

Iriss & North Ayrshire HSCP

Reimagining social work

Summary report of key
activities and learning

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May 2024

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1. Introduction

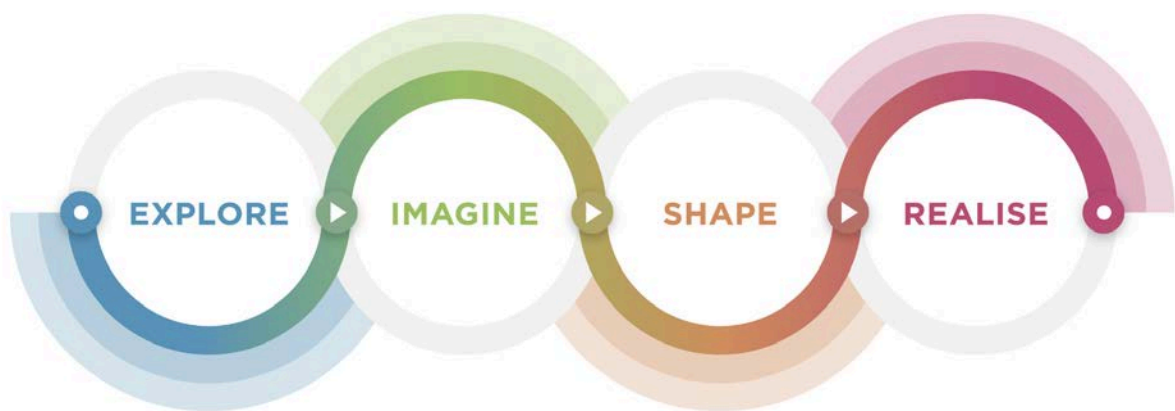
This report provides an overview of a project between Iriss and North Ayrshire HSCP from April 2023 and February 2024. A brief background is outlined and a summary of workshop activity provided, with detailed workshop reports available in the appendices. This report focuses on key learning from the workshops and insights from a short evaluation conducted in February 2024.

A call for partners

In response to our call for new partners in 2023, North Ayrshire HSCP submitted an expression of interest. This outlined a broad vision, a shift in social work culture and practice towards more effective, compassionate, relational, reflective and autonomous support. Community Social Work provided a ‘golden thread’ throughout the project as an example of how social work might be reimaged across North Ayrshire.

This report distils the learning from this project and provides a summary of workshops facilitated by Iriss with managers and practitioners across the HSCP.

Iriss’s approach



Iriss works with people, workers and organisations in social work and social care to help them use knowledge and innovation to make positive change happen. We use a flexible 4-stage approach to working with partners. The activity with North Ayrshire this year focused on the first two stages, Explore & Imagine, of the innovation approach.

Space to Practice

This project was part of our [Space to Practice](#) theme. This aims to help partners create space to practice effectively and respond to what the social work and social care workforce told us about the many pressures that make it difficult to prioritise learning, relationships, reflection and career development. Projects under Space to Practice provide support to recognise and shift the conditions that hold these pressures in place and promote a culture of reflection, learning and curiosity. A second project with North Ayrshire focused on [commissioning and contracts](#) and formed part of our [Foundations for Change](#) theme.

2. What we did: workshops

Between May 2023 and February 2024, Iriss designed and facilitated four sessions for the Space to Practice project.

May: Explore

This workshop aimed to gain an understanding of where practitioners were within their current context. The workshop was designed to provide a blend of presentation on key topics (innovation & ideas, Community Social Work, Local Area Coordination, ways to make change) and space for group reflection, discussion and planning about what reimagining social work in North Ayrshire might look like.

August: Defining Our Change Story

This second, larger workshop was designed to network various pieces of improvement work happening across the HSCP and to help define this change story. Inputs on Large Scale Change as well as local change stories on SDS, Transitions, 'Front Door' Access and Commissioning were provided. A further input on Community Social Work was also delivered. 50 participants, including practitioners and managers from a range of service areas, attended the workshop (see Appendix 4 for attendee list).

November: Practitioner Research for Newly Qualified Social Workers

This workshop about practitioner research was for newly qualified and student social workers. Designed through conversation with the Learning and Development team, we put together a session to explore the topic and develop ideas with participants. We took along our [Navigating Evidence](#) tool that explores what evidence is and what is needed to make good evidence-informed decisions.

February: Designing A Test of Change

The purpose of this session was to revisit Community Social Work and explore what a test of change might look like. It provided space to examine Community Social Work as an ethos and an approach, including opportunities and challenges. We found out how participants viewed their knowledge, confidence and motivation around the approach. Ways to test new ideas, including measuring impact, were also introduced.

3. What we learned: key messages

Summary of workshop learning

Learning from across the workshops demonstrates there is appetite, motivation, hope and optimism for reimagining social work in North Ayrshire. The main learning points were that participants:

- Connected strongly with the ethos of Community Social Work including prevention, early intervention, social inclusion, relationships and trust
- Welcomed the opportunity for new thinking and learning, challenging existing mindsets and updating their knowledge
- Valued the opportunity and permission to think differently and to imagine
- Imagined themselves as change-makers and shared what they needed to support them
- Gained greater understanding, clarity and shared learning about current challenges and complexity
- Enjoyed being engaged in creative approaches to look at old problems from new angles, finding the workshops enjoyable and inspirational
- Highly valued time to think and make connections with other colleagues
- Could connect their experience of the project to progress and changes in practice

However, discussions also demonstrated that hope, optimism and motivation exist in a complex system which can challenge the conditions needed to realise change, including time for reflection and learning, leadership and relationship-based practice.

Key messages

These messages highlight tensions between a reimagined social work and the current system. They also outline strengths to be built on including hope and the desire to improve the lives of supported people and communities.

Context is key

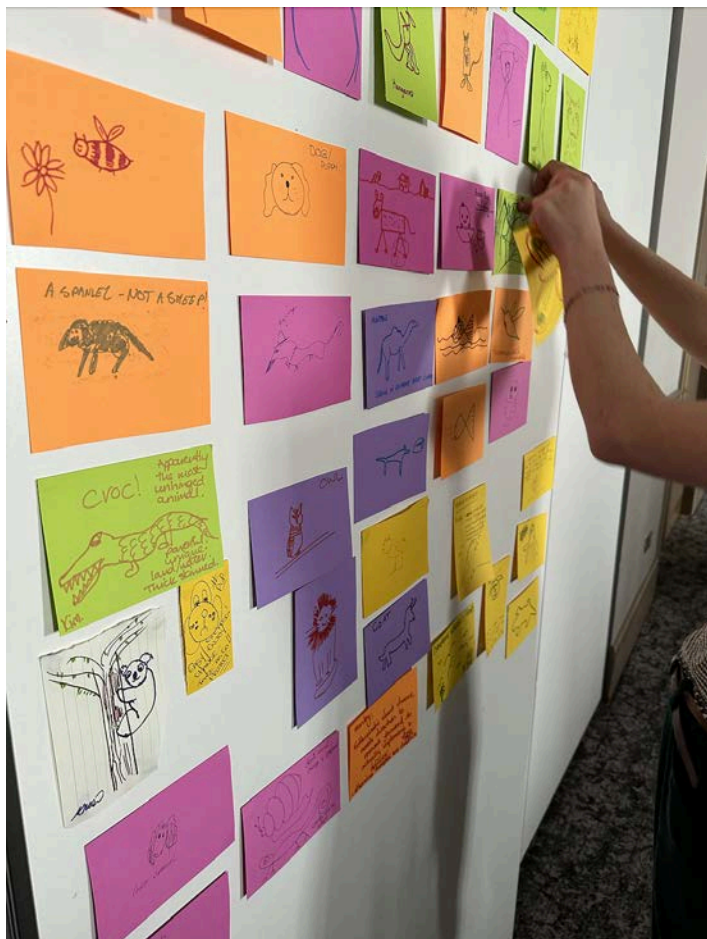
Using creative approaches helped to facilitate conversations about the wider context and system practitioners and managers operate in. The seascape exercise in workshop 1 provided a picture of the wider system participants are part of and how they perceived it. This surfaced a range of perspectives about hope, optimism, ethics and values as guiding lights, buoys and anchors for good practice. Challenges, risks and uncertainty were expressed as things that lurk beneath the surface, shipwrecks, waves or weather. An image of Nessie was also used to illustrate the importance of challenging myths and questioning existing thinking.

These exercises were effective in demonstrating the tensions between the desired culture shift and reimagination of social work practice with the realities of the current system constraints. Workshop 1 participants also recognised the engagement, buy-in and collaboration needed for a reimagined social work with families, communities, practitioners and senior management. They also underscored the importance of time and space for reflection and learning.

New thinking and attitudes to change

Workshop 1 discussions highlighted the importance of new thinking about old problems, specifically 'the myth of scarcity', that 'duplication' is a negative thing, how resources are allocated and the 'ingrained response' that more staff will create more time. Participants recognised the need to challenge current mindsets and a culture of risk aversion.

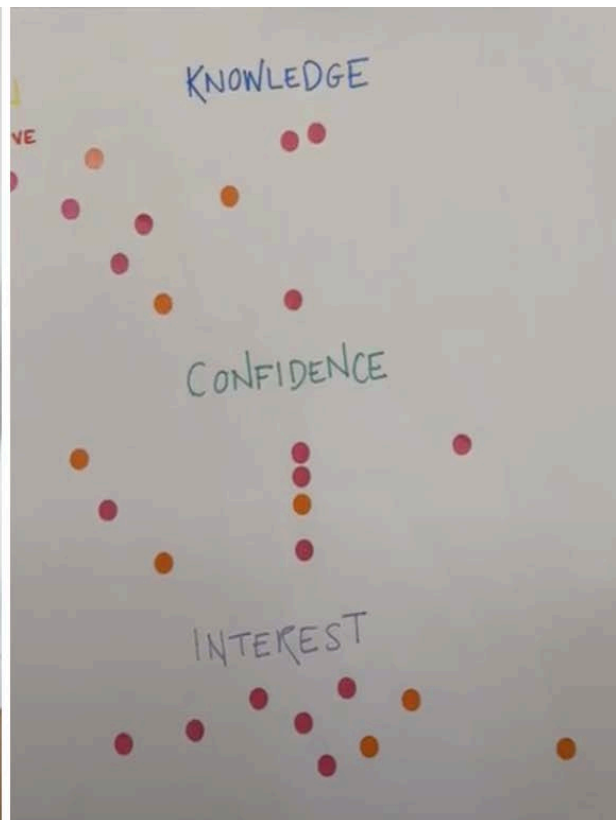
Activities in workshop 2 aimed to surface participants' attitudes to change.



Participants were able to articulate what support they needed to do things differently. This session highlighted:

- There's energy and motivation for change to be harnessed
- Pace is important to keep momentum and hold attention
- Participants need peer and leadership support. They want to do this together
- There needs to be a clear narrative around the 'why' of change that connects to practitioners' value base (e.g. improved outcomes for families and workers)
- Emphasising the learning opportunities of change can be an enabler

In workshop 3 with NQSWs, we aimed to connect research with making change. From an icebreaker exercise, we knew people were feeling unsure and stressed about the idea of undertaking research on top of their caseload.



We wanted to generate enthusiasm and motivation for practitioner research so we used an exercise to connect it closely to practice and to improving the lives of supported people. We asked what practitioners were noticing in their practice that they wanted to know more about or any persistent issues they wanted to resolve. This resulted in a flurry of ideas for research activities. Through this, we were able to encourage participants to see themselves as being change makers through research as well as practice. Feedback after the session suggested we'd made some 'converts'.

Workshop 4 provided another opportunity to explore how we test change and how we know it's effective. Revisiting the Community Social Work ethos and approach again demonstrated the appetite for change and working more preventatively with communities.



Participants recognised the opportunities posed by the approach but also the challenges of developing a shared understanding with communities and the wider workforce about what Community Social Work is, the culture shift in expectations, and the need to balance this with statutory demands.

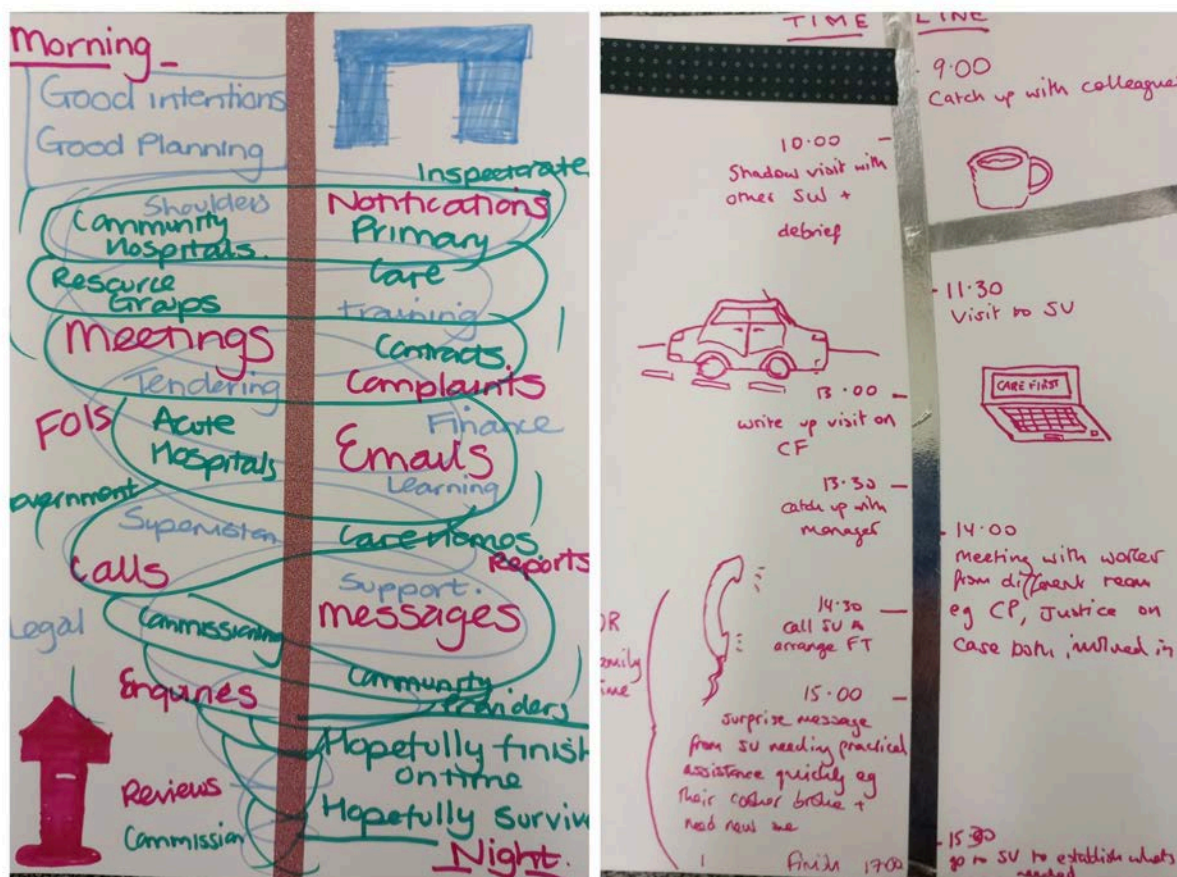
What good looks like

The workshops helped define what good looks like for participants. It was clear that practitioners and managers know what a reimagined social work could look like, including:

- People in communities actively seeking us out to support them when they need us
- Verbal and written feedback, fewer referrals
- Peoples' outcomes being met, and the positive feedback loop from this
- Potentially reductions in the need for support
- A mindset of relationships rather than caseload
- Happier staff - recruitment crisis could be tackled by better work wellbeing
- Sustainable communities and building natural pathways for support
- Money and resources
- Monitoring complaints
- 'Surgeries' or drop-in services

An ideal day

Discussions from workshop 2 also highlighted a clarity around what good looks like in a reimagined context. One of the activities included the comparison between a standard day and an ideal day.



Standard days were described as being dominated by desk-based activities and ‘feeding the system’. An ideal day prioritised two key elements:

- Teamwork: meeting, sharing, planning, debriefing, decompressing and peer support
- Spending time with supported people in their communities (‘be where people need us’)

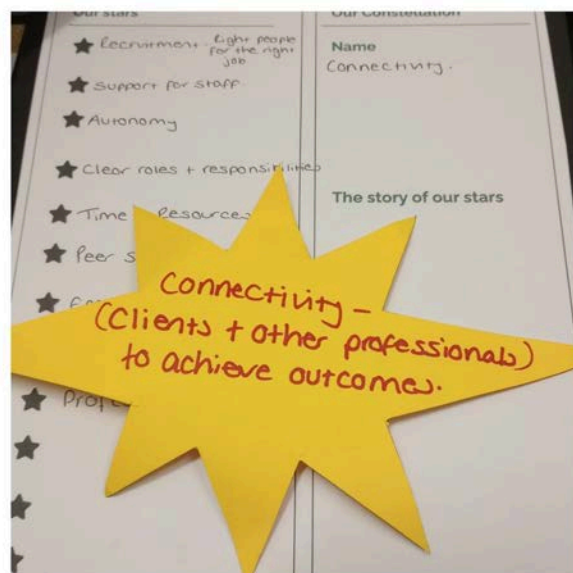
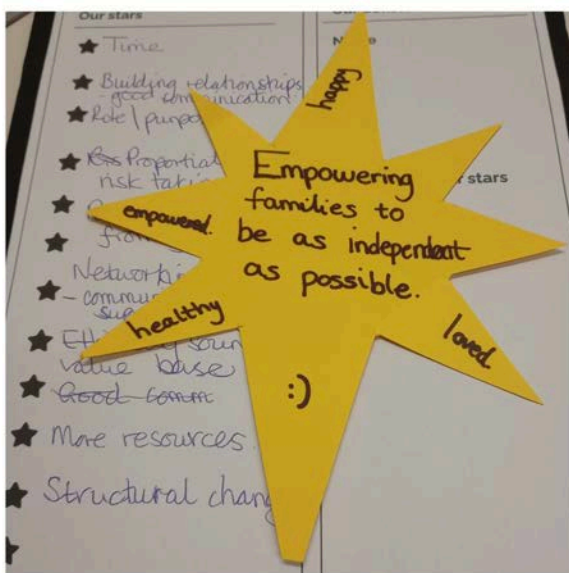
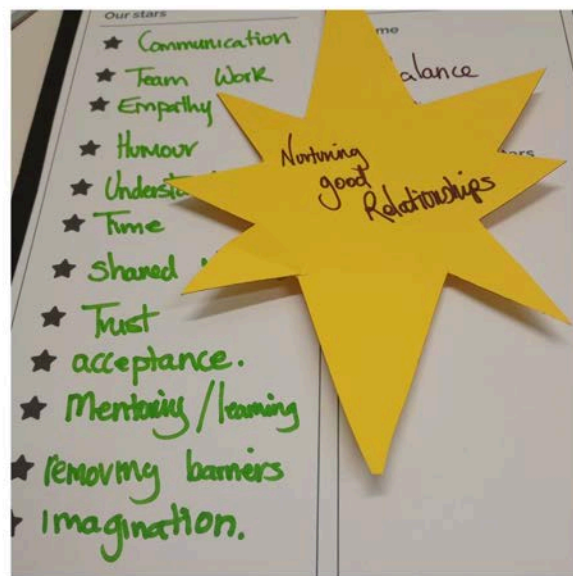
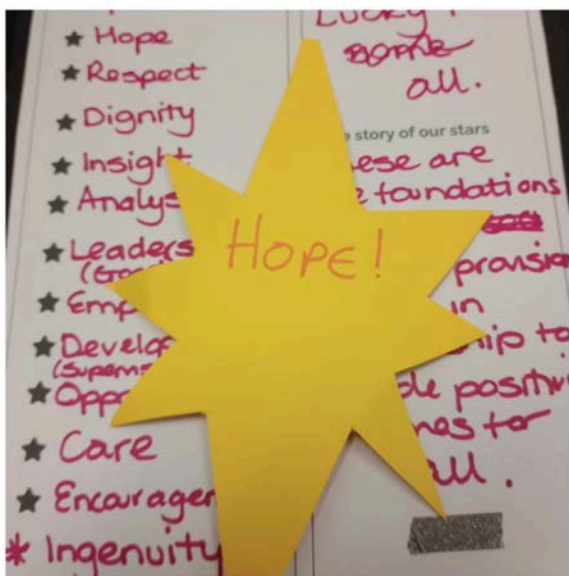
These priorities reinforce that participants want to collaborate and focus on direct support to communities.

Guiding principles

Participants in workshop 2 were asked to identify a ‘North Star’, a guiding light for reimagining social work in North Ayrshire which included:

- Hope

- If we get it right for the staff, we get it right for the people we support
- Nurturing good relationships
- Truly person-centred. Time for social work and self
- Connectivity (Clients and other professionals to achieve outcomes)
- Empowering families to be as independent as possible (healthy, loved, empowered, happy)



What these have in common is a focus on relationships, working together and improving the lives of supported people and workers.

With their North Stars in mind, groups were asked to consider what the indicators (stars) would be to keep them on the right track to their goal (North Star). Analysis of the constellations identified a number of themes including attitudes, values, approaches and supports (cultural, practical, financial) needed to navigate towards a new vision of social services in North Ayrshire. Indicators map a landscape with enough resources (time and staff) where managers, practitioners and families work together from a shared understanding and value base. Practice is grounded in professional development, reflection and strong leadership.

4. Evaluation

We asked those involved in the Space to Practice and Foundations for Change projects to tell us about their experiences using the following questions. Five participants who had been in Space to Practice or both projects, shared their experiences¹. Where this chimes with previous feedback, those comments are included (mainly from workshop 2).

What did you gain from being part of this project?

Participants gained ‘a greater understanding of the potential of Community Social Work models’ (P1) and developed ‘shared learning’ with the wider workforce (P3). These points were also made in the feedback from workshop 2.

Having ‘time to think, time to act’ (P2) was valued but also time to make connections (P2) and explore different perspectives with colleagues (P5). Again, this echoes earlier feedback from participants after workshop 2, who said they really valued the ‘headspace’ offered by the session. ‘Opportunity and permission to consider how things may be done differently/better’ (P5) were also highlighted as key project outcomes. Others talked about gaining ‘a sense of hope with regards to the openness of others’ to different approaches

¹ P = Participant plus a numerical identifier

(P1). Hope and optimism were also identified as outcomes from workshop 2. The project was 'a valuable resource and greatly appreciated' (P4), though it was noted that capacity constraints were a distraction 'as you are constantly thinking about what you've missed by taking the time' (P4).

Did working with Iriss help you think differently about your practice or a problem you're working on? If so, how?

In terms of impact on thinking and practice, participants said that the project 'reinforced the need for connection between the various strands of activity in North Ayrshire' and the value of 'adopting more creative/flexible approaches to exploring problems' (P1). Workshop 2 was highlighted as a strong example.

Some appreciated the support, motivation and encouragement to consider change (P2). For others, the project helped develop clarity and 'a concrete sense of what Community Social Work in North Ayrshire will look like' (P3).

The external facilitation from Iriss was highly valued as it 'allowed members from HSCP and third sector to come together as equal players, as opposed to one dominating or controlling the other' (P2). Workshops were positively described as:

'... helpfully structured to allow input and sharing of ideas and plans across management and practitioners from different teams and services in a non-threatening way'. (P5)

Participants also appreciated the workshops as opportunities for 'viewing the challenges of current practice/possible practice from different angles (P5). Again, challenges were noted including time out to 'learn new things and revisit old knowledge' and the difficulty of remaining 'focused on social work in an HSCP situation' (P4).

What did you enjoy most about the project?

Participants were very positive about the Iriss facilitators (P1, P2), noting their 'deep experience' (P1) and 'skillful interventions' (P3) with staff. The creation of 'a relaxed and open forum within each session' (P1) was also appreciated:

‘Their craft was readily evident in capturing/describing complexity...’
(P1).

Workshop 2 participants also acknowledged the session as a safe space for sharing information and found the session ‘fun’, ‘lively’, ‘entertaining’, ‘inspirational’, ‘motivating’ and ‘enjoyable’.

Again, time out and time to connect in-person with others were enjoyed by participants (P1, P2).

They also valued ‘the opportunity and encouragement to imagine differently,’ noting the difficulty of this ‘in the midst of the busy day-to-day’ (P5).

What, if anything, could have been better?

More time (P3) and more involvement of frontline staff rather than senior staff (P4) was suggested.

Tell us about any changes you’ve made (or plan to make) as a result of being part of the project?

Connections with colleagues from the projects continue (P1) with progress evident across both workstreams (P2). Resource was being sought for a ‘concrete model’ informed through the project (P3). Others described shifts in approaches to work including ‘making time and trying not to work too many unpaid hours’ and exploring ‘distribution of work and not taking the blame for other departments (P4). Ways to embed Community Social Work were being explored (P5)

Anything else you’d like to share

Participants highly valued being involved in the projects ‘regardless of the outcome, simply for the space it creates to think differently and be more hopeful’ (P1) and acknowledged the importance of increasing access to these opportunities for frontline workers (P1).

‘As a service, we maybe need to get better at encouraging staff at all levels to engage in work of this kind, and to value knowledge creation

as much as responding to the immediate needs of individual clients, and not to see it as a luxury, but a right/responsibility.’ (P1)

Some described the ‘kindness and inspiration’ of others in the project: ‘I am genuinely sad that our time is now up’ (P2).

Again, similar to feedback from workshop 2, strengthening links between managers and practitioners were highlighted.

‘I think there needs to be more of a baseline with agreement from senior managers whilst it is a topic with them to go around frontline social work and maybe help with SLWG or agendas for change.’ (P4)

5. Conclusion

This project has provided insights into different aspects of a reimagined social work including what positive change looks like in practice as well as what supports and hinders it. It demonstrates the value of time for reflection, connection and learning for practitioners and managers. It also shows how creative approaches to facilitation can help inspire hope and energy for doing things differently. These insights lay the groundwork for next steps towards a new vision for social work in North Ayrshire.

Appendix 1: Workshop reports

Workshop 1: Explore

Context

Group discussions provided some reflection space to visualise the backdrop to current practice. Using the prompt of a seascape, the group created pictures to outline how they see their current context:



This was an effective exercise and uncovered a range of perspectives about hope, optimism, ethics and values as guiding lights, buoys and anchors for

practice. Challenges, risks and uncertainty were expressed as things that lurk beneath the surface, shipwrecks, waves or weather. Nessie was also used to illustrate the importance of challenging myths and questioning our thinking.

Key themes

The workshop made space for discussion on a range of topics that surfaced. Key areas included culture change, what good looks like, resources, engagement, gaps and actions.

Culture change and integration

Discussions around culture change emphasised the importance of involving parents, family members, and practitioners from health and social services in bringing about change. The need to demonstrate examples of success and connect parents to showcase what is achievable was noted. Additionally, points were made about the significance of using various social work skills to expand people's perspectives through group activities, greater recognition of potential, and raising awareness within communities, services and beyond. The group were positive about the need for a cultural shift within social work but acknowledged the challenge of this in a 'risk averse culture'.

What does good look like?

The group discussed what good would look like and some indicators of change which included:

- People in communities actively seeking us out to support them when they need us
- Verbal and written feedback, fewer referrals
- People's outcomes being met, and the positive feedback loop from this
- Potentially reductions in the need for support
- A mindset of relationships rather than caseload
- Happier staff - recruitment crisis could be tackled by better work wellbeing
- Sustainable communities and building natural pathways for support

- Money and resources
- Monitoring complaints
- ‘Surgeries’ or drop-in services

Resources

Resources were frequently referenced throughout the discussion. In terms of money, the point was made that we need to ‘challenge the myth of scarcity’ and focus needs to shift to how resources are allocated. Questions were raised about making a difference with the same resource. Questions about budgetary requirements, red tape and Governance were raised. The discussion also highlighted the importance of challenging current mindsets around ‘duplication’ as a negative thing and considering if a ‘complimentary range of access points to services could be more human’.

Recruitment and retention

Using resources more effectively could help make jobs in social work more attractive by reducing bureaucracy (related to the outcomes of the SDS review), having manageable caseloads, CPD and good reflective supervision. This could help address the cost of ‘perpetual recruitment’.

Time and space

Time was a key resource discussed. Questions focused on how to work in current time constraints, how to reduce time taken to do things while carving out time to work in new ways. It was recognised that practitioners needed freeing up from ‘the claims of systems’ to ‘undertake preventive work at a community level’. An ‘ingrained response’ of more staff as the answer to creating more time was also noted, relating to issues around recruitment.

The need to provide space for practitioners to reflect, study, engage and feel confident to address fear and risk were noted.

Engagement & buy-in

The need for engagement to gain buy-in for a new approach was highlighted including clarity about our terms and having a range of engagement mechanisms to reach communities, practitioners & local politicians. There was a call to understand current practices for engagement and gaining staff buy-in. Being able to articulate what Community Social Work is and the value of it, as well as evidence it, is essential.

When we asked the group about their key questions for a new approach, many of them focused on the buy-in of senior management, those involved in commissioning and their ability to 'carry an element of risk and tolerate uncertainty' in pursuit of meaningful change. There were also questions about navigating elements of professional identity, 'role overlap' and 'professional ownership'. Questions also focused on when and how to include citizens and communities.

Gaps

Towards the end of the day, we discussed any gaps and things to think about in our next steps. What emerged included:

- Understanding how existing team structures, including location, might lend themselves to more focused community practice and relationship building.
- Community profiling to better understand and identify any particular communities to focus on (geographical or virtual). How we define community was a question.
- A working together agreement - this could help with the mix of management and practitioners in the room and to support a safe space for 'non-hierarchical discussions'.
- Broader representation/input from other colleagues including frontline practitioners, adult services, health, third sector, education, community groups and early years.



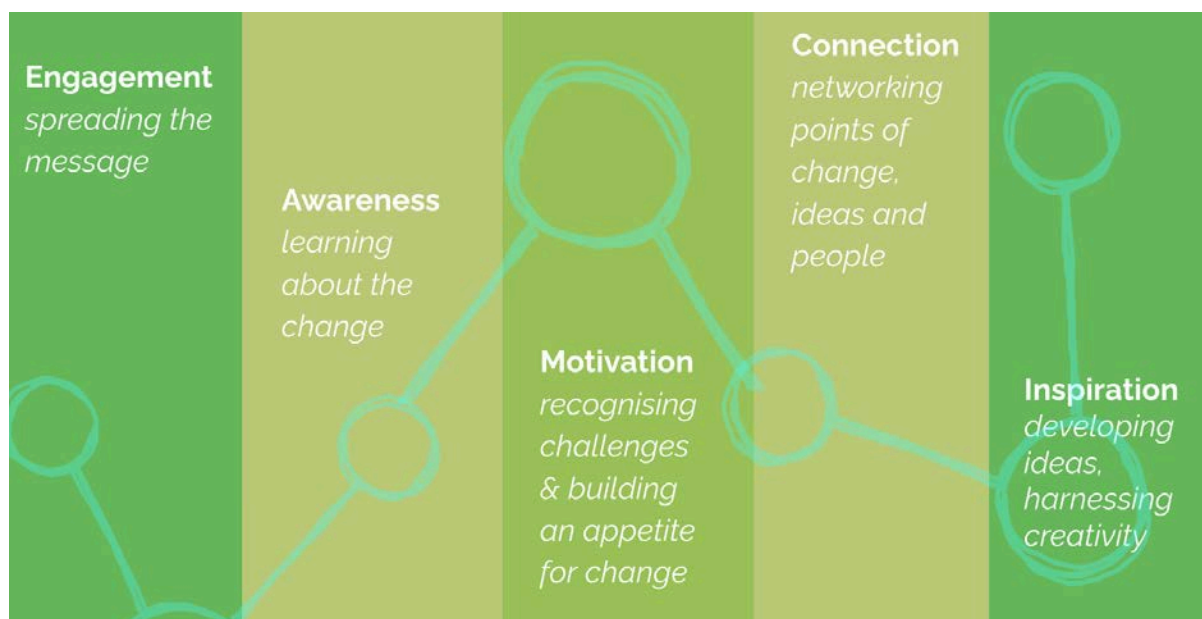
Actions

This discussion asked the group to think about some potential changes they might make as part of this project. Responses included:

- Communication and messaging - taking information to team meetings and raising awareness.
- Reducing paperwork - alleviating pressure on practitioners.
- Tool development - creating a constructive, meaningful tool that supports relationship-based practice so people accessing support don't have to repeat their story.
- Creating a 'Northern Star' - a guide for any shifts in practice. This could be a persona (*What would Nancy think of this?*) or a core question (*Is this of benefit?*) to act as a navigation aid.

Workshop 2: Defining Our Change Story

Outcomes of this session focused on:



Change rationale

The workshop brought together two Iriss projects happening in the HSCP this year, one focusing on reimagining social work and one on commissioning and contracts. The rationale of this was that these activities are part of a wider story of change and evolution across the partnership. An important part of this opening session was to hear about the rationale for change in North Ayrshire which was provided by Scott Hunter, Chief Social Work Officer.

Scott outlined the drivers for change and improvement including the [Setting the Bar for Social Work](#) research (Social Work Scotland, 2022) and recognition of the ethical stress for practitioners. Scott also suggested ways for colleagues to contribute to improvement activities. Scott ended with a clear message:

‘This is about evolution, rather than change’.

Zooming out - Large Scale Change

Dee Fraser, CEO of Iriss and part of the Iriss commissioning project work in North Ayrshire, provided a short input about Large Scale change. This

focused on what Large Scale Change is and isn't, and how we can use this as a framework to consider change activities across the HSCP.

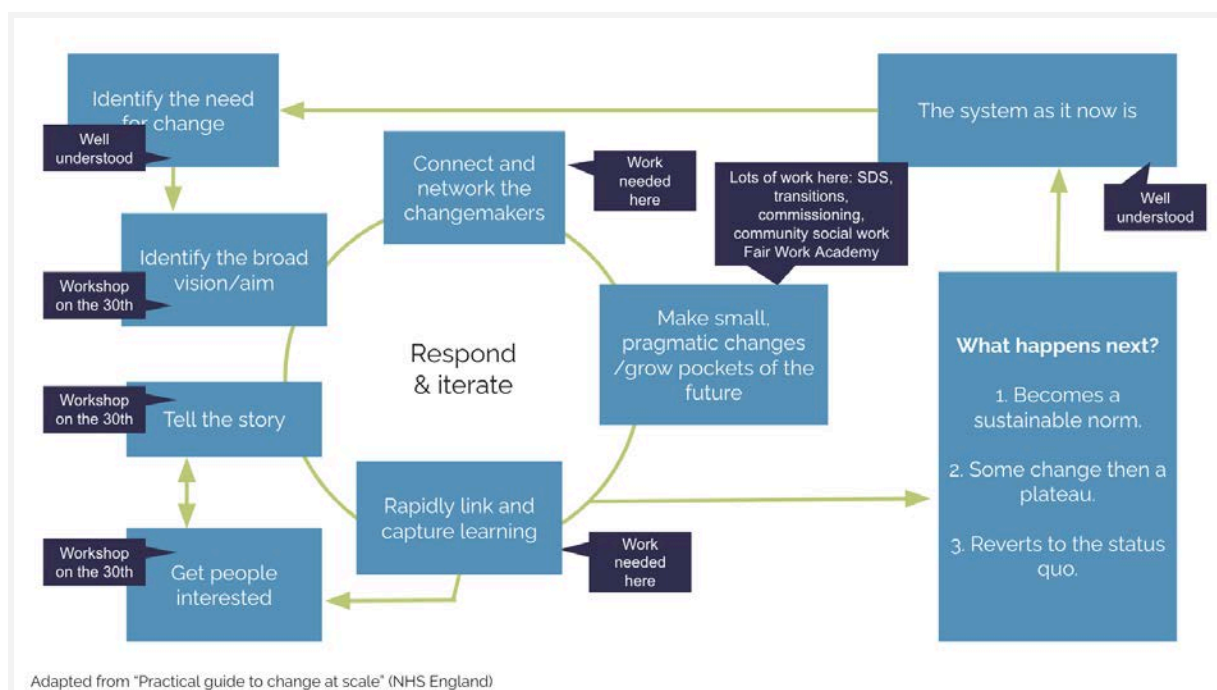
What is Large Scale Change?

What it is

- The **'how'** of change (mindsets, processes, relationships and methods to make it happen)
- **Learning** from multiple industries and perspectives,
- Providing leaders with a **clear agenda** for action on change, based on evidence
- **'Evidence'** in its widest sense - tacit knowledge, views and experiences of supported people, research

What it isn't

- The **'what'** of change (explicit change interventions in a health and care context)
- An **explanation** of specific transformational themes, drivers and enablers within health and care
- A **narrowly defined** research paper or policy commentary
- Change as a goal in itself. **Change is not the goal**, 'the goal is the goal'.



Zooming in - snapshots of change



Four snapshots of change work were provided by managers covering a range of areas including Self-Directed Support, Transitions, Access to the Front Door of the HSCP, and Commissioning.

Group work 1: Change animals



Aim

This exercise encouraged participants to orient themselves in the current change story and reflect on how they can contribute to and are impacted by change.

Analysis

Content gathered through this discussion showed a strong mix of attributes and an overall positive attitude to change (some optimistic lions, butterflies, diving birds, only one ‘surviving old grumpy dog from finance’). Several ‘tribes’ of animals could be identified with participants belonging to more than one tribe:

- **Horizon scanners:** Those seeing the bigger picture, taking a wider lens and seeing the environment in which the large scale change is

happening (giraffes, owls, and cows, birds). These animals also want to focus on what matters to families (diving bird).

- **Pack animals:** Those that want to do this together, supporting and listening to each other (zebra, cocker spaniel, seagull, greyhound, budgie, bee, fish, puppy, owl).
- **Excitable types:** They want to have their attention grabbed, to be motivated, but need help to keep focus and momentum, to hold their attention and help them prepare for change (owl, cocker spaniel, monkey, dogs, puppies, butterfly). A couple of ‘stubborn’ dogs who might need persuading.
- **Go with the flow animals:** Comfortable with change and happy to go along with the direction of travel (kangaroos, bird, fish).
- **Adaptable survivors:** Animals that can adapt and survive in diverse landscapes, environments and climates (fish, bird, camel, chameleon, hummingbird, goat, lizard).
- **Support seekers:** Newly Qualified Social Workers looking to leaders and more experienced practitioners for support and guidance. They see change as a learning opportunity (baby birds).
- **Noisemakers and communicators:** These animals are not afraid to use their voices to say what needs to change (budgie, greyhound, seagull, crocodile).

What does this tell us?

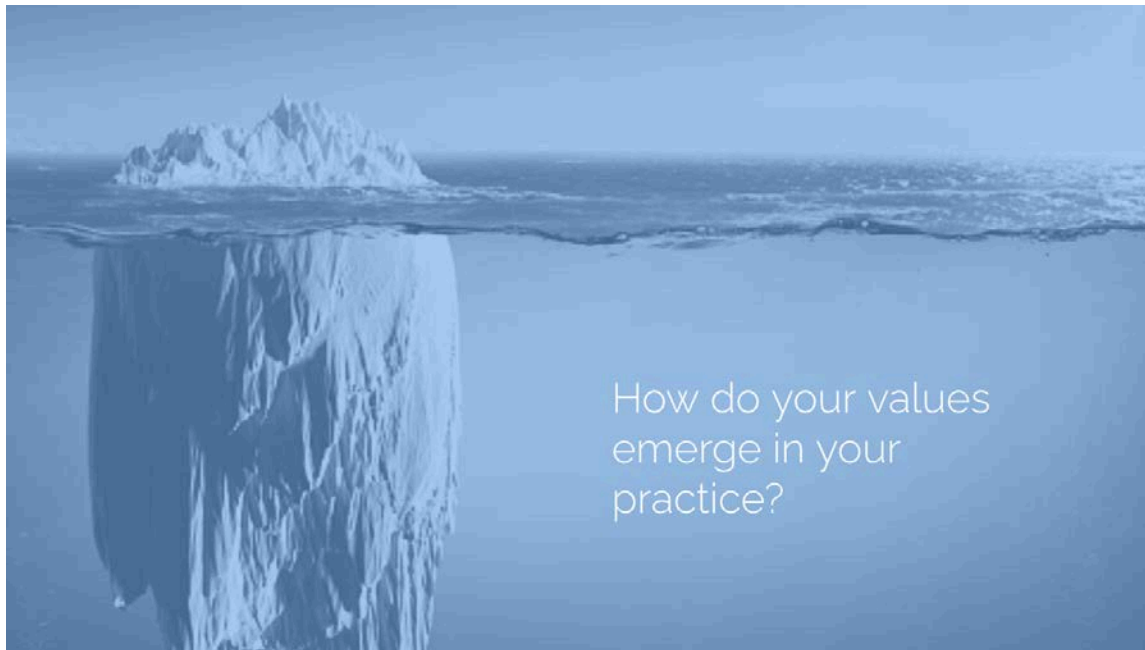
This exercise was helpful in demonstrating attitudes to change and how participants can be supported to be part of the change story. Key messages from the exercise include:

- There's energy and motivation for change to be harnessed
- Pace is important to keep momentum and hold attention
- Participants need peer and leadership support. They want to do this together
- There needs to be a clear narrative around the 'why' of change that connects to practitioners' value base (e.g. improved outcomes for families and workers)
- Emphasising the learning opportunities of change can be an enabler

Community Social Work

This presentation from Colin Turbett (Common Weal Care Reform Working Group) focused on the values and principles underpinning Community Social Work and the questions around what it is to be a professional. Colin introduced examples of Community Social Work to illustrate the difference it makes to people's lives. These ideas are further explored in this evidence summary: [Rediscovering and mainstreaming community social work in Scotland](#).

Group work 2: Values and principles in everyday practice



Aim

This exercise supported reflection about how the values, ethics, principles outlined in Colin's presentation show up in a typical day of practice and how these are supported or blocked.

What's important?

‘The most valuable time in the day is the time you spend with people.’
(workshop participant)

‘Getting to know families over time so that you can intervene differently in a crisis is where I see my values showing up. I worry about online meetings and how the move to online is going to affect new workers. Face to face is where the solutions are.’ (workshop participant)

We discussed how the rhythm of the working day supports values being implemented into practice. This led to discussions about home working and how it impacts service delivery including the loss of facilities to gather together and host meetings. People's day-to-day working environment has a clear influence on their practice.

Worker autonomy and the ability to respond to situations as they arise is seen as a really important way to allow social workers to bring their values into practice. This creates the space for social workers to be where they need to be.

Participants outlined values underpinning their work - honestly, integrity, empathy - with principles of practice including being non-judgemental, person-centred, solution-focused, consistent, empowering, relationship-based and working in partnership. There were clear standards around what it is to be a professional including principles around competence, boundaries, professional knowledge and development, meeting targets, identifying savings, prioritising tasks and risk, accurate recording and making hard decisions to list a few.

Activities

The activities captured through this exercise demonstrated a range of different types of role requirements:

- **Desk-based:** recording practice, scheduling, emailing, planning, phone calls, tendering, budgets and finance
- **Travelling:** to and from offices, for visits to supported people, providers and partners
- **Direct work with supported people:** in homes, care homes, schools, the community

- **Partnership working:** with colleagues, providers, partners, commissioners, supervision, case discussions, Care Inspectorate, Government, resource groups, hospitals
- **Professional development:** training

Participants also often referred to the demands of family life including school pickups and dropoffs, extracurricular activities, going to the gym, walking dogs, food shopping and cooking. They also noted doing extra work in their own time including emails and case notes at home and working through lunch. Some noted feeling isolated, anxious and wondering what they could do better.

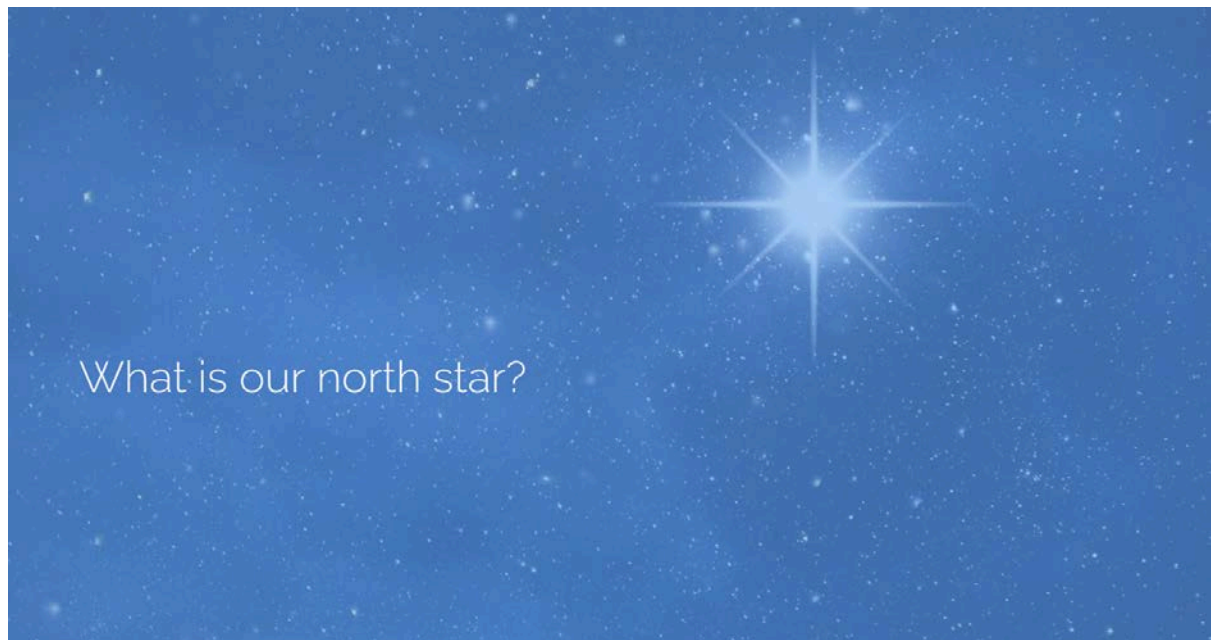
Some feedback included a comparison between a standard day and an ideal day. Standard days were described as being dominated by desk-based activities and ‘feeding the system’. An ideal day prioritised two key elements:

- Teamwork: meeting, sharing, planning, debriefing, decompressing and peer support
- Spending time with supported people in their communities (‘be where people need us’)

What does this tell us?

Through mapping a typical day in practice, participants provided insights into the activities, feelings and pressures they experience. They were able to illustrate the interplay between the principles workers value and a complex range of activities they routinely undertake. This highlighted a strong value base aligned with the foundations of Community Social Work, and how the current system constrains practice. It shows participants want to work in a different way that is better for them and for supported people but feel they have to ‘feed the system’.

Group work 3: What is our North Star? (and how do we get there?)



Aim

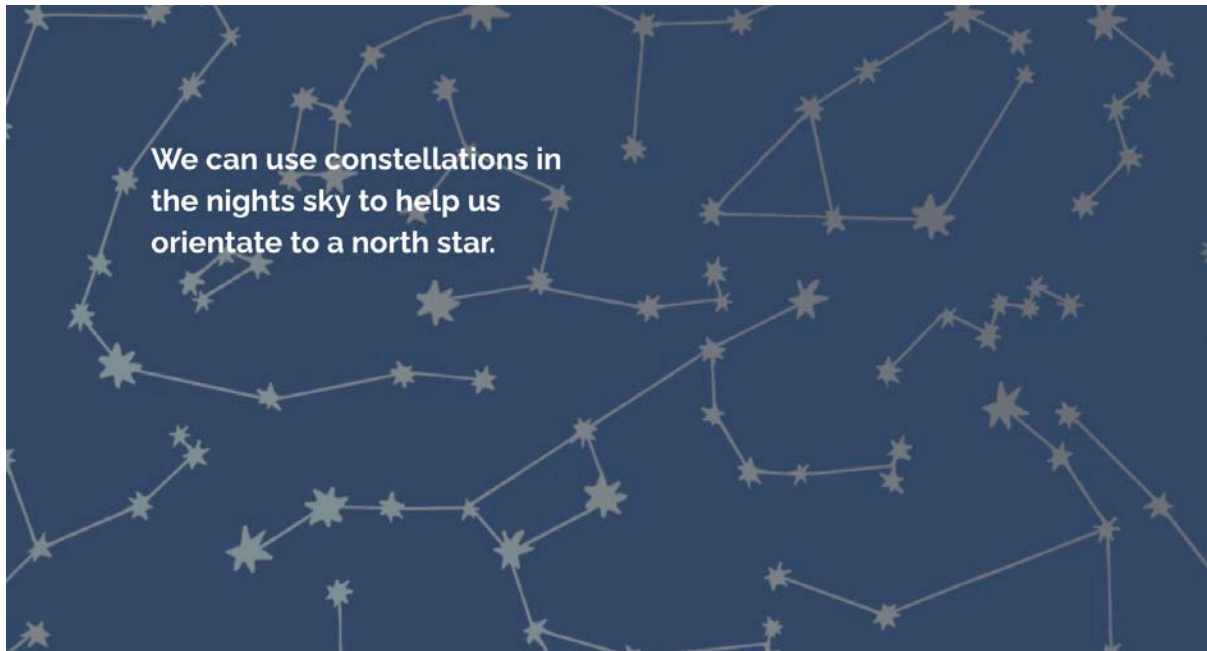
This exercise connected participants to a common purpose and supported action planning. This built on discussions from the May workshop around identifying a guiding principle to help maintain focus through change.

The exercise asked participants to discuss a 'North Star' in their groups and then plot a course to get there, using the idea of a constellation of stars to guide the journey. North Stars included:

- Hope
- If we get it right for the staff, we get it right for the people we support
- Nurturing good relationships
- Truly person-centred. Time for Social Work and self
- Connectivity (clients and other professionals to achieve outcomes)

- Empowering families to be as independent as possible (healthy, loved, empowered, happy)

What these have in common is a focus on relationships, working together and improving the lives of supported people and workers.



With their North Stars in mind, groups were asked to consider what the indicators (stars) would be to keep them on the right track to their goal (North Star). Some described the 'story' of their stars as 'foundations for future service provision'.

What does this tell us?

Each group came up with many different guiding indicators. These show us what participants need to support new ways of working. Analysis of the range of stars identified a number of themes: attitudes, values, approaches and supports (cultural, practical, financial) needed to navigate towards a new vision of social services in North Ayrshire. The details have been visualised (see appendix 1) but overall, the indicators map a landscape with enough resources (time and staff) where managers, practitioners and families work together from a shared understanding and value base. Practice is grounded in professional development, reflection and strong leadership.

Change messages

Aim

This exercise aimed to support clarity about the change story, to work together to co-create meaningful messages and think about communication with wider audiences.

Participants generated many ideas about ways to get the message out using different platforms, budgets and media (see appendix 2 for details). Overall, participants recognised the importance of using a variety of engagement activities to reach the workforce and the community, including advertising and promotion using multi-media, merchandise, large scale events, community activities, meetings, feedback and staff surveys.

Evaluation

Towards the end of the session, we asked participants to give us some feedback about the workshop using the ideas of ‘Now’ (what did you get from today?) and ‘Wow’ (what do you hope happens next?). A number of themes could be drawn from the feedback, evidencing that the outcomes for the session were met.

Now

Headspace

Participants appreciated the ‘headspace’ and time for reflection provided by the workshop. They felt it created a safe space for sharing information and found the session ‘fun’, ‘lively’, ‘entertaining’, ‘inspirational’, ‘motivating’ and ‘enjoyable’. They felt hopeful and optimistic about the proposed changes.

Networking

Feedback noted that participants valued the networking opportunity and sense of community created through the workshop, making new relationships, and meeting other staff in different roles. There was a sense of ‘shared purpose’ as well as ‘shared frustrations’ in the room. Feedback

reported that the workshop demonstrated staff opinions were being listened to. Discussion was felt to generate ideas, learning and a better understanding of issues for social work and practitioners.

Change messages

Participants reported reaffirmed messages about change, including that it is needed, that there is appetite, willingness and opportunities in place. They felt a greater appreciation of the change work already underway and that the message about 'evolution' was getting out. They noted relationships, communication and listening to stories and experiences would be key to embedding a positive future.

Concerns and questions

Some concerns and questions were also raised, particularly around management buy-in, being more specific about changes in practice and how to take ideas forward:

'Interesting content but feel wrong people in the room. Senior management need to be on board and they aren't, not in practice.'

'Asked us to spread the word but haven't actually said what will change in practice.'

Wow

Hope, motivation, creativity

Feedback captured a sense of hope and motivation to 'keep going', driven by wanting to meet needs and improve outcomes for supported people. Creative and bespoke methods were called for to do this with limited resources. Participants hoped that change will be embraced and that things will get better. One reflection was about the 'good vision' presented but noted a reluctance to believe anything will really change. This might suggest some 'change fatigue' in the group.

Action

What participants wanted most was visible, tangible action and plans put in motion. They wanted recommendations and ideas to be implemented, to move from theoretical to practical changes. Commitment and progression to staff wellbeing and buy-in from senior management were also highlighted. Examples of what this change would look like in practice were called for. Practice changes such as quicker shifts, reduced caseload, updated policies (particularly around Self-Directed Support) and more autonomy were noted.

Engagement

Participants wanted more discussion to put ‘flesh on the bones’ of ideas and to build on communication and relationships in the next steps. Updates and involvement of staff from all levels and how to engage those missing from the conversation were important to participants. Timing and pace of ongoing engagement was also highlighted as was collaborative working with health and other agencies.

What's next?

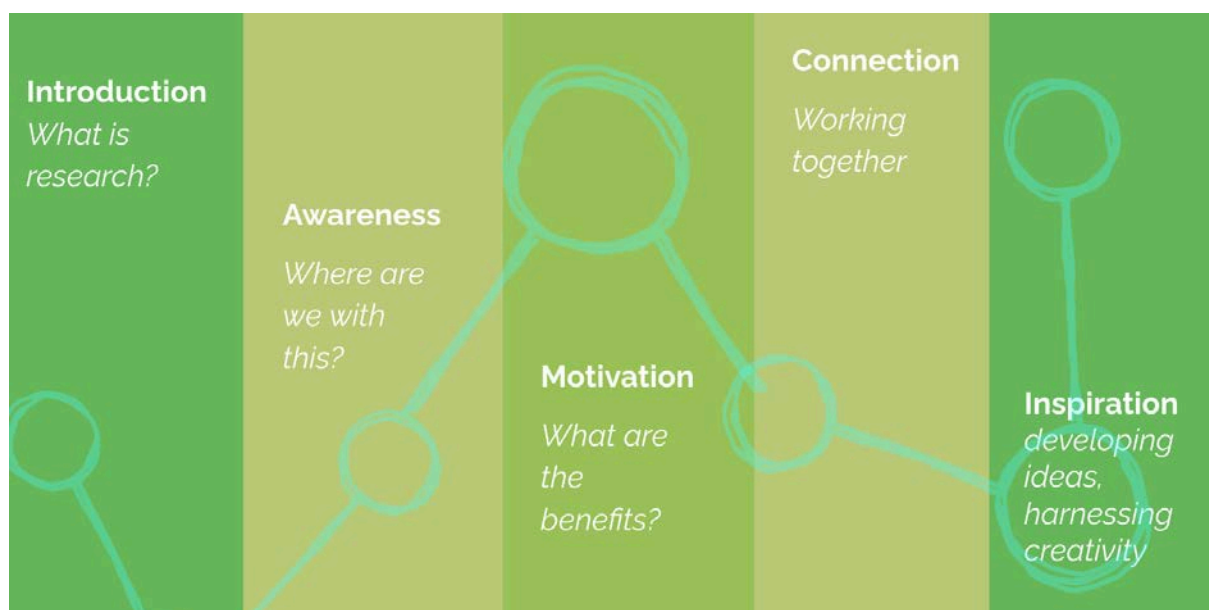
This workshop provided an opportunity to engage and network practitioners and managers with change activities happening across the HSCP. It also provided space to network ideas and to explore attitudes, values and experiences of current and future service delivery. Participants demonstrated motivation, hope and optimism about change. They could articulate what good looks like, why it's important and what's getting in the way. This indicates a strong foundation for realising change in North Ayrshire. Learning and insights from this workshop can help inform plans for:

- Supporting staff through change activities based on their animal ‘tribes’ and the themes identified through the workshop
- Removing barriers to effective practice and reducing system demands
- Co-creating messages and planning activities to engage the workforce and community
- Responding to what staff say they want to happen next

Workshop 3: Practitioner Research with Newly Qualified Social Workers

Iriss and North Ayrshire HSCP colleagues met again in November for a workshop about practitioner research with newly qualified and student social workers. Designed through conversation with the Learning and Development team, we put together a session to explore the topic and develop ideas with participants. We took along our [Navigating Evidence](#) tool that explores what evidence is and what is needed to make good evidence-informed decisions.

Outcomes of the session focused on:



Learning & Development Strategy

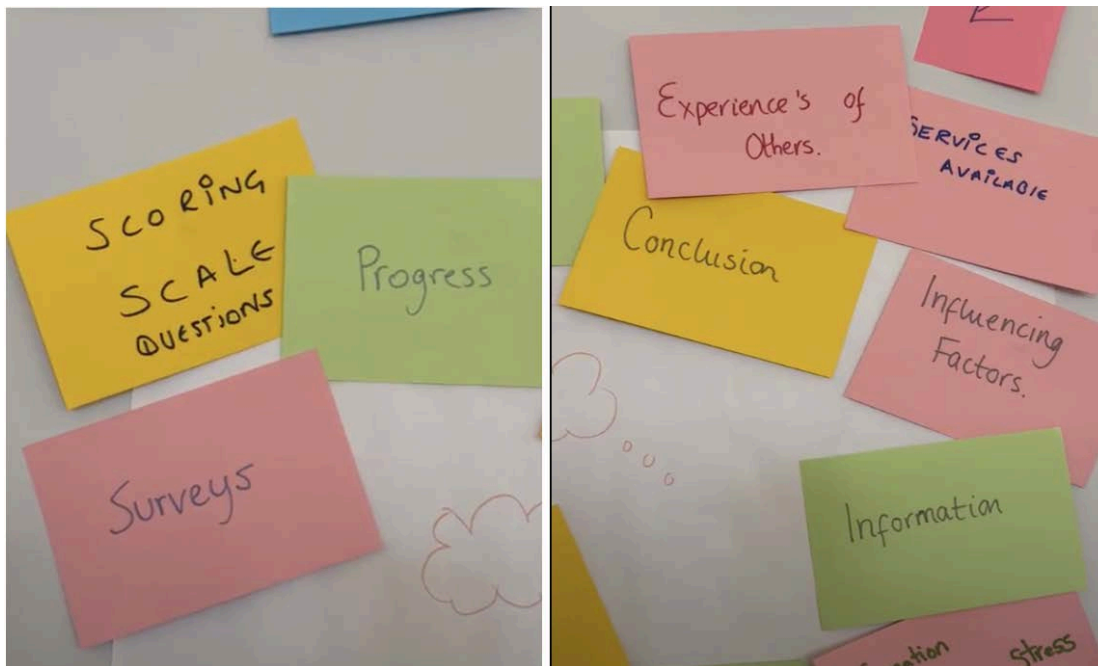
The session opened with an introduction to the recently published Learning and Development Strategy for North Ayrshire HSCP, which outlines the ambitions for practitioner research. Practitioners will be supported to undertake research during their first year of qualified practice and share learning through a Practitioner Research and Practice Forum.



Sharing experiences of research

In our work, we want to find out where people are so we can start there and not make assumptions. So before we got into definitions and processes of research and practitioner research, we asked the group to discuss their experience and perceptions of research. We asked them to put one or two words down on card that came to mind when they thought of research and discuss in their groups. There were mixed responses. Some had conducted

research for university dissertations. Others had very little or no experience. There were comments about feeling stressed by the idea of practitioner research, specifically related to [capacity](#). Some were concerned about how to add this alongside their practice.



We then asked if they could indicate, using sticky dots, where they felt they were in terms of knowledge, confidence and interest around research. This created a visual to inform us and to revisit later in the session. Overall, the group put themselves at the lower end of knowledge but in the middle for confidence and interest.

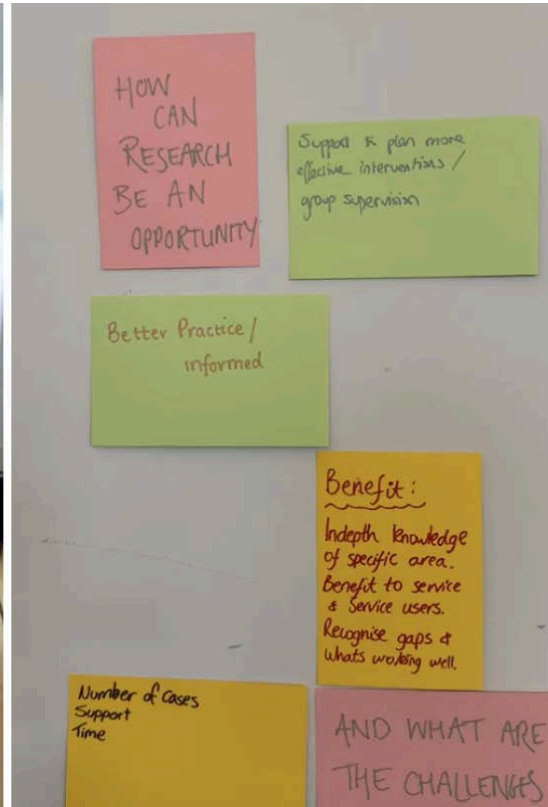
What is research and practitioner research?

We outlined these concepts and the steps that a research process typically goes through. We spent some time discussing ethical considerations in research and reflected on the alignment of ethics and the social work role.

We focused some time on connecting to the purpose of practitioner research to support motivation and understand the rationale for it. We discussed how well-placed practitioners are to see the real issues and barriers that impact supported people and how practitioner research can create evidence to inform local decision-making and solutions. We recognised that practitioner research could help bridge the well-documented gap between research and practice. We explored the benefits (reflective practice, professional development, knowledge sharing, integration of practice and research), the barriers (limited resources, time constraints, need for training in research methods) and the idea of evidence-informed practice. We also highlighted that having academic partners as part of the process, like we did in the PROP project, can help alleviate some of the barriers.

What excites you? Who might benefit? What are your challenges?


Groups then discussed benefits and challenges in their local context and how these might be addressed before taking a break. Benefits seemed easy to identify and focused on ways to improve outcomes for supported people. Challenges centred around capacity, time and skills.




What do you want to know?

The next activity asked groups to focus on gaps - what were they seeing in practice that they wanted to know more about? This aimed to link the idea of research and enquiry closely to practice. We designed a worksheet to help support practitioners to think through the high level components of their research ideas.

Name: _____



RESEARCH IDEAS



Idea (question)	Why (impact)	Who (sample)	How (methods)

The practitioners had lots of ideas and were able to clearly connect research to impact. Their individual practice experience was clear in their ideas for research areas, which drew on their personal curiosity about problems they notice in their day-to-day work. This helped to underline how important practitioner perspectives are in identifying relevant areas for research; and for research that can meaningfully impact practice.

Next steps

This was a really positive session and gave newly qualified and student social workers the space to explore practitioner research before it gets started. They were supported to identify potential research ideas and to recognise benefits and challenges. We look forward to supporting them further as the practitioner research practice programme and forum take shape.

Workshop 4: Designing a Test of Change

Outcomes for this session included:



The workshop provided space to:

- Update on current plans for introducing Community Social Work in North Ayrshire
- Recap on Community Social Work as an ethos and an approach.
- Explore the knowledge, confidence and motivation in the group towards the approach
- Test assumptions and hopes around what Community Social Work might achieve



Confidence, knowledge, motivation

As with previous workshops, we wanted to provide some space for participants to share where they were in terms of confidence, knowledge and motivation. This exercise showed that people felt in the middle of the scale in terms of knowledge, that confidence was mixed but motivation was overall positive.

Opportunities and challenges

We discussed in small groups the benefits and limitations of Community Social Work as a model and what attracted staff to this approach. Participants liked that the model 'prioritised people over systems and paperwork' and could help 'illuminate unmet need'. They liked the ethos of social inclusion, capacity building, early intervention, prevention and 'the potential to move away from traditional models of care management which are at saturation'. The opportunities to change relationships and build trust with communities were also highlighted. Challenges were also acknowledged in terms of 'people in the community knowing what Community Social Work is' and the

‘cultural shift in expectations of service users and families’ as well as other services. Others noted that the approach would need to operate alongside the ‘statutory demands’ and crisis responses of social work.

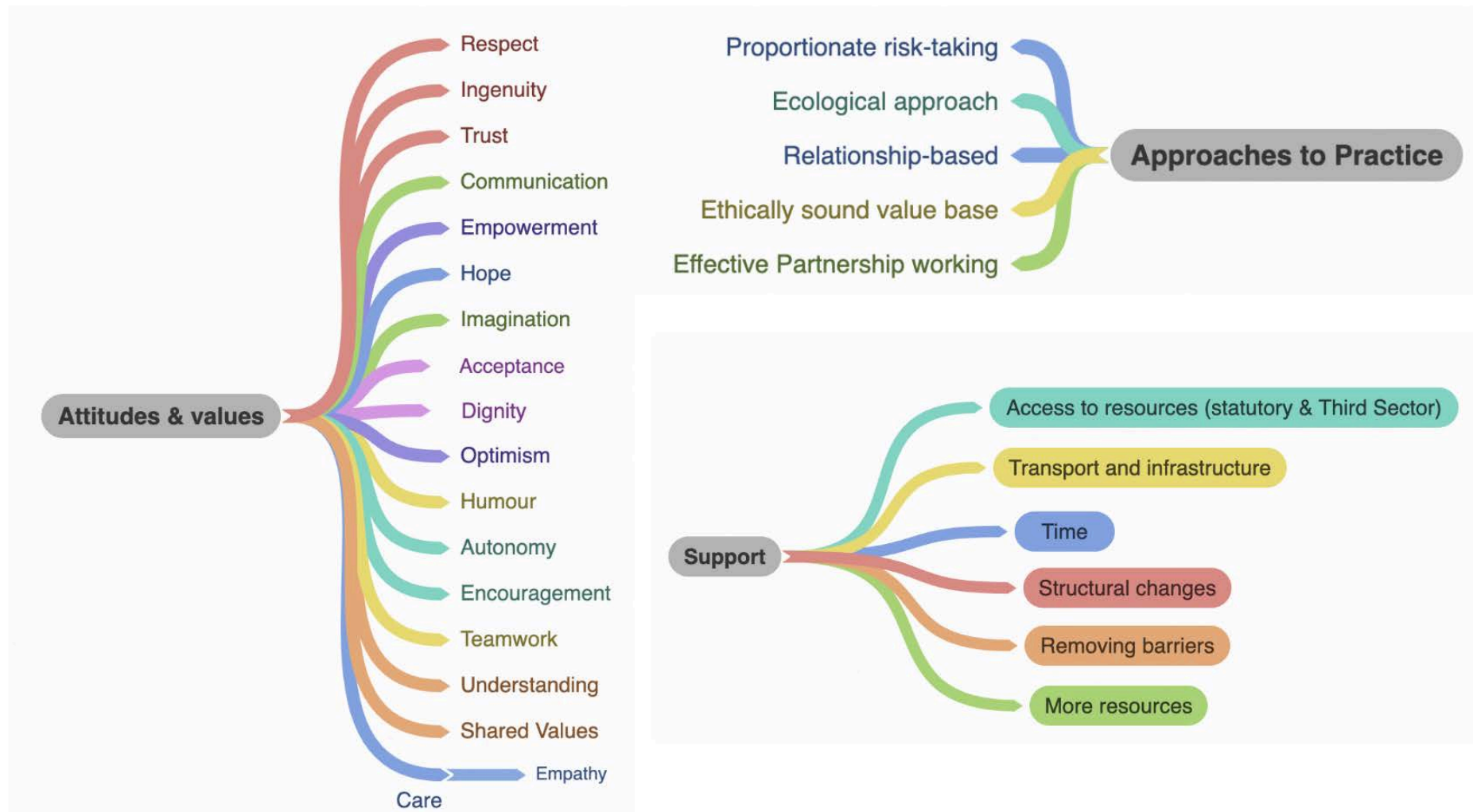
A test of change

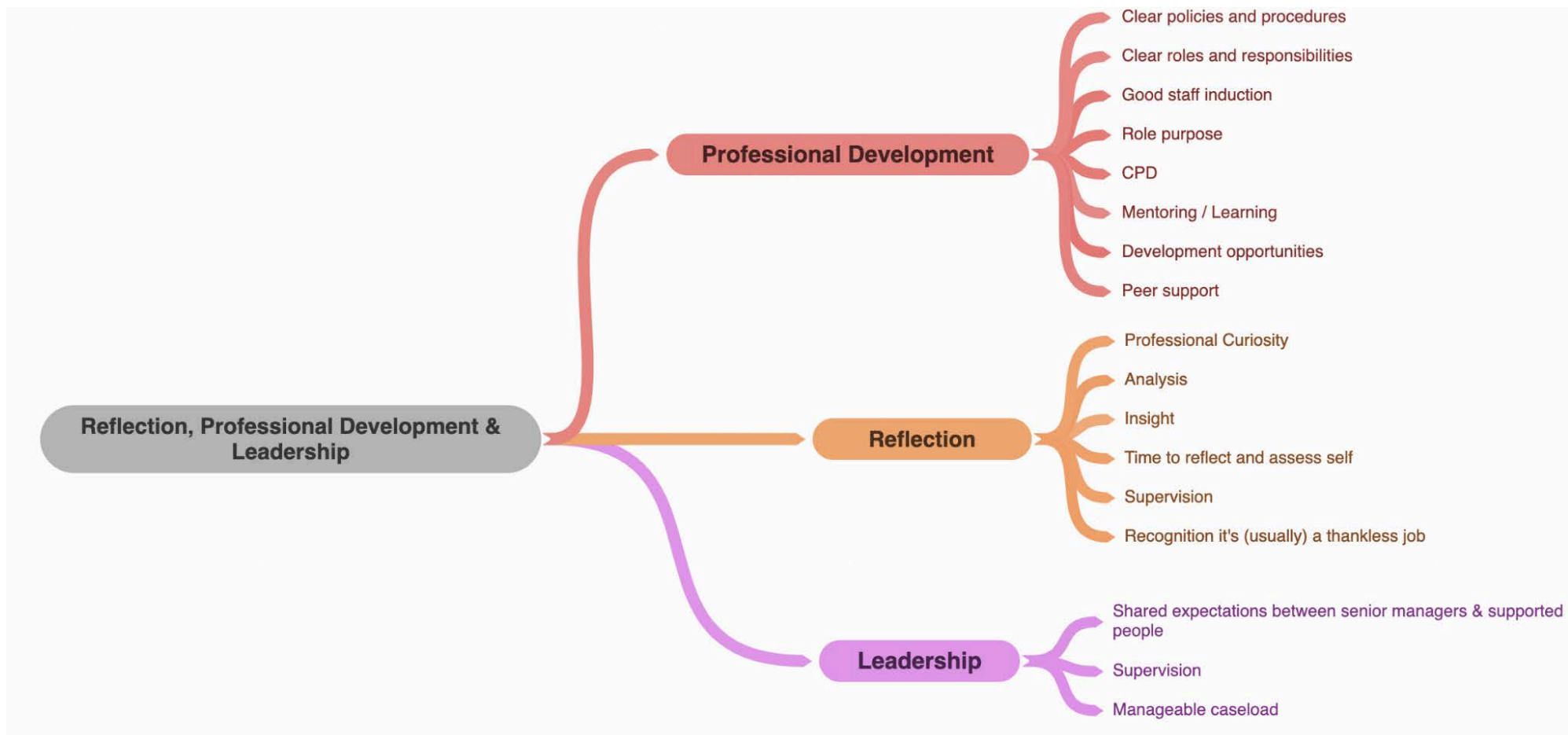
We introduced models that can be used for tests of change (double diamond, Plan Do Study Act), people’s experiences of pilots and the importance of taking a learning approach. We discussed what impacts matter for tests of change in a social work context, including those on supported people and communities, and on practice and the wider workforce. Groups explored how to measure progress and the challenges of more outcome-focused and qualitative measures.

Sharing the learning, embedding the change

This part of the workshop focused on how to share and embed learning from a test of change. We explored resources in the wider system, for example champions in the workforce and community, and the role of learning and development. The purpose of this part of the session was to emphasise the importance of sharing learning to support strong feedback loops between the test and its impact on other parts of the system including practice, people and communities. Having a clear strategy for spreading learning can support changes to take hold.

Appendix 2: Workshop 2, North Star indicators, themed







Appendix 3: Workshop 2, Change message platforms and activities

Online Platforms	Advertising	Events - large scale	Engagement	Activities
Email CSWO does a podcast Social media: Facebook, X, Instagram, Tik Tok QR codes	Adverts: radio / tv / local radio / lampposts / milk carton / food Merchandise: stationary / poster / notepads / mugs / badges ('NAC is the place to be / 'Change is coming' / 'Make NAC great again' Competition / prize Sky writing / aeroplane A change bus Project on side of a building Big TV at Bridgegate / big screen ads Topiary Roadside banners Council website Flyers / booklets at schools and library & mail drops Adverts on cars / buses Newspapers	Community events Roadshow Event open days (coffee mornings etc) Community fun day Festival (change fest) Protest (government funding)	Meetings: engagement / consultation Use IJB - external meetings that senior managers attend Staff survey Service user feedback Megaphone Letters (with glitter, and confetti, and a song) Word of mouth Information stalls Paper-cup telephone Celebrity endorsement	Walk and talk Cheese and wine (on a private yacht) Speed dating-type conversations Boat trip Cake day Whole family holiday (destination of choice)

Appendix 4: Workshop 2 attendees

Social Work Asst / MHS - Addictions
Social Worker / CF - GV,Nth Cst & Arran
Family Wellbeing Support Worker / CF-Justice&Interv Servs
Snr Manager / Contracts&Commissioning
Social Worker / CF - Irv,Kg & 3 Towns
Senior Accountant / HSCP - Finance
Team Manager / MHS - Community
Social Worker / CF - Irv,Kg & 3 Towns
Social Work Asst / MHS - Learning Dis
Learning Disabilities - Development Manager
Social Worker / HCC - Locality Services
Team Worker / CF-Justice&Interv Servs
Social Work Asst / Professional Standards
Service Manager - Learning Disabilities
Social Worker / MHS - Learning Dis
Snr Manager - Learning Disabilities
Social Work Asst / HCC - Locality Services
Snr Manager / HSCP Senior Managers
Social Worker / MHS - Community
Social Work Asst / HCC - Locality Services
Snr Manager - Mental Health Services
Team Manager / HCC - Comm Care Serv
Social Worker / HCC - Locality Services
Social Worker - Learning Disabilities
Social Worker / CF - Irv,Kg & 3 Towns
Social Worker / CF-Justice&Interv Servs
Manager / Professional Standards
Team Manager / HCC - Locality Services
Senior Accountant / HSCP - Finance
Team Manager / Professional Standards
Social Worker / CF - Irv,Kg & 3 Towns
Market Facilitation Officer / Contracts&Commissioning
Social Worker / CF - GV,Nth Cst & Arran
Team Manager / CF - Irv,Kg & 3 Towns
Team Manager / HCC - Comm Care Serv
Team Manager / MHS - Learning Dis

Social Work Asst / HCC - Locality Services
Trainee Accountant / HSCP - Finance
Social Worker / MHS - Learning Dis
Social Worker / HCC - Locality Services
Head of Service / Chief Officer
Social Work Asst / HCC - Locality Services
Social Worker / CF - GV,Nth Cst & Arran
Social Worker / MHS - Community
Social Work Asst / HCC - Locality Services
Social Worker / MHS - Addictions
Senior Accountant / HSCP - Finance
Social Worker / MHS - Learning Dis