



what  
matters  
to **you**

# WM2U Helping the Magic Come Through

February 2026



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# Introduction

**What Matters to You (WM2U) is a voice-led community based system change programme working alongside families and workers in Dundee and Clackmannanshire. The ambition of WM2U is to move public resources to offer support earlier, thereby addressing inequalities and enabling children to flourish within their own families. This requires quite radical change in the way the system of supporting families currently operates.**

This practice report is written by the WM2U learning partner, who has been embedded within the team since the outset in 2018. It builds on and complements the previous codifying report, which was written from the perspective of the funders and based on learning and evaluation, and the lessons from a [literature practice review](#)<sup>1</sup>. The previous report was [published in April 2024](#)<sup>2</sup>.

This practice report draws heavily on interviews with eighteen leaders and workers in Dundee from across the local authority and partner agencies, most of whom have been involved in WM2U for several years. It includes quotes from these interviews throughout. The word 'worker' is used generically to mean those who are practicing directly in communities from any service.

This is not a comprehensive evaluation report<sup>3</sup>. Instead its purpose is to support those working in Dundee to reflect on the voice-led changes they are seeing and encourage them to consider how to sustain and embed them over time.

It is accompanied by three shorter reports which detail the Coordinator's role, the Café Conversation approach and the Make it Happen Fund process and a codifying report which pulls out the essential elements of WM2U.

WM2U defines system change as 'shifting the conditions that keep a problem in place'<sup>4</sup>: the cultural and organisational values, mindsets, practices, and behaviours that are often taken for granted or unnoticed. We have found that this work is ultimately about changing patterns of behaviour and belief, finding new ways of working that recognise complexity and prioritising working on the deeper levers of change by building relationships.

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1. <https://wm2u.co.uk/resource/literature-and-practice-review>

2. <https://wm2u.co.uk/resource/codifying-our-learning-support-scale>

3. The evaluation is being undertaken by Dartington Service Design and reports will become available from June 2026 onwards.

4. Kania M; Kramer M and Senge P: the Water of System Change 2018

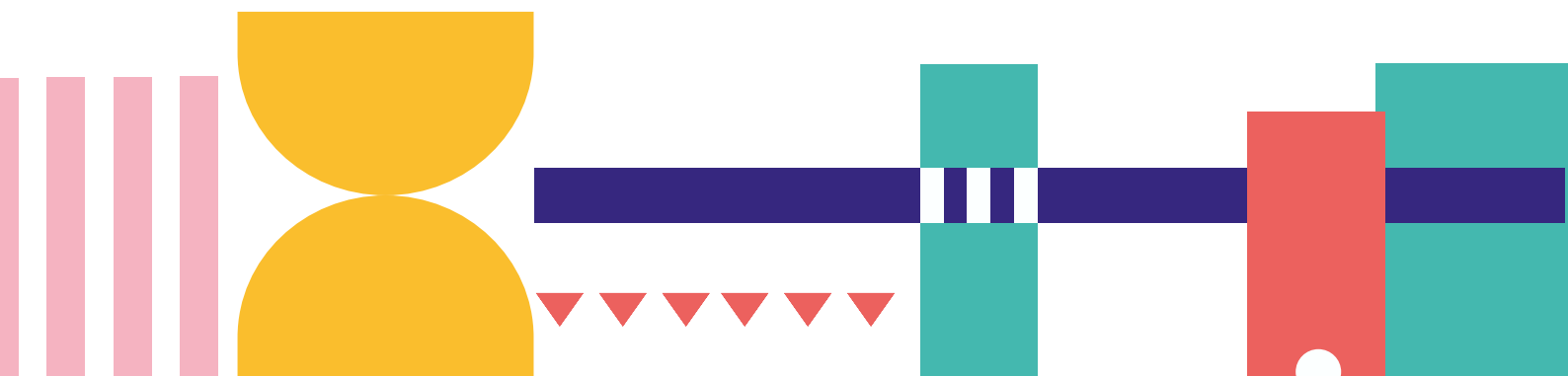
We asked leaders and workers what changes they have seen and how they think the changes could be sustained moving forward, identifying what might get in the way and how these barriers could be overcome. It is deliberately formative rather than evaluative, seeking to distil the learning available now so that we can intervene early to prevent reverting to old patterns.

This report is informed by those working in Dundee and addressed as much to themselves as they try to sustain and build change into their system of supporting families facing inequalities, as it is to anyone else embarking on the journey.

It starts with detailing the key activities and seven essential elements of WM2U before focusing on the 'golden rules' which are practical pointers for sustaining the work.



**Systems are transformed generatively not by one person or team taking one big transformative action but rather by many people taking many small actions, separately and together, for many reasons<sup>5</sup>.**



5. Kahane Adam: Everyday Habits for Transforming Systems. Berrett-Koehler Publishers. 2025

## Key activities

For the past three years, WM2U has focused on delivering two strategic objectives to produce the evidence which will increase investment in prevention both locally and nationally:

1

Creating conditions and structures that sustain change by working alongside families to co-produce and embed new ways of working and accelerate existing and effective interventions

2

Scaling the WM2U approach deeply across Dundee

Practically this has meant:

- ▶ delivering Values Based Leadership Experiences (VBLEs) to community members and workers (2019 onwards)
- ▶ brokering connections between individuals and organisations locally and nationally (2019 onwards)
- ▶ being accountable to regular Oversight Board meetings involving workers and leaders from across sectors (2022 onwards)
- ▶ working with community learning and development workers across Dundee to set up spaces where families can meet and support one another, and providing small amounts of money to cover food (2022 onwards)
- ▶ organising and facilitating Café Conversations where local people and workers meet to learn more about what is working well and plan for what needs to improve in localities, replacing local community planning partnerships (2023 onwards)
- ▶ developing Make it Happen Funds where a budget of £360,000 has been provided to six community panels for allocation to community run initiatives in six areas across Dundee between 2024 and June 2026

Throughout this work we have invested in continuous and collective learning, rooting our planning and development in our understanding of what is working well and what could be better, developing indicators of success with community members, workers and strategic leaders, facilitating reflective spaces and sharing our learning through stories and reports. Embedding learning has meant that we have been able to experiment and adapt the WM2U approach as we go.



**Transforming a complex system requires learning through doing – not just thinking and doing. Radical engagement involves experimenting: trying things out that we're not sure will work, paying careful attention to the results, and adjusting accordingly – not just doing what is familiar or safe<sup>6</sup>.**

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6. Kahane Adam: Everyday Habits for Transforming Systems. Berrett-Koehler Publishers. 2025

## Essential elements

**The WM2U approach contains several essential elements: enabling voice and agency; convening (bringing people together to plan and learn); data and learning as tools for change; starting with people not problems; coordinating; planning and accountability and communicating hope and possibility.**

We elaborate on these elements below before addressing what will be needed to sustain them.

### 1. Enabling voice and agency

The Dundee City Council Community Learning and Development (CLD) teams have been supporting community members who are experiencing inequalities for decades. This has been steady, careful work. Cognissoft, the CLD data recording system, details how long community members who are now leading interventions have been supported by community learning and development. Data shows that there has been regular, reliable support over years.

But, according to one CLD manager, in recent years, the number of community activists has declined, for several reasons, including a fall in the numbers coming through trade unions and tenant associations.

WM2U brought a sharp focus on families who were experiencing inequalities, and the Values Based Leadership Experience (VBLE) enabled those families who attended to build their confidence and find their voice. The Community Learning and Development teams were given and embraced the opportunity to support those families before, during, and after the VBLE, so that families felt energised, and enthused about how they can use their skills and experience to benefit their community when they came back. They have become the new generation of community activists.



In practical terms this meant CLD staff offering things such as a family fun night which included a hot meal and a place to play and talk. Once the parents had got to know and trust each other and the workers, they were offered a VBLE. These were tailored to focus both on developing individuals and building community and adapted to meet the needs of families in each locality. Some were residential over three days, others were delivered one day a week over six weeks. Following the VBLEs, families and community members have been supported in different ways by the WM2U local coordinator and the CLD teams to develop opportunities for themselves and their families, and to set up groups for community benefit. The Make it Happen Fund (MIHF) which started in 2024 has provided an opportunity for community members to take on a role as a local funder.

As funding for the VBLEs has come to an end, CLD workers have developed their own Citizenship Education Programme. It draws on VBLEs, encouraging community members to recognise and celebrate what they can offer and is combined with specific information on how to participate and influence change in communities. The pilot was well received.

“

It gave me more confidence and made me realise strengths I didn't know I had. Showed me that barriers can be overcome.

Community member

“

Before this I was feeling overwhelmed about setting up my own group. I feel I can see much clearer steps for working out where I need to go and overcoming the mental and physical barriers I had.

Community member

“

That's something we never had... people would get involved and start running groups too quickly. This is a structured pathway to get them thinking a wee bit more about what they can do.

Communities officer

And Communities Officers have been motivated to seek out other opportunities for personal and leadership development for community members, such as raising funds for an exchange visit to a twinned city in Germany.



Community members have also had the opportunity to become panel members for the Make it Happen Fund (with support from the WM2U Coordinator, CLD teams and the Corra Foundation). The MIHF enables grassroots communities to design and deliver local grantmaking processes that are genuinely led by the community, and the training brought together community members from different areas. By the completion of the WM2U work, the MIHF panels will have had a total budget of £360,000, £60k per panel, to distribute to local community initiatives and **organisations**<sup>7</sup>. They have also provided an easily accessible opportunity for a wide range of community members, such as ethnically diverse communities and young people, to get involved.

These opportunities have enabled community members to find their voice and use it. So far, 43 volunteers have been trained, and 874 volunteer hours have been spent on investing £91,236 in 59 community groups.

In addition, across the city community members are setting up and leading groups aiming to provide support to local families. They are fundraising for local causes, organising and running gala days and advocating for one other. In some cases, community members are collaborating directly with services. In one locality, they are leading on housing and environmental improvements and they have offered to support a secondary school to connect with parents and carers in an area where pupils are struggling to attend school. Their input is not only changing the way services are designed and delivered, but also the way workers feel about their jobs.



The Make it Happen Fund has changed our thinking... it is possible... they can do it... there is funding and support... it is a powerful thing.

Communities officer



We are motivated by them. We see a lot of negativity on a daily basis. They don't know what difference they are making to us – they are changing our jobs and our roles. I think it has got the potential to totally change how we work.

Housing officer

7. See separate MIHF report on [www.wm2u.co.uk](http://www.wm2u.co.uk)

Strategic leaders are having their assumptions challenged about what voice and agency really mean in practice.



People have to be willing to give up a bit of power – and be open to voice led work changing things in communities.

Listening to parents is humbling and enlightening because they can tell you what needs to change. When I have gone along to a group meeting I realised that I was underestimating them. When you hear what people can do with just a bit of scaffolding – tiny amounts of money – these are the things that have shifted my thinking. A little bit makes a big difference to people's lives. We have always wanted to help – but it is not always our job to help.

I have found myself thinking a lot more about how we build people's resilience and confidence so that they can help themselves more. It is letting go of the bit we think we needed to do. That's the shift I have made. I always thought I was quite good at listening to people but I don't think I thought enough how they can be the solution.

Strategic leader



## 2. Convening (bringing people together to plan and learn)

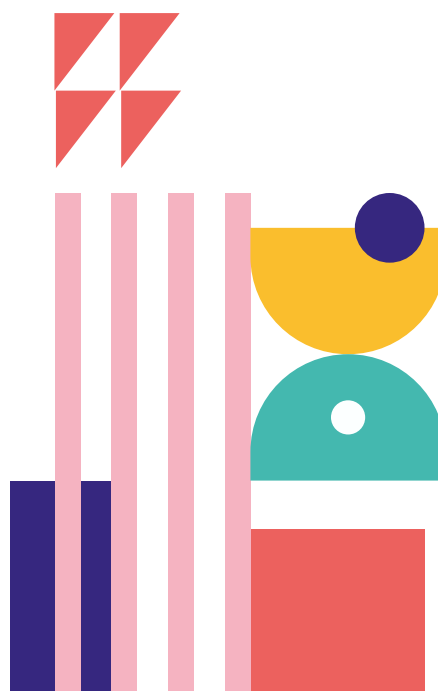
**Café Conversations<sup>8</sup>** were set up to provide opportunities for local people and local workers to talk and learn together about how to improve the local community, and for strategic leaders to join in that discussion. They were deliberately informal, started with what was most important to community members and emphasised that everyone had a role to play in celebrating successes, identifying problems and developing solutions together. The first one was held in December 2023 and since then they have extended across the city, being held three times a year and replacing the more traditionally run Local Community Planning Partnership meetings.

Attendance at Café Conversations from community members has trebled (from c.20 to 60) and from workers has doubled (from c.100 to 200) across the city. The Café Conversations have contributed to, and in some case initiated, a host of new developments involving both workers from across sectors and community members. These initiatives have included: a group focused on suicide prevention (which includes local shopkeepers); a men's recovery group; a peer support group for families with neurodivergent children; young people putting in funding bids for the development of the neighbourhood park and asking to join the neighbourhood representative structure; intergenerational groups and groups focused on green space. Many of these groups are 'short-life' and dynamic, set up to address a particular issue and ensure that people's views and ideas lead to action rather than becoming a permanent part of the structure.



What's refreshing is new working groups that have a clear focus taking forward ideas generated at the Café Conversation.

Communities officer



8. See separate Café Conversations report on [www.wm2u.co.uk](http://www.wm2u.co.uk)

Strategic leaders are keen to come to Café Conversations to test their ideas and receive honest feedback: they know that they will meet local people and the meetings are set up and facilitated to promote discussion rather than lobbying.



There is more energy in it. I was blown away by the Chair of the Local Management Group. I had no idea that this much is happening. When I have been out to groups before they have just given me a grilling.

Strategic leader

Informal discussions generate new solutions: one woman had written to a council officer suggesting her community group take over some gardening from the Council and was met with resistance for health and safety reasons. When they met in person and by chance at a Café Conversation they were able to work out a way forward together.

Housing officers realised that *'limited conversation is a problem, not limited information'*. Their manager initiated a restructure which focused on putting workers into communities and they are now deliberately using community venues to engage with tenants.



We have our housing officers going out to community groups – they are engaging with the community across the city. In food larders, soup kitchens there was real pushback to begin with but they now really like it and can intervene much earlier.

Strategic leader

The Café Conversations have changed the culture and the focus of local community planning. Although they require more involvement from a wide range of partners, they offer an opportunity to focus on prevention and early intervention, saving time and resource in the longer term. Problem solving with community members is changing attitudes.



There is an element of arrogance – we need to stop thinking we know best and we need to start thinking that communities can help us to make a bigger difference.

We can turn these communities around if we work collectively and put the resource in.

Communities officer



Café Conversations are uncomfortable but provide an opportunity to speak truth to power – without hearing it like that it wouldn't have the same impact.

Strategic leader



It's very much everyone's voices that are important. If you don't continually get that voice, we get lost. It comes direct and it's not necessarily what you want to hear.

It needs to be about that mature conversation with communities – don't want to just be about making cuts or putting something in they don't want. Café Conversations are a massive opportunity.

Dundee Health & Social  
Care Partnership Director

The Café Conversation model has been endorsed and adopted at all levels. And it is recognised that ongoing effort is needed to continually bring new people into these conversations and into the action-focused working groups.

### 3. Using data and learning as tools for change

WM2U emphasises the role of learning as a tool for transformation, because it enables us to share and reflect on what we know now, generate new ideas, innovate and adapt based on feedback at every level.

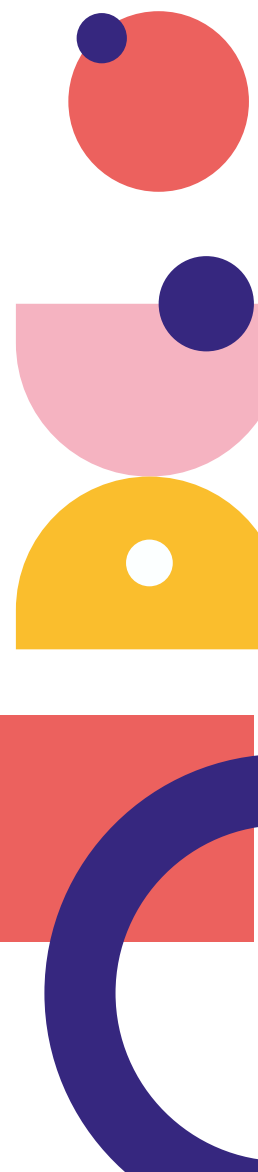
We have also paid attention to quantitative data and in this endeavour, we have benefited from the part-time secondment of the Dundee City Council Senior Officer (Information and Research) to the team. She brings valuable internal knowledge and credibility. Her position means that she is able to ensure that WM2U is aligned to other city initiatives including the 'engine room' which is developing an integrated logic model for all projects which aim to strengthen the voice of communities and reduce inequalities. This will provide a coherent citywide perspective on the indicators which will show difference in the medium to long term.

#### 3.1 Doing data differently

Data is routinely collected from services provided for children and families, but it often misses what it feels like for families. And, it can be a challenge to find capacity to use and analyse this data for learning going forwards rather than evaluation of what happened in the past.

Working with the WM2U learning partner team, the Senior Officer has developed a methodology using longitudinal data to analyse children's journeys through services. It is shining a light on what goes on in children's lives, highlighting where intervention may have made a crucial difference. The Communities Service provided data showing how many more people are involved in community activities as a result of WM2U activities, where they come from and what their outcomes are. Crucially, the outcomes include both personal outcomes, such as learning new skills, and community outcomes, such as becoming volunteers or even leaders in their local communities. At this stage there is genuine evidence of investment bringing return to the community, as the newly upskilled community members free up capacity within the CLD team to engage with and train new cohorts of community members.

'Doing data differently' also means taking the time to enquire into the experience of community members and workers, reflecting and learning from their stories alongside the quantitative data rather than simply evaluating impact. The WM2U learning partner gathers feedback and stories from across the system, circulating them to the WM2U team, strategic leaders and workers, facilitating Café Conversations (which act as thinking and planning spaces in communities) and writing briefings which inform future direction at a strategic level.



### 3.2 Embedding learning

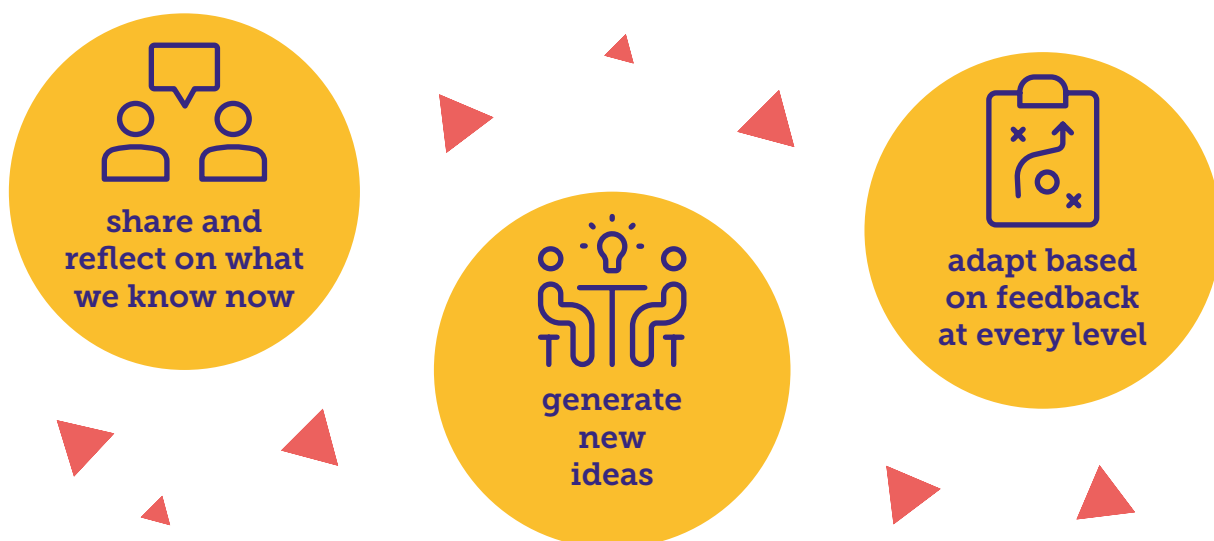
Embedding learning means supporting everyone to notice and highlight what is going well and why and to identify the barriers to change drawing them to the attention of those who can remove them. It means facilitating spaces where workers, community members and strategic leaders, sometimes separately and sometimes together get a chance to think strategically about what is happening, and how it could be improved. These spaces have enabled workers from across sectors to focus on prevention and early intervention.



[The learning partner] has helped developing the model, facilitating collaboration, drawing it out of us, capturing the narrative and telling the story to the people who need to hear it.

Communities officer

Because WM2U is active in more than one local authority, it has offered strategic leaders and workers the opportunity to learn from one another. This is particularly useful for 'wicked issues' such as how to address siloed working and reporting.



## 4. Starting with people not problems

WM2U starts with asking individual community members what matters to them and goes on to explore what matters to the whole community.

This is common Community Learning and Development practice but some workers can shy away from this question for fear that they won't be able to provide what communities ask for, or because they already have services in place which need to be used. They have become accustomed to offering an intervention rather than asking what is needed first.

Having a focus on families and starting with what matters to them makes collaborating with other workers both natural and essential rather than an extra job to do.



We are starting with people not problems now. I went to a stakeholders meeting including church, youthwork, third sector, housing, recovery worker and headteachers. It was a discussion about substance use but I jumped in about the family work and it meant everyone had a connection around the table. We all care about the same families.

Communities officer



The key thing is family engagement – WM2U offers a way for us to do that. It is about leaning into it and knowing it is there.

Dundee Health  
and Social Care  
Partnership Director



Being involved in WM2U and chairing the Café Conversation locally has shown me the potential of community members as a partner and has changed my approach to partnership working.

Dundee Local Area  
Commander



Taking a family approach has led to collaborations between housing, education, community learning and development and the third sector. As a result of meeting a representative from the secondary school in a Café Conversation, a community worker contacted the Home Economics teacher to talk about easing the transition from primary to secondary for families she knew. The teacher offered to run classes after school so that they could get to know a member of staff and the building. This was successful for the young people, their families and the school staff involved. Another Community Officer has offered space in the community centre for teachers to have lessons with young people who are struggling to come into school.



**We have got lots of people in lots of different roles working with the same families.**

**Strategic leader**

The strategic emphasis on prevention within **health**<sup>9</sup> and **policing**<sup>10</sup> has meant that strategic leaders in these services are also keen to strengthen their relationships with others, collaborate and start in communities and with families.

*'Transforming a system is really about transforming the relationships between people who make up the system... far too often, organisations, groups and individuals working on the same social problems work in isolation from each other. Simply bringing people into relationship can have a huge impact<sup>11</sup>.'*

But there is still more opportunity to make the most of the resource that is in the city. Taking a family approach could mean even better collaboration between the Council, its community planning partners, independent funders and the third sector, working strategically to reduce duplication and be accountable to the priorities set by community members in localities. The Hunter Foundation is convening a series of meetings of Dundee-based and national funders with the aim of developing a strategic approach to collaborating to address and tackle inequalities within Dundee and reduce the unacceptable level of Dundee children living in poverty.

9. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-population-health-framework/>

10. <https://www.svr.uco.uk>

11. Kania M; Kramer M and Senge P: the Water of System Change 2021

## 5. Clear coordination

The WM2U Coordinator has provided a vital bridge between communities, workers, and organisations in Dundee, drawing in resources from across Scotland. He is valued and trusted by community members, workers and strategic leaders.



Someone in the coordinating role – with operational and strategic links – can encourage diverse partners to come together in different ways.

Strategic leader



The additionality that the coordinator has brought to the city is incredible – the Make it Happen Fund, the conferences that he has had on his radar – there is nobody here that does what he does.

The opportunities that the community members have had – as a team we would always struggle to nurture such a deep progression for individuals. There isn't a [coordinator] in the Council and no one with the scope in their week.

Worker



The WM2U coordinator role is explored in more detail in the dedicated coordinator report but the essential elements include:

- ▶ **a wholly relational approach** taking time to understand what makes people feel positive and motivated, not just focusing on problems.
- ▶ **a 100% focus on being alongside workers and families** identifying practical, real-life solutions that improve how public resources are used locally.
- ▶ **freedom to follow opportunity** responding to emerging needs rather than being confined to predetermined priorities.
- ▶ **outcome-focused rather than output-driven** with no imposed KPIs that undermine relational trust.
- ▶ **entrepreneurial mindset** proactive, adaptive, persistent, and continually seeking creative ways to make progress.
- ▶ **ability to engage at all levels** from senior local authority leaders to frontline workers and community members of all ages, interests, and needs.
- ▶ **direct access to decision-makers** bypassing bureaucratic ladders that delay or dilute action.
- ▶ **flexible use of an autonomous budget** enabling quick, practical responses to opportunities.
- ▶ **flexible working patterns** recognising that meaningful community engagement rarely fits into a 9-5 framework.
- ▶ **storytelling and communication skills** collecting and sharing stories to build insight and connection.
- ▶ **cross-sector connector and networker** unbound by departmental silos (e.g. CLD, education, housing, or social work).
- ▶ **personal passion for Dundee** a sense of genuine interest in the city's wellbeing and potential.

A similar role was undertaken by a dedicated Communities Officer in the Linlathen Fairness Initiative (LFI). The LFI was guided by the voice of local people, and there are many other parallels with WM2U. The evaluation demonstrated that it improved residents' lived experiences and **quality of life**<sup>12</sup>. Strategic coordination is vital to enable voice to influence change for individuals and communities. Given dedicated time, a version of this role can be taken up by Communities Officers and drawn together across the city by strategic leaders in Community Learning and Development. But given the limited time of Communities Officers, an additional, independent coordinator with strategic responsibility can make all the difference.

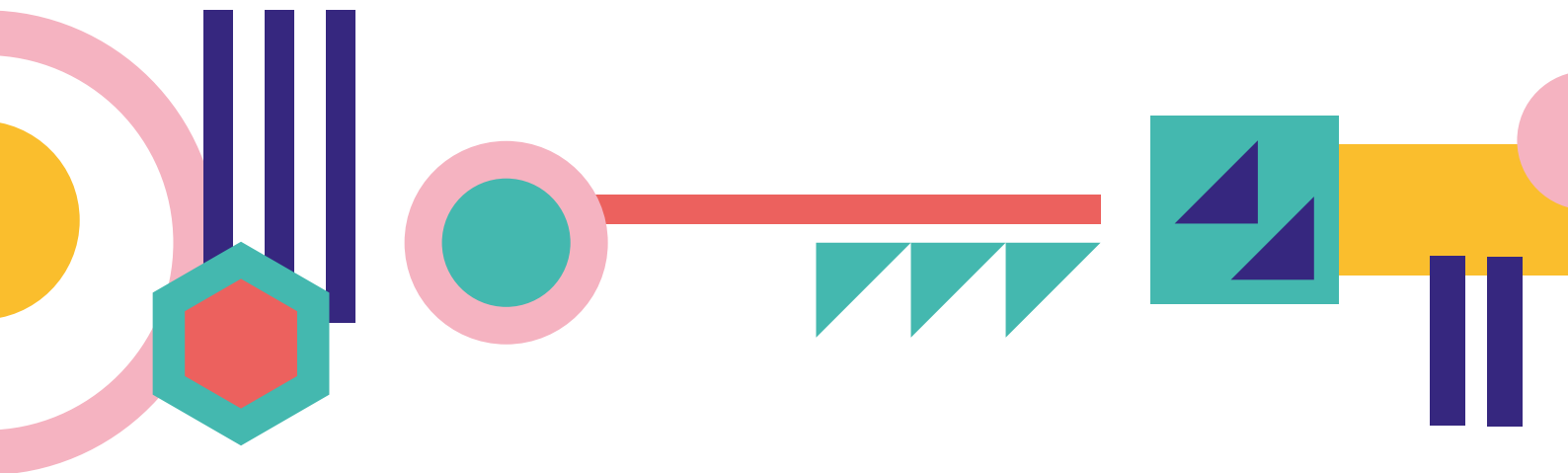
12. <https://www.dundee.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Linlathen%20Local%20Fairness%20Initiative%20%20Evaluation%20Report%20September%202025.pdf>

## 6. Governance as a tool for sustaining and embedding change

WM2U has been governed by an Enabling and Oversight Board which reports into the Dundee City Council Children and Families Executive Committee. The Enabling and Oversight Board meets quarterly to consider progress and plan next steps. It is chaired by a strategic leader and supported by the Programme Lead at WM2U. It includes representatives from across the Community Planning Partnership: police, health, third sector, education and community learning and development. Over the past three years the Enabling and Oversight Board has met quarterly providing a learning and reflection space for strategic leaders and workers from across sectors and at different levels in the hierarchy. These board meetings have included hearing directly from community members about their experience; reflecting on the quantitative data and the stories and what they tell us about impact and more recently focusing on risk as the funder prepares to withdraw.

The Enabling and Oversight Board has recognised that it performs a vital function and has decided to continue to meet beyond June 2026, to: *be accountable for ensuring Dundee continues to sustain and scale the conditions for whole system place-based approaches that place families, local communities and the environments in which they live at the very front and centre of everything Dundee City Council and its community planning partners do in support of families*<sup>13</sup>.

Strategic leaders are considering how to adapt existing planning practice in the light of the issues identified in and the initiatives developed by community members and workers in Café Conversations.



13. Revised terms of reference agreed in August 2025

## 7. Communicating hope and possibility

The WM2U approach is underpinned by the assumption that families need the right kind of support from a range of people and services at the right time to flourish. This doesn't overlook the very real day to day issues they are facing, but focuses on building their confidence and resilience in the belief that this will enable them to find a way forward. This may be in small steps, from attending a group of family fun to asking for help, and then, for some, becoming community activists.

Hope and possibility is embodied by the WM2U coordinator, it underpins the Values Based Leadership Experiences and means that every Café Conversation starts with an appreciative question: 'what do you love about your community?' or 'what is working well around here?'.

Starting with hope and possibility releases energy and ambition in others. It speaks to community members who feel valued, and value themselves more, and it speaks to workers who are inspired to find ways through difficult situations.



Don't lose sight of who and what is important – always look for and find ways to demonstrate impact on people's lives e.g. get someone a mattress. It keeps the energy going around the right thing.

Strategic leader



We need a space to look at what the actual barriers are and work through them. I am one for jumping the red tape.

Communities officer

Sometimes hope feels hard to maintain, but it is fed by:



**Celebrations** which mark the end of every leadership experience and every Make it Happen Fund panel decision making process



**Updates** on the actions agreed at the end of the last Café Conversation at the beginning of the next one



Collective and collaborative **spaces** for practitioners and leaders to reflect and learn together



**Stories** which highlight success however small

## The 'golden rules' for sustaining this work

The WM2U approach has released capacity and potential in both workers and community members. It gives leaders and workers the opportunity to be honest and say “we can’t do everything for everyone” at the same time as acknowledging that community members are far better placed to make a difference in their own communities if they are given the right support at the right time.

The WM2U approach is already embedded in some areas across Dundee and is being developed by workers and community members alike. Its achievements and success factors were mirrored in the [Linlathen Fairness Initiative](#)<sup>14</sup>, a complementary and parallel initiative in the city led by Dundee City Council with significant synergies with WM2U.

At the December 2025 Enabling and Oversight Board, strategic leaders and workers recognised progress and highlighted the risks of sustaining it. They asked that together we highlight the ‘golden rules... which we can refer back to when agendas start to change’.

These are summarised and enumerated below.

### Golden Rules

- ▶ skilled workers who are given time to do the work
- ▶ active coordination
- ▶ leaders committing to voice-led investment
- ▶ leaders and managers supporting personal and leadership development opportunities for community members and workers
- ▶ engagement with elected members and existing community activists
- ▶ leaders and managers collaborating with the third sector and independent funders
- ▶ leaders and managers enabling a systematic approach to learning embedded across the whole planning partnership
- ▶ leaders and managers focusing on collecting meaningful data for evaluation

14. <https://www.dundee.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Linlathen%20Local%20Fairness%20Initiative%20%20Evaluation%20Report%20September%202025.pdf>

## Skilled workers who are given time to do the work

Valuing a voice-led approach to releasing potential within communities means valuing the staff who initiate and support it. The WM2U approach has been coordinated externally but led internally by Community Learning and Development and youth workers who are trained and skilled in listening to community members and supporting them to address issues for themselves and their communities, without providing solutions. Some activities were also supported by School and Family Development Workers and third sector staff.

Building trust and developing the confidence of community members has required workers to be given permission and agency by their local leaders to give time to it. Given the right support, community members have become more independent, however, running their own groups and managing group dynamics within a close knit community has at times been challenging. Trusted Community Learning and Development members continue to be involved, at arms length, to support them to *'plan as well as react'* (Communities Officer).

The Communities Officers have wholeheartedly adopted the Café Conversation approach. And they are also committed to delivering citywide Local Community Planning Café Conversations focused on citywide themes or particular groups such as young people.

But making the most of the focus on early intervention and prevention requires workers with different skills, such as community empowerment, being given permission and time to put the effort in earlier.



It does make more work for us. It definitely does. Before I would sit down with [the Chair] – we would set the agenda and fire it out. That was easy. But this is more meaningful.

It requires me to do more planning and find a venue – we have been using the school. It requires more thought. My team come along – they didn't come before. But I have made a point of involving them and delegated some working groups to them because it is good for their partnership working.

Communities officer

The WM2U approach has relied heavily on CLD resources. Numbers have already slightly reduced during the time WM2U has been working in Dundee, and as a non-statutory service, CLD is at high risk of losing further resources during times of financial constraint.

Investing in community empowerment skills which enable conversations which lead to early intervention and prevention, should save overwhelm later for workers with different skills (such as social workers and mental health workers). The evaluation of WM2U has a focus on showing the cost and consequence analysis of this approach<sup>15</sup>. But this is likely to be a major challenge to strategic leaders as they will need to argue for sustaining and providing flexible investment, relying on the evidence they see and hear in advance of the economic case.



**If our staffing were removed it would be a problem. It takes a lot for a group to get a stage where they can manage everything themselves. All the support and training has helped. We need to stick around long enough to help the magic come through.**

**Communities officer**

## Active coordination

Active coordination is fundamental to sustaining the WM2U approach. Without a coordinator there is a risk that the shared commitment to being alongside families and finding practical solutions could fade, cross-sector collaboration may weaken (without someone holding the connections between organisations, teams, and communities) and opportunities for collaboration with external organisations might go unnoticed.

The Enabling and Oversight Board will also need additional support to plan strategically once the Programme Lead withdraws. Real concerns about maintaining focus and developing a clear strategy were expressed by both strategic leaders and workers.



**There needs to be strategy which deliberately includes those who are not locality based and considers what can be stopped because something else has been started and is growing.**

**Strategic leader**

15. To be published in December 2026



## Leaders committing to voice-led local investment

The Make it Happen Fund sends a strong message to community members that they are the right people to act in the best interests of their community.

MIHF provides an opportunity for community members to learn grant making skills together and it has supported a vast amount of additional community activity. The MIHF aligns with other participatory and community funds in the city. Bringing these strands into clearer alignment could strengthen the overall participatory funding and help avoid duplication of effort across different teams. It is essential that community involvement in distributing local funds is supported and maintained to ensure that community members continue to see that their voice counts and that new grassroots initiatives are supported. Sustaining it requires strong partnerships between community members, workers, and experienced grant advisors who can bring both structure and flexibility to the process<sup>16</sup>.



The things they see they have changed make a huge difference... people suggest something and it happens.

Communities officer

## Leaders and managers supporting personal and leadership development opportunities for community members and workers

A new Citizenship Education Programme and a Get Set Rebuild training journey for community members have been developed. These will need to continue to be resourced with small amounts of funding for tutors, venues and refreshments.

And it is not only community members who value leadership development opportunities. They also gave workers and strategic leaders from across sectors the time and space to connect with their values together and to develop fresh ideas for making a difference. Training and development opportunities will need to be built in to ensure that there is time to innovate, reflect and plan to facilitate community voice at a local level and continue to ensure that it influences citywide planning and prioritisation.

16. See separate 'Community-led grantmaking lessons from our WM2U experience' report on [www.wm2u.co.uk](http://www.wm2u.co.uk)

## Engagement with elected members and existing community activists

The WM2U approach engages with community members and enables them to make changes in their communities. Many elected members and existing community activists are fully behind this, but a few feel concerned about how this might impact on their role. To sustain the approach, time needs to be taken to understand their perspective, to ensure that fears are allayed and to identify opportunities for working together.

## Leaders and managers collaborating with the third sector and independent funders

The Make it Happen Fund and Café Conversations both provide opportunities for independent funders to invest in community priorities. Development work is ongoing to bring third sector and independent funders to the table and support their participation.

## Leaders and managers enabling a systematic approach to learning embedded across the whole planning partnership

The WM2U learning approach has enabled a focus on prevention and early intervention by ensuring that workers are listening to families at every level and acting on what they identify as priorities. This challenges existing structures.



We are so caught up in the governance we don't get time to get out and do things that really matter.

Strategic leader

Workers shared that the pace of work means that it is very difficult to find and prioritise headspace and thinking time, either individually or collectively. This impacts on the ability to innovate or find new ways forward on complex issues. It means that operational priorities often trump strategic ones. And it means that efforts are duplicated because there is no time to find out who else is involved or doing similar work.

Learning spaces could include: dedicated time in Enabling and Oversight Board meetings to reflect and plan; multi-disciplinary development sessions for workers at all levels grounded in data and stories; opportunities for strategic leaders to find out more about what other service areas can offer and participation in Café Conversations where they can engage with local families.

## Leaders and managers focusing on collecting meaningful data for evaluation

Reporting takes up a huge amount of time and resource in the public sector, and much of the data collected carries no meaning for community members, workers and local leadership. This issue is beginning to be tackled at a national level with agencies like the [Improvement Service](https://www.improvementservice.org.uk)<sup>17</sup> highlighting the duplication and wasted resource. At a local level WM2U has demonstrated how taking time to interrogate the quantitative data alongside stories from community members gives workers a real insight into the current picture, and an opportunity to consider what could be done to improve it.

Currently local and national government require the reassurance provided by set outcomes but genuine voice-led system change means shifting from a predetermined strategy to focusing on building power and voice. This tension has already surfaced as Café Conversations reveal new priorities alongside existing city plans and will need ongoing attention to ensure that processes, planning and practice change in response to community voice.

*"System change occurs within a constantly fluctuating activity that makes it impossible to determine 'cause and effect' in the traditional linear evaluation framework. Funders that seek to track progress within system change must gather data through multiple windows and from multiple players keeping the focus on learning to inform what to do next."*<sup>18</sup>



17. [www.improvementservice.org.uk](https://www.improvementservice.org.uk)

18. Kania M; Kramer M and Senge P: the Water of System Change 2018

## What next?

**This practice report details how, over the past six years, WM2U has been 'scaling wide' by extending out across the areas of Dundee where inequalities are most prevalent; 'scaling up' by actively engaging strategic leaders, and finally 'scaling deep' as the mindsets and behaviours of community members, workers and strategic leaders start to change<sup>19</sup>.**

Watching how community members have made the most of all the opportunities offered to them through the adoption of the WM2U approach has encouraged strategic leaders and workers to move out of the way: supporting, enabling and often following rather than leading. Some structures and services such as housing and community learning and development have either changed or extended their practice to work alongside a new generation of community activists. And other services such as health and social care are keen to do the same.

Community members are being given the support to see themselves as confident and capable<sup>20</sup> of making a difference to themselves and their communities. Workers are motivated to collaborate not because they are told to, but because they have a joint interest in doing their best for a family or community member. Services are finding ways to move towards prevention and early intervention by listening to and working with community members, which ultimately will save time and resource in the future.

The approach is becoming embedded, and has been endorsed and accepted right across the Community Planning Partnership. To be sustained it will need to be nurtured and resourced with and alongside community leaders. And it will need to involve continuous and collective feedback and learning to drive further adaptation<sup>21</sup>.

Sharing power will involve taking calculated risks and is likely to feel uncomfortable, but families are already showing where the right kind of support can take them and their communities.

A system is maintained as it is through the use and abuse of power, and it can be transformed only if the power of the people who want it to be transformed is greater than the power of those who want it to stay as it is<sup>22</sup>.

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19. [https://mcconnellfoundation.ca/wpcontent/uploads/2017/08/ScalingOut\\_Nov27A\\_AV\\_BrandedBleed.pdf](https://mcconnellfoundation.ca/wpcontent/uploads/2017/08/ScalingOut_Nov27A_AV_BrandedBleed.pdf)

20. <https://wm2u.co.uk/news/why-growing-capabilities-matters-and-difference-it-can-make>

21. Observations of and consultations with the organisations and people they funded over fifteen years led the Lankelly Chase Foundation to identify core behaviours that help systems function better for people facing severe and multiple disadvantage focusing on perspective, participation and power. These provide useful indicators which can act as a guide going forward.

22. Kahane Adam: Everyday Habits for Transforming Systems. Berrett-Koehler Publishers. 2025 p123



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