



Investing in whole family support: the impact of voice-led decision making

Report from 9 March 2026 event

Organised by What Matters to You (WM2U), funded by The Hunter Foundation and BBC Children in Need

Introduction

Introducing the purpose and ambitions for this event, Lynn Hendry from the Hunter Foundation stated that the ambitious targets set by Scottish Government for reducing child poverty were unlikely to be met. Continuing the status quo is unacceptable given the desperate need for change of children and families living in poverty.

This event is about hope and belief that change is possible.

As a result of a 7 year investment of funding and time in WM2U, the Hunter Foundation and Children in Need understand more and more deeply just what it takes to do voice-led systems change. We are now expanding this work as part of a UK-wide, five funder collaboration, called Communities for Children. Wishaw will be our first Scottish base and we will bring WM2U's learning and approach to the centre of that investment.

Scotland has many examples of voice-led leadership approaches. In many areas these approaches are central to strategies to eradicate child poverty and wider inequalities. But it is our experience that all too often voice-led approaches remain superficial and inconsistent. They may include power, but that power is seldom supported by genuine agency.

Many funders wish to build and maintain strong partnerships between them, the public sector, and others. These partnerships would be based on giving communities a say in how money is spent locally as an important first step toward building stronger, more confident and hopeful communities. This event is designed to highlight how this change is happening.

Opening speaker

Annie McKenzie, author of '[Alternative voice](#)', reminded us why Scotland needs to embrace voice-led empowerment if it is to achieve an effective preventative approach to ending child poverty. Annie also referenced JRF's [recent analysis](#) that many people are feeling overlooked by politicians and current political systems, and want to see changes that reflect their priorities.

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Workshops

Getting started

The Make it Happen Fund Community Decision Making panels in Dundee and Clackmannanshire led the workshop to describe the impact their grant-making work has had on their communities and on them as individuals. The discussion in this workshop are detailed here. More information on the grant-making process is also available at wm2u.org.uk.

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Measures that matter

The workshop explained how both numbers and the voices of families are essential for decision making. Dartington colleagues explained how ripple effect mapping can be used to show impact on individuals, communities and wider systems. Participants then looked at quotes from parents and CLD workers to see what impact WM2U has had and what the greatest takeaway would be for themselves.

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Accelerating voice-led system change

The workshop on the introduction of the Clackmannanshire Transformation Space highlighted the progress towards the end of Year Zero in developing a funding vehicle to enable statutory, corporate and independent funder monies to be pooled and investment determined by groups of citizens with lived experience in a range of key priorities within Clackmannanshire, such as prevention of homelessness.

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Plenary session

The plenary of independent funders reinforced the importance and future direction for deepening partnerships at all levels and across all sectors.



The Make it Happen Fund is an exercise in powerful multi-funder collaboration working well with statutory funders and points to the future.

Jim McCormick

Chief Executive, The Robertson Trust

Partnerships would be based on giving communities a say in how money is spent locally as an important first step toward building stronger, more confident and hopeful communities.

Shelley McCarthy, of the NHS Tayside Charitable Trust stated the Make it Happen Fund had fit perfectly with its direction of travel – front facing and close to communities and the third sector.



It's a no-brainer for me – it's been absolutely brilliant. We will continue to support it – it's been amazing from a funder's perspective.

Shelley McCarthy

NHS Tayside Charitable Trust

Elaine Wilson of the Corra Foundation stated the Make it Happen Fund and other grant making approaches that they lead are based on going out to communities and participating alongside them, reducing the bureaucracy around our application process and finding a model that works for the communities.

Morag Neville of the Northwood Charitable Trust, which operates in Dundee and neighbouring areas, talked about the unique role that a long established and local grant maker has in supporting and encouraging partnerships across communities and the public and third sectors



We have built trust with the communities we fund. The expertise is in the communities. Everything is interlinked when we are investing in people and communities. There is responsibility on us to share our knowledge... help funding go further and work harder and more effectively.

Morag Neville

Northwood Charitable Trust

Rachel Searle offered **some insights** from Scotland's evolving practice with community benefit funds.

Ellie Craig, Chair of the Scottish Youth Parliament and a member of the UK National Lottery Board, concluded by observing that participation must happen at all levels and not just an add on at the end of a project. Young people in particular had faced the sharp end of cuts. Funders need to create a stronger link between the local delivery of youth work and youth empowerment to encourage young people to be involved in funding decision making.

Closing

Lynn Hendry reinforced these points in her closing comments emphasising that the event's proposition has been simple.

- If we want better outcomes, we must place community voice at the centre of decision-making.
- And we must be willing to let go of power.
- Because when communities genuinely shape decisions:
 - solutions are grounded
 - innovation accelerates
 - prevention strengthens
 - trust grows

Let's recognise this takes courage and it **does not mean** abandoning responsibility.

It means recognising that expertise lives in experience and that those closest to the problem are often closest to the solution.

This can feel uncomfortable. Communities may challenge assumptions; prioritise differently and may surface truths that systems would rather not hear.

But discomfort is productive. Durable reform will come from redistributing power; trusting lived experience; investing in relationships and from designing systems **with** communities – not for them.



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