Measures that Matter

Report 4 - What Matters to You: Evaluation Reports 2024

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Acknowledgements and thanks

Thanks are due to very many people who have contributed to the work of WM2U in East Ayrshire and Dundee over the years.

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.

Evaluation is an important part of the prevailing model of public service, that can influence decisions about policy and funding and yet, can feel abstract and remote. In drawing conclusions, we have given weight to the views of parents and community members, as their perspectives are so often not heard or discounted. The stories that inform this work ground it in the human realities of life in communities. Ultimately, the willingness of parents to engage in learning together have contributed to our belief that it is possible to move towards a more collective accountability for improving the opportunities for families in our communities. Their engagement has helped to create a stronger ethic of mutual care and learning, where we all pay attention to our values, to the trust and relationships between us, and the responsibilities we have towards each other. This report is written in service of those ambitions.

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.

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Glossary of Terms and Acronyms

Columba 1400: A key delivery partner of What Matters to You, Columba 1400 faciliate 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 teram 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 faciliation, learning, research and evaluation and System Dynamics. 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 2 day residential programmes, with an initial meeting and a reconnector 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.

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.[1] Now in 2024 we are issuing *"Becoming Allies in Change"* a Learning Digest that summaries 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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[1] https://wm2u.co.uk/our-reports

Executive Summary

What Matters to You (WM2U) has been working alongside families in Dundee and East Ayrshire to change the way support is offered in communities since 2018. The specific ambition is to move public resources to offer support earlier enabling children to flourish within their own families. WM2U takes place in the context of long-standing ambitions for public service reform, alongside a range of national and local interventions including The Promise and the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund that seek to support early intervention and prevention.

The ambition of 'system change' demands that we think differently about how we define and measure success. The need to engage with a wide range of people, take time and emphasise continuous learning and adaption has had to contend with systemic taken-for-granted mindsets and reporting practices that favour a quick pace, more familiar metrics and simplistic silver-bullet short term solutions.

This report is dedicated to the fuller exploration of learning in relation to the conceptual, empirical and practical dimensions of the measurement of impact. Our learning is likely to be relevant to all those interested in programmes and interventions that seek to demonstrate shifts to early intervention and prevention.

The WM2U learning partner work has helped to air and challenge ways of thinking about change, going to scale and measuring impact. Our ambition has always been to approach learning in a way which is congruent with the aims of WM2U.

> *"We want to measure what matters, because it matters, rather than because the data is available."* (Learning Partner Update to the East Ayrshire Strategic Board, August 2020)

Key insights

Both qualitative and quantitative data are vital. Making better use of combined numerical data and stories can generate possibilities for wider and deeper understanding of what matters and a more insightful and collaborative analysis for planning, improvement and evaluation.

Co-designing a learning framework with leading indicators

- The co-design of the WM2U learning framework with parents, practitioners, senior leaders and the WM2U Programme Board has enabled discussion and agreement about the desired on-the-ground changes amongst the different stakeholders.

- The framework includes five high-level outcomes and sets of leading indicators: together these underline the shared vision, allow for differences in perspectives, and show how what matters to families, practitioners, and strategic leaders connects with the expectations of the funders of WM2U.

- The leading indicators point to signs of emergent and systemic change, shifts in the mindsets, practices, and behaviours that are often taken for granted, unexplored or unnoticed, including the development of trust, safety, mutual understanding and a willingness to work together.

- Such qualities are often dismissed as intangible: bringing them to light in this way makes the changes we want to see and how to work together much more discussable and brings about a deeper mutual understanding of the nature of the shared journey to change.

- As 'measures' the leading indicators help to identify changes that enable the demonstration that WM2U is on the right track or that the course should be altered. This provides feedback and motivation to those involved, even before it is possible to identify and measure better outcomes at the population level. Leading indicators illuminate progress but are less about measuring distance travelled, than providing a framing and language to talk about achievements, contributions and learning.

- Our learning demonstrates that participatory and qualitative methods, including the involvement of parents as community researchers, are well suited to provide, deepen and share insight with others, to create shared ambitions, foreground learning, enable collective sensemaking, and generate valid evidence of emergent and systemic change.

What we can do with our stories

- We have learnt much about what we can do with our stories: they enable a more inclusive, collaborative and iterative approach to sensemaking.

- The various qualitative inquiry approaches we have used have been humanising and levelling, helping to develop new sensitivities to others, vivid and useful examples of ways that good outcomes can be facilitated or frustrated, and point to changes that would make a real difference for families. This can support people to notice and share valued small changes, talk about what still needs to change, and the part that different people might play in that change.

- There is a need to build the confidence and capabilities of people to understand what might be worth sharing, and to help decision-makers understand the validity of qualitative data, including how it can help to understand wider contexts and high-level population change.

- Clarity of purpose, sensitivity to context and how participation and sharing might best be promoted are important lessons for working with stories.

Exploring connections and measuring change for all children and young people

- The iterative process of constructing a System Dynamic (SD) model with key stakeholders led to the creation of 'Connection Explorer', a map of the system that helped people to see their own place in the system and better understand the roles of others. In the light of the development of WM2U as an 'approach' to system change, without identifiable beneficiaries or personal outcomes, the modelling work

has increasingly focused on how to measure the wellbeing of children and young people at an aggregate or population level.

Highlighting data needs, gaps and analytical possibilities

Our original assumptions about data abundance and availability have been overturned: in seeking to measure what matters to funders and local authorities, we had not anticipated the absence of appropriate, consistent quantitative data to measure the impact of prevention and early intervention on the whole population of children and young people. Important insights from the modelling element of our work are:

- Local authorities conceptualise their service responses in relation to the widely recognised GIRFEC levels, although GIRFEC is not used as a measurement framework: this means that neither local authority with which WM2U is engaged could provide data to gauge the numbers of children at each GIRFEC level at specific points in time.

- Data is held in different data sets operated by education, social work, and various parts of the health system that would need to be linked to provide the summary measure of GIRFEC level of intervention.

- This is a strategic challenge for all programmes or interventions, and probably for all Scottish Local Authorities and highlights the lack of integrated and holistic evaluative information about population level outcomes for children and families.

- WM2U introduced SD informed methodology which highlighted the significant analytical limitations of relying on snapshot or dashboard data, despite the prevalence of this approach to data presentation. In essence, face-value interpretations of data presented as numbers or 'stocks' (whether they are stable, rising or falling), can miss the underlying contributory in- or out-flows that affect how those numbers change.

- Our analysis shows that information about flows is critical to understanding what is going on, noting that this kind of movement is familiar to practitioners, children and young people and their families, but readily missed by senior managers because of the prevailing forms and limits of analysis.

- An important lesson is that there is no one 'upstream location' (prior to crisis) in which to invest: an assumption that may reflect deficit and service-led ways of understanding and views of children's needs as events which require a service-led response.

- Revealing the sometimes-surprising volumes involved in the flows raises useful questions for planning and practice and highlights where work might be prioritised.

- There remains continuing scope and appetite for local and national learning about the use of data for evaluation and service improvement.

Reflections on Measures that Matter

Evaluation of impact is perhaps an aspect of public service focused work that has largely been taken for granted or seen as primarily a technical rather than adaptive issue, rather than a crucial part of systemic change: not just measuring change but contributing to it and able to include the active engagement of families in learning processes.

All funders, commissioners and local authorities want to be confident that they will achieve value for their investment, or that funding will be used well; they often look to and sometimes impose complex sets of frameworks and indicators, by default relying heavily on quantitative measurement and prevailing assumptions about data abundance and availability.

Through the development of the learning framework, WM2U has sought to sufficiently reconcile these different interests. However, the realities of data availability and configuration outlined here limits the ability of (probably any) local authorities to identify inefficiencies in systems, create new responses or understand the effective implementation of any intervention to improve the lives of children and families.

Our quality criteria for evaluating system change (Annex 1) set out elements of a different approach to defining and measuring success that have guided our work. We would highlight that:

- the shifts that we seek, in the cultural and organisational values, mindsets, practices, and behaviours (often taken for granted or unnoticed), are not amenable to pre-determined quantitative measures or measures of what has been prevented.
- stories that demonstrate personal outcomes are motivating and valuable and play a key part in understanding change but in themselves, are not evidence of systemic change, of shifting the conditions that keep a problem in place.

Like many other programmes, WM2U has been developed alongside concurrent programmes and initiatives, with similar aims. In considering the traditional approach to the measurement of impact, this reality brings claims of attribution and contribution into sharp focus.

Such situations should be an opportunity for alignment, and challenge to duplication or 'silos' with a chance to develop realistic and shared expectations about measuring impact, genuine accountability for learning and enough reassurance for all parties that time and other resources are being well used.

Engaging with complexity: conclusions and prospects

None of these challenging issues are unique to WM2U. Systems Change is particularly complex work, with many different perspectives at play and for many of those involved, a need to maintain essential services whilst also seeking to bring about improvement. Nevertheless, there is a need to engage more fully with the unavoidable complexity, foregrounding implementation rather than 'delivery', recognising complexity, and viewing implementation as an iterative and adaptive, collaborative process. This might help to

unpick the 'implementation gap' between high-level policy ideals and changing practices on the ground.

This learning explored mental models or 'theories of change' about how system change happens, helped to identify fruitful possibilities to test out ideas for change, and offered an unanticipated, although important systemic lever of influence to use data to improve service responses and measure change at a population level.

The SD modelling process has contributed to the development of the WM2U Strategic Objectives and the indicators in the learning framework, particularly the specific ambition for the WM2U Programme Board and senior leaders to develop the use of data about the whole population of children, which remains an on-going ambition. The learning from the modelling element of the learning partner work is now being taken forward by each local authority. East Ayrshire has taken up the challenge to explore if linkages between datasets can be achieved. Work in Dundee is exploring a new methodology to look at how children move through the system.

Costs and savings remain an issue of great interest, with scope for further exploration, in particular the use of existing databases to generate data will allow the SD model to run with real information and may challenge assumptions of simple savings or return on investments. However, we note that given the ever-harsher financial realities of local government, the assumption that any net savings that can be made will be protected and redirected towards preventative work, rather than being used to reduce deficits will be severely tested.

These insights have been met with recognition and interest amongst national and local stakeholders, reminding people of the complexity of children's lives and practitioner and service responses and bringing further benefits of introducing local authorities to new ways of looking at data and understanding change.

It will take more time for those changes with systemic potential to be truly embedded with long term sustainable impact for the multi-agency system with lasting effects after WM2U funding ends in 2026.

We hope that these insights can assist others in the creation of an approach to learning and evaluation of shifts to prevention and early intervention for children and young people, with wider implications for the development and evaluation of system change more generally.

1. Systemic enablers and barriers to the evaluation of system change

This report explores learning in relation to the conceptual and empirical elements of the measurement of change. It shows an evolution of ideas and practices used to evaluate impact; this learning brought further unanticipated benefits of introducing local authorities to new ways of looking at data and developed wider understanding the measurement of change.

Our learning is likely to be relevant to all those interested in planning and evaluation of programmes and interventions that seek to demonstrate shifts to early intervention and prevention, with wider implications for the evaluation of system change more generally.

We recognise that the evaluation of system change challenges many established perspectives about evidence and how funders and leaders can influence change. Our review of lessons from other system change initiatives across Scotland, the wider UK and internationally suggest that there is scant evidence of the kind of sustainable impact that meets the expectations of funders.[2] A recent review by the Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors (RPA) of international philanthropic efforts to create systems-level impact noted that 'the field is having difficulty coalescing around a shared, collectively vetted body of evidence and wisdom about what really works' and found that despite much talk about system change, there has been little progress in practice towards sustainable change.[3]

1.1 Integrating approaches to evidence

In the absence of any defined pathway for this way of working we have sought to be learning-led. Our initial literature review highlighted the need to develop a learning approach that engages with all partners and involves them in developing a 'Learning Framework'.[4] We wanted to create a culture which values embedded collaborative and experiential learning: our Grow as We Go (GAWG) approach treats learning as a verb, as an essential component of making change, not a phase or something transferred from elsewhere.[5] Over several years we have worked to integrate three core approaches to the generation and use of evidence. They are:

- a recognition of both the importance and limitations of a 'what works' approach
- a commitment to knowledge coproduction and collaborative learning
- an acknowledgement of systemic complexity and the importance of multiple perspectives.[6]

Features of our practice include:

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[2] https://wm2u.co.uk/resource/where-should-we-look-system-change
[3] https://www.rockpa.org/new-report-evaluation-of-the-shifting-systems-initiative
[4] https://wm2u.co.uk/resource/brief-literature-review
[5] Report 1
[6] https://research-for-real.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/CLS-Where-nothing-is-clear-and-everything-keeps-changing-february-2019.pdf

- Drawing on national and international literature, acknowledging that this does not offer clear-cut blueprints that can simply be adopted.
- Engaging families, practitioners, senior leaders and funders closely involved in the evolution of WM2U to develop a common ambition captured in a co-designed Learning Framework.
- Supporting strategy and implementation through understanding the mechanisms of change, responding to emerging insights on what and how to adapt for different, or changed contexts, and improving practice over time.
- Developing the interests and capacities of community researchers to support data collection, peer reflection and collaborative sensemaking.
- Understanding emerging signs of change, inequities and differential impacts, and, where change is happening, highlighting the attributions made by those closest to the work.
- Focusing on the signs of emergent change and understanding what is being created and how it is supporting families and communities, rather than focusing on claims or measurements of prevention, which is harder to measure in any meaningful way.
- Using theories of change approaches to develop thinking and support 'sense making', rather than being a literal, prescriptive or measurement device.
- Valuing insights from a range of research methodologies, challenging and expanding views of what constitutes high quality evidence. Mixed-methods approaches to generating evidence and collaborative analysis, including testing out approaches to story-gathering, joint reflection and collective sensemaking with those active in the situation of interest.
- An interest in the systemic and contextual influences which can affect outcomes, and the wider, unintended, impact of activities.

There have been several conceptual and practical considerations that have acted as enablers or barriers to evaluation. Approaching evaluative practice as a shared interest and responsibility has sought to create a sense of value and progress to help a wide range of stakeholders maintain their perseverance, and generate truly valued outcomes, rather than imposed measures of performance or targets.

To reflect our ambition for the GAWG approach, we developed a set of quality criteria for WM2U that are systemic, inclusive, and participatory, so that the learning has credibility with those with most at stake as well as others invested in the work. These are included in Annex 1.

1.2 Co-designing a learning framework with leading indicators

The development of the learning framework has been an iterative and pragmatic process over several years using existing meetings and structures as well as bespoke opportunities for conversations about purpose and progress. This approach has enabled discussion of the desired on-the-ground changes amongst the different stakeholder groups. This has underlined their shared vision, allowed for differences in perspectives, and demonstrated how what matters to families, practitioners, and strategic leaders connects with the high-level expectations of the funders of WM2U.

The 'leading indicators' are indications of emergent and systemic change, changes in the mindsets, practices, and behaviours that are often taken for granted or unnoticed, including the development of trust, safety, mutual understanding and a willingness to work together. Such qualities are often dismissed as intangible: bringing them to light in this way makes the changes we want to see much more discussable.

As 'measures' the leading indicators help to identify changes that enable the demonstration that WM2U is on the right track or that the course should be altered. This provides feedback and motivation to those involved, even before it is possible to identify and measure better outcomes at the population level. Leading indicators illuminate progress but are less about measuring distance travelled, than providing a framing and language to talk about achievements, contributions and learning.

Developing the learning framework has provided insight and better understandings of local conditions, organisational and community priorities and values, what enables the changes we seek and what gets in the way as the conditions for productive relationships between public services and families.

This iterative process has at times, been difficult and slow. Evaluation is perhaps an aspect of public service focused work that has largely been taken for granted or seen as primarily a technical rather than adaptive issue. A lesson is that learning and evaluation is a crucial part of systemic change, not just measuring change, but contributing to it, and able to include the active engagement of families in learning processes. Efforts to be more systemic and relational in evaluation may feel counter-cultural and not yet at a stage where the strengths of the approach are sufficiently widely understood and developed to be seen as trustworthy. There have been both promising developments and some challenges to established thinking about evaluation.

1.3 What we can do with our stories

A crucial aspect of such systemic evaluation is the use of participatory and qualitative methods including the use of stories. Working with those actively engaged with the development of voice-led change, such approaches are well suited to provide, deepen and share insight with others, to foreground learning, enable collective sensemaking and illuminate how a change programme can create an impact.

Stories have become a useful humanising resource to elicit conversations about what is changing, what still needs to change, and the part that each of us might play in that change.

Building on our experience, we nominated 2023 as 'Our Year of Stories' to demonstrate the value in story sharing as an approach to learning. This has been through written, visual and spoken forms of sharing with a range of people involved in the work, including other parents, practitioners, Senior leaders, Oversight and Programme Board members. Approaches where stories are told directly by the story protagonists have also been made possible by the involvement of the community researchers in East Ayrshire, the

participation of parents in an on-line WM2U Programme Board meeting, Board visits to both localities and most recently, two videos.[7]

Four stories of change are shared here as examples.[8] Taken from both Dundee and East Ayrshire they show insight into ways of thinking and what people value, how their encounters and experiences have influenced them, a wider ripple effect as they take action in their community or in work, and their hopes for the future. These stories are shared not as admonishment to others, but to encourage people to reflect on their own ways of thinking, practices and possibilities, encouraging people to offer their own insights and perspectives that they might not previously have been aware of or have felt able to share.

Looking to the future

There's ten of us that met through the 'Big Night In' held on a Monday night. It's a food and fun session for families in Charleston Community Centre started by Community Learning and Development workers with support from WM2U. It's been an opportunity for families to spend time together, and whilst the kids are playing, we parents talk to one another and to the workers about what matters to us. We also went on a three-day residential programme to explore what we wanted for ourselves, our families and our community. For me, that was life-changing. 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. Since I got home, I feel the same. I have come on so much more in two months than in ten years on anti-depressants. I want to expand my learning opportunities and gain qualifications.

The other parents had a similar experience and have said that they, their families, and people they meet have been noticing real differences in how they feel and what they are doing. There's much more of a sense of looking to the future now, rather than living day to day. And we all have ideas for change for ourselves and in the community. We will continue to support each other and get support from the local CLD team. We're making plans, so watch this space!

It's the small things that make a difference

I was part of a group of parents that went to meet the school counselling coordinator. I went along because I was excited about what mental health and well-being could look like for children and young people. It is a total passion for me. I wanted to see what was happening around mental health and wellbeing. With everything that has happened within the last few years, to see it being highlighted

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[7] https://wm2u.co.uk/our-video
[8] Also available on the WM2U website. https://wm2u.co.uk/

within the school for the pupils, there seemed to be a sense of possibility and that excited me.

I was nervous before going, I was unsure about meeting new people. I wondered how I would come across, what she and other people would think of me and what I would say. I was flustered going into somewhere strange. I felt a wee bit panicky.

The welcome we got made me feel less nervous. The people were so welcoming and just relaxed. They were human, smiled, we had a blether, a laugh, it broke the ice, and we had a wee cup of tea. The welcome and the positivity from everyone made me feel welcome.

I think what was going through my mind was that 'I've heard all this before'….and it never appears. But through the meeting, she was saying 'well, this is in place…and this…' The evidence was there within the meeting, to say that 'we're working hard and we're going to do this, we're not just telling you stories, it's actually happening'. She was also very honest. She admitted that the waiting lists are longer than they want them to be, but that they were trying to work on cutting that down and I believed her. It was good to know that things were in place and she was able to give us some real, concrete examples. I felt exhilarated after the meeting because I can see so many possibilities.

Limited conversation is a problem, not limited information

I am a housing team leader in Dundee. I recently went along with some colleagues to a "Conversation Café" in Menzieshill. This allowed me to speak to residents and get 'grounded again' to see exactly what residents think about what is good and what could be improved about the services. Personally, one of the biggest areas that came from the Conversation Café was how *"limited conversation is a problem, not limited information"*. In the last year our three main offices have closed, and it has become a barrier to connect with residents. During the Conversation Café the residents told me about their challenges of solving problems online or via email. I have been given the flexibility from my manager to work differently and I feel supported to move forward and we have some ideas about using community centres and sheltered housing for resident meetings and drop-in sessions, including allowing tenancy officers to work remotely from within the community. I am hoping this will make us more visible and contactable as a housing organisation and put residents at the heart of our work.

I think we need to stop

In my work as a social worker, it had stuck in my mind that one of the parents at the recent values-based leadership experience had said 'it's the small things that make a difference'. I realised that we were asking too much of a mother I was working with. Every service had bombarded her with information all at once. I said, 'I think we need to stop! We are giving you mountains to climb' – and she said 'yes, and I can't even get out of bed'. So, I changed tack and instead I asked, 'what can I do today?' She

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said the issue was her heating – she'd not had heating for over a year. We got onto her landlord, and it was fixed within a week.

The relationship has built from there, and we do small tasks every week, things like making the house more homely. She really responds positively to this approach. She decides what's important and we tackle it together, but she takes the lead. Her child is back home with her now and is off the child protection register. Things aren't entirely sorted out, but the prospects are much better as she does engage with most services now.

1.4 Lessons from working with stories

In working with stories, we have sought to create good habits of sharing experience, of asking about what matters and listening so that we hear each other's perspectives and use the insights to create a different kind of response to local issues and new, shared solutions.

We have learned about the effectiveness of gathering and use of stories to shift perspectives and contribute to system change. We would highlight:

- Stories are not only about finding a form of presentation of experience, but also way of talking about what matters, sharing values and ideas in a more informal way. They help people to slow down and genuinely listen to each other.
- Using a range of approaches, including individual interviews and creative and participatory methods, including collage work and Photovoice, stories have been developed to help people reflect on past or recent experience and to look ahead by telling 'stories of the future', which has been helpful in sharing and recognising mutual ambitions.
- New insights have emerged by putting stories together in ways that show different perspectives at play across a system, that may have not been evident before. We take care to preserve the truth of what we were told by the original storytellers, but a new composite story or series that emerges offers something beyond the simple representation of a single voice.
- Stories are not solely about voice: once a story is shared, the right of interpretation belongs to the reader or listener, and very often that's where the value lies. Going beyond simply sharing a perspective, sharing stories can help to identify enablers and blockages. Stories sometimes convey things that are difficult to say or openly acknowledge and in doing so, help to articulate ways of thinking or assumptions at play.

Clarity of purpose, sensitivity to context and how participation and sharing might best be promoted are important lessons. Making better use of stories is a promising approach, with a need to build the confidence and capabilities of people to understand what might be worth sharing, and to help decision-makers understand the validity of qualitative data, both including and going beyond the value of a single case. Qualitative insight is also essential to understand the wider contexts and any high-level population changes and is important as evidence of change for stakeholders at different levels within the system.

Both qualitative and quantitative data are vital. The ongoing work in Dundee will use SD informed methodology, alongside story gathering to better understand crucial decision points in the journeys of children and families through service systems. Building on our existing approach, this work will attempt to link personal accounts (people and practitioners) with community accounts (what difference this makes to others) and system/service level accounts (how an insight generated from the work impacts on services). This is explored in section 3.6.

2. Dynamic Impact Analysis: tracking change over time

Within WM2U there has been a long-standing interest in assessing the wider human value of changing the way services are designed, generating evidence about impact, learning about how to achieve system change and the potential for cost savings.

> *"The hypothesis is that by investing in prevention and listening to what matters to families, fewer children will need to be looked after and that local authorities will be able to redesign services and shift some of their investment from more expensive care provision to early intervention approaches."* (WM2U, Delivery Plan, 2020)

The WM2U funders issued the original call for 'Learning Partner' proposals for a Family and Community-led Funding Programme to Help Children and their Families Thrive in 2018, at that time conceived as a preventative project to support vulnerable families on the 'edge of care' to remain together. In response, our learning partner offer blended System Dynamic modelling (SD) with on-going learning and evaluation with parents and carers, practitioners and leaders, which we call 'Grow as We Go' and on which Reports 2 and 3 are largely based.[9] The modelling element was accepted by the funders as an alternative to traditional cost-benefit analysis, better able to represent change over time within a complex system and as a powerful visual tool for exploring inter-connections. This combination of approaches sought to capture the human, very local impact of relational services designed around people, as well as structural and financial impacts at a larger scale population level.

Dynamic Impact Analysis, combining modelling with local data seemed to offer a good way to consider different dimensions of change within a complex system operating at several levels. Essentially, the model is a tool to support thinking about strategic issues, and to enable better visualisation of the intended and unintended consequences of possible interventions, including costs and benefits. The SD model developed here helps to ultimately determine how change at a population-level might be measured. It does not answer all the practice dilemmas that relate to the enablers and barriers to system change, which are explored through the qualitative inquiry.

In particular, this report explores the development and measurement of the third WM2U Strategic Objective:

By listening to the voices of children and families Public Services will increase investment in prevention, thus in the medium term making significant public sector savings for reinvestment and enabling children to flourish within their own families.

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[9]See glossary and McKelvie D (2013), Modelling social care complexity: the potential of System Dynamics, National Institute for Health Research – School for Social Care Research, London
www.sscr.nihr.ac.uk/PDF/MR/MR14.pdf

f) Public service leaders have shifted resources and focus to offer support earlier, enabling children to flourish within their own families.

g) Local authorities and their partners can use data to measure the shift to prevention & identify how they reduce the number of children who are care experienced or in formal measures, such as their Child Protection Register.[10]

Modelling has contributed to the development of these WM2U Strategic Objectives and the indicators in the learning framework, particularly the specific ambition for the WM2U Programme Board and Senior leaders to develop the use of data about the whole population of children. This section provides a summarised account of the key elements of the modelling work in both East Ayrshire and Dundee, reflecting the different opportunities and interest of each locality, with significant insights and contributions detailed in section 3.[11]

2.1 The evolution of an approach to data and modelling

The modelling element of the WM2U work has proceeded through a number of stages and iterations, reflecting the need for strategic support and active engagement amongst partners at a time when other priorities and pressures have often taken precedence. In 2020 we issued an invitation to local partners to co-design an appropriate learning and evaluation framework:

> *"We want to measure what matters, because it matters, rather than because the data is available."* (Learning Partner Update to the East Ayrshire Strategic Board, August 2020)

Our own assumptions and expectations have been significantly challenged since that time, particularly in relation to what data is available, whether it is useful for practitioners, or used beyond descriptive or performance reporting purposes. Key elements of the approach were:

- An early demonstration SD model was developed based on the initial theory of change and assumption that WM2U would engage with a definable population. Workshops in each locality introduced basic modelling ideas and began the process of co-design of a learning framework.

- The development of WM2U was increasingly seen as an 'approach', rather than a 'project' with a defined set of inputs and a specified set of beneficiaries whose outcomes could be evaluated. Given this, much of the modelling work focused on how to measure the wellbeing of children at an aggregate or population level.

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[10] The full set of Strategic Objectives are included in Report 1.
[11] Reports 2 and 3.

- The iterative process of constructing a model led to the creation of a map of the system showing its different elements, based on four GIRFEC levels.[12] Figure 2.1 shows the Dundee version. Named 'Connection Explorer', this integrates the perspectives of different services and practitioners into a single connected picture, and illuminates the relationships between the parts of a system.

- In using this map, people began to see their own place in the system and better understand the roles of others. It helped to focus conversations on the specific transitions for children and young people and to explore what forms of response might be appropriate at different stages and amongst practitioners with different responsibilities: for example, might an intervention speed up the green arrows in the children and young people section (rehabilitation/de-escalation) or slow down the red (prevention/escalation)?

Figure 2.1: Connection Explorer Dundee
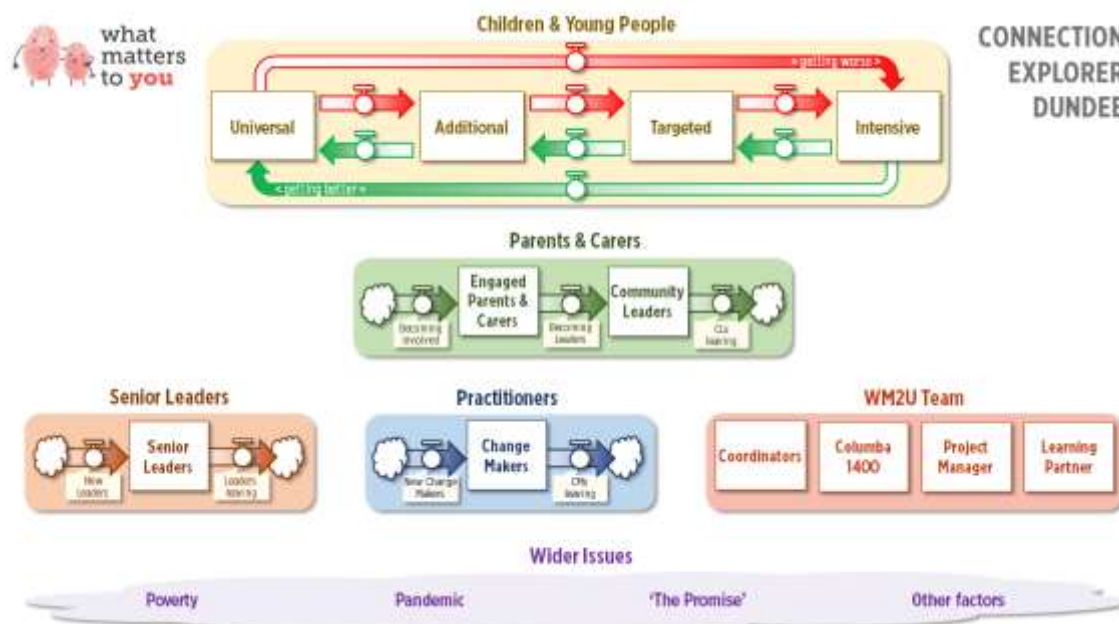
- This led to a request for local authority held data on the distribution of children across the four 'GIRFEC levels' of intervention. This request could be met by the provision of a single item of data collected on a regular basis for every child, using the GIRFEC levels. From this it would be possible to derive the flow or movement of children through the system, rather than simply presenting snapshot data.

- Whilst each had different challenges, neither local authority with which WM2U is engaged could provide this data. In November 2023, the WM2U Programme Board agreed that the model would not be expected to make a direct link between the specific WM2U investment and outcomes, and the learning partners focused on

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[12] There were two slightly different versions that reflect the GIRFEC terminology used in each locality. In Dundee: Universal, Additional, Targeted and Intensive. In East Ayrshire: Universal, Additional, Specialist and Intensive.

supporting the two local authorities to find a way to create the data for the GIRFEC level of intervention for each child.

The modelling element of the learning partner work is being taken forward separately by each local authority. Annex 2 provides a fuller timeline of key developments in the SD modelling. It will take more time for those changes with systemic potential to be truly embedded with long term sustainable impact after WM2U funding ends in 2026. Before that time, there remains continuing scope and appetite for local and national learning about the use of population level data for evaluation and service improvement.

3. Summary of key insights and contributions arising from the modelling approach

This evolution has enabled exploration of mental models about how system change happens, helped to identify fruitful possibilities to test out ideas for change, and offered an unanticipated, although important systemic lever of influence to use data to improve service responses and measure change at a population level.

This section summarises the achievements and prospective further contributions arising from the modelling as a relatively small, but significant part of our overall approach. We hope that sharing progress and outlining the different approaches taken in Dundee and East Ayrshire will provide a stimulus for more local authorities to recognise the strategic value of adopting similar work.

The WM2U learning partner work has helped to air and challenge ways of thinking about change, going to scale and measuring impact. In particular, the modelling element has illustrated the absence of appropriate, consistent data that could help to demonstrate any shift to early intervention and prevention for the population of children. Focus on the flow data has brought to light the analytical limitations of relying on data dashboards that do not reveal how individual data items are dynamically connected, despite the prevalence of this approach to data presentation and perceptions of abundance of data. It has also highlighted that these issues present a strategic challenge for all programmes or interventions, and probably for all Scottish Local Authorities.

In proposing a possible way forward, the work has demonstrated the value and potential of SD informed 'stock and flow' methodology to demonstrate the journeys that children and families experience that are masked or simply not captured by prevailing forms of snapshot or trends analysis.[13] The snapshot provides the single item of data (stock) about every child at a particular point in time; this enables us to examine the changing distribution over time of the population of children and young people across these groups and the (flow) dynamics explain how it is changing, thus allowing further analysis as to why the changes are occurring and whether they are positive or negative.

3.1 Encouraging dialogue about concepts, connections and measuring change

There were several important lessons that emerged from using the visual 'Connection Explorer' based on the widely recognised four GIRFEC levels.

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[13] "Stock and flow" are technical terms used in System Dynamics. In this report, when we refer to 'stocks' we mean the number of children and young people in each part of the system at a specific point in time and reference to 'flows' means the number of children and young people moving through the system between different points in time. As Learning Partners, we adopt this terminology to specify important analytical points and distinctions in approach, so that this methodology is not confused with other types of analysis and to help those who want to find out more about this way of thinking.

- The Connection Explorer graphic was a useful device to promote fresh conversations between different services about planning and design of service responses and how that might reflect what matters to families.

- We learned that although the local authorities were conceptualising their service responses in relation to these levels, the levels are not recorded as a 'status' for a child, nor are they complemented by consistent (population-wide) outcomes or well-being data which would allow tracking levels of need.

- Subsequent exploration of the status of the GIRFEC levels found that there is no Scottish Government universal descriptor for these terms, although the terminology is in common use to describe levels of intervention for statutory and third sector services.

- Connection Explorer highlighted the lack of integrated and holistic evaluative information about population-level changes for children and families and so influenced our subsequent focus.

3.2 Contributions to planning, strategy and evaluation

The modelling work with the WM2U Delivery Team, practitioners and senior leaders helped to crystallise thinking about WM2U, not as a single coordinator-led project with limited capacity to reach people in the community, but as an approach that crucially depends for impact on the wider involvement of key groups of practitioners and agencies.

- This important insight further influenced thinking about scaling, recognising that systemic change would rely on 'scaling deep', shifting embedded cultural values and beliefs, that continue to reproduce unwanted patterns in complex systems and act as barriers to change, as well as impacting on the formal and institutional structures that might hold a problem in place.[14]

- It also presented a challenge to expectations about what evidence of impact should be sought and the associated challenges of attribution within a complex landscape. This influenced the shaping of leading indicators that explore changes in practices amongst the different stakeholders (including parents, practitioners, senior leaders, and funders). Such changes are the *necessary* conditions to be on track to achieve our ultimate outcomes at population level.

3.3 Highlighting data needs, gaps and analytical possibilities

Neither local authority with which WM2U is engaged could provide data to identify the numbers of children at each GIRFEC level from which the rates of flow between levels could be derived; this is because they hold the data in different data sets operated by education, social work, and various parts of the health system that need to be linked to provide a summary measure of GIRFEC level. This is a strategic challenge for all programmes or interventions, and probably for all Scottish Local Authorities. In the light of this insight,

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[14] https://wm2u.co.uk/resource/what-matters-you-how-do-we-go-scale

WM2U explored alternative and valuable ways to improve the way that existing data is analysed.

- The use of SD informed 'stock and flow' methodology helped to demonstrate the journeys that children and families experience which are masked or simply not captured by prevailing forms of snapshot or trends analysis.[15]

- Sharing this approach has met with recognition and interest, not least as it also challenges a common understanding of prevention and early intervention as an entirely upstream (or prior to crisis) intervention. It reminds people of the complexity of children's lives and practitioner and service responses, including 'de-escalation' of levels of intervention, for example, if children once in the specialist category with social work intervention, return to the universal category.

- This illustrates that information about flows is critical to understanding what is going on below the surface of apparently relatively little change in overall figures, noting that the high levels of change reported by practitioners, children and young people and their families, are readily missed by senior managers because of the prevailing forms and limits of analysis.

- Reliance on snapshot data in dashboards without data about the flows can hide important information about what is going on in the system. Bringing stock and flow data together can reveal the sometimes-surprising volumes involved in the flows between different GIRFEC levels, raised useful questions for policy and practice, and highlighted where work might be prioritised.

- These insights have also contributed to the development of the Strategic Objectives of WM2U and indicators in the learning framework, particularly the specific ambition for the WM2U Programme Board and local Senior leaders to develop the use of data about the whole population of children.

3.4 Testing out ways to 'do data differently'

There are opportunities to make good use of stories and numerical data for improvement as well as measuring change over time.

- In East Ayrshire, the local authority is exploring what it would take to be able to describe the population of children and young people in GIRFEC terms and focusing on if and how linkages between datasets can be achieved. This would provide insight into whether and how it is possible to derive population-level data of value to managers and frontline staff and enable the development of an embedded improvement methodology valuable for both practice and strategy.

- Additional funding from the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund has supported a short-term secondment of an analyst from Dundee Council from February 2024. Whilst still on-going this work is already proving to be insightful and promising. The types of analytical insights generated are valuable in themselves, with a strong expectation

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[15] https://wm2u.co.uk/resource/where-should-we-look-system-change contains an example

that different kinds of conversations and actions can follow on in Dundee and further afield.

- These developments all point to the value in working with existing data, even though it has limitations. There is significant scope to make better use of existing data rather than collect new data, and a chance to improve data alignment and quality by illustrating the value of and enhancing the appetite for data amongst practitioners with responsibilities for recording.

- The qualitative inquiry approach of WM2U has generated vivid examples of ways that good outcomes can be facilitated or frustrated and point to changes that would make a real difference for families. This provides strong complementary evidence to that emerging from the modelling and numerical data work.

- Making better use of combined data and stories can generate possibilities for deeper dives into specific areas of interest, providing a more granular and insightful analysis of children and young people's journeys through the system, for example, analysis of flows could identify sub-samples of families where focused small-scale qualitative methods could then help understand crucial decision points in their journeys.

3.5 Supporting national dialogue about data and stories

Our extended explorations with the two local authorities have enabled WM2U to influence dialogue about how national policy is implemented and practice is shaped in relation to data and supported wider recognition of the importance of organising information in a way that allows tracking of progress both at the level of the individual and at a population level.

WM2U co-hosted an event with the Scottish Government Whole Family Wellbeing Fund and The Promise Scotland in April 2024. This brought together over sixty people with interests in how to develop earlier and more effective support for children and families by making better use of data. Participants were drawn from the Scottish Government, local government, the third sector, funders, and others with interests in improvement and innovation for children and families. The event focused on two presentations that shared data-related current work by The Promise Scotland and WM2U in Dundee. Using these contributions, the focus was on learning from each other and identifying further scope for collaboration locally and nationally.

- Many participants were enthusiastic about how they may be able to apply the insights and practices explored in their own work, to use data to support learning across a range of local and national roles.
- There is clear scope at national and local levels to continue to support change in many elements of data collection and use, including data linkage, quality, and analysis, allied with scope to enhance understanding and use of qualitative approaches.
- There were felt to be real possibilities for collective experimentation and learning and an interest in retaining connection and further sharing of learning in this area of work.

- Making greater use of stories as both support and challenge was also seen as a valuable strategy; this would help to 'keep the human element', root the analytical work in what matters to children and families, foreground lived experience and demonstrate progress and good practice.

3.6 Developing data capacity for routine explorations and reporting

Since November 2023, the modelling work has focused on supporting the two local authorities to find a way to pull together data from various systems in a meaningful and sustainable way with a view to creating a clearer specification of data needed to support the ongoing monitoring of preventative measures. This is being taken forward internally in each locality and has brought a benefit of supporting local authorities to adopt new ways of looking at data and understanding change. If they can develop systems of tracking (the stocks and flows) that are meaningful within their own context, this will support local authorities to understand where things are getting better, worse or staying the same for the child population over time.

In the meantime, in Dundee there have been new and interesting explorations that are already proved fruitful and have begun to change conversations about what happens to children and young people in the system. For example:

- It challenges the view that children escalate or de-escalate through the system step by step; instead, it found that 'stages' were jumped. There were also many more moves hidden below the surface of standard data reporting than had been imagined by practitioners.
- In this way, by revealing the complexity and volume of moves across GIRFEC levels across the system, we learned that there is no one 'upstream location' (prior to crisis) in which to invest.
- Focused analysis of smaller subsets has also been useful, for example, looking more deeply at children and young people returning from external residential placements to Dundee, 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 children for more qualitative understanding of what happened, taking into account the views of practitioners and, wherever possible, the children themselves.

In time, the stock and flow informed methodology being developed in Dundee should provide a tool to explore what are likely to be the most effective parts of the system in which to intervene 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.

There is also scope to further develop the use of stories by linking personal accounts (people and practitioners) with community accounts (what difference this makes to others)

and system/service level accounts (how an insight generated from the work impacts on services).

This approach to using stories and data to understand change over time should also be of wider interest; to complement for example, the data-analysis currently being undertaken on behalf of The Promise Scotland.

3.7 Exploration of costs and savings

The WM2U 'theory of change' and strategic objectives clearly articulate an aspiration that by investing in prevention, fewer children will need to be looked after and that local authorities will be able to redesign services and shift some of their investment from more expensive care provision to early intervention approaches.

Based on the original programme assumptions, we had hoped to be able to model the extent to which savings are generated, using a set of key indicators to be monitored throughout the life of the project. This would have enabled exploration of different scenarios such as whether it is possible to reduce the numbers of children looked after only by spending more on prevention than used to be spent on looking after children. With some scenarios, one possibility is that overall costs might rise but 'average quality of life' might also rise. The question of interpretation would be one of judgements about the relative merits of trade-offs between costs and benefits.

Evidence from elsewhere reviewed in 2019/20 suggested that such underpinning assumptions about savings and shifting spend are problematic not least because of difficulties in monetising benefits and attributing them to specific interventions and issues of the financial context in which public bodies are having to reduce spending regardless of need.[16]

As this work has evolved several factors have altered our thinking, including shifting the nature of WM2U as an approach rather than a programme with identifiable beneficiaries, and the complexity of measuring change at population level. Furthermore, it is becoming clearer that given the ever-harsher financial realities of local government, the assumption that any net savings that can be made will be protected and redirected towards preventative work, rather than being used to reduce deficits will be severely tested.

Costs and savings remain an issue of great interest, with scope for further exploration. The continuing work in Dundee still has potential to use the model in an experiential way to compare costs and outcomes for different types of interventions, any shift of investment to more community and family-based support, and the impact on some agreed measure of average level of wellbeing or quality of life for children in any of the GIRFEC levels.

Linking existing databases to generate data will allow the SD model to run with real information and may challenge assumptions of simple savings or return on investments.

Typically, what stakeholders learn from such simulation exercises is that, often:

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[16] https://wm2u.co.uk/resource/brief-literature-review

- Things will get more expensive before any improvement arises
- Costs of some services will then reduce slowly, and steadily
- Savings might never outweigh additional costs, but such expenditure might be considered worthwhile because overall quality of life will gradually improve, and
- After several years, there might be both overall savings and increased quality of life
- Ideally, the savings can be reinvested in the new, preventive measures and successful interventions need not be time-limited.

Using the model to make projections into the future should generate insight about where change is most likely to have impact.

4. Conclusions and reflections on measures that matter

Our ambition has always been to approach learning in a way which is congruent with the aims of WM2U and to use learning to support strategy and implementation by helping key stakeholders to assess the patterns and dynamics at play in the systems in which they work. In adopting this approach, there have been several important challenges that indicate how funding or commissioning system change work may differ in significant respects to mainstream programme funding and management.

WM2U learning has helped to challenge and develop ways of thinking about change, going to scale and measuring impact. It has also brought further unanticipated benefits of introducing local authorities to new ways of looking at data and understanding the measurement of change.

Funders, commissioners and local authorities want to be confident that they will achieve value for their investment, or that funding will be used well; they often look to and sometimes impose dominant evaluation practices that use complex sets of frameworks and indicators, relying heavily on quantitative measurement and prevailing assumptions about data abundance and availability.

Prevailing, and largely unexplored assumptions can act as barriers to the full recognition of complexity and the embrace of learning and adaption as an essential component of system change. Examples of assumptions that can be challenging include that it is possible or desirable to attribute impact to specific interventions; that the nature of valid evidence is already clear and does not need to be explored; that evidence from elsewhere is readily transferable; and that it is possible to 'roll out' interventions that prove to be positive in order to 'go to scale'. Fuller exploration of these issues might help to unpick the 'implementation gap' between high-level policy ideals and changing practices on the ground.

The WM2U Programme Board has explored some of these assumptions over several years. In light of this we note:

Data availability: the unanticipated absence of appropriate, consistent population level data to establish a benchmark against which change could be measured, challenged our own original hope that such data would be available. The realities of data availability and configuration outlined here reduces the ability of (probably any) local authorities to identify single points of inefficiency, failure or duplication in the system. Nevertheless, it may highlight these complexities to create new responses or understand the effective implementation of any intervention to improve the lives of children and families.

Demonstrating outcomes: the scoping and measurement of personal outcomes for parents, children and young people is a significant challenge to the original expectations of funders, senior leaders and other stakeholders, as WM2U is not a programme that engages directly with a defined group using a specific service. This is a challenge to how we define and measure 'success': stories that demonstrate personal change are motivating and valuable but in themselves, should not be seen as evidence of system change.

Looking for signs of system change: we view the emergence of more relational and systemic practices amongst the different stakeholders (including parents, practitioners, senior leaders, and funders), as *necessary* conditions for scaling deep to achieve system change. The kinds of change we are looking for are not amenable to pre-determined quantitative measures, instead we learned to focus on seeking evidence of what is being created, rather than what has been prevented. Here, the use of stories is helpful to generate insight and the development of new sensitivities to others, illustrating necessary shifts in thinking and practice.

Attribution and contribution: Expectations about evidence and claims about attribution came into sharp focus given the situation in both local authorities where there were aligned, concurrent initiatives, with similar aims to shift towards prevention or early help; these include GIRFEC, The Promise, the HEART model in East Ayrshire and the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund. Such programmes typically have their own accountability demands and measurement frameworks which don't necessarily align, risk considerable duplication and burdens of reporting and of overclaiming specific contributions. Acknowledgement of this common situation is and should be an opportunity to develop realistic and shared expectations about measuring impact and genuine accountability for learning amongst local sponsors, providing enough reassurance for all parties that time and other resources are being well used.

As a result, and contrary to our mutual initial expectations, the SD model is not being used to evaluate the impact of WM2U. In November 2023, the WM2U Programme Board agreed that the model will not be expected to make a direct link between the specific WM2U investment and outcomes. None of these issues are unique to WM2U.

> *"…Responsible and power-aware funders should display aggressive humility in this field and open up space for people to shape solutions as well as the way these solutions are assessed. This will allow for more nuanced knowledge to be compiled and thus will result in the generation of a higher-resolution picture."* (RPA, 2023)[17]

We hope that these insights and can assist others in the creation of an approach to long term evaluation of shifts to prevention and early intervention for children and young people, with wider implications for the evaluation of system change more generally.

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[17] https://www.rockpa.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Shifting-Systems-Initiative_Evaluation-Report.pdf

Annex 1: Our Quality Criteria for Evaluating Systems Change

Sensitivity to the context and purpose of the work

a) The learning and evaluation process proceeds with care and positive regard to promote relationships and avoid damaging them in the process of creating useful knowledge.

b) The learning and evaluation process is ethical and equitable and creates the right conditions for people to take part in ways that are beneficial for them.

c) A framework of desired outcomes is co-created to recognise and reflect diverse stakeholders' different kinds of expertise, expectations and hopes, and potential contributions.

d) Evaluation questions reflect different stakeholders' values and contexts, developed at a pace that is appropriate and timely for each group.

e) Data collection and analytical methods promote inclusion and participation and address the systemic drivers of inequity by giving weight to the views of parents and community members, giving voice to people that are often not heard or perspectives that are discounted.

f) There is engagement with people that can use the information in a timely way to enable decision making and action that can improve processes and outcomes.

Quality of thinking and learning processes

g) Learning is a dynamic, embedded, and collective process, in which data generation and sense-making methods highlight patterns, themes, values, and connections between phenomena and create a dialogue amongst people with different perspectives.

h) Interpretations, insights, and recommendations for action are generated by those most closely involved in the situation of concern.

i) Resonance testing seeks affirming and alternative interpretations and acknowledges the existence and potential significance of outliers or individual cases.

j) Learning seeks to resist certainties, closure and finality through precise measurement or hasty judgement of the phenomena observed.

k) There is acknowledgement of the limitations of the methods and data sources and gaps in knowledge.

l) Research findings are situated within the wider research, practice, and policy literature.

m) The reporting and sharing of insights and learning is negotiated with stakeholders' and gives credit for contributions.

Credibility of claims and support for action

n) Insights offer fresh perspectives for individuals involved about their own thinking and practice

o) Insights offer fresh perspectives for individuals involved about the thinking and practice of others engaged in the situation of concern

p) Evidence offers help to determine practical actions in real-life situations by identifying what practices to sustain and what to change.

q) There is confidence that the claims that positive change is happening is rooted in evidence that has been tested in practice and identifies unwanted or unanticipated outcomes.

r) Conclusions identify diverse stakeholders' values and perspectives of the quality and effectiveness of systems and programmes.

Annex 2: Key elements of the SD modelling approach

Figure A2.1: Key milestones in System Dynamic modelling

Date	Milestone /key issue in SD modelling
Before Dec 2018	Specification for LP contract contains an initial theory of change and an expectation of cost-benefit analysis: 'proving the cost saving to local authorities will encourage them to redesign services and shift some of their investment from more expensive care provision to early intervention approaches.'
December 2018	Learning Partner was appointed: their proposal emphasised that SD modelling could provide a more appropriate way of understanding the complexity of the situation using a dynamic cost-benefit analysis approach and that shifting the focus to prevention might improve wellbeing, but not necessarily reduce spend or that more might be spent before achieving savings.
Early 2019	Early demonstration SD model developed based on initial theory of change and assumption that WM2U would engage with a definable population. Subsequent 'open' approach to engagement with families meant it would not be possible to classify a 'wellbeing' status or degree of vulnerability.
April to August 2019	The SD work in Dundee was to be aligned with a data science project run by The Datalab (University of Edinburgh). Their aim was to make connections between the main public service data systems that cover children and young people to explore whether and how it might be possible to identify children with particular needs. The SD team had several meetings with Datalab; though interesting little of note came out of this element of the work at this time.
June and Oct 2019	Two workshops held in East Ayrshire – introduced basic modelling ideas to practitioners (June) and Stories of The Future in the community (Oct) and a workshop on How We Think About Impact in Dundee (Oct).
Dec 2019	Initial data request to East Ayrshire.
Autumn 2020	• Clear ambition to engage local partners in co-designing an appropriate learning framework that 'measures what matters, because it matters, rather than because the data is available'. • Three model-building workshops in East Ayrshire recognised benefits arising from the process to support both programme planning and evaluation design, enabling consideration of close-up features of the system or a more 'spaceship' view of linked elements. • Allied qualitative development of the learning framework continues alongside this work in both localities.

Jan to June 2021	Three model-building (online) workshops in Dundee (Jan, Mar, August). The main outcome was the beginning of the focus on the 'GIRFEC' levels, particularly influenced by FORT/ Child and Family Support.
Spring 2021	• Adoption of use of four GIRFEC levels to structure the conceptualisation of need and the related configuration of services in both local authorities. • Connection Explorer (system map) created, using the GIRFEC four categories.
Summer 2021	Reconnected with The Datalab to find out more about what they were doing on The Promise: their focus was on mapping data sources.
August 2021	Model completed using four stock GIRFEC categories representing the children at different levels of intervention connected to the interacting service system involving practitioners, senior leaders, coordinators, parents and carers. This identified data items (actual data or plausible estimates) to enable a realistic simulation.
Late 2021/ 2022	Delivery Team increasingly framing WM2U as an approach – rather than a 'project' with a defined set of inputs and a specified set of beneficiaries whose outcomes could be evaluated. Over time, a significant part of the modelling work became searching for a way of measuring the wellbeing of children impacted by the work of the project at an aggregate or population level. • Requests for coordinator data made but proved to be unrealistic to expect regular and consistent reporting on these data items. • September 2022: a second data request made to East Ayrshire for data about both stocks and flows using the four GIRFEC levels. Ultimately it became clear that neither East Ayrshire or Dundee had data available about the numbers of children at each level nor about the rates of flow between levels.
Autumn 2023	Subsequently a third, revised data request clarified that only a single item of data (stock) about every child would be needed to understand the distribution of children among the GIRFEC levels. How that distribution changes over time (flow) could be derived from this single item. • In East Ayrshire, several factors hindered this request, including the use of multiple databases within which children's information was recorded, none of which referenced the GIRFEC level, different professional views of a child's GIRFEC level and challenges in relation to data quality. This led to development of a business case seeking permission to convene a fuller discussion with people with an understanding of practice processes and recording practices.

	• In Dundee, as a pilot, manual analysis undertaken of GIRFEC level of children in a small number of Dundee schools.
November 2023	Shared findings with WM2U Programme Board: • Most significantly a strategic implication of the data issues was that it will not be possible to track population-level changes in outcomes resulting from any measures implemented seeking outcomes for children and young people. Also highlighted limitations of relying on some existing data items in isolation, which do not provide adequate information, with implications for the design of management dashboards.[18] • WM2U Board agreed that the model will not be expected to make a direct link between the specific WM2U investment and outcomes. Decision that the learning partners will focus on supporting the two local authorities to get data for the GIRFEC level of intervention for each child.
Early 2024	Continued support to both local authorities to solve these data and measurement issues. • Secondment of Kerstin Jorna, Senior Data Analyst in Dundee Council to WM2U, funded by the WFWF. Exploration of the status of the GIRFEC levels finds that there is no Scottish Government universal descriptor document for these terms. • Proof of Concept proposal and sponsorship approved by East Ayrshire C&YP Strategic Partnership Feb 2024 and joint meeting held with Dundee March 2024 to explore the prospects for generating a single item of data for every child.
2024	• Dundee secondment continues. Analysis of the population of children looked after away from home showed that relatively stable numbers of children have been the result of high levels of transition between placements. A 'rough and ready' analysis of a different subset of children identified some unexpected patterns of movement, e.g. a relatively high number of children who move directly from the Universal to the Intensive level without passing through the Team Around the Child process. • April 2024: WM2U co-hosted an event with the Scottish Government Whole Family Wellbeing Fund and The Promise Scotland. This brought together over sixty people with interests in how to develop earlier and more effective support for children and families by making better use of data for improvement. Dundee initial analysis shared and highlighted potential use 'stock and flow methodology' to demonstrate the journeys that children and families experience that are masked or simply not

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[18] https://wm2u.co.uk/resource/where-should-we-look-system-change

	captured by prevailing forms of snapshot or trends analysis; complementarity of methods of analysis and scope to make better use of existing data and improve data quality by enhancing the appetite for data amongst practitioners with responsibilities for recording. • May 2024: East Ayrshire Doing Data Differently – data alignment group taking local work forward.
By June 2024	• Dundee exploration phase tested a new methodology using stock and flow analysis to look at how cohorts or subsets of children move through the system. • Substantial amendments to SD model at request of Dundee. This latest iteration of the model takes account of the detailed work currently being undertaken in Dundee on 'GIRFEC' data. • Modelling element of the LP work ends. There remains continuing scope and appetite for local and national learning about the use of data for evaluation and service improvement.
July 2024 onwards	• In Dundee the analytical work shows promise in using existing databases to generate data that will allow the SD model to run with real information. This means that projections into the future become possible with the opportunity to gain insight about where change is most likely to be helpful. This will include exploration of costs and outcomes for different types of services challenging the assumptions of simple savings or investments.

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.