

Funding for Systemic Change action enquiry

**Learning paper #3**

# Places learning to change systems

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## Introduction

### The project

The Funding for Systemic Change project is chaired by Save the Children UK. It is overseen by a steering group of individuals from a range of social sector organisations including national charities, agencies and individuals (for full list see page 27).

The steering group provides project oversight and direction, engages with outputs and findings to inform the direction of the project, and shares access to contacts, networks and other relevant opportunities.

All members of the project have a deep understanding of community or place-based initiatives, systems change and complexity.

The key issue this group will examine is: **how to manage funds to best support long-term, place-based systemic change (PBSC).**

It will also explore how to reach that goal, moving away from short-term, simplistic and output-based approaches to resourcing social change.

The first phase of this work, led by Renaisi on behalf of the steering group, is designed to:

- build an understanding of how funding can best support local, place-based organisations and leaders in ‘systems change’ work;
- work with traditional funders and the national charity sector to explore ways to better fund and support this type of work,
- develop a range of practical tools and/or proposed approaches which could be tested or piloted in future stages of work; and,
- strengthen the understanding, relationships and interest in this area between steering group members and wider stakeholders.

### This learning paper

This paper sets out some examples of organisations and communities attempting to change the systems that they are working in and with. No single organisation interviewed feels comfortable that they are ‘doing systems change’. Everything is partial, experimental, restricted or limited by the funding and commissioning environment. This paper sets out:

- The starting definition of PBSC
- A range of examples of organisations working in ways that can be seen as PBSC
- An adapted definition for PBSC.

# 1. Definition of PBSC



The working definition that was developed by the group, building from their own practice and from a discussion, was then developed in work with funders (see learning paper 2) and places (see learning paper 3) to finish with this definition.

It is that place-based systemic change is an approach to social change, rather than an outcome of it, and is defined by:

<b>1. Focus</b>	It is not limited to a single organisation or service, but rather about collective and interrelated practice within a geography
<b>2. Time horizon</b>	It is long-term in ambition and practice, although it may well achieve things in the short-term
<b>3. Approach</b>	It is engaged in building and developing ongoing and evolving relationships between people and organisations, it is flexible and responsive, and it explicitly engages in questions of complexity
<b>4. Scale</b>	It is focussed on geographies that are understood by those who live in them, and to the systemic challenge.
<b>5. Intentionality</b>	It is attempting to unlock structural change, and is conscious of the different roles that need to be taken to achieve this. As a result it builds learning and adaptation into its work.

## 2. Approaches to PBSC

The ambition of this part of the project was to highlight examples of organisations and places doing place-based systems change.

The working definition allows for many organisations to claim that they fit it, on paper. What has emerged following conversations with some of those organisations, is that they were rarely sure that they were doing it, or that it was the correct definition for them.

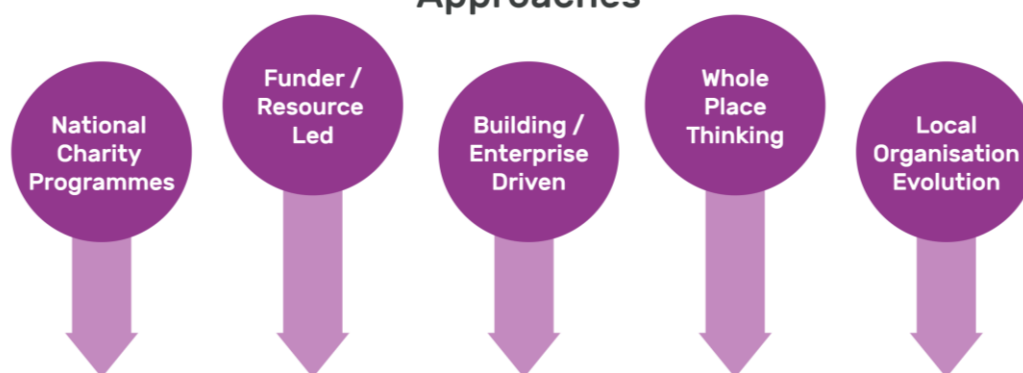
Many, many organisations could have been considered and interviewed for this research. While none of the organisations that took part think that they are doing place-based systems-change correctly or even entirely, all of them recognised at least some elements of their work in the definition. All of them saw themselves on a journey towards something systemic and bounded. That journey is as essential as the ‘systemic’ and ‘place’ elements.

The idea of doing place-based systems-change is a developing field of practice. The value of the case studies that follow is not in seeing these organisations as the ‘best’, and those not involved as in some way inadequate. Instead, these cases give some valuable insight into how the practice of those organisations has developed. The similarities are perhaps more instructive than the differences. The conversations with these organisations have been instrumental in helping to shape the framework that is presented in learning paper 4. They offer insight into how organisations develop their work in practice rather than just in theory.

The cases are grouped into common approaches which take different routes towards place-based systems change. The approaches, listed below, often describe how the organisations are seen and understood. When considering place-based systems change, however, those approaches are the starting point for work, not the definition of that work.

Case study	Learning
Volunteering Matters	Local change is predicated on investing in individual relationships.
Corra Foundation	Patience and trust from the funder can develop long term Impact.
Local Motion	Exploring the potential leverage of a collaborative.
Southmead Trust	The asset helped the community realise their needs and ambitions for change but now there is a need to maintain the asset.
Bore Place	The role of land, and our relationship to it, helping to build a sense of place
Onion Collective	The vision and drive of a group of residents combined with a focus on justice
Grapevine	Centring individuals and organising, and trusting it to make the change.
Centre 33	Volunteer led work, with local will, beginning to invest in place.

## Approaches



Approach	Description
National charity programmes	These are national organisations that have a focus on a specific issue or social problem. They have been, or are starting to, work more consciously in place as a method to achieve their charitable objectives. Their national structure, without a defined location, give them a particular approach to PBSC, and potential to influence systems in a different way.
Funder or resource led	These are approaches that are designed by a funder or are explicitly led by the resource. They build off or spark some practice locally (which could be anything from a community group to a local institution), but the role of the funder shapes how it is understood. This can give a programmatic feel, but it can also bring the significant potential for system change.
Building and enterprise-driven	These are organisations that start from a local building or a local enterprise (often both). They evolve from the business model of that space or enterprise, to connect with a range of issues within their place, which affords them opportunities to influence and shape systems. Their enterprising and community approach gives them a particular way into systemic challenges.
Whole place, thinking	These are approaches that start and end by thinking about the whole place, whether through the ambition of a group of local people, or a highly defined and funded intervention that begins with strategic collaboration across. They start by thinking about the whole, and so there is a potential to work systemically quickly. Their novelty and ambition are both their systemic strength and challenge.
Local organisation evolution	These are local organisations, often charities, that have begun to use place-based approaches to achieve their initial objectives, working outside of their 'core-business' and across the community to do much more. There are similarities to the national group, but their local nature means that they have different opportunities to influence systems.

## Approach 1: National charity programmes

These are national organisations that have a focus on a specific issue or social problem. They have been, or are starting to, work more consciously in place as a method to achieve their charitable objectives. Their national structure, without a defined location, give them a particular approach to PBSC, and potential to influence systems in a different way.

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### Case study: Volunteering Matters – Ipswich

#### Summary approach and learning

Volunteering Matters is a national organisation beginning to work systemically in some of its locations. This place-based change is possible because of the relationships employees have built across the local system and existing systemic infrastructure.

That change is predicated on individual relationships and has been most successful in Ipswich.



#### About Volunteering Matters – Ipswich

Volunteering Matters has been working on volunteering policy and practice in the UK for over 50 years. In the last two decades or so, it has focussed on developing programmes to address specific needs or to support particular groups to access the opportunities of volunteering. In recent years they've had success with programmes for older volunteers (such as Grandmentors), young people through social action, corporate volunteering programmes, and work with and for refugees.

As with many other social organisations, this focus grew out of two public policy drivers:

- the opening up of procurement and commissioning across government to a range of providers;
- the push to understand and measure value or impact in service delivery (particularly since austerity).

Combined, these drivers tend to encourage precise, programmatic and targeted interventions that can be measured and 'purchased' by commissioners or funders.

#### Place-based work

Volunteering Matters works across a wide variety of geographic locations, and in some of those locations team members' connections have ensured that they can do more systemic work by building on existing relationships and practice in those places.

Ipswich is one of those places. Volunteering Matters has been in Ipswich for twenty years. Over the last five years, the Volunteering Matters team in Ipswich has moved from being programmatic to an embedded part of the local infrastructure across a range of issues, starting with young people and the concept of youth social action.

The Volunteering Matters team in Ipswich has taken on a variety of roles and has built many local relationships. Their role is partly a leadership one, partly a connecting one, and very much a facilitating one, where they host work, connect people and build partnerships.

### **Relationships**

Volunteering Matters team in Ipswich has representation on the Opportunity Area Partnership Board; is well connected across the local voluntary sector; has supported the young people it works with to advise the local police and justice system; has engaged in the creation of local art and culture; has opened up its building to be a space that is shaped by young people and the wider sector; has relationships with key institutions and employers such as the football club so that it can leverage those to support individuals and groups such as refugees; and is seen by the local college as being able to support young people to achieve and succeed academically as well as socially.

### **Resourcing and operating**

The Opportunity Partnership (with all the drawbacks of such a programme) has brought a spotlight and focus to the work, in which the Volunteering Matters team can demonstrate its value. This is an essential part of the local context.

When spending time at Volunteering Matters in Ipswich, it is clear that young people have shaped and redefined the building, but also the thinking and attitudes of the senior team. The foundation for this collaboration is social action because it fits with the values of the team, the Volunteering Matters vision, the wider question of place, and the ambitions of the young people to change their world.

This work builds from the concept of social action into the place, and grows the power of the place, rather than building from and using the place as part of the delivery of a programme of work.

The key operational features of this local working are:

- Strong **local autonomy** for the lead and the team to make decisions within the context of the national charity. There is trust in that team, but also a clear connection back to the centre
- A building with low rents that has given the flexibility and ability to **share the space** with other organisations and young people. This has encouraged trusting relationships and collaborative attitudes.
- A **highly experienced team** who can bring specialist skills, but also flex them to contexts and needs. Skills, competencies and programmes are valued, but staff are encouraged to bring themselves fully to holistic challenges.



- A **leading team member** who sees the work of the charity in Ipswich as a mechanism to improve the place, and not an end in itself. This individual shapes a culture for what the organisation is about that is rooted in the place, and has the support to do this.
- A **blend of funding and finance**, but with that a strong awareness of what kinds of money and contracts distract from the work they are trying to do, which means they won't go near local government money. They do want to work with local government to get their infrastructure (data, capacity and communications), but not their commissioning.

### Looking ahead

The challenge for Volunteering Matters is one of replication and scale of this way of working into other places when the success of Ipswich is based on the individual, their relationships and outlook.

For the Ipswich team, the challenge is how to influence the parts of the system that are not part of the accountability mechanisms of the Opportunity Area partnership, where the team has credibility. They are looking for more partners who are willing to cross organisational boundaries.

## Approach 2: Funder or resource led

These are approaches that are designed by a funder or are explicitly led by the resource. They build off or spark some practice locally (which could be anything from a community group to a local institution), but the role of the funder shapes how it is understood. This can give a programmatic feel, but it can also bring the significant potential for system change.

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### Case study: Corra Foundation



#### Summary approach and learning

These are approaches that are designed by a funder or are explicitly led by the resource. They build off or spark some practice locally (which could be anything from a community group to a local institution), but the role of the funder shapes how it is understood. This can give a programmatic feel, but it can also bring the significant potential for system change. It is reliant on patience from the funder.



#### About the Corra Foundation

Corra Foundation exists to make a difference to the lives of people and communities. It works with others to encourage positive change, opportunity, fairness and growth of aspirations which improve quality of life. Corra wants to see a society in which people create positive change and enjoy fulfilling lives.

In 2020 Corra launched a ten-year strategy. It is long term because making a difference to the big challenges will take time. At its heart is the strong belief that when people find their voice, they unlock the power to make change happen.

Since 1985 the foundation has distributed almost £193m and made nearly 24,000 grants to charities.

In 2013 Corra began a process of identifying areas that funders weren't reaching in Scotland. Through a mix of data analysis and conversations nine communities, mostly of 2,000 people or less, were agreed on to be the initial focus for the People in Place programme. The programme was supported by a Funder Collaborative (Esmée Fairbairn, JRF, Lankelly Chase, Tudor Trust) with a shared interest in learning and an equal investment in the work.

The identified communities had less voluntary sector activity, although that certainly doesn't mean they have been without social and community assets. Corra's role wasn't as simple as handing over a cheque to the communities. The programme involved working with local government, listening to local people, and developing relationships before anything further was done. It was 'asset based' in its identification of community strengths and focused on a clear pledge to the place. Rather than lead with funding, the

programme saw a dedicated member of staff working within and alongside communities – supporting local people to identify ideas, aspirations and take action to achieve them.

### **Place-based work**

In Dunterlie, East Renfrewshire, a Community Co-ordinator supported local people, to work with partners like the council and local housing association to open the community centre up. This resulted in a blossoming of activity and ideas which has continued to grow. New groups have come together to use the space and radiating from that space there is a broader sense of community involvement and a much stronger local voice.

### **Relationships**

Corra is collaborating with the communities and this means working at the pace of the community in each place. The Co-ordinator's focus is on building trust and relationships. They bring people together to discuss ideas and aspirations, which Corra can support into action through small scale funding or brokering support.

The key context is the local. Geography has to be understood locally – not as an administrative boundary.

### **Resourcing and operating**

The main investment in each place is the Community Co-ordinator who is both locally based and part of the wider People in Place team. There is also budget available to support ideas into action for each community. To date the level of funding required has been modest – in part due to the innovation and agility of communities. It is likely that as the work develops and aspirations grow, larger scale funding will be required.

The local activity and learning from each place helps shape the future plans of the community and the wider programme. So far, some common themes have emerged across the programme including the importance of participation, space, voice, Investment, and learning & development.

Corra is willing to invest the time. Over time it is anticipated that roles will change and that Corra's input will reduce as community influence and control of local decision making and resources increase.

### **Looking ahead**

Place is now seen as integral to Corra's work. It has gone from something that they were interested in, to a key feature of the organisation's 10-year strategy.

Due to the unique conditions in each place, the work is at a different stage in each community. In some places the focus is on listening, building trust, relationships and participation. In others, communities are using increased participation and voice as a platform to engage with local decision making and democratic structures.

Looking ahead, Corra hopes to support communities to connect with each other and to use their voice and power to influence wider system change.

The challenge is to shift this work to the norm rather than the exception. How do you scale something which isn't easily 'copy and paste'? How can Corra use the systemic, place-based work they're doing to influence wider systems? How do they make the community level changes they've made more mainstream?

## Other examples

Another example of funder led approaches, which was not part of this research is the funder collaboration, Local Motion.

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## About Local Motion

LocalMotion is a collaboration of six independent foundations who have come together out of a desire to be more effective in supporting communities facing social, economic and environmental issues across the UK. LocalMotion will also see funders use their collective resources, experience and strengths to help shape philanthropic practice based on the learning from the project.

The six foundations are:

- City Bridge Trust
- Esmée Fairbairn Foundation
- Lankelly Chase
- Lloyds Bank Foundation
- Paul Hamlyn Foundation
- Tudor Trust

LocalMotion is designed to boost the potential of people and communities through a place-based approach to working. The six foundations have identified the mission of LocalMotion as:

*“To use our collective power and resources to support local people to address social, environmental and economic priorities selected and driven locally and derive as much learning as possible from that process.”*

## Place based work

At the time of writing, LocalMotion was finalising the identification of places to begin to work with, without prejudging the kind of support it would give to places, or even the precise scale of those places.

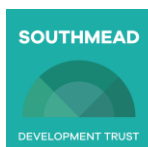
It is highlighted here not as an example of existing practice, but instead as it is exploring many of the questions of this report, and the Director of Collaboration is grappling with many of the questions of how to use the assets of foundations to best engender place-based working.

## Approach 3: Building and enterprise-driven

These are organisations that start from a local building or a local enterprise (often both). They evolve from the business model of that space or enterprise, to connect with a range of issues within their place, which affords them opportunities to influence and shape systems. Their enterprising and community approach gives them a particular way into systemic challenges.

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### Case study: Southmead Development Trust



## Southmead Development Trust

### Summary approach and learning

The impetus for taking hold of the Trust came from the community in a time of crisis and the community drove change. Without an investment in the place by that community, then so much of the work that is happening now wouldn't have happened. Without the centre, there would have been no asset for the community to focus its energies.

The asset helped the community realise their needs and ambitions for change but those activities drain the asset.

### About Southmead

In 1984, a boys school on a nine-acre site in Southmead, a north suburb of Bristol, closed down and the process of saving the space at the centre of a community began the following year. In the early 1990s a community trust was established to take ownership of that site for the community. In the years since, there have been significant ups and downs for the community and the organisation that became the Southmead Development Trust, but over the last 15 years, between a 125 year lease from the council, a land deal around the site and a significant drive to develop a plan for the community around the site, the Trust has become a significant institution within the area.

Southmead is a community with a life expectancy much lower than surrounding parts of Bristol, and with a number of other socio-economic challenges that group around places with higher levels of poverty and disadvantage. But it also has a clear identity and a wealth of social capital, much of which has been invested in and built around the Trust.

### Place-based work

There are two elements to the work of the Trust that roots it in the place:

1. A convening role. The Trust became a vehicle through which the community could organise itself five years ago it facilitated the development of the Community Plan, this was led by community volunteers.
2. Building the asset through provision of services that meet the needs identified in that Plan, that advocate for the area, that try to give the community what it needs.

The Trust is now a leading provider of social prescribing, creating a clear health and wellbeing programme; houses mental health services; runs a community café; provides an affordable gym and business units, rents out training rooms and much more.

In doing the two roles, the Trust is both of the place and for the place. It is trying to represent, facilitate, deliver and lead. It is a challenging role to take on, and one that requires balance.

### **Relationships**

The critical relationships for the Trust are its trustees, who understand the community and the building, local residents, and local health commissioners and partners.

Team Southmead Residents is a group of residents that remain independent from the Trust, to advise and influence it to keep the community at its heart.

So much of the work of the Trust has focussed on health (in the broadest sense of that word), which has developed strong relationships, which have also put strains on the Trust. There is a need to serve them as commissioners and partners, but this does create tensions.

### **Resourcing and operating**

The Trust operating model is also in tension. The challenge of delivering on its two roles is the focusing of resource. Each element of work, the café, the gym, the business units, has its own small business plan. These have to work individually for the different stakeholders, customers and commissioners, but they also have to add up to the whole; sustaining the Trust and its operating costs.

In an environment of austerity and competitive commissioning, this means that each of those individual business units is very lean. If the need for any of those services goes up, then there is a risk that the Trust begins to subsidise them so that they can continue to deliver what the community needs. To do that the Trust draws on the assets of the first part of its role. It is this role that gives the Trust and the centre their credibility with the community, that ensures that it is a representation of them and what they want, but it is also the value that ensures that what they offer to commissioners is something that other providers cannot achieve.

### **Looking ahead**

The tension of the Trusts dual role works well in theory, the community shapes the centre and builds the asset, the asset enables the development of plans that can be sold to commissioners, which better meet the needs of the community than other providers, through the physical and communal asset. In practice, the risk is that the assets get drawn away, subsidising a service that cannot afford the true value of what is being created.

What is needed, is services that are willing and able to pay to build up the asset, rather than extract from it. This would give the Trust the capacity to invest more in its convening role, focusing on community organising, facilitation, social action and other regenerative parts of their mission.

## Case study:

### Bore Place



#### Summary approach and learning

Bore Place is place based not because it is a ring-fenced area but because of the educational objectives of the Trust and the site's connection to the surrounding place and people. Its challenge is maintaining the balance of the multiple businesses it hosts, their financial sustainability with its social and environmental aims.



#### About Bore Place

Bore Place in Kent is set in 500 acres of countryside, which encompass an organic dairy farm, organic market gardens, conference centre, environmental education centre, as well as programmes for young people.

Bore Place is home to the Commonwork Trust, which was founded in the 1970s by a couple who bought the property with a vision

*“to explore how to live and work sustainably understanding and recognising the interconnectedness of the environmental, social, economic and political aspects of sustainability.”*

While best known for the conference centre and farm, in recent years the systemic and interconnected ambitions of the founders' vision have returned to being priorities of the leadership of the modern organisation.

#### Place-based work

Place and systems make sense to people that work the land in a different way to those who consider them in urban or socio-economic contexts. The Trust's role has grown from the experiences and challenges of running a working farm, of seeing young people engage with the land and understanding that while running a really good business is necessary, it is not enough to achieve their ambitions for sustainability.

#### Education

The Trust aims to use Bore Place to help people think about their interactions and relationship with the land in a different way. This happens through school visits, targeted programmes for young people with specific learning needs that are commissioned by the local authority, and through adults coming to the site for conferences and events. It uses environmental projects and farming practice to demonstrate what a sustainable relationship with the environment looks like. It uses the place to engage people in systems.

*“We’re bringing together into one location things that co-support and connect a rural location.”*

## **Environment**

The Trust works beyond its place by working with a range of other local landholders to think completely differently about how landholding and land subsidies are used. As the relationships have evolved, so has their ambition. The work has become much more about how the practices of working, caring for, engaging with and using the land needs to change for environmental reasons. It is a place-based approach to the climate emergency.

The rural setting of Bore Place sets it apart from much place-based work. Fewer people, more land and a less defined boundary open up new and interesting questions for the Trust such as how should the land be designed and managed for the society around it, and how can they influence others to think differently about land management.

## **Relationships**

Bore Place farm is run in partnership with an experienced farmer, there is also a venue (for conferences, retreats, holidays, weddings and camping), rentable space and partnerships with local businesses (such as a cheese maker, an under woodsman and a vegetable grower), and the local authority commissions work to support young people with additional educational needs.

Each of these elements requires a significant investment to demonstrate the highest quality of farming and land management practices so it can play an influential role locally and with the companies that come through and use the space. That influence on the companies that hire the venue justify the investment in the conference centre.

The key connections have been with the collaborators of the businesses, then the customers and the users of the space. Finally those who the Trust is trying to build more outward facing partnerships with. The Trust has moved from partnership and collaboration in the business domain, to thinking about what that looks like with the users of the site, to thinking about what that could look like across a wider system

*“I’m not interested in bidding and transactional relationships. I’m interested in a long-term project.”*

## **Resourcing and operating**

These relationships and connections lead to a fine balancing act. Each bit of the business model needs to work financially and also in a way that is supportive of the mission. There is a temptation to focus on the lowest risk, highest earners - the venue and the farm. Any risk means they may have to extract something from that asset or generate a surplus from the Farm but without that risk there is no systemic change.

## **Looking ahead**



The ambition of Bore Place and the Trust has grown with its understanding of the land, and the way in which the social businesses that sit around it can influence and support their ambitions to engage in much larger systemic questions of land use and land management in this country.

How can those environmental ambitions balance with the business model of the site?

## Approach 4: Whole place thinking

These are approaches that start and end by thinking about the whole place, whether through the ambition of a group of local people, or a highly defined and funded intervention that begins with strategic collaboration across. They start by thinking about the whole, and so there is a potential to work systemically quickly. Their novelty and ambition are both their systemic strength and challenge.

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### Case study: Onion Collective CIC

#### Summary approach and learning

This approach to PBSC is about the values and ambition of a small group of people. What started as a plan to rejuvenate the quay in Watchet, Somerset, through a classic, physical regeneration project morphed into something more systemic. In the act of consulting about the regeneration the real work of Onion Collective emerged. The consultation didn't just change the project, it changed how the organisation thought about Watchet and their responsibility to the people – all the people – who lived there.



Different views and ideas emerged and it became clear that this heterogeneous perspective was the power of place-based change.

#### About Onion Collective CIC

Onion Collective was set up in 2012 when a major development, in Watchet Somerset, fell through. A group of residents wanted to empower the community to make the decisions about what developments took place.

*“We spent a lot of time talking about how somebody should do something to revitalise this town. There were obvious problems and obvious solutions. In the end, we did it.”*

Watchet is not that easy to get to via public transport. It hasn't been overrun by tourism, although it's only down the road from Minehead, and it's a little isolated. Each member of the Onion Collective had left Watchet and then returned so they had both roots and perspective. They shared a vision for social, economic, environmental and cultural justice.

#### Place-based work

Onion's work started as being about physical change in Watchet, and it still is. It is working for the community, trying to navigate private developers and council priorities, and funding streams. Now it also works on art, culture and heritage projects, supporting young people and the development of their skills,

working on community ownership and social action, building and nurturing local networks. In 2015, following the closure of paper mill, and the resulting loss of 170 local jobs, Onion began to research what new industry could create jobs and reinvigorate the town in an environmentally sustainable way. They took on this leadership role, not to direct but because they had the capacity to lead.

### **Relationships**

Onion has taken on a range of roles that are sometimes wonderfully complementary and occasionally fraught with tension, they have an evolving relationship with the different levels of local government and the different traditions of local civic leadership.

Back in 2014 none of the people involved in Onion had thought the boat museum was a priority, but consultation revealed that the community did.

*“Consultation and engagement became the bedrock of what we did.”*

Raising £500,000 and building a business model around the boat museum, which they run to this day, gave Onion two types of credibility; they listen and they get things done.

Onion has become something of a backbone organisation for so much of what is going on in Watchet.

### **Resourcing and operating**

Onion’s business model is not about commissions or about a steady income stream. It relies on grant funding for projects, and then the ideas are built around the funded projects. The core of Onion is not funded because there is no asset, no commissionable service and no saleable product. This has necessitated grants and finance from a variety of sources and also means there have been months without pay, overtime and exhaustion.

They use business consultancy, mainly social impact work, to fill funding gaps but have found that this work often distracts from the work they are passionate about. As a result, Onion’s model is mainly reliant on new ideas to bring in resource. With no asset to rely on it both is exciting and exhausting. This will change when their East Quay project opens next summer and with the establishment of the mycelium biomanufacturing facility later this year, when they will add major assets and production to their income potential.

*“Hardest bit to fundraise for is time to think. You don’t get ideas out of nothing. They come from thinking, mistakes, practice and trial and error, and nobody wants to pay for that. If somebody would just give me half a year’s salary...It’s the bit that changes the world. It’s the systems thinking that is going to change the world, and there is no time for that.”*

### **Looking ahead**

Onion Collective’s work is inspiring because of the connection from idea, to people, to place, to planet. What started as a vehicle to talk about regeneration, now uses the place as the route to engage local people in social, economic, cultural and environmental justice.

Onion is reframing a problem as much as it is solving a market failure but local politics and systems leave Watchet out on its own. As a single social enterprise in one small, isolated town it is hard to influence systems across a county.

The challenge of any whole-place thinking is who pays for something that is taking over a backbone role?

### **Other examples**

Two examples of whole place work, that were not part of this research, show very different ways to Onion Collective to doing whole place work are West London Zone and Right to Succeed.

### **About West London Zone**

West London Zone started out as systems thinking in a community in west London ‘around the Harrow Road’, one of the most unequal areas in England. Families, charities, local government and schools, came together because everyone knew someone – friends, siblings, sons, daughters – who might have taken a different path with the right opportunities and with their local ecosystem of support working better for them.

West London Zone was inspired by the world’s first ‘children’s zone’ – the ground-breaking Harlem Children’s Zone (HCZ), later rolled out across 20 US states as President Obama’s ‘Promise Neighbourhoods’ programme. One of the founders, Danny Kruger visited Harlem Children’s Zone in 2011.

Kruger wanted to take HCZ’s core principles - working with a group of children from ‘cradle-to- career’ in a place-based way by building deep relationships – to change the lives of children in west London. He and the chief executive Louisa Mitchell led a community consultation to agree how to do this.

They interviewed local families with children of all ages, ex-offenders, and groups of secondary school students. They then brought together over 40 people from local government, the voluntary sector, education, community groups, and funders, to work together over about 6 months to design a model.

What has emerged from this is a community led, systems thinking, impact-driven delivery model. There is a team of West London Zone Link Workers, each embedded in a primary or secondary school every day as the trusted adult for every child on the programme. Supported by a West London Zone backbone team, they guide, support and champion each child and are responsible for designing and facilitating each child’s 2-year programme of support with them, their families and their teachers. Programmes often include specialist support such as therapy, drama, sport and catch up literacy, delivered in partnership with organisations and services working locally.

They aim to ensure that the whole community – families, schools, charities, local council, community groups – is joined up around the child to support them growing up in our Zone.

Each child’s plan is dynamic and regularly adjusted so that it meets all of their developmental needs as they progress. By tracking their progress and adapting their plan, they ensure they are improving their wellbeing, capability to form relationships, confidence and school grades throughout the 2-year programme. They also track the child’s progress over the long term until they leave school. A child can come back into the programme if they go off-track again.

Over the last five years West London Zone has grown from working with 100 children in 3 schools in one local council near the Harrow Road, to 1000 children in 30 schools in the four local councils that surround the Harrow Road. Ultimately, the aim is to change the place for a generation of children.

Their vision is of a west London community where all children and young people have access to the support they need to enable them to overcome challenges and achieve their goals.

### **About Right to Succeed**

Right to Succeed is a national organisation that works with local partners in places to build whole system improvement for a community, It starts within schools and education, but builds out.

Right to Succeed works in two ways:

1. to overcome a major educational issue – across a whole district or local authority; or
2. to drive focused, but whole system improvement in a defined area or community.

Education is data rich, but rarely does that data provide actionable insight that gives professionals confidence of what approaches/interventions might be most effective in improving outcomes in their school. Part of the problem is that we are often considering data-sets that don't give us the depth of understanding of the development of the children we see in front of us.

Right to Succeed take a developmental focus, helping schools to understand the capability development of children. This allows the school to understand what capabilities might be holding back a child's development, and consider what approaches might best develop these young people.

They do this because many of the most compelling research reports that consider the impact of various educational interventions are approaches that focus on developing a child's capability-set.

They see capability as falling into the cognitive, social & emotional, and physical realms, but with some key capability sets that sit across a couple of these realms including meta-cognition (thinking about thinking).

## Approach 5: Local organisation evolution

These are approaches that are designed by a funder or are explicitly led by the resource. They build off or spark some practice locally (which could be anything from a community group to a local institution), but the role of the funder shapes how it is understood. This can give a programmatic feel, but it can also bring the significant potential for system change.

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### Case study: Grapevine Coventry and Warwickshire



#### Summary approach and learning

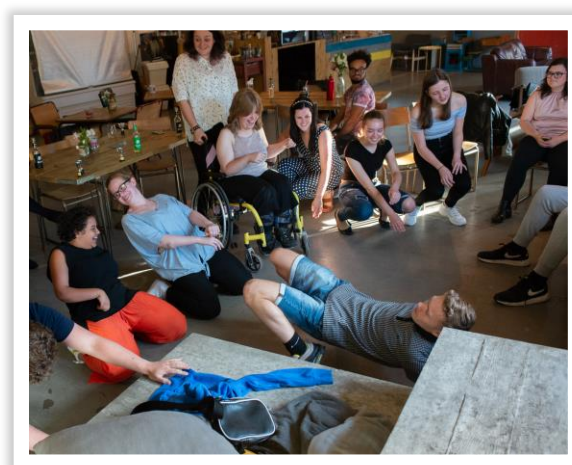
By working closely with individuals in a place, Grapevine has changed how it frames the problem and how individuals solve those problems for themselves.

#### About Grapevine Coventry and Warwickshire

Grapevine's vision is to see strong local people and communities tackling their challenges, taking opportunities, and shaping their own lives.

Thirteen years ago Grapevine was a small single-issue charity helping Coventry people with learning disabilities lead 'a more just life, a life like any other'. Along the way they developed a theory that

*'What people really need is love, intimacy, purpose, friendship, hope. People can meet these needs in each other through two-way flows of support. Two-way flows of support can solve their problems for good.'*



They began exploring new methods and expanded their reach to offer support to people facing all kinds of tough times, whatever labels or diagnosis they were given. In shifting from a single-issue charity, community organising became a key part of their approach particularly in relation to health issues and working with health partners.

Over the last five years, the organisation has learnt about the role of mobilisation to connect people to overcome issues of health, wellbeing and isolation.

#### Place-based work

Grapevine is bounded by geography but the work they did on health, wellbeing and isolation was not necessarily connected to place until they started working in one defined area, Stoke Aldermoor. With their focus on shifting power into the hands of individuals, and an awareness that the networks around those individuals can be actively strengthened to help the whole community, they began to use the place

as route into improving individuals' wellbeing by asking the question, "What do you want to change in Stoke Aldermoor?" rather than "what do you want to change in your life?"

Through this movement building approach, they have learnt about the power of place and how it resonates with individuals is relevant for their relationships with each other, their communities and the institutions that operate across their lives.

### **Relationships**

As a result, Grapevine has become something of a key organisation within the local voluntary sector in Coventry and is building a relationship with the local authority around the principle of movement building in the city.

It is also building on that organisational practice and experience in a particular neighbourhood of the city – Stoke Aldermoor. This means that Grapevine has moved from supporting an individual issue, to enabling individuals to take power, to thinking about how relationships sit in a geography around those individuals.

The role of Grapevine has had to change, to enable that individual power building, and to carefully not claim power from the community. It doesn't try to manage and doesn't try to facilitate or convene the voluntary sector. It works to find leaders, support, develop and connect them, and be there when needed. It is a careful and, at times, slow process but one with a clear vision of individuals, relationships and place.

### **Resourcing and operating**

As a charity, Grapevine is reliant on a typical funding mix of grants, commissions and contracts to piece together its work.

It's key asset is power. Grapevine is completely contingent on the work it does to support individuals and the community to have more power. This means that Grapevine operates differently as it builds relationships with the community; it doesn't consult, or co-produce. Instead its organisers build relationships first and encourages others to do the same. As a resident said:

*'If you don't click with somebody straight away when you're talking and they come at you with a clipboard basically, you're more likely to just walk away. Just going for a coffee or talking while they are walking the dog, it puts you on their level.'*

### **Looking ahead**

Grapevine has evolved significantly in recent years. That change came from an insight that focussed on power and justice for people who were not getting what they needed from existing services. As it has changed, Grapevine has engaged more and more in places and systems. They are the locations for, and the forces that stand in the way of, people living the lives they want.

The next step is to take that thinking beyond the local. How could Grapevine apply their principles to city-wide work and what institutions must they engage with to do that? And importantly, and how do they do this without taking the power away from the people?

## Case study: Centre 33



### Summary approach and learning

Centre 33's work with young people is about trust and relevance. This is achieved by teams of local workers who have driven their success in five different places.

### About Centre 33

Centre 33 was established in 1981 in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough to provide advice and support that helps young people to fulfil their potential. On referral around 76% of young people face at least two issues and 86% come with a mental health need.

It is a well-known charity, particularly in Cambridge.

They have invested in an environment and culture that allows them to work with young people in a supportive and trusting way.



### Place-based work

In recent years, the charity has established four hubs in Ely, Wisbech, Peterborough and Huntingdon, alongside its long-standing Cambridge office, giving it roots in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

Centre 33's aim is to have a locally relevant place for young people to come to and get the help that they need in a place that makes them feel safe. The rootedness and relevance are built through a large team of local workers, networks and supporters.

### Relationships, resourcing and operating

Centre 33's team includes counsellors, guided self-help workers, housing specialists, employment specialists, and many others. There are around fifty paid staff and fifty volunteers. The volunteers come from each of the five areas and bring knowledge of the context of the place with them.

*'We understand where we work, and we know the differences about what we do and don't work with. That means working with the local mosques and faith communities in one place, and taking a very different approach in how we support young people in the traveller community in another place. They have very different experiences, and we work to understand them through our work and volunteers who are from those areas.'*

Some people who have used the service move on to become members of staff, volunteers, or supporters.

*"There is an ownership by the community. It's what I aspire to."*



The charity runs on a self-referral model but young people are often signposted by professionals. They get lots of GP referrals because they are well known for their model and their focus on mental health.

Centre 33 is funded by over 40 different funders including two local commissions, National Lottery Community Fund, Department for Health as well as some local trusts, businesses and individuals. The charity finds it challenging to fund the quality the young people value most – a welcoming place for them to come and feel safe, before discussing the reasons that have brought them there. Local commissioners are looking whether to commission a very medicalised model or to consider place-based commissions for young people's mental health service.

### **Looking ahead**

The relationship Centre 33 has built with the places and communities it works with have taken them a long way and resonates with the people they serve.

Centre33 has come as far as it has despite earlier local commissioning decisions but the upcoming decision will shape what the charity becomes. This demonstrates the power of local finance in shaping how far organisations can push their place-based thinking and ambitions.

Could strategic changes to funding and resources support this place-based model to grow and allow them to engage in more systemic questions in the places they work? Or, how can they use their approach and the strength of their model to do more in the places they work?

### 3. A new definition of PBSC



The working definition that was developed by the group, building from their own practice and from a discussion, was then developed in work with funders (see learning paper 2) and has been further nuanced in this paper.

Place-based systemic change **is an approach to social change, rather than an outcome of it, and is defined by:**

<p><b>1. Focus</b></p>	<p>It is not limited to a single organisation or service, and is about collective and interrelated practice within a geography, but it is often initiated by one organisation or group</p>
<p><b>2. Time horizon</b></p>	<p>It is ultimately long-term in ambition and practice, although it may well achieve things in the short-term</p>
<p><b>3. Approach</b></p>	<p>It is engaged in building and developing ongoing and evolving relationships between people and organisations, it is flexible and responsive, and it explicitly engages in questions of complexity</p>
<p><b>4. Scale</b></p>	<p>It is focussed on geographies that are understood by those who live in them, and to systemic challenges.</p>
<p><b>5. Intentionality</b></p>	<p>It is attempting to unlock structural change and is conscious of the different roles that need to be taken to achieve this. As a result, it builds learning and adaptation into its work.</p>

## Notes



### Funding for Systemic Change Steering group

The membership of the steering group includes:

- The Children's Society
- Collaborate CIC
- Dartington Service Design Lab
- Homeless Link
- Save the Children UK
- Lankelly Chase
- The MEAM Coalition
- The National Lottery Community Fund
- New Philanthropy Capital (NPC)
- North Camden Children's Zone/ the Winch
- West London Zone

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## About Renaisi



We're passionate about creating the conditions for strong, inclusive communities to thrive.

We're constantly learning from the different perspectives we see working directly with communities, with the providers of services and the investors in communities. It gives us a unique perspective on how systems work and how to improve places fairly.

The combination of our research and evaluation consultancy with significant community programme delivery experience, makes Renaisi a uniquely well-rounded learning partner for the voluntary and community sector.

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