What Matters to You: Contributing to Systems Change

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what matters to you

Introduction

What Matters to You (WM2U) is a community-based systems change initiative working alongside families in two communities in Dundee and East Ayrshire. System change is about shifting the conditions that keep a problem in place. WM2U focuses on moving public resources to offer support earlier, thereby enabling children to flourish within their own families. We seek to do this by putting the voices of those with lived experience at the centre of all we do. Our approach is to start with the families themselves – to discover if together we can learn how to make a difference to what really matters to them. The purpose of this briefing is to highlight the potential for a 'WM2U approach' to contribute to the practical realisation of the goals of public service reform. In particular, we note:

- There are many policy documents and frameworks that are relevant to the work of public services. System change and hearing from those with lived experience are often proposed, but much less often implemented.

- Putting voice or lived expertise at the centre is an important missing ingredient in the practice of public service reform and one that is clearly connected to the potential to 'get it right'; the lived experience of services is both key to understanding the operation of the system, and the ultimate test of whether reform is being progressed.

- We believe that the learning from our work can illuminate or illustrate how important policies of public service agencies and national and local government, can be put into practice. In committing to and taking the time to develop a WM2U approach we have been discovering how 'help' can in fact be helpful.

Here we highlight a few key policies that cut across different professional domains along with documents reflecting on policy implementation. This accompanies a separate Literature and Practice review and short digest which provide fuller background material. We offer all these contributions as an invitation into ongoing conversations about how best to support real change.

The Policies and Frameworks

The Christie Commission on the future delivery of public services was commissioned by the Scottish Government and reported in 2011[1]. The four 'pillars' of the recommendations are:

- Reforms must aim to **empower individuals and communities** receiving public services by involving them in the design and delivery of the services they use.

- Public service providers must be required to work much more closely in partnership, to **integrate service provision** and thus improve the outcomes they achieve.

- We must prioritise expenditure on public services which **prevent negative outcomes** from arising.

- And our whole system of public services – public, third and private sectors – **must become more efficient** by reducing duplication and sharing services wherever possible.

Despite wide agreement about the wisdom and urgency of the Christie Commission recommendations, public sector bodies have struggled to understand how to put key elements into practice, including the shift towards prevention and the empowerment of individuals and communities. The Auditor General for Scotland, reflecting on 10 years since the publication of the Christie Commission report, pointed out that there has been a continuing focus on 'short term service-specific' measures rather than the 'longer term outcomes for individuals and communities.'[2]

This discrepancy between policy and practice has been described as an 'implementation gap' in reports by Audit Scotland[3] and The Health Foundation.[4]

- The Audit Scotland report talks of 'an implementation gap between the Scottish Government's ambitions for reform [of public services] and delivery on the ground. It is vital that these reforms are delivered effectively, and with public engagement, to deliver sustainable services that improve people's outcomes.'

- The Health Foundation report, which explicitly refers to the Christie Commission, makes clear the close connection between social and economic inequality and health inequalities. The report emphasises that while a radical shift in approach is needed, 'there is no need for a new strategy …Policies are currently not translating into action'.

The **National Performance Framework**[5], in law since 2015, lists outcomes in 11 areas, all related to a core purpose that includes 'opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish through increased wellbeing'. Addressing inequality is an intention across several of the broad outcome areas including in Education, Health, Poverty and Community. However, it has been difficult to make progress. We get an indication of what is at stake from Audit Scotland:

> **"Twenty-six per cent of children in Scotland were living in relative poverty in 2019/20. … Children living in poverty are more likely to have health issues including mental health problems, gain fewer qualifications, experience stigma and bullying at school and be at higher risk of being care experienced. Child poverty is at a higher level than when targets were set by the Scottish Parliament in 2017."[6]**

Three policy frameworks that are specific to children and families are **Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC), Holistic Whole Family Wellbeing** and **The Promise**. All of these emphasise the importance of service providers listening to the child and family and that help should be provided at the time when it is needed (often described as 'early') – and all recognise that these important requirements point to changes in how services work.

- **GIRFEC**[7] made an important contribution to the possibility of offering support at the point when it is needed by extending the responsibility for engaging in welfare/wellbeing issues beyond specialist services to 'universal' services, thus broadening the professional resource and normalising 'help' by recognising and responding in the course of day-to-day engagement (for instance in school). The guidance and arrangements that have developed are also intended to support collaborative practice in

responding to individual circumstances. The initial focus of GIRFEC was, however, on outcomes for the individual child, with the family and wider community featuring as instrumental contributors to the child's wellbeing, and engagement with wider systemic issues usually seen as beyond the capacity or remit of services.

- The £500m **Whole Family Wellbeing Fund**, announced in September 2021 in response to the pressures of the COVID pandemic, appears as a development of GIRFEC, emphasising that the wellbeing of the whole family needs to be a focus. The accompanying guidance, 'Routemap and National Principles of Holistic Whole Family Support,'[8] includes within its vision a range of 'cultural' developments including 'address power dynamics', and among its principles, 'Take account of families' voice' – at both strategic and individual level.

- The work of the **Independent Care Review** and the resulting **Promise**[9] has also placed a major emphasis on family support at the point when it is needed to promote wellbeing and avoid progression towards family crisis and children moving into 'care'. The promise made to care experienced children and young people, is that 'they will grow up loved, safe, and respected.' The Promise continues to be an important contextual feature for the work of WM2U and local authorities and others looking at how to rise to the challenges it sets will be looking for effective approaches.

Among the many system features that these national frameworks cover, they give prominence to the voice of the family and the importance of co-producing with children and families not just the individual family care plan but also the design of 'the system' of care and provision. The Promise puts it like this:

> **"Regardless of how children and family's voices are heard, there must be a full and considered exploration of how listening, shared sense-making and shared decision-making will be embedded into practice and mechanisms to actively use what is heard, must be put in place."[10]**

The Challenge: Changing Individual and Organisational Practices

"Everyone likes to claim they are 'doing Christie', but how much has really changed?"[11]

The challenges for transforming individual and organisational practices at scale are considerable. Because poverty is so pervasive and entrenched, it is a significant barrier to system change when services fail to take account of it or only tackle the symptoms, so compromising attempts to meet people early in their problems.

Audit Scotland's report on what has happened since 2018 and plans to 2026 to tackle child poverty notes:

"The views of children and families living in poverty are not always meaningfully considered as policies and actions are developed, implemented and evaluated."

That report also cites a review of local authority actions from the Poverty and Inequality Commission: 'people with experience of living in poverty were rarely involved in developing plans'.[12]

Despite the policy commitment to prevention, early support, and community and family engagement, the core planning approaches and practices of public service organisations are usually more geared to occasional consultation on plans than to co-design or structuring the planning and development process around ongoing relationships and conversations with citizens.

The May 2022 report on the 'stalled mortality progress' from **the Glasgow Centre for Population Health** emphasises the importance of local provision and services and includes the recommendation: 'Design local services for the populations they serve, involving citizens in the design of services wherever possible.'

Yet there is little clarity about how to make such a shift and there is no script or manual for this way of working. Being asked to engage directly as a core part of individual and organisational practice, is far from a simple challenge for organisations that have evolved to work as they currently do, with corresponding practices, cultures, assumptions, and commitments. And citizens, parents and community members have few, if any, opportunities or experience of a 'co-production' role. Whatever their experience and thoughts, it may not be a straightforward step to contribute to the shaping of different practices.

Abstract appeals for services to be alongside or involve families, citizens, communities, children, and young people in shaping services do not provide a sufficient or convincing enough template for how such work should be undertaken in concrete terms.

Amidst the service necessities of meeting statutory obligations, it can feel like a leap of faith for senior managers to have confidence that diverting resources at scale to preventative 'solutions' involving communities will indeed reduce the need to continue high levels of spending on responding to crises and serious difficulties.[13]

In our experience many staff members would value a more relational approach to their work and are excited by the policy ideas emphasising voice. However, the nature of professional training, post-qualifying staff development and workplace expectations are not designed to equip the workforce with the sense of agency or discretion, skill, or practice repertoires for an alternative approach.

WM2U: Our response and contribution

The challenge of how to put voice or lived expertise at the centre is an important missing ingredient in the public service reform agenda. Our experience is that really listening to people and designing support with and around them takes time and commitment to interactive and ongoing learning. Authentic trust needs to be built and sustained with all parties.

- Staff working with the public need to build confidence and skill in a more relational approach. That, in turn, requires managers and policy makers in the different sectors and organisations to provide an enabling, supportive environment.

- Relationships need to be built and sustained with people and communities and with individuals who may also require support in developing confidence in speaking up. Processes need to be developed for considering and dealing with issues that emerge.

It has also been important to recognise that change cannot be 'delivered', rather that implementation is a collaborative learning process. Any blueprint or plan needs to be subject to critical and continuous review in the light of emerging experience and small, valued successes. Making explicit this understanding of learning as central to the process points to the creation of space for shared reflection amongst those closely involved with the issue at hand using, for example, the model of 'communities of practice'.[14] The literature and practice review illuminates elements of wider learning about how the work of system change might proceed.

The rootedness of this approach in local, small-scale interactions, even where these are widely adopted, must be combined with the strategic, planning and managerial concerns about scale, resource allocation and effectiveness at the population level.

In thinking about how to evaluate the overall impact of this work, we are developing an approach called *Dynamic Impact Analysis*: this explores how the connections and influences exerted by one part of the system on other parts are connected, and how they change over time because they are connected. Our approach blends System Dynamics modelling (SD) with an embedded, on-going approach to social learning based on local data collection and analysis.

We know that others are working in a similar way and have found value in hosting and being part of conversations to explore the emerging learning about effective practices and how to use that learning to improve our work now and in the future. To stay connected and contribute to our developing thinking and practice, please contact Jackie Brock, WM2U Programme Manager, jackie@whatmatters2u.org.uk

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Endnotes

1   Report of the Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services, June 2011. (Emphases in the original)

2   Stephen Boyle, Auditor General for Scotland, Blog: Christie 10-years on, 7 September 2021 (https://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/publications/blog-christie-10-years-on)

3   Audit Scotland, Scotland's Public Finances: Challenges and risks, November 2022

4   The Health Foundation, Leave No One behind: The state of health and health inequalities in Scotland (https://doi.org/10.37829/HF-2023-HL01)

5   Information about the National Performance Framework can be found at https://nationalperformance.gov.scot

6   Audit Scotland, "Briefing: Tackling Child Poverty" September 2022

7   Information about GIRFEC can be found at https://www.gov.scot/policies/girfec/

8   https://www.gov.scot/publications/routemap-national-principles-holistic-whole-family-support/

9   Documents about The Promise are available here: https://thepromise.scot

10 The Promise, Plan 21-24: The Fundamentals, 31 March 2021.

11 https://www.holyrood.com/inside-politics/view,if-were-all-agreed-why-is-it-not-happening-the-christie-commission-10-years-on

12 Audit Scotland, Briefing: Tackling Child Poverty, September 2022

13 The Three Horizons (https://www.internationalfuturesforum.com/three-horizons) is an example of a planning model that addresses the dilemmas presented by the conflict between the need to change our current approach and the difficulties of making the change. It invites consideration of transitional measures towards a desired future and recognises that change takes time. An observation has been that most policy making, and most policy discussion, occurs by default in the first horizon. It is about fixing the failing system, innovating to maintain it, 'keeping the lights on'. The extended model of the three horizons opens a new policy domain: second horizon policy making underpinned by third horizon aspirations

14 Communities of Practice (CoPs) are defined as 'a group of people with a common sense of purpose who agree to work together to share and build knowledge and apply that knowledge to practice. Wenger, E., McDermott, R and Snyder, W. M (2002) Cultivating Communities of Practice, Harvard