

Knowledge and Learning



# Putting good ingredients in the mix

Lessons and opportunities for place-based working and funding



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This paper has been prepared by The National Lottery Community Fund to summarise learning about working and funding in place-based ways.

It is not a comprehensive or systematic review, and acknowledges the, at times, contradictory nature of the learning to date, as well as the limited evidence-base for what effective interventions for local transformation and sustainable systems change look like.

We propose simple principles, adapted from work on responding to complexity, to group key learning points to inform future approaches to working in place. We also pose questions for funders to reflect on, and offer four brief cases studies illustrating how organisations are undertaking place-based funding or work in practice.

Keyword reference: place-based working, funding, place, relationships, learning, philanthropy

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## Introduction

Place-based approaches to working and funding have been around since at least the 1960s (Buckley & Taylor, 2017) and are an attempt to respond to the interplay between relationships, needs, assets, community engagement, power, systems and structures in building thriving communities, maximising social capital and testing sustainable solutions to complex challenges.

There's no single model or 'right' way to work or fund in a place and organisations, including funders have chosen from a palette of options, depending on their own motivations, or the wider social and political climate. They may believe that treating the whole place, person or 'system' in a collaborative or interdependent way is more meaningful or sustainable than isolated interventions. They may want to strengthen the voice of people in communities in setting funding priorities, or recognise the need to remove barriers for those who traditionally may have faced obstacles to accessing funding.

Work by Lankelly Chase (Buckley & Taylor, 2017), the Institute for Voluntary Action Research (IVAR) (Institute for Voluntary Action Research (IVAR, 2016), the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) (Telfer, 2013), the Rank Foundation, the Baring Foundation (Bolton, 2015), Local Trust (Leach, 2017) and Creative People and Places (Robinson, 2016) (Arts Council), amongst others, offers learning and frameworks for funders looking to progress place-based work.

This paper draws from this work to propose simple principles, adapted from work on responding to complexity, (Boulton, et al., 2015) (Green, 2015), to group key learning points to inform future approaches to working in place.

It is not a comprehensive or systematic review, and it is essential to acknowledge the, at times, contradictory nature of the learning to date, as well as the limited evidence-base for what effective interventions for local transformation and sustainable systems change look like.

# Learning

## 1. Know the history, background and context of place

*“Beginning work in an area requires a commitment to learning about the place and respect for what is already there [...] too many past approaches have failed on this count [...] the sensitivity and skill with which a funder uses local knowledge is the most important aspect of best practice”* (Buckley & Taylor, 2017)

*“Working with local people to understand the landscape, history and nuances of small localities, and encouraging groups to be independently active and attract their own funding has removed barriers. This suggests potential for a new kind of self-sufficiency.”* (Robinson, 2016)

In their place-based work in Hull, Dundee and Plymouth, Rank Foundation have recruited their local Coordinator or Associate from, ‘well-connected locals.’ This has allowed freedom from Local Authority and other local infrastructure mechanisms and enabled an independent ‘honest’ middle person to broker deals and create networks.

- Don’t lead with the money - take plenty of time for ‘reconnaissance’ and getting to know the area.
- Identify local assets and systems, don’t simply focus on data and demographics.
- Base yourself in your chosen place. Local people don’t trust ‘parachuting in’ from the outside.
- Define boundaries of place that have meaning for local people, but don’t ignore the wider context - boundaries may have different meaning for some communities.
- Take time to understand local power dynamics, political agendas and cultures.
- Be aware of the reputation and ‘baggage’ that your partners may carry locally and how this might impact on people’s readiness to engage.
- Areas with transient populations can pose particular challenges and require constant attention.
- Ensure there’s accountability between, and to, local partners, not to you as Funder
- There are no easy answers on whether to target work in cold spots or where there’s some pre-existing capacity.

## 2. Invest in people and relationships

*“Investment in buildings and people can help to [...] strengthen the networks and relationships that are key to unlocking the resources within our communities.”* (Big Lottery Fund, 2014)

*“Whilst a discussion of everyday relationships and kindness in neighbourhoods might on the surface appear to have little relevance in the face of the urgency of the challenges of austerity and increasing inequality these concepts are at the very heart of our ability to generate wellbeing and the foundations upon which the power for change can be built.”* (Ferguson, 2016)

In Great Yarmouth, National Lottery funded ‘Neighbourhoods That Work’ found there was a learning curve for staff on the ground to build and strengthen relationships in order to fully engage local people. Recognising all the ways that people are involved in their communities, however small, e.g. holding the keys to a local church, is an important part of the process.

- Some funders have found that starting with strong local leaders is essential, others, have reflected that this perpetuates the issue of the ‘hard to reach’ or ‘easy to ignore’. Some have found that drawing from the ‘unusual suspects’ is the most radical aspect of their approach.
- Funders may need to skill-up local people to maximise their contribution but might need help from others to do this effectively.
- Working ‘with’ people and not doing things ‘to’ them is essential to build trust and meaningful engagement.
- Making work relevant and useful is done best by connecting it to people, their lives and where they live.

### 3. Work with others to build a shared vision for change

*“If you want something to change it needs to be focused upon (and funded) rather than hoping there will be ‘overspill’ or knock-on effects [...] previous place based approaches have been hampered by the absence of a clearly articulated rationale for working in place - a ‘theory of place’ - and/or a lack of clarity about the motivation or starting point for choosing to work in place.” (Buckley & Taylor, 2017)*

- Funders must listen deeply, facilitate effectively and challenge appropriately.
- Agree realistic ambitions and clear objectives
- Work on what’s possible, build on local assets and invest in potential.
- Working separately with different communities may be needed to begin with, to build confidence and trust.
- Giving power to local people is an important component of achieving and sustaining change however, “over ‘romanticising’ community members can perhaps be as disempowering in the long term as the failure to share power - they don’t have all the answers and cannot be expected to.” (Buckley & Taylor, 2017)
- Partnerships or consortia can effectively bring together organisations that may not have worked together before. This can be done through making collaboration an essential requirement of funding applications.
- Partnerships can help distribute power but tensions and disagreements need to be worked through, funders have an important opportunity to offer support and constructive challenge.
- Agreeing the right lead organisation is vital; it doesn’t automatically have to be the ‘obvious’ choice, such as a Local Authority.

The National Lottery Community Fund’s place-based funding pilot in Lanarkshire sought out other funders through the Scotland Funders Forum, 360 giving, via word of mouth and by setting up an informal network of Lanarkshire funders to share contacts and information. This also enabled discussions about working together; better signposting of applicants where proposed activity didn’t fit with the National Lottery Community Fund priorities; joint activities such as outreach events, pre-application meetings and monitoring visits.

## 4. Start small, try different things

*“Many of our areas started out with small investments in neighbourhood activities to gain experience of making stuff happen before moving onto bigger and more ambitious targets.” (Leach, 2017)*

- Have a clear sense of purpose for your work, but don't come with preconceived ideas of what will and won't work, start small and test lots of options.
- Resident-led, short-term projects can act as a catalyst and build foundations as well as gaining traction and buy-in to address bigger or more complex challenges sustainably.
- Quick wins to show 'what's in it for me?' are really important in engaging local people.
- In some contexts, big 'showy' events are important in giving the community a 'ta-dah!' moment. (Arts Council, 2018)
- Funders must not judge the tastes of local people. “If you give decisions to the community they will choose things you don't like and that has to be ok.” (Arts Council, 2018)
- Focus on the possible; local people are creative and their skills and passions may surprise you. They'll know about the buildings and spaces where people go.

## 5. Allow for variation

*“Some funders will want to transfer approaches that have been successful in their initial target areas to elsewhere in the country, or at least to disseminate the learning further. However, this is not always straightforward and differences in local context and history will affect the dynamics of change and the transferability of the lessons, while some areas may be resistant to learning 'brought in' from elsewhere.” (Institute for Voluntary Action Research (IVAR, 2016)*

*“Plans will change as a result of what happens and how people involved respond. No matter how well you predict, you'll be surprised.” (Robinson, 2016)*

- Things almost always take longer than anticipated, expect this and accept it.
- Stay flexible, learn and adapt - consciously and mindfully.
- It takes time to develop trust and understanding and this can add pressure if project funding windows are tight.
- Alternative world views add value and challenge to local working, and help partners to adapt their language and approach.
- Scaling or moving a successful approach from one area to another will not necessarily be straightforward, expect to adapt and change to the local circumstances.
- Talk to people about the changes and improvements they want to see to services. This, *“greatly increases the chance that others will want to use those services.”* (Dartington Social Research Unit, 2015)

## 6. Be realistic. Accept mistakes and failure, make space for learning and reflection.

*“Sometimes it goes wrong, with areas having to re-group and re-launch. Or partnerships failing to effectively engage with their communities and having to rethink how they work. One of the important benefits of a patient, fifteen year programme is that it can stay with people and communities as they overcome adversity, rebuild confidence and start out afresh.” (Leach, 2017)*

- In some places local people may not recognise or use the assets in their community, thinking they are not for them. Be creative - hairdressers, tents, even vans have been used to positive effect. (Arts Council, 2018)
- Things will go wrong, long-term funding allows time and space to regroup and rethink when this happens.
- Space and time to learn and reflect is essential to success but don't expect this to come good overnight.
- Place-based working should also lead to changes in how funders work, including their internal processes.

Great Yarmouth, Neighbourhoods That Work recognised that some needs in the community were more complex than initially anticipated. Based on learning in year one, employability support has been refocused away from a model of CV writing and job-searching to one that connects with people to identify their skills, talents and aspirations and provides more holistic support.

## 7. Keep looking for change

*“Allow stakeholders to understand not just the “what” of change, but the “how” of change [...]investigating qualitative, process-related issues, and not just quantitative outcome measures, can also reveal what might be driving “implementation gaps”— the relationships, day-to-day politics, power structures, or other factors that might be posing a detrimental effect on progress. This kind of qualitative information is vital for finding ways to improve a place based initiative mid-stream, and for teasing out lessons for funders about how to construct initiatives going forward.” (Cytron, 2010)*

- The length of a grant may feel at once like ‘a long time’ and ‘no time at all’, so looking out for and noting signs of change may help keep up momentum and reduce the sense of being under pressure to perform or deliver.
- Listening to those nearest to the issues and places you work with can reveal new perspectives and help you think ahead.
- JRF found their strength was an ‘honest broker’, which allowed them to enable conversations that would not have happened otherwise. As a result partners were more able and willing to work together on emerging issues. (Telfer, 2013)

## An emerging evidence-base?

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation's work over 10 years in Bradford concluded that one of their key achievements was, *“creating the conditions for impact rather than having a direct impact on the city itself.”* (Telfer, 2013)

The Rank Foundation similarly learned, *“that the independent funder cannot transform deeply embedded social problems but it has a powerful role as convenor and connector. This in itself has the potential to unlock opportunities for people in local communities to collaborate for a greater benefit to all.”* (The Rank Foundation, n.d.)

Carnegie UK Trust proposes that, *“interactions of kindness between individuals underpin community participation and a broader sense of social capital and are worth considering in their own right [...] the evidence indicates that this infrastructure of connections and values underpins community cohesion, participation and engagement.”* (Ferguson, 2016)

These conclusions may be strengthened by a systematic review of interventions to boost social relations through improvements in community infrastructure (places and spaces) by the What Works Centre for Wellbeing. This found that,

*“Community hubs can promote social cohesion, by bringing together different social or generational groups; increase social capital and build trust; increase wider social networks and interaction between community members; and increase individual’s knowledge or skills.*

*Changes to neighbourhood design can positively affect sense of belonging and pride in a community.*

*Green and blue space interventions that provide the opportunity to participate in activities or meetings can improve social interactions; increase social networks social interactions and bonding and bridging social capital; increase physical activity and healthy eating; improve community members’ skills and knowledge.*

*Interventions that provide a focal point, or targeted group activity, may help to: promote social cohesion between different groups; and overcome barriers that may prevent some people (in marginalised groups) from taking part.”* (Bagnall, et al., 2018)

These emerging clues offer opportunities for funders to consider not just their strategic investments in place, but also how responsive funding can contribute to the landscape and infrastructure to create the right environment for transformation and change.

## Questions for funders

### **1. How can place-based funding address well-being inequalities?**

The What Works Centre for Wellbeing proposes a focus on the people with the lowest wellbeing. Some of their findings offer information about interventions that have a bigger effect on inequalities than on average wellbeing. For example, they found that higher levels of engagement in heritage activities and the use of green space for health or exercise is associated with lower wellbeing inequality in local areas, even though increased engagement in these activities is not associated with improved average wellbeing. Although taking part in these activities benefits everyone - it appears that it might yield higher returns for people with lower wellbeing.

We know there are barriers to the use of heritage and green spaces for those with poor mental health, or from disadvantaged backgrounds, so should these results strengthen the case for targeted funding opportunities that encourage wider use of local assets.<sup>1</sup>

### **2. How can we be as effective as possible in connecting our initiatives in a place?**

How can Funders of all kinds continue look beyond their financial offer and demonstrate even greater willingness to cooperate and collaborate, whilst maximising their unique potential as convenors, brokers and connectors?

*“Collaborative working is still hard for Foundations, each of which has its own ideas, priorities and suspicions of working with others. However we [Rank Foundation] have shown that combining resources targeted at local causes [means] a relatively small amount of funding can make a big difference.”<sup>2</sup>*

### **3. How can Funders dedicate more time and resource to reviewing and sharing learning about our own practice?**

In researching this paper it was much easier to find synthesis reports from others than it was to source first hand reflection and learning from Funders. Whilst many individuals have been generous in sharing their reflections we do not, for the most part, share by default.

As funders we offer support to grantholders to capture and reflect on their practice, including things that haven't worked well, but when it comes to our own work do we over-rely on tacit knowledge?

Do we limit ourselves by not taking a more open and transparent approach to sharing learning from our mistakes and challenges as well as sharing practical and tangible learning on what works in place?

#### **4. How can a mix of responsive and strategic funding combine effectively to build on existing social capital?**

Many large, strategic funding investments appear to be predicated on an existing base of social capital, often, though by no means exclusively, through local authority or other statutory providers. Other Funders are actively engaging beyond the 'usual suspects' and using micro or small grants for responsive funding available to communities to allocate themselves. With such a breadth of approaches can Funders come together to articulate what a balanced and effective portfolio of place-based funding approaches might look like?

## Appendix A: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Hartlepool Action Lab

In 2013 Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) published a seminal report (Telfer, 2013) on lessons from its work in Bradford over 10 years. With integrity, openness and honesty, the report shared where JRF hadn't got things right, and where they had. Much of that learning is echoed in more recent reports referenced in this document.

When they decided to undertake further place-based work, JRF identified Hartlepool as a suitable choice. It is a smaller and less complex environment than Bradford, with a stronger sense of 'whole town' identity. Whilst Hartlepool faces similar challenges to other post-industrial and seaside towns, and had limited voluntary sector infrastructure, JRF had an anchor in the town via the Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust's Hartfields retirement village of over 300 residents. As a significant local employer they felt they would be able to work with local people, organisations and businesses via their existing presence and networks to learn how local assets could be mobilised to address poverty.

Choosing explicitly not to identify as a funder, but as a catalyst for change, JRF began talking to people and organisations in Hartlepool in 2015 to understand their experience of living and doing business there. Reaching people through adverts in the local press, radio and social media, they engaged and trained locals as community researchers. This led to two reports on what is important to people living in Hartlepool (Hartlepool Community Researchers, 2016) and affordability (Hartlepool Community Researchers, 2017).

*"The community researchers are a rare group of people. All are very passionate about their town with much loyalty, affection and a lovely brand of local humour [...] they are trusted local experts."*

Conversations in Hartlepool (2016)

The Hartlepool Action Lab began in 2016. These showcase events use agile problem solving techniques to facilitate people who live or work in the town to

develop solutions to problems as quickly as possible. They are unashamedly 'biased towards action', with a strong commitment to learning by doing, from both successes and failures. An initial four-day Lab generated three projects working on housing for 'looked after' young people, strengthening communities and a time banking project to improve skills and employability (Allen, et al., 2017). Small micro-funding of £500 every 100 days is available to support projects but the onus is clearly on the community and partners to deliver the ideas generated.

A second Lab in 2017 focused on affordability, to get to grips with people's day-to-day experience of poverty whilst avoiding the term poverty which did not resonate with some local people or stakeholders. As a result the Hartlepool £1,000,000 Challenge aims to put £1 million into local people's pockets by the end of 2018, through advocacy and support to reduce the cost of living and maximise income (energy switches, home insulation, water meters, and benefits take-up). Food and Fuel Fairs offer help including online shopping, budget cooking, free sanitary products and children's entertainment. This includes giving away free slow cookers, herbs, spices and cookbooks.

JRF continues to learn, with local people, about the impact and effectiveness of the

Action Lab through external evaluation and the development of a practical learning framework and process.

[hartlepoolactionlab.org](http://hartlepoolactionlab.org)

## Appendix B: The National Lottery Community Fund, Jaywick Sands, Essex

Jaywick Sands is a seaside village in Essex and contains the most deprived neighbourhood in England (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2015). Consequently it has attracted many efforts to inject investment from a range of different funders.

Historically the National Lottery Community Fund has supported the three main trusted local providers via Reaching Communities<sup>3</sup> grants, and previously worked with the Jaywick Community Forum to fund a community vision and plan, developed by an external consultant. Funding was awarded for activities to encourage residents to engage with this work and whilst the plan and vision were both delivered, the Fund subsequently questioned whether we had been as successful in engaging as many local people as we had hoped.

As we shifted our way of working to a more local model with a dedicated staff member based in the area, we heard from those involved that there were mixed feelings about the approach we had taken and that many residents had not been keen to engage with another ‘outsider’ focusing on their ‘needs’. Basing our Funding Manager locally empowered us to observe the rich network of informal groups, residents and individuals who want to do great things in, with and for their neighbours and area.

In our meetings with residents we recognised Jaywick’s strong community spirit, and saw that there are many people working to support their community and each other, but in a very grassroots way. The local civil society infrastructure is relatively underdeveloped and there are few charities based very locally or that are trusted by the community.

Working with the Jaywick Community Forum we brought together a group of around 20 local people and organisations to discuss what was good in the area and which could be built on. Through this and subsequent conversations we identified that there is a significant amount of un-funded and under-funded resident-led ideas and that typically these activities happen on a short timescale, ‘in the next few weeks’. We realised that even our simplest funding product (National Lottery Awards for All) isn’t suitable to respond within that crucial window of enthusiasm to support these kinds of ideas.

We also recognised that as a Funder, we don’t yet have the presence, knowledge of local people’s connections and history, or the nuanced understanding of the area to make informed awards ourselves. The Jaywick Community Forum and key local people do.

As a result we supported Jaywick Community Forum with a National Lottery Awards for All award of £7,000 to establish a local funding scheme to receive, assess and award micro-level grants (of between £50 and £1,000) to support Jaywick residents or informal groups to make their ideas happen. Applications are based on short criteria, for example, ‘for community activity, happiness and well-being in Jaywick’ and a brief written proposal, adapted from a similar scheme operated by the Rank Foundation.

A panel consisting of Jaywick Community Forum, National Lottery Community Fund

staff, and an Essex County Council representative makes decisions and a template agreement is completed before funding is released, this covers key areas of responsibility and legal requirements. The first grant has recently been awarded, to support the village pantomime.

<http://www.essexinfo.net/jaywick-community-forum/>

## Appendix C: Rank Foundation, Hull Community Development Programme

The Rank Foundation has over 60 years' experience of community development and a strong interest in the potential collective benefits of funding in a place. They wanted to test a multi-faceted approach to community development, across many fields, in a tight geographic area to see if this could achieve greater impact than single, isolated projects spread geographically. They identified Hull as a test-bed, based on a number of crime, health and wellbeing 'risks' in the city, alongside, *"a committed and unified approach from those leading the primary agencies [that] realized that pooling their collective efforts towards evidence based problem solving was the only realistic way of achieving improvements."* ( The Rank Foundation / The Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, Unpublished)

Phase I of the programme aimed to create, "conditions for a restorative city that includes all residents, regardless of age, disability, upbringing, education or lifestyle. To identify and support a range of services that offer greater opportunities to improve quality of life, with a focus on those most at risk of exclusion from society. To co-ordinate a partnership of service providers and other stakeholders that will collectively contribute to improving the life chances and experiences of the residents of Hull." (Edwards, 2017)

21 projects covering a wide range of services from community gardens to probation services, received £1.5m (2013-2015). Projects were designed on values rather than specifications, outputs and targets. For example, all projects trained staff in Restorative Principles (Restorative Justice Council, n.d.) to provide common language and ways of working.

Basing staff in Hull and working on the ground for 'reconnaissance' and then to seek out local leaders able to deliver projects was key to engaging effectively. Rank's unwavering focus on building and nurturing networks and relationships for their own sake, came to be seen as the 'crucial glue' in the programme.

*"HCDP has created a new space so diverse players; statutory agencies (commissioners), voluntary sector, faith and local people can come together, without organizational 'hats' to collaborate on what the community actually needs and wants."*

Rank ensured that projects regularly came together to support each other, and whilst they had hoped that projects working within similar themes might be prepared to work closely they were surprised by projects' willingness to work together beyond thematic interests and outside the core network. Time and effort spent developing leadership and creating relationships enabled trust and commitment, which in turn built voluntary cooperation and allowed sharing of knowledge and creativity which drove performance and people going 'above and beyond the call of duty'. (Rawdings, 2018)

At the end of Phase I, feedback from projects was that it was the additional support that Rank provided, that projects were most concerned about losing, not the funding. Phase II is now underway with a focus on strengthening resilience, promoting collaboration and leaving a vibrant legacy. Hull Activity Grants of around £500 are available to support activities increasing engagement and social connectedness, approved by a local decision-making panel.

[rankfoundation.com/hull](http://rankfoundation.com/hull)

## Appendix D: National Lottery Community Fund, Great Yarmouth, Neighbourhoods that Work

Great Yarmouth shares characteristics with other isolated coastal communities: a low skills and wage economy, lower educational attainment, long-term unemployment and seasonal variation in the local economy. The Borough Council had unsuccessfully bid for two of the National Lottery Community Fund's large strategic programmes, but responded by working to strengthen its position so that, a year later, it was able to approach us with a proposal, Neighbourhoods that Work (NTW). NTW is an example of place-based funding grounded in four key elements: a) A well-defined geography; b) A thematic 'hook' for the work; c) Pre-existing and developed social capital (all of the National Lottery Community Fund's large investments follow this approach); d) Local leadership and drive to enable systems change.

NTW deploys 'Connectors' from three Neighbourhood Hubs to help people access services to support complex issues such as low self-esteem, mental health, debt, drug and alcohol misuse, homelessness and long term unemployment. It aims to show that small-scale, asset-based community development interventions can be scaled and integrated with redesigned community services, and job creation initiatives, to offer a model that is appropriate to the current financial and economic climate.

NTW is overseen by a Neighbourhood Board for each hub, made up of residents, who hold 50% of seats; elected ward members from the County and Borough Councils; statutory seats and representatives from Voluntary and Community organisations. The Boards set local priorities, inform the design of activities and feed into overall leadership.

Key evaluation findings after three years show that the Connectors are working well to deliver the programme outcomes and good relationships have been developed between delivery partners. Some evidence is emerging that NTW is increasing confidence and access to multiple areas of support, with some reduced dependence on crisis services. Consistent with the findings outlined in this paper, capturing learning and adapting accordingly has been key to continuous development:

Moving from being eight organisations to 'team NTW' took most of the first year to achieve so investment in team-building activity was essential.

Significant effort had to be made to create awareness of NTW, through an ongoing programme of events. Awareness did not in itself transform into engagement.

The complexity of some people's needs exceeded initial expectations and the roll-out of Universal Credit in May 2015 also impacted on the levels of support required. The project has re-aligned resources and refocused some of its work whilst reflecting on the subtleties of what challenge and achievement look like for different client groups and how to better evidence these.

Good progress has been made in aligning resources with a wide array of stakeholders to ensure seamless delivery and to influence statutory services and infrastructure organisations to align objectives. The team also takes care to link in with other funding initiatives to avoid duplication.

[neighbourhoodsthatwork.org](http://neighbourhoodsthatwork.org)

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## Resources

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- 1 Correspondence with Ingrid Abreu Scherer, What Works Centre for Wellbeing  
18/05/18
- 2 Correspondence with Dave Rawding, Local Associate Hull, Rank Foundation  
09/05/18
- 3 Flexible funding over £10,000 for up to five years

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