



# Dundee: Progress and Prospects

## Report 3 - What Matters to You: Evaluation Reports 2024

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December 2024

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## Acknowledgements and thanks

Thanks are due to very many people who have contributed to the work of WM2U in Dundee, particularly those who have agreed to be interviewed for this report.

Conventionally reports of this kind are anonymous but we wish to give credit, to the hard work and dedication of both WM2U Coordinators: Nicola Leddie and Geoff Leask.

The families, communities, practitioners and senior leaders have made us feel welcome and shared their perspectives with us in many important ways. Whilst the measurement of change is not commonly the focus of the members of the public, we know that communities want to see concrete change on the ground and to be confident that public service resources are well used.

Columba 1400 have been an important partner throughout and with the funders BBC Children in Need and the Hunter Foundation have maintained their original commitment to a family and community-led funding programme to help children and their families thrive even as it has shifted shape and pace. All of us have also had to contend with the challenges of Covid-19 and the inevitable false starts and dead ends of any programme that aspires to be firmly rooted in learning.

The Learning Partner team are, Cathy Sharp (Research for Real), Jo Kennedy (Animate), Emily Whyte (Research for Real) and Douglas McKelvie and Donald Scott (Symmetric Scenarios). In 2024, WM2U is also supported by Kerstin Jorna an analyst on secondment from Dundee City Council, with support from the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund.

As learning partners, most of us have been alongside since 2019 as both participants and observers, with a commitment to support learning to enable the success of the work. We have come to know the people and the work in unusual and privileged ways. In writing this account, we acknowledge that there will always be different perspectives. Whilst we hope that it is an authentic and fair account, we are responsible for any errors and omissions.

## Preface

Since 2019, there has been a series of learning partner reports, literature reviews and learning updates, many of which are available on the WM2U website.<sup>1</sup> Now in 2024 we are issuing an overview summary and a portfolio of four learning and evaluation reports based on the experience of working in East Ayrshire and Dundee.

Each of the set are designed to be read as standalone reports, signposting readers to existing reports and accounts which reflect the history and evolution of the thinking and practice of this initiative. Each report has an executive summary and links to earlier WM2U and other relevant reports.

**REPORT 1 - PURPOSE** Our ambition and key elements of our approach: this paper contains an overview of the key and common elements of WM2U that relate to both areas, East Ayrshire and Dundee. We anticipate that most readers will find it helpful to start with this report, particularly those not already familiar with the work. It will help readers to understand the evolution of the ambition and practices of WM2U, the approach to learning and the overall evidence base.

**REPORT 2 - EAST AYRSHIRE** This report focuses on the development of WM2U in East Ayrshire and offers an account of the expansion of community-led support and the subsequent formation of the Nest Wellbeing Group (NWBG), now at the forefront of developing a range of health, wellbeing and social activities in Cumnock. This report contains important lessons about the gap between positive aspirations and implementation on the ground, how to enable the agency of community members and local practitioners, and the challenges of creating the strategic conditions for change. Whilst WM2U funding concluded in East Ayrshire in October 2024, the far from unique challenges and insights are likely to be important for others to understand.

**REPORT 3 – DUNDEE** This report focuses on the development of WM2U in Dundee over the past five years. It details the ambitions and challenges of developing system change in a highly complex environment. After a gradual start in which foundations were laid, but progress was limited, more recently the pace of change has accelerated. The new approach has the backing of strategic leads and is becoming more strongly embedded in the work of local practitioners. Real opportunities are beginning to emerge for long-term system change and funding for this work will continue to 2026.

**REPORT 4 - MEASURES THAT MATTER** This report is dedicated to the fuller exploration of learning in relation to the conceptual and empirical elements of the measurement of change. It demonstrates our evolution in thinking about how to evaluate impact and brings further benefits of introducing local authorities to new ways of looking at data, working with stories and understanding change.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://wm2u.co.uk/our-reports>

## Glossary of Terms and Acronyms

**Columba 1400:** A key delivery partner of What Matters to You, Columba 1400 facilitate values-based leadership experiences for young people, parents, practitioners and Senior Leaders based on their long-standing leadership academies. <https://columba1400.com/>

**Delivery Team:** the WM2U coordinator, programme manager and funders.

**Grow as We Go (GAWG):** the shorthand way in which the learning partner team refer to their approach to learning and evaluation.

**Leading Indicators:** signs of essential changes that might otherwise be missed, dismissed as intangible or hard to measure. They describe the changes we want to see in positive terms and give early feedback and encouragement to participants.

**Learning Framework:** a set of outcome and leading indicators that reflects jointly made decisions and agreements about the most important measures of changes that people want to see and helps to guide the work as it proceeds.

**Learning Partner:** a team of people dedicated to supporting learning throughout the programme, with backgrounds in facilitation, learning, research and evaluation and System Dynamics. [www.research-for-real.co.uk](http://www.research-for-real.co.uk) <https://www.animateconsulting.co.uk/> and <https://symmetriclab.com/>

**Make it Happen Fund (MIHF):** a dedicated fund to shift power, budgets and control into the hands of families and communities.

**Outcomes:** the ultimate changes that we want to see happening that should be tangible and visible in the community.

**Programme Board:** a high-level Board made up of the two funders and their staff.

**System Change:** a way of talking about change that acknowledges the need to change established and deep seated ways of thinking and patterns of behaviour in organisations and communities that continue to produce unwanted outcomes.

**System Dynamics (SD):** an approach that provides a way of understanding how complex systems change over time by co-creating useful computer simulation models that explore how changes in a wide range of variables are dynamically or causally connected.

**The Lens:** an organisation which specialises in developing customer-led change, supporting people to develop their ideas for change into workable and fundable projects.

**The Nest Wellbeing Group (NWBG):** an East Ayrshire community-led charity at the forefront of health and wellbeing activities for the people of Cumnock and the surrounding area. They have a strong focus on recovery and peer support.

**Theory of Change:** this is a description and illustration of how and why desired changes are expected to happen in a particular context. Usually used in programme planning and evaluation it shows the assumed links between different activities.

**Values-based leadership experience (VBLE):** a leadership programme facilitated by Columba 1400, to support parents, practitioners, and strategic leaders to work together to put what matters to families first. VBLEs are usually two-day residential programmes, with an initial meeting and a reconstructor day shortly afterwards.

**Whole Family Wellbeing Fund (WFWF):** Scottish Government funding for £500 million investment between 2022 to 2026 to support the whole system transformational change required to reduce the need for crisis intervention and shift investment towards prevention and early intervention.

**What Matters to You (WM2U):** a name settled on for this work as a neat shorthand that expresses what it is about. With roots in person-centred care and health services in Scotland, this work takes the question out into communities.

## Executive Summary

This report focuses on the development of WM2U in Dundee over the past five years. It details the ambitions and challenges of developing system change in a highly complex environment. WM2U has maintained a collaborative approach guided by the voice of local communities. After a gradual start in which foundations were laid, but progress was limited, the pace of change has accelerated exponentially in the last two years. The new approach has the backing of strategic leads and is strongly embedded in the work of local practitioners.

### Important outcomes and achievements are:

- **A positive difference on the ground:** families in Charleston, Kirkton, Menzieshill, St Marys, Ardler, Lochee and Whitfield are all benefiting from the additional activities being run by Dundee City Council Community Learning and Development (CLD) and supported by WM2U.
- **A sense of belonging to a valued group, feeling that you matter and are valued within it:** parents have set up groups supported by CLD in both Charleston and Kirkton. These groups are places where they feel valued and supported but also places where they can bring additional value to the community. Parents are now leading on providing activities for other local families and fundraising for their local communities.
- **Real supportive support:** the trust developed between parents and CLD teams has led to people receiving support with health, finances and housing. But beyond that it has also led to changes in structures and services that whilst modest are significant: the CLD manager recognises how WM2U has changed the way the teams practice across the city and the potential to make Local Community Planning Partnerships more inclusive. The Service Manager for Housing has restructured the service to be more accessible to community members.
- **Better mental health for children and families:** parents testify to better mental health for themselves and their children as a direct consequence of attending leadership experiences and participating in family activities.
- **A sense of looking towards a positive future:** the growth of safety and trust has encouraged individual and collective agency amongst community members and practitioners, who are now hopeful that the achievements so far will be built on and replicated in other areas. Sharing community members' stories has engendered hope and been a stimulus for change.

### Emerging signs of system change

The emergence of more relational and systemic practices amongst the different stakeholders are *necessary* conditions for scaling deep to achieve system change. The examples and stories shared here are important, motivating and valuable but in themselves, are not sufficient evidence of system change. However, over the last two years there has been encouraging progress: there are shifts in thinking and practices and real opportunities are beginning to emerge for long-term system change.

- Amongst community members, there are positive challenges to the ways that they have thought about themselves and their own agency in relation to their lives and those of others in their communities, with the emergence of new community-led activities.
- With the support of strategic leaders, practitioners have also experienced a shift in mindsets and of their own agency, taking up their desire to act on their values to support community-led change.
- The involvement of strategic leaders is recognising and beginning to change the formal and institutional structures that are no longer working well enough for communities including local community planning. This holds out the prospect of finding ways to embed more positive and responsive practices within the governance and accountability structures in operation, address power imbalances and devolve decision making as much as possible. This will provide WM2U and local leaders with the opportunity to underline the relevance of voice-led community approaches to elected members, which is an area of priority development for 2024-2026.
- The WM2U team, together with strategic leaders is adopting a careful approach to extending, building on learning and adapting it to local circumstances, rather than seeking to mandate or 'roll out' a programme.

The evidence points to a common vision and purpose amongst different stakeholder groups and a clear sense that they can only achieve it together. New spaces are being created for listening and understanding each other's perspectives and most importantly acting together to develop ways forward. Mutual understanding and acknowledgement of strengths and capabilities is growing and there is a fresh willingness to work together.

### Significant enabling factors include:

**Support to Strategic Leaders:** over the past five years, the funder and the programme manager have invested considerable time working directly with Strategic Leaders in Dundee City Council, including the Chief Executive, building trust, ensuring that they understand each other's perspectives and imperatives and aligning WM2U to the goals of strategic leaders for the city.

**Putting Values into Practice:** The Columba 1400 Values Based Leadership Experiences have played an important part in inspiring local leaders, practitioners and community members to refocus on their values and believe in their own capacity to make a difference. There is significant evidence that people at all levels, community members, practitioners and strategic leaders have subsequently found ways of putting their values into practice supporting one another and contributing to improving their communities.

**Resourcing an internal team:** CLD staff are experienced in engaging with communities, are already known, and trusted by local people, and can 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 more effectively use community planning processes to the advantage of local communities.



The local WM2U Coordinator works alongside CLD teams, to support them to work flexibly with children and families through encouragement, connection-building, and access to small amounts of funding. The positioning of CLD within WM2U has been a critical factor as it was only when the WM2U delivery team really began to understand, appreciate and resource the capacity of Community Learning and Development local practitioners that the approach became well-grounded and able to proceed at pace. The combination has been highly effective.

**Speedy access to small amounts of money:** WM2U has provided small grants to meet the immediate needs of local people, local initiatives and local organisations: it is easier for an independent funder to access funding quickly in response to local need and to test new ideas than it is for a local authority to use their lengthy formal processes. This has both generated trust and enabled more participation in community-based activities such as Family Fun Nights and Café Conversations.

**Using the data to understand how to tip the balance towards prevention:** the assumption that children escalate or de-escalate through the system step by step has been challenged and we have learned that here isn't a simple 'upstream location' (prior to crisis) in which to invest. This on-going data analysis by Dundee's Senior Research and Information Officer has begun to change conversations about what happens to children and young people in the system, generating questions from strategic leaders and local practitioners about more effective support. This continuing work raises the prospect of making data-informed judgements about the questions at the heart of system change such as where to invest early to ensure that fewer children experience care in the future.

**Convening conversations:** The Café Conversations have provided an opportunity for WM2U to convene regular conversations amongst community members, local practitioners, strategic leaders and now elected members giving them a space to develop local solutions, whose applicability can be tested in other areas.

**Trust in the funders:** The funders have been consistently visible in Dundee over the past five years: in local communities, regular attenders of the local Oversight and Enabling Board, organising a special site-specific meeting of the WM2U Programme Board and using their contacts to influence at a national level whenever possible. They have extended the work and investment twice and it is now not due to conclude until 2026. This has earned them the trust of senior leaders, local practitioners and community members.

**Commitment to Learning:** Over the course of five years the WM2U has experimented with new approaches, built on what has worked and learned from what didn't. The stories and insights generated by the learning team are well used and inform the WM2U approach to the planning and development of system change.

## Prospects and ongoing challenges

This is work in progress. The WM2U team is committed to supporting system change in Dundee until 2026.

The strategy is to enhance the investment in WM2U building on the progress and learning to date. The work with Community Learning and Development practitioners will extend across the city. This will be led by the WM2U local coordinator with VBLEs supporting parents and practitioners at every level. The voice of young people will be amplified through Young People's Leadership Academies. Café conversations will be extended throughout the city and over time will strengthen the Local Community Planning Partnerships ability to engage and respond effectively to local people. The data project will focus on how to shift investment to prevention. The Make it Happen Fund, led by local people will be able to make small but significant investments in projects and community organisations. The learning partner will continue to host spaces in which the WM2U team, practitioners and community members can listen to one another, reflect and find ways forward detailing insights generated in learning briefings. These insights will be used to inform discussion at the Oversight and Enabling Board which will be accountable for progress across the whole.

There are big challenges to confront: local people will continue to be impacted by the cost-of-living crisis, mental health issues, which impact in particular on younger people, and addictions to alcohol and drugs. Budget restrictions mean that services valued by the local community will almost certainly be lost. Collaboration between services and initiatives will be more essential than ever to ensure resources are well used, which requires commitment from practitioners, community members and strategic leaders.

The strategic leaders identify that 'shining a light on what is going well' needs to be accompanied by being open about the complexities. These complexities reflect the very real dilemmas of local government faced with significant financial restrictions. There is no clear view yet of which interventions provide the right support at the right time to families who need it most and thereby keep children with their families or in their communities.

The WM2U team are committed to continuing to support Dundee City Council to be candid about these challenges, to listen to the voice of local people, to notice and celebrate success and to stand by its commitment to improve. During the next two years, it will need to find a way to replace the external support provided by the local coordinator and to reprioritise resources so that local people and local practitioners have what they need to own and make the change required in local communities.

# 1. Introduction and background

This report focuses on the development of WM2U in Dundee over the past five years. It details the ambitions and challenges of delivering system change in a highly complex environment. The enthusiasm and passion to improve opportunities for local families has resulted in a range of initiatives some led by the local authority and others by local voluntary sector organisations. WM2U began its work in 2019, before the onset of Covid and for the past five years, has taken collaborative approach guided by the voice of local communities.

## Overview

The original focus was direct work with local parents in Lochee, which has now developed into strong collaboration with the Dundee City Council Community Learning and Development team and an ambition to scale-out the approach across Dundee.

Key features of the approach have been:

- Initial development work in Lochee with both practitioners and families leading to the set-up of a community garden during Covid 19.
- Between 2020 and August 2024, 106 people have been involved in a VBLE, 39 parents and 67 staff across seven cohorts.
- An WM2U Oversight and Enabling Board including education, social work, housing, the third sector, health and police and chaired by the Executive Director of Children and Families in Dundee City Council, set up in November 2021 and is ongoing.
- A Lens programme delivered in the early months of 2022, designed to put ideas into action resulting in Street Soccer being funded to deliver provision for more than 90 young people on a Friday night between August 2022 and June 2023.<sup>2</sup>
- A 'strategic renewal' in the second half of 2022 to accelerate change, which involved working alongside the Community Learning and Development teams initially in Lochee and Strathmartine but with the ambition of expanding city-wide.
- The development of a bespoke Learning Framework to monitor progress alongside parents, practitioners and strategic leaders.
- The secondment of Dundee Council's Children and Families Senior Information and Research Officer to consider the data collected locally and use it to describe how children are being supported currently and how a shift in investment to prevention could improve outcomes.

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<sup>2</sup> The Lens is described in Report 1.

- Focused support which has enabled the CLD team to deepen and expand its work with families in Charleston (an area in Lochee) and Kirkton (an area in Strathmartine) which has led to parents running their own activities for other families.
- Making small amounts of money available quickly to support activities in the community as a precursor to the second stage of the Make it Happen Fund.
- Setting up of Café Conversations in Strathmartine and Lochee in 2023/2024 to bring parents, practitioners and strategic leaders together to develop solutions to local issues, with plans to adopt this approach in more areas.
- Consistent engagement by the funders with senior leaders in Dundee City Council to strategically support the work with practitioners and in communities.

The initial sections of this report describe earlier developments to set the scene for a discussion of leading indicators and outcomes in 2024 in sections 5 and 6. Readers that are unfamiliar with this work may appreciate the background and sense of timelines in the earlier sections, whilst others may want to start with sections 5 and 6. A fuller account of the basis and background to WM2U is detailed in Report 1. Report 4 “Measures that Matter” describes the modelling work that underpins the development of the analytical approach being adopted in Dundee.

- Section 2: How do we go to scale: recounts the set up and early work of WM2U (2019-2021).
- Section 3 Strategic Renewal: describes the shift to align with the Community Development Team in Dundee (2022)
- Section 4 describes an acceleration in the pace of change throughout 2023
- Section 5 describes extending and embedding the approach across Dundee in 2024.
- Section 6 explores the leading indicators, progress and prospects
- Section 7 draws conclusions and highlights implications for Dundee

## 2. How Do We Go to Scale (2019-2021)?

Our interim report in March 2021 set the scene at an important stage in the work of WM2U, drawing on material from earlier reports.<sup>3</sup> Discussed in more detail in Report 1, it illustrated how WM2U had focused on 'creating the conditions for change' through relational working with people whose voices had been marginalised, and with locally based professionals and voluntary and community sector organisations. WM2U had also established good relationships with senior leaders and practitioners, building on the foundation established during the initial Columba 1400 Values Based Leadership Experience (VBLES).

The Dundee local coordinator began work in Lochee in April 2019, building trust on the ground with local families and local practitioners. Her approach was appreciative and relational, offering 1:1 support and providing opportunities for peer support. She developed a community garden behind a school, which provided an easy access point for families. Working on the garden meant that they were creating something together, whilst she was finding out what mattered to them. Gaining the trust of local people meant trying to address the immediate practical issues that mattered to them often focusing on helping them get the right support for their children or sort out housing issues.

### 2.1 Values based leadership experiences (VBLEs)

By the end of 2019 headteachers and practitioners working with families in the community, had been recruited to the first Dundee VBLE which took place in January 2020. It was well received, and practitioners emerged eager to address the barriers which got in the way of them putting their values into practice.

As Covid hit, the engagement work continued. The local coordinator maintained her contact with local families, offering support online and whenever possible face to face.

VBLEs took place online and face-to-face including:

- on-line leadership development sessions for parents and in-person half days
- an online VBLE for a group of 18 managers from across health, social work, education and community work
- an in-person Tayside Collaborative leadership development residential for senior leaders across Dundee and Angus<sup>4</sup>
- a follow up session for those who had been involved in the January 2020 VBLE.

Some parents were also involved in the development of the *Make it Happen Fund* to which funding was awarded in Summer 2021.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> <https://wm2u.co.uk/resource/what-matters-you-how-do-we-go-scale> Earlier reports include a literature review (December 2019), a learning update (May 2020), a working paper based on interviews with parents, senior leaders, funders and delivery team members (Jan 2020) and meeting notes and Board papers dating back to the commencement of the work in early 2019.

<sup>4</sup> Funded separately by the Hunter Foundation

<sup>5</sup> A separate review of the Make It Happen Fund in 2021 is included in Report 1.

In summer 2021 the learning partner undertook a learning review interviewing parents and community leaders, senior leaders, and participants of the VBLES.

## The impact of VBLES for parents

Engagement with WM2U had made a difference to parents: building trust, enhancing confidence and self-esteem and creating hope in the future. Parents particularly valued how the VBLES reconnected them with their own strengths and hopes for the future. Many of the immediate gains were personal: individual parents felt confident enough to apply for and get jobs or return to study.

One of the parents who was involved in the East Ayrshire *Community Leaders* programme, appreciated the chance to connect with other people and learning how to facilitate groups. The skills she learned on the Community Leaders course, and the confidence which she gained there, enabled her to get a job.

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*"I wouldn't have been able to go for it or have the experience to put down in my application or in the interview without having done that...it feels really significant, it is a full-time job... I was really nervous... but I was really focused and determined. I felt more positive when I was talking about myself."* (Dundee parent 2021)

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Being on the VBLE also gave her the confidence to advocate for her daughter more effectively with the school, and she choose to use her 'Make it Happen Fund' budget to support both her daughter and her husband to gain new skills. Another parent felt ready to go back to college:

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*"I'm not so hard on myself now. It makes me appreciate myself and look at the things I've ignored. I could build on that... There are people actually listening to me and respecting what I say. It took away the fear of interacting in a group. I felt safe... I was isolated but this group has been part of the change and my overcoming my isolation. Now I am thinking about continuing my studies. Just following the things I want to do, maybe finding a job. Before I was too scared."* (Dundee parent 2021)

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The parents really enjoyed the community garden. They appreciated 'hanging out' there because it was relaxed, fun and unstructured. Building something locally felt important:

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*"I love the idea of rebuilding community... it takes a village to raise a child...WM2U helps with building relationships with the school."* (Dundee parent 2021)

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One parent told us that she was determined to see services changing, because they have 'lost the trust of local people'. It was noticeable that the families were keen to meet strategic leaders when they visited the garden in the summer of 2021. They were confident to speak out about their ideas and concerns. As one strategic leader noticed the consistent support from WM2U had given them the confidence to trust that it was worth voicing their hope for better things for both their families and their communities.

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*"I have been impressed by two things: the parents feel more confident to question what is going on and get involved in developing solutions and they want to do it as a group, assisting each other... when I met them at first they were more interested in their own issues". (Dundee Strategic Leader 2021)*

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Despite such individual success stories, the community work of this early phase of WM2U in Dundee proved hard to sustain. The development of the community garden faltered when it proved impossible to source funding to repair the shelter, where families congregated during the winter, and the WM2U coordinator found it hard to maintain her relationships with community members in the absence of a specific locus.

### The impact of VBLEs for Senior Leaders

By September 2021 strategic leaders in Dundee had both understood the potential of WM2U and acknowledged the momentum had been lost, much of that attributed to the impact of Covid.

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*"If we have done anything in terms of listening it has been done in isolated pockets. We have never listened strategically and systematically across the whole – the key principle is how we support families. What are the issues they are facing and how do we respond as a system to those issues? The (WM2U) method is helping us to have conversations." (Dundee Strategic Leader 2021)*

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These leaders were always aware of the alignment with other work going on in the city such as the Fairness Commission, where they worked with a group of Dundee citizens over a period of nine months to produce recommendations on how to reduce poverty and promote greater fairness in the city in the light of the impact of the pandemic.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> [https://www.dundee.gov.uk/news/article?article\\_ref=3761](https://www.dundee.gov.uk/news/article?article_ref=3761)

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*“It can run as a thread through all of that...if you like, the fuse that ignites a lot of that – it is about bringing all that to life.” (Dundee Strategic Leader 2021)*

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They were willing: taking time to debrief with practitioners who had attended a VBLE and to meet with families in the garden. They saw WM2U as the future:

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*“It is really important to see what matters to community...we should see WM2U as the way we listen and work with our communities not as a project. It is breathtaking to me what can be achieved by working in this way.” (Dundee Strategic Leader 2021)*

*“We need everyone working with the public to work in this way. They all need to have that attitude. We need to think about (how to do) that next.” (Dundee Strategic Leader 2021)*

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They noticed a gathering momentum and a difference in their conversations with practitioners, which they attributed to the work of WM2U and related initiatives:

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*“Leadership wise I think I am seeing more and more conversations that reflect a certain set of values – people are now talking much more about how we shouldn’t do schools, social work, police, third sector, we should listen properly to families and provide the type of support that matters to them – informed by what they tell us. Those conversations are occurring more often and with a broader group of people, helped by conversations we are having through the Drugs Commission, the Promise etc – all of that is coming together. The WM2U method is helping to accelerate it. People are starting to see it is as approach not a programme. (Dundee Strategic Leader 2021)*

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The Chief Executive of Dundee City Council invited practitioners to tell him what he could do to ‘join the dots’, by dismantling bureaucratic barriers between different parts of the organisation: *‘We are set up to operate in silos. We want to create a culture which means we can work across the organisation.’*

Strategic Leaders were keen to grow what was already working and recognise that successful approaches in one area (such as being responsive to children and celebrating success in early years) should inform and resource other areas more routinely. But there were tensions with parallel initiatives working towards the same outcomes, and understandable concerns about competition for funding in a time of scarcity. The strategic leaders in Dundee City Council, the WM2U team and senior practitioners across sectors were honest about their fears and assumptions and worked hard to overcome differences.



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*“We are all being given the freedom to put all the competition aside and focus on the needs of children and families. We have all agreed to work together differently – even those with a history.” (Dundee Strategic Leader 2021)*

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Part of the challenge was about ultimate attribution and the ability to take credit for outcomes:

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*“The problem is when everyone is being trained to look for evaluation. The more our different projects work together, the less you can attribute change to one or other, but the better for the population. A measure of our success will be when we don’t know what it is.” (Dundee practitioner 2021)*

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These challenges to expectations about the measurement of impact have also been explored in East Ayrshire and amongst the Programme Board. Report 4 explores some of the implications for the evaluation of ‘system change’ that demands that we think differently about how we define and measure success.

The strategic leaders could see that WM2U could deliver tangible outcomes for children and families, ensuring that children are supported firstly by their family, and if that is not possible, in their local community. In 2021 there were 442 looked after children in Dundee, some of them outside the city:

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*“We want to keep them all and are interested in, to what extent we have empowered the community that is nearest the child (family, extended family, friends and neighbours) to support their child?” (Dundee Strategic Leader 2021)*

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Looking back, it is clear that, two years in, strategic leaders understood the potential of WM2U and were engaged and motivated, keen to ‘join the dots’ in a city where families were struggling, despite all the initiatives aimed at supporting them.

### The impact of VBLEs for practitioners

A group of practitioners undertook a residential VBLE in Dundee, in early 2019. Although they appreciated the experience, the onset of the pandemic made it difficult to offer them continuing support. The second Dundee VBLE programme was offered to a cohort of 18 managers from across health, social work, education and community work. They were all nominated by the strategic leadership team, as people who could both influence and take action. The focus of their VBLE was on listening to the voice of families in Lochee and working collaboratively to take action on what mattered to them. Participants appreciated the chance to step back a bit:

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*"...[to] refocus on the key thing that will make a difference: families feeling more empowered and supported to engage."* (Dundee practitioner 2021)

*"What's different for me about what working in this way, is taking shared responsibility for things – it is a much more productive way to work."* (Dundee practitioner 2021)

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In general, they felt they were well supported by the local authority and had permission to work differently, although participants also noted bureaucratic and time barriers.

The key themes emerging from the VBLE were fed back to Strategic Leaders at two separate meetings in July 2021. These were:

- A need (and a commitment from the practitioners) to redesign services and support, such as Team Around the Child meetings, around children and families.
- A desire for more collaborative working, particularly between education and social work.
- Identification of gaps in early years/community supports.
- Valuing, building on and learning from the good work already going on.

The enablers they identified were:

- Protected time and space to reflect together.
- Staff being open-minded, feeling valued and being self-aware.
- Understanding each other's roles.
- Access to finance and resources at the right time so that they can implement what they know works.

The VBLE was followed up with a learning partner led 'learning community' and the first session took place online in August 2021. It was attended by 14 of the original 18 practitioners, with others keen but unable to attend because of competing demands. The group retained a real desire to work collaboratively to improve what was on offer for families but didn't have a strong enough connection to one common goal or one community to sustain momentum in the longer term.

Over the winter of 2021 and early into 2022, the local coordinator continued her support to individual parents and began working more closely with the Community Learning and Development Team, running joint groups for women and families.

### 3. Shifting to align with and support the Community Learning and Development Team (2022)

This section describes a 'strategic renewal' in the summer of 2022. Several factors came together to make this possible: the local authority was emerging from the immediate impact of Covid, the CLD team knew that families wanted more opportunities to get together and a new WM2U lead and local coordinator were in a position to develop a more ambitious strategy to build on the strength of community work and respond to local need.

By March 2022:

- Twenty nine practitioners from across health, social care and education had been through VBLE in two cohorts, initially residential and then online
- Values based leadership support and team coaching had been provided to strategic leaders as needed, throughout the pandemic and through the Tayside Collaborative
- Twenty four parents had participated in five different VBLE cohorts either face to face or online.

In addition:

- a learning community had been set up to support practitioners to put their ideas into action
- The WM2U local coordinator was continuing to provide encouragement and support to local people and practitioners
- A Strategic Oversight and Enabling Group had formed (Nov 21) at a senior leadership level to focus on making connections between the different initiatives across the city, overcoming any obstacles to change and assessing impact

Strategic leaders noted that for the first time they were being given the opportunity to listen '*strategically and systematically across the whole*'. But securing their time to focus on creating the conditions for long-term change when much of their attention was absorbed in tackling the existing crisis created by the pandemic was almost impossible. And although practitioners were willing to work differently, they were distracted by competing commitments and bureaucratic demands.

#### 3.1 Using learning to put values into action

In April 2022 our learning update highlighted the gap between the reconnection with values and the formation of strong relationships which takes place in the VBLEs and becoming a 'team' of system changers who can make a significant difference to children and families' lives.

This gap had already been acted upon by the funders who in December 2021, commissioned the Lens to provide a more structured and accelerated process to move ideas into action. Although participants enjoyed the process and it led to some valuable

youthwork provision from Street Soccer, ultimately it didn't engage parents effectively enough.<sup>7</sup>

By the summer of 2022 it was clear that despite good intentions, the WM2U approach was not influencing the structure and delivery of services in the city. The local coordinator had returned to a substantive post in the local authority, and it was clear that if the work was to continue, a new strategy was needed to deepen, scale and sustain the impact.

At this point, the WM2U team took stock. There was solid groundwork to build on. Small interventions were making a big difference to parents. Relationships with strategic leaders in the city were strong and they trusted the WM2U approach. The evidence showed that taking a relational approach and community development skills and practice were at the heart of the success of WM2U thus far. This approach and these skills were already present within the local authority's Community Learning and Development Team. Therefore, WM2U decided that working within the local authority system would increase the likelihood of sustainability.

### 3.2 Strategic Renewal

The incoming WM2U Programme Manager listened to those who had been involved thus far and worked with strategic leaders within Dundee City Council to draw up a new strategy. In November 2022 the strategy was endorsed by elected members. It involved working more directly with the Community Learning and Development team, resourcing them to amplify the voice of local people across eight wards in the city.

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*A critical accelerator has been the positioning of CLD within WM2U. (The CLD lead) was on the same VBLE as me and we joined the dots." (Strategic Leader 2024)*

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A new local WM2U Coordinator was appointed to work alongside CLD teams, to support them to work flexibly with children and families through encouragement, connection-building, and access to small amounts of funding.<sup>8</sup> This was a slightly different role given the new strategic approach: still adopting a relational approach, but seeing the role as more strategic and enabling, providing opportunities, and removing obstacles, working closely with the CLD Managers and alongside them, with the families.<sup>9</sup> He is persistent, persevering with pragmatism and humility:

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*"I have great relationships with people that were resistant at the beginning, and you could see it in how they responded in the first few meetings, particular through facial expressions and body language. But [this] isn't a true*

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<sup>7</sup> For more on the Lens see Report 1

<sup>8</sup> <https://wm2u.co.uk/our-team>

<sup>9</sup> Where Should We Look for System Change: WM2U Learning Update August 2023 p26

*reflection of who they are... you don't know how it will pan out and you can't fix resistance straight away, it takes perseverance." (Dundee, coordinator, 2024)*

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Interviews undertaken in 2024 suggest that the combination has proved effective and generated fresh momentum.

At the same time, Columba 1400 were commissioned to deliver local VBLEs. Strategic leaders endorsed their support and commitment to the Oversight and Enabling Board as the steering group for the scaling of WM2U Dundee-wide dedicated to removing barriers to respond to the voice of local communities and practitioners.

### 3.3 A learning framework: constructing a joint held ambition based on shared values

The Dundee Learning Framework was developed with parents, practitioners and strategic leaders during VBLEs and Oversight and Enabling Board meetings between Nov 2021 and June 2024. It has always reflected agreement about the importance of the five WM2U high-level outcomes and the inter-connectedness between them and has been developed to reflect the particular ambitions and achievements of those involved in the work.<sup>10</sup> This continues to evolve and the latest additions to the framework reflect the progress of the families in both Charleston and Kirkton where support for families is now being designed and led by the community.

The framework puts the focus on seeking evidence of what is being created, and what we want to see more of, rather than trying to measure what has been prevented. The overall ambition for WM2U is framed in terms of five population-level outcomes:

- 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.

Parents, practitioners and strategic leaders each have their own set of 'leading indicators' as shown in Figure 3.1 The 'leading indicators' point to signs of emergent and systemic change, shifts in the mindsets and practices of practitioners, community members and strategic leaders. These are the first signs of change which each would expect to be able to see from their own perspective.

Whilst the indicators are framed slightly differently by each stakeholder group, they broadly cover the following elements:

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<sup>10</sup> Fuller details are in Report 1.

- The development of safe environments in which people feel understood, welcome and heard.
- An increased sense of purpose, enjoyment and confidence to take risks amongst both parents and practitioners.
- A willingness amongst practitioners and strategic leaders to test out new approaches (including structures) which really respond to the voice of families.
- Honesty about what is going well and what is still difficult
- Tipping the balance of resource to prevention.
- Community designed and led activities.

These indicators guide our work as learning partners, underlying the evidence gathering process through our interviews, small group work and survey design.

Figure 3.1: Dundee Leading Indicators

LEADING INDICATORS		
Parents and carers	Practitioners	Strategic Leaders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We feel more connected to self, one another, and professionals</li> <li>• We feel listened to by professionals</li> <li>• We have a place in the community where we can share and overcome challenges ‘without kickback’</li> <li>• We feel an increased sense of purpose, enjoyment, and confidence</li> <li>• We gain support to manage the challenges that can come with being a parent or carer</li> <li>• We design and run our own activities in the community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We are listening to families and putting them at the centre of all our work.</li> <li>• We feel confident to take creative risks.</li> <li>• We experience ourselves as having senior management support to work in a different way.</li> <li>• We support each other to work in a different way to be able to better support families.</li> <li>• We support community members to design and run their own activities</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 better</li> <li>• We are developing mechanisms to really respond to the voice of families with flexible family support</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 families</li> <li>• There are more positive stories about young people and communities</li> <li>• There is more positive sustained participation of young people and families in designing support and in using support</li> <li>• We support community members to design and run their own activities</li> </ul>

## 4. Accelerating the pace of change (2023)

In 2023, we reported that there was real cause for celebration and progress in creating the conditions for change both at an individual and a systemic level.<sup>11</sup>

The WM2U delivery team had been working with the Community Learning and Development team in Charleston and Kirkton: explaining the approach to groups of local practitioners, developing funding bids to support local community centres and local management groups, linking practitioners to useful contacts outside their area, authorising small grants quickly to enhance local activities and gathering feedback from families.<sup>12</sup> Our 2023 learning partner report highlighted six significant areas of progress:

- Engaging with parents and families
- Securing funding
- Engaging with services
- Direct work with young people
- Working alongside
- Strong connections with data analysis in the local authority.

The first three are explored briefly, with reference to the learning framework and as context for a discussion of outcomes in 2024 in sections 5 and 6. There has been little direct work with young people since the summer of June 2023, but forthcoming work with them is covered in Section 5. And the impact of strong connections with data analysis in the local authority, is explored in more detail in Report 4.

### 4.1 Engaging with parents and families: Charleston Matters

CLD leads in Charleston set up regular weekly sessions from May 2023 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 8-18 families attending, amounting to 50-60 people in total each week at each venue.

Their approach was grounded in a deep understanding of the challenges families face, and carefully thought through: engaging with families directly to understand their needs and interests, with the aim of empowering parents and fostering an environment where parents and practitioners can support one another.

Feedback from families was very positive. They appreciated 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.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://wm2u.co.uk/resource/where-should-we-look-system-change>

<sup>12</sup> The 'working alongside' approach of the local coordinator is explored in more depth in Section 1 of this report.



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*“My bairns are all different ages, and we don’t get to eat together at home...Here the food is provided for free..and we eat as a family, it feels good! I also enjoy speaking to people that I don’t know, it’s open and sociable and for the whole family. I can also access other support from this project.”*  
(Dundee parent, 2023)

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*“I usually spend time with my Mum so being here helps me feel less isolated as I am with my whole family and other families.”* (Dundee child, 2023)

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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. Coming together in a safe environment has meant that parents are noticing improvements in their mental health. They have been able to participate in 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. Since September 2023, the parents have been running the sessions themselves.

In October 2023, a group of nine women from Charleston attended a three-day residential VBLE supported by two of the CLD team. This was deeply transformational on a personal level:

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*“I feel like I have unlocked a whole new part of myself that I never thought I would explore. It has giving me a new outlook on a range of aspects in my life, I feel different, I think differently, and I am in a much more positive place mentally. I have been stuck for a while, but now I am ready to do something, be something! It has opened my eyes to what I can be. I am excited to use these new skills to continue to take on new learning opportunities and grow as a person. The whole experience has been an amazing opportunity that I am truly grateful to have been a part of.”* (Dundee parent, 2023)

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Their confidence had an impact on their families and on the community. Most shared that they felt like better parents, with happier relationships with their children. And, since then, the group have taken part in training to set up their own organisation (funded by WM2U and delivered by the Circle a local social enterprise) and have been supported by CLD staff to become constituted as a group, known as “Charleston Matters”. They are fundraising locally so that they can set up more activities for young people in the area and some have individual aspirations to undertake further training and development. They speak

compellingly about their ambitions to funders, strategic leaders and other community groups and have received some TV coverage brokered by the WM2U coordinator.<sup>13</sup>

## 4.2 Engaging with parents and families: Kirkton

The Kirkton story has similarities and differences. Seven families were referred by the local primary school to another CLD hosted activity, which was modelled on the Charleston experience. The careful approach and advocacy of the CLD team at the *Family Fun Nights* has enabled the parents to develop trust that it is worth sharing their concerns and aspirations. The team have advocated for them with other services to maximise their financial benefits and address housing issues. And the parents have grown in confidence. One has set up his own men's group:

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*"There are loads of groups for women and children, but men aren't always going to open up in them. I have got mental health issues myself and I know that men need a space to talk about that. They aren't going to talk straight away, and they need to talk alongside doing something else like playing pool or making models. We can share our skills like some of us are good at DIY, someone else is a chef. Some guys in the group are older, and no longer working. My employer really likes that I am doing this and gives me time to do it. I am learning new skills myself and finding my voice."* (Dundee parent 2024)

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Again, it has been remarkable to see how quickly members of the original parents' group have become willing to speak out about what matters to them: to funders, strategic leaders and other community groups. One of the group has attended the Local Community Planning Partnership meeting, another has been sharing her experience with kinship carers across Dundee, one has participated in a CLD Podcast to be shared online,<sup>14</sup> and several have trained in first aid and food hygiene so that they can contribute to the running of the community café.

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*"WM2U is a place where you can be heard, having a voice that isn't dismissed... help you can't find on the internet or the opportunity to do different things that you might thought was possible. I have come a long way from last year thanks to everyone in WM2U. My son is interacting with children all different ages and from different schools and that has helped him being more comfortable with others around him. Being able to be yourself*

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<sup>13</sup> <https://wm2u.co.uk/our-video>  
<https://wm2u.co.uk/news/charleston-matters-stv-news>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.linkedin.com/company/what-matters-2-you/posts/?feedView=all>

*without being judged has always been one of my fears, but thanks to WM2U that has changed me for the better.” (Dundee parent 2024)<sup>15</sup>*

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In summary, families in Charleston and Kirkton have voice, agency and are at the heart of change for themselves and others. The families have spoken of feeling listened to, feeling an increased sense of self-worth, joy and confidence and feeling more connected to one another and to professionals. The families have a place in the community where they can share and overcome challenges and are getting support to manage the challenges that can come with being a parent or carer.

### 4.3 Securing Funding

The small grants provided by WM2U 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 work at a deeper level and address underlying individual and organisational issues.

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.

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*“Working with WM2U has been such a remarkable journey, and it has been great to see projects develop meaningfully and at the right pace. WM2U has been so supportive, and we have delivered similar work like this in the past, but through the WM2U funds we have developed sustainable projects, complemented by the VBLE’s and The Circle. Charleston Matters are now fundraising for themselves, and they are passionate about raising funds, so we aren’t worried about sustainability. The passion and momentum of the family’s progression is exciting and inspiring, and we are hearing parents say when they look at the work of Charleston Matters “that will be us next year, we can do that!” (CLD team member, 2024)*

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<sup>15</sup> For the full story see <https://prezi.com/i/mcz2-hn1acv5/24-25-qtr-1-wm2u-personal-development/>

## 4.4 Engaging with Services

Over time parents have opened up about what good support might look like for them.

Again, the sense that they are being listened to has helped them to talk about what they need for themselves and for their local area. Supporting individual parents to find solutions for particular issues has been crucial in developing trusting relationships and enabling people to move from 'private troubles to public issues'.<sup>16</sup> 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. Overcoming these barriers takes time<sup>17</sup>, but has led to structural changes which benefit the whole community.<sup>18</sup>

CLD managers have noted the importance of support from senior management and the imperative to see more engagement from other services:

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*"This is community work... bringing in other partners is what makes the difference... if we have the families coming at it from the ground up.. the cultural shift for practitioners needs to come from the top down...it is a preventative model... less people will need social work intervention... it has to be seen as more than just what CLD does." (CLD manager 2023)*

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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 have highlighted these issues through the Local Community Planning process and local people have begun bringing them to Café Conversations.

## 4.5 Amplifying voice through Café Conversations

The local Café Conversation process was developed by the WM2U delivery team and the learning partner to amplify the voice of local people and support them to develop solutions to local issues alongside local practitioners and strategic leaders. The design is deliberately informal and carefully facilitated with an emphasis on learning from the direct experience of both practitioners and community members equally.

The first Café Conversation was held in Menzieshill in December 2023, attended by local people and practitioners from CLD, housing, the fire and rescue service and the third sector. Local people shared stories about housing challenges and difficulties accessing support and practitioners asked for senior leaders for permission to 'do things differently'. The discussion was illuminating, and the conversation ended with a poem recited by a

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<sup>16</sup> This phrase is commonly used in community development practice and the CLD team describe this process in their story, The Sociological Imagination (1959) C. Wright Mills.

<sup>17</sup> See the fence story [www.WM2U.co.uk](http://www.WM2U.co.uk)

<sup>18</sup> See Michelle's story [www.WM2U.co.uk](http://www.WM2U.co.uk)

community member. The Service Manager for Housing attended with two of her tenancy officers:

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*"I haven't been in post long, but I knew there were some difficulties in getting things done for people in communities. The CLD team invited me to come along to the Café Conversation in Menzieshill to find out more. It was enlightening. I was embarrassed by some peoples' experience of the housing service. I am glad I know now because we can do something about it ."*

(Dundee Service Manager Housing 2024)

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The service manager has gone on to change the way the service is structured releasing more of the team to work in local communities.<sup>19</sup>

One of those tenancy officers spoke about his new approach to working directly with tenants at the second Café Conversation in Kirkton in March 2024.<sup>20</sup>

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*"I have been given the flexibility and leeway from my manager to work differently and I feel supported to move forward without obstacles."* (Dundee practitioner 2024)

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Café Conversations have now become a fundamental part of the WM2U approach in Dundee and will be facilitated by the CLD and WM2U team across the city over the next two years. This approach is seen as a way to refresh the long-standing statutory requirement for Local Community Planning Partnerships, allowing a more informal, engaging and exploratory collaborative space.

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*"The Café Conversations can be a new way of operating the Local Community Planning Partnerships, which have been running for 22 years. We still have a legal duty to have the LCPPs and plans, and we want to explore how they can work better for people because although they have their successes, they are extremely technical. The Café Conversations allow a different dynamic because they can create space for exploration of issues and perspectives with a focus on what can be achieved together."* (CLD Manager 2024)

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<sup>19</sup> For further details see <https://wm2u.co.uk/limited-conversation-problem>

## 5. Extending and embedding the approach across Dundee (2024)

In January 2024, the Oversight and Enabling Board agreed to carry on the work in the North West of the city and extend WM2U into the North East to build on existing connections between the CLD teams and members of the Board, with the ultimate aim of extending the approach throughout the city.

### 5.1 Local and targeted Values Based Leadership Experiences

Multi-agency practitioners from Whitfield attended a VBLE in May 2024. They valued the opportunity it gave them to connect and were inspired to work together on practical ways, focusing on help for young people to maintain tenancies and supporting local people to have a community space where they feel welcome, can support one another and access local practitioners when they need to. One GP immediately saw the value in connecting with others working in the local community to support health and wellbeing and reduce the reliance of people on GPs. She has subsequently worked with other local practitioners, on what they refer to as 'handholding instead of signposting', where patients are introduced to community workers and the GP Practice administrative staff are encouraged to attend community events.

Practitioners working with children and young people have also seen practical benefits arising from their values-based leadership experiences. In May 2024 WM2U ran a VBLE with a particular focus on collaboration between youth workers and teachers working in three schools. Participants used the opportunity to develop multiple plans to work together on supporting children and young people to have a strong voice in how school facilities are used particularly out of hours; engage in activities which work for them (like football at the leisure centre) and take part in the Columba 1400 Young Peoples Leadership Academies (YPLA) planned for later in 2024.

### 5.2 Continuing support to Strategic Leaders

In January 2024, the Hunter Foundation met with the Chief Executive of Dundee City Council who agreed to support the WM2U approach in his monthly video and at the Corporate Leadership Conference in May 2024. WM2U worked with Dundee City Council to co-design this event, highlighting the impact of WM2U and using it as an opportunity to showcase the Charleston Matters video. This was a powerful way of demonstrating the difference the approach makes and has enabled leaders to genuinely celebrate success at a time when they were beset by seemingly intransigent problems.

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*"It is great to connect with local people and hear the positive stories about the impact on their lives. They feel stronger as parents and community members and empowered to do something about the challenges they face."*

(Senior Leader 2024)

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Whilst mindful of the political and financial challenges they face, senior leaders made commitments to:

- reduce silos and duplication and maximising the impact of services within the limited resources available
- create synergy across the Council
- intentionally include the hardly reached and seldom heard
- engage in meaningful engagement with communities.

### 5.3 Integrating the WM2U approach

There is evidence to show that the WM2U approach is having an impact on existing structures, particularly Local Community Planning Partnerships, where the potential for involving parents is being highlighted. Parents who have been supported by CLD through WM2U are beginning to attend these meetings, and make their views known. Progress is being supported by Senior Leaders, who chair Local Community Planning Partnerships; the presence of the WM2U Coordinator and the input of the Senior Research and Information Officer, who is exploring how we can use data to improve services and support in communities. This will also provide WM2U and local leaders with the opportunity to underline the relevance of voice-led community approaches to elected members, which is an area of priority development for 2024-2026.

### 5.4 Continuing engagement with local practitioners and families

WM2U is continuing to work alongside CLD teams in Lochee, Strathmartine and Whitfield supporting activities such as:

- engagement activities in Ardler and in Whitfield for young people and families
- enabling photography students from Dundee and Angus College to make a film showcasing the 'Guid Stuff of Kirkton', dedicated to highlighting what is working in the area to counterbalance the negative press coverage it often attracts
- refurbishing the Gynaecology Assessment Unit (GAU) ward at Ninewells Hospital to create a warmer and more comfortable place for women and girls seeking early terminations. The next phase of this initiative will involve a video aimed at young people to support them to make healthy choices.
- VBLEs planned for parents and for practitioners across all three wards - Lochee, Strathmartine and North East (Whitfield).
- The development of a Make it Happen Fund run by local people in Lochee, Strathmartine and North East (Whitfield)
- A short focused VBLE for elected members and then further tailored support for them as required.
- A reconnect session for all those who have participated in VBLEs in the past two years in early 2025.

The CLD Manager for Dundee City Council explained how his understanding of what WM2U offers has developed:



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*"I was initially somewhat unsure of how CLD could work alongside WM2U because it did not feel like anything 'new'.. But as the work has progressed.., it has allowed us to reflect on how we can improve CLD practice... In the past we sometimes rushed to the next steps without exploring in-depth what community members wanted and needed, including what gets in the way, and how to navigate challenges. Working with WM2U has really changed how we practice and how we can organise CLD in the city moving forward." (CLD manager, 2024*

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## 6. Leading indicators: progress and prospects

Figure 3.1 in section 3 shows three sets of leading indicators for parents, practitioners and senior leaders, reflecting their shared interests and common desired outcomes. These point to signs of emergent and systemic change. This section explores these signs of change, what has enabled them, what has got in the way and what that all means for the future.

### 6.1 Leadership: creating the strategic conditions for change

The WM2U Oversight and Enabling Board was set up in December 2021, chaired by the Executive Director of Children and Families in Dundee City Council. It meets 3-4 times a year to consider what difference WM2U is making and what support it needs at a leadership level from across the local authority and beyond. The membership includes Police, Housing, Health, Social Work, Community Learning and Development, the Voluntary Sector and Education who share a dual role: focused both on accountability and on taking the time to learn together.

The Oversight and Enabling Board has always been in favour of the WM2U approach. In November 2022, it signed off the ambition to deepen and scale the work through working with the CLD team across the city. It has continuously made links between the work of WM2U and other initiatives in the city. It has supported dedicated time from the Dundee City Council Senior Research and Information Officer, endorsed the commitment to support practitioners to work with their colleagues to tackle 'simple' problems early on and adapt locality governance arrangements to give families a stronger voice in decision making about resources. Senior leaders have participated in local Café Conversations and their presence has been noted and appreciated by practitioners. It is clear that:

- Strategic leaders are doing some things in a really different way which suits the needs of families better and responding to them with flexible family support.
- They are shining a light on what is going well and the complexities.
- Positive relationships are beginning to develop, and positive stories are beginning to emerge as there is more sustained participation of children and families in planning, designing, developing and using support.

Over time the senior leaders have become clearer about what WM2U can do and how it aligns with the broader public sector reform agenda of responding to local communities in a more integrated way, building from the small-scale practices that the WM2U approach supports to being able to adopt these approaches across the whole system.

### 6.2 Tipping the balance of resources towards prevention

The shared ambition to tip the balance of resources towards prevention is high on their agenda. With the support of the Strategic Leaders, the Dundee Whole Family Wellbeing Fund has funded a secondment to WM2U from February 2024, now with an extension to 2026.

Building on the System Dynamics informed 'stock and flow' methodology developed by the WM2U learning partners, the work focuses on the development of better understanding of how families interact with the education and social work system.

- The analysis has challenged the commonly held view that children escalate or de-escalate through the system step by step. An important finding is that there isn't a simple 'upstream location' (prior to crisis) in which to invest.
- The data analysis has found that children and young people experienced many more moves and services hidden below the surface of standard data reporting, evidencing that the numbers need to be examined closely to reveal more of their experience.
- The analysis has begun to change conversations about what happens to children and young people in the system, generating questions from strategic leaders and local practitioners about how services can support vulnerable children and families more effectively.
- The developing methodology facilitates focused analysis of smaller subsets for example, looking more deeply at children and young people returning from external residential placements to Dundee placements, or on pupils who became social work cases without interim GIRFEC steps, such as team around the child meetings.

Such analysis is being supplemented by individual stories of particular children, for a more qualitative understanding of what happened, taking into account the views of practitioners and wherever possible, children themselves.

In June 2024 the Oversight and Enabling Board considered what lessons they could learn from the story of a child who has moved back into the city<sup>21</sup>: celebrating the commitment shown by individual practitioners to the child's safety and happiness, questioning why the child's experience of support has been so disjointed and reinforcing their commitment to putting more resource into keeping children with their families or in successful foster placements whenever possible.

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*"Tell us the stories we can learn from... about how we need to change our culture."* (Strategic Leader 2024)

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The secondment of the Dundee Senior Research and Information Officer is invaluable in several different ways. She is highly experienced, well informed about how the local authority and its partners work, and enthusiastic about blending quantitative and qualitative data for the purposes of improving the lives of the families who need it most. Significantly, she is trusted by local practitioners and strategic leaders:

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<sup>21</sup> See Moving Back story:

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*"[this] data is the most sophisticated and forensic set of data we have ever had...instead of being defensive we can be curious."* (Strategic Leader, 2024)

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Ultimately, we anticipate that this work will provide a tool to explore where to intervene in the system and will highlight changes that previously were unnoticed. It will also enable an assessment of the potential scale of impact of such changes, the likely impact on the GIRFEC levels and may challenge assumptions of simple savings or investments. For example, short-term savings in placements costs may be welcomed, but may displace costs to other parts of the system or be outweighed by poorer long-term outcomes.

In 2024-25, the Strategic Leaders on the Oversight and Enabling Board agreed to consider how to channel savings from reducing the cost of children being in care or intensive support out of area into preventative work. This was no easy commitment to make, given the context in which they face the loss of £18m funding. They are increasingly willing to talk about difficult issues, to admit some services are not as good as they should be and that identifying where to save money is very challenging.

One of the strategic leaders with long standing involvement has noted how the original intention of WM2U to focus on 100 children on 'the edge of care' has evolved into direct work with local communities to build their capacity and self-efficacy, for practical reasons.

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*"We learned early on that no community member would have been willing to participate on the basis that their child was on the 'edge of care'."* (Strategic Leader 2024)

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His advice to others would be to ensure full buy-in at a strategic leadership level, clarity about purpose and values and a focus on approaches which:

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*"...put young people and their families front and centre of everything we do...value them, adopt a strengths-based approach, help them to address practicalities and enable them to grow."* (Strategic Leader 2024)

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Dundee City Council strategic leaders are fully supportive of the approach and are keen to examine the data being gathered by WM2U and partners which will show how preventative

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<sup>22</sup> In our first Literature Review we noted how whilst 'the edge of care' concept can be useful in framing a strategic purpose for the work, it is stigmatising language which alienates families.

<https://wm2u.co.uk/resource/brief-literature-review>

spend can improve outcomes for young people and reduce long term financial costs to support their attempts to spend more on prevention.

## 7. Overview of impact and prospects

### 7.1 What outcomes have been achieved?

After a gradual start in which foundations were laid, but progress was limited, the pace of change has accelerated in the last two years. 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. Tangible, practical differences are important to maintain momentum, bringing more people onboard and growing the ambition.

Important outcomes and achievements are:

- **A positive difference on the ground:** families in Charleston, Kirkton, Ardler and Whitfield are all benefiting from the additional activities being run by CLD and supported by WM2U.
- **A sense of belonging to a valued group, feeling that you matter and are valued within it:** parents have set up groups supported by CLD in both Charleston and Kirkton. These groups are places where they feel valued and supported but also places where they can bring additional value to the community. Parents are now leading on providing activities for other local families and fundraising for their local communities.
- **Real supportive support:** the trust developed between parents and CLD teams has led to people receiving support with health, finances and housing. But beyond that it has also led to changes in structures and services, that whilst modest are significant: the CLD manager recognises how WM2U has changed the way the teams practice across the city and the potential to make Local Community Planning Partnership more inclusive. The Service Manager for Housing has restructured her service to be more accessible to community members.
- **Better mental health for children and families:** parents testify to better mental health for themselves and their children as a direct consequence of attending VBLEs and participating in family activities.
- **A sense of looking towards a positive future:** the growth of safety and trust has encouraged individual and collective agency amongst community members and practitioners, who are now hopeful that the achievements so far will be built on and replicated in other areas. Sharing parents, practitioners and senior leaders stories has engendered hope and been a stimulus for change. The video telling the story of the Charleston Women has been well received as authentic and inspirational and has been shared widely. The Housing Service Manager's story has been used to illustrate how a leader can use the authority they have to change a structure in response to the voice of community members.

## 7.2 Conclusions and implications for Dundee

In Dundee, there is agreement about the overall purpose of WM2U and the shared ambition for early intervention and preventative approaches for children and families. Progress towards the leading indicators for parents, practitioners and strategic leaders is encouraging and we are seeing clear progress towards the high-level outcomes detailed above.

**Emerging signs of system change:** The emergence of more relational and systemic practices amongst the different stakeholders are *necessary* conditions for scaling deep to achieve system change.<sup>23</sup>

The examples and stories shared here are important, motivating and valuable but in themselves, are not sufficient evidence of system change. However, over the last two years some progress has been made towards system change: there are some important shifts in thinking and practices, necessary to see any wider or deeper impact of WM2U at scale.

- Amongst community members, there are positive challenges to the ways that they have thought about themselves and their own agency in relation to their lives and those of others in their communities, with the emergence of new community-led activities.
- With the support of strategic leaders, practitioners have also experienced a shift in mindsets and of their own agency, taking up their desire to act on their values to support community-led change.
- The involvement of strategic leaders is recognising and beginning to change the formal and institutional structures that are no longer working for the benefit of communities. This holds out the prospect of finding ways to embed more positive and responsive practices within the governance and accountability structures in operation, address power imbalances and devolve decision making as much as possible.
- The WM2U team, together with strategic leaders is adopting a careful approach to building on learning to extend the approach by adapting it to local circumstances, rather than seeking to mandate or 'roll out' a programme. Again, this is in recognition that true 'scaling' depends ultimately on the embedding of new practices through the adoption and adaptation of effective practices.

The evidence points to a common vision and purpose amongst different stakeholder groups and a clear sense that they can only achieve it together. New spaces are being created for listening and understanding each other's perspectives and most importantly acting together to develop ways forward. Mutual understanding and acknowledgement of strengths and capabilities is growing and there is a fresh willingness to work together.

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<sup>23</sup> <https://wm2u.co.uk/resource/where-should-we-look-system-change>

## **Significant enabling factors include:**

**Support to Strategic Leaders:** over the past five years, the funder and the programme manager and have invested considerable time working directly with Strategic Leaders in Dundee City Council, including the Chief Executive, building trust, ensuring that they understand each other's perspectives and imperatives and aligning WM2U to the goals of strategic leaders for the city.

**Putting Values into Practice:** There is real evidence that people at all levels, community members, practitioners and strategic leaders have found ways of putting their values into practice supporting one another and contributing to improving their communities:

The Columba 1400 Values Based Leadership Experiences have played an important part in inspiring local leaders, practitioners and community members to refocus on their values and believe in their own capacity to make a difference. They are consistently mentioned as influential by practitioners and the Charleston Women testify to it being a life-changing experience<sup>24</sup>. Just giving senior leaders the time to think together led to significant changes.

**Resourcing an internal team:** the positioning of CLD within WM2U has been a critical factor as it was only when the WM2U delivery team really began to understand, appreciate and resource the capacity of Community Learning and Development local practitioners that the approach became well-grounded and able to proceed at pace.

**Speedy access to small amounts of money:** WM2U has provided small grants to meet the immediate needs of local people, local initiatives and local organisations. This has both generated trust and enabled more community participation.

**Using the data to understand how to tip the balance towards prevention:** the assumption that children escalate or de-escalate through the system step by step has been challenged and we have learned that here isn't a simple 'upstream location' (prior to crisis) in which to invest. This on-going data analysis by Dundee's Senior Research and Information Officer has begun to change conversations about what happens to children and young people in the system, generating questions from strategic leaders and local practitioners about more effective support. This continuing work raises the prospect of making data-informed judgements about the questions at the heart of system change such as where to invest early to ensure that fewer children experience care in the future.

**Convening conversations:** The Café Conversations have provided an opportunity for WM2U to convene community members, local practitioners, strategic leaders and now elected members giving them a space to develop local solutions, whose applicability can be tested in other areas. These are proving invaluable opportunities to connect and leading to concrete examples of change such as the restructuring of housing support.

**Trust in the funders:** In March 2024, the funding partners, drawing on the insights of the delivery and learning team, codified their experience into five key components of system

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<sup>24</sup> See Charleston Women story

change. Their first component was creating the conditions for change through leadership and culture and trust. The funders have been consistently visible in Dundee over the past five years: in local communities, regular attenders of the Oversight and Enabling Board, organising a special site-specific meeting of the WM2U Programme Board and using their contacts to influence at a national level whenever possible. They have extended the work and investment twice and it is now not due to conclude until 2026. This has earned them the trust of senior leaders, local practitioners and community members.

**Commitment to Learning:** Over the course of five years the WM2U has experimented with new approaches, built on what has worked and learned from what didn't.

- Initially WM2U underestimated how core community learning and development practice would be to the success of the approach, meaning that the CLD team were underused for the first three years. Since then, WM2U has forged strong and highly effective partnerships with CLD managers enabling community members to have a voice locally which can be amplified city-wide.
- The VBLEs have always been well evaluated by participants, but their impact wasn't harnessed for system change purposes until they were locality based and complemented by the work of the Community Learning and Development Team and the new Project Lead from the summer of 2022 onwards. Now, the WM2U local coordinator works closely with Columba 1400, the local CLD managers and wider practitioners to ensure that VBLE cohorts have a clear, common purpose and a local focus.
- The Lens programme generated enthusiasm and excitement at the time, but it led to only one sustained initiative (the Street Soccer youth provision) and ultimately this wasn't voice led.<sup>25</sup> Local people and practitioners found it hard to generate grassroots initiatives within the short timescales allowed. New initiatives are now created by local people at their own pace and supported by known practitioners.
- The stories and insights generated by the learning partner team are an important part of the commitment to learning. They can show potential, such as the significant impact of discretion exercised by a housing officer or highlight the ongoing impact on community members of bureaucratic processes and the lack of service integration.

### 7.3 Prospects and ongoing challenges

This is work in progress. Creating the conditions in which everyone can feel confident and safe to ask difficult questions and voice disagreement is an ongoing challenge. The child's voice has been almost absent from the work so far and will be a clear focus moving forward, reflecting recent revisions to the WM2U voice strategy.<sup>26</sup> The WM2U team is committed to supporting system change in Dundee until 2026.

The strategy is to enhance the investment in WM2U building on the progress and learning to date. The work with Community Learning and Development practitioners will extend

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<sup>25</sup> <https://wm2u.co.uk/resource/where-should-we-look-system-change>

<sup>26</sup> See Report 1



across the city. This will be led by the WM2U local coordinator with VBLEs supporting parents and practitioners at every level. The voice of young people will be amplified through Young People's Leadership Academies. Café Conversations will be extended throughout the city and over time will strength the Local Community Planning Partnerships ability to engage and respond effectively to local people. The data project will focus on how to shift investment to prevention whilst continuing to develop understanding of how children and families move through the 'system'. The Make it Happen Fund, led by local people will be able to make small but significant investments in projects and community organisations. The learning partner will continue to host spaces in which the WM2U team, practitioners and community members can listen to one another, reflect and finds ways forward detailing insights generated in learning briefings. These insights will be used to inform discussion at the Oversight and Enabling Board which will be accountable for progress across the whole.

There are big challenges to confront: local people will continue to be impacted by the cost of living crisis, mental health issues, which impact in particular on younger people, and addictions to alcohol and drugs. Budget restrictions mean that services valued by the local community will almost certainly be lost. Collaboration between services and initiatives will be more essential than ever to ensure resources are well used, which requires commitment from practitioners, community members and strategic leaders.

The strategic leaders leading indicators identify that 'shining a light on what is going well' needs to be accompanied by being open about the complexities. These complexities and contradictions reflect the very real dilemmas of local government faced with significant financial restrictions. For example:

- Although there is no doubt that community members are feeling heard, they are unable to influence some decisions. Financial constraints mean that community centres are being closed despite local opposition, and although new ones are planned there will be a long period with significantly less provision.
- Senior leaders would like community members to treat 365 Schools' as a community resource, but these are unavailable during school hours and not always acceptable to local people some of whom don't feel comfortable in an educational building.

There is no clear view yet of which interventions provide the right support at the right time to families who need it most and thereby keep children with their families or in their communities. And therefore, there is no clear way for any funder to make well informed decisions about what to fund. Instead, there are multiple overlapping initiatives, some of which seem to be highly effective and others about whose impact, little is known.

The WM2U approach to learning through the development of the learning framework, story gathering and System Dynamics informed analysis offers the potential to capture and analyse the impact on families of different interventions using the GIRFEC levels of intervention as a proxy measure of wellbeing.<sup>27</sup> The long-term aim is to understand the

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<sup>27</sup> This is discussed more fully in Report 4.

relationship between interventions, costs and outcomes and identify where early intervention and prevention might be better value.

WM2U has worked with the local authority and the voluntary sector. Staff from voluntary sector organisations have participated in VBLEs and have used these opportunities to forge stronger partnerships with local CLD practitioners. Their work is often highly valued by community members. But there is still no citywide understanding of how the voluntary sector can work most effectively with the statutory sector to provide consistent support to the families who need it most, which makes it difficult to work effectively in collaboration. This issue is recognised by strategic leaders:

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*“At present, we have multiple partners delivering various services and highlighting their niche via specialist themes to compete for funding. Instead, we need flexible family support which focuses on the holistic and ever-changing needs of vulnerable families.”* (Strategic Leader 2024)

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Strategic leaders still struggle with the way funding is allocated to the local authority by Scottish Government in separate funding streams with separate reporting mechanisms which encourages siloed working and makes being accountable very time consuming.

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*“All of it could be under the banner of reducing child poverty.”* (Strategic Leader 2024)

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The WM2U Make it Happen Fund has been slow to get started. An initial trial in 2021 showed how small amounts of money can make a significant difference supporting the wellbeing of parents and children enabling them to fix bikes or take classes. In practice these small grants have continued but it has taken time to set up the scheme more formally. The governance surrounding a fund run by families, giving money directly to families in ways that don't impact on their benefits and satisfy the governance requirements of funders is challenging.

The WM2U team are committed to continuing to support Dundee City Council to be candid about these challenges, to listen to the voice of local people, to notice and celebrate success and to stand by its commitment to improve. During the next two years, it will need to find a way to replace the external support provided by the local coordinator and to reprioritise resources so that local people and local practitioners have what they need to own and make the changes required in local communities.

## Bibliography of Learning Partner and Funders Reports

These reports are all available on the WM2U website. <https://wm2u.co.uk/>

### Codifying Our Learning to Support Scale, Funders Report (April 2024)

Written by the funders, this paper sets out their current practice wisdom, learning from the ongoing learning and evaluation and supported by lessons from the literature and practice reviews.

### Where Should We Look for System Change? Learning Update (August 2023)

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.

### Practising What We All Preach (August 2023)

WM2U and the Nest Wellbeing Group co-hosted a local “Grow as We Go” learning event in June 2023. The report highlights the importance of opening clear and constructive dialogues between communities, the families that live within them and service providers as a tool to enact useful change and provide ‘supportive support’.

### What Would Young People Like Adults to Know? (July 2023)

The “Hope-Hack” (Hackathon) was a full-day, large-scale event for young people held in June 2023 at Ayrshire College in Kilmarnock. This briefing is based on the perspectives of those adults that acted as facilitators and is designed to be shared amongst all those with an interest in enhancing the voice and agency of young people in East Ayrshire.

### WM2U Contributing to Systems Change (March 2023)

This is a short policy-oriented briefing that highlights the potential for a ‘WM2U approach’ to contribute to the practical realisation of the goals of public service reform.

### WM2U Literature and Practice Review (December 2022)

This review explores national and international allied developments amongst those looking to achieve system change in policy and community contexts similar to those of WM2U. It provides a brief synopsis of initiatives or reports that are of most relevance or have been highlighted recently as being of likely interest, supplemented by several accounts of practice.

### Our Digest of Practice Lessons (December 2022)

A short digest of the key elements from the Literature and Practice Review.

### What Matters to You: How Do We Go to Scale? Interim Report (March 2021)

This interim report sets the scene at an important juncture of the work of WM2U, to inform decisions about the future direction of the work. It draws on material from earlier reports dating back to the commencement of the work in early 2019.

## What Matters to You: a Brief Literature Review (December 2019)

This small-scale scoping review helps to position the WM2U approach in a context of what is known about work with children on the edges of care and place-based approaches to system change – and the connections between the two areas of work.