Relationship -Based Funding

life changes trust

COMMUNITY FUND

Introduction

The Life Changes Trust was established by the National Lottery Community Fund in April 2013 with a spend out endowment of £50 million. We have used that endowment to support and drive transformational improvement in the quality of life, wellbeing, empowerment and inclusion of three groups in Scotland: people living with dementia, unpaid carers of those with dementia and young people with care experience.

The main ways in which we do this are by:

◗ Investing directly in people and expanding the choices and opportunities available to them
◗ Investing in the work of public and third sector partners that champion their inclusion, leadership and rights

Listening to, amplifying and acting upon the voice of the people we're here for is woven into the fabric of the Trust. Over the past eight years, we have developed a deep understanding about what leads to significant and positive change in people's lives.

As we approach the end of the Trust, we are focused on leaving a positive legacy. In order to do that, it's important that we explain what we do and how we do it, as well as share insights into the impact of working in this way. This funding booklet is one in a series of four:

◗ Putting beneficiaries at the heart of funding
◗ Relationship-based funding
◗ Being a flexible funder
◗ Being a strategic funder

This booklet will explore our relationship-based approach to funding, sharing our learning around its value and impact.

Relationship-based practice is not a new concept, but is gaining prominence in many areas of Scottish policy and practice. It's an approach to working that prioritises relationships and invests in people first and foremost.

For the Trust, this meant beginning with defining our values and mission, building relationships and investing in these on the basis of shared values rather than fixed intentions. It meant remaining as flexible as possible and building systems that worked around people rather than the other way around.

Characteristics of relationship-based approaches can vary depending on the context in which you are working. For the Trust, relationship-based funding is primarily characterised by:

▶ investing in people before outcomes

▶ a willingness to shift power dynamics and listen to different perspectives

▶ a commitment to valuing lived experience and empowering beneficiaries to take the lead

▶ supporting flexible and creative ways of working

▶ creating the time and space for individuals and organisations to achieve their ambitions

(For more detail regarding our relationship-based practice and its impact, please see 'The Lines Between Relationship-Based Practice and Policy Final Report' which relates specifically to the Young People with Care Experience (YPCE) Programme. This can be found on the Publications page of our website.)

This booklet sets out the Trust's learning around relationship-based funding by exploring its impact on:

- Projects and Beneficiaries
- Funding Practice
- Strategic Ambitions
- Influencing Goals

This booklet is not intended to be the definitive guide on a relationship-based approach to funding. Rather, the following advice is based on our learning and experience of our relationship-based approach at the Trust, and we hope this booklet will provide a jumping off point for other funders to reflect on their practice.

Impact on projects and beneficiaries

Prioritising and valuing time spent forming trusted and resilient relationships has had a number of positive impacts for funded projects, supporting them to work towards and achieve their aspirations. In this section we explore a few of the elements which have been crucial to the success of this approach.

Long term funding and connections

At the Trust, we have committed to a variety of funding periods, from 1-year development funding all the way through to 5 year funding periods. A number of projects have fed back that having a longer funding period (3-5 years) empowered them to develop, evolve and adapt their original project plans in response to a range of internal and external reasons, such as beneficiary feedback, staffing changes and, as seen in recent times, in response to public health emergencies. This freedom to adapt and evolve positively impacted on not just their project, but also the relationships they were able to build with beneficiaries. We also feel these longer-term connections have provided the time and space required for projects to develop, evolve and become embedded within their communities.

In addition to providing time and space, there are several other key reasons why we feel longer funding periods are beneficial to projects.

Longer funding terms can:

▶ Support projects to achieve sustainability, as they have been empowered to form resilient and respectful relationships within their communities and with other key partners in their area of focus.

▶ Empower projects to explore what "best practice" looks and feels like on the ground, allowing them to focus on the changes needed to provide maximum impact for their community rather than continually working to secure additional funding.

▶ Encourage funding staff to build genuine relationships with projects and beneficiaries, enabling them to go on the journey together and support them through changes, adaptations, achievements and any bumps in the road along the way.

▶ Facilitate organic relationship building which contributes to establishing a culture of open and trusted communication between both funding and project staff, increasing the level of effective support and guidance that our funding staff can provide to projects before a crisis point arises.

▶ Enable projects to provide a rich evidence base of learning to be explored, reflected upon and shared both internally and with the wider sector.

We understand that it is not always possible, or appropriate, to provide long term funding for all funding initiatives or projects. However, where the Trust has provided funding to a project for one or two years, we have encouraged projects to keep in touch with the Trust via our project specific networks and relevant Trust events, in addition to sharing their continued progress and learning on an individual basis with funding staff.

We feel this investment in continuing relationships post-funding contributes to continued knowledge and information sharing, which benefits not only our own evidence and influencing work but the wider sector in which we work.

Reaching quieter voices

Grounding our work in a relationship-based approach which values the importance of lived experience and expertise has also provided us with the opportunity to develop trusted and valued relationships with beneficiaries who have 'quieter voices'[1] and the organisations who support them. The investment in these relationships has meant that beneficiaries and organisations feel comfortable challenging us in our own practices, in addition to providing their expertise to guide the way our funding needs to work to provide the maximum benefit and impact to their community.

To include and engage these quieter voices we developed specific key funding initiatives such as the 'Rights & Equalities' initiative within the Young People with Care Experience programme and the 'Minority Ethnic Communities and Dementia' and 'LGBT Communities and Dementia' initiatives within the Dementia programme.

We invested in organisations who had pre-existing, meaningful and respected relationships with particular beneficiary groups. In order to attract the right organisations to these initiatives, we had targeted conversations and hosted workshops with organisations who may not have been aware of the Trust or who may not have originally considered themselves as a good fit for our funding initiatives.

This, of course, can be time intensive, but by proactively building these relationships we have reached individuals who are often not provided with the opportunity to share their experiences, aspirations and talents with a wider audience.

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1 Often described as 'hard to reach', we use the term 'quieter voices' to describe those who may have difficulty communicating or engaging in traditional mainstream activities due to a range of medical, physical and environmental factors (such as people with advanced dementia, people with physical disabilities and those with experience of homelessness).

Based on our learning from these organisations and their projects, our own funding practice and processes have been meaningfully adapted to ensure they are as accessible and inclusive to as wide a range of individuals as possible.

This is particularly evident within the Young People with Care Experience programme's most recent individual grants programme, 'My Choice, My Future'. This programme aimed to support young people with care experience to make choices about their future and take steps that will have a positive impact on their lives.

Aspects of My Choice, My Future built on our learning from Aspirational Awards[2], the previous individual grants programme. Developments included making a concerted effort to connect with organisations with links to quieter voices prior to the fund's launch, expanding the age range and making telephone and video applications more accessible and widely promoted.

The driving force behind these changes was the feedback we had received from young people themselves and from conversations with organisations funded through our 'Rights & Equalities'[3] initiative who highlighted the adaptations and change in approach required to enable the young people they work with to fully participate in this opportunity.

My Choice, My Future Awards
Personal Stories

life changes trust

The —— Lines Between

2   https://www.lifechangestrust.org.uk/project/aspirational-awards
3   https://www.lifechangestrust.org.uk/young-people-care-experience

Valuing lived experience and expertise

Giving individuals the opportunity to shape our funding initiatives and be involved in decision making and influencing activities has further supported us to develop deep and respected relationships, while also ensuring that beneficiaries and their voice remain at the heart of our work. For example, within our Dementia programme the 'Creating Better Lives' regional grants[4] were assessed by a panel of local people which included individuals with dementia and unpaid carers.

This process enabled individuals with lived experience to be part of the decision making process on how funds were spent. The fund itself also allowed beneficiaries themselves to tell us directly what they felt was required to support them in their communities and create the transformational changes needed at local and national level.

Recruiting, training and supporting individuals to meaningfully participate in grant assessment and initiative development does require resource, capacity and time, and this should never be under-estimated. However, by choosing to invest time and resources in this way, we are able to develop relationships which bring benefits for individuals, their communities and the Trust. The positive impact of these relationships contribute to our goals for sharing ongoing best practice, supporting learning exchanges, and creating transformational change for our beneficiaries.

We are acutely aware that we do not always have the required knowledge and expertise to deliver work identified by beneficiaries and the organisations who support them. In these instances, we have proactively sought the expertise of individuals with lived experience and the organisations who support them. An example of this collaborative work in action comes from our 'Rights Made Real in Care Homes'[5] project, which brings together the Trust, Scottish Care, My Home Life and other independent experts. This partnership work is vital to the Trust, as partners have been able to bring the correct level of knowledge and expertise to deliver this work to a high standard.

Fully recognising and embracing the fact that we are not the experts in our areas of work has undoubtedly opened up innovative and creative approaches to funding development, management and evaluation within the Trust. Without this investment in relationships, we would not have been able to achieve the impact, reach and influence we aspired to.

RIGHTS Made Real in Care Homes

Recognising, respecting and responding: *promoting human rights for residents of care homes in Scotland*

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5   https://www.lifechangestrust.org.uk/rights-made-real-care-homes-evidence-and-learning

Impact on funding management and practice

Investing the time to build strong and resilient relationships with beneficiaries and projects has positively impacted on all aspects of our funding management practices and processes. We have chosen a few key areas to discuss in further detail below.

Relationships before and throughout the application process

During the course of our work, we have prioritised cultivating relationships with projects very early on in the funding cycle. For our targeted work, this has meant having early conversations with experts and partners during the development of initiatives. For our open-call initiatives, we have devoted time to hosting pre-application workshops, having individual conversations with prospective applicants during their preparations, and developing processes which enable applicants to take a creative approach to their applications. We have also created innovative ways for applicants to interact with Trust staff and advisors who have developed the initiatives.

For example, in addition to a formal written application, our 'Home & Belonging'[6] initiative supported applicants to create a 'prototype' to represent their project.

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6   https://www.lifechangestrust.org.uk/young-people-care-experience

This could be in any form they wished - from creating a film to building a Lego masterpiece! Workshops were held with applicants to help them brainstorm their ideas with both Trust staff and Advisory Group[7] members who helped design the initiative, to chat through ideas and give guidance on what we wanted to see shine through.

A key benefit of investing time in relationships before and during the application process is that it provides the opportunity to set out very clear and explicit expectations for successful awardees. This encourages applicants to consider carefully how their work will meet the standards and values expected of awardees in addition to ensuring that relationships start off on the basis of mutual understanding. Sometimes having these early conversations means that projects decide to withdraw or not continue forward with their application if they feel their plans and proposals are not a good fit with the fund - and this is okay.

We feel this early investment in relationships also enables better conversations and supports projects to work towards their best possible outcomes, instead of the Trust imposing our own assumptions and best guesses of what we think good outcomes look like. It has been our experience that, by committing to a proactive approach to relationship building, we remain responsive and beneficiary-focussed, which brings mutual benefit for everyone involved. Projects benefit from being respected, valued and trusted to know what is best for their communities, and the Trust benefits from a rich evidence base and a willingness by projects to participate in additional learning opportunities, such as networks, events and external evaluations.

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7   The Advisory Group, whose members have all had experience of care at some point in their lives, was established by the Trust to ensure we truly were listening to the voice of young people with care experience. The Group members volunteer their time to advise the Trust, and work on specific funding projects and initiatives.

This approach is also particularly helpful when managing difficult conversations or relationships which may arise during the course of the funding award. As everyone involved has started off from this same shared understanding, we are more able to facilitate open and honest conversations regarding any issue(s) and how they may be resolved.

Making the right decisions

Feeling comfortable and empowered to have honest and frank conversations with potential and existing awardees also contributes to better and more effective decision making. Continuing to prioritise and invest in relationships before, during and after funding periods ensures that strategic decision making is informed by the latest developments, learning and practice coming from projects.

Discussions at both a formal and informal level with projects and beneficiaries throughout their funding journey have been absolutely invaluable. They have helped us to identify priority areas and themes for new funding initiatives, reach beneficiaries with quieter voices, and challenge ourselves to strengthen and develop our own funding management processes and practice.

Without developing strong relationships with projects, where they feel comfortable and empowered to share feedback and respectfully challenge decisions or processes in place, we would not have been able to achieve our desired level of impact — or in truth, fully embody and embrace our own values and vision. Relationship-based approaches have been the foundation to realising our aspirations and propelled forward our flexible, creative and inclusive approach to funding - and this takes resource.

Resourcing your team

As funders and funded organisations know, for any project or programme to succeed, it must be properly resourced and supported. A relationship-based approach to funding can change how you – and your funded projects – allocate human and financial resources. Job descriptions might be adjusted, work planning might alter its emphasis or budgets might change. This is why it is helpful to think carefully about how you will resource and support your own team and your funded projects to make these changes, making sure everyone is equipped to take a relationship-based approach.

It is also important to approach relationship building as a deliberate activity and not something that simply 'happens' over time. This ensures there is a clear understanding within your organisation about the proportion of people's roles that are dedicated to supporting these relationships.

This approach empowers staff to prioritise relationships and make time to engage with funded projects outwith formal meetings or reporting periods, which is important to build genuine and trusting relationships.

Some of these deliberate activities seem very simple, but are worth stating explicitly - for example, providing acknowledgment of receipt of monitoring reports and feeding back some reaction to them. A simple 'I really enjoyed hearing about the recent residential activity' can signal to our awardees that we respect the time they put into the report and we value the work they are doing. Likewise, ensuring that awardees are aware at the beginning of their award the information we expect them to collect, instead of at the end, shows respect for their time and allows them to better plan for how to provide us with the information we are requesting.
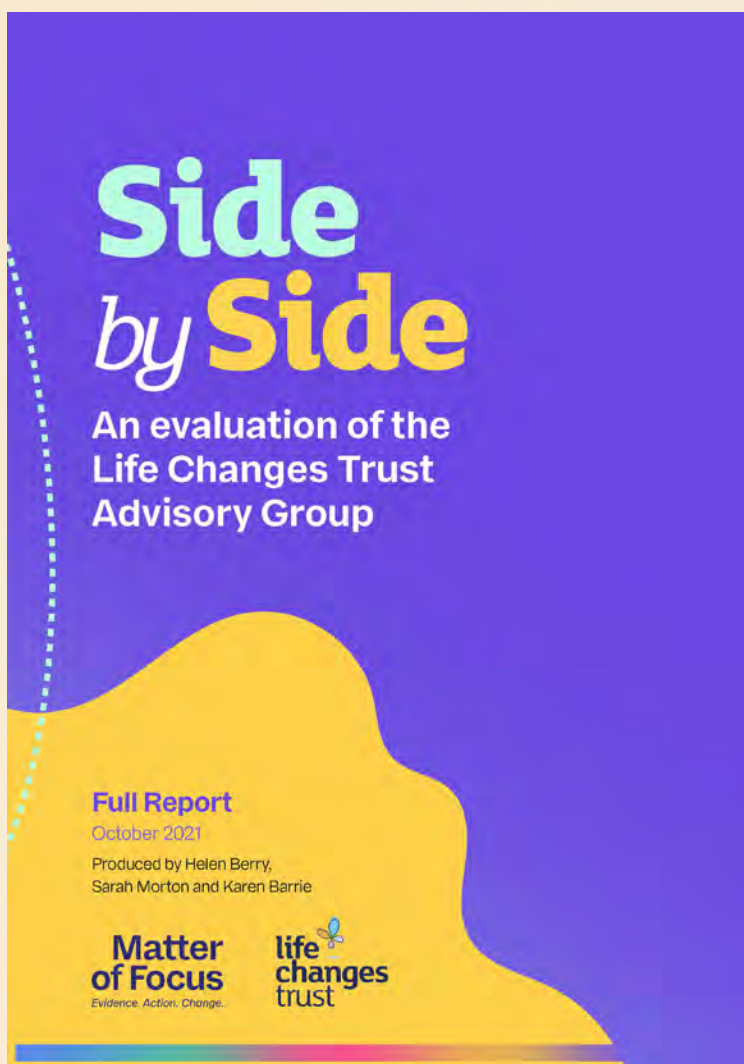
Other activities also included attending workshops, network meetings and encouraging high levels of attendance at any project or community event. We have found that going out to awardees, instead of asking them to come to our office, is also a powerful way to signal respect and build relationships. This can require frequent travel and out of hours working so it is important to find ways to support staff in offering this flexibility. For more on this, see our Flexible Funding booklet.

One example of the resource required to build trusted and respected relationships with beneficiaries is seen through our work with the Young People with Care Experience Programme Advisory Group. The Advisory Group was established to ensure that young people with care experience's voices were directly involved in the development and direction of the work of the Trust. As the remit of the Advisory Group expanded over time, the support required changed as well. Supporting the Group had been one aspect of an individual staff member's role.

However, as advisory members became more involved in the wider work of the Trust – and the Trust felt the benefit of this – the proportion of time spent supporting the Group increased. This support involved:

◗ acting as the main link between the Trust and the Group

◗ working with the Group to identify priority areas for work

◗ working co-productively with the Group on programme development

◗ training members on assessment of applications

◗ facilitating sessions and aiding participation

◗ supporting individual Group members

Side by Side

An evaluation of the Life Changes Trust Advisory Group

Full Report
October 2021
Produced by Helen Berry, Sarah Morton and Karen Barrie

Matter of Focus
Evidence. Action. Change.

life changes trust

It was important to recognise this development and re-examine the use of staff members' time. Considering the authenticity, energy and direction the Advisory Group gave to the Trust's work, it was decided this work was a priority that needed additional support. As a result, the key staff member's work plan and job description was revisited in order to ensure they had the capacity to fully support the Group.

Ensuring staff have the room to develop relationships in a way that feels authentic and genuine is incredibly important and, as highlighted above, we have benefitted immensely from ensuring the staff members' time is protected for activities that bring the most benefit to awardees, beneficiaries and the Trust as a whole.

Prioritising time within our staff team to commit to a relational approach has also better enabled funding staff to support funded projects to consider how they too can explore and resource this approach to their practice. Spending time with projects without a fixed agenda and sharing learning and experiences, in addition to being flexible regarding space for development and monitoring procedures, have all contributed to projects feeling valued and empowered to explore different relational approaches which work for their beneficiaries.

Resourcing your team and supporting your projects in this way is a significant investment that can change the shape and nature of your work. It can feel, at times, that human and financial resources are being committed to areas that don't immediately connect to outcomes. However, by adopting this relationship-based approach, you offer staff and projects the time and space to flourish and increase your own ability to demonstrate impact and create change.

Impact on strategic ambitions

As well as benefitting funded projects and beneficiaries and changing our funding practices, relationship-based funding has also informed our strategic work. Primarily, this is because choosing a relationship-based approach to funding has enhanced our learning opportunities, resulting in a stronger evidence base. This evidence base - with beneficiary voices at its core - better equips us to identify priorities, influence policy, practice and culture, and ultimately creates lasting and transformational change. This section explores how we built our evidence base with the support of our learning communities.

Learning communities

The hallmarks of a good relationship are well known – clear communication, mutual trust and support – and as mentioned several times before, good relationships take time to build. By investing this time, you also create strong, mutually-beneficial learning communities.

At the Trust, we worked to create these learning communities with and between:

◗ our participants and beneficiaries
◗ our funded projects
◗ our wider networks (strategic partners and communities of interest)

It is these communities that enabled and enriched our learning, and we explore in further detail how we have cultivated relationships with each below.

Our participants and beneficiaries

From the earliest stage of the Trust, we spent time listening to and working alongside our participants and beneficiaries and encouraged funded projects to do the same. This was done in several different ways:

- engaging with existing groups in their own spaces
- getting to know activists and other influential voices in the communities
- creating new forums and groups
- stopping to think about who we haven't reached and finding ways to do so

For the Young People with Care Experience programme, working alongside our Advisory Group was a fundamental part of our approach. One of their earliest projects was developing and delivering Aspirational Awards[8], our original individual grants project designed to provide young people with care experience between the ages of 21-26 years old with the opportunity to think big about their future and transform their lives with a grant to help them reach their potential.

8   For more information of Aspirational Awards please see our Aspirational Awards – Briefing Paper available on our website: https://www.lifechangestrust.org.uk/publications

Since the success of Aspirational Awards, the Advisory Group's contribution to the programme has evolved to include:

◗ advising and consulting with external stakeholders

◗ influencing policy by responding to consultations

◗ supporting the development of many programme initiatives

Members played a pivotal role in establishing the Group and, by taking time and space to allow the Group to develop its own identity, the Trust was able to benefit from their collective expertise as they helped shape our programmes. It also meant we had a critical friend reminding us to stay curious, keep listening and keep asking questions.

Our funded projects

In working with funded projects, we aim to create close partnerships based on taking a supportive approach, often over a longer timeframe. As referenced earlier, longer funding periods have brought many benefits, including allowing funding staff the time to be curious and build their knowledge of projects, their organisations and their key staff. This allows them to be supportive and responsive and to offer support where necessary.

This approach also lets organisations get to know us as a funder and understand our flexible approach. Projects then feel able to communicate openly, even when things don't go to plan. They then have the freedom to develop their project in a way that best meets the needs of their beneficiaries (which can sometimes mean revisiting their outcomes).

A key mechanism that enabled these relationships to develop was the Trust's approach to monitoring and in particular, the measures that were put in place alongside the more standard written annual report. These measures included:

- involving projects in the development of monitoring structures
- maintaining an emphasis on beneficiary/participant voice in all reporting
- encouraging projects to use self-evaluation
- working with independent consultancies to evaluate initiatives
- Learning Meetings* (see below for an example)
- visits and face-to-face (or online) meetings in the stead of some written reports
- making time to feedback on reports to projects to further reflect on learning
- recording learning gained from informal communications
- creating opportunities for projects to gather and share learning with each other

Learning Meeting example

Over the lifetime of the Trust, we funded 21 Champions Boards[9] based within local authority areas. These Boards create space for young people with care experience, key decision makers and Corporate Parents in their area to get to know each other and then build an agenda for change.

All Champions Boards develop their own model and are based on collaboration between young people and people from a wide range of agencies.

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9   https://www.lifechangestrust.org.uk/young-people-care-experience

This rich participation model involved a multitude of activity and key players in each project, so while Annual Reports were an important way to capture key figures and headlines, they didn't tell the whole story. To do this, we invested the time to hold an annual Learning Meeting with each Board. Learning Meetings provide the opportunity for a range of people from across agencies (e.g. housing, education, Fire Service) and young people involved in the Board to come together to talk to us about their activities, their progress and their next steps.

These were an important way to learn about the relationships, the softer impact Champions Boards were having and most importantly, to hear directly what young people had to say.

Without these meetings the Trust wouldn't have gained the same understanding of how individual Boards operated. We would not have been able to promote the centrality of young people's voice nor would we have had the same insights into the impact of the Champions Boards.

Our wider networks - strategic partners & communities of interest

The Trust also worked closely with strategic partners and networks beyond those that were directly funded, in order to bring all relevant people round the table to set and work towards agendas of change and improvement.

For example, our Dementia programme worked in each of the 14 Health Boards to facilitate collaboration between key people in communities including people living with dementia, unpaid carers, staff in the voluntary and independent sectors as well as those working in Health & Social Care Partnerships.

This approach involved several planning meetings with key stakeholders in preparation for a series of events bringing together local communities to debate, discuss and influence change, with regard to dementia policy and practice within the Health Board area.

Through facilitated conversations in communities, the Trust was able to support the development of local priorities aimed at improving the lives of people with dementia and unpaid carers in each Health Board area.

Events like these generated valuable learning for the Trust that came directly from beneficiaries, participants and stakeholders that reflected the reality of provision for dementia care in their area. This learning would have been challenging to uncover without connecting this wider strategic network of individuals.

Working with the groups mentioned above was an important way to harness the benefits of working relationally. But another vital strand of relationship-based funding was to encourage relationships within and between these groups too. The Trust has invested a lot of time in nurturing these networks as they are crucial to progressing work outside a funder's direct investment and influence.

As a time-limited organisation, the Trust would always need to have legacy plans in place that would continue to build upon the strong infrastructure and evidence base it had developed. Two examples of the legacy programmes established by the Trust in 2019 are About Dementia and BOLD[10].

These programmes, hosted by Age Scotland and Queen Margaret University and the University of Edinburgh respectively, focus on the development of a 'national policy and practice forum' for dementia and the establishment of a 'school of leadership' for dementia leaders, in Scotland.

The learning and impact generated by these programmes and the leaders they develop will continue beyond the life of the Trust and will strengthen the Trust's emphasis on keeping beneficiary voice at the core of all activity.

legacy partner
life changes trust

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10 Further information on legacy arrangements for the dementia programme can be found on our website. https://www.lifechangestrust.org.uk/news/news-life-changes-trust-dementia-programme-legacy-partner-announcement

Impact on our influencing goals

Working in this relational way strengthens learning, as it draws on the evidence and experience of the wide range of individuals, communities and agencies the Trust has been working with. Gathering this evidence is an interesting process, but it's only made meaningful when it shapes future actions and creates positive change. Throughout our work, the Trust sought to use this learning to make transformational changes to the lives of young people with care experience, people living with dementia and unpaid carers. This section will explore how we did this by:

▶ drawing on learning to guide our own practices and activities

▶ using our learning as an evidence base to influence local and national policy
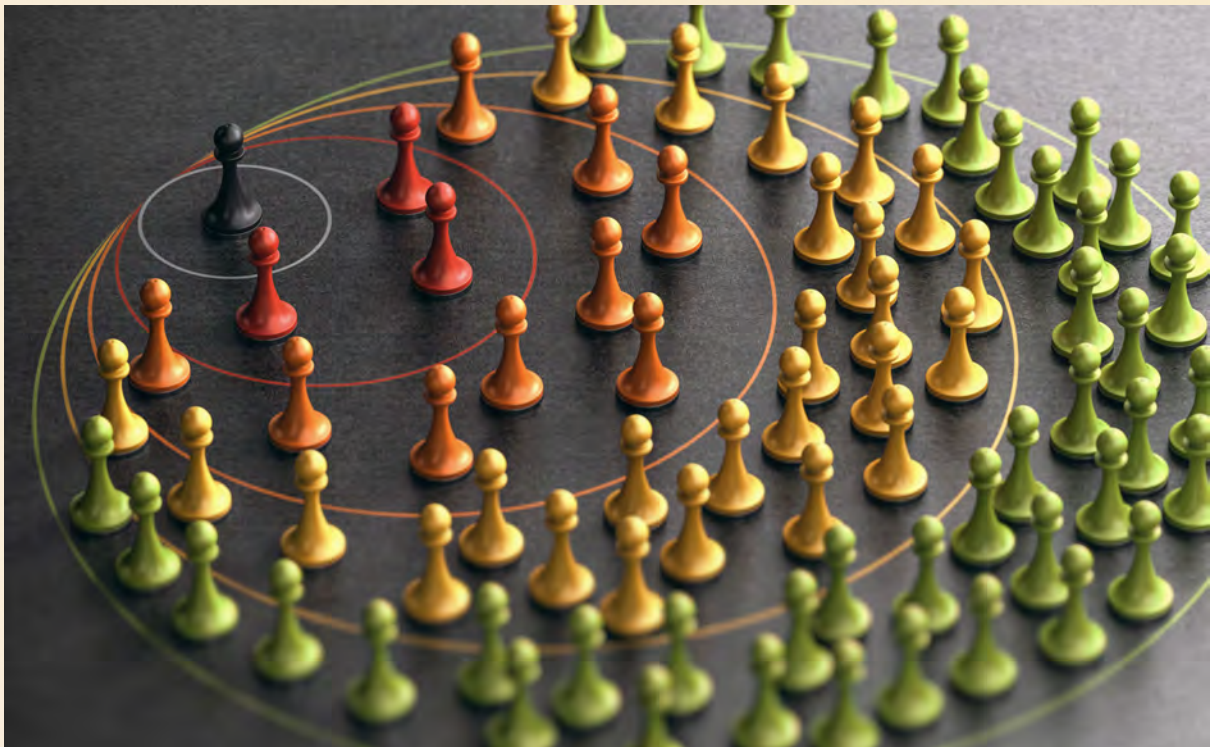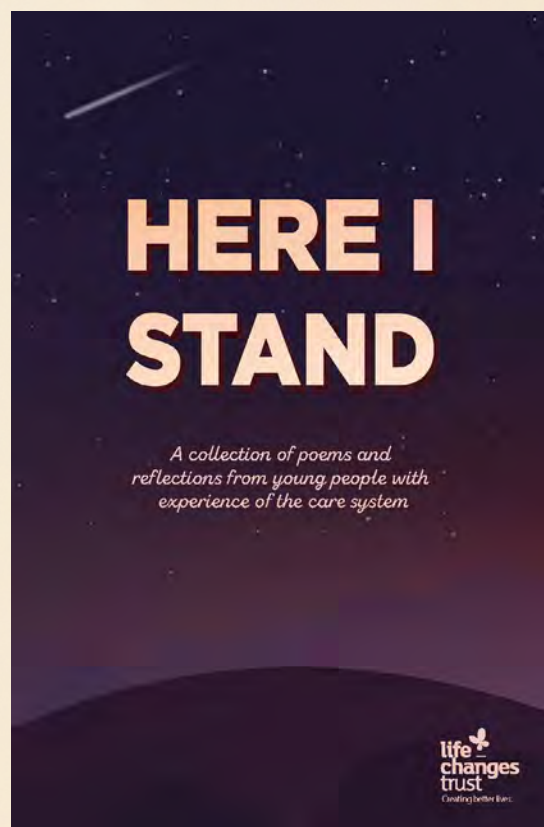
Drawing on learning to guide our practices and activities

Through reflecting on learning generated by our participants/beneficiaries, funded projects and wider networks, the Trust identified key priorities and made sure that these shaped our own practices and activities.

Across both the Young People with Care Experience programme and the Dementia programme, it became increasingly clear that taking a creative approach was a vital tool in listening to people, inviting them to take part and elevating their voices. The centrality of creativity was clearly demonstrated in written reports, in learning meetings, in group discussions at network meetings and most clearly in the creative output of projects themselves.

The Young People with Care Experience programme responded to this learning by expanding its creative approach and developing programmes such as the 'Here I Stand'[11] project which celebrated young people's writing talents, the 'Voice & Vision' event[12] in June 2021 that highlighted the impact of creative projects on young people and the 'Creativity and Care Experience' legacy project which seeks to capitalize on the progress made and enable partners to build on this creative legacy.

11 A digital copy of Here I Stand can be found on our website. https://www.lifechangestrust.org.uk/publications

12 The Voice & Vision Gallery can be viewed here https://artspaces.kunstmatrix.com/en/exhibition/6705258/voice-vision-the-gallery

By focusing on building relationships, we have joined or had a pivotal role in bringing together various communities of interest such as networks of funders or groups of projects who have formed their own peer networks. These groups have developed their own voices and priorities and are well placed to absorb and build on learning, share this learning through their own networks and take the next steps to secure change and progress.

One example of this is the development of the Young People with Care Experience programme's 'Young Funders' initiative, in which organisations were awarded funding to design and run their own individual grants awards. In building this initiative, we were aware that we wanted to build on the progress we had made in our individual grants work. Over several of these grant programmes, we have learned a lot about the power and efficacy of individual grants, and hoped that other organisations would be interested in extending this learning and benefitting the young people in their networks.

As the initiative developed, we spent time discussing the aims and objectives of the work and highlighted that we wanted each successful organisation to participate in a learning community made up of awardees and other funders. This learning community allows projects to explore the practical and strategic aspects of individual grants in a supportive environment, encouraging them to identify ways in which individual grants could benefit their work as well as wider organisational processes and practice.

Influencing policy

The learning generated from taking a relationship-based approach to funding has been instrumental in allowing both programmes to use a strong evidence base to influence policy and inform key decision makers.

For instance, by investing in communities and organisations which share our values, and working alongside the people who can make change, the Dementia programme, as part of its legacy funding, is building local networks based on Dementia Friendly Communities, Peer Support opportunities and Meeting Centres.[13] These co-exist and complement each other in creating a solid local approach to post-diagnostic support which satisfies both national aims for dementia care and a grassroots approach to highly personalised care. These networks that prioritise partnership working, local relationships and sharing of learning are influential in shifting practice and policy.

By committing to a relationship-based approach to funding, we have created many enhanced learning opportunities with beneficiaries, projects and their wider networks. These opportunities have enabled us to produce evidence that helped us identify what change was needed, to get alongside the people who could work with us to secure it and to demonstrate impact. Overall, working in this way has undoubtedly contributed to the evidence base and community networks that have enabled us to meaningfully inform and influence policy, practice and culture.

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13 https://www.worcester.ac.uk/about/academic-schools/school-of-allied-health-and-community/ allied-health-research/association-for-dementia-studies/ads-research/uk-meeting-centres.aspx

Conclusion

We hope this has given you an insight into our experience of a relationship-based approach to funding, and that it has stimulated some thoughts about how it can be implemented or progressed in your own organisation. From our learning, we think the following 'top tips' may help you to do so.

Top Tips

Embrace and implement closed loop feedback processes. This enables for continual knowledge exchange, learning and reflection which benefits your entire organisation and its practice.

Engage with organisations throughout the entire funding process, including pre-application. Opportunities to provide feedback throughout the entire process helps to build upon and strengthen existing funding management practice.

Dedicate the proper time, capacity and resources needed to develop healthy and meaningful relationships. Poor engagement at any stage of the relationship journey can cause damage. A real desire to commit to a relationship-based approach is essential to success.

Provide the time and space for organisations to do the work. Longer funding periods, flexible budgets and project plans enable projects to build genuine sustainability and remain focussed on the people as well as the outcomes.

Proactively engage in relationship building. If you really want to meaningfully extend your reach, maximise impact and hear directly from those quieter voices, you need to create opportunities for individuals and organisations to engage. This can be 1-1 conversations, workshops, themed networks and events.

State clearly your expectations and standards for funded organisations from the onset. This ensures everyone understands your vision, values and aspirations, and contributes to more resilient and long-lasting relationships. Sometimes relationships do breakdown and this is okay. Valuable learning can still be gained from this experience, which can then inform and develop future practice and processes.

Support applicants to make connections with funding staff and each other. Facilitating networks, spending time together with no agenda and workshops are useful tools to help others to connect.

Embrace changing the power dynamic between funder and awardee. This can feel scary at first but being open to participatory grant making, co-production and transparency benefits everyone!