

# Building Blocks of “Better”

Reflections on the 10  
Underpinning Principles of  
Local Area Coordination

choice and  
control

working together

natural  
authority

formati

community

tribution

complementary nature  
of services

lifelong learning

relationships

citizenship

local area  
coordination<sup>®</sup>  
network

communitycatalysts<sup>®</sup>  
unlocking potential effecting change

# CONTENTS

- Page 3      **Introduction** – Nick Sinclair
- Page 7      **The 10 principles in brief**
- Page 8      **Overview Reflections** – Eddie Bartnik
- The principles of:**
- Page 12     **Contribution** – Clenton Farquharson
- Page 15     **The Complementary Nature of Services** – Jessica Studdert
- Page 19     **Natural Authority** – Nick Gardham
- Page 22     **Working Together** – Sian Lockwood
- Page 25     **Relationships** – David Robinson
- Page 28     **Lifelong Learning** – Serena Jones
- Page 32     **Community** – Clare Wightman
- Page 36     **Information** – Angela Catley
- Page 39     **Citizenship** – Simon Duffy
- Page 45     **Choice and Control (and conclusion)** – Ralph Broad

# INTRODUCTION

## Nick Sinclair, Director of the Local Area Coordination Network

With the tragic onset of Covid-19 soon came discussion around how communities across the globe might “build back better”. This is a slogan that appears to have been used in a number of different ways over recent years. The UN for instance adopted Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction in 2015 which refers to the term as part of plans around post disaster recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction<sup>1</sup>. Joe Biden used it as one of the key slogans in his successful 2020 presidential campaign<sup>2</sup>. In the context of the UK, the phrase is associated with the Government’s economic development plans focused on growth that “levels up” every part of the UK<sup>3</sup>. It seems to us that in order to make sense of its meaning, it is important to understand what the vision of “better” is in the sights of those who use it.

The Local Area Coordination vision of “better” is one where ‘all people live in welcoming communities that provide friendship, mutual support, equity and opportunities for everyone’<sup>4</sup>. For the members of the Local Area Coordination Network, this gives us a goal to strive towards as we continue to grow the approach alongside local people, their families, communities and partners alike. Our approach is built upon a foundation of ten powerful principles that guide us in all we do. We see these principles as essential building blocks upon which we can collectively build this vision of “better”.

At the end of 2020, we wanted to reflect on these principles, celebrate them and consider what they meant in the context of a uniquely challenging year for all. As part of this, we invited [10 well known social leaders](#) to consider one of the principles each and share their perspectives via an online conference. We also asked Eddie Bartnik, a prominent global leader of Local Area Coordination to give his overall thoughts too. The conference was attended by 180 people, and was just one way we could come together whilst we had to remain apart. In this document we are delighted to be able

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.undrr.org/publication/sendai-framework-disaster-risk-reduction-2015-2030>

<sup>2</sup> <https://joebiden.com/build-back-better/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/build-back-better-our-plan-for-growth>

<sup>4</sup> <https://lacnetwork.org/local-area-coordination/>

to share transcripts and edited versions of those wonderful talks as well as the questions our presenters posed.

We believe the 10 principles associated with Local Area Coordination can be the building blocks of a more inclusive, welcoming and self-supporting society and hope that this document might inspire those striving to realise a better world too. If there is anything in this piece that inspires you then please do get in touch as we'd really love to hear from you.

May we take this opportunity to say a massive thank you to all of our speakers for their time, contributions and generosity in supporting this piece of work.

[nick.sinclair@communitycatalysts.co.uk](mailto:nick.sinclair@communitycatalysts.co.uk)

Contributors were asked to pose a number of challenging questions. For ease of reference, we have summarised these below.

### **Eddie Bartnik**

- What are the core principles of Local Area Coordination and what adjustments do we need to make to keep up with changing times?
- Is Local Area Coordination doing enough around choice and control and what is the best alignment with the work on direct payments and personal budgets (and how do you change the power in the system)?

### **Clenton Farquharson**

- How do we create a society where everyone gets to make their contribution?

### **Jessica Studdert**

- How do we transform the system from outside?

### **Nick Gardham**

- How do we find ways and channel the energy of the people in communities so that unilateral power and relational power can work more effectively together?
- How do we find ways of hearing people's stories on the self-organized actions of communities to develop and take action on issues they care about?
- How do we find a way for that to be embraced and welcomed, not harnessed, and shackled, within this system that we live our lives?
- How do we find ways of sitting down more equitably together with parity to understand how the voices of those people go unheard?

### **Sian Lockwood**

- Working together well needs trust. How can we build trust between organisations that are competing for scarce resource or a dominant reputation?

### **David Robinson**

- How do we keep alive, not only the practical stuff, the learning about Zooming and WhatsApp and the mutual aid relationships we have established, but also

the shifts in attitudes, those undercurrents, which can potentially prefigure much wider change?

### **Serena Jones**

- Which command and control structures do you think we need to dismantle to enable us all to thrive?

### **Clare Wightman**

- In the challenges ahead we know that the biggest resource lies untapped and outside of formalised support. It lies in our people. It lies in what can be achieved when they organise together around the people and issues they care about. It lies in community. How do we collectively tackle this challenge in 2021?

### **Angela Catley**

- How do we bring back enough of the human to make our increasingly electronic future hospitable and inclusive of everyone?

### **Simon Duffy**

- Local Area Coordination and many good initiatives work best at the level of neighbourhoods. Yet in most communities there are no structures - and certainly no democratic structures - to really help us act as citizens, to think, decide and act together. So, isn't it time for us to demand and to create a meaningful shift towards truly local democratic power?

### **Ralph Broad**

- How will you know and what should you do if you or your organisation are doing things that restrict choice and control and anything else around these 10 principles?

The principles explored	What they mean in practice
<b>Citizenship</b>	All people in our communities have the same rights, responsibilities and opportunities to participate in and contribute to the life of the community, respecting and supporting their identity, beliefs, values and practices.
<b>Relationships</b>	Families, friends and personal networks are the foundations of a rich and valued life in the community.
<b>Natural Authority</b>	People and their families are experts in their own lives, have knowledge about themselves and their communities and are best placed to make their own decisions.
<b>Lifelong Learning</b>	All people have a life-long capacity for learning, development and contribution.
<b>Information</b>	Access to accurate, timely and relevant information supports informed decision-making, choice and control.
<b>Choice and Control</b>	Individuals, often with support of their families and personal networks, are best placed to lead in making their own decisions and plan, choose and control supports, services and resources.
<b>Community</b>	Communities are further enriched by the inclusion and participation of all people and these communities are the most important way of building friendship, support and a meaningful life.
<b>Contribution</b>	We value and encourage the strengths, knowledge, skills and contribution that all individuals, families and communities bring.
<b>Working Together</b>	Effective partnerships with individuals/families, communities and services are vital in strengthening the rights and opportunities for people and their families to achieve their vision for a good life, inclusion and contribution.
<b>Complementary Nature of Services</b>	Services should support and complement the role of individuals, families and communities in supporting people to achieve their aspirations for a good life.

# OVERVIEW REFLECTIONS AND CONFERENCE INTRODUCTION

## Eddie Bartnik

The following text is a summary transcript based on what Eddie shared at the conference.

I'd like to start with some acknowledgements:

- Our hosts the Local Area Coordination Network for England and Wales and Community Catalysts. This is a wonderful event today and we are lucky to have such a Network.
- All Local Area Coordinators, allies, and supporters
- All those pioneers who have been brave enough to start Local Area Coordination in each location and each country.

I've been asked to say a bit about my involvement with Local Area Coordination and then some reflections on the importance of the principles for Local Area Coordination work and more generally.

I've been lucky enough to have been continuously involved with Local Area Coordination since the first site in 1988 and seen it grow to an international initiative with thousands of Coordinators in 6-7 countries. Local Area Coordination is something I am passionate about and where I feel most authentic – alongside individuals and families in their local community, figuring out things together. My best image is of being alongside people, not in front leading the way or behind, failing to keep up with people's aspirations.

It's been a process of sharing our learnings and taking Local Area Coordination from 1 site to a complete state-wide system and then the whole community around Australia, and also learning from other countries. We now have 30 years uninterrupted learning and evidence which is very powerful, plus a cycle of reciprocal learning across sites. For example, Western Australian learnings to the UK, UK learning back to Australia and then combined learnings to new countries such as Singapore, and so on.



Our approach has been to preserve core values and at the same time stimulate change and improvement. The 10 Local Area Coordination Principles have been critical to Local Area Coordination work.

At the beginning, we used a pretty simple graphic representing the old system with people on the outside having to fit into programs and then a new system where the person and their family were at the centre, surrounded by layers of informal and formal support which were built person by person in each community. The change was also represented by resources and direct funding being directed to people rather than the organisations.

Progressively, with individuals and families, we developed the Local Area Coordination Framework. One of the key ideas was the unpicking what “a good life” means for us all and the critical importance of valued relationships and making a contribution and people who love and care about each of us. These are the things that money can’t buy and must be given freely. This led to a strong focus on people’s gifts, assets and contributions rather than just their deficits and the repositioning of formal services as complementary to but not replacing the support of family, friends and community.

So, these principles became part of the DNA of Local Area Coordination and have been applied with passion and rigour. The 10 Principles were originally developed in Western Australia and remain robust to this day, with occasional refinements to reflect the changing context for our work.

I would like to share 2 examples:

- When I was state-wide director of Local Area Coordination in Western Australia, this was in a huge state with a population of 2m people spread over 2.5m km<sup>2</sup>, with 54 local Offices. Despite there being huge variations in context, we had the same overall approach, same principles, all adapted to the local context.
- When things went wrong in the lives of people we supported, I would always ask three key questions which invariably got to the bottom of the issues: how well do we know the person? Who is making decisions here? How can we look at engaging family/friends and informal community supports before a “service” response?

Beyond Local Area Coordination, the 10 principles have also been very robust and powerful. For example, when I first started as Mental Health Commissioner in Western Australia, I was confronted by a very negative family crisis story in the local newspaper about a young man in terrible trouble with the justice system and likely to be detained indefinitely due to his poor mental health and offending. The system seemed to be throwing large amounts of police, court, justice and mental health crisis effort at the situation but the family could see the situation spiralling out of control. I had recruited a very experienced former Local Area Coordination manager to work with me and asked her to visit the family and try to understand the situation and assist. She spent a lot of time listening and getting to know the person and family and through her skilled information and knowledge of the service systems, she was able to spur the family to take control of the situation again and work their way through the complex situation with support along the way. Fast forward 3 years and the family and man were now managing very well and are supporting other families in distress. They would say to me that this was the first time that anyone had really taken the time to get to know them, listen to them and support them practically to find their way and do things for themselves.

Application of the Principles also attracts other like-minded values based approaches which become more of a critical mass of reform, for example Les Billingham from Thurrock in a recent video spoke about “how Local Area Coordination worked like a magnet, attracting other similar approaches such as Open Dialogue”.

Now I would like to briefly mention an exciting new development I have been working on with Ralph Broad and Nick Sinclair, with Simon Duffy as editor/publisher and nearly 20 contributors from 6 countries. We have nearly completed a new book on the international development of Local Area Coordination, featuring progress over the past five years and new components around evaluation, sustainability, sustainability and leadership. Then book will include new people and population groups; new places including the first national roll out in Australia, the first Asian country in Singapore and new challenges including the COVID-19 pandemic response and recovery.

We believe that the book will be another powerful and helpful resource for Local Area Coordinators as well as leaders and supporters and will help consolidate and grow our international learnings and partnerships.

Nick asked me to finish with a couple of provocative questions:

- *What are the core principles of Local Area Coordination and what adjustments do we need to make to keep up with changing times?*
- *Is Local Area Coordination doing enough around choice and control and what is the best alignment with the work on direct payments and personal budgets (and how do you change the power in the system)?*

On that note, I look forward to another challenging and inspiring Local Area Coordination event.

# CONTRIBUTION

Clenton Farquharson

*“We value and encourage the strengths, knowledge, skills and contribution that all individuals, families and communities bring.”*

The following is an edited transcript from Clenton’s talk given at the conference.

I am going to talk to you about contribution according to human needs, psychology and the theory developed by the leadership psychology expert, Tony Robbins. He talks about six fundamental needs that govern us, and contribution is the sixth human need. What I have learned, in my life journey so far on contribution, is mostly from a life changing experience that I had, and others I have heard in passing. Many of them I am still practicing, but all of them I do believe are true.

Now, this may be truth to me, but I do not think that makes them mine, because you cannot own the truth from my perspective. So please think of these as signposts, approaches or guides that give some science to uncovering us as human beings. They are yours to steal, they are yours to share and liken to your own lives and to personally apply in your own lives in your own way should you choose to.

So here I go. As people, we have needs for 1) certainty, 2) variety, 3) significance and 4) love. The fifth need is connection and growth, and this leads us to contribution, which goes hand in hand with the need for growth. We usually satisfy our needs of growth and contribution last, after we have found ways of dealing with the four basic needs. But unlike some of the other needs, growth and contribution are not in conflict with each other. They do not need to be in balance, but rather more, we have one more than we have of the other.

Contribution is any act or intention that improves the position of others and it can be physical improvement, which I have gone through and experienced, and it can also be emotional improvement too. If the interaction has made the other person feel better, even in a small way, you have contributed to someone else's life. And contributing feels good!

Whenever we give it helps us think highly of ourselves, although I can only talk about what it feels for me. Sometimes when we give, we learn to appreciate what we have. Giving is also a wonderful way to feel a few of the other needs that I have mentioned. We give, and we can have certainty about our own ability to give. Obviously, we would not be able to give anything if we did not think we had something to give. It can also give us a sense of variety if we help and contribute to different people. It can even help us feel special. It helps us connect with other people. The important thing is to give selflessly for the purpose of being kind and helping others, not in order to get something in return. This is why random acts of kindness are great ways to feel we are contributing to the world around us.

Many people say the secret to living is giving. We grow so we can eventually give, whether you are giving back to your own loved ones, the community, or to society. You will only find true fulfilment when you start to look outside of your own needs. And if your goals are only to serve you, then achieving a major milestone in your own life will only bring you fleeting happiness. But, if your goals are with the aim to benefit something larger than yourself, you will eventually be able to find a true sense of joy. When you give back to the community or society at large, you start to realize that you do not need to be prized by others. You will witness the positive impact you are making, and you will find that positive impact creates a ripple effect.

How the people you surround yourself with affect your life and create positivity, will only bring you more positivity. The mood, the emotional rare thing you feel will end once you begin to give. That is not to say you will not still encounter stressful times. But once you make the psychological, emotional, and spiritual shifts that comes with being someone who gives back, you feel more grounded in all aspects of your life and you do not need to be wildly successful. Whether we give someone on the streets a hot meal or a few pounds or are able to contribute on a larger scale. Giving back to society will give us a sense of fulfilment and we just can't get anywhere without that.

I would like to leave you with these two points on contribution that are examples to me, of what contribution is about. I will start with being a parent. Parenting is the best way to shape our society. If we invest in parenting, we invest in a social change and making this world a better place for us and generations to come.

If you raise your children to feel that they can accomplish any goal or task that they decide upon, you will have succeeded as a parent and you will have given your children the greatest of building blocks. Helping your family, also helping around the house, I am finding especially in the pandemic that I have had to pull my weight. But I believe any form of help at home can improve relationships. It is estimated that most marriages go through breakdowns because of three reasons: 1) money, 2) sex, and 3) housework. Helping each other around the house will change our society because we will raise happy families. By offering help someone can make us feel good. It is as basic as that. The other person feels that they are not alone, and, for this, it costs nothing.

The second analogy I would like to use is being a teacher. Teaching is the most wonderful way to make a difference in our society. Like parenting, teachers have the ability to shape society and make changes in big groups of people. Teaching is a profession that generally really fulfills many of the basic needs. Any change, when it is reinforced by growth and contribution, not only sticks, but goes on to positively influence hundreds of other people, which I believe is the foundation of giving back.

But, I would like to leave you with this question.

***How do we create a society where everyone gets to make their contribution?***

# THE COMPLEMENTARY NATURE OF SERVICES

**Jessica Studdert**

*“Services should support and complement the role of individuals, families and communities in supporting people to achieve their aspirations for a good life.”*

The following is an edited transcript from Jessica’s talk given at the conference.

I was really pleased to be given this principle to discuss it feels like the complementary nature of services are really important and really reflective of the principle of community power that we at New Local have been articulating and trying to understand in the context of. That work on the community paradigm for us, the concept of community power, reflects this principle of the complementary nature of services.

It covers a wide range of approaches, initiatives, and activity, from deliberative democracy to asset-based service delivery approaches to wider peer support networks and different community led grass roots initiatives. What those activities have in common in the community power approach, as we see it, is that they have a firm belief and an understanding that communities themselves, individuals themselves, have the knowledge and skills and assets that makes them best placed to identify and respond to the challenges that they face.

I want to use my time now to talk about how in many ways the system of public service provision, as we see it and as we experience it, is not set up to sufficiently leverage people's capacity to have insight into their own situation. I think wanting to pick up a little bit on the point Eddie was making in his opening remarks about where the power in the system lies.

So, if we reflect on this principle, the opposite of it is that power lies much more within institutions and public service bodies than it does, and largely the centralized nature of our country. But power largely rests in institutions, as opposed to people in places.

We have articulated two public service paradigms, the state and the market paradigm, which are two overbearing features of how our public service is incentivized to behave and how they behave at the moment, which characterizes a lot of the public service provision that we get.

So, the state paradigm would have come into force from the late 1940s to the 1980s. It is the dominant paradigm that continues to frame the architecture of public service provision to this day. Features of the state paradigm include that there is a default assumption within services that the institutional and professional dominance services are accountable to Whitehall departments, not to people in places. There is an assumption that officials and experts know better. Under this paradigm the person and the community are deemed passive recipients of a predetermined service offer. The market paradigm kind of grew out of that. It did not fundamentally alter the substantive architecture of the state paradigm which does exist.

The market paradigm came to force in the 1980s and is having dwindling efficacy to this day. But it does remain a dominant force, which tried to inject a bit of choice and control into the service provision, driving cost efficiencies and trying to create more effective services. But actually, what's happened is that you're still largely a passive recipient of a predetermined service offer. You might have a bit more choice and control and there might be a bit more competition between providers, but you are not shaping what provisions are on offer. What is happening is as much more of a transactional relationship.

In marketizing public services, there is a need to break down activity and interaction into kind of costed units of interaction. There is much more of a transactional relationship and the individual is not so much a passive recipient as more of a customer or client. There is still a kind of transactional model there and under both the state and the market paradigms you are incredibly limited in terms of how much control you have, how much you would be able to shape what is available and clearly leverage your own insights into your own situation.

What I'd like to just say is that both of these paradigms are dwindling in efficacy and there's a real urgency that faces our public services. But there is one great opportunity that we find ourselves in the moment as specific on the cusp of the early 2020s. There was an enormous demand challenge on public services. It is not



sustainable for us to outsource our problems with public services to resolve and parcel back to us. So, what public services need to be able to do is exactly this principle [the complementary nature of services] and be much more capable of leveraging people's insights into their own situation. It is not desirable or sustainable for the state to always do it or services to do it on our behalf, and it is not going to be sustainable into the future. We know about demand and pressures on the NHS acute services and this kind of hierarchical approach is not sustainable for the longer term.

The market paradigm approach also has diminishing returns. When you need to take on a much more collaborative approach, it is quite hard in that transaction environment. So as a consequence, public services are going to be trapped, ever more into a situation where they're going to be delivering the kind of symptomatic responses to deeper issues. There is a risk that we have a system that is going to be much more focused on acute crisis provision than long-term preventative practice.

But there is a big opportunity, which I think we need to kind of understand leverage a little bit more, which is there is an enormous demand amongst people for more control over their lives and a massive expectation that they will have more control over their lives. There is a big sense of their own efficacy. We see this in a kind of negative sense with populism and the take back control kind of mantra that chimes with people. We use social media as platforms and we are not used to being passive recipients in many spheres of our lives. Why should it be the same in public service provision?

I think the mutual aid response to the early days of the pandemic really showed how much of a desire people have to contribute and how much of a desire there is that is a kind of latent force that really isn't leveraged systematically by our public services. I think it's possible to say that in the early days of the pandemic, when we were really seeing a kind of neighbour to neighbour support network and communities mobilizing incredibly quickly, communities were acting in a matter of days where you would maybe see counsellors responding in a matter of weeks and government in a matter of months. So, unless our wider system of public services is much more capable of leveraging, in non-crisis times, that latent desire for people to have more control over what is on offer, then I think that there is a very real risk that public services aren't viable in the future.

To an extent in the last 10 years there has been a kind of macro political debate about austerity. It has become a kind of invest or cut discussion and some of the really rich pioneering stuff that's been going on much more under the radar of national policy makers, just isn't kind of coming to the forefront in terms of how we're thinking about public service reform more generally and into the next decade. We have got the challenge of rising demand and the opportunity for people to want to take more control over their lives. Those are really the driving factors behind why we would potentially try to see a shift towards more of a community paradigm as opposed to state and market paradigm.

There is a fundamental principle underpinning this, which is that people are much more actively involved in the design and delivery of public services. We need to think about how, at the moment, the system logic is very much against a lot of the work around Local Area Coordination.

The question I want to leave with participants to focus on is:

### ***How do we transform the system from outside?***

There's always amazing work that goes on that is often against the typical state and market paradigm assumptions. So that has lots of implications for how practitioners operate, how the state operates, how public services are funded, how they are incentivized, how accountability runs through the system, not vertical silos to Whitehall, but kind of horizontally to place, and how services collaborate in different ways. At the heart of all of that is this principle of how you are putting the person at the centre, and the centre of gravity comes outside the institutions and to people in places incredibly strongly. It is an area that there are no easy answers for, but it's certainly an area that New Local is going to be continuing to focus on in the future.

# NATURAL AUTHORITY

Nick Gardham

*“People and their families are experts in their own lives, have knowledge about themselves and their communities and are best placed to make their own decisions.”*

The following is an edited transcript from Nick’s talk given at the conference.

The answer lies in people and right to the hearts of communities, but often we do not get the chance to hear it. Speaking on natural authority, I think what we need to explore first of all, is how do we hear those voices?

If we think about our work and the work that we are all collectively involved, I'm sure we need to ask ourselves one question. That question that I am going to start with is this, why are some people heard whilst others go unheard? And why so often is it that for many millions of people who are living on the margins, that their voices are not heard by anyone or anybody, and what is the impact of that?

Certainly, our work and our experiences over the last six or seven years recognises that [people on the margins] have the answers to their problems, if only we could find a way of finding those stories, hearing them and listening to those people. That is where our work starts and that is exactly where Local Area Coordination starts too. It starts by just listening. Listening is a powerful act, it is about giving and contributing. If we could find the time and space to sit down and listen each other, we might be able to understand each other a little bit better, [and] hear what life is like for some people.

Listening itself is great, but it is actually not the only answer. We have to think about what we do with it once we've listened. Certainly, community organizing focuses around power and about building power in the places perhaps where that power might not be. When we go out and when we start to listen to people and we start to understand their stories and hear from them about what life is like for them, what we are often hearing [from people] is that they have no natural authority.

I do not necessarily mean [by that] they do not have it; they just do not believe it. Organizing is about building possibility and culture of possibility where people not only see that change is possible, but they believe it as well and that believe they can be part of it. When we're hearing stories from people and we're listening to them about their lives and what it's like, they'll tell us, "what can I do that can make a difference? Do you know what life's been like for us for a long time, nothing changes, nothing ever changes. I do not believe I can affect any change. If I did, nobody else would be involved either." So, it is not just about building personal power. It's about building collective power.

The most enlightening thing is for those people involved in organizing at the grass roots, is when they talk to not just one neighbour, but 20 neighbours. And they say, "what would happen if we all came together? What would happen if three, four, five fifty or five hundred came together to affect change? Would we have some natural authority then? Would we be able to do something about it?" And people then start to realize themselves that their stories that they have shared genuinely means something if they came together with others to do something about it.

But there is a challenge, isn't there? That challenge is that there's power in the system and that it sometimes needs to be challenged. But how do we do that? How do we find effective means for that? And we all point to how COVID shined a spotlight on the power of community to self-organize. We have seen that across our own network, and we have seen that across the country. How millions of people came together to act in the best interest of their neighbours, to care for one another, to show a sort of directing and to tackle issues that people were facing. Most of that was in support for whether that be food or pharmacy runs or whatever that might be. We have seen all of these acts of really what we would see as relational power, the relational power of people when they come together. It is all about relationships.

Perhaps public services might be deemed irrelevant at times if they cannot find a way of connecting with this power in communities. I am having a number of calls right now with local authorities who are grappling with a situation that they want to find themselves harness[ing] the energy of communities and that's the wrong language. We do not want to shackle communities and point them in the right direction, which they have to go. We need to trust communities and unleash that potential to work with them more effectively. We are in a situation where a pandemic has created a

crisis of legitimacy and a logistics in an established system, which has been challenged because it took them three months to respond.

Their challenge was that actually communities all of a sudden de-legitimized the role of public services in some areas by self-organizing themselves to respond to the pandemic far quicker than anybody else could. So rather than asking ourselves, how do we harness this energy that's emerging in communities, ask:

***How do we find effective ways for the unilateral power of our institutions, which often dictates how many people live their lives and how people experience power by (by doing to and for people), to find ways and challenge the energy of the people in communities so that unilateral power and relational power can work more effectively together?***

How do we find ways of hearing people's stories so that the self-organized actions of communities come together to develop and take action on issues they care about? How do we find a way for that to be embraced and welcomed, not harnessed, not shackled, but embraced and welcomed within this system that we live our lives? How do we find ways of sitting down more equitably together with parity to understand how the voices of those people that go unheard can find a place in the system to be heard, and that people have the power to affect their lives and the lives of people around them in a positive way?

# WORKING TOGETHER

**Sian Lockwood**

*“Effective partnerships with individuals/families, communities and services are vital in strengthening the rights and opportunities for people and their families to achieve their vision for a good life, inclusion and contribution.”*

The following is a piece contributed by Sian based on what she shared at the conference.

Working together is one of the important principles underpinning Local Area Coordination – and it is also a central underpinning principle for Community Catalysts.

At its most effective ‘working together’ involves people and organisations coming together on an equal footing, to work together on a common goal. Such equality is rare – but embedded in Local Area Coordination. Co-ordinators walk alongside people as they take steps towards their vision for a good life, working with them, their families and people in the local community as equals.

Community Catalysts’ own deep commitment to working together came from an early recognition of the waste of resource that came from organisations competing with each other for dominance in a particular area, often ignoring or disparaging the wealth of knowledge and resource that lie in each other’s’ organisations and in the people of the same area. In our work we found and still find many communities with long histories of organisations coming in to mend/develop/empower them that just haven’t seen the activity already going on in those communities or appreciated the knowledge and depth of experience that lies in local people and community organisations.

This commitment to working collaboratively with other organisations and people has been deepened by the experiences of colleagues and enterprise leaders who themselves needed some care or support to live their life. They opened our eyes to

the way in which people with labels are often seen simply as people needing help and not for their talents, skills and potential to contribute. There seems to be a human tendency to divide people into 'givers' and 'receivers', without any realisation of the impact on both and on their communities. We all need to feel valuable and purposeful and forcing people into the 'receiver' box has not just hugely negative impact on the person, but wastes much needed energy and talent that would enrich the people around them and their community. Working with people on an equal footing, seeing them for their gifts as well as acknowledging where they need help, unleashes creativity and energy that can lead to wonderful (and unexpected) consequences.

One example close to my heart is Dance Syndrome. They are one of the first enterprises we helped 13 years ago and we have stayed part of their journey ever since. Their founder Jen Blackwell happens to have learning disabilities but also more importantly leads an inclusive dance company which has achieved remarkable things over the years.

The challenges we are trying to address are too complex to be able to be tackled by one organisation. We know we need to find and work together with other organisations and people who share our values - and our vision of a world where people who need some care or support can live their lives in the way they want to, as connected and contributing citizens. We know that in order to work together well we need to be committed to working together on a basis of equality and respect. Above all we need to work hard to build up trust as without trust we will waste time and energy on protecting our own interests rather than concentrating on and giving energy to the task in hand.

We give time to a small number of collectives of organisations and people working together to ensure people who need some help can get the support they need to live the life they want. We are glad to be a home for two of them – the Local Area Coordination Network of course but also the movement for personalised support in health called the Coalition for Personalised Care. We are a long-term member of the equivalent movement for personalised support in social care called Think Local Act Personal and an early member of the #socialcarefuture movement.

*Don't we all want to live in the place we call home with the people and things that we love, in communities where we look out for one another, doing the things that matter to us? That's the **#socialcarefuture** we seek.'*

Those coming together via this growing movement include people with lived experience, families, professionals, managers, support providers, user-led organisations, politicians, commissioners, community groups and others. The principle of equality is implicit rather than explicit, and as in all human networks not always perfectly present. Nevertheless, that implicit assumption of equal organisations and people working together on a shared goal strongly influences the nature of discussion and draws new organisations and people in. The recent **#socialcarefuture** festival is an example, bringing together different networks of people and organisations to contribute to different parts of the vision. In the process people heard from and spoke to people from completely different geographic and work areas, leading to rich conversations and unexpected insights.

The question I leave with you is this one:

***Working together well needs trust. How can we build trust between organisations that are competing for scarce resource or a dominant reputation?***



# RELATIONSHIPS

David Robinson

*“Families, friends and personal networks are the foundations of a rich and valued life in the community.”*

The following is an edited transcript from David’s talk given at the conference.

I am a community worker by background and over many years I have worked with a very wide range of different groups of people including those in prison, children struggling at school, homeless people, quite a long list. Over and over again, when we have begun to unpeel the problems, we find relationships either broken down or never existing to a meaningful degree. Over and over again, the policy response or the practical project response has been to work together on building or repairing relationships. So, like the Local Area Coordination Network, I believe that families, friends and personal networks are the foundation of a rich and varied life.

I also think that as a society over my work life, we have been moving in the wrong direction. Of course, we transact as we have never been able to do in the past but being well connected is not the same as connecting well. So, we set up The Relationships Project a couple of years ago to work with others on building a better society by building better relationships. Doing what Nick Gardham earlier called practicing your relational power.

In March, we set up the relationships observatory to gather insights into how our behaviour and our relationships were changing over the course of the first lockdown and the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns. We are particularly interested in hearing from voices, less heard and we share what we learnt in, in real time, not wait for two years before we published it. We were looking at especially or learning that we could carry forward to improve our practice in the future.

I think that at our best in the spring, we noticed that we neighboured, we have already referred to the 9 million people who became involved in caring for neighbours and others around them in the mutual aid movement. We retooled, we learnt how to

use Zoom, WhatsApp, to learn, worship and shop online. We will carry forward those practical things. But even more interestingly than that we also noticed that some of our attitudes shifted. I think that in general there has been the development of attitudes, or certainly there was not the spring, which were more trusting between partners, between individuals and between organisations. These were principle led rather than rules-based, cemented by solidarity rather than compliance, less hierarchical, more horizontal, less defensive, more can do, kinder, more emotionally responsive, personal and human.

This at its very best is the best of the positive legacy. The story of the year in our communities, has not been all good. Lots of our observers notice also that 22% are digitally excluded. That is not a new problem, but it certainly had a light shown on it over the last year. But others are without the homes in which many of us have been able to isolate in relative comfort, without the income to eat adequately, let alone to feel secure, and without the relationships we all need to survive and thrive. Covid, lockdowns and perhaps even more importantly, Black Lives Matter heightened our understanding of these inequalities in 2020. I think then, our task as community workers is to not be starry eyed about this, but to try to sustain the best without illusion.

The good bits about this relationship centred year are not an adequate response to the bad. Poverty, inequality, discrimination, and social exclusion are fundamental structural problems requiring fundamental structural solutions. But there are here the seeds of a just and inclusive renewal in the positive legacy. I think it is the right time to be talking about assets and abundance, not because 2020 has not revealed enormous deficits, but because it has.

In 2021 I think there will be a great impatience to return to normal, whatever that might mean. Last summer, we got a foretaste of what that might look like. In many areas as lockdown was released, there was a rush to return to past patterns. We saw, particularly local authorities eager to embrace some of the learning, but to squeeze that learning into existing systems and structures. We need to learn a lesson from that. We can be much braver and bolder in how we seek to change in 2021. Amidst the sadness and pain of recent weeks we have also had our best days when we have noticed one another as we seldom notice before.

So I think my question to you is:

***How do we keep alive not only the practical stuff, the learning about Zooming and WhatsApp, the mutual aid relationships we have established, but also the shifts in attitudes, those undercurrents I talked about, which can potentially prefigure much wider change?***

I think we caught a glimpse of something special in 2020. People on the front line saw it more clearly than anybody else. Just as Michelangelo, 500 years ago saw an angel in the marble and carved to set it free, now we too have got work to do.

# LIFELONG LEARNING

Serena Jones

*“All people have a life-long capacity for learning, development and contribution.”*

The following is a transcript of what Serena shared at the conference.

Without learning, there is no progress. This is as true for individuals as it is for organisations. It's about being curious, about engaging and interacting with the world around you – no matter how big or small your world is. It's about seeing that there are possibilities beyond your own experiences, expectations and self-limiting beliefs.

For too many people though, this curiosity is diminished by other people's judgements about their contribution and all too often those judgements are made by professionals – paid helpers – who in their well-intentioned desire to support others promote the view that one set of people do the helping and another are the helped.

For others, curiosity is diminished by the need to survive. Whether it's the kind of survival that heats a home, clothes and feeds the kids or keeps loan sharks at bay; or the less socially acceptable survival of turning tricks to pay for the drugs that medicate the trauma. Either way, the route out of surviving and into thriving is rooted in learning.

Learning is connecting. With people, ideas and opportunities. It can be in the micro exchanges between neighbours discovering shared interests and passions, or in the macro exchanges of whole organisations shifting direction because of what's been learned.

Learning is an exchange. Often an exchange of time or trust. An investment in a relationship, or a community or an institution to bring about personal development or advancement. But rarely do we see learning in such an expansive way. We're constrained and conditioned into equating learning with qualifications, passing exams and tests and while there is no doubt those have value, the principle of learning is much vaster and how can it not be lifelong?

I wanted to share a little about what this principle has meant to me, in the context of my own work and life experience.

In learning, through leaving home at 17 and abandoning my A' levels, that I could stand on my own two feet; I learned that kinship and community were there for me.

In learning, through protest against homophobic legislation, that LGBT people can live happy fulfilled lives; I learned it was ok to love who I wanted to.

In learning, through activism, that the world didn't need to be designed around the pursuit of profit; I learned that change was possible.

In learning, through trialling a few shifts in a hostel for street homeless young people, that I had a talent for being alongside people facing tough times; I learned it was possible to love work. I also learned that the systems supposed to care for them, didn't.

In learning, through inadvertently triggering trauma responses in some of those young people, that I needed to get new skills or that talent would be short lived; I learned to listen to those more experienced than me and develop my skills.

In learning, through listening to young people share their experiences, that not everyone was getting a good service; I learned that I could become manager and influence that.

In learning, through a complaint made about me by my former colleague within weeks of that promotion, that power changes everything; I learned I needed to change and adapt.

In learning, through intense grief at the sudden death of a parent, that life was fragile and precious and that my lifestyle wasn't respecting that; I learned to embrace self-care.

In learning, through therapeutic work and wellbeing activities, that life could offer so much more; I learned that personal development and professional development go hand-in hand.

In learning, through data analysis and observed practice, that services were not consistent in their quality; I learned how to work collegiately alongside others to improve them.

In learning, through challenging peers on their improvement strategies, that I could have a difficult conversation and still maintain trust; I learned that the skills from working alongside young people in hostels were not dissimilar to the skills needed to work alongside directors & CEOs.

In learning, through partnership work with the Foyer Federation, that deficit based services sustain themselves instead of the people they intend to support; I learned that 'advantaged thinking' or 'asset based/strengths based' approaches had to be the best design.

In learning, through work alongside young people in the criminal justice system and those who worked in it, that restorative approaches brought about real and sustained change to victims and perpetrators of harm; I learned that it could be applied in all areas of our lives to bring about healing and health.

In learning, through a return to formal education in my mid-40s, that not only could I pass an MBA but I could do so with distinction; I learned that it's never too late to study formally.

In learning, through exposure to the Vanguard method for studying 'how the work works' that all the metrics, targets, plans and methods I had been using for over a decade as a manager were counter-productive; and so I unlearned all of them.

In learning, through becoming a foster carer for the 1st time, that love is not enough and limits will be stretched beyond imagination; I learned that community is always the answer.

As a society, we need to rebalance the concept of learning so that it embraces the wholeness of it. Yes, formal education, professional and trades qualifications matter but we are more than what we do. We are human beings not human doings! So how each of us can reach our potential to be whatever and whoever we want to be needs to be at the forefront of all we do - in work, rest and play. And to do that, we need an honest and self-critical view of all the things we are doing, individually and collectively, that get in the way of people living their versions of a good life. It's easy to see the harm we can cause when we treat people badly or deny them opportunity; it's less easy to see the harm that is dressed up as help - so this is where the tough work is. And we've all done it. We've all engaged in the drama triangle one way or another, as rescuer, victim or persecutor. We do it in our personal lives, we do it in our professional lives and the only way to exit is through critical self-reflection and learning – individually and collectively.

If there is one hope I have for 2021, it's that we acknowledge that when the chips were really down, like they have been for so many people in 2020 during this pandemic, it was community that stepped up. Yes, an infrastructure of public service was needed, but it was neighbours looking out for each other that was truly inspiring - neighbours learning about each other's situations, resourcing ways they could help each other and looking out for each other, as communities of equals.

I recently heard Hilary Cottam talk about this pandemic having exposed what many have known for some time, that centralised command and control systems don't work and it is horizontal connections and relationships that determine so much about our health, social support, work, etc. She went on to say that 20<sup>th</sup> century approaches are not fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century and we need to orientate our systems on those horizontal connections, which means seeing everyone as having capacity to contribute.

So the question that I'd like to leave you with is this:

***Which command and control structures do you think we need to dismantle to enable us all to thrive?***

# COMMUNITY

Clare Wightman

*“Communities are further enriched by the inclusion and participation of all people and these communities are the most important way of building friendship, support and a meaningful life.”*

The following is a piece contributed by Clare based on what she shared at the conference.

In the context of Grapevine’s work in our early days, we were interested in stigma and segregation and how these things hold people with learning disabilities back. We felt the answer to people’s problems lay in community - not in segregated specialized services, because the evidence was all around us that lives were not being improved by these services.

We needed to go ordinary. We needed to help people make friends and uncover an identity that was not about disability or a diagnosis, but about who they are, what their dreams are, what they can offer, and their relationships with others.

This pandemic has messed with our heads. It has simultaneously released community spirit and action, but also reasserted vulnerability. The most isolated people among us, now and always, are the furthest away from any kind of leadership role. But these are some of the people our movements are made of and led by in Coventry. They contribute as much as they receive, in networks where support flows freely between all members. Everyone is vulnerable or no-one is. It is a very different narrative to the one we see now. So, for us the challenge of the pandemic is to take this rare moment in which we view our problems – of an isolated and restricted life - as shared.

The answer to our problems is each other.



Our tools are twofold - people and community. Community is the thing that happens when people decide to come together. These tools are free and easily to hand. But folks don't just decide to come together around those, society pushes to the edge of the herd. It is hard for others to see who you really are once they know what you have been called, and so they stay on their side of the fence. You have to do something if you want to stitch community back together. You have to do something if you want people to take charge of who they are and who they might become.

Our task is figuring out how people can meet each other's needs through two-way flows of support that potentially solve problems for good. Because our hunch was right. People get more of what they really need that way – love, intimacy, purpose, friendship, hope. Things that can't be provided by a service but which can be unearthed if you help people in the right way.

## **Sparking community around an individual**

Rishard was realising he was different. But he did not know how to talk about it. Instead, he got angry. One day he asked his mum to get the doctor to give him a pill to take his Down's Syndrome away.

We focused on Rishard's ambitions and removed any limits. We worked on the relationships around him and his family, knowing that is where strength and a better future come from. Now, instead of coping alone until a crisis is reached, he and his family have people around them who can back them up - encourage, problem solve, find opportunities.

He has a career as an actor – not an easy thing for anyone to achieve. His storyline on BBC Doctors is focusing on hate crime. He is a happy uncle to Isaac and a gym regular with Curtis and Ben. During lockdown one, he did live weekly fitness sessions gaining over 4,000 views. He's set up WhatsApp groups to offer support and guidance to family and friends about staying fit and healthy during Covid with top tips about food, drink, daily walks etc and continues his own fitness programme from home. It's not magic. It happened because relationships keep on giving – regrouping around new problems or new opportunities.

There are many versions of Rishard's story waiting to be told.

Learning disabled people are not the only ones for whom community and prospects don't just happen. Anyone who has grown up with or suddenly been landed with a label, a stigma or a bad reputation knows it too. They know what is to be held back by their own or other people's low expectations. To feel like your story has already been written for you. To feel left behind.

## **Sparking community around a cause**

We can spark community around a cause and let the bonds created that way help change many lives. A few years ago, we started sparking community in that kind of way. So, here's one more story.

When she was diagnosed with a rare spinal condition, Melissa had to give up work teaching. She lost her main source of friendships and connections and instead became "stuck on the sofa" (her words) waiting for her next consultant appointment. Her thoughts revolved around what she had lost and what she couldn't do any more. Disconnected from her community, she descended into isolation and low mood – until she set up the 'Feel Good Community'. Now it's a 1,000-strong group of people coming together to create activities that help them stay well - and also a burgeoning social business.

Community is organic.

Katie, with ME, is a Feel Good member. She has gone from not leaving her flat and not talking at meetups, to showing people individually how to 'scratch doodle', to talking at a community gathering about how being creative makes her feel good.

There were lots of examples of people kindly helping each other out far beyond the original reason they came together - lifts, maths tutors, bike repairs, you name it.

Community is organic like that.

### ***How do we collectively tackle a challenging 2021?***

The principle of community – shared by many of us - gives strength for the road ahead. We stirred solidarity in 2020 through three major online summits and monthly community ideas nights. So that more and more of us won't want to go back to the flawed normal. It's not going to be easy. Mental ill-health, family instability,

unemployment, as well as deep damage to public finances are already here. For some of us that damage will be temporary, but for others – those with underlying social conditions - it will be permanent.

In the challenges ahead we know that the biggest resource lies untapped and outside of formalised support. It lies in our people. It lies in what can be achieved when they organise together around the people and issues they care about. It lies in community.

# INFORMATION

Angela Catley

*“Access to accurate, timely and relevant information supports informed decision-making, choice and control.”*

The following is a piece contributed by Angela based on what she shared at the conference.

I have been asked to talk today about information and principally information in the context of choice and control for people looking to live their life their way.

As the saying goes ‘information is power’ and those that hold it are the powerful.

Throughout our lives we all have times when we feel the need for a bit of extra support or expertise. Times when we reach out for advice or information. Times when we feel disconnected or vulnerable – times when we don’t feel very powerful at all. The exact times that the people, agencies and organisations with that (information) power need to be aware how powerful they are.

It seems to me that part of this is about information, part about access and part about personal connections that make sense and which we trust, be they face to face or distant.

And Covid has certainly heightened this (information, access, connection) issue for us all. We find ourselves physically distanced from everyone – those we love, those we connect with informally AND crucially those who might offer us specialist support, expertise or information.

As people move to make decisions and take control over their lives and futures they can only do so with access to accurate, timely and relevant information – that they can GET, understand and trust. Without this their confidence to act will be undermined and the decisions they make are likely to be ill informed. Their power is diminished and with it their life choices.

So, what are the key issues right now?

The rise of online information and services has been building over the last decade or more and Covid has taken an already steep curve and made it steeper. For some people this is a positive thing that is long overdue, but for others, those without the capacity, confidence or connectivity it leads to ignorance and disconnect at best and looming dread and anxiety at worst. Digital exclusion as a concept is well documented. I think of a friend in her 90s who FaceTimes family members around the world but would be too scared of viruses to ever consider online banking or communication with the DWP on behalf of her disabled daughter. Or someone I heard about last week who lives in a care home that doesn't give access to Wi-Fi for residents. I think too about public sector websites, so often designing to tell people what we want them to hear and not what they actually want to know! Come to think of it, I often think that as I click FAQs, on nearly every website I visit, I have no idea who is asking those questions, let alone frequently asking them! And I CANNOT BELIEVE 10,000 people are not frequently asking the question that I have!

Accessibility is also a key issue. This links to online challenges and those around digital exclusion but seems much wider. The need for jargon free, clear information in the right language and presented in ways that can be accessed is one that is ever present. The development of apps, tech platforms and social media should in theory lead to easy solutions, but sadly sometimes lead to more challenges. For example, we set out to develop a survey aimed at people with a learning disability last week. We realised quite quickly that our preferred tech platform doesn't enable anything to be added using easy read symbols.

Connecting with people who have the information you need to make key life decisions is another ever present issue, but another exacerbated by Covid and the physical distance rules it imposes. How do you consult a Doctor on your growing anxiety when appointments are reserved only for emergencies? How do you get help to go online when library staff are not allowed to come close? I heard a really sad tale on Twitter last week of a librarian facing disciplinary after tapping a keyboard to help a sobbing man in his 60s faced with eviction and unable to fill in a web form alone. How do you talk through a personal issue with a friend and get their sage advice?

And then there is the double-edged sword of social media. A place to connect with others in accessible ways that make sense, available 24 hours a day and 7 days a week and an endless font of the information we need. Whilst also a place to be

bullied and ridiculed, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, where friends might not be friends and where information and advice can easily be false or even dangerous. So many recent stories of misinformation spread actively to deceive or incite and more passively through ignorance. The potential for elections to be influenced, essential vaccinations refused and minds to be poisoned all without the need to actually meet the peddlers of hate and confusion.

When it comes to information, the key principle, from my work and experience at least, would seem to be inclusion.

How do we embrace the positive change that Covid has forced upon us without leaving people behind?

How do we make information accessible to as many people as possible (and FAQs really that)?

How do we enable people to really connect with others who have what they need – and move away from the ‘distant/electronic’ approaches that seem a false economy for nearly everyone and certainly for society?

***In short, how do we bring back enough of the human to make our increasingly electronic future hospitable and inclusive of everyone in what I hope will be a sunny 2021?***

Hopefully that is where you come in?

# CITIZENSHIP

Simon Duffy

*“All people in our communities have the same rights, responsibilities and opportunities to participate in and contribute to the life of the community, respecting and supporting their identity, beliefs, values and practices.”*

The following is a piece contributed by Simon based on what he shared at the conference. It includes the short poem ‘Our Citizenship’, which is dedicated to the People Focused Group, Doncaster.

The ideal of Citizenship has always inspired me, because to me it seems to call us to be the best version of ourselves, and because it offers us the best possible version of what it means to be an equal - because being a citizen means equal and different. Now, isn't that rather groovy?

Citizenship is a word that reminds us that we can only exist as a full human being if we take an active part in creating the community within which we live. We are social beings and the best kind of society is one that supports our equal citizenship.

It is an ancient ideal - even older than the Latin word for Citizenship - civitas - a word which describes both the citizen and a whole community of citizens. The ancient Greeks valued this ideal - and inspired by the ideal of Citizenship they created forms of democracy that, in many respects, we've still not been able to replicate today. In fact, the Greeks would not call the UK a democracy, the technical name for our kind of society is an Oligarchy. In an oligarchy rulers were often chosen by election from a small choice, offered by the powerful. Does that sound familiar to anyone?

The ideal of Citizenship can also be found in the Bible. Leviticus demands:

“If one of your countrymen becomes poor and is unable to support himself among you, help him as you would help an alien or a temporary resident, so that he can continue to live among you.” [Leviticus 25:35-38]

Or in other words we are under a fundamental obligation to ensure everyone can live as a full member of the community - equal in membership and equal in dignity. This ancient understanding was that everyone should be treated as an equal.

Today of course some governments are happy to create Hostile Environments for refugees, for disabled people and for anyone in poverty. And these powerful ideals and important words are all corruptible. Words and ideals do not defend themselves. It requires work to maintain the integrity of our ideals.

Today some politicians and leaders want to divide us and so they treat Citizenship like a special badge or passport - to be restricted only to a special few and handed out by the powerful.

But if we think Citizenship just means passport-citizenship then we do not really understand what Citizenship means. Our equality, our rights and our responsibility to play a full part of the community continues to exist - whatever any politician or any government says.

Citizenship comes first, government comes second; for it is meant to serve us.

Some others want to use Citizenship to rank us. First-class citizenship, for the best of us; second-class citizenship for rest of us.

As Stef Benstead describes in her recent book *Second Class Citizens*, many disabled people today know that society has started to systematically attack and control them. If you're not careful the danger is that the wrong people get to decide what Citizenship means, who gets the best deal and who sit at the bottom of the pile.

Citizens are equal. There is no ranks, no classes, we're all the same, and we're all unique - and each of us must make our own unique contribution to our shared community.

The ideal of citizenship appeals to me as a philosopher because it shows us how we can be truly equal. But citizenship is also a really practical ideal and it offers a really practical set of things to work on together.



Several years ago, I started helping people with learning difficulties regain their place in the community after many years living in institutions. And over the years - and with the help of friends like Wendy Perez - I have tried to describe some of the basic building blocks from which everyday citizenship is constructed. We have found that there are seven keys to citizenship:

1. **Meaning** - having a sense of purpose, awareness that you have something to offer.
2. **Freedom** - freedom to pursue your plans, to give life to your dreams.
3. **Money** - enough to give you independence and the foundations for a life of your own.
4. **Help** - giving it and getting it - working with others to make the changes you want to see.
5. **Home** - a place of your own, within the community, a place of welcome and retreat.
6. **Life** - contributing, working, enjoying all that the community has to offer.
7. **Love** - relationships of warmth and kindness from friends, family and partners.

When springing people from hospitals this framework proved very useful, not just in reminding us of important problems to solve, like how to get the right home, but also in helping people see the interconnections between the keys: for the right home will also be the home that enables people to live with meaning, freedom, money, help, life and love. The keys offer a coherent and interconnected image of the elements that make up everyday citizenship and how those elements interact with each other.

We might just call it a good life, or the good life, but in the end, as philosophers like Aristotle have noticed, if you try to describe a good life then you'll end up describing something a lot like citizenship. It's as if, at our best, we were made to be citizens.

I think that we get the best understanding of citizenship from those who face the reality of exclusion. I think the keys to citizenship offers an emancipatory conception of citizenship, and I think we often find that it is those who the powerful think should

be excluded from citizenship (like the refugee) or those they deem less important (like people with learning difficulties) who are those are actually living as true citizens. It is they who know what is truly meaningful, the value of freedom, the need for economic security, the power of mutual assistance, of helping each other out - the need for a home of your own, the joy of the community life and the absolute importance of love.

This week I was with one group that inspires me with its understanding of citizenship - PFG Doncaster - a group of peer supporters who have been helping each other since 2010 and who have been successfully challenging, teaching and realising their relationship with local public services. I wrote them this poem to read at their poetry night last night.

### **OUR CITIZENSHIP (2020) by Simon Duffy**

**If they tell you,  
You don't belong  
To their club, their class, their country;  
Then remember that we all long  
For more than hollow spaces  
And empty boxes.**

**Don't feel small because some small man  
Tries to make himself feel bigger  
By clinging to some flag  
By claiming our fathers' victories  
And denying our fathers' sins.**

**We liberate ourselves,  
When we see that we belong:  
Right here, right now,  
Amongst those who've found us.  
Our citizenship begins  
The moment that we claim it;  
Don't let it be defined  
By those seeking to deny it.**

**Let no club, no class, no country**

**Divide or categorise you.**

**We are citizens of every place**

**Where and when**

**We start to build it.**

**Our little lives burn brightest**

**When love and fellowship unite us.**

Local Area Coordination certainly seems to me to be closely aligned with this work of enabling everyone to live a life of citizenship. The model seems to bring life to citizenship in at least two critical ways:

- **First** - Help is given as an act of love, uncomfortable as that may sound in our bureaucratic age, it is an act of love because it is open, it seeks to build a meaningful relationship of trust, and it works to help people find their own path. And that is a work of love.
- **Second** - Help is given from within the community and it seeks to strengthen the community. People are not to be exported into service-land; they are not products or commodities. We are citizens - or, if not - we are at least citizens-in-waiting.

Another important word for me is inclusion. Inclusion describes a goal for any community inspired by love. Inclusion is the word chosen by such great leaders as John O'Brien, Beth Mount, Jack Pearpoint, Judith Snow and Marsha Forrest. It was these activists who inspired me at the beginning of my adult life. A citizen is perhaps also the name for any human being who understands the value of inclusion and who chooses to act so as to make inclusion real.

Today I hope we can pass on these ideas and ideals to a new generation. If you want to join us then please join the global movement we've created to make inclusion real for everyone - Citizen Network - working to create a world where everyone matters.

As Eddie Bartnik says – it is great to see innovations develop with integrity - and a more global community can help us to separate the true meaning of things from toxic or immature government policy. I would like to thank Eddie, Ralph and the Local Area

Coordination Network for working to develop these ideas in the spirit of equal citizenship and integrity.

Amongst many questions I have about the future this one seems pressing.

Local Area Coordination and many good initiatives work best at the level of neighbourhoods. Yet in most communities there are no structures - and certainly no democratic structures - to really help us act as citizens, to think, decide and act together. It is for this reason that we have recently launched the Movement for Neighbourhood Democracy. ***So, isn't it time for us to demand and to create a meaningful shift towards truly local democratic power?***

# Choice and Control, and Concluding Thoughts

Ralph Broad

*“Individuals, often with support of their families and personal networks, are best placed to lead in making their own decisions and plan, choose and control supports, services and resources.”*

The following is an edited transcript from Ralph’s talk given at the conference.

It is not enough to just believe in choice and control or have it written down. It is the same with all of the principles. We need to do the things that help them to happen and to keep happening. We also need to understand the things WE do, that may be obstacles to ‘choice and control’ (and the other principles) and do something about it.

It is worth acknowledging that individuals, often with the support of their families and personal networks, are best placed to lead in making their own decisions and to plan, choose, and control support services or any resources they may need. People are the experts in their own lives. That is the one thing we really need to keep in our minds all the time.

I grew up in Western Australia and I was lucky enough to work in a locally based team in disability services before and after the introduction of Local Area Coordination there. We saw the difference it made alongside people, their family, within local communities and also within our own roles. People started to have different conversations, resulting in increasing opportunities, increasing personal networks, having a stronger voice and being heard, people having greater choice and control over life decisions, and over any support and services they may require as well.

It felt like a really big change. What struck me early on was the power and the connectedness of the 10 principles. Rather than being separate functions that are packaged and delivered separately, or seeing it as a pick and mix, it became really clear that when combined alongside the connected role of the Local Area Coordinator, they create the foundations for active, valued citizenship, choice and control and contribution.

After working in that team, I then worked as a manager in a local community non-government organisation, also working alongside Local Area Coordinators in the local community. We saw exactly the same things happening, with benefits not only for people and families, but also for the organisation. So, my early experience, was that Local Area Coordination partnerships with people, families, communities and services, resulted in a whole range of things, including improved opportunities and choice and control and more welcoming, inclusive, and supportive communities. Also, I saw, through services becoming more personal local and flexible, that we could reach people that needed our specialist support because Local Area Coordination was building capacity, confidence, connection and choices.

People were telling us that they were more able to access the right personal supports or services at the right time. Access and choice were improved. Some people were starting to need formal services less, but able to access those services more quickly if required. So, a whole range of things started to happen through Local Area Coordination being embedded in the community, alongside people and in the system. We could see Local Area Coordination principles and practice impacting on the quality of life of people and families and how it started to increase self-determination or choice.

After returning to the UK, I had a small role in supporting some of the early Local Area Coordination developments in Scotland in the early 2000s, and then much more so in the development of it in England and Wales. More recently, some of the really interesting learning has been around the same things starting to occur in different places, for example in Singapore and Western Australia. Singapore in particular has been a fabulous place to learn and to really challenge and think about these universal ways of behaving. We are truly seeing the universal value and relevance to the principles, design and practice of Local Area Coordination alongside people of all ages and all backgrounds in a whole range of different situations.

It is really interesting for me to see and experience the principles in action and how they have guided the design and practice, what we do and how we do it, and helping to address the determinants of inequality. We have a long way to go, but we're starting to understand better through these really thoughtful, intentional conversations, by building partnerships and by holding ourselves accountable as well. Additionally, the impact has been not only for individuals, families, and

communities, but it also stimulating challenge and positive change across the service system too. We see this more so when there's strong, principled change leadership, that is also very inclusive in style.

Now, choice and control does not just magically happen. It is about much more than control over supports and services, although that is important. It's about much more than accessible information, but that's just as important and it's about much more than control over resources and a personal budget. All of these are really important, but it's also about the right to self-determination in all aspects of life with any necessary personal and technical support and resources to make it happen. So, we need to work really hard to create the conditions for this to be possible for everyone in our community.

Of course, for choice you also need to have more than one thing on offer, there is no choice if you are only offered one thing. The greater the possibilities, the greater the choice. So, I think some of our learning has been that the intentional combination of the principles drives a more holistic whole person, way of working with choice and control and better outcomes being the results.

For example, within Local Area Coordination self-determination or choice control is enhanced by quite a few things that have been talked about today.

Individuals and families being acknowledged for their expertise, experience and being supported to speak up and be heard makes a significant difference.

Having the chance and time to explore, to imagine different and better and to build your vision for a good life has a significant impact on the choices that start to emerge as a result.

Having better access to accurate, relevant, timely information, in whatever way makes sense to you, is fundamental for choice and control. Of course, natural relationships (family, friends, work colleagues, neighbours, groups, associations) and the wider community are a rich source of information, opportunities, contribution, and support. People helping people. These things together give greater choice.

Having greater access to personal and financial resources is so important - exclusion, poverty, homelessness, and loneliness are all obstacles to rights, opportunities, self-determination and citizenship.

Through intentionally combining the Principles, self-determination is much more likely to happen, but there is still much to do to get there. For us, the journey starts right at the beginning with how we meet people. If there is a power imbalance it can be an obstacle to exploring for speaking up for making decisions or challenging.

For Local Area Coordination that means this starts with being a voluntary relationship of trust. We have to build that trust. We have to be given that trust by people and acknowledge the authority and expertise of the person and those they know and love. If someone is referred or compelled, it is removing choice and control, and it embeds a relationship of unequal power and compliance. That's a direct obstacle to 'choice and control'.

Anyone can access a Local Area Coordinator for information, connections, and short-term support. They are easy to find, easy to contact and easy to talk to. We are trying really hard to remove the obstacles to early help and choice. There are no assumptions, no agendas, no predetermined actions, no pressure and no coercion.

It starts by building the right relationship of trust, taking time to get to know people well. It is about having the right conversations, understanding what matters to people, understanding and celebrating their strengths and aspirations, as well as their needs, and understanding the people who are important to them. It is about taking time to help people to explore, to imagine different and better, and to try new things, to meet new people, to build and pursue their vision for good life and how to make it happen.

So how do we make citizenship a reality person by person?

Only providing 'just enough support' for the person to lead and control their own life is fundamental as well. Too much, too little or the wrong support are all obstacles to 'choice and control'.

Through understanding and being connected to the richness of resources within communities, the possibilities and people within those communities and then by 'thinking natural' first, instead of only signposting to services or assuming services are the only option, is a key part of what we do. Suddenly, the range of possibilities is exponentially bigger than if the only choices were formal or funded supports. Of course, services may be really important for some people in some parts of their life,



but these should complement the skills of the person, people who know them well and the opportunities within community life.

People being able to access, navigate, choose and control any supports or services they may require, also enhances choice and self-determination.

Collectively, these are the building blocks of choice and control.

For Local Area Coordination, being embedded in, having knowledge of and contributing to both the community and the system becomes of huge value alongside people and families on their journey. Information, connections, opportunities - choice.

So finally, for Local Area Coordination, by fully adopting the principles means we're uniquely placed to support self-determination and citizenship alongside people of all ages and all backgrounds in partnership with the person, the people who are important to them and the wider community and in partnership with formal funded services.

The challenge is, we all need to do it all of the time with every person - person by person, family, by family, community by community, because all of those are completely unique. We all know many of the obstacles to self-determination, so we also have a responsibility to always reflect and take care, to not to be part of the cause of those obstacles, especially when we're alongside people and families.

Finally, and importantly, it also requires that local people, families, and communities, are key contributing parts of Local Area Coordination and in turn, every other service that has contact with people in the community. Their experience, their expertise, their connections and their leadership can only strengthen Local Area Coordination and any other service. It embeds self-determination leadership and contribution for all people in communities.

The 10 principles together make the rights and opportunities and responsibilities of citizenship, and therefore self-determination, a possibility for everyone. That is what we need to work towards.

***My question is, how will you know, what can you do, what should you do if you or your organisation are doing things that restrict choice and control and anything else around the 10 principles?***