



Local communities and local change

Learning from the first three years of working with communities

BRIGHTPURPOSE

**LLOYDS BANK
FOUNDATION**
England & Wales



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For nearly 40 years, Lloyds Bank Foundation for England and Wales has been supporting small and local charities that help people overcome complex issues like homelessness, addiction and domestic abuse. However, funding and availability of local services has declined dramatically against the backdrop of more than a decade of austerity.

These are services designed to help people at crisis point, such as refuges, shelters and counselling, as well as support that helps people before they end up in crisis. They are often delivered by small and local charities who have seen their funding to deliver these contracts decline. All of this as more and more people are turning to charities for help, never more so than these last five years following the impact of the global pandemic and now the cost of living crisis.

To address this increased pressure on charities, people and communities, the Foundation set up a team in 2018 to:

explore and facilitate new ways of strengthening small charities and designing and resourcing local services, with the ultimate goal of stronger, more sustainable services for people facing complex challenges in their lives.

Evaluation and learning methods

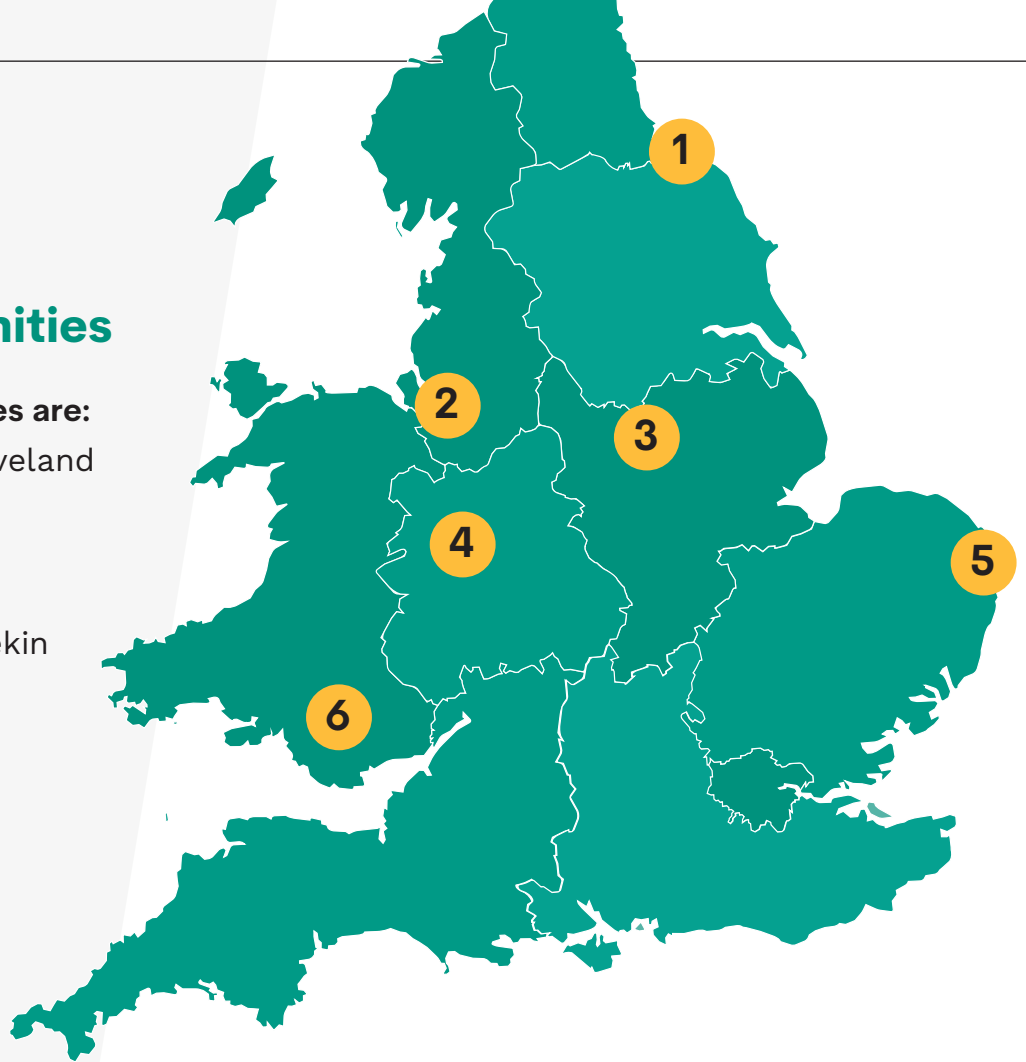
Brightpurpose has worked with the Team as a learning partner and developmental evaluator since summer 2019, and this report summarises our findings at the end of 2022.

Developmental evaluation is an agile methodology characterised by close involvement of the evaluator with the Team and their stakeholders, to observe and evaluate their new approaches in real time. The evaluator creates rapid feedback loops, which support the Team to reflect and continue to develop and adapt their approaches based on what is happening and the learning being generated.

The communities

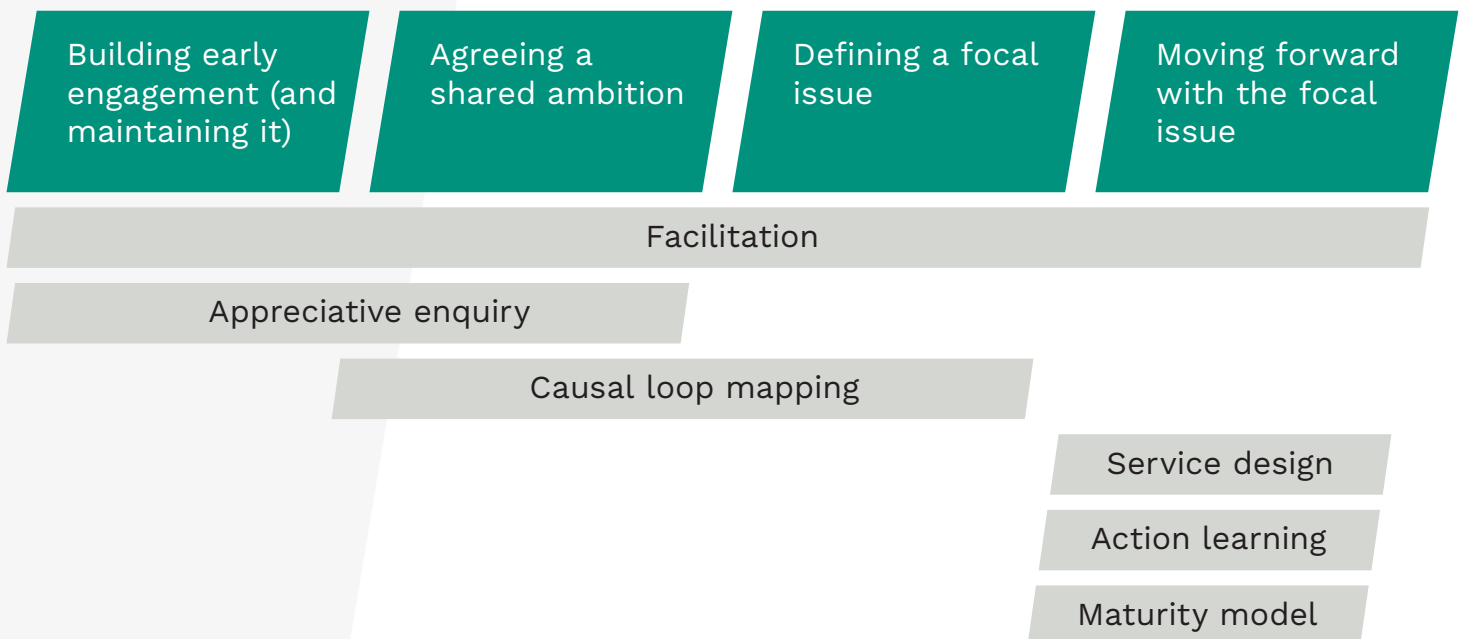
The six communities are:

- 1 Redcar and Cleveland
- 2 Halton
- 3 Bolsover
- 4 Telford and Wrekin
- 5 Great Yarmouth
- 6 Merthyr Tydfil



The phases of work

In each community, the work began with a few enthusiastic local partners and the belief that things could be different. It takes time to mobilise that enthusiasm and build momentum for change – and there are distinct phases to the process. As the work has progressed, the team identified effective methods to support the different phases.



What have we learned so far?

Changing the system takes time

Trust can't be rushed
If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together

Even positive change is hard

Rubber is hitting the road now
Even exciting change represents loss
The status quo is threatened
More hard conversations ahead

Sometimes it takes more than one try

When working in uncharted territory, there are no tried and tested solutions
Failures are to be expected
Humility to reset and try again

The role of money

Funding packages can be a distraction
But resource and capacity are crucial, eg Local Implementation Leads

Local ownership

Beyond setting the broad parameters, this can't be driven by the Foundation
But this is counter-cultural from a funder
Needs a relentless focus on dispersed ownership and leadership

VCSE infrastructure and sector strength

This is circular:
The work needs it, and the work will create it

Communication and messaging

It's important to give people something to grasp (footholds)
Help make expansive change and abstract concepts psychologically manageable

Speaking the hard truths

Critical friends need to challenge
Speak out sooner
Trust your observations, experience and intuition

Resisting the allure of technical solutions

Service and programme thinking is the organisational norm
It's also a comfort zone
Embracing system change takes confidence, skills and disciplined attention



Top right: Telford at its Best community workshop.
Top left: Causal loop mapping exercise in Telford and Wrekin, showing the interconnected nature of the issues in that local community.

The right balance

As the Team and their partners have explored what system change might mean in the six communities, we have identified four factors that we have come to think of as the Goldilocks factors: too much or too little of each has a negative impact, and it is essential to find the right balance – the ‘just right’ amount of each.

Power

Certainty

Pace

Shape

We have not found a magic formula for the ‘just right’ amount of each factor – it differs in each place and at different points in time. Instead, there is a need to be constantly alive to these four factors, and to adjust dynamically according to the needs of the communities and their respective system change ambitions.



In Telford, we brought together the charity sector, public sector, businesses, community groups, and residents to form an alliance with a shared vision of unlocking potential – not just employment opportunity, but how potential can bring purpose, balance and meaning to individuals, communities and the borough itself.

Ann Johnson, Local Implementation Lead, People & Communities, Telford and Wrekin.

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Brightpurpose is an evaluation and organisational development consultancy supporting the public sector, non-profits and charities.

We help organisations make a bigger difference for the people they serve.

Whether it's through evaluation, learning or organisational development, we look at how they do things and how it could improve.

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We're an independent charitable foundation funded by Lloyds Banking Group. We work in partnership with small and local charities, people and communities, changing lives and working towards more just and compassionate society.

The needs and aspirations of people drive our work. We strengthen the small and local charities that support them and the communities they live in, and advocate for a better future.

Through unrestricted funding, support to develop, and influencing policy and practice we help small and local charities thrive, communities grow stronger, and people overcome complex issues and barriers so they can transform their lives.



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