was part of my motivation. (Coordination Crew 4)

Shaping the change and doing things differently was a clear motivator for the Coordination Crew members. But this can be an uncomfortable stance when the Relationships First project seems to sit at odds with other strategic work in the Council:

I don't think [the Council] know what to do with us at times because we're not a project that's saving money at a time where the focus is on smarter travel, smarter working, smarter use of technology. And we're coming in from left field with 'it's important to relate to one another and that we should be thinking about how we relate to one another and acting differently, perhaps acting out with our traditional roles'. None of that is going to sit well with these other projects that we're surrounded by. (Coordination Crew 3)

Focus

Doing something different has required the Coordination Crew to carefully plan the day-to-day process of the project work, so that everyone can be involved and any barriers to participation are reduced as much as possible. But it's also required the Coordination Crew to think forward to the end of the project and ensure that there are clear pathways into the strategy and planning at the Council level so that this project has a wider influence.



Challenge for coordination: Responsiveness and sticking to the plan



At this stage in the project, the Coordination Crew have worked with the Public Servants Team and Citizens Team separately. From the perspectives of the Coordination Crew, the work of training and relationship building has been “purposeful” (Coordination Crew 1), so that everything in the preparation phase has been included for a reason – from the working together agreement, the personas, the leadership and co-design training, the work on empathy and so on.

But there have also been a number of unexpected “hiccups” in the project (Coordination Crew 1), meaning there have been issues or events that could not be anticipated. Most of these hiccups seem to be around different barriers to participation for members of the Citizen and Public Servant team. Health issues, a personal issues or a workload issues have also created barriers to people’s ability to participate.

As one member put it, some of the strategies to encourage participation have already been well thought through: “My main role is to basically help breakdown any barriers that young people may have. But I think some of that’s already been well thought out, in terms of child care, travel and payments” (Coordination Crew 4). And yet, all three groups, the Public Servant Team, the Citizen Team and the Coordination Crew, have had a member leave the project.

Endings seem to have been managed sensitively. One team member described the efforts that the Coordination Crew have made to keep people on the project – as well as the work that was done to manage that person’s departure:

[The Coordination Crew] tried their hardest to keep [the team member] on board but it just obviously wasn’t feasible at the time. They did try their hardest, I know that because we had a group discussion about it at the time when it was revealed to us that [someone] was going to have to leave. So it was nice of them to do that, and nice of [the team member] to agree, because I think if he’d just left and we didn’t know what was going on, [it would have] left us wondering what happened. So it was good that we were able to have that wee bit of reflection on what happened and discuss it through with the team. (Public Servant 9)

Where people who left the project were interviewed, there was a strong sense that the purpose of the project was sound, but that there were other priorities in their workload which would prevent them from making the kind of commitment the project deserved.

This pressure of workload, and of other commitments, was a common theme. A number of the Citizen Team have caring roles, work commitments and volunteer responsibilities: “I also do volunteering with the fostering and adoption team ... I’m my gran’s full-time carer. So, I do a lot” (Citizen 4).

The balancing of work, volunteering, projects like Relationships First alongside family commitments and managing one’s own health were themes for almost all the team members. Given that relationships is a core theme for the project, there are tremendous insights to be gained from how people make connection, how relationships form, and how they end – and, importantly, what features of people’s lives and circumstances enable that connection to occur and which features get in the way.

Suggestion 11: Coordination Crew to document their communication wins, and communication failures. Are enthusiasm and belief the core enablers for others taking this work on board?

Suggestion 12: It could be that people will leave this project at different times. Resources were put in place for team members to help them manage this first series of endings. Is there capacity to continue this investment if other people

Suggestion 13: Since relationships are core to this project, it could be helpful to think about the role of strategic connections. What role do existing strategic relationships play in ensuring that the project has had visibility?

Challenge for coordination: Communicating the value of experiential learning

Getting strategic support and visibility was a key priority for the Coordination Crew right from the start:

I was saying, look, in order for this project to be sustainable, we need to invest in and inform key people within the council now. We need to get the Chief Executive on this agenda. We need to get a buy-in from the senior leadership team corporately on this project.

But Coordination Crew also talked about their struggle to describe a project about love and relationships, which seems to be so different from other change projects:

It’s fine if you’re talking about Corporate Parenting, it’s fine if you’re talking about services for care leavers, leadership, service design. But when you’re talking about caring for care leavers as you would your own family and putting love at the heart of relationships is where it starts to become a bit trickier because then you get into, well, what does that look like, how would that be. And I think as a society we already struggle with using the word love anyway. So, to bring it into the workplace is an added struggle. (Coordination Crew 3)

The challenge for the Coordination Crew comes from “selling” the project to their strategic colleagues so that there is a place for this work to scale-out and affect the wider business of the Council:

We found it really difficult to sell the work we were doing, because you have to feel it. With the long-term projects, they’re expensive and people do not want to commit that kind of money and not know what it is they’re getting at the end. (Coordination Crew 1)

Despite the challenges, some real gains have been made in getting the project to be visible within the Council:

Communication has been a real challenge for this project so that we get it in the right parts of the council. I can see the importance of that so we’re not just this little project beaver away in the background. And we got the ear of the Chief Exec in the early stages and we got onto the Corporate Management Team to deliver a presentation. So, we’ve managed through tenacity, and our combined skills, we’ve managed to become quite visible. (Coordination Crew 3)

For the Coordination Crew, this tenacity of focus seems to be a core attribute of their approach. In the context of wider changes in the Council, this tenacity may be an important enabler for the overall success of the project.

Conclusion

What has been learned about the “demonstration” role of the Relationships First project?

An experiential learning process helps reveal some of the deep tensions in a system. As one team member put it: “If the people on this project can work together, then it shows that hopefully, the Council as a whole could work better towards helping care leavers feel love” (Public Servant 2). The benefit of an experiential learning process is that it is ‘felt’ – it goes deep, it raises questions, it holds a mirror up and helps us blossom. But it is also difficult to predict each and every element of the process. It can be emotionally draining. It requires reflection to make sense of what’s happened and that takes time.

In order to achieve that ideal of ‘working together’, the teams have had to grapple with questions of readiness, representation, translation across different ways of speaking, emotional ups and downs, questions about the nature of the relationships that are forming (family, friend, colleague?). Where there have been challenges, there are have also been great strengths. The diversity of the group, the tools such as the working together agreement and WhatsApp, the space for reflection and, of course, the commitment to social change which each of the team have brought with them.

In this context, the first phase of the Relationships First project has prepared team members to work meaningfully together. More importantly, it has done the work of ‘demonstrating’ in very real ways the experience of changing one’s mind, changing ones relationships and learning.

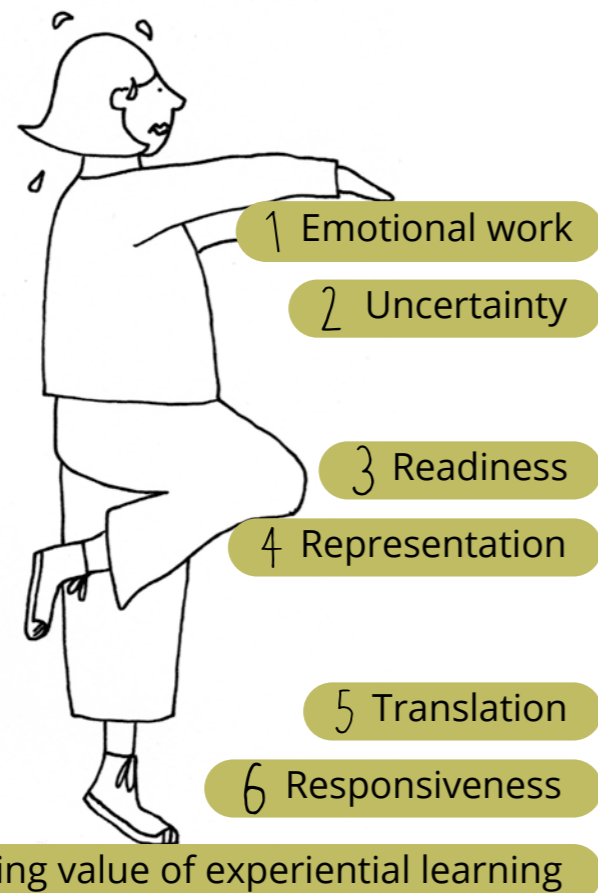


What has enabled and challenged the project?

The gains that have been achieved in terms of learning, changed mindsets and changed relationships have occurred because of the preparation process and because people drew from their own experiential knowledge of the care system, of working in the Council, of trauma, of positive relationships and life transitions.

Team members described some of the challenges of this project as well as some of the supports they've experienced. The challenges listed below show some of the difficulties that team members have experienced in being part of the project. The supports give clarity to some of the resources that the project has so that team members can work through difficulties and stay on track.

Challenges



Supports



It may not be possible to 'resolve' all of these challenges. A recommendation for team members is to 'work with' these challenges by acknowledging them, transparently discussing the issues, and finding a process of mitigation which suits the whole team.

- For example, people who take up a translation role between different ways of knowing may be necessary – important even – for this project. It is challenge, but if it is worked with and acknowledged, it could become a support.
- For example, discussing trauma and life transitions will require emotional labour and sensitivity. This is a challenge, but done well, this kind of work can become a core support for the project and a model for other demonstration projects in the Council.

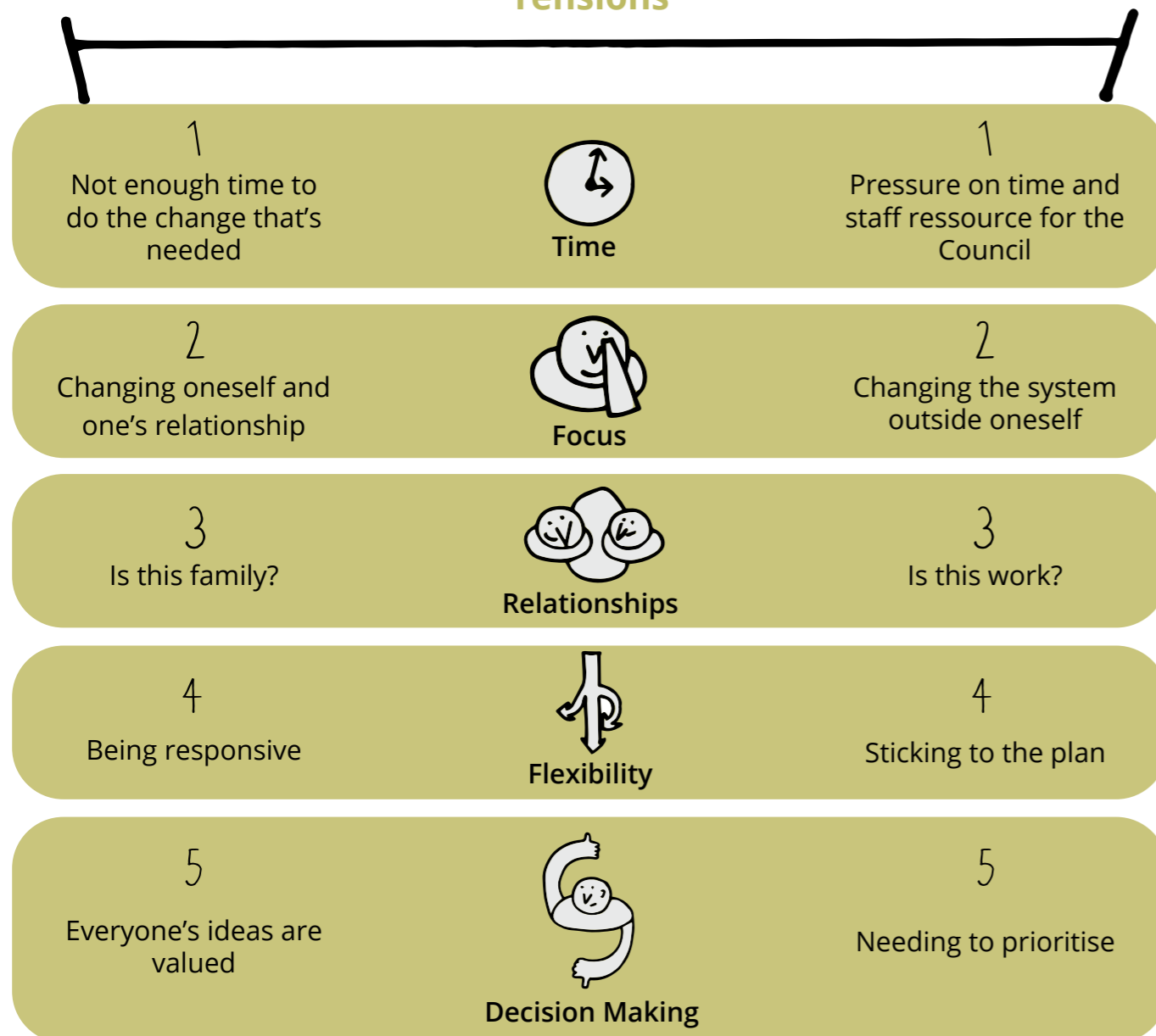
There is a clear and positive view from team members that the supports, such as the group's shared motivation and commitment to change, availability of contact through the WhatsApp group, the diversity of team members, the Working Together Agreement which supports confidentiality, the space for reflection, are all necessary enablers for the project.

Tensions to be balanced in 'demonstrating' change and learning

The Relationships First project, like other system change initiatives, will need to balance a set of tensions in order to be effective. These tensions reveal the wider constraints of the system that need to change, so it is unlikely that the Relationships First project will 'solve' these problems. Instead, the project's ability to balance these tensions will be a marker for success for Relationships First.

The following list of tensions has been drawn from analysis of the challenges and enablers for learning and change in the Relationships First project.

Tensions



Key features of the demonstration project

Key features which can be translated to other demonstration projects:

- 1 → Preparation was viewed as necessary part of the project.
- 2 → Preparation allowed for people to gain insights into themselves, the roles they take up, the way that groups work best.
- 3 → Preparation allowed Citizens and Public Servants to form connections within their own groups, which has helped people to develop strong levels of trust.
- 4 → Trust is important for enabling people to be honest and to work through disagreement and discomfort.
- 5 → Working honestly has allowed some team members to change their mindsets, test out new behaviours and build new relationships.
- 6 → For many in the Citizen Team, the relationships that have formed are like family.
- 7 → For the Public Servant Team, the focus on relationships has highlighted that they are committed to change for personal as well as professional reasons.
- 8 → The project uses an experiential learning process, which means that people are learning from formal 'teaching' as well as working, and being, together.
- 9 → Everyone is taking up a teaching, and a learning, role.
- 10 → Members have experienced being a dominant voice and a marginal one.

Suggestions

The following suggestions are opportunities for learning for the Relationships First project, and for others who want to adopt this kind of “demonstration” approach.

Learning

- Learning is happening in ways that are easy to talk about, but it’s also happening in ways that people don’t yet have words to describe. It will be important for this project, which is iterative in nature, to continue to capture learning as it emerges.
- Could the idea of representativeness be explored? Perhaps an explicit discussion and agreement amongst the group could help make decisions around ‘what is representative’ more transparent.
- Is translation a necessary part of any communication process? Is it worth making that translation work more transparent? Could different people practice taking on that role?
- Can the Relationships First explore different ways of processing emotion,

Changing Mindset

- Team members are all taking up teaching and learning roles. How do those roles feel? What helps people to be at their best when they are ‘teaching’ and when they are ‘learning’.
- Relationships First project to explore the team’s comfort with emergence and develop strategies to support people who find this way of working a particular challenge.
- The project involves a highly experiential learning process, many people in the group are drawing on their own experience, both professional and personal. How do different kinds of experience blend together in the learning process?
- Coordination Crew to document their communication wins, and communication failures. Are enthusiasm and belief the core enablers for others taking this work on board?

Relationships and Connection

- The preparation phase seems have created a strong, separate, group identity amongst Public Servants and Citizens. Does some element of these separate groups need to be maintained? Or should they end?
- Is this project work, which by definition begins and ends? Or is it a family, which by definition continues, through generations? What are the team’s associations (positive and negative) with ‘projects’ and ‘families’?
- Can the team explore what it means to form a sibling relationships with other care leavers? Can the formal care system do more to support care-experienced young people to form sibling like relationships with one
- Since relationships are core to this project, it could be helpful to think about the role of strategic connections. What role do existing strategic relationships play in ensuring that the project has had visibility?
- It could be that people will leave this project at different times. Resources were put place for team members to help them manage this first series of endings. Is there capacity to continue this investment if other people depart the project?

Suggested next steps for learning

1

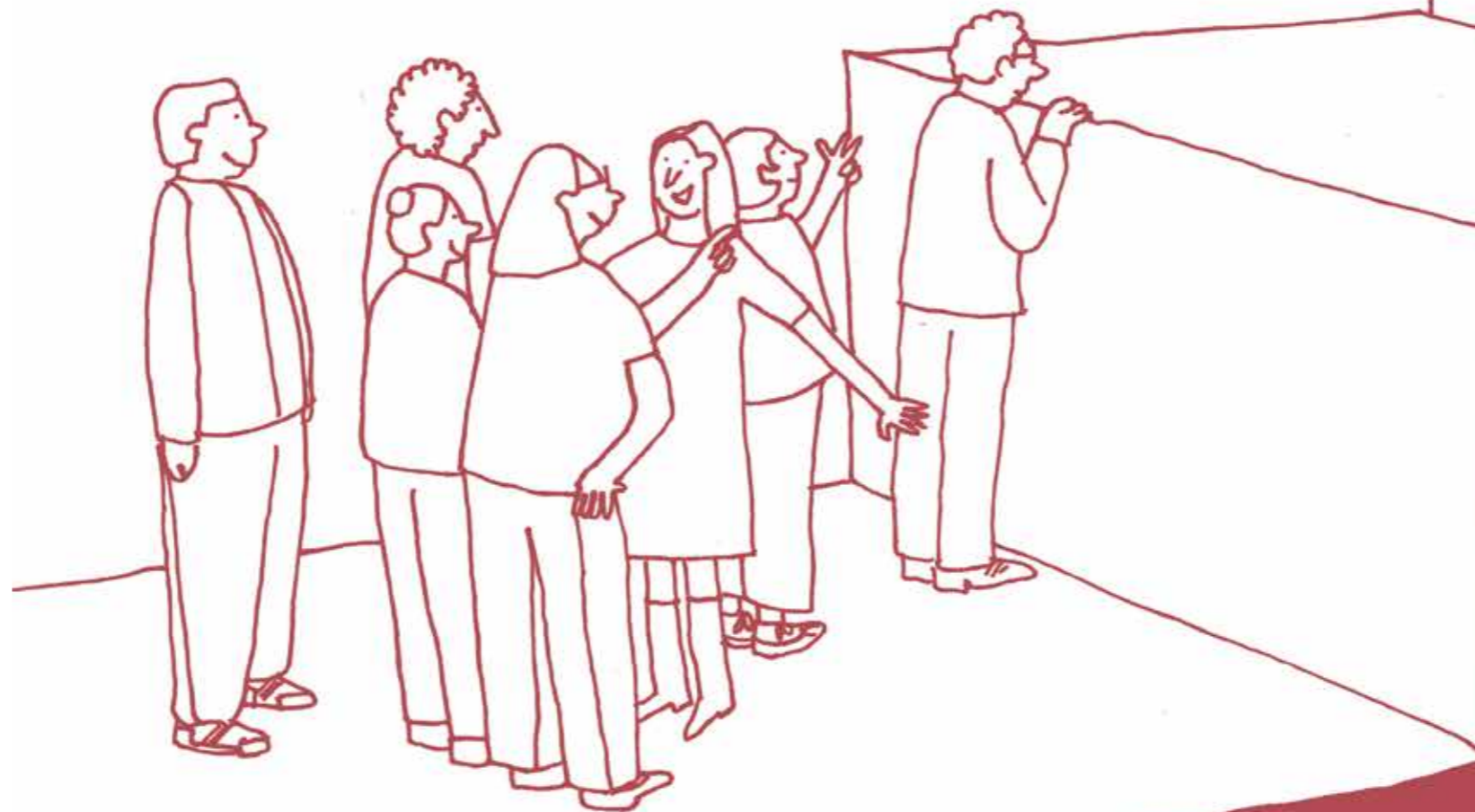
Understanding of evidence is deepened with conversation. To that end, it would benefit the Relationship First project if it could create dedicated time with the evaluator to review the key themes and suggestions.

2

Learning should be ongoing. To that end, it would benefit the Relationships First project to make time for a learning review at the end of Phase 2. This review can be done through a facilitated conversation rather than in-depth interviews. It can be organised by the Coordination Crew or facilitated by an external stakeholder. The recommendation is to collect evidence on the strengths and challenges of Phase 2 of the project.

3

Final impacts – and the processes which enabled them – to be captured and shared more widely. The insights in this report, and those collected at the end of Phase 2, can be used to support a robust final evaluation of the project.



Appendix: Methodology

This section of the report describes the way evidence was gathered and how people gave their consent to their information being used. This section also describes the appreciative approach that was used, which focuses on learning first and foremost.

This learning review grounded in a set of values. As an evaluator and researcher, I think being transparent about values is a good way for people to test the robustness of research work. Here are my research values: I am collaborative, I am transparent, I am flexible and I am ethical. Wherever I go, I model the importance of joy, fun and camaraderie as part of all learning.

As a reader, you can use this section to understand how the findings were developed and where the evidence came from. Contact details are provided at the end of this section so that you can get in touch if you want to learn more.



Where did the evidence in this report come from?

The evidence presented in this report is based on insights from 21 interviews with team members in the Relationships First project.

Interviews were conducted in November and December 2019. Each interview was 45-60 minutes long. I asked team members for their consent at the beginning of each interview. I described the anonymous nature of the interviews. I shared my intention to write a report which everyone could read. I talked about my hope that I could come and meet with the team and share the findings.

In these conversations, I asked team members about their memories of the beginning of the project and how they got involved in the first place. We then discussed their experience of the project and their reflections on the work they were doing together, its purpose and the progress they felt they'd made from the beginning of the project to the end of this first phase.

This discussion usually led naturally into a focus on the changes that people were experiencing. Some of these changes are relationship-based in terms of new, or deeper, connections. Others changes were much more personal in terms of individual growth and a change in mindset. Everyone on the project talked about the learning that they were doing and its role in supporting change to occur.

At the end of each interview, I asked for consent again – just to ensure that team members were comfortable with me using the information that they shared. Where it was important to do so, we talked about information that I wouldn't use in the research. All team members gave consent to record the interviews. Interviews were transcribed and analysed using a thematic analysis.

Using thematic analysis involves listening to the interviews and reading transcripts in search of the most common ideas. It's important to look for the most common themes in people's experiences, but it is also very important to look for ideas that are challenging to the common viewpoints. In this way, the diversity of people's experiences is included – as well as the commonalities between people's understanding of the project.

The evidence presented here is representative of the viewpoints of the team members as they were experiencing the project in November-December 2019.

In total, I interviewed 21 people who have participated in the project. At the time of this research, there were 20 people, from an original group of 23, actively involved in the project. Three people had left the project by the time I was doing this research. I interviewed 19 of the active members. And I interviewed two of the people who had moved on from the project. I was not able to interview one of the active members due to scheduling constraints. I did not interview one of the three members who had left the project.

How did the researcher engage with the project?

I used an appreciative approach to this learning review, which means that my research is rooted in a desire to learn. As an evaluation tool, appreciative inquiry is an asset-based approach and helps people learn about their strengths so that they know what to build on.

Appreciative inquiry is an approach that values the connection. This approach puts a high value on trust and the importance of ensuring people feel that participating is beneficial for them. Where possible, this approach models a joy in learning and a sense of fun. Even when research focuses on difficult topics, the learning we do can be rich and rewarding. As a researcher and evaluator, I try and model the sense of joy that can come from learn about ourselves, our work and contribution.

In this learning review, I also highlight the project's challenges and share evidence on tensions which can be used to support reflection and development. This review is deliberately focused on learning, rather than outcomes and impacts which will be part of a final evaluation. At this stage, the Relationships First project is modelling good evaluation practice by building in learning and evaluation during the delivery phase of the project (rather than just at the end).

About the author

Dr. Catherine-Rose Stocks-Rankin is a researcher, knowledge mobiliser and evaluator. She has expertise in both the theory and practice of knowledge translation and evidence into action. She describes her methods as 'creating a bridge between policy, practice and community with a focus on generating evidence that leads to meaningful social change.' Find out more at LinkedIn and connect @thisiscsr.



Author: CR Stocks-Rankin
Creative Direction: Gayle Rice
Illustration: Charline Roussel