

# Where should we look for system change?

## What Matters to You, Learning Partner, Learning Update

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## **Acknowledgements and an invitation**

We would like to thank the many people who have contributed their perspectives to this report, which brings together data from many different sources. We acknowledge that this work is complex and fast moving, which means a report is only ever a reflection of a point in time. We hope that recording the development of the work in this way, we support reflection and further action, building an evidence resource that is useful in each locality and for others with similar interests.

As authors we remain ultimately responsible for any errors of omission or interpretation.

Mindful that system change also includes engagement with and challenge to established perspectives about evidence, we are interested in using these emerging insights to support wider dialogue about system change, including the place of evidence within it. We encourage readers to share their responses, hopeful that shared learning will develop understandings of individual and organisational contributions and help the approach to put down deeper roots for the long term.

## Executive Summary

*What Matters to You* (WM2U) is a community-based systems change initiative working alongside families in particular communities in Dundee and East Ayrshire. The ambition of WM2U is to move public resources to offer support earlier, thereby enabling children to flourish within their own families.

This learning report shares our thinking about how to measure and evaluate system change and offers emerging evidence of impact so far. This report prepares the ground for a report planned for June 2024 that will provide a fuller five-year retrospective account and evaluation of progress towards the desired outcomes.

### Our Understanding of System Change and Expectations of Impact

For us system change means:

*'Shifting the conditions that keep a problem in place': the cultural and organisational values, mindsets, practices, and behaviours that are often taken for granted or unnoticed.*<sup>1</sup>

In seeking 'system change' WM2U is not a conventional project, programme, or intervention that can be piloted and simply 'rolled out'.

Lessons from other system change initiatives across Scotland, the wider UK and internationally suggest that there is scant evidence of the kind of sustainable impact that meets the expectations of funders. System change is ultimately about changing paradigms, a way of working that recognises complexity and prioritises working on the deeper levers of change: mental models, beliefs, worldviews, norms, and power relations, giving voice to people that are often not heard or perspectives that are discounted, and supporting collective inquiry and reflective learning. In the absence of any defined pathway for this way of working and recognising that system change also challenges established perspectives about evidence, we have sought to build in continuous and collective learning.

Our definition of system change offered above is important as we will not achieve our ultimate outcomes at scale if we do not 'scale deep' by making an impact upon the 'below the waterline' embedded cultural values and beliefs that are barriers to change and continue to reproduce unwanted patterns in complex systems.

### What Would Be Good Evidence of Impact?

Creating a systemic impact will necessitate nurturing the enabling relational and systemic practices of daily interactions and relationships amongst communities, practitioners, and senior leaders, encouraging positive practices, and using the voice of parents as a touchstone. This seeks to address the systemic drivers of inequity by giving particular weight to the views of parents and community members, who are also uniquely positioned to provide insight into the more granular and relational signs of change.

In several respects this presents a challenge to conventional expectations about what evidence of impact should be sought, that go beyond questions of what can be attributed to an intervention. In asking the evaluative question 'where should we look for signs of system change?' we view the emergence of more relational and systemic practices amongst the different stakeholders (including parents and carers, practitioners, senior leaders, and funders), as *necessary* conditions for scaling deep to achieve system change. Whilst the

policy ambition to shift towards preventative 'early help' remains, this puts the empirical focus on seeking evidence of what is being created, rather than what has been prevented.

## Emerging Insights and Learning

### Overview: What's Changing?

This period illustrates a divergence of approaches in the two local authorities over time, reflecting the different contexts in which the practical evolution of the WM2U approach has taken place.

- In East Ayrshire, the primary focus was originally on working with parents in the community, latterly bringing them together with practitioners to shape joint interests and ideas to be taken forward, with an Oversight Board of Senior Leaders.
- In Dundee, WM2U has more recently chosen to operate as a strategic enabler, working alongside practitioners with strong authorisation from Senior Leaders, using community learning and development activities as a vehicle for learning and embedding system change.

Both these approaches are instructive and valuable and offer great scope for further learning about how to support voice-led system change.

Whilst the strengths and progress reported here might seem modest in relation to the ultimate goals of WM2U, this experience brings those ambitions to life in ways that demonstrate how voice-led systems change can develop.

- There is real cause for celebration: the conditions are being created for change both at an individual and a systemic level.
- Through this work WM2U is giving voice to people who are not heard and perspectives that are discounted, valuing the experience and knowledge of parents *and* practitioners.
- WM2U has created a strong, shared imperative and common agenda that the impact of the approach should be judged by the ability to deliver outcomes for children and families, with the expectation that a key measure of success will be change that is visible to those on the ground.
- An enduring theme is the importance of trusting, non-judgemental relationships, and practices. The importance of being listened to and genuinely heard is fundamental to any effort to work with communities to create solutions together and make shared ambitions a reality.
- Systems Change is particularly challenging work, with many different perspectives at play and for many of those involved, a need to maintain essential services whilst also seeking to bring about improvement. Nevertheless, there is a need to engage more fully with the unavoidable complexity; there is much still to learn about how to sustain engagement with parents and the wider community at any scale, to embed the kind of early help that supports children to flourish within their own families and ensure the approach continues once the WM2U investment ends.
- There remains an opportunity to generate wider influence to change mindsets, cultures, and everyday practices in relation to the voice and agency of children and young people across services and communities.

### East Ayrshire: What's Changing?

In East Ayrshire, WM2U has enabled parents, young people, and practitioners to meet and learn more about each other. From these encounters, there is a clear and shared message that 'mutual respect between services and the community needs to continue to improve' as the existing system is 'not working for the community'. Key learning includes:

- The power and potential of bringing parents and professionals together is evident; this created space for conversations about change and created better understandings of the different commitments and motivations, opportunities, and barriers to change, given people's different perspectives, pressures, and roles. It has enabled the development of insights into what works and what still needs to change, with impacts on individual professional practices.
- There is a growing understanding of the nature of 'real supportive support' and the difference that it can make to people's lives. Community is undervalued as a resource, a source of insight, offering something distinct and unique. Small, yet significant changes demonstrate the value of the community as a unique source of knowledge and connections, in its own right, rather than mainly being seen as a safety net when services fail.
- The safety, trust and sense of belonging created encourages growing individual and collective agency amongst people, often built despite considerable personal hardship and trauma. Examples include many ways of helping people to reclaim a sense of control over their own lives and create safer environments for themselves, perhaps taking the first steps out of the house, building friendships and wider connections, learning to trust others and feeling able to ask for help, wanting to play a more active role in supporting other people, and finding trusted people that can vouch for and help to access wider services.
- Practitioners who have been part of WM2U have a desire to work differently and sometimes are able to do so, shedding light on possible pathways for system change, whilst also being keenly aware of the pressures and frustrations of their own job roles and contexts.

Whilst there are further opportunities to generate wider influence there remains frustration amongst community members and professionals that although change is possible, the slow pace of change, difficulties that parents report engaging with schools and with decision-makers risk derailing the progress that has been made to date.

### Dundee: What's Changing?

In Dundee, the pace of change has accelerated exponentially in the last year. Real opportunities are beginning to emerge for long-term voice-led system change, with strong strategic support and an embedded 'in-house' approach to community engagement. Key learning includes:

- The long-term investment of funders has generated trust amongst senior leaders and practitioners and meant that they are open and willing to invest time and take risks, reassured that WM2U is continuing to work alongside them.

- Community Learning and Development (CLD) staff are experienced in engaging with communities and are known and trusted by local people. Their work is generating real insight into how complex and frustrating families find it to access the support they need at the right time. Being embedded in the wider locality structure ensures that CLD practitioners can use community planning processes to the advantage of local communities, and there may be better prospects for sustainability.
- Small-scale financial support for practitioners has provided opportunities to create more agile responses and demonstrate different possibilities.

### The Prospects for Values-into-Action

The wider context remains particularly harsh: austerity for families, the tail-end of the pandemic and recovery from it, restrictive spending by public services, and changes in key personnel. Diminishing financial resources and workforce challenges, mean that the creation and implementation of joint initiatives by services and communities is essential.

Our learning suggests that in terms of the future:

- The best prospects lie in the collaboration of services and communities, where the community is a clear and valued partner, able to draw on untapped resources to reach people, and able to contribute to joint initiatives or ‘tests of change’ that offer timely and ‘real supportive support’.
- In both areas the challenge remains to develop wider and mutual understanding of what it means to genuinely ‘be alongside’, to ‘work with’ rather than ‘do to’, and to shape practical ways to move forward. The national and local evidence is clear that this is a route to effective change.
- Providing leadership and small-scale financial support to practitioners empowers them to highlight opportunities for system change. Greater practitioner discretion to respond to insight from communities about what matters to them may be a form of ‘early help’ that prevents or disrupts further or wider systems failure.
- The development of a ‘social learning capability’ that seeks to embed continuous and collective learning into the work as it unfolds is a core element of an approach to systems change.

The WM2U Blueprint for Learning sets out the theory of change expectation that ‘allies in change’ will come together and connect for a common purpose.

- The Values-Based Leadership Experiences (VBLEs) are one forum where practitioners and local people might use their time more purposefully: to consider what they want to test out together and co-design a values-into-action phase, with a focus on learning from the experience. This would give practical shape to the changes that are important to families, provide a chance to see how they work, and influence change at a community and wider system level, building on the existing progress and goodwill created.

The continuing work confronts the significant complexities of living with and responding to trauma, understanding, and supporting recovery in non-judgemental ways, and addressing the impact of poverty, which is a significant barrier to system change and risks compromising attempts to meet people early in their problems.



## Scanning the Horizon

In both areas, the different stakeholders are united in their desire to improve the lives of children and families. It is notable that whilst there are insights about children's lives, the direct voices of children and young people are largely absent from this work. Given the stated ambition, what such engagement might look like is worthy of fuller exploration.

It may be that each of the WM2U localities offers a potentially different pathway into local communities and organisational systems, that might standalone or run concurrently and this is something we expect to explore in the coming months, in the expectation that other local authorities and the Scottish Government will be interested in our learning.

Beneath the shared high-level purpose of a shift to prevention, there are still different perspectives and aspirations that have been brought to light and which may yet emerge. For example, the prevailing harsh financial realities of local government suggest that it is unlikely that any savings that can be made will be protected and redirected towards preventative work, rather than being used to reduce deficits.

Going forward, it will be important to air and explore the integration of different perspectives. We would highlight the primary interests of the funders in exploring long-term system change; the hopes of the community to see real, practical change; the challenges for senior leaders of financing public services amidst continuing and severe austerity; the everyday considerations of practitioners navigating the barriers to making the difference they want to make; the focus of Columba 1400 on values; and the learning partner interests in finding ways to measure and demonstrate progress.

We have discussed several conceptual, practical, and ethical challenges for the evaluation of systems change, which include:

- The existence of concurrent initiatives to support prevention or early intervention in both local authorities can be an opportunity for alignment based on dialogue about expectations and contributions as part of the ongoing work.
- The scoping and measurement of personal outcomes for parents, children and young people is a conceptual, empirical, and practical challenge for work of this nature that is not engaging directly with a defined group using a specific service.
- Data availability and configuration limits the ability of local authorities to identify any inefficiencies in systems, create new responses or understand the effective implementation of any intervention to improve the lives of children and families. These data issues are a problem common to all local authorities and have a great bearing on the national debate in Scotland about the need to access useful data. This presents an important opportunity for WM2U and partners to explore possible solutions which could have positive national implications.

We acknowledge that the evaluation of system change is difficult territory, perhaps an aspect of work that has largely been taken for granted or seen as primarily a technical rather than adaptive issue; it may feel counter-cultural and not yet at a stage where the strengths of the approach are sufficiently widely understood and developed to be seen as trustworthy. To assist, annexes include a set of criteria to promote the quality and credibility of the approach and a short briefing about these issues to encourage wider discussion.

## 1. Purpose of the Report: Introduction and Orientation

*What Matters to You* (WM2U) is a community-based systems change initiative working alongside families in particular communities in Dundee and East Ayrshire. Ultimately, the ambition of WM2U is to move public resources to offer support earlier, thereby enabling children to flourish within their own families. This is built on an underlying assumption that by listening to the voices of children and families and acting on their insights, local authorities will be able to redesign services and invest in early intervention approaches meaning that fewer children will need to be looked after and the need for expensive care provision will diminish.

### Creating conditions and structures that sustain and embed change

A key strategic objective of WM2U is to create conditions and structures that sustain change by working alongside families to co-produce new ways of operating.

Previously we have noted an emerging, significant convening role for WM2U: to bring together strategic priorities, whilst also supporting parents and families to lead change through the role of the local coordinator. This report describes learning from how this approach is developing in the two local authorities.

For us system change means ‘shifting the conditions that keep a problem in place’: the cultural and organisational values, mindsets, practices, and behaviours that are often taken for granted or unnoticed. WM2U has a clear interest in discovering and promoting the conditions that enable positive change and lead to action towards the desired outcomes.

In seeking ‘system change’ WM2U is not a conventional project, programme, or intervention, the theory of change articulates a form of systemic inquiry, an on-going multi-party exploration of a problem or situation of concern, with interests in how the key relationships shape system behaviours, recognising the different perspectives and interests at play, and seeking to adapt and build on emergent learning.

Alongside the work in each local authority, we have now published two reports that review relevant literature and practice from amongst those looking to achieve system change in policy and community contexts like those of WM2U.<sup>2</sup> These highlight that there is no script or manual for this way of working.

The implications of this insight include a need to develop ‘social learning capability’ to embed continuous and collective learning into the work as it unfolds, offering help to decide what to adopt, adapt or abandon. This means that a Learning Framework of the desired outcomes and indicators is co-created to recognise and reflect diverse stakeholders’ different kinds of expertise, expectations, hopes and potential contributions.<sup>3</sup>

### The measures that matter: our approach to evaluation of system change

This report is written by the Learning Partner team who have an embedded role alongside the work of WM2U and lead the development of the Learning Framework that shapes and articulates the vision of WM2U.<sup>4</sup>

Recent experience has highlighted emerging divergence in approaches to system change in the two areas as they respond to local circumstances. This divergence presents a chance to further refine, test and share learning about voice-led system change.

In addressing the question of where to look for evidence of system change and the types of conditions and behaviours that are necessary, this report prepares the ground for a report planned for June 2024 that will provide a fuller five-year retrospective account and evaluation of progress towards the desired outcomes.<sup>5</sup>

This report provides an update of WM2U, building on three sources of evidence collated in the period December 2022 to June 2023. These offer different lenses through which to consider learning:

- Local activities and learning events in East Ayrshire and Dundee.
- A series of earlier reports and reviews of policy and practice literature.<sup>6</sup>
- Recent national events for those interested in system change.

Here we specifically review progress in relation to the leading indicators in the learning framework, drawing on activities to June 2023.<sup>7</sup> In doing so, it highlights our approach to the measurement of system change and concludes by discussing some of the remaining challenges for evaluation.

### Scale a WM2U approach deeply across both Local Authority areas

A further strategic objective of WM2U is to scale a WM2U approach deeply across both Local Authority areas. It is worth noting that our interim report (March 2021) identified three types of scaling:

- ‘Scaling Out’: achieving impact at scale is often thought of as being about achieving impact through extending the reach of the work to greater numbers of people, ‘rolling out’ or replicating a successful intervention or programme.
- ‘Scaling Up’: impacting the formal and institutional structures that might hold a problem in place.
- ‘Scaling Deep’: impacting the embedded cultural values and beliefs, whether formally expressed or otherwise, that continue to reproduce unwanted patterns in complex systems that act as barriers to change.<sup>8</sup>

The contention is that for any systemic change, scaling needs to happen at all three levels and that there is a need to make scale and impact a conscious choice. Scaling Deep will necessitate nurturing the relational and systemic practices that take place on a daily basis, encouraging positive practices from the ground up, using the voice of parents as a touchstone. We have argued that ultimately, questions of scale and sustainability are linked as it is only if such change processes are owned that they can go to scale. Most simply, ‘scaling deep’ is a route to ‘scaling out’, shifting hearts and minds to fundamentally alter the conditions that continue to hold the problems in place.

This perspective on scaling guides us in asking the evaluative question ‘where should we look for signs of system change?’ This framing is important because we view the emergence of more relational and systemic practices amongst the different stakeholders (including parents and carers, practitioners, senior leaders, and funders), as *necessary* conditions for scaling deep to achieve system change.<sup>9</sup> This puts the empirical focus on seeking evidence of what is being created, rather than what has been prevented and includes:

- The development of safe environments in which people feel welcome and heard.
- The ability of all the stakeholders to work alongside others in the community and amongst different professional groups.
- The recognition of achievements and learning together.
- Confidence in strengths and roles.
- Developing trust, recognition of contributions.
- Willingness to test out new approaches and learn from what is working well and what might be adopted, adapted, or abandoned.

Such systemic, relational practices would recognise the systemic nature of the issues that a family might face and enable families and practitioners to explore the difficulties and possible responses in that light, creating possibilities for more co-productive solutions. This kind of response may contrast to those seen as 'characteristic of the system'. For example, more routinised practices, governed by procedural imperatives and usually unilaterally determined by the practitioner or the organisation, or reductive assessments that focus on the capacity or responsibility of the family.

In terms of the ultimate population level outcomes of the work, these practices are expected to lead to:

- A positive difference on the ground
- Better mental health for children and families
- Real supportive support at the right time
- A sense of looking towards a positive future
- A sense of belonging to a valued group, feeling that you matter and are valued within it.

One of the ultimate measures of 'system change' will be our ability to demonstrate a shift towards preventative actions and shift of resources, noting that continuing financial austerity does mean that savings may well be used to reduce overspend rather than being invested in preventative work. This is discussed more fully in section 4.

Clearly many of the desired qualities and behaviours that are sought are difficult to capture or quantify through conventional external evaluation approaches. In this context, the quality of the learning process relies on the participation of a range of people able to test emerging evidence in practice and take part in sensemaking as a multi-stakeholder activity. To support this approach, we have developed a set of quality criteria for WM2U that are systemic, inclusive, and participatory so that the learning has credibility with those with most at stake as well as others invested in the work.<sup>10</sup> The ultimate measure of system change remains whether such relational and systemic practices are sufficiently embedded to make a positive difference on the ground and achieve the outcomes identified by the stakeholders, and which remain the ultimate goal.

The development of the learning framework and associated activity, creates a culture in which we 'work with' people to reflect together on their experience.

- The details of the desired on-the-ground changes amongst the different stakeholder groups underlines the shared vision and connects what matters to families,

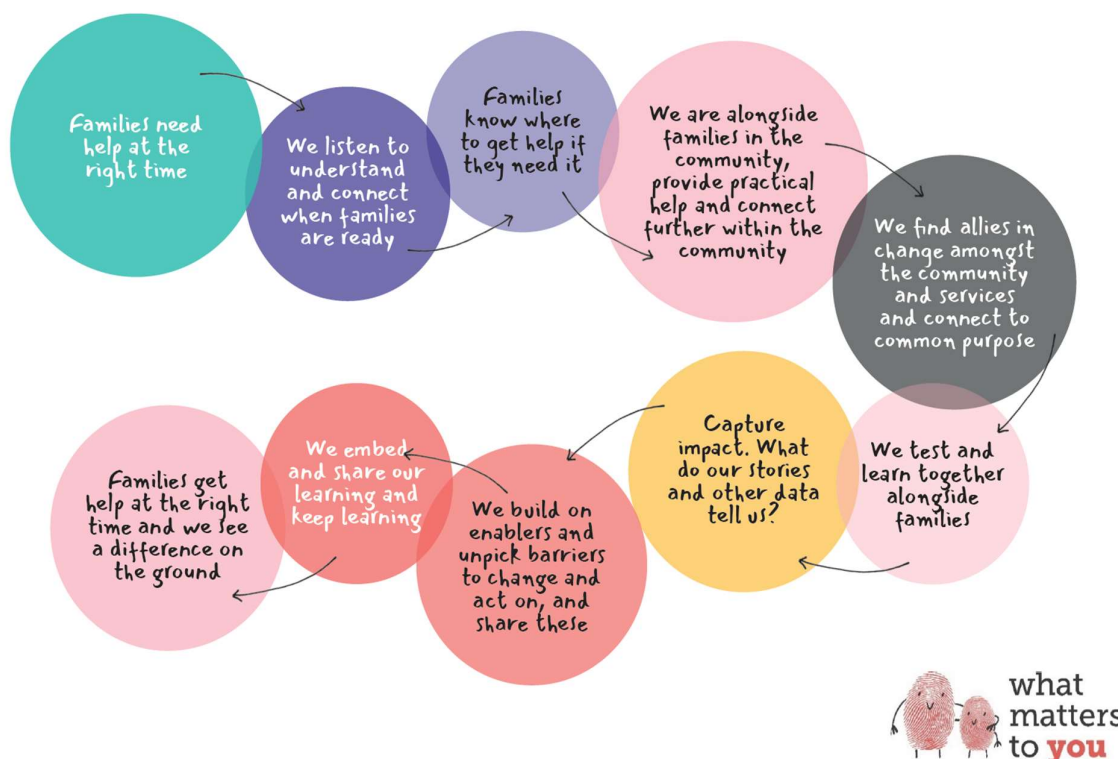
practitioners, and strategic leaders with the high-level expectations of the funders of WM2U to demonstrate population-level positive outcomes for children and young people.

- The 'leading indicators' help to identify changes that will demonstrate that WM2U is on the right track, even before it is possible to identify and measure better outcomes at the community level.
- Developing the framework has provided insight and better understandings of local conditions, organisational and community priorities and values, what enables the changes we seek and what gets in the way.

Approaching evaluative practice in this way as a shared interest and responsibility helps those involved to have a sense of value and progress, maintain their perseverance, and generate truly valued outcomes, rather than imposed measures of performance or targets.

Our approach means that learning is embedded into the testing of different forms of response with and alongside families, capturing impact, identifying enablers, and unpicking barriers to change. This learning is reported and shared so that others may incorporate insights and useful lessons into their own work. Our shorthand for this embedded, on-going, collaborative approach is "Grow as We Go" (GAWG) and is best expressed in the Blueprint in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Grow as We Go: a Blueprint of Our Learning Approach



This approach tackles the issue of developing realistic and shared expectations about measuring impact and genuine accountability for learning with local sponsors, including indicators that show that the direction of travel is aligned with the long-term strategic

intentions of both funders. It needs to provide enough reassurance for all parties that time and other resources are being well used.

### Drawing on learning from wider systems change practice

As learning partners, we review and build on the lessons from other system change initiatives across Scotland, the wider UK and internationally.

It is worth noting that there is scant evidence from these sources of the kind of sustainable impact usually expected by funders. A recent review by the Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors (RPA) of international philanthropic efforts to create systems-level impact noted that *'the field is having difficulty coalescing around a shared, collectively vetted body of evidence and wisdom about what really works'* and found that despite much talk about system change, there has been little progress in practice towards sustainable change.<sup>11</sup>

Whilst WM2U is aiming to achieve impact and change in the absence of any defined pathway that will assure success, the RPA recommendations offer pertinent guidance to help to create conditions and structures that sustain change by working alongside families, and acknowledge the need to approach learning and evaluation differently, for example:

- Make systems change work about transformation, recognising that system change is ultimately about changing paradigms.
- Prioritise working on the deeper levers of change: mental models, beliefs, worldviews, norms, and power relations.
- Focus attention and capacity and make your choices about where to focus explicit.
- Challenge whose experiences and knowledge are valued, reflecting on the imbalance in power and give voice to people that are often not heard or perspectives that are discounted.
- Engage with complexity. Embrace emergent and adaptive strategy based on collective inquiry and reflective learning, with commitment to an appropriate set of guiding principles.
- Develop stronger strategic partnerships and collaborate much more.
- Improve engagement and communication strategies, using credibility and convening power to further advance the field.

Wider practice-based learning is also available to us from a series of national events, co-hosted with the Robertson Trust and involving a mix of practitioners and parents. These have enabled exploration of the emerging learning about effective practices and how to use that learning to improve our work now and in the future.

The most recent national event in May 2023 considered how best to proceed with system change, highlighting the importance of connection, building relationships, and creating space for conversations. The questions in Figure 2 reflect the concerns of those present and resonate both nationally and locally: we share them here to help readers keep them in mind as they digest this report.

## Figure 2: System change in Scotland: Our Questions for Practice

- This is a very long process, change is urgent – but how do we keep going in a patient and purposeful way?
- Sharing our stories showed our common humanity and purpose, how can we help people to hear things they haven't heard before?
- It's so good to meet like-minded people – how can we get the right team and create the right energy and conditions in our localities?
- How do we create space to share blocks in our own communities and localities?
- Different perspectives help solve problems, nobody knows everything, so how do we make sure that we hear from a mix of people?
- How can we value what and who is already there?
- What should we stop doing?
- What can we do about the blockers – without labelling people or causing defensiveness?
- What about the money? Who has control?
- Who really holds power? Do I have any? Does it always come from above?
- Poverty and stigma are hot topics – what small change that we can make might shift things?



## 2. East Ayrshire: What's Changing?

This section highlights focus areas of learning and summarises key learning about change on the ground in East Ayrshire,

### Agreement of a shared learning framework

In East Ayrshire, the leading indicators for parents, practitioners and strategic leaders have all been agreed, completing the learning framework which 'wraps around' the work in East Ayrshire. Included in Annex 1, the framework has been developed using multiple collaborative processes which are embedded in the work of WM2U, many of which are described in this section.

The following thematic sections provide fuller details about emerging learning.

### Focus 1: Practitioners and parents together: developing values-into-action

Since December 2022, WM2U in East Ayrshire has been characterised by efforts to build on the relationships and connections forged through a shared of values-based leadership experience (VBLE) amongst parents and professionals. Efforts have focused on generating practical ideas that might build trust and relationships, and shift practices by finding the right space and authorisation for a doable 'test and learn' element of the work. The development of the Nest Wellbeing Group (a community led group) has also been taken forward with The Corra Foundation.

In East Ayrshire, a total of 85 places at VBLE have been taken up between 2019 and early 2023. Across six different cohorts, eighty people have been involved in at least one VBLE, 24 parents and 56 staff. Five people have attended more than one VBLE, including three parents.

- Feedback from successive VBLEs has been consistently positive and reported in several previous updates. Whilst the engagement of 80 people in these VBLEs is valuable, such activities are only an initial stage. There remains a need to enable participants to build on that experience, to put their values into action, test them out with others and learn from the experience.
- The most recent VBLE was developed to support the work of the Barony (HEART) Community Team. This took place in December 2022, with a reconnect session in January 2023, involving fourteen practitioners and three parents together in one group for the first time.<sup>12</sup>
- The immediate feedback from this group was positive. Convening a combined cohort created and illustrated the significance for parents and professionals of new relationships and connections. It gave people the chance to hear different points of view, reconnect with personal values and focus on 'what really matters'. Amongst the group, new ways to share practical information and resources through social media were adopted. Insights gained by listening to parents subsequently influenced some individual's professional practices.
- Most participants were keen to develop ideas and could see the potential for developing 'values-into-action'.<sup>13</sup> At the reconnect day in January 2023, despite the undoubted enthusiasm for and value in meeting and connecting with others, the



focus tended to be on barriers to change and it was difficult to work out how best to proceed.

- Several initial ideas were proposed and there was interest in how to influence the wider community team, clarifying the purpose of the group and what it would take to drive the work forward with momentum. It was felt that gathering stories as evidence of what is possible would help to encourage others and demonstrate how change might begin to happen.

### Focus 2: Developing understanding of the enablers and barriers to system change

Bringing people together in this way created space for conversations about change and created better understandings of the different commitments and motivations, opportunities, and barriers to change, given people’s different perspectives, pressures, and roles.

The enablers and barriers to system change identified by this group in Figure 3 illustrate both the scale of the challenges to bringing about the desired changes at any scale and signal both commitment to and understanding of what does work. Noticeable changes, the enhancement of enablers and the dismantling of barriers, would be signs of systems shifting in the desired direction.

Figure 3: Enablers and Barriers to System Change (February 2023)

Enablers	Barriers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Families being central to everything</li> <li>• Bonds, trust, connectedness, social glue, bumping into each other out and about</li> <li>• Practical help, especially £</li> <li>• Lack of formality, helps conversations</li> <li>• Contact amongst professionals</li> <li>• Naming what we’re doing (‘that’s (not) very HEART’)</li> <li>• Systems speaking to each other</li> <li>• Quick responses, recognising urgency</li> <li>• A good team</li> <li>• Less preciousness about who responds</li> <li>• More time to focus on fewer families</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal and professional pressures, including cost of living crisis, job insecurity</li> <li>• Workload, restrictive job roles</li> <li>• Lack of autonomy/discretion to make decisions and fear of consequences of error</li> <li>• Too slow responses to families</li> <li>• Over ambitious plans</li> <li>• Lack of involvement of middle tier of management</li> <li>• Frustration at slow pace of change – disheartening</li> <li>• Slow formal processes and long timescales</li> <li>• Burnout – staff and volunteers</li> <li>• Red tape, IT access issues</li> </ul>

The experience of the Nest Wellbeing Group illustrates the barriers to system change. The group were formally constituted as a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) in December 2022. They have been successful in raising funds to support community activities from Comic Relief and STV Appeal and continue to play a significant part in the mobilisation of people from the community in WM2U. Currently, they are using the Barrhill Community Centre as a temporary ‘community living room’. as there have been difficulties in establishing transfer of the building in Cumnock purchased with funding from the Scottish Government in April 2022. WM2U and the Corra Foundation continue to support the group.<sup>14</sup>

### Focus 3: Sharing stories to generate insight and support learning and change

Since March 2023, stories of change have been collated from participants in the Barony Community Team VBLE.<sup>15</sup> These stories have become a useful resource to elicit conversations about what is changing, what still needs to change and the part that each parent or professional might play in that change. They were shared at a wider Barony Community Team meeting, in April 2023 at which around 30 people, both parents and professionals were present. Through a short participatory exercise, the participants identified what they valued about what the stories illustrated can happen and what specific actions they felt were possible for themselves. These stories were illustrative of small steps that have been taken, offer important fresh insights about individual agency and sight of the wider possibilities; such insights or changes in thinking are necessary first steps for any wider actions that might be taken, for example:

- Professionals do have agency: even if small scale, positive change can be made by individuals with an impact for children and families.
- Listening and developing trust can be a platform for meeting people's specific needs that matter to them, rather than providing a more general 'service' response, 'treating the person rather than the issues'.
- A focus on everyday activities is worthwhile. Things that might be taken for granted or seem simple for professionals really matter to individuals and families and can have a positive impact on people's lives.
- Parent-led support for peers in the community enables the creation of safe spaces to people to speak, reduces isolation and builds friendships.
- The importance of relationships and approachability, being treated with dignity and respect and being heard.
- Approaches need to be bespoke, based on active listening to appreciate 'where someone is at' and without expectation of a quick fix, enabling families to make choices that work for them.
- The value of simplicity - in questions and responses and commitment to follow through with actions.

Many of these elements relate to the exercise of individual and professional agency and are valuable in helping to shed light on possible pathways for system change. However, in terms of future steps to translate these insights and small changes into wider practice, the participants identified the need for:

- Better communications and more meaningful conversations, informal exchanges, more human responses, and self-awareness amongst professionals.
- Regular checking-in, without bombarding people with information.
- Greater trust, within services and with the community and services working together.
- Willingness to try different ways of working, including with other professionals.
- Schools seeing parents as valued partners.
- Less 'red tape'.
- Time to build relationships, create informal opportunities for introductions and engagement.
- Listening and asking, rather than reacting to crises.
- Practical help to maximise income.

- Speaking about what needs to change.
- Raising awareness of what services do.
- Working together better with other services, learning more about each other to build networks of support and share knowledge.

#### Focus 4: Practice learning: hearing the voice of children and young people

The “Hope-Hack” (Hackathon) was a full-day, large-scale event for young people held in June 2023 at Ayrshire College in Kilmarnock.<sup>16</sup> The event was attended by over 100 young people aged 14-24 from across East Ayrshire.<sup>17</sup> As part of learning about voice-led systems change, the perspectives of those who had acted as facilitators were sought to distil learning and illuminate the further potential of such a one-off initiative for wider, systemic impact.

Facilitators were drawn from a wide range of organisations that work locally with young people, including What Matters to You, Columba 1400, East Ayrshire Council, East Ayrshire Health and Social Care Partnership, NHS Ayrshire and Arran, The Nest Wellbeing Group, Corra Foundation and Young Enterprise Scotland. Those involved had dedicated facilitation, community work and participation roles, or were employed in Allied Health Professions, social work, youth work and school nursing.

Facilitators identified many professional benefits from the event, important connections and momentum were created providing a strong foundation for the next steps. There are new connections and understandings amongst and between the adults and young people, as well as lessons for the wider professional practices of those involved in facilitation.

In terms of next steps, the young people themselves wished to decide their priorities and consider how they wish to share their insights and ideas. This is being taken forward by the East Ayrshire Promise team, WM2U, Vibrant Communities and Columba 1400.

For the facilitators, there was intrinsic value in hearing the voices of young people that are often silent, their specific ideas and insight into how these might challenge the expectations and assumptions of adults. The quotes below show how facilitators were reminded of the value of not imposing adult views, worries or preconceptions onto children and young people. Such challenge to their own thinking was a positive outcome for the facilitators. They powerfully ask: what would young people like adults to know?

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*“...it was interesting for me in giving young people the floor and opportunity. The adults can perceive what is important to young people, but that can differ from what young people say is important to them and why.”*

*“I was reminded to trust the creativity and innovation of young people. ....I was so impressed with their ability to articulate what was important to them. .... I was probably guilty of underestimating the young people and worrying about how they would cope with the environment as it was really challenging. But I was blown away by their ability to stick with it, to really communicate what they wanted to say and to do that really creatively.”*

*“You couldn’t predict how the day was going to go, it was so interesting to see what was being created. No matter what adults think the relevance will be, the children and young people have their own views and their own perspectives...”*

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The Hackathon served as a demonstration of how engagement with young people at scale can be achieved. Despite the challenges of convening a large-scale event of young people with different interests and needs, there were benefits of the scale of the event in terms of diversity of voices and experiences, opportunities for social mixing with new people and confidence borne of witnessing others taking part.

There were benefits for the facilitators of meeting each other and of the chance to connect informally with senior leaders. There were also benefits in terms of their own ability and confidence in ‘hosting’ conversations with and amongst young people, including the value of listening, the specifics of language and the importance of visual facilitation to demonstrate that the messages were being heard.

The event generated a strong interest in and feeling of responsibility for what could happen next and a desire to see tangible follow-up action, shaped by young people. There is potential for greater systemic impact than might be achieved from a one-off consultation event, however successful in its own right: there is a still to be realised opportunity to generate wider influence to change mindsets, cultures, and everyday practices in relation to the voice and agency of young people across services and communities.

#### **Focus 5: Collective sensemaking – conversations about learning and change**

In reviewing the May 2023 National Event, the WM2U team considered what was getting in the way of learning leading to tangible change. We decided to focus on learning events at the local level in the short term in the hope that it would be easier to see the link with action.

The first of these took place in June 2023 when WM2U and the Nest Wellbeing Group co-hosted a local “Grow as We Go” learning event to support conversations about progress towards the changes sought in Cumnock and Muirkirk and to create renewed energy and commitment to make and sustain further change. Almost 40 people attended the event held at Netherthird Community Centre. The participants were drawn from the local community and practitioners with a role in the locality, with a rough 50:50 split.<sup>18</sup>

Five community members played an active part in the design and co-facilitation of the day, including three of the parents that had attended the Barony Community Team VBLE in December 2022. In planning the event, the group of parents were clear that *‘we want people to come who can and want to make change, including those who hold budgets and other resources’*. This group played a significant role in enabling other community members to attend and take part on the day.<sup>19</sup> It is a testament to their commitment to change that they took part in the day in such a positive manner and encouraged others to do the same, despite navigating recent setbacks in their efforts to secure a building for the group.

This event was an opportunity for collective sensemaking of the recent learning, in accord with our quality criteria for evaluating system change. There was a positive and challenging

atmosphere in the room, a sense of a common agenda and shared hope that change is possible. The occasion allowed people to see and hear the collective passion and commitment to make a difference.

The conclusions reported here are drawn from the discussions on the day and have been further validated by a number of those attending.

### Summary of key learning in East Ayrshire

There is a strong, shared imperative amongst all the stakeholders that WM2U should deliver outcomes for children and families, with visible change on the ground. The shared commitment to creating better mental health for children and families is a galvanising force, there are positive signs of progress in several respects, momentum, and ideas for improvements.

Whilst there are different degrees of emphasis and interests, the agreement amongst stakeholder groups of a shared learning framework with five high-level outcomes demonstrates a clear common agenda.

### Overview of progress

- Parents and community members are clear that the existing system is not working for them. There is a clear and shared message that 'mutual respect between services and the community needs to continue to improve': practitioners who have been part of WM2U have a desire to work differently and sometimes are able to do so, whilst also being keenly aware of the pressures and frustrations of their own job roles and contexts.
- Small, yet significant changes demonstrate the value of the community as a unique source of knowledge and connections, in its own right, rather than mainly being seen as a safety net when services fail. Examples include many ways of helping people to expand their 'space for action'<sup>20</sup> as they reclaim a sense of control over their own lives and create safer environments for themselves, perhaps taking the first steps out of the house, building friendships and wider connections, learning to trust others and feeling able to ask for help, wanting to play a more active role in supporting other people and finding trusted people that can vouch for and help to access wider services.
- A sense of belonging is evident amongst those with experience of WM2U, the Nest Well-Being Group and in other groups in the community that offer people spaces and occasions to get to know each other in new ways. This safety and trust encourage growing individual and collective agency amongst people, often built despite considerable personal hardship and trauma.
- Community is undervalued as a resource, a source of insight, offering something distinct and unique. The power and potential of bringing parents and professionals together is evident; it has enabled the development of insights into what works and what still needs to change, with impacts on professional practices.
- An enduring theme is the importance of trusting, non-judgemental relationships, and practices. The importance of being listened to and genuinely heard is fundamental.
- The stories shared highlighted how individual professionals engage with families and the role of the community as peer connectors and sources of practical help.

- It is also positive that there is confidence that young people, those in the community and that attended the Hackathon, have many ideas about what would help.
- There remains an opportunity to generate wider influence to change mindsets, cultures, and everyday practices in relation to the voice and agency of children and young people across services and communities.

### Seeking systemic impact

In relation to how we think about and measure impact, there is agreement about the importance of the five WM2U high-level outcomes (detailed in section 1) and the interconnectedness between them.

Whilst signs of positive change are reported here, the learning about the enablers and barriers to system change illustrates both the continuing challenge to bring about the desired changes at any scale and signals commitment to and understanding of what does work.

WM2U has convened two different interventions to support local system change. Both contain the potential for greater systemic impact than might be achieved from a one-off or short-term intervention, however successful in its own right.

- Bringing practitioners and parents together through a shared leadership experience is a significant approach that provided a chance to make new relationships and connections, hear different points of view, reconnect with personal values, and focus on 'what really matters'.
- Engagement with young people through the Hackathon enabled a small number of practitioners and senior leaders to hear the voices of young people that challenged the expectations and assumptions of adults in ways that have been welcomed.

Recent interventions offer further opportunities to generate wider influence to change mindsets, cultures, and everyday practices in relation to mobilising voice and agency amongst parents and that of young people.

### Being alongside: looking ahead in East Ayrshire

In charting a way forward, it is important to acknowledge that there is frustration amongst community members and professionals that whilst change is possible (and some staff 'are listening and doing things differently' or able to make small changes to their own practices), the slow pace of change, difficulties that parents have engaging with schools and with decision-makers risk derailing the progress that has been made to date.

- Workloads, a lack of autonomy or discretion to make decisions, fear of repercussions and the consequences of error are significant issues for practitioners. Yet, despite these factors, there is goodwill amongst these parents and practitioners to develop ideas further in the light of their learning so far.

The wider context remains: despite developments that support better mental health, there are issues of stigma, a lack of understanding about trauma and recovery, and deaths from suicide and drugs. The continuing work confronts the significant complexities of living with and responding to trauma, understanding, and supporting recovery in non-judgemental ways, and addressing the impact of poverty.

The challenge remains to develop mutual understanding of what it means to genuinely 'be alongside', to 'work with' rather than 'do to', and to shape practical ways to build on the existing progress and goodwill created. Those parents and professionals that have been part of the Barony VBLE and subsequent activities are enthusiastic about this prospect.

The national and local evidence is clear that this a route to effective change. The best prospects for the future lie in the collaboration of services and communities, where the community is a clear and valued partner, able to draw on untapped resources to reach people, and able to contribute to joint initiatives or 'tests of change' that offer timely and 'real supportive support'. This is underscored by the national context in which diminishing financial resources and workforce challenges, mean that the creation and implementation of joint initiatives by services and communities is essential.

There is still a need for consolidation and agreement about the specific ideas to be taken forward and tested out by community teams, including Barony. At the time of writing, it seems that Autumn 2023 will be an important time for such agreement.



### 3. Dundee – What’s Changing?

This section highlights areas of focus and summarises key learning about change on the ground in Dundee.

#### A shift of approach: working with families in Charleston and Strathmartine

The WM2U programme team made a deliberate decision in summer 2022, to focus on embedding and sustaining the WM2U approach by building relationships with and supporting the work of local practitioners, rather than getting directly involved in work on the ground. This approach was approved by the Dundee WM2U Oversight Board who agreed to extend the approach across the city, with an initial focus on Charleston and Strathmartine, areas where families clearly need better support and some WM2U activity has already taken place.

Since our last update in November 2022, the WM2U team in Dundee has worked with the Community Learning and Development team in Charleston and Kirkton (an area of Strathmartine Locality), supporting them to engage with families and local practitioners. The WM2U Programme Lead and the new Dundee Local Coordinator have invested their efforts in: explaining the approach to groups of local practitioners, supporting the development of funding bids to support local community centres and local management groups, linking practitioners to useful contacts outside their area and authorising small grants quickly to enhance local activities and gathering feedback from families.

#### Focus 1: Engaging with Parents and Families

The Community Learning and Development (CLD) practitioners themselves have engaged directly with families; CLD leads in Kirkton and Charleston set up regular weekly sessions from May 2023 onwards for families to get together, have fun, and talk about their lives and their communities. In both areas these activities have been highly successful with between 8-15 families attending each week, amounting to 50-60 people in total each week at each venue.

Their approach is grounded and carefully thought through, with the intention to get to know families better to find out what they need, with a deliberate approach that seeks to empower parents and to create an environment where they can support one another.

The activities took place every week and carried on throughout the summer school holidays. During the summer they also included trips to soft play centres and the cinema. CLD have run activities before but not on such a sustained basis. Seeing the parents regularly over the past four months has developed trust and they now know much more about their particular circumstances and what matters to them.

Families are clearly enjoying the events and the feedback has been very positive. They appreciate in particular: that everything is free, the whole family can take part together in activities, the chance to sit down and eat together in a local venue and the friendly attitude of staff.

All of those taking part in the activities are severely impacted by the cost-of-living crisis. Some are also contending with mental health issues or addictions. Many have lived in the areas all their lives, some experienced bullying at school and are being retraumatized by seeing their own children bullied.



Coming together in a safe environment has meant that parents are already noticing improvements in their mental health. They have been able to do new activities with their children and spend time as a family. Some have made new friends, and feel more connected to and accepted within their community.

Over time their trust in the staff has developed '*I feel like I am listened to here*' (family member). They have begun talking about what they need for themselves and for their local area.

### Focus 2: Securing Funding

The financial support provided by WM2U has enabled CLD practitioners to put on the kind of activities that really appeal to families and to spend time finding out what support they need individually and collectively. They provide food, enabling families to sit down and eat together, and children's entertainment, giving CLD staff time to talk to parents.

CLD managers have appreciated the support in securing funding. They and their teams don't have the capacity to bring in additional funding to the area and having access to small amounts of money quickly has meant that there is no delay in being able to organise activities. For instance, the CLD lead in Kirkton wanted to put on Friday night football in response to complaints about anti-social behaviour from local residents and the supermarket. The turnaround time to apply for funding to source a coach through the local authority is eight weeks, by which time it would have been too late to provide the activity in the school holidays. WM2U approved a budget for the football coach within a few days.

### Focus 3: Engaging with Services

The CLD team are listening out for opportunities for families to get the support they need from services. Although there have been successes, when the CLD team have been able to refer parents to support with finances, literacy, and mental health, they are also coming across barriers. One woman said that what mattered most to her was having access to her garden. The fence had been taken down several months before when the next-door house was cleared, and she was asking for her fence and her washing line to be put up again so that she could dry her clothes outside and her child could play in the garden safely. The housing department had no record of the fence being taken down, and therefore no route for taking responsibility for putting it back up again. The issue remains unresolved and illustrates how a small issue which should be easy to fix, can get stuck and has a strong negative impact on the mental and physical health of a family.

Local people have also identified changes they would like to see in their communities such as: affordable activities for all the family from young through to older generations, more help with electricity/gas bills and more attention paid to community safety.

The CLD managers are able to highlight these through the Local Community Planning process and will be bringing these issues to the upcoming Values Based Leadership Experiences. This raises the potential of the VBLE as a forum where practitioners and local people use their time to consider what they want to test out together and co-design a values-into-action phase.

#### Focus 4: Direct Work with Young People

In May 2022, two local parents collaborated with Street Soccer and used support from the Lens to develop an idea which would provide young people with activities on a Friday night. WM2U invested £15,000 in the idea and the Friday night youth provision has been running for a year. It has been successful in attracting large numbers of young people (sometimes up to ninety) and engaging them in sports and other activities. Some of these young people have previously struggled to engage with school or with other youthwork provision but have been encouraged by the positive, friendly, and informal approach of the Street Soccer team.

WM2U held a review of the activity in July 2023. The collaboration between the parents and the Street Soccer team has been a key part of the project, and there has been a lot of learning on both sides. It is the first time that Street Soccer have worked directly with parents in this way, none of the team members are community development trained, and they admitted that at times they could be 'overprotective'. The parents are highly appreciative of Street Soccer's approach to the work with young people but have found it hard to get involved in a meaningful way despite efforts on both sides.

After the review meeting Street Soccer paused the Friday night sessions for the summer so they could develop a clear vision with greater clarity on roles and responsibilities and improve safeguarding procedures. It is not clear yet how they will move forward, but the WM2U Local Coordinator is in touch with both parents and the Street Soccer team.

The Friday Night Youth Provision is highly valued by young people, but Street Soccer acknowledge that it has not made the parents involved feel heard or valued. The recent meeting highlighted the need to identify how to use the strengths of community members as well as of the Street Soccer team. WM2U is maintaining efforts to ensure that ultimately the project benefits both from the expertise of Street Soccer and the wisdom, experience, and networks of community members.

The contrast between the pace of the CLD approach and the Street Soccer approach has been illuminating: Street Soccer organised the Friday Night Youth Provision quickly and made a significant difference by doing so. But they are having to slow down now to take parents with them. CLD work focused first on developing parent agency, so that any changes are truly voice led.

#### Focus 5: Working alongside

The Dundee WM2U Local Coordinator has adopted a different role which is more strategic and enabling, providing opportunities and removing obstacles, working closely with the managers, rather than directly with the families. The role is more indirect, supporting the managers to involve other practitioners, introducing them to other funders who can support activities, and assisting with funding applications where necessary.

The CLD managers are very well connected and experienced collaborators, constantly looking for opportunities to invite other practitioners from education, health, social care, the third sector and the local authority in to work on joint solutions to the issues raised by community members. Their teams are adept at signposting people to services which can support them.

One of the enabling factors in developing the role in this way is the familiarity of key strategic leads with the WM2U ambitions. The strategic lead for CLD is part of the Dundee WM2U Oversight Board and alongside several other members of the Board, undertook a VBLE as members of the Tayside Collaborative. The CLD leads in Strathmartine and Charleston have been authorised and actively encouraged to participate, and members of the Oversight Board are urging local practitioners to take up places on the upcoming VBLEs in September and October 2023.

#### Focus 6: Strong connections with Data Analysis in the Local Authority

Dundee City Council have provided dedicated time from a Senior Research and Information Officer, who has had some involvement with WM2U from the start and understands the approach. The research and engagement with the modelling work has cemented interest in tracking the impact of investment in different parts of the system; for example, we can use local data to show how investing in preventative spend can have a direct impact on the lives of families in Charleston and Strathmartine. This work has also highlighted that although savings are currently being made in Children's Services when young people are looked after locally rather than in out of area placements, these savings are used to reduce the overspend rather than being invested in preventative work.

#### Summary of Key Learning from Dundee

The pace of change in Dundee has accelerated exponentially in the last year. The new approach has the backing of strategic leads and is strongly embedded in the work of local practitioners. Real opportunities are beginning to emerge for long-term system change.

#### Overview of progress

The long-term investment of funders dating back to 2019, has generated trust amongst these leaders and practitioners and meant that they are open and seem more willing to invest time and take risks, reassured that WM2U is continuing to work alongside them.

In Dundee WM2U has created the conditions for strategic support that has enabled an approach to community engagement to be adopted which is different to that being used in East Ayrshire. This raises the prospect of a more long term and embedded approach to system change and greater understanding of the overall ambitions and potential of WM2U. We are learning much about the difference between running a successful project and embedding and sustaining voice-led change.

CLD staff are experienced in engaging with communities, already known, and trusted by local people, and are able to use their connections to attract new people. Their work is generating real insight into how complex and frustrating families find it to access the support they need at the right time. Being embedded in the wider locality structure ensures that CLD practitioners can use community planning processes to the advantage of local communities.

Small amounts of money (less than £5000 overall across both areas) have released significant capacity: enabling isolated families to connect with one another, providing activities and food for families to enjoy together every week, and enabling CLD staff to engage with them and find out what they need.

The Senior Research and Information Officer understands how data is gathered and used within the local authority and where the opportunities are to test and monitor new approaches. WM2U can gather feedback for the Oversight Board on how their system is working in practice enabling them to consider how to improve it.

### Seeking systemic impact

Providing additional support to practitioners who are familiar with a system empowers them to highlight opportunities for system change. The example of the family trying to get a fence re-erected in their garden, detailed above, shows the systemic impact of the unrecorded and externalised social costs of the failure of bureaucratic processes and the potential for significant impact, if discretion could be exercised by a housing officer.

Strong connections to local research and information, through the Senior Officer are supporting our efforts to track the difference that an early intervention approach can make. That work highlights assumptions and accounting practices that may influence any savings that can be made, and local strategic opportunities to deepen and intensify the impact of WM2U.

### Being alongside: Looking ahead in Dundee

The next few months will be a test of whether WM2U can move forward as a genuine collaboration between the funders and the local authority as they are asked to invest alongside and monitor the impact on children and families together.

These next steps reflect the framework set out in the New Local/JRF Report<sup>21</sup> focusing first on building a strategy and coalition by building learning and reflection into the heart of local action and developing a galvanising shared agenda to connect and grow local action on the root causes of poverty. The next stage: shifting power and redesigning the system could be tested by diverting savings from reducing the overspend to investing in prevention.

Engaging with parents in Strathmartine and Charleston will continue, they will be supported by CLD to link into support from other services and to make their voice heard through community planning processes. Two VBLEs are scheduled to take place in September and October 2023.

The Dundee Local Coordinator is working with the CLD managers in Strathmartine and Charleston to recruit local practitioners and local parents for these VBLEs. This role is highly valued: *'thank you for your support in recruiting participants for the VBLE, in all honesty I couldn't have done it without you'* (CLD manager).

Previous VBLEs have been open to practitioners across Dundee and to local parents. They have been well-evaluated and led to stronger connections between practitioners and increased confidence in local parents, with some positive personal outcomes. These VBLEs will take a more targeted approach to system change, being highly focused on developing mechanisms to take forward the changes locally which are important to families, and which have a chance to influence change at a community and wider system level. They will also provide an opportunity to update the learning framework with the practitioners and parents who are currently involved in WM2U. The indicators developed by previous participants still feel highly relevant but the WM2U approach is to ensure that everyone contributes to our understanding of success.

The WM2U team is proposing to the September Dundee Oversight Board that it supports a test of change which will involve dedicating a percentage of savings made in Children's Services Budget to early preventative work in Strathmartine/ Charleston. It is anticipated that some of this budget will be spent supporting individual local families on what matters most to them right now, and some will be spent on local community activities. CLD managers are keen to ensure the process for spending any new resources is transparent and has local voice at the heart. At the same time, the learning shows that the budget needs to be flexible and immediately accessible, in order to make a difference on the ground. The impact of this 'test of change' will be tracked through the updated learning framework.

## 4. Towards 2024: Insights from System Dynamics & Remaining Challenges for Evaluation

Investment in prevention will enable children to flourish within their own families

One of the measures of 'system change' will be our ability to demonstrate a shift of resources towards preventative actions.

A strategic objective of WM2U is to listen to the voices of children and families to enable public services to increase investment in prevention and enable children to flourish within their own families.

*"The hypothesis is that by investing in prevention and listening to what matters to families, fewer children will need to be looked after and that local authorities will be able to redesign services and shift some of their investment from more expensive care provision to early intervention approaches."* (WM2U, Delivery Plan)

This hypothesis is based on expectation that it will be possible to measure change at the population level over time. It is based on a theory of change that investment in prevention will enable savings to be made, which will then be invested in further early interventions or preventative activities.

Expectations about evidence and attribution come into sharp focus given the situation in both local authorities where there are aligned initiatives working concurrently which also seek a shift toward prevention or early help; these include GIRFEC, The Promise, the HEART model in East Ayrshire and the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund. We see this synergy as an opportunity for alignment based on dialogue about expectations and contributions as part of the ongoing work.

This section explores some of the empirical challenges that these expectations present and our response. Given the complexities of demonstrating impact in this context, we have also drafted a short briefing paper on the key ideas and issues, included in Annex 3.

### Dynamic Impact Analysis

To reflect the range and complexities of the ambition of WM2U, we have developed an approach called *Dynamic Impact Analysis* that blends System Dynamics modelling (SD) with the embedded 'Grow as We Go' approach based on local data collection and analysis.

With the perspective on scaling outlined in Section 1, it is important to acknowledge that WM2U is not a conventional programme or project that works with defined and measurable numbers of identifiable beneficiaries, expected to have personal outcomes. Rather it is intended to reach and influence a perhaps ultimately unknowable number of people, both in communities and in a range of organisations.

Our recent review of literature and practice explored experience from elsewhere of the challenges of the evaluation of similar system change initiatives<sup>22,23</sup> Of particular note, the Independent Care Review also recognised the challenges of measurement of impact:

*"[...these changes] necessitate new ways of measuring impact and success. Measurement processes need to define success in a broad sense of the term and deploy tools that enable the full suite of outcomes to be appreciated. In practice this*

*means a richer process, including qualitative evidence, compared to often simple cost-benefit analysis....”<sup>24</sup>*

Our approach builds on insights from the emerging evaluation literature that recognises complexity and the relational foundations of systemic work.<sup>25</sup> Important methodological elements are:

- An emphasis on *improving* rather than proving, to support design and implementation that is responsive to emerging learning and able to improve practice over time.
- The development of understanding of the important mechanisms of change or ‘active ingredients’, to offer guidance on how to adapt for different, or changed, contexts.
- An interest in the systemic and contextual influences which can affect outcomes, and the wider, unintended, impact of activities.
- Using theories of change approaches to focus on ‘sense making’, rather than being a literal, prescriptive or measurement device.
- Developing the perspectives and interpretations of participants to understand inequities and differential impacts, and highlight the attributions made by those most close to the change work.
- Valuing insights from a range of qualitative and narrative methodologies, challenging and expanding views of what constitutes high quality evidence.

The design of our approach is reflected in the Quality Standards included in Annex 2.

### Insights from System Dynamics for WM2U

System Dynamics (SD) provides a way of understanding how complex systems change over time by creating useful computer simulation models.<sup>26</sup> The SD modelling is a relatively small but important part of our overall approach. Blending modelling with local data and insight offers a good way to consider change over time within a complex system operating at a community level, exploring how things are connected and how they change over time because they are connected. It also helps us think about both costs and benefits and how they relate to each other.

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*“I am often asked by prospective clients, ‘What’s so great about System Dynamics? What will my organisation get that we can’t get from other, more familiar, methods of strategic planning and analysis?’ I tell them that System Dynamics is the one method that will allow them to make all of their assumptions explicit, integrate them in a logical and testable way, challenge the assumptions, provide a broader perspective and put clients in a better position to make decisions that will stand the test of time.”<sup>27</sup>*

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The model developed by the WM2U Learning Partners simulates and measures the expected impact over 10 years on the children and young people in a ‘locality’ in terms of their GIRFEC status. This involves:

- finding out the baseline ‘dynamics’ of how children move between the GIRFEC levels



- making some explicit assumptions / estimates about the mechanisms and practices influencing changes in GIRFEC status
- calibrating this impact based on data about the numbers of children and young people that are affected by changes in practices
- quantifying this impact based on cost and quality of life measures, as they too change over time

Arguably more important than that summative purpose, the iterative, participatory modelling process is very much about learning. The emerging model becomes a tool to aid thinking. Model building has been used with varying degrees of intensity throughout the life of WM2U, its purpose always to capture the human, very local impact of relational services designed around people. At an earlier stage, the model was a graphical reminder of the various elements of WM2U. As the initial work of the coordinators took shape, by this time in the context of COVID, the modelling was used to support thinking about how parents and carers joined WM2U and how they could be supported to the point where growth would be more organic. The model also helped to point to the GIRFEC framework as the best way to take a view of the whole children and young people population.

#### What is the Model and What does it Show?

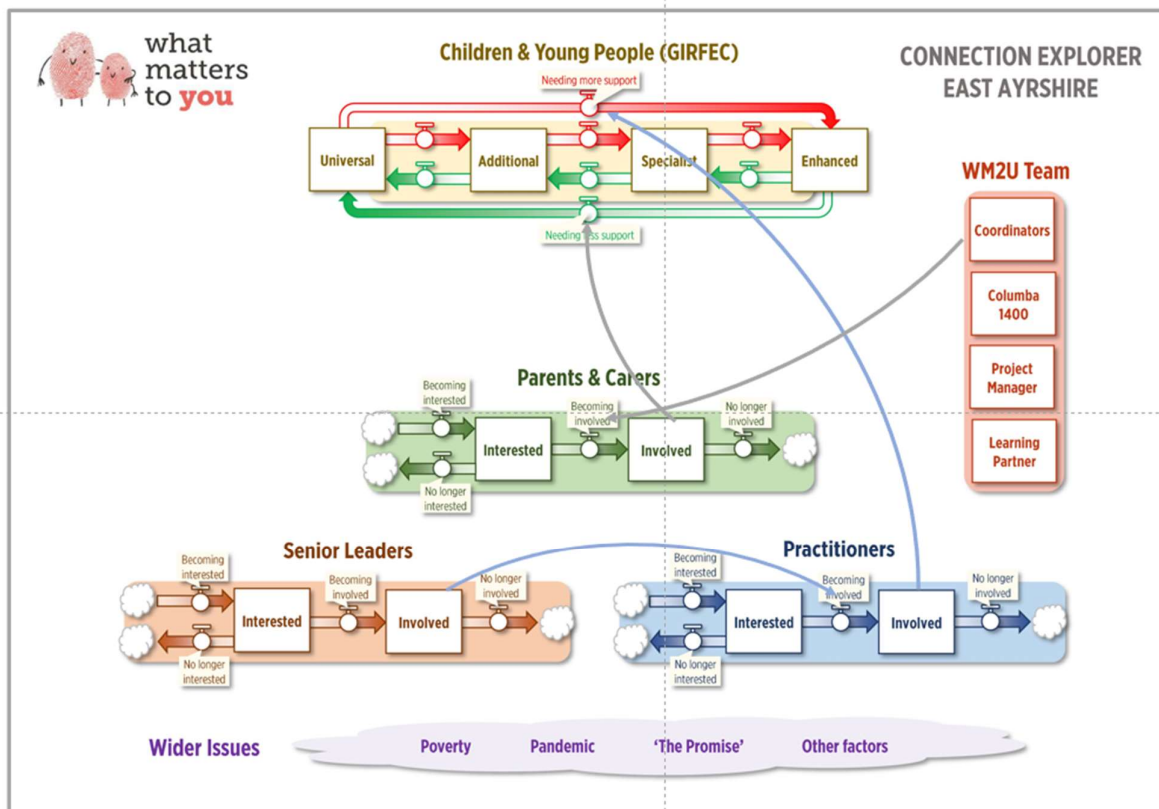
A key part of understanding a system is to gain a high-level view of its stock and flow structure: to understand how a system changes, whether under 'normal' conditions, or in response to some policy initiatives, it is necessary to pay attention to its flows.

The model is a simulation that takes an operational view of the situation of concern. It enables participants to make explicit their assumptions about impact, and therefore to explore together what would happen under a range of assumptions (a series of 'what ifs?') about the impact of WM2U on the children and young people population.

The best introduction to the model is the Connection Explorer, a kind of 'system map' that summarises WM2U in terms of its main stakeholder groups, as shown in Figure 4.



Figure 4: Connection Explorer (East Ayrshire version)



The model treats the whole children and young people population as distributed across four levels or GIRFEC categories (stocks).

Figure 4 shows two types of connection.

- Flows, where people move between stocks, for example in the top line, children and young people moving between different GIRFEC levels.
- 'Causal connections', shown here as curved arrows, typically showing connections between the different groups.

The relationships between stocks and flows or 'system dynamics' mean that at all times, children and young people move between these levels, in either direction to any other level.

In thinking about the impact of WM2U:

- We assume that WM2U will create a lower probability of children moving up the levels of intervention (by slowing down the red flows), and greater probability of moving down (by speeding up the green flows), and such impact is cumulative over time.

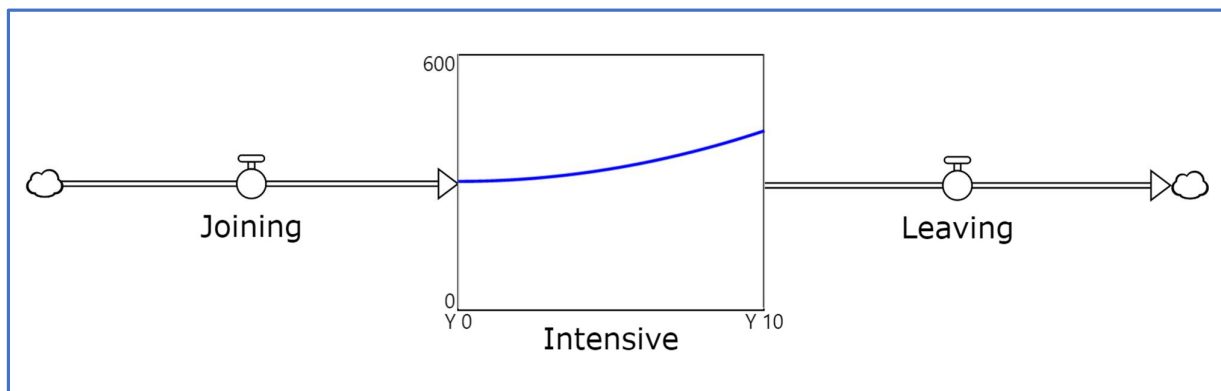
### Why Stocks and Flows?

Many of the variables that are commonly found in datasets are 'stocks', which in this context would represent the number of people in a particular state at any point in time, as shown in Connection Explorer. Other examples include 'children looked after' or 'children on the Child Protection register'. An important insight is that it is only through changing flows that the size of a stock can change. The same stock may be a result of different combinations of inflows and outflows. This is a crucial point in terms of developing interpretations of trends, the underlying contributory elements and the limitations of some existing data sources.

The purpose of monitoring the shape of a graph as it changes over time is to be able to respond, to sustain a positive situation or to address a problem situation. However, the stock data does not speak for itself, the shape of the graph alone does not provide adequate information. It also follows that when we are trying to make sense of change in a variable, we need routinely to examine the variables to which it is connected, and these connections are not always easy to spot in a data-table.

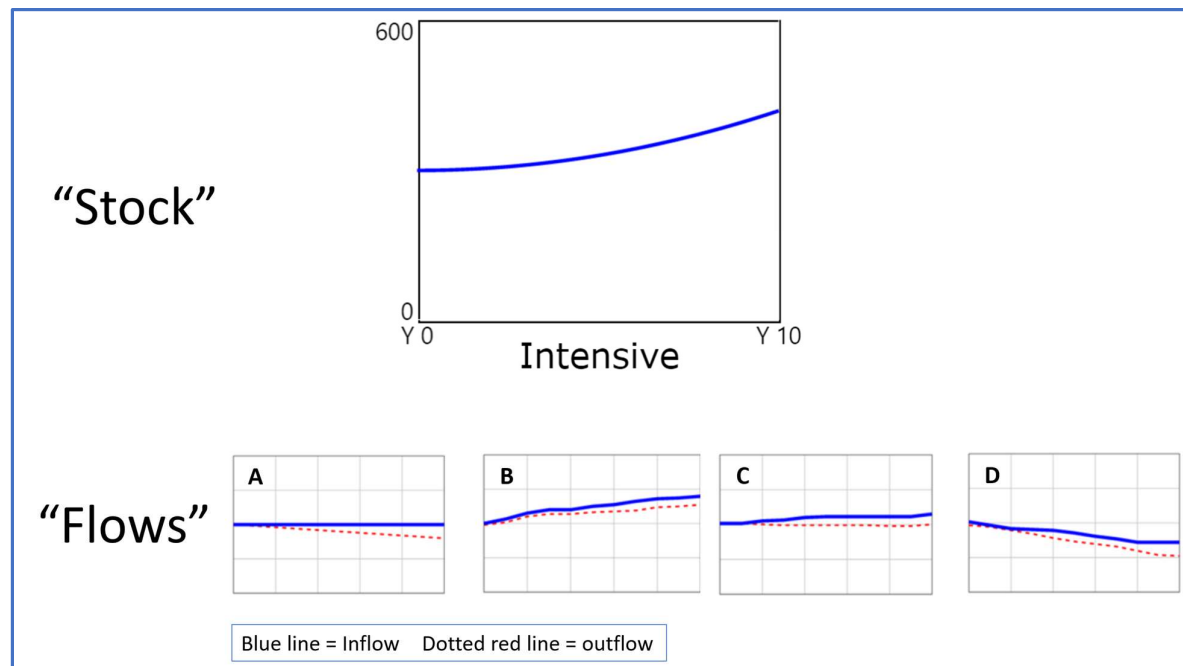
To take just one stock as an example, the number of children in the Intensive (GIRFEC) Group, shown here in Figure 5<sup>28</sup> as rising, can only change if the numbers joining (inflow) or leaving (outflow) change. Therefore, we can see that, at all times in the example shown below, the numbers joining (inflow) always exceeded the numbers leaving (outflow), so the number in the stock rose.

Figure 5: Change over time in a stock



We must go further and investigate what these flows actually were. Is it possible that the numbers joining were actually going down? Figure 6 shows four distinct combinations of inflow and outflow that all produce the same rise in the Intensive stock.

Figure 6: How the same stock can result from different combinations of flows



This rise in the Intensive group can be the result of at least four different scenarios:

- Box A: **Inflow flatlined, Falling Outflow.** There is no increase in the numbers joining over time, but Outflow has declined. This also tells us that the duration of stay is lengthening (which might be beneficial, if being in the Intensive group means having one's needs met).
- Box B: **Rising Inflow and a Rising Outflow.** The Stock is rising, again, because the Inflow is at all times higher than the Outflow. The rising outflow tracking the Stock trend means the duration of stay is unchanging.
- Box C: **Increasing Inflow and Flatlining Outflow.** There are rising 'admissions' but numbers 'leaving' have flatlined. This means the duration of stay is rising but not as much as in A. The same number are going in but are staying in for longer.
- Box D: **Falling Inflow and Falling Outflow.** For example, preventive measures result in a reduction in new arrivals, but perhaps a related reduction in the resources devoted to those in the Intensive group mean that the smaller number entering the Intensive state remain there for longer and the Stock rises. In this example, the length of stay is rising faster than in A, B or C.

#### Summary Measures in the Model – Costs and Quality of Life

The model can be used to derive measures of performance and outcomes including changes in costs and quality of life (QoL) proxy measures that summarise the state of wellbeing of the children and young people population. The model can therefore compare the cost data against the summarised QoL measures.

The economic case for improving the experiences and life-chances of looked-after children has been most recently well-made and evidenced by the Independent Care Review.<sup>29</sup> This means that in considering the measurement of impact of WM2U, there is no need for our model to track children and young people into adulthood and project the impact on a range of public services and the economy generally. In financial terms, the model focuses on the:

- Costs of delivering WM2U
- Costs to local authorities of meeting the needs of children and young people
- How these costs change given assumptions about the impact of WM2U
- How changing costs relate to changes in overall wellbeing or quality of life.

### Can we do more for less?

It is important to note that we do not presume that the model will show 'savings' under all conditions. With some scenarios, it is possible that overall costs might rise but 'average quality of life' might also rise.

In the current fiscal and political climate, it is evident that the day to day focus of public services is not on prevention, but on reducing costs and improving outcomes. Based on recent experience, a number of observations about savings are pertinent:

- Whilst a local authority may well be able to identify savings, for example, by reducing the use of expensive out of area residential placements, this does not mean that there are no further costs attached to the care of the children and young people affected. Such costs may not be known given the need to develop viable alternative forms of care.
- Furthermore, it is becoming clearer that the prevailing harsh financial realities of local government suggest that it is unlikely that any savings that can be made will be protected and redirected towards preventative work, rather than being used to reduce deficits.

The question of interpretation becomes whether any improvements are worth the money. And under most scenarios we can simulate, it does appear that there is a 'win, win' where costs reduce, and quality of life improves. Though, sometimes, things must become more expensive before savings appear later in the simulation.

### Addressing our mutual data needs

Our work to date has highlighted several concerns about data availability and configuration within each local authority. The challenges of data have been recognised in the agreed indicators in the WM2U Learning Framework:

- Board Strategic Indicator: *Local authorities and their partners can use data to measure the shift to prevention & identify how they reduce the number of children who are care experienced or in formal measures, such as their Child Protection Register.*
- Strategic Leaders, East Ayrshire: *We develop the use of data about the whole population of children to support and demonstrate the shift of resources to prevention.*

In particular, we note that at present:

- In Dundee and East Ayrshire, and we suspect more generally, it is not possible at present to allocate all children to one of the GIRFEC categories and it follows that it is not possible at present to discover what the flow rates are between different states to measure any shift towards prevention.<sup>30</sup>
- A significant limitation is that data about children and young people is held in a variety of information systems that are not linked and are not currently mutually accessible. Individual agencies may not know which other services children and young people are accessing nor how those services understand their needs.
- This undermines both the coherent planning and practice approach advocated as part of GIRFEC and, significantly, the ability to record a single need/risk status for each child.

A strategic implication is that it is not possible to track changes in outcomes as a result of any measures implemented by WM2U, Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC), the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund and any other intervention seeking outcomes for children and young people.

These data issues are a problem common to all local authorities and have a great bearing on the national debate in Scotland about the need to access useful data.<sup>31</sup>

Our insights to date suggest that there is a need to reshape data at national and local level to raise the priority of addressing known deficiencies in data, specify what data would support the monitoring of preventative measures, include the voice of lived experience, allow the monitoring of progress rather than reporting for its own sake, and build data skills and cultures that incorporate data into decision making and practices.

There are promising developments in both East Ayrshire and Dundee and interest in wider local and national government. It is worth noting that:

- With the support of the East Ayrshire WM2U Oversight Board, we have convened meetings of those with an interest in exploring the potential to address these issues of mutual interest. This work is exploring what it would take to describe a population in terms of the four-stock GIRFEC model in order to have the data to measure the shift to prevention.
- In Dundee, the ambition is to develop the capacity to report on the size of the GIRFEC category groups and the rates of flow between them on a regular basis as a matter of routine. There is a prospect of building on initial research by the analytical team over the coming months.

There remains potential for dialogue across the two localities about this aspect of WM2U.

This presents an important opportunity to contribute to the WM2U Strategic Objective to influence the redesign of children's services locally and contribute to how national policy is implemented and practice is shaped. If the two authorities involved in WM2U can develop an approach to what we might call Stock and Flow Informed Data Analysis and Presentation this could have positive national implications.<sup>32</sup>

## 5. Systemic Impact: Summary and Prospects

In conclusion, we highlight where we can see progress towards system change and what is getting in the way particularly in the light of the RPA recommendations for systemic impact.

As outlined in section 1, we view the emergence of more relational and systemic practices as necessary early conditions for system change. This period of the work of WM2U illustrates the divergence of approaches in the two local authorities over time.

- In East Ayrshire, the primary focus has originally been on working with parents in the community, latterly bringing them together with practitioners to shape joint interests and ideas to be taken forward. The development of the NEST Wellbeing Group is one example, noting that the challenges experienced by this group illustrate the difficulties of working purposefully with families and communities to support voice-led system change.
- In Dundee, WM2U has more recently chosen to operate as a strategic enabler, working alongside practitioners with strong authorisation from senior leaders, using community learning and development activities as a vehicle for learning and embedding system change.

Whilst the work in each locality is taking a different course and the progress reported here might seem modest in relation to the ambitions of WM2U, this experience brings those ambitions to life in ways that demonstrate how the work can develop. Sight of this pathway articulated in our initial theory of change is a real cause for celebration.

- Through different routes, the conditions are being created for change both at an individual and a systemic level.
- WM2U is helping to give voice to people that are not heard and perspectives that are discounted, valuing the experience and knowledge of both parents and practitioners.
- The power and potential of bringing parents and professionals together is evident; it has enabled the development of insights into what works and what still needs to change, with impacts on individual professional practices.

Encouraging signs of emergent system change include the development of greater trust, built in environments where people have felt welcome and heard; being with other members of the community in different ways and alongside practitioners.

- There is a deepening understanding of the nature of 'real supportive support' from within the community, the difference that it can make to people's lives and the systemic challenges to valuing the part that community can play.
- Small, yet significant changes demonstrate the value of the community as a unique source of knowledge and connections, in its own right, rather than mainly being seen as a safety net when services fail.
  - Such support includes many ways of helping people to expand their 'space for action' as they reclaim a sense of control over their own lives.

- It enables them to create safer environments for themselves, perhaps taking the first steps out of the house, building friendships and wider connections, learning to trust others, and feeling able to ask for help, wanting to play a more active role in supporting other people, and finding trusted people that can vouch for and help to access wider services.
  - This builds knowledge and confidence, better mutual understandings, recognition of contributions and achievements and a growing sense of possibilities amongst community members and practitioners.
- Practitioners who have been part of WM2U have a desire to work differently and sometimes are able to do so, whilst also being keenly aware of the pressures and frustrations of their own job roles and contexts.
  - The Dundee experience highlights how the long-term investment of funders has generated trust amongst senior leaders and practitioners creating the leadership conditions to invest time and take risks, including engaging CLD staff in the process.
  - Small-scale financial support for practitioners has provided opportunities to create more agile responses and demonstrate different possibilities.
  - Allaying funding to CLD practices in this way brings real insights into families' difficulties in accessing the support they need at the right time and helps CLD practitioners use community planning processes to the advantage of local communities.

In terms of future prospects, the challenge remains to develop mutual understanding of what it means to genuinely 'be alongside', to 'work with' rather than 'do to', and to shape practical ways to build on the existing progress and goodwill created. Both areas face the challenges of putting 'values-into-action' – finding ways to develop mechanisms to test out the changes locally which are important to families, and which have a chance to influence change at a community and wider system level.

The work reported here has taken place within a continuing challenging context of austerity for families, the tail-end of the pandemic and recovery from it, restrictive spending by public services, and changes in key personnel. Evidence from elsewhere highlights that any failure to address early challenges or losses, conflict and loss of trust, risks reducing feelings of neighbourhood belonging and connectivity and creates barriers to community agency and control.<sup>33</sup>

Many community members are living with trauma and in poverty. Our recent review of policy literature noted that this should never be overlooked or underestimated:

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*"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."<sup>34</sup>*

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The divergence of approaches in the two local authorities reflects the different contexts in which the practical evolution of the WM2U approach has taken place. Both approaches offer great scope for further learning about how to support voice-led system change and both are instructive and valuable.

It may be that each area offers a potentially different pathway into local communities and organisational systems, that might standalone or run concurrently and this is something we expect to explore in the coming months, in the expectation that other local authorities and the Scottish Government will be interested in our learning.

There is a need to engage more fully with the complexity, and there is much still to learn about how to sustain engagement with parents and the wider community at any scale, to embed the kind of early help that supports children to flourish within their own families.

It is notable that whilst parents report difficulties in engaging with schools on behalf of their children, and children and young people do take part in community activities, the voices of children and young people are largely absent from this work. The measurement of outcomes for children and young people is presently confined to the population level. The scoping and measurement of personal outcomes for parents, children and young people is a conceptual, empirical, and practical challenge for work of this nature that is not engaging directly with a defined group using a specific service. Given the stated ambition, what such engagement might look like is worthy of fuller exploration in the coming months.

This is a paradigm shift that requires a shift in mental models, beliefs, worldviews, norms, and power relations. This shift extends to how we think about learning and evaluation: the development of a 'social learning capability' that seeks to embed continuous and collective learning into the work as it unfolds is a core element of this approach to systems change. Such approaches require the integration of collective inquiry and reflective learning, with commitment to an appropriate set of guiding principles for learning. We believe that the quality criteria set out in Annex 2 will help to promote the appropriate sensitivity to the context and purpose of the work, create high quality of thinking and learning processes, and enhance the credibility of claims and support for action.

The different stakeholders are united in their desire to improve the lives of children and families. Beneath this high-level purpose, there are still different perspectives and aspirations that have been brought to light and it will be important to explore the integration of these different interests. We would highlight the primary interests of the funders in exploring long-term system change; the hopes of the community to see real, practical change; the challenges for senior leaders of financing public services amidst continuing and severe austerity; the everyday considerations of practitioners navigating the barriers to making the difference they want to make; the focus of Columba 1400 on values; and the learning partner interests in finding ways to measure and demonstrate progress.

The focus for the future in each locality must be to explore how putting values-into-action can bring together these different elements and tackle the barriers to making an immediate difference on the ground, creating the conditions for long-term system change.

Such long-term system change requires a different relationship between the funder and the local authority as a strong strategic partnership. Although it has always been recognised as



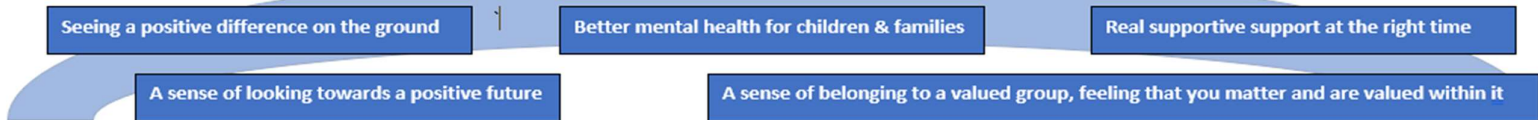
a collaboration, in practice each local authority has been benefiting from the support from the funder to help them to meet the prevailing policy imperative to invest financially in preventative spend. Without this external investment, at present, the risk is that the approach will disappear with the funder. We note that others interested in system change highlight the risk that the potential withdrawal of funding can undermine trust, motivation, and progress.<sup>35</sup>

WM2U still operates nationally, using its credibility and convening power to reflect on the learning generated locally with others engaged in system change work in different parts of Scotland. It is clear that the national events have inspired and supported participants, particularly those from the third and grant making sectors. The commitment to using the learning to influence local and national policy remains.

# Annex 1: Learning Framework - Outcomes and Indicators



## SHARED OUTCOMES AND INDICATORS: EAST AYRSHIRE (July 2023)



PROGRAMME BOARD STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND INDICATORS			
<p><b>SO1: Create conditions and structures that sustain change by working alongside families to co-produce new ways of operating</b></p> <p>a) Families have voice &amp; agency and are at the heart of change for themselves and others.                      b) The contribution &amp; achievements of families, communities &amp; local decision makers are visible to them &amp; others.                      c) Families, communities, and decision makers pay attention to learning to sustain continuous change.</p>	<p><b>SO2: Scale a WM2U approach deeply across both Local Authority areas.</b></p> <p>d) Those working alongside families put their voice at the heart of their work, have new insights about what matters to families and express confidence in applying these in their day-to-day work.                      e) The degree of scaling is seen through a combination of changes in the embedded cultural values and beliefs experienced within the system; changes in formal organisational policies, protocols, and structures; and increasing numbers of people engaging in this approach.</p>	<p><b>SO3: By listening to the voices of children and families Public Services will increase investment in prevention and enable children to flourish within their own families</b></p> <p>f) Public service leaders have shifted resources and focus to offer support earlier, enabling children to flourish within their own families.                      g) Local authorities and their partners can use data to measure the shift to prevention &amp; identify how they reduce the number of children who are care experienced or in formal measures, such as their Child Protection Register.</p>	<p><b>SO4: Our influencing strategy achieves a redesign of children's services locally &amp; contributes to how national policy is implemented and practice is shaped nationally</b></p> <p>h) Genuine voice-led policy and practice is visible, experienced, and contributing to local, redesigned children's services.                      i) Learning influences understanding of how voice can be mobilised to influence the design and implementation of national policies.</p>
LEADING INDICATORS			
Parents and carers	Practitioners	Local Strategic Leaders	
<p>a) We feel heard, safe to speak up and disagree, and are good listeners ourselves.                      b) We don't lose sight of what we have achieved so far and continue to learn together.                      c) We are confident of our strengths and role as a group.                      d) We are trusted by others to support change for all children and young people not just our own or those we know.                      e) There is recognition of our interests and potential contributions to the life of the school and community.                      f) We are working alongside those in schools and in the community that share our vision and want to make it happen.                      g) School staff and other professionals feel welcome at our meetings and in our spaces.                      h) We are engaged in and contribute to the learning from what is working well and what we should adopt, adapt, or abandon.</p>	<p>a) We feel heard, safe to speak up, and combine our expertise with humble listening.                      b) We work alongside parents and carers that share our vision and want to make it happen, seeking out their contributions to the wellbeing of the community.                      c) We know and value practitioners from other services and are confident to raise issues and share information with them.                      d) We feel welcome at community meetings and spaces.                      e) We don't lose sight of our achievements and strengths so far and continue to learn together and with parents.                      f) We are flexible &amp; responsive to the needs of people in communities, seek out possibilities, whilst honest about the realities and the limitations of our roles and responses.                      g) We feel more able to act in ways that feel right, can use relationships amongst us to support change and take actions ourselves and with others that feel more inclusive and collaborative.                      h) We are engaged in and contribute to the learning from what is working well and what we should adopt, adapt, or abandon.</p>	<p>a) As Community Teams develop their approach, they include families and children in designing the support at the point of need.                      b) As leaders, we guide service responses in harmony with individual and community strengths and in ways that establish, restore, and maintain trust.                      c) As leaders, we seek to understand enablers and address barriers to change.                      d) Where changes are complex, we work together to develop plans to make changes over time and advocate for change with those who have decision making power.                      e) We develop the use of data about the whole population of children to support and demonstrate the shift of resources to prevention.                      f) The experience of families and children continues to contribute to staff learning and practice development.                      g) We are engaged in and contribute to the learning from what is working well and what we should adopt, adapt, or abandon.</p>	

## Outcomes and Leading Indicators: Dundee (March 2023)

Seeing a positive difference on the ground

Better mental health for children & families

Real supportive support at the right time

A sense of looking towards a positive future

A sense of belonging to a valued group, feeling that you matter and are valued within it



Strategic Objectives and Indicators			
<p>Create conditions and structures that sustain change by working alongside families to co-produce new ways of operating</p>	<p>Scale a WM2U approach deeply across both Local Authority areas</p>	<p>By listening to the voices of children and families, public services will increase investment in prevention and reduce the number of Care Experienced children</p>	<p>Our influencing strategy achieves a redesign of children's services locally &amp; contributes to how national policy is implemented and practice is shaped nationally</p>
<p>a) Families have voice &amp; agency and are at the heart of change for themselves and others.</p> <p>b) The contribution &amp; achievements of families, communities &amp; local decision makers are visible to them &amp; others.</p> <p>c) Paying attention to learning sustains continuous change.</p>	<p>d) Those working alongside families have new insights about what matters to families and put the voice of families at the heart of their work, as an embedded way of working.</p> <p>e) The degree of scaling is seen through a combination of changes in the embedded cultural values and beliefs experienced within the system; changes in formal organisational policies, protocols and structures; and increasing numbers of people engaging in this approach.</p>	<p>f) Public service leaders have shifted resources and focus to offer support earlier, enabling children to flourish within their own families.</p> <p>g) Local authorities can use the data they need to measure the shift to prevention &amp; the impact on the distribution of children between GIRFEC classifications.</p>	<p>h) Genuine voice-led policy and practice is experienced and contributing to local, redesigned children's services.</p> <p>i) Learning influences understanding of how voice can be mobilised to influence the design and implementation of national policies.</p>
Parents and carers	Practitioners	Strategic Leaders	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents feel more connected to professionals – they reach out to them because they trust that they will be given support which will be useful to <u>them</u></li> <li>Parents feel listened to by professionals. Any targets set in Team around the Child meetings feel realistic, positive and <u>achievable</u></li> <li>Parents feel more connected to one another and able to support <u>one another</u></li> <li>Parents feel like they are managing behaviours they find difficult in their children more <u>effectively</u></li> <li>Parents feel like they have a place to go where they can share their problems 'without kickback'</li> <li>Parents have a place in the community where they can connect</li> <li>Children are more connected, feel more nurtured and feel like they are achieving more</li> <li>Parents feel like they have more purpose and fun in their lives</li> <li>Parents feel more happier in themselves and more confident – life feels like it is worth living</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We are listening to the parents and putting them at the centre of all our work</li> <li>We know who each other as professionals, we can connect and walk the road <u>together</u></li> <li>We feel confident enough to take a <u>risk</u></li> <li>We are more creative, we think outside the box, we know that we have senior management backing to go with our <u>hearts</u></li> <li>We are a more confident workforce, knowing that we are doing the right <u>thing</u></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We are doing some things in a really different way which suits the needs of families <u>better</u></li> <li>We are developing mechanisms to really respond to the voice of families with flexible family <u>support</u></li> <li>We are tipping the balance of resource to prevention (all of us including health)</li> <li>We are shining a light on what is going well and, on the complexities,</li> <li>There are more positive relationships between the police and young people and <u>families</u></li> <li>There are more positive stories about young people and <u>communities</u></li> <li>There is more positive sustained participation of young people and families in designing support and in using support</li> </ul>	

## Annex 2: Our Quality Criteria for Evaluating Systems Change

As part of the development of the learning framework, we have developed a set of quality criteria for WM2U that are systemic, inclusive, and participatory so that the learning has credibility with those with most at stake as well as others invested in the work.

### **Sensitivity to the context and purpose of the work**

- a) The learning and evaluation process proceeds with care and positive regard to promote relationships and avoid damaging them in the process of creating useful knowledge.
- b) The learning and evaluation process is ethical and equitable and creates the right conditions for people to take part in ways that are beneficial for them.
- c) A framework of desired outcomes is co-created to recognise and reflect diverse stakeholders' different kinds of expertise, expectations and hopes, and potential contributions.
- d) Evaluation questions reflect different stakeholders' values and contexts, developed at a pace that is appropriate and timely for each group.
- e) Data collection and analytical methods promote inclusion and participation and address the systemic drivers of inequity by giving weight to the views of parents and community members, giving voice to people that are often not heard or perspectives that are discounted.
- f) There is engagement with people that can use the information in a timely way to enable decision making and action that can improve processes and outcomes.

### **Quality of thinking and learning processes**

- g) Learning is a dynamic, embedded, and collective process, in which data generation and sense-making methods highlight patterns, themes, values, and connections between phenomena and create a dialogue amongst people with different perspectives.
- h) Interpretations, insights, and recommendations for action are generated by those most closely involved in the situation of concern.
- i) Resonance testing seeks affirming and alternative interpretations and acknowledges the existence and potential significance of outliers or individual cases.
- j) Learning seeks to resist certainties, closure and finality through precise measurement or hasty judgement of the phenomena observed.
- k) There is acknowledgement of the limitations of the methods and data sources and gaps in knowledge.

- l) Research findings are situated within the wider research, practice, and policy literature.
- m) The reporting and sharing of insights and learning is negotiated with stakeholders' and gives credit for contributions.

**Credibility of claims and support for action**

- n) Insights offer fresh perspectives for individuals involved about their own thinking and practice
- o) Insights offer fresh perspectives for individuals involved about the thinking and practice of others engaged in the situation of concern
- p) Evidence offers help to determine practical actions in real-life situations by identifying what practices to sustain and what to change.
- q) There is confidence that the claims that positive change is happening is rooted in evidence that has been tested in practice and identifies unwanted or unanticipated outcomes.
- r) Conclusions identify diverse stakeholders' values and perspectives of the quality and effectiveness of systems and programmes.

## Annex 3: System Change: How We Understand Impact

### INTRODUCTION

*What Matters to You* (WM2U) is a community-based systems change initiative working alongside families in particular communities in Dundee and East Ayrshire.

### OUR AMBITION

Ultimately, the **ambition** of WM2U is to move public resources to offer support earlier, thereby enabling children to flourish within their own families.

Our **theory of change** is that by listening to the voices of children and families and acting on their insights, local authorities will be able to **redesign services** and **invest in early intervention** approaches meaning that **fewer children will need to be looked after** and the **need for expensive care provision will diminish**.

### WHAT WE MEAN BY SYSTEM CHANGE

For us **system change** means 'shifting the conditions that keep a problem in place': the cultural and organisational values, mindsets, practices, and behaviours that are often taken for granted or unnoticed.

With ambition to go beyond a diagnosis of the issues, WM2U has a clear interest in discovering, testing, and spreading the conditions that enable positive change and lead to action towards the desired outcomes.

WM2U is not a conventional project, programme, or intervention of the kind that can be piloted and rolled out. Rather than working with a defined, quantifiable group of people, system change is intended to reach a perhaps ultimately unknowable number of people in the wider community, both people in communities and those working in a range of organisations.

In this situation, **scale** is achieved through:

- shifting embedded cultural values and beliefs, that continue to reproduce unwanted patterns and act as barriers to change (scaling deep);
- changing any formal and institutional structures that might also be working to hold a problem in place, (scaling up), and
- encouraging wider replication and adaptation of positive practices with greater numbers of people (scaling out).

### WHY LEARNING MATTERS

WM2U is a live and dynamic approach, that recognises the complexity of the issues and involves multiple stakeholders in an on-going exploration of a shared problem or situation of concern.

To reflect the system change ambitions of WM2U, we are developing an approach called **Dynamic Impact Analysis** that blends **system dynamic modelling** with local data collection

and analysis to consider change over time, exploring how things are connected and how they change over time because they are connected.

Given our perspective on system change, we view the emergence of more relational and systemic practices amongst the different stakeholders (including parents and carers, practitioners, senior leaders, and funders), as necessary conditions for achieving system change at scale.

Many of the desired qualities and behaviours that we are seeking are difficult to capture or quantify through conventional external evaluation approaches.

This underlines the necessity of a **participatory and embedded approach to learning** that enables us to track our learning, so that we can amplify the practices we find to be effective and adjust our course where needed. We call this approach **'Grow as We Go'**.

In looking for evidence of change, we are primarily interested in looking **what is being created**, rather than what has been prevented. To tell us we are on the right path, we track whether we are seeing change in **leading indicators** that matter most to the different stakeholders involved and capture:

- The development of safe environments in which people feel welcome and heard.
- The ability of all the stakeholders to work alongside others in the community and amongst different professional groups.
- The recognition of achievements and learning together.
- Confidence in strengths and roles.
- Developing trust, recognition of contributions.
- Willingness to test out new approaches and learn from what is working well and what might be adopted, adapted, or abandoned.

## **OUTCOMES MATTER**

These practices are expected to lead to five high-level and longer-term **population outcomes** (rather than personal outcomes) that together capture the impact of WM2U and are part of the WM2U Strategic Plan. The following set of outcomes have been developed with stakeholders as part of the work of WM2U and reflect the shared agenda to see:

- A positive difference on the ground
- Better mental health for children and families
- Real supportive support at the right time
- A sense of looking towards a positive future
- A sense of belonging to a valued group, feeling that you matter and are valued within it.

## **MEASURING THE CHANGES IS CHALLENGING**

It is not always straightforward to be able to measure change in any meaningful or reliable way. So much is changing all at once and it is difficult to establish a clearly defined 'before and after' picture or disentangle all the other factors at play.



The blending of **quantitative and qualitative** insight is crucial to help us understand change.

Statistical indicators may show some sort of movement happening at a population level, but in themselves, may not shed much light on what's behind those changes, either what has helped any change or hindered it. Furthermore, if numbers of children in care remain the same over a period of time, despite known changes in social work practices, is this because, say, the benefits of shorter placements are counter-balanced by greater numbers of children coming into the care system, leaving the overall number unchanged?

A further issue is the **availability of appropriate data**. Data about children and young people is held in a variety of information systems that are not linked and are not mutually accessible. This means that it is not possible to track changes in outcomes as a result of any measures implemented, with implications for the effective implementation of Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) and the evaluation of the impact of WM2U and the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund.

East Ayrshire and Dundee are not alone with these challenges. These data issues are a problem common to all local authorities and have a great bearing on the national debate in Scotland about the need to access useful data.

## **COST SAVINGS**

One of the measures of whether system change achieves the results we expect will be our mutual ability to demonstrate a shift towards preventative actions and shift of resources. In practice, this will depend on decisions about how any savings are to be deployed; continuing financial austerity does mean that savings may well be used to reduce overspend rather than being invested in preventative work.



## Notes and References

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- <sup>1</sup> John Kania, Mark Kramer, Peter Senge (2018) The Water of Systems Change, June [https://www.fsg.org/resource/water\\_of\\_systems\\_change/](https://www.fsg.org/resource/water_of_systems_change/)
- <sup>2</sup> Literature and Practice Review and Digest [https://wm2u.co.uk/sites/default/files/WMTY\\_Literature\\_Practice\\_Review.pdf](https://wm2u.co.uk/sites/default/files/WMTY_Literature_Practice_Review.pdf) and [https://wm2u.co.uk/sites/default/files/WMTY\\_Digest\\_of\\_practice\\_lessons.pdf](https://wm2u.co.uk/sites/default/files/WMTY_Digest_of_practice_lessons.pdf) (December 2022) Contributing to System Change [https://wm2u.co.uk/sites/default/files/WMTY\\_Contribution\\_to\\_Policy.pdf](https://wm2u.co.uk/sites/default/files/WMTY_Contribution_to_Policy.pdf) (March 2023)
- <sup>3</sup> [https://wm2u.co.uk/sites/default/files/WMTY\\_Literature\\_Practice\\_Review.pdf](https://wm2u.co.uk/sites/default/files/WMTY_Literature_Practice_Review.pdf)
- <sup>4</sup> This is now close to completion. Annex 1 has the current versions of the leading indicators and desired impact for both localities. The high-level Strategic Objectives and Indicators for both localities have recently been agreed by the Programme Board. There are three related, but distinct sets of indicators for parents and carers, practitioners, and senior leaders, that sit beneath the Strategic Indicators valued by the WM2U Programme Board.
- <sup>5</sup> We have compiled a separate data supplement which provides sources of evidence, and details of our research methods. This is available on request.
- <sup>6</sup> <https://wm2u.co.uk/learn>
- <sup>7</sup> The development of the learning framework and the evaluation of progress to date have been a participative process, engaging those families and practitioners who have been most closely involved in the evolution of WM2U.
- <sup>8</sup> What Matters to You: how do we go to scale? Interim Report, Learning Partners (March 2021) <https://wm2u.co.uk/sites/default/files/WMTY%20Learning%20Partner%20Interim%20Report%20March%202021%20General%20Final.pdf>
- <sup>9</sup> In time, such conditions may prove to be sufficient, perhaps alongside changes to formal and institutional structures, to achieve a wider impact: this is an issue that later reports will address.
- <sup>10</sup> These are included in Annex 2.
- <sup>11</sup> <https://www.rockpa.org/new-report-evaluation-of-the-shifting-systems-initiative/>
- <sup>12</sup> As of May 2023, 15 of the original 17 people who attended the most recent VBLE remain connected and active in the work of WM2U in some way.
- <sup>13</sup> A What's App group was established that saw significant use immediately as a channel to share information about practical and financial help for families in the pre-Christmas period; this has continued to be used since then.
- <sup>14</sup> <https://www.corra.scot/nest-wellbeing-group-update/>
- <sup>15</sup> This is a continuous process of story gathering. Some of the stories were also used at the WM2U national event in Stirling (May 2023).
- <sup>16</sup> Designed by the Hope Collective with the support of East Ayrshire Council and What Matters to You, this was part of a UK-wide series of events to bring together young people from the most vulnerable communities with cross-sector leaders and decision-makers to explore and develop innovative solutions to societal challenges.
- <sup>17</sup> There is a separate fuller report available.
- <sup>18</sup> Four of the (non-WM2U) professionals (from community work, youth participation and social work) that attended had been part of the most recent VBLE in December 2022, alongside three of the parents.
- <sup>19</sup> Almost 40 people attended, drawn from the local community and practitioners with a role in the locality, with a rough 50:50 split. A separate fuller event report is available.
- <sup>20</sup> This is a term coined in relation to coercive control that might well be more widely relevant eg. trauma recovery Stark, Evan (2007) Coercive Control – How Men Entrap Women in Personal Life, Oxford University Press
- <sup>21</sup> Pollard G and Hashmi I: Designing out the Most Severe Forms of Hardship in Local Areas 2023
- <sup>22</sup> This includes Dartington (2022) An integrated approach to evidence for those working to improve outcomes for children & young people, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c86931b4d87114c07db1adb/t/620d1cf65d442e5ec1944c27/1645026589266/Integrated+Approach+Dartington+Service+Design+Lab%27s+Strategy+Paper.pdf>

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- <sup>23</sup> [https://wm2u.co.uk/sites/default/files/WMTY\\_Literature\\_Practice\\_Review.pdf](https://wm2u.co.uk/sites/default/files/WMTY_Literature_Practice_Review.pdf)
- <sup>24</sup> <https://www.carereview.scot/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/The-Money.pdf>
- <sup>25</sup> <https://workforcescotland.files.wordpress.com/2018/11/collectiveleadershipreport1.pdf>
- <sup>26</sup> See McKelvie D (2013), Modelling social care complexity: the potential of System Dynamics, National Institute for Health Research – School for Social Care Research, London  
[www.sscr.nihr.ac.uk/PDF/MR/MR14.pdf](http://www.sscr.nihr.ac.uk/PDF/MR/MR14.pdf)
- <sup>27</sup> Jack Homer (1996) Why we iterate.... System Dynamics Review, 12, 1
- <sup>28</sup> Taken not from the WM2U model, but an example used in WM2U workshops
- <sup>29</sup> [https://www.carereview.scot/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/ICR\\_Evidence\\_Framework\\_v2-1.pdf](https://www.carereview.scot/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/ICR_Evidence_Framework_v2-1.pdf)
- <sup>30</sup> This makes it difficult to develop shared understandings by not distinguishing between, on one hand, the level of need/risk of the young person and, on the other hand, the level of the service they are receiving.
- <sup>31</sup> WM2U shares the concern articulated by The Independent Care Review/ The Promise about the difficulty in accessing the data that is necessary for understanding the operation of 'the system'.
- <sup>32</sup> Even we can obtain this data, it would represent a description of the 'known' population. There is a further challenge to get data about children / young people whose level of need is not known and is therefore not recorded.
- <sup>33</sup> New Local (2023) Rapid review of community agency and control, as final outcomes, or enablers of place-based interventions to improve community wellbeing, <https://whatworkswellbeing.org/resources/rapid-review-of-community-agency-and-control/>
- <sup>34</sup> [https://wm2u.co.uk/sites/default/files/WMTY\\_Contribution\\_to\\_Policy.pdf](https://wm2u.co.uk/sites/default/files/WMTY_Contribution_to_Policy.pdf)
- <sup>35</sup> Kate Tobin & Catherine-Rose Stocks-Rankin (2023) What Methods and Conditions Help, and Hinder Systems Change? A case study of one system change initiative in children's services, Dartington Service Design Lab and the Community Fund.