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# Kinder Communities: The power of everyday relationships

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# Foreword

Talking about kindness in a professional context does not sit comfortably with many of us. On a personal level we fear getting involved in difficult situations, of being asked to give too much or of being seen as needy. For most policy makers it feels wholly uncomfortable and open to ridicule.

However there is a growing body of evidence that consistently shows that positive relationships and kindness are at the very heart of our wellbeing. This rings true in our own lives; it is so often our families and friends that bring us warmth and support, who are there in times of need. The absence of these relationships in our own lives, and the lives of others, leads to isolation and loneliness.

We are not alone in commenting on loneliness as one of the great ‘social evils’ of our times. Modern social science has focused attention on social disengagement and on what can happen when solidarity is eroded. We are beginning to understand the costs of such erosion to society as a whole, as well as the costs to the individual.

Government, in all its guises, can be understandably reluctant to offer solutions in such a personal aspect of our lives. It pulls us, knowingly or otherwise, towards institutional solutions. To solutions focused on ever more paid professional staff and their organisations. The voluntary sector is a much caught up in this ‘institution think’ as government. But a perceived lack of humanity is impinging on our trust in all these institutions and there are important questions about the role of organisations in reasserting basic values.

This discussion paper is the start of a process, not the end. Over the coming months, we will be engaging directly with people who want to explore and talk about kindness in their work, their lives and their communities. Our central question is whether we should, and indeed could, do anything to encourage kinder communities?

We will document our experiences and share them as widely as possible, believing that it is kindness, a sense of care for others, that binds us together. By talking more openly about the importance of kindness in our lives, we hope to encourage behaviours and activities that improve all our lives.

**Martyn Evans**

Chief Executive, Carnegie UK Trust

**Julia Unwin**

Chief Executive, Joseph Rowntree Foundation



## Noticing 'not so random' acts of kindness



One of the key pieces of learning from the JRF Liveable Lives project was that the experience of taking part in the research had a significant impact on participants. They were asked to keep journals logging all the interactions involving giving or receiving help and support. Many reported that keeping a journal and just noticing, in many cases small, acts of kindness gave them new insight into their relationships. Some realised that they were more connected than they thought, others that the people they could rely on were perhaps not the ones they would have thought of immediately, some were giving without receiving or even in some cases they had no contact with others at all.

U-Lab is a massive open on-line course which aims to develop

people's capacity to be change-makers. This involves encouraging those not normally included to participate in developing holistic solutions to cross sectoral challenges in modern life. The Scottish Government is supporting a new cohort beginning in September 2016. As part of the course participants will be invited to take part in a 'month of joy' in December. We aim to ask participants to keep journals during this month logging the 'not so random' acts of kindness – those which take place in the context of connections and neighbourhoods and form relationships, and as such are more laden with meaning and risk than random acts.

Participants will share insights and hopefully take learning into prototyping of projects.

# 1. Introduction

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Carnegie UK Trust both have a longstanding interest in evidence-based approaches to enabling and empowering communities in order to promote thriving places and the wellbeing of individuals.

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JRF's overarching mission is to achieve a prosperous, poverty-free UK, while the Carnegie UK Trust seeks to improve the wellbeing of the people with particular regard to those experiencing disadvantage.

Carnegie UK Trust's work on an enabling state has charted the shifting relationship between the state and individuals and proposed a route map which would help the state become an enabler, handing communities and individuals the power to shape and contribute to their own wellbeing. JRF's programme of research on risk, trust and relationships has investigated how everyday help and support happens in informal relationships between individuals and in neighbourhoods.

This joint project brings these strands of work together to test a developing theory of change on the importance of everyday relationships and kindness in

communities. Partnerships are limited to Scotland but approaches will have wider applicability.

Our hypothesis is that everyday relationships and kindness are necessary pre-requisites for other types of community activity, such as volunteering and civic engagement. If our insights into how everyday relationships work are applied by a variety of stakeholders, can this help to increase individual wellbeing and encourage community life to flourish?

The project aims to:

- explore the evidence on the impact of everyday relationships and kindness on individual and societal wellbeing, and community empowerment;
- develop a theory of change with particular attention on those who experience poverty and disadvantage in society;



- test the theory of change with debate and deliberation among stakeholders and the public;
- develop practical approaches for applying the theory of change.

This paper:

- sets out a rationale based on evidence;

- proposes a theory of change;
- introduces 7 partnerships which aim to develop practical approaches to the theory of change; and
- sets out an approach to capturing learning.

A final report sharing learning will be published in Spring 2017.







## Permission, shared values and boundaries

The exploration of evidence showed that people often feel there is risk involved in engaging with others and in giving or asking for help within relationships. There is a risk of getting involved in a difficult situation, of being asked to give too much, or of being perceived as needy or even of being rebuffed. One of the JRF studies included a comment from one participant who said ‘why don’t you just go out and give an old lady like me a hug today’. On reflection, there are lots of good reasons why people don’t behave this way.

Thinking about what would mitigate the risk of engaging and either of giving or receiving help indicates a number of factors. The first step seems to be permission to engage in an increasingly individualised society. Secondly having some shared values about the nature of the relationship seems important. Speaking to older people you often hear stories of neighbours helping each other in a way which goes beyond what would be considered normal behaviour nowadays. People perhaps need to establish some



ground rules for interaction. The boundaries involved in Food Train Friends befriending scheme are important in making people feel comfortable that rules will not be overstepped.

The practical approach involves making the Food Train Friends boundaries available to anyone in the community who wants to be a ‘friend’. The aim is to see if providing light touch permission, values and boundaries encourages comfort in connecting and in interactions. ‘Friends’ would register on the Food Train website or complete a simple form and ‘pledge’ to support values and a few simple boundaries. We will follow up with participants to explore experiences.

## 2. What are we talking about?

The central notion of our hypothesis is that everyday relationships and kindness are important. The relationships and the kindness are distinct and mutually reinforcing.

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Acts of kindness, as revealed by the JRF work (Anderson, Brownlie & Milne, 2015), may be small scale but nevertheless significant, occur between individuals in an infrastructure where moral, or cultural, framing and reciprocity are important. We operate within a culture where we like to think of ourselves as kind to others whilst maintaining stoicism in the face of our own difficulties. Broadly speaking, our sense of dignity outweighs our comfort in revealing vulnerability. Forming and maintaining connections and acting in kindness appear

mundane but also difficult amongst the challenges presented by life, particularly for those experiencing poverty and disadvantage.

This notion clearly refers to the concept of social capital but we believe is distinctive and worth exploring in its own right. Work on social capital tends to focus on the nature of connections and the assets within civil society, defined as the space where people come together to pursue shared interests, enthusiasms and values (Hunjan, 2010), or community (see Box 2).

### Box 1: Sen's Capabilities

We can view this notion in the context of Sen's capabilities framework (Brunner & Watson, 2015) where instead of focusing on resources such as wealth or legal rights, the emphasis is on understanding what people are actually able to do and be through what Sen terms functionings and capabilities. Functionings refer to states of the person or community, what they are able to do and what they are; things such as literacy, health and mobility. Capabilities are real freedoms or opportunities – they are the set of things people can do and can be. In this way connections are functionings and kindness a capability.

## Box 2: Social Capital

Despite different definitions of social capital, most appear to be based on four key notions (Dodds, 2016):

- social trust and reciprocity
- collective efficacy
- participation in voluntary organisations
- social integration and mutual benefit

Putnam's definitions of bonding (tight relationships between homogeneous groups), bridging (looser connections between diverse groups) and linking (unequal relationships to influence and power) are familiar in a growing recognition of the importance of these types of assets alongside more traditional understandings of capital (Putnam, 2000)

The space in which we see kindness happening is between individuals, albeit with both an influence and dependence on norms within civil society or community. Our hypothesis is that these interactions of kindness between individuals underpin community participation and a broader sense of social capital and are worth considering in their

own right. An additional issue worth raising is that the concept of social capital can be seen as problematic because it implies that communities are disadvantaged as a result of perceived deficits of networks and relationships as opposed to the root causes of poverty and disadvantage (Collins, 2015). In our approach to this project we are clear that disadvantage impacts negatively on social capital and the root causes of structural inequality must be tackled, but also that regardless of other factors social capital can be built and have a positive impact on communities.

It is worth mentioning the growing movement around random acts of kindness (for example nipun. servicespace.org) and again to make a distinction. A number of individuals and organisations are advocating 'gifting' for example paying the bill of the next person in the queue at a cafe, and practicing small acts of kindness on a daily basis as a way of both achieving individual wellbeing and social change. What we are talking about here are perhaps 'not so random' (Anderson & Brownlie, forthcoming) acts of kindness – the ones which take place in the context of connections and neighbourhoods and form relationships. As such they are more laden with meaning and risk in execution.



### Box 3: Isolation and loneliness

Isolation is the absence of social networks. Loneliness is the subjective experience of isolation. The distinction is important. Being alone may be a risk factor in loneliness but is not the same thing, just as having relationships does not guarantee escape from loneliness. Solitude can be enjoyed whereas loneliness is miserable. The Mental Health Foundation have found that 42% of people have felt depressed because they were lonely and highlight loneliness as both cause and effect in mental health problems. Growing recognition of the impact of isolation and loneliness is apparent in Scottish Government actions to set up a fund to tackle loneliness, a national summit and announcement of the intention to develop a loneliness strategy in the programme for government.

Other related, but again distinct, concepts worth mentioning are resilience, isolation and loneliness. Resilience, defined as the ability of individuals, places and populations to withstand stress and challenge (Seaman, McNeice, Yates, & McLean, 2014) can be seen as an

expression of a virtuous circle of connections and kindness within communities. Growing concern and reference to isolation and loneliness (for example, Atrobus, 2014) can be seen as the opposite expression of lack of connections and kindness (see Box 3).



## Shaping stories

Learning from Inspiring Scotland's Link Up programme shows that lack of social connections, low self-esteem and lack of confidence are fundamental barriers to individual change and when these factors are prevalent across a significant proportion of the community's population that community's ability to look out for each other, to organise and effect larger scale change is inhibited. Link Up engages further upstream than many initiatives and concentrates on building new connections, developing confidence in social settings and working effectively in groups.

Link Up has been active in Hawkhill, Alloa over the last 4 years. The Village Storytelling Centre is about to engage with a cross section of the community to create and share stories which reflect their views, experiences and aspirations in their community. In addition



to producing a tangible record, it is also anticipated that the process will help forge improved relationships between community members and act as a catalyst for increased community participation. The initiative also provides an opportunity to observe some of the factors that appear important from our evidence review. Stories and myths are important in setting a context which in part informs how people behave and we are interested in how negative narratives can be proactively turned around and what impact that has on relationships within the community.

### 3. Why is this important?

In order to help answer the question of what we could do to encourage kinder communities we made connections between the Liveable Lives study (Anderson, Brownlie & Milne, 2015), a review of related evidence (Haslewood, 2016) and wider (largely Scottish based) sources.

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This was not a systematic review of evidence but drew on discussions with the advisory group (see Annex 1), key stakeholders and community representatives and includes their experience and insights in addition to published sources. The aim was to draw inferences from connections in relevant evidence to build a rationale for a theory of change to suggest potentially new perspectives or approaches.

The exploration of evidence shows that everyday relationships and kindness are fundamental to the wellbeing of individuals and communities. In an increasingly virtual world we still live in real houses, on real streets and rely on real people to make our lives work. In the context of growing isolation and loneliness (see Box 4), we believe it is worth shining a light on the infrastructure of connections and values which underpin our relationships, which remain largely invisible and taken for granted.

In addition to the contribution to wellbeing, the evidence indicates that this infrastructure of connections and values underpins community cohesion, participation and engagement. With increasing emphasis on genuine community empowerment and well documented uneven confidence to engage and participate across communities, we believe it is worth considering the potential to encourage kinder communities as a starting point in both increasing and levelling the capacity for community empowerment. We argue that whilst a discussion of everyday relationships and kindness in neighbourhoods might on the surface appear to have little relevance in the face of the urgency of the challenges of austerity and increasing inequality these concepts are at the very heart of our ability to generate wellbeing and the foundations upon which the power for change can be built.

#### Box 4: Increasing isolation and loneliness

A number of well understood shifts underpin increasing isolation and loneliness:

- an ageing population and an increase in single adult households – estimated to be the majority – 55% in Glasgow by 2037 (Dodds, 2016);
- increasing female participation in the labour market – positive in many ways but as noted by Harrop, the Beveridge welfare state was grounded in the assumption that unpaid care in society was the role of married women and as that becomes a historic relic how that care is replaced becomes an increasing challenge (Wallace, 2013);
- professionalisation of care. A feature of the way in which public services have developed has been our increasing focus on professionalism and concern with risk. Where neighbours, even when they did not have much, had a mentality of helping each other out, for example cooking for and sharing food we shifted to thinking that care e.g. food provided by a service would be better as we could be sure it would meet hygiene standards etc.
- increasing individualism and atomisation of families as we are driven by success at work, experience greater mobility in the labour market, and the decline of faith groups;
- technology fueling ever busier lives and whilst in some contexts underpinning connections in others adding to isolation e.g. texting replacing a phone call or a visit (Telfer, 2015).

#### Wellbeing

We know relationships are crucial to wellbeing. There are well documented strong associations between higher social capital and lower mortality. A recent meta analysis shows 26%, 29% and 32% increased likelihood of mortality over an eight year period, irrespective of age, due to experience of loneliness, social isolation and living alone,

respectively (Holt-Lunstad et al, 2015). Relationships impact significantly on physical and mental health. The GoWell study finds that residents in 3 high rise estates in Glasgow often attribute health problems to adverse relationships and whilst they welcome changes in physical living conditions believe improving relationships in their community would have more impact (Egan & Lawson, 2012).

ONS finds that personal wellbeing is higher among individuals who know and regularly talk to neighbours and that people's satisfaction with where they live is more affected by getting on with neighbours than by quality of housing (ONS, 2015). The Canadian Index of Wellbeing (uwaterloo.ca), on the basis of significant public engagement, identifies community as the most important of eight domains of wellbeing whilst in our own Scottish National Performance Framework it has been recognised that we do not as yet have measures good enough to reflect the importance of connections in our communities. There is a growing recognition that wellbeing is a more relevant measure of progress in society than GDP as we have seen diminishing returns on increasing wealth on quality of lives in the post-industrial world (Wallace & Schmueker, 2012).

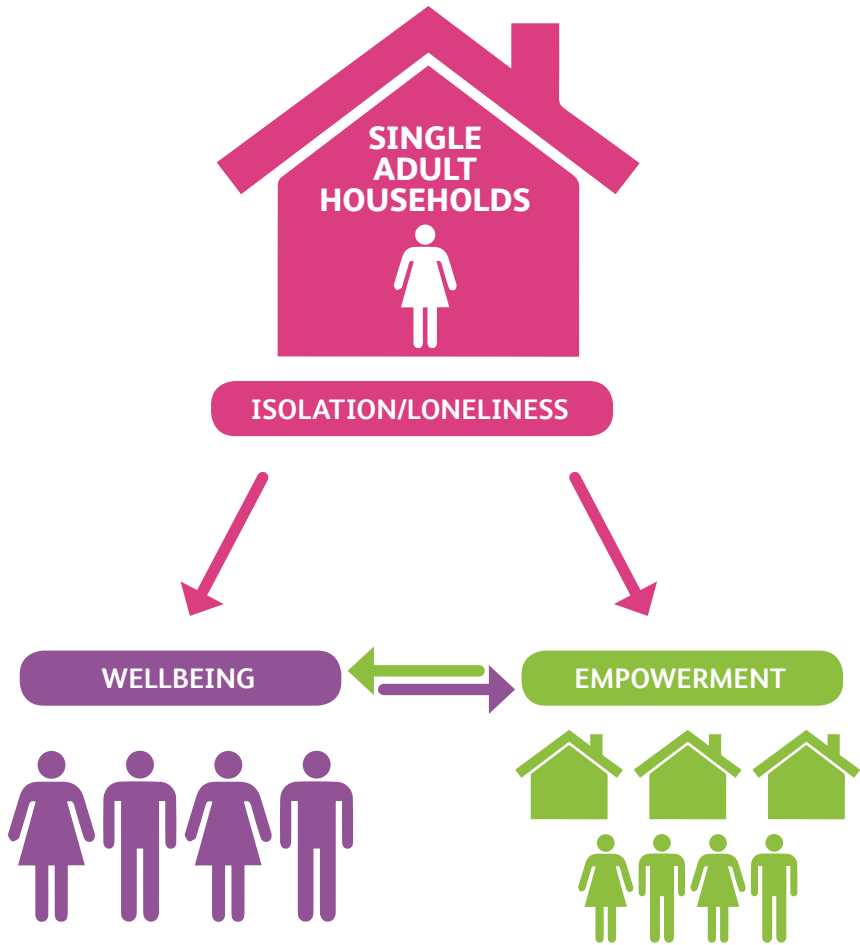
### Empowerment

ONS also identify positive relationships with neighbours as playing an important role in improving social cohesion, levels

of trust and feelings of belonging (ONS, 2015). As such they can be seen as a pre-condition for an enabling state (Elvidge, 2014) as community cohesion and social participation underpin our ability to realise key shifts from welfare dependency to genuine community empowerment. It is important to highlight that the concept of an enabling state is not one of a hollow state which simply withdraws and leaves communities to get on with it and it recognises that there is an unequal confidence among communities to create the power for change. The enabling state (Wallace, 2013) recognises culture and values as a key factor in change alongside the fiscal challenge, intergenerational tensions and environmental limits to growth. We are more likely to act in accordance with dominant values than new information. One of the key challenges of realising an enabling state is in developing intrinsic values (such as community and caring for each other) and the unequal confidence to engage makes this harder in some areas than others.



DIAGRAM 1: WHY KINDNESS IS IMPORTANT



## A space outdoors

The exploration of evidence highlighted the importance of the nature of the places we have to connect and interact in our communities. Looking at the evidence suggests we should think beyond the places we might generally tend to think of and be aware of the potential for places which include some, excluding others, of stigma and the sense of comfort and safety different members of the community will feel in different places.

In our meetings in Maryhill community representatives noted that often when they held events outside they had much higher participation than events held indoors. Speculating on why that might be, they felt that members of the migrant community might feel more apprehensive about going in somewhere they haven't been before. There might also be a sense of mistrust of public or voluntary sector run places as noted by Arnade (Arnade, 8 June 2016).

The tenant's association recently upgraded the local park and there are a number of picnic tables.



We thought it would be worth encouraging more use of this space drawing on the ideas of the importance of outdoor space and sharing food.

The tenant's association will advertise a regular picnic for anyone who wants to come along to bring their own lunch and something to share if they feel like it. The aim is to see if, with very little encouragement and no sense of provision or running by an organisation, you can generate community spirit.

## 4. What do we know about enablers and barriers?

Looking at relevant evidence we sought to understand what factors might enable or inhibit forming and maintaining everyday relationships and the capacity to act in kindness.

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They fell in three broad areas: structural inequality; history and culture and individual experience. What is important to note in considering this evidence is that whilst there are factors relating to the relative disadvantage of where we live, distinctive histories and our own biographies which shape the nature of our neighbourhoods, it does appear that communities can have very different infrastructures, values and atmospheres in very similar conditions. This evidence chimes with the experience of funders. The Lloyds TSB Foundation for Scotland (the Foundation) in partnership with other charitable funders has identified 'cold spots' in take up of funding for community activities. Areas of similar disadvantage and need differ in their 'energy' in accessing funds. Based on the above analysis we might assume that it might therefore be possible to encourage infrastructures, values and atmospheres which are better for individual and community wellbeing and empowerment.

### **Structural inequality**

It is well understood that poverty and disadvantage impact on levels of social capital. It is common sense that poor housing and the cost of leisure inhibit making and maintaining relationships (Dodds, 2016). The geographic separation of individuals and families experiencing poverty, concentrate disadvantage and stigma with the result that people living in the least deprived areas are almost twice as likely to say that most people can be trusted compared with people in the most deprived areas (61% and 34% respectively, Social Attitudes Survey, 2013). Other types of inequality impact on both the ability to make and maintain relationships and the nature of resulting isolation and loneliness. For example: differences in male and female experience; migrants; young people; lone parents and older people. Notwithstanding the clear impacts of inequality on social capital it does not explain all variation. JRF research has pointed to a need for a more nuanced

understanding of the differences between neighbourhoods that on the surface appear similar in terms of deprivation indices (Batty & Cole, 2010). They suggest that housing, transport and labour markets can make qualitative differences. The GCPH study of excess mortality in Glasgow (Walsh, McCartney, Collins, Taubault, & Batty, 2016) has also found deeply political reasons for differences, concluding that decisions to 'skim the cream' of the city's population to rehouse it's 'best' citizens in new towns left the city with 'the old, the very poor and almost unemployable' and a legacy of premature death.

### History and culture

The GCPH three cities study (Seaman & Edgar, 2015) further explored differences in social capital in areas of similar socio economic circumstances, looking at:

- psychological outlook, for example aspirations and preference for immediate or delayed gratification
- individualism
- family life, for example experience of family break up
- social mobility
- distribution and form of network links.

The findings highlight differences which in part can be linked to distinctive experiences (for example deindustrialisation has been experienced in different ways, leading to greater geographic separation from employment opportunities in Glasgow) and defining events which shape the history of a city (for example the Hillsborough tragedy is seen as instrumental in forming strong social solidarity across class divides in Liverpool). Distinctive histories shape cultural and moral framings in communities.

Social media is recognised as an important element of current context influencing how relationships are formed and maintained. It can play a positive role in increasing connections in 'the isolation of urban sprawl' (Tufekci, 2012). Evidence does not suggest a replacement of one type of conversation (offline) with another (online), rather that people who use social media are either also more social offline or have benefitted from social media to connect with people they otherwise would not have found. Keeping in touch with family and friends is among the main reasons for going online cited by people in

Glasgow (White, 2013). However, our discussions also highlighted concern with the way in which social media is used when relationships are not working – for example when neighbours are in dispute, the detachment of the medium offering cover or making it easy to vent aggression, exacerbating community relationships. Whilst our primary focus is on real life, proximal relationships, we will seek to explore the role of social media in helping or indeed hindering kindness in communities.

### Individual experience

Individuals experience and respond to circumstances in different ways. Resilience literature (Seaman, McNeice, Yates, & McLean, 2014) highlights key characteristics of resilient individuals as: having at least one strong emotional attachment; access to wider support; positive community experiences and disposition. The Liveable Lives stories (Anderson, Brownlie and Milne, 2015) show that ‘disposition’ rather than being an inherent quality is at least in part shaped by individual biography. The GCPH pSoBid study (Glasgow Centre for Population Health, 2013) has shown that, for those in more favourable circumstances, health outcomes are better regardless

of personality characteristics. However, for those in more deprived circumstances, personality traits are significant and important predictors of mental wellbeing and health related behaviour. To a degree, good mental wellbeing and the trait of extraversion (sociability, optimism and impulsivity) help to protect against the consequences of poor circumstances. Telfer, who as part of the JRF project kept a journal of her bid to be a ‘good neighbour’ notes ‘it is all very well this being neighbourly when you’re in a good place, but when some horrible things have happened you really don’t want to talk to anyone’ (Telfer, 2015). How we see ourselves in relation to those around us is also important. We might want to identify with our community leading to positive cohesion but there might also be reasons for distancing ourselves. The GCPH three cities study (Seaman & Edgar, 2015) identifies a process of ‘othering’ as a strategy of maintaining an identity of being respectable, hard-working and deserving, of individuals distancing themselves from communities perceived as being problematic. This process can be seen in Fife, where individuals who have benefitted from Fife Gingerbread’s services are keen to volunteer to help other



families. In contrast they tend to have little empathy for immediate neighbours, distancing themselves from their problems (from interview with Rhona Cunningham, Strategic Manager, Fife Gingerbread). How individuals choose to act within their circumstances is important and it is recognised that giving support can be as important to wellbeing as receiving (Dodds, 2016) and indeed that giving support can be the prompt for other to act in kindness. (Telfer, 2015) notes 'one thing I hadn't expected was that being a good neighbour is as much about receiving as giving'.

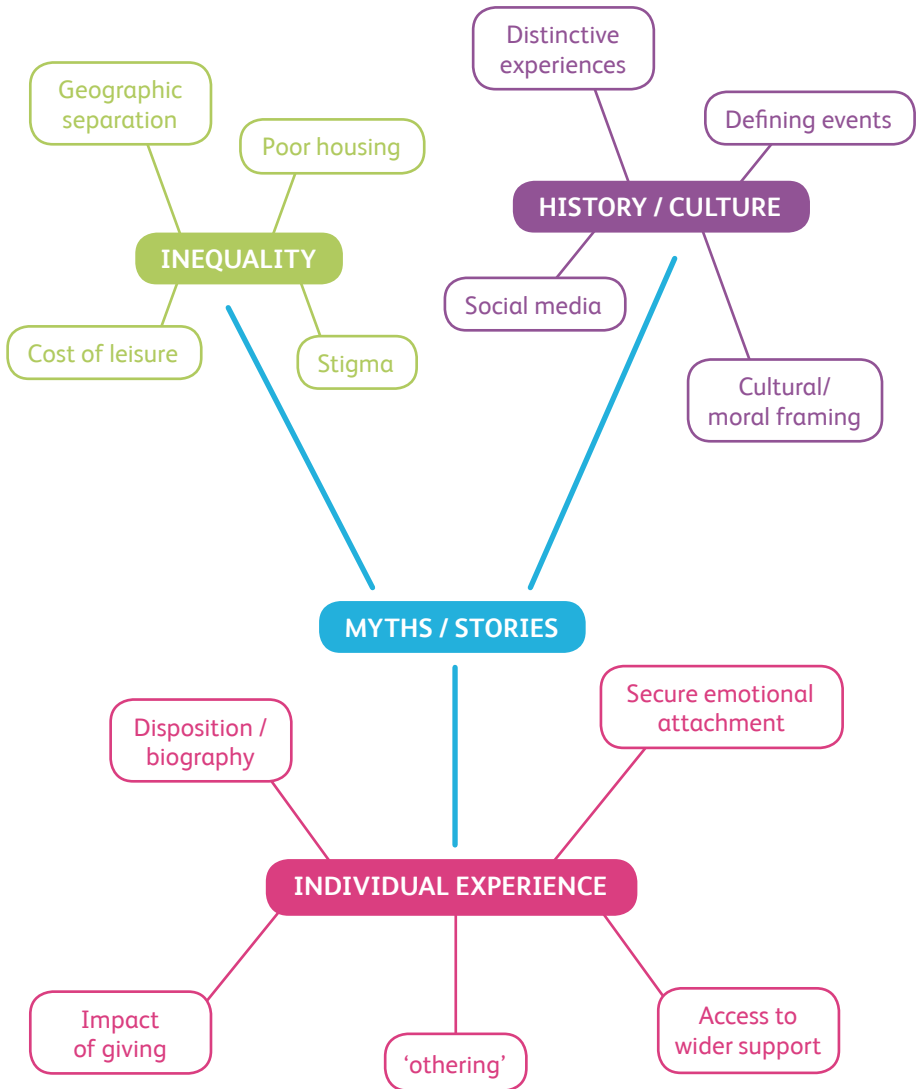
### Stories

The nature of inequality, distinctive histories and our individual experience intersect in the stories that grow up around places. Those narratives of place in turn shape our responses to individuals in

those places. For example the AHRC (AHRC, 2016) has explored how people in Dennistoun, an area to the east of Glasgow city centre, understand the relationship between stories of place and personal narrative and identify eight tropes: violence, friendliness, culture, sickness, disconnection, working class, male dominant, beauty. The Liveable Lives study (Anderson, Brownlie and Milne, 2015) also notes the importance of 'myth' at a city wide level in framing the way in which we approach relationships. Glasgow's reputation as a friendly city in part frames how Glaswegians behave, interestingly though it was to some extent seen as superficial and different from friendship. Negative narratives can be seen to be perpetuated by the use of statistics by organisations seeking resources for the area and representation in the media.



DIAGRAM 2: ENABLERS AND BARRIERS



## Valuing kindness in staff



One of the JRF reports (Anderson, Brownlie and Milne, 2015) focuses on the role of the ‘middle layer’ between interpersonal and formal service delivery. These include informal groups, leisure, community activism, public, voluntary sector and commercial organisations. They stress that it would be wrong to view the world of work and organisations as separate from or in tension with that of everyday kindness between individuals. They note that when staff transcend their formal roles there is the greatest scope for small acts of kindness and relationships of support to emerge. Such behaviour can be seen as risky in detracting from core purpose but also as congruent with good service.

The research revealed that Tesco is an important community hub in

Maryhill, an area to the north-west of Glasgow city centre, and that staff often go out of their way to help and support the community, often showing great kindness.

We aim to work with Tesco to explore:

- how Tesco Maryhill recognises and values kindness in their staff;
- to what extent staff in the Maryhill store see the benefit of acting in kindness;
- the real and perceived risks (e.g. health and safety legislation) of encouraging kindness and overcoming those barriers;
- to what extent Tesco values kindness Scotland wide;
- how Tesco can encourage acting in kindness Scotland wide;
- transferable lessons for other private, public and voluntary sector organisations.



## 5. What are we doing?

The next obvious question is whether we can identify anything that is happening currently to strengthen everyday relationships and kinder communities.

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Finding relevant evidence is tricky as there appears to be a mismatch between what we are talking about – relational experience in communities, and sources which tend to focus on the transactional – i.e. evaluation of the impact of interventions. This could be interpreted as a time lag between the direction of policy development and the evidence approaches which support that development (Ferguson, 2015). Others are invested in an established hierarchy of evidence against which you might measure any policy development (Mulgan & Halpern, 2015). The relative value you place on different types of evidence, for example randomised control trial or community led action research, and your criteria for success, for example economic growth or community wellbeing, lead to different conclusions about what you might do and indeed whether relationships and kindness are important in the first place. Within the scope of this project we do not seek to explore these tensions and counter evidence.

Elements of existing approaches may be important in encouraging kinder communities but tend to jump forward to community empowerment in purpose rather than considering the strength of the community in looking after one another as an outcome or foundation in its own right. Some relevant themes are outlined below.

### **Community development**

Over the last 25 years resources to support community development have been withdrawn. Community Learning and Development moved away from a neighbourhood model and to focus mainly around learning and employability (Garven, Grimes, Mitchell, & Whittam, 2014). As numbers in the workforce have reduced there has been a focus on project / intervention based service provision rather than area based community development. Fiona Garven, Chief Executive of the Scottish Community Development Centre highlights that community development is often seen mainly as support for community projects

(groups or organisations focusing on specific outcomes) rather than a broad based neighbourhood approach where communities work together to engage in collective action and seek to shift the balance of power. The former mitigating the worst effects of inequality but not actually tackling it, as the latter might.

As part of a wider consideration of the need for and nature of community development we believe the analysis here points to the need to think about the connections and nature of relationships within communities, beyond community organisations.

An apparent paradox in looking at the evidence is that what is identified as successful depends on organisations and what we are talking about exists beyond organisations. This perhaps reflects our tendency to jump to institutional solutions or at least solutions defined by our institutional context. All of the organisations consulted highlight key workers as the preeminent factor in their success. Link Up has analysed what makes their key workers successful and identify the following features: alignment of personal goals and values with the organisation i.e. drive to help

others and deliver change; strong self-awareness; and a sociable, calm and stable demeanour. Where we have increasing understanding about the crucial relationships between community organisations and communities we have less understanding about the relationships within the community. The evaluation of Chance to Thrive (Kennedy, Watt, Jaquet, & Wallace, 2015) and Our Place (Curry & Reid, 2015) also highlight a number of other issues inherent in current approaches:

- overlapping / conflicting groups focused in narrow silos
- non local leadership
- difficulty in handing over to volunteers
- expectation of provision both from communities and from organisations

Given that we need some level of organisation to do anything it is worth thinking about how to overcome this apparent paradox. It is perhaps not overly productive to think too long on whether you can strengthen communities without organisations but rather: What kinds of organisations support relationships in communities and how? How can we ensure a lightness of touch in intervention to strengthen communities? How

do we ensure that sustainability is about the strength of the community and not just the organisations?

### **Interface with public services**

The JRF research (Anderson, Brownlie and Milne, 2015) highlights the importance of the ‘middle layer’ between interpersonal and formal service delivery. They note that ‘organisations often assume that public trust in them will be bolstered by tight control of risk and adherence to demonstrable procedure’ but that ‘a highly procedural approach can also have the effect of reducing the scope for development of social trust’. They suggest that ‘when individuals transcend their formal roles’ there is the greatest scope for acts of kindness and relationships to emerge and ask where organisations draw the line between procedure and flexibility for human response and whether they might consciously seek to shift to the latter. The Enabling State work (Wallace, 2013) charts the shift in public services engaging with the public as co-producers rather than recipients and lists barriers as: awareness and skills, interest from the public, resources, organisational culture and accountability. Learning from case studies (Brotchie, 2013) points to the need for leadership

from public services as well as a cultural shift in intrinsic values to change the nature of the relationship between the public and public services. We are interested in the role of organisations in encouraging kinder communities and in particular the lessons for public services. What is the impact of kindness in engaging with organisations and can we create conditions where acting in kindness does not transcend a formal role? As simply put in Maryhill what difference would be made by asking ‘how are you’, smiling and leading by example.

### **Building connections**

A number of organisations are seeking to reinvigorate direct neighbourhood work designed to stimulate and unlock assets. Most focus on places and / or opportunities or purposes for people to make connections. There is much to commend approaches like Link Up (Inspiring Scotland) and places like Resonate Together (Alloa) in their contribution to wellbeing and foundation for further community development. The evaluation of Link Up (ODS Consulting, 2014) identifies impacts including: social networks; confidence and skills; community activity; integration; ability to influence; feeling healthier; more able to cope with life; seeing



community as a good place to live and being in or seeking work.

Much literature (Price, 2015, for example) assumes that making connections is sufficient in strengthening support for one another within communities. However, this exploration of evidence suggests that connections and kindness are distinct and that kindness does not necessarily follow if connections are made. In community meetings in Maryhill as part of the project it was striking to hear older people's stories of neighbours helping and supporting each other to a far greater extent than would be considered normal nowadays. We have rehearsed the reasons why these community values have been eroded but what is also clear from these meetings and other discussions is that we largely miss this sense of community spirit. This is borne out by the Fairer Scotland conversations (Scottish Government, 2016) – people want to have more trust and respect for one another. Without being unhelpfully nostalgic it does seem worth thinking about how we reassert the values of caring for one another within communities.

It is worth noting that whilst migrants report higher rates of using social amenities like

parks, libraries and community centres they have lower levels of trust in informal social control in neighbourhood, speaking with and exchanging things with neighbours, available support and feelings of belonging (GoWell, 2015), suggesting we need to think carefully about what kinds of places encourage connections and for whom.

Having purpose and feeling part of something bigger is associated with higher subjective wellbeing. The RSA Connected Communities (Morris & Gilchrist, 2015) project identifies that it is not necessarily the number of connections that are important but being able to make sense of those connections which is important. They also reflect that lack of diversity in networks is damaging. So, we need to think about the tension of shared purpose bringing people together but being excluding to others and creating inherently weak networks.

A number of initiatives seek to build supportive networks (for example Time banks, Participle, VolunteerNet) often facilitated digitally. They aim to bring people together for mutual support with participants volunteering time and specific skills in return for the ability to draw on others.

In practice some (for example Participle) have found that there is a problem of over demand for practical support. In response they have taken on paid staff to meet demand and have become a service provider rather than a network (Cottram, 2014). This is a natural evolution experienced by many voluntary sector organisations and illustrates the fine balance to be struck between the need for organisation if you are to do anything meaningful and the evolving organisation stifling the very informal person to person support it sought to nourish. Andrew McCracken, Director of the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland points to the boom in community funding following the Good Friday Agreement and the transfer of power to local politicians, sucking the power out of a civil society which until that point had been active and played an important role in society.

Befriending builds one-to-one connections between people who need support and those who want to help. The Food Train identify benefits both to their customers and volunteers in the relationships formed. They point to the 'boundaries' they provide through the organisation as a key

feature which volunteers value. They have guidelines to follow and a 'get out of jail' card if they feel the customer is taking advantage or the relationship isn't working. A number of volunteers who also help out other individuals off their own bat will say they prefer the experience of helping in the context of Food Train, exactly because of the boundaries, mitigating the risk of personal involvement.

### Asset based approaches

The theory of 'salutogenesis' – literally the origins of health – is a key focus and driver of asset based approaches. The focus on asset based approaches currently in Scotland both recognises the best of what was happening anyway and acts as a call to action for others. The GCPH and SCDC work on Animating Assets (Glasgow Centre for Population Health, 2015) among others are building approaches where how things are done are as important as what is done. Learning includes the need to: reframe thinking, use a positive approach, demonstrate that change is possible, develop a common agenda, appreciate what people want from the approach, build relationships and make connections. So, asset based approaches can be seen as one of the methods by which we achieve an enabling



state. As outlined here, everyday relationships and kindness are an important foundation. Is there a layer of development work which is worth considering before the purposeful, organised shift of power envisaged in this approach?

### Individual psychology

Work on resilience recognises that without attention to the social as well as the psychological capacity within our communities, approaches may have limited applicability (Seaman, McNeice, Yates, & McLean, 2014). Similarly, we might expect that any attempt to address social capacity without considering the psychological might have limited success. Chen 2006 (Seaman, McNeice, Yates,

& McLean, 2014) proposes a framework of: growth through pain; connection of mind-body-spirit; appreciation of nature; cognitive reappraisal; social support; and application of a compassionate helper principle. A number of initiatives, including Link Up and Includem recognise the need for significant individual support in self-awareness, understanding and managing relationships, in Includem's case through a cognitive behavioural toolkit. Both recognise the lasting impact of adverse childhood relationships and lack of secure emotional attachment in individuals' ability to make and maintain positive wider connections.



## Someone to eat with

We undertook two community meetings in Maryhill, one of the areas where the JRF Liveable Lives research was conducted, to share findings and explore what we might do to encourage kinder communities. In those meetings sharing food was identified as a useful way of both building connections and a practical expression of caring for each other.

Over the last year, Cyrenians have been exploring the role of food in meeting their objectives – supporting people excluded from family, home, work or community. Their activities, including a farm community, community gardens, cooking classes and running Fareshare distribution of surplus food in Edinburgh and Lothians have potential to link with many aspects of the food system. However, conversations with service users revealed stark priorities – what is important to the most excluded in our society is something to eat and someone to eat with. In fact what came



through their stories most strongly was the need not just for physical nutrition but the need for the connection and warmth of sharing food with others.

With this in mind Cyrenians are establishing two projects which involve providing Fareshare food to be prepared by volunteers who have come through Cyrenians cooking classes. One will focus on developing existing cafes as a local community hub and the other will develop community cook clubs across Edinburgh with communities coming together to prepare and share food.

We will follow these projects and explore the impact in the communities where they are active.

## 6. Conclusions and next steps

The analysis here suggests that notwithstanding significant underpinning factors influencing the relationships and extent of community spirit in neighbourhoods there might be some practical steps which could encourage kinder communities.

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These focus on the nature of ‘third spaces’, opportunities to form connections and addressing intrinsic values (see diagram 3). Through discussion with the advisory group, key stakeholders and community representatives we have identified a number of organisations interested in our question of encouraging kinder communities and engaged in relevant areas to establish a range of practical approaches which aim to explore these factors. These partnerships largely focus on actions which communities could take themselves. They are not presented as a solution and it is important to recognise the bigger picture of barriers and enables at the interface between communities and public, private and voluntary sector organisations.

### Third places

‘Third places’ (Oldenburg, 1999) are essentially the places which are not home, or work and provide

the spaces in which we make connections. In a policy context we tend to think of public amenities like community centres but the JRF research showed the importance of Tesco in Maryhill, providing a hub for regular interactions. This chimes with a recent article about the role of McDonald’s in the US (Arnade, 8 June 2016). Arnade suggests that where wealthier Americans turn to therapists in the face of challenges, others without resources turn to each other, and McDonalds as well as providing cheap and filling food is preferred to non-profits, for it’s safety, and freedom. The staff in these places providing a link between the formal and informal layers of society play an important role. In Maryhill, there were many examples of staff in Tesco going beyond customer service often acting with great kindness, for example checking on older people not in the store at their regular times and gifting essentials for migrant children starting school.



### **Box 5: The glue that holds communities together**

When many lower-income Americans are feeling isolated by the deadening uniformity of things, by the emptiness of many jobs, by the media, they still yearn for physical social networks. They are not doing this by going to government-run community service centres. They are not always doing this by utilizing the endless array of well-intentioned not-for-profit outreach programmes. They are doing this on their own, organically across the country, in McDonald's. (Arnade, 2016)

The community meetings in Maryhill also revealed the importance of outdoor space. Representatives of community organisations notice that when they hold events outdoors they have much higher attendance than indoors, perhaps indicating the significance of a threshold as a barrier for some people.

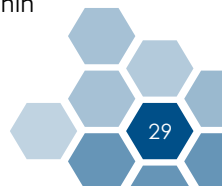
### **Opportunities for connections**

In addition to places a purpose to connect can be required. Many community projects provide

purpose related to specific interests (for example, knitting), personal characteristics (for example, lone mothers) or organising to effect change. The analysis here suggests we should think about the potential for specific interest or characteristics to be excluding to some and to some extent to create weaker networks and the limitations of moving to purposeful community development where relationships are weak. We are interested in exploring light touch ways of giving permission to engage and providing boundaries which would mitigate the perceived risk of personal involvement. We are also interested in the idea of fun and uplifting experiences providing the purpose for connection.

### **Intrinsic values**

The evidence suggests that where much activity intended to build social capital assumes making connections is sufficient we need to think about the intrinsic values underpinning relationships. The practical experiments draw on the experience of the JRF research that noticing connections and interactions leads people to think about and potentially change behaviour. They also explore the notion that we could actively choose to change the stories which, in part, inform behaviour within



neighbourhoods. If we think about the huge changes we have seen in societal values around the LGBT community, brought about partly by campaigning against prejudice, shifting social attitudes and legislation / policy both following and further cementing changes, this surely points to our ability to change our story about who we are.

### Next steps

The next stage of the project will take an approach of learning with communities and organisations involved in developing practical approaches, which explore the themes above specifically looking at the role of:

- noticing our connections and behaviour;
- permission to engage and boundaries for our relationships;
- the stories of our neighbourhoods and how they inform our behaviour;
- places to gather, particularly outdoors;
- the role of staff between the formal and informal;
- sharing food together; and
- the journey from kindness and fun to community empowerment.

The aim will be to answer a number of core questions in relation to each partnership:

- to what extent do we find evidence to support the theory of change?
- how do we cultivate the conditions for kindness and what gets in the way?
- what is the impact of different places and contexts (both personal and external) not only when things are going smoothly but also when things are turbulent (e.g. among neighbours who are in dispute, customers are dissatisfied or someone has an illness which affects behaviour)?

Where appropriate/possible we will also seek to explore:

- the components of kindness
- the role of prejudice
- the role of social media in helping / hindering conditions for kindness
- the role of organisations and leadership.

The approach will be to learn with communities and organisations involved to understand the context in each case, to listen to experiences

and views and to draw on data and evidence where available. We have established a Facebook page to record real time stories and emerging learning at <http://bit.ly/2bBiYtP>.

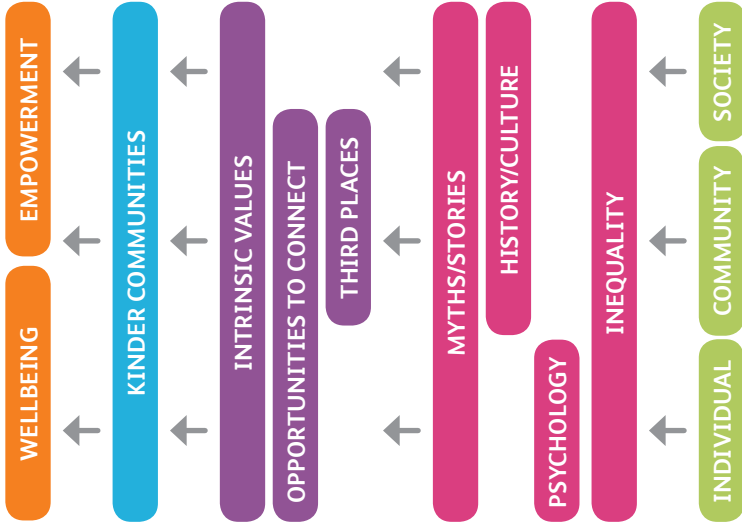
As discussed the practical approaches are not presented as a solution. The advisory group (see Annex 1), in partnership with

a range of key stakeholders, will consider learning alongside the interface with public, private and voluntary sectors.

The aim is to produce a final report in Spring 2017 which will capture learning against the questions outlined and present a range of issues and questions for the role of public, private and voluntary sectors.



DIAGRAM 3: THEORY OF CHANGE



**PARTNERSHIPS**

- U-Lab – Noticing ‘not so random’ acts of kindness
- Food Train Friends – Permission, shared values and boundaries
- Link Up – Shaping stories
- Glenavon Tenants Association – A space outdoors
- Tesco – Valuing kindness in staff
- Cyrenians – Someone to eat with
- Lloyds TSB Foundation for Scotland – From kinder communities to empowerment

**Key:**

- Outcomes
- Intermediate outcome
- Practical approaches
- Underpinning factors
- Levels



## From kinder communities to empowerment



Lloyds TSB  
Foundation for Scotland

The Foundation has identified communities which have had limited or no support from the independent funding community over many years, and which experience high levels of deprivation. They have developed a place-based programme with fellow funders to work alongside communities and other partners to appreciate the distinctness of each local area, understand the aspirations of the local community and deliver a range of approaches to help meet these. The approach relies on a pledge between the community, the Foundation and the local authority, promising an equal, respectful and mutually supportive relationship.

Evidence indicates that strong connections, interactions and relationships between individuals in the community are pre-requisites for community empowerment. If these factors are limited in 'cold spot' areas it will be important that the approach takes time to help develop these foundations, rather than moving too quickly to organising to effect change.

The evidence also shows that solidarity can often develop in response to adverse events (e.g. Hillsborough). In discussions to establish this project many community organisers recognise this but also stress the importance of positive shared experiences. Clearly you would not create adverse events to encourage solidarity. We also need to be careful that in seeking to empower we do not place an unnecessary burden on already struggling communities. Can new aspirations and energy to organise to effect change grow from connections and a sense of fun?

The place-based programme is about to start working in Fernhill, South Lanarkshire and will seek to use the learning from the Kinder Communities project to build the engagement process with the community.



# Annex 1: Advisory Group

- **Jennifer Wallace** – Head of Policy, Carnegie UK Trust
- **Jim McCormick** – Director, Joseph Rowntree Foundation Scotland
- **Fiona Garven** – Chief Executive, Scottish Community Development Centre
- **Ilona Haslewood** – Acting Head of Policy and Research, Joseph Rowntree Foundation
- **Calum Irving** – Director, See Me
- **Angela Leitch** – Chief Executive, East Lothian Council
- **Scott McGill** – Project Manager, Food Train Friends
- **Steven Marwick** – Director, Evaluation Support Scotland
- **Elinor Mitchell** – Director of Agriculture, Food and Rural Communities, Scottish Government
- **Carol Tannahill** – Chief Social Policy Advisor, Scottish Government and Director, Glasgow Centre for Population Health
- **George Thomson** – Chief Executive Officer, Volunteer Scotland

## Annex 2: References

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