

REAL SUPPORTIVE SUPPORT: THE STORY OF THE NEST AND WHY IT MATTERS

What Matters to You (WM2U) has been working alongside families in East Ayrshire to change the way support is offered in communities since 2019, when the coordinator started in post. WM2U has worked in partnership with a small number of highly committed people in the community and the Corra Foundation.¹

The Nest shows what a difference community leadership can make and what can be achieved when community members are listened to and supported to put their ideas into practice.

This short report focuses on the Nest, as one of the important outcomes of this partnership, looking at what it does and why such community-led, real supportive support is so important.²



*"A power shift is happening – we are making the right people uncomfortable
- the community is realising they have power of their own."*

¹ Information about the Corra Foundation role <https://www.corra.scot/wp-content/uploads/Cumnock-Annual-Update-2023.pdf>

² <https://thenestwellbeinggroup.co.uk> This report summarises key parts of the 2024 evaluation report written by the WM2U learning partner that talks about what has helped and what has hindered wider progress in East Ayrshire. This is available along with other reports <https://wm2u.co.uk/our-reports> and a video <https://wm2u.co.uk/our-video> As funders, BBC Children in Need and the Hunter Foundation, have recently taken the decision to conclude their funding of WM2U from October 2024.

GOING BACK TO THE ROOTS

For many years, community-based, wellbeing focused groups and informal support for community members in Cumnock relied solely on goodwill, and voluntary efforts and fund raising. Since 2019, WM2U and the Corra Foundation have worked with a small number of highly committed people to significantly grow this community-led support under the leadership of Natalie Carmichael. This led to the creation of the Nest Wellbeing Group (NWBG) in 2022. The Nest are now at the forefront of developing a range of health, wellbeing and social activities in Cumnock.

The roots of the Nest are in that longstanding volunteer-led work, with the idea taking clearer shape after the contributions of many people and the support of WM2U and the Corra Foundation.

- Volunteer led work within the community was taking place within the local area with little to no support from other agencies for over ten years.
- In October 2019, a WM2U workshop of local people and locally based practitioners shared three strikingly similar ideas for a 'community hub' with a strong emphasis on being 'people first'.
- Local parents who had been on a WM2U/Columba 1400 leadership programme in 2019 were also keen to have a community space 'for people to drop in that feels like they are popping into my living room'. Then Covid happened.
- Later these ideas, alongside WM2U and the Corra Foundation evolved into plans for a community living room,

with the inspiration and support of #WeAreCamarados.

- Financial support from WM2U and East Ayrshire Council was secured in May 2022, where the idea was pitched as a 'safe space to go where parents are met by people who understand them'.
- The group received further support from the Corra Foundation to test the idea within one local community centre in the area.

Since that time, there have been setbacks and significant difficulties securing permanent premises. There is much more to do to make sure that the community is a clear and valued partner, able to draw on untapped resources to reach people and offer timely and 'real supportive support'.

Despite the challenges, the Nest group are focused on informal, practical peer-led support and are in a much better position having secured new funding from a range of sources with support from the Corra Foundation.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Over the years, WM2U worked with local people, professionals and senior leaders in East Ayrshire to agree five outcomes that everyone wanted to see happen as a result of their work together. These are:

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

Making a positive difference on the ground

As a very practical, visible change on the ground, the Nest is an important achievement. From the start, local people and community-based professionals have always been clear that WM2U should aim for such a change, as a real test of the value of their contribution.

Real supportive support

The Nest helps people to reclaim a sense of control over their own lives and create safer environments for themselves. This might mean taking the first steps out of the house, building friendships and wider connections, learning to trust other people and feeling able to ask for help, wanting to play a more active role in supporting other people, and finding trusted people that can vouch for and help to access wider services.

"It's hard to categorise what The Nest does. We might do a funeral one week, fill in a form, help a Mum clean a cooker because she doesn't know how, to then getting a couch for the housing support team, to supporting a police officer the next, giving mindfulness techniques to a nursery teacher, to going to the mental health team.... I think we have made a massive difference, not only to community members, but also to people who are staff. It's for everybody."

A sense of belonging

- People feel a sense of belonging to the Nest. The realisation of their own vision, now grown far beyond the initial desire for a 'home from home' community space, is of immense significance and benefits the mental

and emotional wellbeing of the community.

Practitioners feel welcome and safe in these spaces too, some are using the spaces for their own activities and services and there are benefits for them of access to practical help, advice and other resources.

Whilst the Nest support a range of activities, an important time and space for people to come together is the regular NWBG 'Breakfast Club' held on Wednesday mornings.

"They remember your face, your name, or what you have in your roll."

A lot of different people find significant and sometimes unexpected value from attending the breakfast club.

"Everyone seems to want you to feel like you belong, there are so many people from different walks of life. The people you would never expect to mix are somehow friends."



"We've built up trust. People are starting to see we're doing a job. We're not all about locking folk up!"

".. there is something different about The Nest... people have shared some raw and honest stuff with us, there's a degree of honesty that I do not experience elsewhere. New people are welcome too,



it's not cliquey. I think a lot can be learned from The Nest and I would encourage other people to go along."

Better mental health for children and families

Better mental health is a priority for the community and a real spur for action. There has been some progress including better understanding about what is needed in the community, wider awareness of neurodiversity, adverse childhood experiences, and the impact of parental mental health on children. The Nest have secured resources for training, much of which has been related to mental health and wellbeing. Despite this, wider national and local trends are not encouraging and there are still concerns about stigma, a lack of understanding about trauma and recovery, and deaths from suicide and drugs.



A sense of looking towards a positive future

The achievements of the Nest are based on their growing strengths as a group, greater trust and a sense that 'lived experience is getting a hearing', with some professionals doing some small, but significant things differently. Their focus and matter-of-fact attitude towards the future is likely to help them to continue to learn and thrive.

They still encounter some 'resistance' and are clear that 'mutual respect between services and the community needs to continue to improve'.

COMMUNITY RESEARCHERS

On-going learning for WM2U has been supported by a small number of parents who have been involved as community researchers since January 2022, culminating in their co-design and facilitation of a community learning event in June 2023. Story gathering and sharing has also been an important part of the overall approach to which parents have made important contributions.

WHY VOICE AND ACTION MATTER

Senior leaders in East Ayrshire have acknowledged the importance of these community-led developments and scope to make the most of the significant strengths and assets in communities and amongst practitioners that could be built upon.

There's further to go to achieve deep rooted changes in the way that public services operate in East Ayrshire. Whilst the Nest is more widely recognised and trusted, more practitioners and senior leaders need to experience the 'warmth of welcome' available in this kind of community space. This will help different kinds of conversations to happen, develop trust and better understanding of what matters to local people. Whilst it would be easy to dismiss this as small scale, it is hugely significant for local people, it demonstrates just what is possible and a wider ripple effect amongst practitioners.

Briefing written by Cathy Sharp, Research for Real.
See <https://wm2u.co.uk/our-reports> Jan 2025