



Transforming Relationships

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“The Link Up values and ethos match with my approach to helping people as a psychotherapist. The importance of relationship building and empowering people to trust their own capacity to find ways to live well, to me is key to achieving thriving individuals and communities. As someone taking a social enterprise approach to providing mental health care, the opportunity to work with Link Up has been an ideal way to target my input to help those struggling in deprived communities. As an ex-NHS Psychiatrist, it’s clear that many of the community members the Link Up projects work with have complex, severe and enduring mental health problems for which they are rarely accessing the type of support and care they need from public social care and NHS services. The flexibility of access and relational engagement that the Link Up projects provide, offers the potential for trusted, non-stigmatising, validating and reliable support over the prolonged periods of time needed to empower people who’ve often experienced material and emotional deprivation much of their lives. My experience of Link Up community development workers is that they are committed, empathic, caring, patient and thoughtful in supporting their communities. I think this reflects an organisation which actually functions according to its values and is respectful and supportive of the needs of its employees. This is a contrast to my experience of the largely demoralised and burnt-out NHS working environment I used to work in.”

Dr Calum Munro, Psychotherapist, The Mental Health Care Collective



Foreword

Much has and will continue to be written about the impact and lessons of the current pandemic on our communities in Scotland, including in this most recent and very welcome annual impact report from Link Up. Yet, local responses, including to the pandemic, we now know, have been shaped and enriched by a much longer relationship – that of Link Up with local people. This report is entitled “Transforming Relationships” – and I believe this includes the transformative power of relationships – at its heart, is what Link Up is all about.

Somewhere between these two themes of transformation and relationships is where the magic lies. That place, literally and figuratively, where the way people feel, and the things they do, transform not only their own lives, but also those of others. And then, how that in turn transforms their own collective power, and their relationships with their community and with organisations. For those of us working in these organisations, we might be lucky enough to be able to help.

This new report places the work of Link Up, and the special contributions the Link Up teams make to communities across Scotland, front and centre of a narrative whose time has come. People, relationships, and kindness are where the changes are being made – and with people and in communities where the need is greatest. Turning vulnerability

into confidence is the special power of our partnership with Link Up. And using the confidence that exists in our communities to enrich and shape potential in others.

Eight years is quite a while to be in a relationship – but for those of us fortunate to be in Link Up partnerships, it isn't long enough. I look forward to continuing to work together to see the magic grow.

Dr Audrey Sutton

**North Ayrshire Council,
Executive Director of Communities (Interim)**

Link Up at a glance

Link Up is Inspiring Scotland's community development and wellbeing programme. It started in 2011 and sits at the heart of our ambition for a Scotland without poverty and disadvantage. It is among the largest and longest-running programmes of its kind in Scotland. Link Up brings people together to create activities and events by and for the community. Through this, we enable people to reinvent themselves from passive recipients of external help into active change makers and actors in their own life and community.



£7.5m invested

and 8 years of testing, learning and demonstrable impact



6 local authorities:

North Ayrshire, East Ayrshire, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Fife, Dundee



9 communities:

Saltcoats, North-West Kilmarnock, Gorbals, Possilpark, Craigmillar, Leith, Muirhouse, Gallatown, and Whitfield



A wide range of fun and purposeful activities

e.g. community cinema, upcycling, archery, music, walking, tapestry, gardening, craft, photography, dance, bike club, community food, and more!



COVID emergency response:

providing food, wellbeing support, keeping connected



A total of 25,050 participants

(inc. 1563 volunteers) since the start



Improved key outcomes that align with major policy priorities:

- o reduced isolation, increased social connectedness and belonging
- o self-efficacy/agency/control over own life and higher life satisfaction
- o improved mental and physical health and wellbeing
- o greater confidence, self-esteem, sense of purpose
- o new skills developed, confidence gained, new work opportunities realised
- o greater community cohesion and leadership



Addressing National Outcomes

- o We live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe
- o We tackle poverty by sharing opportunities, wealth and power
- o We are healthy and active
- o We respect, protect and fulfil human rights and live free from discrimination

1.0



Why invest in Link Up?

“We couldn’t have accomplished what we did without Link Up! We had a lot of anti-social behaviour issues in the park and these have now significantly reduced, easing the strain on our services. Link Up has taken the time to get to know us and local residents. Their workers have mediated sensitively where there was conflict, enabling dialogue and nurturing positive relationships to develop. They’ve supported local residents to work together to improve and enjoy the park. As the Police, we’ve also seen first-hand the positive impact this has had on community resilience when the COVID lockdown came down; neighbours had got to know one another and helped each other out. We need more Link Up everywhere!”

PC Clark, Community Police Officer

In its Programme for Government, the Scottish Government has renewed its commitment to building a wellbeing economy that raises living standards for all. It announces a focus on investing in places to create opportunities, tackling inequalities and supporting community wealth building.

“ We only need to look at the current crisis to understand the critical value community power and local economic energy can have on a place and the people who live there. We want to harness the energy of communities to ensure they are a core part of how we do economic development in Scotland.”

Protecting Scotland, Renewing Scotland. Programme for Government (2020)

It will take time to harness the energy and sustainably turn around the fortunes of our most vulnerable people and communities. That's why Link Up is here for the long-haul. But to achieve this and sustain the pace of change Link Up is catalysing, we need the financial and organisational support of the public sector bodies which operate where we do. The case for that support is clear...

- ... Because Link Up has, for eight years, shown an effective – and ultimately, highly resource-efficient – approach to addressing health, justice, and regeneration policy priorities and improving people's lives: one that is relational, bottom-up, strengths-based, and which harnesses people's own motivation and grows their capabilities. Evidence has repeatedly shown the limitations and failures of the prevailing social services model which, however well-intentioned, remains transactional, top-down, needs-focused, and underpinned by a command and control working culture.
- ... Because Link Up takes the time to fulfil people's fundamental human needs, instead of seeking to fix people and their problems. The so-called 'wicked' and 'intractable' social policy challenges faced by successive

governments can only be resolved by going 'upstream'. That is what Link Up does, carefully building the necessary foundations of secure positive relationships, confidence and self-esteem. These foundations enable people to take control of their life and flourish.

- ... Because Link Up creates a positive culture for change in Scotland's most deprived neighbourhoods. One that enables co-production and develops people as agents of change, rather than purely service users and consumers of services set by others. Link Up forges a culture of flexibility, trust, and mutual support, both in the way our workers support community members, as well as in the way our workers, themselves, are supported. Those chains of support create positive ripples that give everyone the space to (re-)imagine, grow and thrive (see our July 2020 paper 'We Start with Hope').
- ... Because Link Up builds the foundations without which we will continue to fall short of delivering on our collective ambition for a Scotland without poverty or disadvantage.

“ The COVID crisis emphasises the importance of relationships. Relationships are founded on trust. And trust is built around empathy and understanding. For me, Link Up is about the art of relationship building. The embedded nature of the programme builds continuity. And a shared will to experience vulnerability, bridge to lived experiences, and connect to opportunities. Leveraging established relationships with communities and community organisations also requires trust. Link Up's role in Foodshare in North Edinburgh demonstrates the depth of trust, responsiveness to context, and organisation, at pace. The impact of this partnership has been phenomenal. The learning from these experiences provides useful references for future place-based action.”

Diarmaid Lawlor, Associate Director for Place, Scottish Futures Trust

2.0



What difference are we making?

2.1: Building the foundations for individual and societal wellbeing

Research has shown the role of Link Up on wellbeing. Preliminary PhD analysis by Cristina Asenjo-Palma (University of Edinburgh) shows Link Up's direct effect on mental health, helping to reduce participants' depression and anxiety, feeling less isolated and enjoying peer support.

“It gives me the strength to carry on because when I am not doing this, I’m in the hospital.”

“I’m not feeling segregated because of my illness. They don’t make me feel like “he suffers from depression, don’t go near him”.”

The following Link Up stories of change further illustrate Link Up's positive impacts.



“ I love coming to The Well as it helps with my self-esteem and gives me the courage to do the things I love and it's so good for so many people that need an outlet for their expression.”

Link Up participant

Supporting recovery

The Well: Leith Acoustic Café brings people with a wide range of challenging life experiences together, providing evening entertainment in a 'dry' and safe space. Participation and impact have grown over time helping people develop new friendships, learn new skills, grow in confidence, and acquire a positive sense of shared purpose and belonging. The entertainment – music, poetry, spoken word – is performed by local people who enjoy the chance to develop their creative talents. There's a broad mix of participants, across age groups and backgrounds, working together to run the events. Everyone is welcome to contribute whatever they're comfortable with, from bravely performing their art, to setting up tables and welcoming people.

The Well allows people to develop skills in hospitality, basic sound engineering as well as the expressive arts and performance. One participant has progressed from reluctantly reading

her short poems to now performing comical skits using different accents. It also provides a space for people with learning difficulties to express themselves on an equal platform to others. Their self-expression is given a validity that is often missing from society. The Well creates a space where it is alright to be honest about your struggles.

Sparking activism

Patrick (not his real name), who is a wheelchair user, took part in last year's "W.E.L." health and wellbeing course supported by Link Up. This was a catalyst for positive change for him, motivating him to start a Degree in Community Education and to join the Board of our host charity.

For the Board, Patrick's involvement has been instrumental in helping them understand and address the barriers to participation for people with disabilities.



“ There's little reminders like this that I'm active in my community and that's important to me and it's important for me to instil it in my kids. It's really important for me.”

Link Up participant

Research has also highlighted Link Up's positive impact on life satisfaction and aspirations, with a greater sense of belonging and shared purpose:

- *"I feel as if now there's a bigger purpose for me; do you know what I mean? I want to go back to work, that's my purpose now, to go back to work. There is a purpose there for me and it's helped me find that. It's basically helped me to find myself again."*
- *"Because I come here I'm happier, so am I. I can go out there. I can relate to people there, so I can. Whereas before it was just: "No, I don't want to talk to anybody. I don't want to go out, I don't want to go near anybody.""*

We have numerous stories of change that shed light on how Link Up creates greater life satisfaction:

Gaining qualifications

Kenny (not his real name), a 14-year old participant with Link Up's Bike Hub, passed his City & Guilds Level 1 Bike Maintenance and was the youngest in the UK to do so. Kenny is autistic and the training was delivered in tandem with his school. Kenny has since moved on to level 2.

'Hip Operation'

The Link Up young people dance group recently engaged two local care homes in Whitfield, teaching residents new dances and learning some themselves. This had a tremendous impact on the residents, many of whom have dementia, but also on the young people who gained a whole new respect for the older generation. It is a model the Activity Coordinators plan to replicate to attract more volunteers into their care homes.

2.2: Enabling community change

As stated above, Link Up helps to create the foundations for change. And for a significant number, this self-managed change is accompanied by growing community activism.

Our evidence has shown that by harnessing this active citizenship, a second phase of transformation can proceed; one that operates at a collective level in which local people and organisations (public, social and commercial) collaborate to identify and begin working towards a sustainable and thriving future. Two examples from the past year highlight the power of this way of working – one which aligns fully with the aims of the Place Principle promoted by the Scottish Government and COSLA:



Link Up Gallatown

Link Up Gallatown has been working in partnership with NHS Fife to address the challenges experienced by the local Victoria Hospital in filling certain vacancies, particularly domestic posts.

Link Up workers developed and co-ordinated a training package for interested individuals and each participant was given a guaranteed work placement at the Victoria Hospital. Six local people took part in training and were supported through the programme by the Link Up workers. Three were given the opportunity to take part in work placements and have subsequently secured full-time employment. One of the individuals

who suffered from low self-esteem and required significant support from local workers told us that his self-confidence has improved significantly, that he is much more able to advocate on behalf of himself and his mother, for whom he is the main carer.

The pilot has been so successful that further talks have taken place with the NHS to look at other opportunities for local unemployed people in areas such as portering and catering. It is hoped that this will turn into an ongoing process which can be supported through training from the new Gallatown Community Hub and through the local Link Up workers.



Link Up Whitfield

In Whitfield (Dundee), our Link Up team was instrumental in establishing the North East Project (NEP) in Autumn 2018. NEP is a collaboration of residents and workers from local third sector organisations and Council teams; it has five priorities:

- Close the jobs gap
- Improve health and well-being outcomes for children and young people who experience inequalities
- Improve mental health and mental wellbeing
- Increase empowerment of local people
- Reduce levels of anti-social behaviour

In 2019–20, in line with these priorities, NEP had successfully established: a support group for families with children with additional support needs; a teenage drop-in; a project for 'not engaging' young people involved in anti-social behaviour; dedicated food provision and family support for vulnerable working and student parents during holiday periods; a community larder combining affordable food provision with IT and job skills support and recovery-friendly activities.

2.3: COVID-19 emergency response

In March 2020, all Link Up groups stopped because of the COVID-19 lockdown. However, as an essential part of the local infrastructure, our local workers swiftly moved to co-ordinate/support the delivery of local responses to the crisis. They achieved this by tapping into the local networks of support established through Link Up (and other groups), using this to identify and sustain contact with vulnerable local people and to gather intelligence on those who may be struggling. This was done in conjunction with a range of local partners.

From March to July, our support focused on ensuring vulnerable families and individuals were able to access the 'essentials' for living: food, fuel and social connection. The scale of this response is illustrated in the following table, providing a snapshot for June:



Our workers used a range of innovative methods to identify and engage vulnerable local people:

- In Saltcoats, our team ran a sunflower growing competition which engaged over 200 local people, mainly local families and many families attending the local nursery. They also teamed-up with the local library to run a book and CD loan service.
- In Whitfield, as part of our aim to engage more people in the neighbouring community of Fintry, our workers ran a series of self-managed activities for up to 19 local families: Grow Your Own Veg Planting, Family Breadmaking, Play Together and BBQ, Homemade Jam making session, Family Chutney Making.

Since late March, we have also sought to help people cope with the wider impact of the crisis. This started with wellbeing calls, and developed to also include new listening spaces, one-to-one support, and providing access to specialist psychotherapy support (see below).

Enabling people to stay socially connected has also been a priority. Initially, this involved moving groups to online channels, but in July we re-started face-to-face work and small groups, all outdoors. The latter has required smart responses such as formulating social bubbles; staggering the timing of groups; being inventive about the nature of the activities (e.g. one project is considering how it might set up a socially-distanced outdoor cinema).

The value of such interaction in terms of the mental and physical wellbeing has been significant. And for the many new volunteers that have become involved in Link Up for the first time, the impact has been material.

“The staff at Link Up treated me like a ‘normal’ person and allowed me to have that confidence to be myself and that who I am is enough! Because of the whole helping out during COVID stuff, the confidence gained has remained and now I carry that with me in my everyday normal life, so to speak. Link Up and the arts centre have given me the opportunity. I feel appreciated, respected and I get asked to do stuff which makes me feel good.”

From an individual in recovery and COVID emergency response Link Up volunteer

The following case studies highlight the adaptive and flexible manner our local projects and partners have taken to supporting local people through the crisis.



Creating a shared purpose in the Gallatown, Kirkcaldy

One of the projects supported by Link Up is the Gallatown Bike Hub which developed from a community initiative into a social enterprise in August 2016. Not only was the organisation established to repair and refurbish bicycles, it was also to provide therapeutic activity for local people and to provide skills and training to improve future employment opportunities. Twelve people currently volunteer with the hub and another eight have applied to join. Unfortunately, due to the COVID restrictions, the numbers of volunteers doing repair and refurbishment has had to be limited.

However, they have still been able to support many local people who have found it particularly difficult to access public transport to access services,

shopping and employment during the lockdown. The Bike Hub lent 42 bikes (including 30 to key workers), did 385 bike repairs, and donated 21 bikes to help people get to work and stay healthy. Many of the key workers who received bikes work in retail and manufacturing, but two are NHS staff. One of them is an intensive care nurse. She reported feeling much safer travelling to work, enjoyed spending more time outdoors with her children on their bikes, and lost a significant amount of weight combining exercise with an improved diet. Another key worker who works in a food factory reported that he would have lost his job had he not been able to access a bike as the changes to public transport would have made it impossible for him to access work.



Partnership working in Saltcoats

Since the lockdown started, our Saltcoats team has built new and strengthened existing relationships with a range of local bodies: the 3 Towns Community Hub (Council), Saltcoats Library staff, Streetscene, Springvale Early Years Centre, Fair Share, Active Kindness Group, Argyle Community Association, Kirkgate Church and West Coast Furniture. The quality of partnership working has been enhanced by a shift in mindset to a ‘just do it’ attitude by all parties, removing the usual red-tape and bureaucracy and enabling rapid responses and new opportunities to be exploited. A good example – beyond the emergency response activity – of the type of change in attitude that has pervaded is demonstrated with the gardening group.

As summer came, some volunteers wanted to start working in small groups outside. Link Up approached the Council and Streetscene and asked if the group could take on management of planters and railing baskets in the town centre. Approval was quickly given and the Council offered free flowers for the planting from their nursery stock. A similar agreement has since been reached with the local Network Rail Station Manager. A win-win for the group and the town! The fact that Link Up had relationships with some of these workers pre-COVID undoubtedly helped with the speed and ease of response; there was already an understanding and trust developing.

3.0



What's unique about Link Up?

“ I wish I'd started gardening 30 years ago; it is better for my mental health than valium!”

Link Up participant

“ I have Link Up to thank for how they help nourish me from that wee nugget to the community person I am today. With their support, guidance and training I've achieved lots. Believe in yourself and reach out for support.”

Link Up participant

Link Up has proven itself a unique and cost-effective model for enabling individual and community-led change at scale by:

- Focusing on prevention and working ‘upstream’ with the most vulnerable in our communities;
- Enabling people to make long-term improvements to their health and wellbeing;
- Empowering people to support one another as active citizens and change makers;
- Building innovative place-based collaborations to tackle poverty and disadvantage;
- Reducing the burden on over-stretched local services.

Our reflective practice and continuous evaluation have revealed the key components that make Link Up unique and successful:

○ We stick with it. We make a deliberate decision to stay and invest long-term in the communities where we work.

We also carefully invest in our workers, resulting in low staff turnover and high motivation. This provides continuity and consistency, key to successfully building relationships at people’s own pace. Our workers remain present and available, giving that important sense of stability for people as they come and go in their involvement. In some cases, the strength of those relationships patiently built over time results in community members going from dipping their toe in Link Up, to becoming so inspired they choose a career in community development, then getting supported through Link Up to go to university (against the odds), and eventually becoming Link Up workers. The trust, respect, and quality of the relationships our workers develop over time is central to maintaining connection and support even with the most vulnerable through times of crisis.

○ Link Up makes the whole greater than the sum of the parts by weaving together the warp and weft of community. It creates meaningful partnerships that emerge in an organic and non-pressured way. This strengthens the connections amongst local people, and between them and local services, voluntary organisations, and businesses. We consciously allow collaboration to develop gradually, as people inspire one another, grow mutual understanding and trust, and together join the dots to create intricate webs supporting the local social fabric.

○ We give workers the training, support and, critically, the autonomy and flexibility to respond in ways that work for local people and draw on the best of workers’ ethos, practice and understanding of the community. This allows them choice and control, which in turn, creates an environment of choice and control for the local people they work with. It harnesses the best of professional intuition and human creativity to foster a positive and

empowering working culture. This culture is critical to success, enabling a rapid, adaptable and innovative response at all times, including in crisis as demonstrated during the COVID-19 lockdown.

○ We recognise the value of psychological support for workers and community members and have forged a unique partnership with Dr Calum Munro, a former NHS Consultant Psychiatrist and Psychotherapist who set up the Mental Health Care Collective as a social enterprise.

Over the last year, Calum Munro’s specialist input has become a key plank in Link Up’s trauma-skilled approach. He has provided direct support to our workers in the form of Reflective Practice Groups and one-to-one sessions, helping them to reflect on and cope with the pressures of their role; we believe supporting workers in this way is a vital part of supporting vulnerable communities.

Given the rising tide of mental health issues, combined with badly over-stretched mental health services and the reluctance of many individuals to seek professional help, the partnership between Link Up and Dr Munro has also been instrumental in reaching and directly supporting local people who are most in need. Through Link Up, Dr Munro has delivered the following support (mostly pro bono and worth thousands of pounds):

- 14 community members each receiving 3 sessions of one-to-one therapeutic support
- 6 single sessions for specific Link Up groups
- one-to-one support for 8 Link Up workers (usually up to 2–3 sessions each)
- Three monthly Reflective Practice Groups for workers

○ Last but not least, Link Up is holistic. It is not about anything in particular, and it’s about everything that matters to people. It is the new A&E (anything and everything)!

“With the help from Link Up Muirhouse through support and training I have been able to turn my life around and now in employment I love x.”

Link Up participant

4.0



Link Up's relevance going forward

The COVID-19 crisis has illuminated in an unparalleled way the fragility of our most vulnerable communities. It has called into question the adequacy of our welfare and benefits system; the nature of employment and fair pay; who matters; digital exclusion; the respective roles of the third and public sector; and, people's ability to function in even the most basic ways. Link Up has demonstrated its adaptability and capacity to respond quickly and meaningfully to new acute challenges. It is becoming more relevant than ever if we are to fulfil the aspirations of Scotland's national and local authorities. As the Edinburgh Health & Social Care Partnership describes below, investing in actively promoting what underpins good mental health and greater wellbeing is tantamount to building the foundation for our most vulnerable to succeed in an increasingly volatile world.

“ We have made it our goal to promote mental health and protect our citizens resiliency, self-esteem, family strength and joy, and reduce the toll of mental illness on individuals, our communities and our city.” A guiding principle is “Listening and learning from each other, making the invisible visible, focusing on social networks, connectivity and relationships with kindness respect and love through active co-production.”

Edinburgh H&SCP Thrive Edinburgh Adult Health and Social Care Commissioning Plan 2019-2022

Link Up supports several of the Scottish Government's National Performance Framework outcomes and underpins its ambitions of a wellbeing economy and community wealth building. Similarly, Link Up's outcomes and approach are strongly aligned to many of the Sustainable Development Goals: we are taking action against poverty, against hunger, for better health and wellbeing, for enhanced learning and skills, for good work, against inequalities, for human rights and for more meaningful partnerships.

Link Up builds an inclusive democracy from the bottom-up and fosters greater economic and social resourcefulness and resilience at a local level. It taps into our shared human gift of imagination that is the engine of recovery and renewal. Critically, Link Up is highly cost-efficient and cost-effective, a key consideration when the public purse is under ever-increasing pressure. Link Up provides the opportunity to harness years of powerful practice and meaningfully invest in communities' renewal.

Hilary Cottam's book '**Radical Help**' about revolutionising the welfare state puts in sharp relief what is urgently needed to address the downward spiral of deepening poverty and inequalities that undermine Scotland's potential. What she describes resonates loud with Link Up's work. **Below is an extract from a blog by our Leith project worker, Hannah Kitchen-Kirkby; she reflects on what Hilary Cottam calls for and the close parallels with Link Up (you can read her full blog at www.inspiringscotland.org.uk/-potential-of-our-relationships).**

The Potential of our Relationships

"To solve today's problems we need collaboration, we need to be part of the change and we need systems that include all of us... And to do this we need to start in people's lives. We need to stand in communities and understand both the problems and the possibilities from this everyday perspective."

Hilary Cottam, *Radical Help* (2018)

I recently read '*Radical Help*' by Hilary Cottam, which presents the stories of people moving through the current care, health and benefits system, rarely achieving the changes they need, and worse, feeling weighed down by the interventions that the welfare state has made in their lives. Rooted in real-life long-term experiments, the book makes the case for a welfare system firmly based on three key components: relationships, capabilities, openness. These struck a chord with me as a Link Up worker in Leith.

Relationships: taking the time to build trust and allowing people to lead can go a long way to solve deep-seated problems.

"When people feel supported by strong human relationships, change happens." H Cottam

In Link Up, we start by getting to know our area and its people, strengths and problems, and what makes it unique. We support people to start groups and activities they wish to create, and through this, we enable them to form new friendships. We also offer flexible and more intensive support one-to-one. Critically, we are trusted to take

time to get to know people and we know that if things are tough, we will receive support rather than blame. Borrowing Cottam's words, our starting point is "an invitation, not an order, command, assessment to be judged by or referral to attend." These nuances in how to build relationships make all the difference.

Capabilities: Cottam's team and Link Up also share a focus on developing strengths and 'capabilities'. In Link Up, when we are getting to know people, we try to see what they are already good at and interested in. As people start groups with others based around these skills and interests, they often get a lot out of learning and practising a craft or skill together. The focus isn't on problems – although we always have a deep awareness of what participants might be facing – it's on fun, and building on the strengths that are already there. Cottam focuses on people's hopes, skills and aspirations. She seeks to develop four capabilities – all equally core to our work: "the capability to work/learn; to be healthy; to be part of the community; and to nurture relationships within the family and beyond."

Openness: all of Cottam's experimental projects benefited from many different people using them, rather than being rationed or narrowly targeted at specific issues. In Link Up, we find this openness not only builds opportunities for exchanging ideas and skills, but also really suits those who can't engage with the traditional models of help on offer, especially for their mental health.

It feels natural and normal, rather than stigmatising and targeted at people's deficiencies. And so sometimes our role is as simple as introducing neighbours who wouldn't have otherwise met – creating more trust and connection in a community; for others it is regular one-to-one support, sometimes boosted by input from a psychotherapist we partner with.

It's wonderful when groups go well and people find their potential, take leading roles, build on their interests and make friends. The confidence and self-esteem that come from using skills and making friends enables people to take huge steps forward. And we have the privilege of witnessing the great strength and courage of people overcoming the massive obstacles in their lives and communities together.

As Cottam sums up: **"A relational way of working, thinking and designing is one that creates possibility for change, one that creates abundance."**

Hannah Kitchen Kirby,
Link Up Development Worker
(Inspiring Leith)

5.0



Conclusion

The power of positive, supportive relationships resonates throughout this report, and indeed, it forms the basis for all our work and the change we bring about in individuals and communities. We know that as humans we are shaped by our social contexts; our sense of who we are is intimately intertwined with our relationships. Our workers are encouraged – and actively supported – to bring their whole authentic self to their work, to be present as a human being first. We know that is their greatest gift and most valuable tool. Our work with Dr Calum Munro since 2019 has helped us further deepen our understanding of this and sharpen the relational practice skills that underpin it.

That is why, if we are intent on Scotland's ambitions to tackle poverty, address deep-seated health inequalities, foster safe and empowered communities for our children to grow up in, we must continue to make the case for investment. Financial investment that translates into stronger chains of support and positive ripples, enabling people to reinvent themselves, to go to the edge and fly, to re-imagine their community and create a better future together.



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