

12 December 2017

The Place of Kindness

On Tuesday 12 December 2017, the Carnegie UK Trust held an event at The Lighthouse in Glasgow to share learning from work on The Place of Kindness, and hear from others about what we can all do to encourage kindness and build a kinder Scotland.

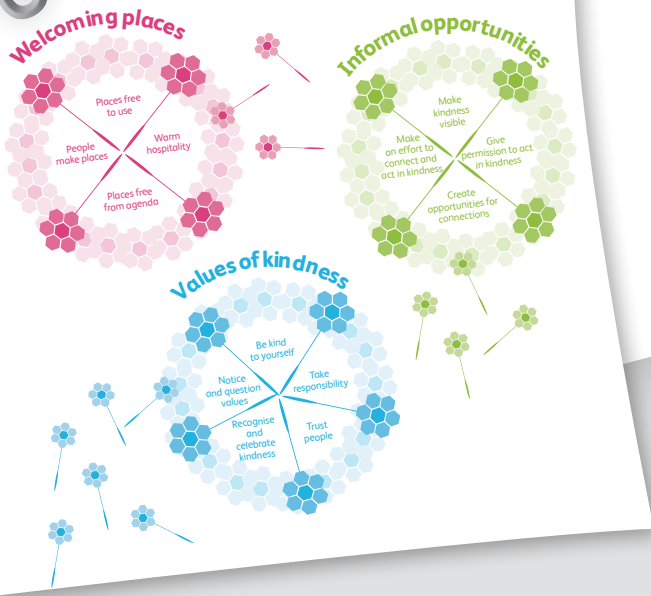
Welcome from Martyn Evans, Chief Executive, Carnegie UK Trust



Martyn Evans began the day by sharing the Trust's story of wellbeing since 1913, and explaining how we came to be working on kindness. The Trust's work on the Enabling State since 2012 has explored the changing role of the state and its relationship with citizens in the 21st century. An essential element of an Enabling State is supporting individual and community control and empowerment. Kindness in communities is central to this, as community cohesion and social participation underpin our ability to realise key shifts from welfare dependency to genuine community empowerment.

Kindness has a 'disruptive nature.' It has implications for all sectors.

- **For the public sector:** It is difficult to layer on kindness to rules-based decision making and accountability systems. But this is a challenge to be embraced; not avoided.
- **For the voluntary sector:** It poses a challenge to moving from doing things for and with; to supporting individual and community agency, and letting people do things for themselves.
- **For the private sector:** It seems many companies embed kindness into customer service, though this may be focus on sales targets rather than authentic connections with customers.



Kindness Matters

Zoe Ferguson, Carnegie Associate



Zoe Ferguson presented her work on The Place of Kindness. This worked emerged from research by JRF in Glasgow, which shone a light on how important our everyday connections and interactions are for making our lives work, and for our overall wellbeing. It is intuitive also that kindness is important for empowerment, which is something the Trust has begun to explore, and for overcoming inequality, as individual control and agency are important for tackling poverty.

Kindness is much more than simply everyone being kind to each other. There are very real economic, social and institutional factors that make it hard to engage in kindness. The Place of Kindness report sets out what we can do to

encourage kindness, centred on the importance of places and opportunities to connect, and the intrinsic values underpinning our interactions and relationships.

There are also major factors that get in the way of kindness both in individuals and organisations, including our attitude to risk and regulation, notions of professionalism, and approaches to performance management crowding out everyday kindness and intuitive human interactions.



Reflections on kindness: Panel discussion

Fiona Garven, Director, Scottish Community Development Centre
 Gerry McLaughlin, Chief Executive, NHS Health Scotland
 Elma Murray, Chief Executive, North Ayrshire Council

Panel members were asked to reflect on the Place of Kindness report, and share their thoughts with the audience. Fiona Garven reflected how kindness should be used to challenge stereotypes. Who are we saying has the 'kindness deficit'? We need to make sure we're not saying people in poverty need to be kinder to one another.

Gerry McLaughlin reflected on how often in positions of management, particularly within big bureaucratic systems, it can be difficult to always do the right thing. He reminded everyone to always challenge the barriers to kindness, in whatever small way we can.

Elma Murray spoke about changing the relationship between the state and communities. Kindness provides part of the 'how' for a new social contract. Kindness can be a tool to challenge poverty, and is something that people can own and lead in their everyday lives.



The panel discussion focused on a number of issues, including the big structural factors that mean huge disparities in life outcomes across society. While a society can be as organised and efficient as it likes in attempting to shift this, what matters in the end is the relationships we have with people around us. The Grenfell tragedy is a pertinent example. While tenants in Grenfell Tower were let down across a number of dimensions, one of the most important to them that has emerged since the tragedy has been a lack of empathy from the local authority and others.

The panel also discussed the issue of a decline in engagement and trust in institutions and people in positions of power – referred to by the panel as 'global cooling'. However, the panel were confident that where there are opportunities for people to come together, around shared places, spaces and interests, people will come. We need to create more opportunities for people to come together.

The panel concluded by reflecting on the role of kindness for brokering understanding between people, and creating opportunities for understanding others to dispel myths in society, particularly perceptions surrounding people living in poverty.



Workshop activity: Building a kinder Scotland

In groups, participants used Manual Thinking toolkits to create mind maps, setting out the enablers and barriers to building a kinder Scotland.

Some examples of the things participants said they can do to build a kinder Scotland are:

"Never think I know what someone's life is like"

"Listen, listen, listen"

"Be gentle to more people more often"

"Try to buy local where possible"

"Slow down, take the headphones out"

The three main factors that came out of the workshop as barriers to kindness were:

Time and space to act in kindness

"Feeling pressure to be efficient"

"Cultural acceptance of being busy"

"Fast pace of life"

Being 'too busy'

"Modern day living - busy and stressed"

A dominant professional culture

"Target-driven culture"

"Too much logic, not enough feeling"

"Using regulation as an excuse"

"Organisational rules and regulations"

"Always feeling the need for permission"

Confidence and fear of engaging

"Feeling like I am interfering"

"Fear of getting in over my head"

"Trust and feeling safe"

"Talking about taboo subjects"

"Afraid of the reaction"



Reflections on building a kinder Scotland

Jim McCormick, Associate Director Scotland,
Joseph Rowntree Foundation



Jim McCormick reflected on the discussions so far. He noted that a conversation about kindness should start with being kind to ourselves. Jim noted that while life can be tough, there is the wrong kind of tough (for example, poverty and inequality) and the right kind of tough. Kindness is the right kind of tough, as it is stimulating and engaging.

Kindness is bound up in relationships. All of us are grappling with the 'risk equation' in our relationships. We need richer types of

relationships, and not just between key workers and service users – it must be broader than this.

Jim also reflected on the role of Fairness Commissions in changing dominant narratives and behaviour around poverty and inequality. Kindness could be an equally valid lens for a similar conversation – the starting point or hook for such a conversation is less important. This model could create opportunities for a wider conversation about kindness.



Next steps for The Place of Kindness

Jen Wallace, Head of Policy, Carnegie UK Trust

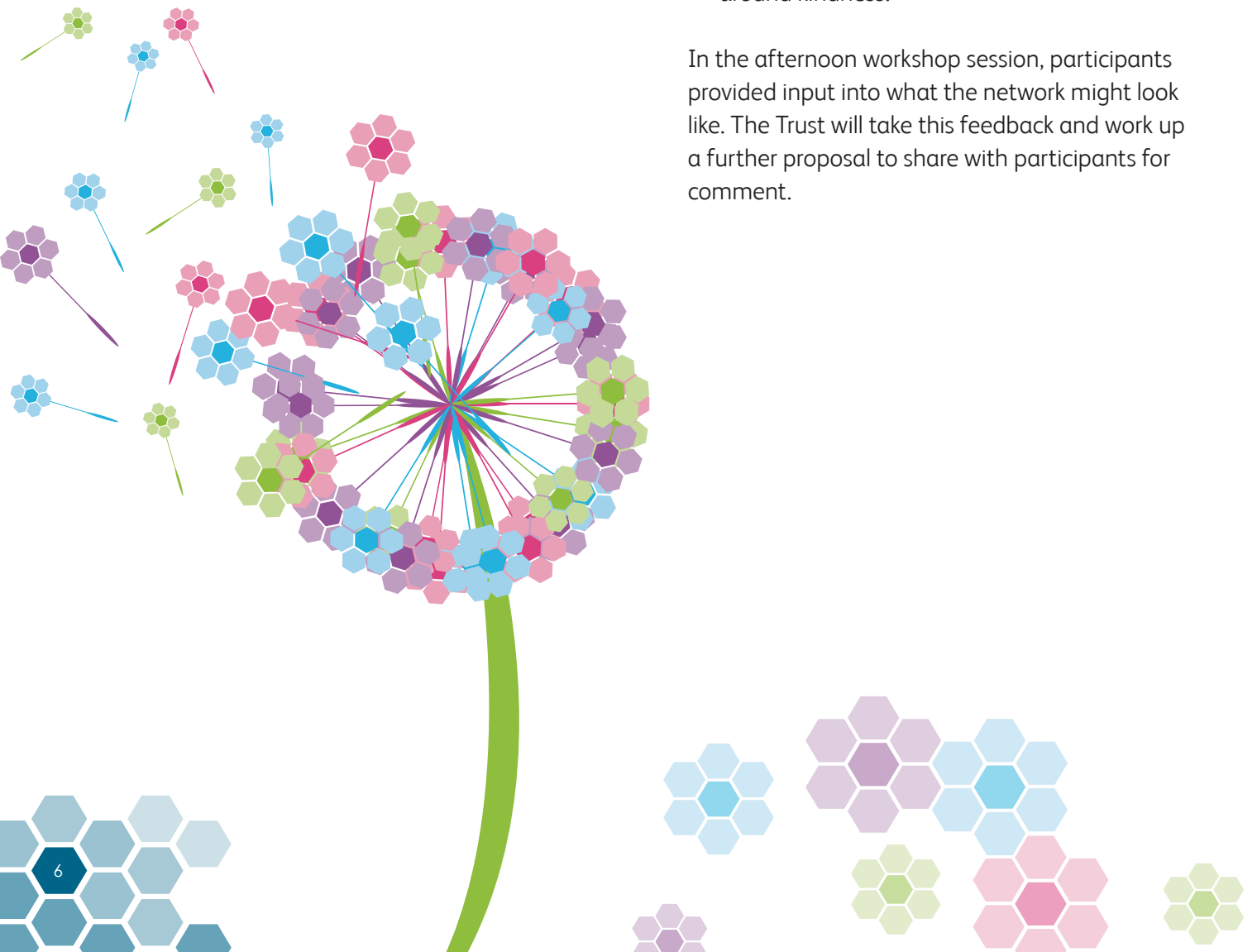
Jen Wallace reflected on the changing nature of public policy, and what the Trust's future work on kindness will involve. To tackle wicked issues in public policy – like isolation and loneliness – a one-size-fits-all approach doesn't work. Change is messy and non-linear. It's a democratic – not a technocratic – process. It requires a conversation and collective action. **Wicked issues aren't solved by one actor alone.**

Building a kinder Scotland will mean experimenting and trying new things; taking risks; not being afraid to lose; learning from failure; and working with lots of different people.

The Trust is continuing its work on The Place of Kindness for a further 15 months. In this time the Trust will:

- **partner with North Ayrshire Council** to undertake a further set of demonstration activities focused on kindness, to support the local authority's work to tackle poverty as part of the Fair for All inequalities strategy. This work will be led by Carnegie Associate Zoe Ferguson.
- **bring together a network** of people and organisations from across Scotland with an interest in kindness to share ideas and learning, test new ideas, and collaborate around kindness.

In the afternoon workshop session, participants provided input into what the network might look like. The Trust will take this feedback and work up a further proposal to share with participants for comment.



Close from Martyn Evans, Chief Executive, Carnegie UK Trust

Martyn Evans closed the event by setting out three tensions he observes with kindness:

- Kindness is disruptive; but it can also be seen as a distraction from key issues, such as poverty and austerity.
- Kindness is radical; but it can also be perceived as being conservative, in particular when it comes to issues of cost.
- Kindness is often seen as being only about organisations (public, private or third sector); but it is also about individuals that make up our organisations, communities and societies.

Martyn reflected on the unobligated nature of kindness. It is something that can't be institutionalised, demanded, or contained in a rule book. But we can create a space for kindness, and we can push people who hold the levers of change – be they space, time, capacity and regulation.

The Trust invites expressions of interest from those wanting to be part of the Kindness Innovation Network (KIN). Please contact Rebekah Menzies, Policy and Development Officer (rebekah@carnegieuk.org).



The Carnegie UK Trust works to improve the lives of people throughout the UK and Ireland, by changing minds through influencing policy, and by changing lives through innovative practice and partnership work. The Carnegie UK Trust was established by Scots-American philanthropist Andrew Carnegie in 1913.

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