



# Voice-led Transformation

## Our Manifesto

# Ending the Status Quo

**Scotland faces a crisis, with one in four children living in poverty. The Scottish Government has made tackling child poverty a priority and there are green shoots of improvement. However, the evidence is indisputable: shifting focus to voice-led transformation and support will deliver even better outcomes, stronger relationships and smarter use of public resources.**

This means empowering local communities, working hand-in-hand with the public sector, to co-create the solutions they believe will give them, and future generations, the opportunity to thrive, transforming neighborhoods into communities of hope and possibility.

This is not about spending more. It's about spending smarter to prevent poverty, family and community breakdown. It is also about holding those with power and resource to account. To the individuals and communities they exist to serve.

What Matters To You (WM2U) is delivering impact and scaling progress across Dundee and Clackmannanshire. With your support, we can turn learning into legacy and help Scotland move from crisis to confidence.

# The Crisis

**Scotland stands at a crossroads: either continue with the current public service delivery crises or invest in reform that empowers communities to direct public spending more effectively and prevent harm before it occurs. The evidence is clear: voice-led transformation and support deliver better outcomes, stronger relationships and smarter use of public resources.**

Too many children and young people are growing up facing multiple disadvantage - poverty, poor mental health, insecure housing, insufficient support for education and a system of support at breaking point. Importantly, these are not stand-alone issues. They compound and interact, creating systemic chasms that the current approach to public service delivery is unable to close.

Failing to meaningfully take account of the voices of those most in need of these services is resulting in a cycle of crisis and inequality. A cycle which directly undermines our whole country's ambitions for fairness and wellbeing.

And, despite years of national commitment and investment, one in four children in Scotland still live in poverty.

In Dundee, that figure is even higher with **26.1% of children** living in poverty. In Clackmannanshire, the picture is even starker, with **28.5% of children** living in low-income households. This needs to change. These are not just statistics. They are children going to school hungry, families skipping meals to pay bills, and communities locked in disadvantage. We can no longer go on reacting from one crisis to the next. Now is the time to apply the evidence, to stop, pivot and do more of what works.

[What Matters To You \(WM2U\)](#) proves that there is another way.



# The Solution

In Dundee and Clackmannanshire, WM2U has shown what happens when communities and families are trusted to lead. By shifting power to those with lived experience, WM2U has helped communities co-design solutions that work and are making a difference to people's lives by strengthening relationships, reducing crisis demand and building positive infrastructure that sustains.

By empowering local communities and working hand-in-hand with the public sector, WM2U is enabling people to co-create the solutions they believe will give them, and future generations the opportunity to thrive, transforming neighborhoods into communities of hope and possibility. **This is not about spending more. It's about spending smarter.**

WM2U demonstrates how existing resources can be redirected towards prevention, resilience and dignity. It's a model that works with families and communities; it doesn't dictate to them.



As we approach the 2026 Scottish Parliament elections, **the outcomes and impact of WM2U offers a blueprint for lasting change.**

We are calling on all political parties to commit to embedding voice-led, community-driven approaches in their manifestos.

**This means:**

- **Allocating at least 25% of Whole Family Wellbeing funding to community voice funds that are led by families themselves**, in Scotland's most disadvantaged communities (SIMD 1–4). This will ensure that families have real power to shape the support they need.
- **Ending fragmented, siloed funding across services that support children and families by enabling Community Planning Partnerships to pool key budgets** including employability, housing and mental health and holding them to account for delivering measurable progress in reducing poverty and inequality
- **Ensuring community voice is at the centre of accountability** infrastructure with real powers to ensure delivery.

**We are supporting these commitments with our offer to convene a new independent National Advisory Group that will champion family-led funding panels in SIMD 1-4 areas.** Led by a coalition of independent funders, it will facilitate the deepening of a culture in Scotland where local people make the decisions that affect their local community.

The status quo is failing too many families. WM2U shows that when we listen differently, we act differently, and the results speak for themselves.

This is the moment to turn learning into legacy.



# Our Manifesto

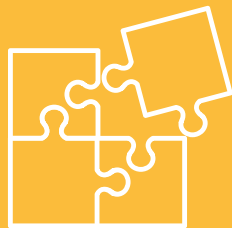
We call on every political party to pledge the inclusion of voice-led, community-driven approaches in their manifestos. While not dependent on it, our manifesto will be most effective where supportive local infrastructure empowers individuals and communities with the skills and capacity to express their voice.



**Put communities in the driving seat of Scotland's mission to end child poverty and shift power and resources directly to families.**

Building on the success of the tried and tested WM2U model in Dundee and Clackmannanshire, the new Scottish Government should embed community-led decision making at the heart of national policy. The WM2U model goes beyond a typical participatory budgeting approach, which often only has small pots of funding available and are not necessarily focused on addressing structural problems.

The new government should allocate a minimum of 25% of Scotland's Whole Family Wellbeing Funding to community-voice funds controlled by families in SIMD 1-4 areas. Local, family-led panels will decide how this money is spent, aiming for at least half of all awards going to new, community run initiatives. This ensures investment flows to where families say it matters most, enabling solutions that are rooted in lived experience, local strengths and preventing challenges before they arise.



### **End siloed funding and demand collective accountability for outcomes.**

Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) should pool key budgets including employability, housing and mental health to invest in local, voice-led solutions that support families and reduce poverty. Each partnership will be accountable for delivering progress against a small number of nationally agreed KPIs, co-designed with COSLA and communities. This cannot just be tokenistic consultation of communities - CPPs would need to involve communities as a starting point.

These solutions must be rooted in lived experience and designed with those they are intended to support. This is about alignment, clarity and shared responsibility for real change.



### **Embed lived experience at the heart of scrutiny and assurance.**

The new government should support Audit Scotland to establish a panel of lived-experience lay assessors to review how well public bodies in Scotland adopt and deliver community-led decision-making. This ensures transparency, challenge and continuous improvement from the perspective that matters most: families themselves.

Families and communities will have not only a seat at the table but the authority to ensure that commitments are delivered. With transparent monitoring, meaningful influence, and mechanisms that cannot be ignored.

# The WM2U Offer

**A new independent National Advisory Group will support family-led funding panels in SIMD 1–4 areas. This will be led by a coalition of independent funders, informing national and local government, funders' boards, the public and voluntary sectors. Most importantly, it will be ultimately accountable to local communities.**

It will be a place where independent funders, community leaders, and local voices come together to champion engagement and meaningful participation, share learning, and deepen a culture in Scotland where people shape the decisions that affect their lives.

Independent funders will also demonstrate their commitment to shared responsibility for real change. A coalition will develop specific funding opportunities that pool budgets to invest in local, voice-led solutions that support families and reduce poverty.

Progress will be assessed and aligned with Community Planning Partnerships' performance framework. Lay assessors will be asked to review how well independent funders are adopting and enabling community-led decision-making.





# The Power of Backing this Approach

## Voice-led change works

When families and individuals within communities help shape local services in a joined-up way, outcomes improve - from education and health, to long-term wellbeing.

## Child poverty is urgent – and solvable.

In places like Dundee and Clackmannanshire, child poverty affects over 1 in 5 children. WM2U shows how community-led solutions can break the cycle.

## Local voices drive national impact

WM2U's approach is already influencing policy and practice. With your support, it can scale across Scotland.

## Prevention saves money

Investing early in what families say they need strengthens relationships, builds resilience and reduces crisis costs across health, education, policing, housing and social care.

## This is real systems change

WM2U shifts power, budgets and decision-making into communities - with tangible results and stronger public trust.

## It's ready to roll

WM2U offers a tested, adaptable blueprint for other local authorities - backed by strong feedback from families, practitioners and funders.

## It's not about more money

It is about changing practice and doing better with the resources we have. Including those assets that already exist in communities across Scotland.

## Political support turns learning into legacy

A manifesto commitment ensures WM2U's lessons shape how Scotland supports children and families for years to come.

# WM2U in Action

## Charleston community-led change

Parents living in Charleston, Dundee, who once felt unheard and ignored became community leaders through What Matters to You. They are now key parts of a local community group, Charleston Matters, running the Wee-Night-In family session and helping organise local events and youth support activities. The group's work has strengthened family relationships and has helped parents move from reacting to problems to shaping solutions.

## What happened on the ground?

Having developed confidence from setting up Charleston Matters, two parents raised housing and environmental concerns with the local council chief executive when he was participating in a Cafe Conversation, which led to a direct referral to housing leadership. The local housing officers organised weekly drop-ins supported by the women, increasing trust and attendance from the community. The parents will now lead a walkabout across local streets with housing officers and environmental services to identify practical changes such as fixing bike sheds and cycle paths, adding dog bins and tidying greenspaces. The housing team will coordinate delivery and the community will commit to ongoing upkeep.

## What did the housing officer have to say?

'They have the vision and the drive. They are very well known and well respected in the community. If we could map them out across the whole of the city that is exactly what we would do. They have invigorated the community in Charleston and we are motivated by them. We will help and facilitate them in achieving what they want to achieve for Charleston. Once we have been in and delivered what they want the community will take ownership of keeping it the way we have left it. I think this could be the way we do things from now on. This could be a massive step moving forward!'

## What is the impact?

Increased confidence and connection for parents, practical improvements to local streets and amenities, and a new working relationship between residents and services. The approach demonstrates that community leadership plus responsive services equals sustained change and that small, visible wins encourage wider neighbourhood pride.

# Next Steps

We want you to include our manifesto in your own ahead of the 2026 Scottish Parliament election, putting people and communities at the heart of decision making and improving the lives of families across Scotland.

Please contact Lynn Hendry and Jackie Brock at **[lynnhendry@thehunterfoundation.co.uk](mailto:lynnhendry@thehunterfoundation.co.uk)** and **[jackie@whatmatters2u.org.uk](mailto:jackie@whatmatters2u.org.uk)** for more information, or visit our website at **[www.wm2u.co.uk](http://www.wm2u.co.uk)**

