Community Innovation Partnership

Equipping people, communities, and systems
to adapt and flourish in the face of complex challenges.

LIS Community Resources BD COLLECTIVE Care City

Cover image: Anjali Moorthy for Care City

Contents

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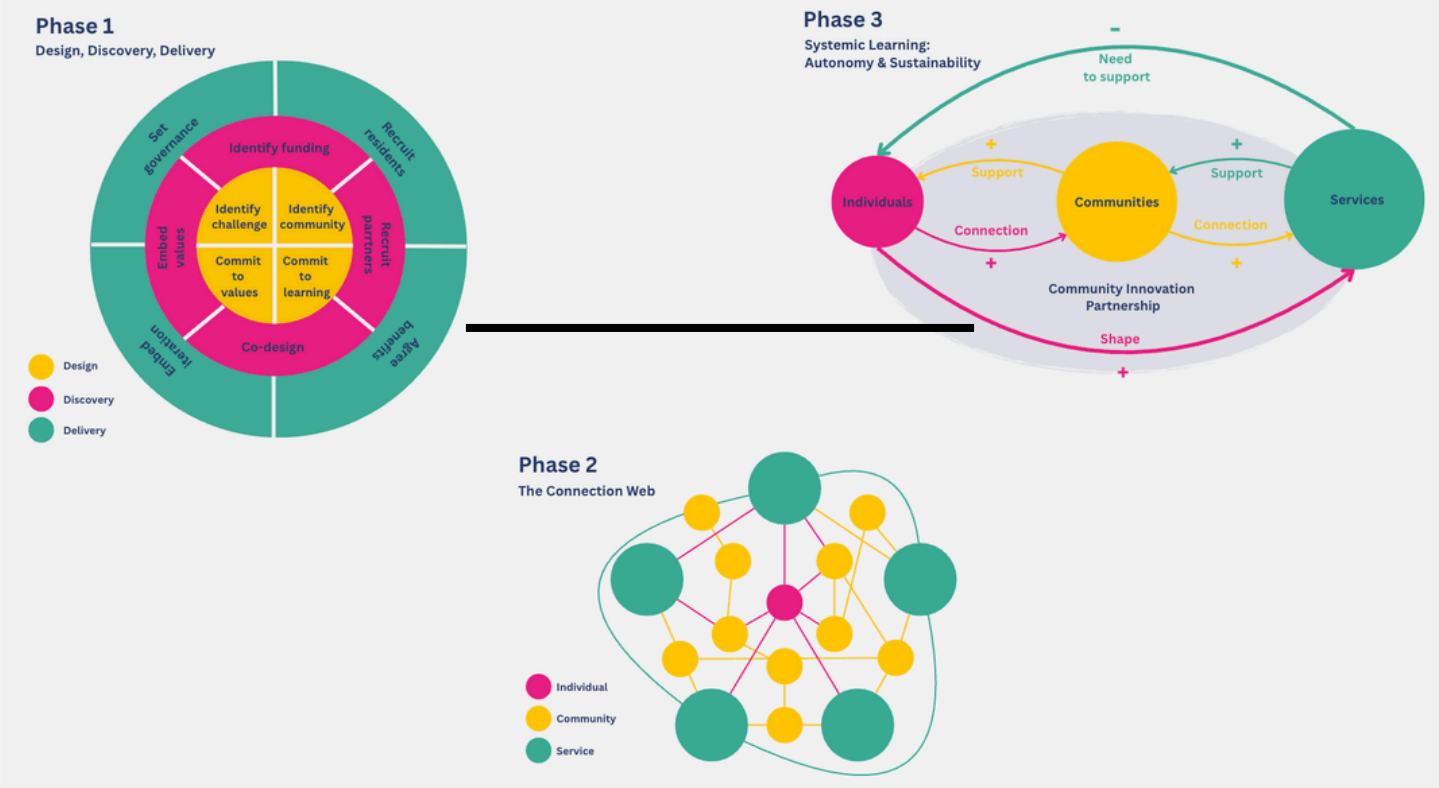
Executive Summary

The **Community Innovation Partnership** is a model developed in Barking and Dagenham to bring together individuals, communities and services in a collaborative learning space to develop place based capability by strengthening connections between them. **The BD Collective** (a local community 'network of networks') have developed the concept over several years, most recently through **Connect**, which is two years into community learning focused on socially isolated residents.

The following report identifies the **key stages** of a Community Innovation Partnership, as seen in Connect, to facilitate uses in other localities with varied focuses. The model has shown promising results in its abilities to tackle social isolation in the local borough, but it need not be limited - the lessons and methods can be applied flexibly and broadly within the parameters described below. The model follows three phases, each shown briefly below and in more detail later.



Phase 1 follows a three stage process, with each stage progressively building on the last. The three stages cover Discovery, Design and Delivery; this phase encompasses the very beginnings of an idea that something needs to be done differently, up to the point of making the project "live". This is about getting the right people in the room with a shared drive, values and commitment to learning.

Phase 2 is the core of the project, where the growth of individual, community and service connections have transformative impact to build capabilities at each level. By focusing on and learning from individual residents, the community is strengthened and services can have a greater impact with less energy wasted.

Phase 3 is an integration of the partnership into community practice that is guided to grow autonomously and encourages systemic change through learning, stemming the flow of need while delivering better support when it is needed.

Introduction

Increased need for public services alongside a reduction in budgets has seen a sharp incline in support focused on crisis management across all sectors, yet late stage intervention in traditional models is neither economically sustainable or the best case of care. Strengths based and relational working have been identified as more competent ways of working alongside individuals than current methods, by striking a better balance between individual, community and system inputs.

'Local government spending is "no longer sufficient to meet demand in adult social care, children's social care and neighbourhood services."' (Fox & Fox, 2023)

Preventative measures reduce future spending and improve lives on the ground, but the more expensive, acute action that is needed, the less energy and expenditure is available to develop long-term future focused policies. Despite evidence that late intervention spending costs an average of £287 per person per year in the UK (Chowdry & Fitzsimons, 2016), overfocus upon acute settings is limiting the ability to embrace long-term preventative approaches. And recent work suggests this is being compounded by siloed budgets and centralised, politically charged policy making (Davies, Hodinott & Kim, 2024).

Social Determinants of Health

At the heart of lots of this spending are 'wicked problems' - challenges faced by people or places that don't neatly fit into the existing infrastructures of support, and often overlap and interlink, fundamentally exacerbating and compounding until it becomes seemingly impossible for any one person to get to the root of it or find a way forward. This is exactly the problem - it is impossible for any individual or service to fix everything - what's needed are stronger communities who have better capability and capacity to work together, and public sector support which is more adaptable to the needs of different groups and localities.

Figuring out where to start can be more challenging; due to the complexities, cause and effect are often not easy to trace - for example investing in policing doesn't necessarily address the root cause of crime, as crime is significantly a response to environmental factors rather than absence of punishment (Canter & Youngs, 2016). Similarly, treating illness is insufficient in responding to unhealthy societies, we must strive to address the root causes in order to promote healthier lives. The social determinants of health are recognised as key requirements to happy, healthy and stable populations. Developing long term, preventative, strengths based and relational services within a collaborative environment that focuses on improvements in areas like social determinants can have a far reaching positive impact.

Residents in a locality experiencing vulnerabilities in any one of these areas are likely to experience challenges in other areas too - by targeting one group and working to make things better, the likelihood of strengthening the system, community and individual experience in many of these areas is high.

Community Innovation Partnership - Tried & Tested

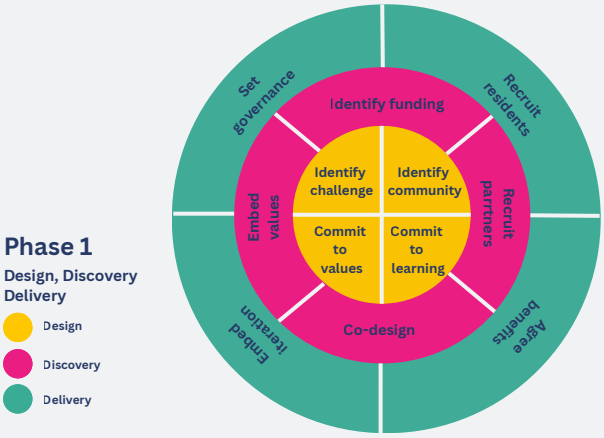
Connect

A Test & Learn Programme

The Community Innovation Partnership was a collective response in Barking and Dagenham to social isolation and deterioration on release from hospital, based on prior **BD Collective** learning. The **BD Collective** and **Community Resources** linked up with **Care City**, an innovation partner, to address these issues with support of the local authority.

Phase 1

Design, Discovery Delivery



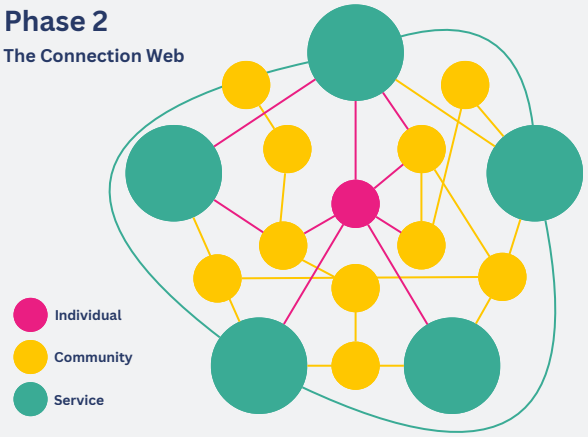
Accessing the **Better Care Fund** significantly enabled the pilot of the project. Recruitment of partners - **Humorisk, Harmony House and Independent Living Agency** happened by application after early interest at the co-design stage. Commitment to learning, iteration and value driven work were key considerations in who to work alongside.

Residents were referred in through community and service contacts while keeping the process, requirements and agreed aims (to build connected communities) simple. Governance took representatives from the council, delivery and community partners and set the innovation partner, Care City, as the commissioned body, with **power and funding shared**.

'Connection Catalysts', built strong 1-1 relationships with referred residents, helping them to find out what matters to them in their lives. **The neighbourhood team** considered how to extend organic connection across the streets in our communities. **Learning sessions** and collaborative working helped to connect organisations and break down silos.

Phase 2

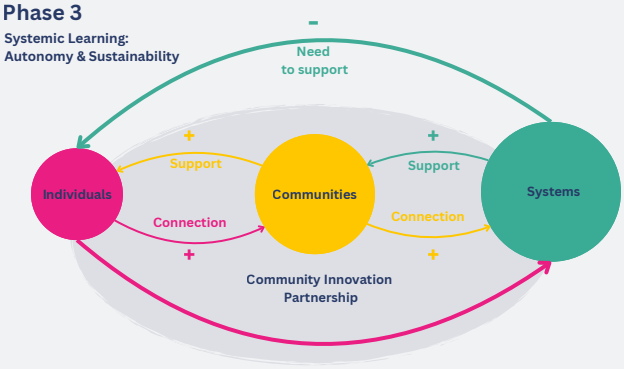
The Connection Web



Residents were given access to **SIGNAL,** a tool to help them map out their lives and figure out what is important to them, whilst also tracking change over time in an accessible and enjoyable way. Learning sessions focused on the **Human Learning Systems** approach, where the focus is on connecting and learning from residents to shape services.

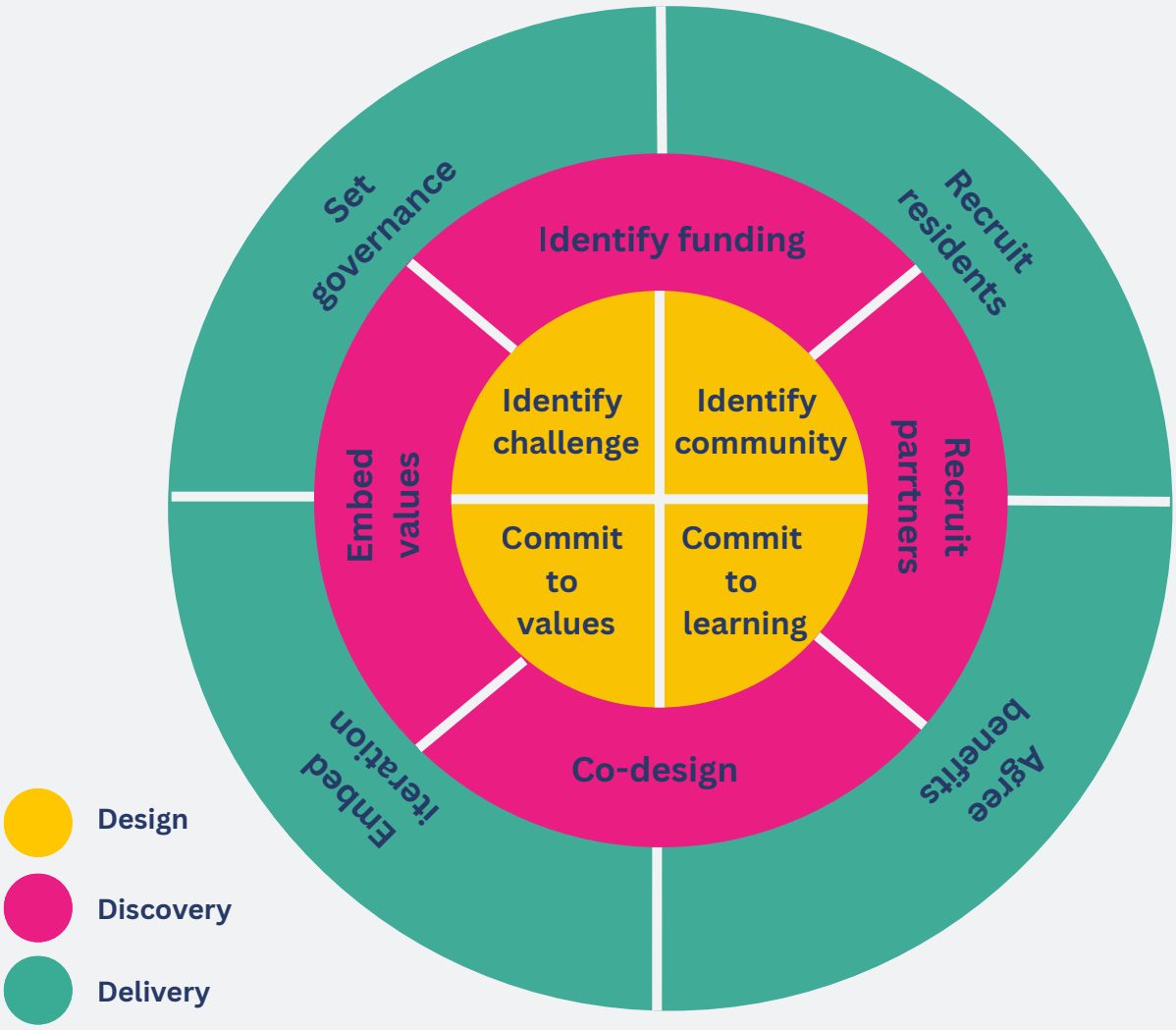
Phase 3

Systemic Learning: Autonomy & Sustainability



Over time, residents begin to independently build connections and give back through volunteering and mutual aid, making their communities stronger and **'graduating'** from the project over 6 months or so. From their experiences, services have been better able to recognise issues and problem solve through **'Connecting the Dots'** sessions.

Phase 1: Discovery, Design, Delivery



Phase 1 lays the foundation for a **Community Innovation Partnership**. It begins with **Discovery**, where local challenges are identified, existing community assets understood in terms of their collective impact, and residents, VCFSE organisations, and public bodies brought together around shared values and a commitment to learning. In **Design**, partners and residents co-create the approach, secure collaborative funding, and embed core values such as connection, accountability, trust, and power-sharing into the model. Finally, in **Delivery**, residents are recruited, aims are agreed in flexible and responsive ways, and the project is launched through iterative working that adapts as learning unfolds. Together, these steps ensure the partnership is rooted in local realities, genuinely collaborative, and primed for long-term impact.

Phase 1: Discovery, Design, Delivery

Discovery

Challenge identification

Each place is unique in its make up, and the discovery phase is all about finding what community already exists and what problems they are facing that they struggle to resolve. Identifying a 'challenge' to build around may be what brings you to the model in the first place, or it may be about finding what could make the biggest impact based on what you know about an area. In Barking and Dagenham, the Connect model was built responsively to issues of loneliness in the borough, alongside deteriorating outcomes for those recently released from secondary care, like after a hospital stay. Often, local councils will be acutely aware of challenges existing within the locality, but may need collective support to begin addressing them. Public sector bodies may be involved during the discovery phase as both participants and facilitators.

Identifying community and utilisation of VCSE organisations

Identifying the existing community is the catalyst that allows everything else to follow, this may happen at any stage of problem identification, but is crucial to progressing further. Different uses of the model will mean that the people who make up the community will vary from place to place, but at this stage there should be a very flexible exclusion/inclusion criteria of what the community looks like and who should be involved. However the key to the collaborative model is the three pronged partnership between individuals, community and public services, which enables interconnected personal, community and systemic capability building. Where there is already a strong VCSE sector and other local assets, these organisations should be utilised for their local knowledge and access to residents.

In an ideal world they would already have a network and be able to bring this energy with them, if not, it may be worth trying to bring interested community organisations together to build a basis for collective action. This should be accompanied by a public body - it might be a local council, NHS trust or a group like the police or OFSTED. Volunteers, residents, board members, business owners, workers and public services should all be welcome during the discovery phase - the whole point is to stay open to the idea that the community within a place are best placed to understand and intervene in local issues, and that no one knows who or where knowledge will come from.

Phase 1: Discovery, Design, Delivery

Commitment to values

Holding multiple publicly accessible workshops early on gives an opportunity not just to listen as an exercise, but as a group practice in understanding the community as well as individual perspective. This is a time to start discussing and working through what everyone already knows and exploring broad ideas about what should be done. Although these sessions should be facilitated and records kept, the floor should be open. Lived experience voices should be explicitly sought and centred from the earliest possible stages, bringing both legitimacy and direction to the dialogue and ensuring challenges to the status quo are well founded in lived realities.

Two key commitments should be made at this early stage and made clear to all involved; committing to learning throughout the process, and committing to uphold values within the communities approach. Based on Julia Unwin's (2019) inquiry to 'Civil Society Futures', Connect embodied the values she suggested; connection, accountability, power sharing & trust. Although open to the best fit for any locality, for the model to work these values are intrinsic, adding to them may be valuable, but removing any should be questioned.

Commitment to learning

Alongside the commitment to values, is the commitment to learning. No individual or organisation is expected to be faultless within the process, or have all of the answers to a complex problem, but everyone needs to commit to active learning for the model to bare any real benefit. The model is specifically designed to find out where things could be better and why - despite best efforts and resources - there are still so many problems that seem unsolvable.

Active learning will likely bring up personal, community and systemic issues and there needs to be a commitment to transparency and accountability for any change to meaningfully occur. However identifying where things could have been better is only step one of active learning - it must be followed by understanding why it wasn't working, innovating new approaches to act on this, testing them out and then embedding a better way into practice and systems. Learning environments do not have an end point - the process continually evolves and the model or collective must be supple enough to adapt to new approaches and continual testing.

Phase 1: Discovery, Design, Delivery

Design

Identifying funding sources

The model outlined here rethinks conventional funding processes to better enable communities to come together around local place challenges and provide leadership and direction from within a community itself. This demands thinking about funding in ways that can incentivise collaborative working, and reduce competitive bidding for service provision. A partnership might be supported through already available flexible pots of funding, or it may be raised by demonstrating its the importance of funding that incentivises collaboration (over "service provision") in building place based capability to address particular, people centred local issues. The Connect version of the model focused on social isolation, yet it is suited to be applied to complex issues more generally (e.g., youth disengagement, homelessness, obesity or knife crime). And the potential of this model to tackle 'wicked problems' cost effectively should be recognised as one of its selling points to anyone who doesn't intrinsically see its social impact. Although funding is essential, it should not be the driving motivation for organisations wishing to participate and funding may be limited at the pilot stage; Connect accessed £360k for an 18 month pilot project. This funding was allocated during design and invested in three partner organisations, an innovation partner, a community lead organisation and resident-led prototyping - as well as small participatory funding pots for technology, workshops, and personalised budgeting to support the designed approach.

This spending returned 9 times on investment in savings made, but requires long term preventative thinking that embraces the idea that a healthier, friendlier community is a benefit for everyone in it.

Funding should be able to cover at least a year of work - although elements of the model can be utilised on a more short term basis, there needs to be a long term commitment to enable adequate design, delivery, piloting and learning. Leaving timelines flexible is crucial to allowing communities and residents to become autonomous at their own pace, while repeated iterations on learning will result in cumulative returns. After the first delivery of a project, more long term funding for new cohorts is likely to be valuable. The Community Innovation Partnership needs a year to do 1-1 work well, but transforming communities and building stronger neighbourhoods is much better suited to longer term ambitions and a commitment to new methods of collective problem solving.

Phase 1: Discovery, Design, Delivery

Identifying collaborators

Using open call outs through the VCSE sector network, a campaign asking for applications to be part of the collaboration is essential. Organisations don't need to fill out lengthy bids, simply state in their own words over a page or two what they would bring and why they would like to be involved. It may not always be the places that you suspect who are most on board or have the most to offer. Both small and large groups can play an important role; what matters most is their commitment to the approach, particularly to learning, along with evidence of curiosity and an ability to connect within the community. This emphasis on mindset over proven solutions from previous efforts makes it a very different recruitment approach. Shortlisted groups should then be interviewed by stewarding organisations (this might already be an innovation partner, public body or a VCSE organisation).

Co-designing

Workshops bringing together different stakeholders and community members should co-design the way forwards. As outlined by Vargas et al. (2022) this is an 'active collaboration between stakeholders in designing solutions to a pre specified problem. It promotes citizen participation to formulate or improve specific concerns. [It] is not always formally documented and can take the form of group problem solving, critically after the problem has been determined.' and should involve key community members - those who are most affected on personal, community and systemic levels (in the literature these are referred to as 'service users, implementers, and procurers', but the model isn't a service, so this language is at odds with the approach). Each voice has its part to play, but those who live day in day out in the midst of the 'wicked problem' will have the most insight and lived experience voices should continue to be fore-fronted and they should be prioritised as active designers. The co-design process is integral to 'flipping the telescope' (Holmes, 2025) which means acknowledging and working through the issues locally and on the ground without assuming that those who traditionally hold the power have the knowledge to create lasting positive change, although they will be an important partner in a successful project.

Embedding values (not just committing to them)

Embedding values is something that many try to do but few get right. Values are not reference points to refer back to at points of contention (although this might also be necessary). Values should underpin the very design of the model. Each of the aforementioned values of connection, accountability, power sharing & trust have very practical implications for how the model runs and must be consciously and systemically integrated. Learning sessions are a powerful tool in enabling these values to be embodied; often framed around the extent to which everyone shows up, the benefits that are being delivered and where adaptations are needed to better enable this. Everyone involved also needs to be be conscious of how we exert power over others, proactively sharing or asking for it. There needs to be honesty about motivations, concerns and experiences to demonstrate trust and accountability and importantly, everyone must be truly open to making sure connection is multidimensional and genuine rather than hierarchical and contrived.

Phase 1: Discovery, Design, Delivery

Recruiting residents

One of the benefits of cross-organisational collaborative working is that those who are already involved in the project by this stage will have a much broader overview of the local community and residents than any individual organisation. This is a great starting point for referrals to be part of the 1-1 element of the project. Depending on the project's make up, public or local authority services will also be knowledgeable about residents who fit with the project's aims. In Connect, initial referrals came in from partner organisations, by spreading the word within the local community and at the point of being released from hospital, with the second stage of the project specifically aimed at those with an Adult Social Care plan. Alongside this, as neighbourhoods and communities develop, the aim would be for more informal referrals from shop keepers, postmen and local residents - solely focusing on those who are already in contact with more formal communities is a missed opportunity to hear from and work alongside the most marginalised or isolated. Referrals need not be involved, a short explanation of why you think they'd benefit from some 1-1 attention and a few contact details will do.

Agreeing what you're aiming for

Static KPI's like 'get x people into work' are unlikely to bear results - the intention is to flip things around. Keeping aims broad and focused on personal or local transformation leaves the right amount of space for the types of creativity and non-linear journeys that a Community Innovation Partnership relies on to guide towards sustainable long term change. Setting and agreeing to the right aims (which may be closely linked to the identified challenge) focuses energy into the right places and ensures that everyone can stay focused on the vision. In Connect, the side effects of working with residents and communities may be reduced hospital visits, but the challenge was high levels of social isolation within the borough and the aim was to reduce isolation and increase connection. If the aim had been to reduce hospital readmission then the focus and project would have looked very different - and may not have been anywhere near as effective.

Phase 1: Discovery, Design, Delivery

Embedding iterative working

Iterative working should be an extension of embedded learning - it is the active consequence of reflection, feedback and trial and error. What is crucial is that iterations shouldn't only be initiated when something goes wrong (although that's important too!) but instead be an outcome of a space that nourishes creativity and reflection. It is a process of trying processes or approaches on for size, seeing where they work and where they don't, tweaking or trying something completely new. What works in one postcode may not work in another, and similarly residents and communities might have different priorities and capabilities from summer to winter. Staying open, curious and responsive keeps the process living, and gives the project more chance of growing autonomously than sticking firmly to one set design. Iterative working means building a back catalogue of experiences, successes and learning that can be returned to and developed on without getting complacent.

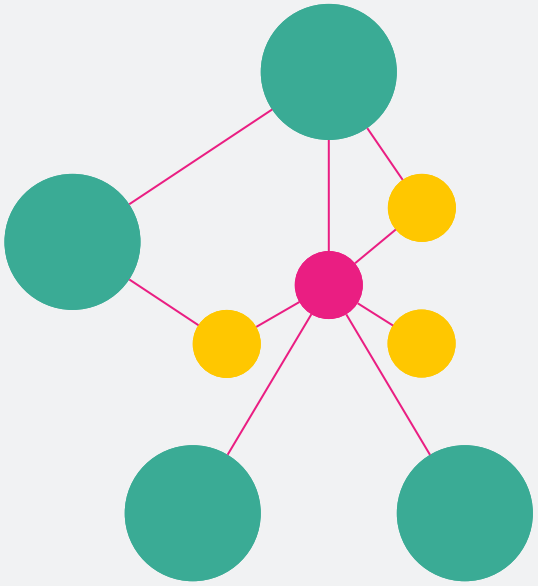
Setting up governance

Figuring out governance may be an emergent process - by way of design a Community Innovation Partnership will have lots of groups involved in the delivery and design, but it is unlikely to be efficient for each of these to be represented within the governance. With the value of power sharing embedded, representatives of different groups (in particular VCSE and any public services or local authorities) should be sufficient, with an agreed lead organisation who are able to be commissioned or hold and distribute funding.

Phase 2: The Connection Web

Phase 2, at the heart of any Community Innovation Partnership, is the work of building stronger, more meaningful connections. This happens on three levels: **individual**, through 1-to-1, strengths-based relationships that focus on what matters most to residents; **community**, by reconnecting people into local networks, reducing competition between groups, and nurturing inclusive spaces for belonging; and **services**, by breaking down silos so organisations can respond collectively rather than in isolation. These interwoven connections create resilience, reduce wasted effort, and allow support to flow more effectively across people, communities, and systems.

Phase 2: The Connection Web



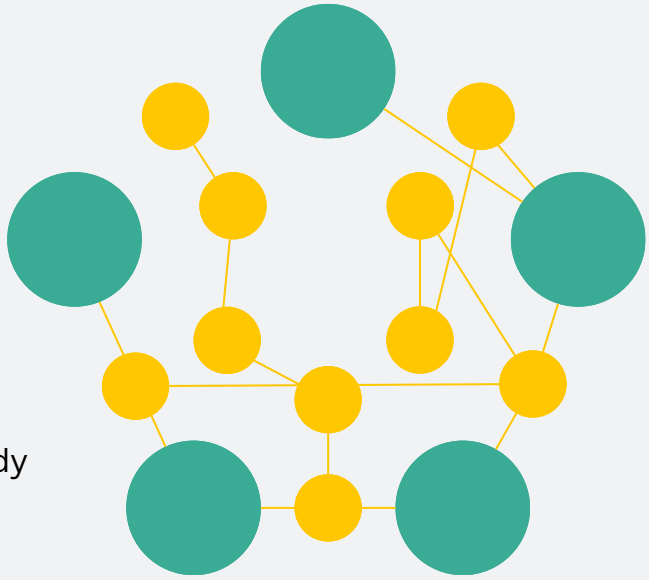
Individual

Residents who have been used to a one size fits all service provision are often frustrated, disengaged or afraid of being let down. Taking time to build relationships and to really understand who someone is may take time, but it is vital to building strong, lasting change that comes from within, not just jumping through hoops.

Connect worked 1-1 with >100 residents in its first phase, with relationships being built by VCSE delivery partners using a strengths based, human first approach. That means figuring out what matters to someone and working with them to get to where they want to be, even if it doesn't initially seem to build towards our own assumptions of what they "need". It also means recognising what someone has to give and what they're achieving, without diluting their awareness of that through constant discussion of their 'presenting needs', which often only serve to pigeonhole residents and reinforce unhelpful beliefs about themselves. Part of this work is also about softening the boundaries between the supported and the supporting; allowing residents to see some vulnerability from "professionals" can help them come to terms with their own. Allowing support to run in both directions can show residents that they too have something to give. To develop lasting community connections and support, people need to build relationships on a personal level that are real, not that exist in a vacuum of service delivery timelines and directives. Although initiated by the project, relationships should be organic in their development and begin to bloom out into new spaces. Demonstrating and coaching this in 1-1s creates an opportunity for this to be expanded into other 1-1 relationships, paving the way to community re(integration) by building confidence and overcoming challenges in a safe, but not bubblewrapped space.

Connect used tools like SIGNAL to support the more structured conversations they were having 1-1 and to give residents a sense of the bigger picture of their strengths, desires and areas to focus on. This type of work is not suited to pre determined time limits, there is great value in people having autonomy over how and when they are ready to move on. This happens by refocusing away from what they can get from the time they're allotted to thinking about the type of transformation they need to see (either in themselves or in the wider community) to know they're ready. In taking time to get to know someone's life we gain so much additional knowledge about the world that they live in and the ways it supports or fails to work for them. These personal stories give a far greater insight into a breadth of systemic challenges than years of report writing and inquiries are able to capture.

Phase 2: The Connection Web



Community

Reconnecting people into a community requires a community to reconnect to. In some places this may already be strong and clear, while in others it will need to be nurtured. The society we live within in any locality is made up of formal and informal community, built through activities, joint decision making and mutual support.

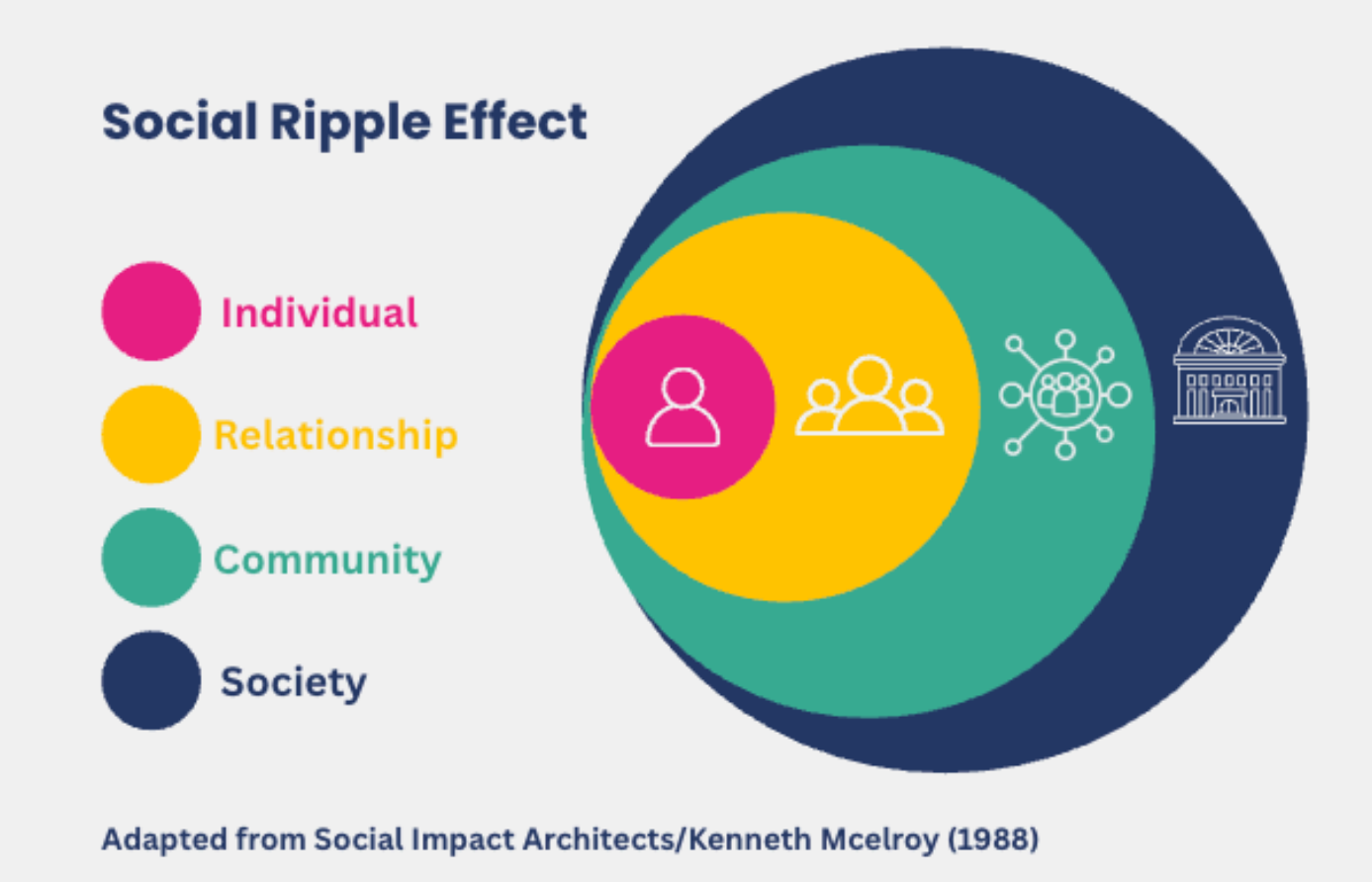
In the Connect project, the BD Collective had a preexisting consortium of community groups who were called on, alongside partner organisations, to connect individuals to each other. Further iterations should explore broader definitions, explicitly seeking to find ways of including informal community spaces and connection - like the corner shop, bus stops and local parks. Despite the more formalised approach in Connect, these interactions are still able to create environments that are friendlier, more accessible and more connected, with individual transformation rippling out to wider society.

‘Resources, infrastructure and social capital are vital components of a thriving community [but] the communities most in need of investment often have the fewest established charities and community groups to make use of these resources.’
Strengthening Communities - TNL Community (Parnaby & Iqbal, 2023)

The underlying design of a Community Innovation Partnership brings together different parts of a community through collaboration rather than competition, theoretically derived from a desire to make more of limited resources, pooling energy and experience but practically underpinned by participatory grant making with a bottom up approach. This is core to providing communities with the tools and infrastructure needed and to acknowledging and forefronting their expertise and capability to address complexity locally.

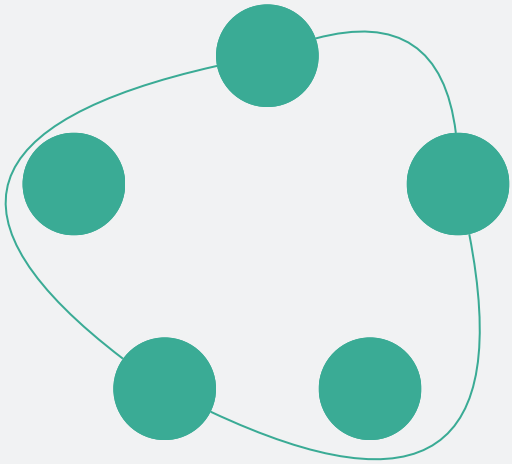
Designing and delivering a shared aim enables communities to reduce administrative wastage and to approach with a broader scope and wider reach, but fundamentally also working in a way that is human and joyful.

Embracing the idea of ‘no wrong front door’ (Brook, 2025), the more cooperatively communities can operate together to work through local complexities the more likely any one individual who comes into contact with them will be able to find what they need to move forward. This means not just approaching from a joint funding perspective, but embracing learning, challenging and supporting each other over organisational or group boundaries.



This also means building an environment where individual and collective opportunities to connect can thrive, which are the foundations needed for ‘the ripple effect’ (Mcleroy et al., 1988) whereby individual experience becomes the starting point for community, organisational and institutional change.

Phase 2: The Connection Web



Service

‘Services’ is the shorthand in the UK for government backed organisations that aim to ensure safe, long and healthy lives for residents. Traditionally these would involve public sector bodies concerned with housing, healthcare, social care and education (among others).

It is common to outsource aspects of service provision via local authorities to third sector organisations who specialise in particular areas - be that homelessness, mental health, museums or leisure centres. In its best light, this enables provisions that are more adept at adapting to change than larger public bodies and who are experts in their particular area. On the other hand, this division of power (and funding!) can result in narrow focus and difficulty in overcoming barriers that exist outside of specialisms. With many service providers having to set highly specific criteria for what or who they can help due to funding and capacity, we end up with a siloed service provision that leaves many gaps for residents to fall through. Often the ‘messy’ work of our lives does not fit with the clear cut boxes laid out in services, and barriers to access or barriers within services undermines good intention.

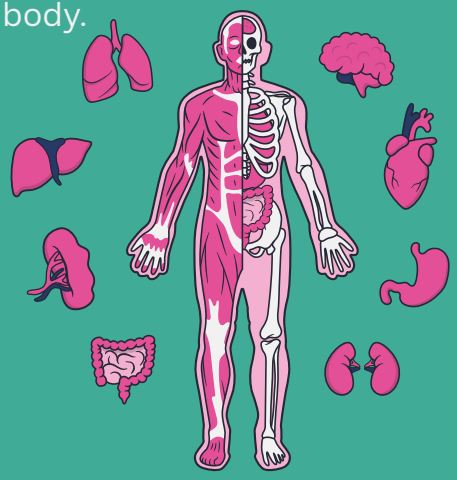
“A 2016 lottery-funded study estimated that disconnected communities cost the UK economy £32bn per year - around 1% of GDP at the time.”
(Care City, 2025)

Building connections between services, as well as to communities and individuals, is crucial to supporting the inner web and providing the basic structure required for life to thrive. By shifting away from a service provision mindset towards a connection mindset, organisations can more effectively overcome barriers and respond to residents they meet with the ability to resolve rather than manage cases. Often barriers are not so complicated as to be unworkable, but they may require some creativity outside of the set norms.

Tools within the Community Innovation Partnership can help to build this capacity. ‘Connecting the Dots’ sessions have been used in the Connect project to bring together public services and VCSE groups to hear individual stories, understand challenges and to work through barriers with innovative approaches. These sessions are not intended to ascribe blame, but to give an opportunity for new insight and opportunities by sharing knowledge and responding collectively. The ‘small good things’ fund enables individual participants to get funding for particular things that will enable them to move forward - it might be a mobility aid, a photo ID application or emerging assistive technology that can support them.

These small uses of funding can have huge individual impacts that enable someone to take part in the mainstream, where previously they had been held back. Whilst demonstrating and recognising the positive impacts of connected and responsive provisions, services (if they choose to engage in the process) will also be better able to design and incorporate their learning into their provisions. While ultimately the aim is to improve lives and communities, there are clear economic, social and political advantages to healthy, thriving localities with strong place-based capabilities.

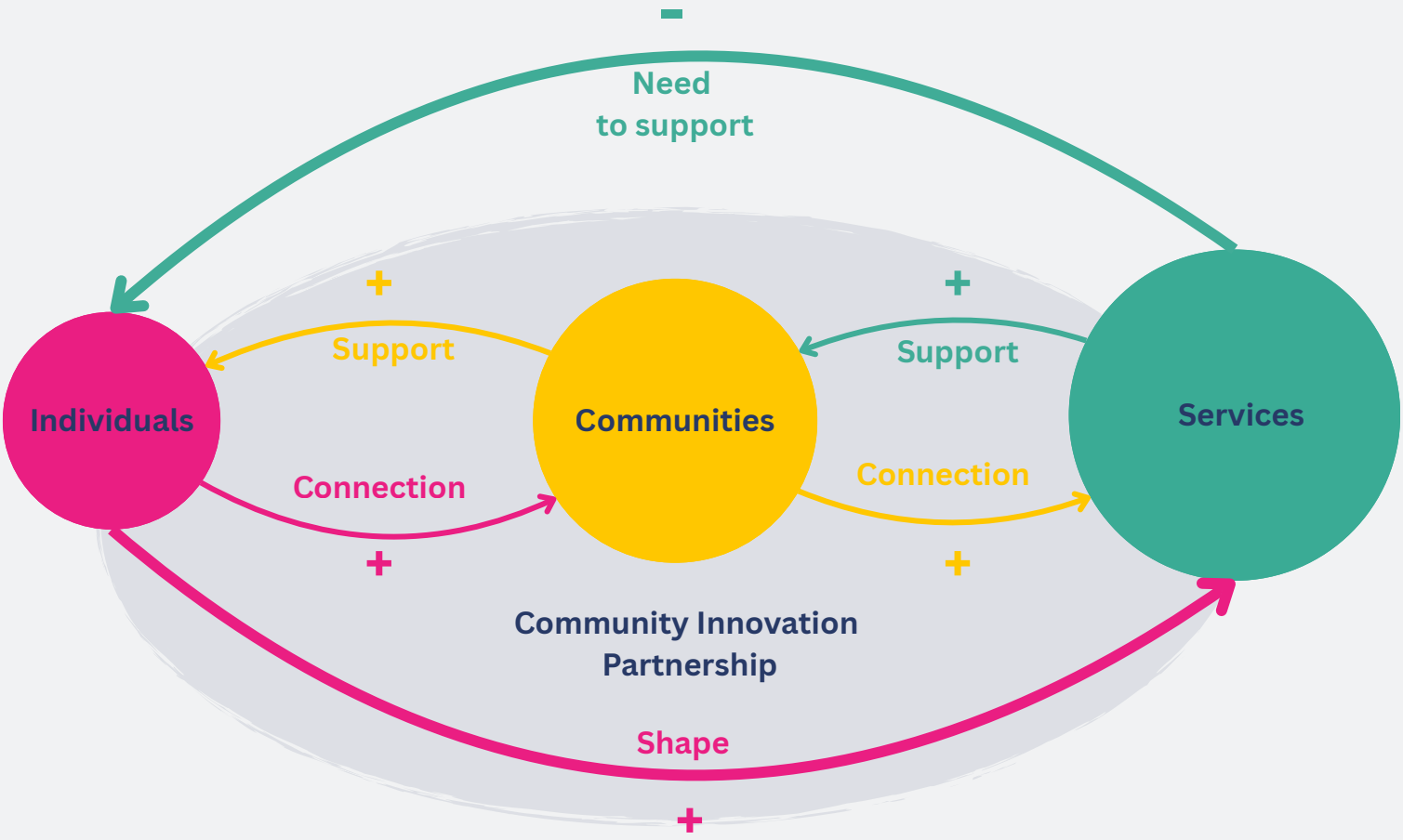
As **Margaret Kalaugher (2021)** has observed, organisations function much like organs in the body: each is essential, but only truly effective when connected to the wider system. Participants on a programme may already be in contact with a range of ‘organisations’, but these interactions are often limited and one-directional. Without strong connections between teams, services, and communities, each part struggles to understand its role and cannot contribute as effectively to the whole—much like an organ trying to function in isolation from the body.



One of the aims of the programme is therefore to build connections between people, creating a web of relationships with far more strength and multi-directionality than traditional service/service user approaches. These connections ensure that signals, support, and resources flow where they are needed. Stronger connections reduce wasted resources, including individual energy, and build resilience and reliability – when one connection weakens, others notice, adapt, and reconnect.

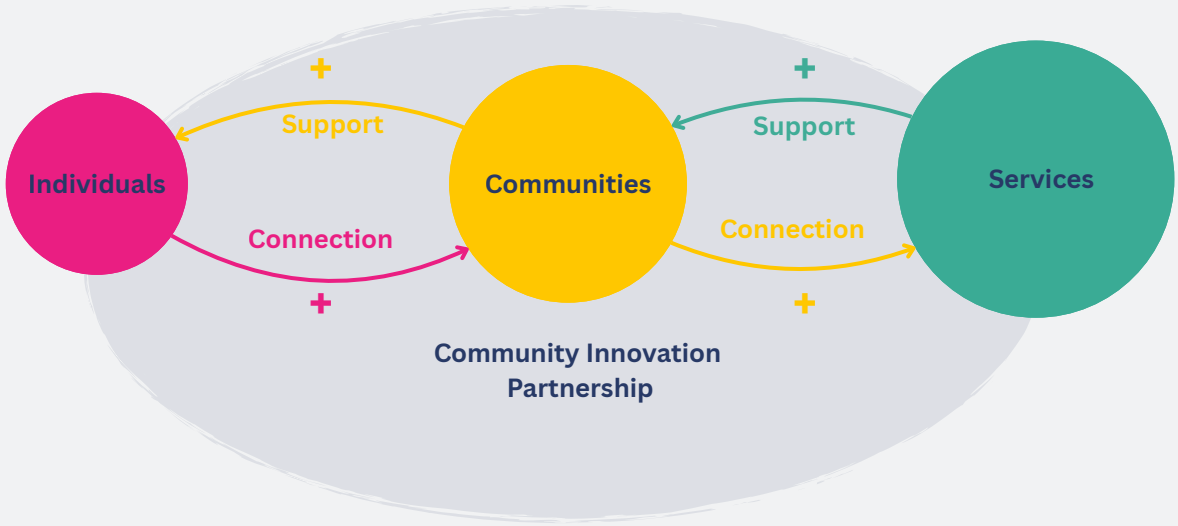
To achieve this, connections need to be nurtured within and between the three levels of personal (individual), societal (community), and service (system). Focusing on connection helps uncover what matters to individuals, supports where they want to focus their energy, and builds a sense of ‘mattering’ that strengthens long-term personal resilience. Communities and services, in turn, are more responsive and effective when fully connected to residents and to each other.

Phase 3: Systemic Learning, Autonomy & Sustainability



Phase 3 focuses on embedding the partnership so that individuals, communities, and services can thrive without ongoing project support. **Autonomy** means residents gain confidence to act independently, communities sustain their own networks and initiatives, and services adapt collaboratively beyond the pilot. At the same time, **systemic learning** ensures insights from the partnership feed back into wider organisations and policy, gradually reshaping systems to be more preventative, adaptive, and responsive. This phase moves the work from a supported project to a **self-sustaining** shift in how places tackle complexity together.

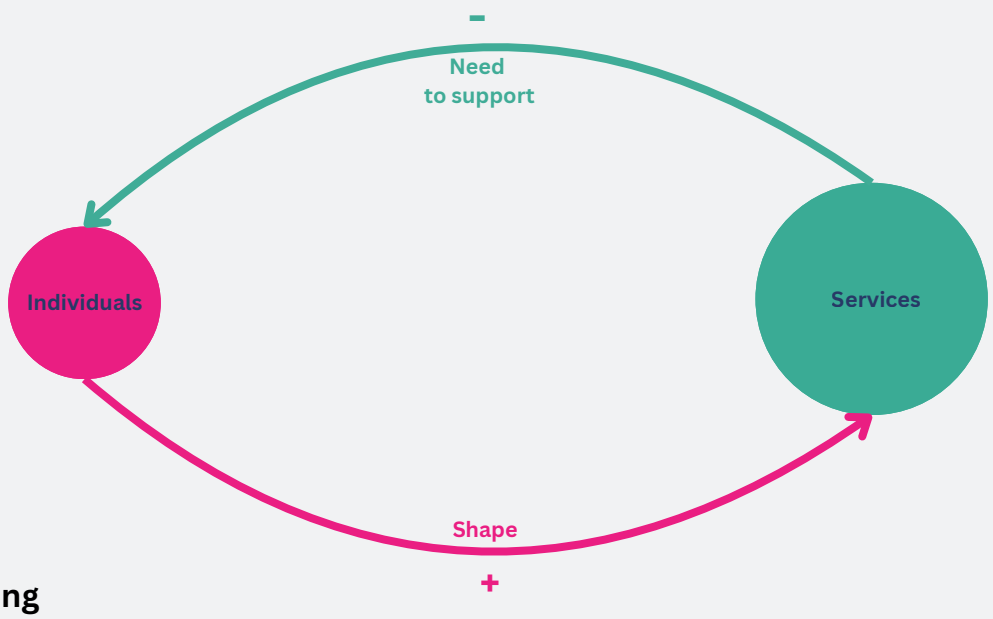
Phase 3: Systemic Learning, Autonomy & Sustainability



Autonomy

The Community Innovation Partnership develops structures on the three levels described above, yet the aim is for these structures to become autonomous and their behaviours systemically embedded. That is not to say that they become rigid, as fluidity and reflexive responsiveness are key to successful embodiment of the partnership. What it does mean is that individuals, communities and services are able to manage challenges independent of the project, especially in new scenarios. In the Connect project this might be demonstrated by a resident undertaking new experiences or self advocacy without support from professionals within the project to do so, or by a community group building new networks, collaborative funding and developing their own practices of learning. These are demonstrations of community capability, whereby outside the scope of a pilot or project programme there is organic capacity to reproduce and evolve from lessons learned. For individuals or organisations that take part, success can be measured by the impact they continue to have by participating in and expanding their communities - this is the ripple effect on a community level.

Phase 3: Systemic Learning, Autonomy & Sustainability



Systemic Learning

Systemic buy in is essential to stemming the flow of residents and communities needing radical change. This partnership model should not be considered just a way of working through the most difficult of place and people based challenges, but also a way of building more adaptive systems that are better designed to prevent complexities from developing - it is a preventative approach at heart. For this to be realised, learning from Community Innovation Partnerships should be fed back into public bodies and policy developments, and supported through adequate funding and commissioning. In Connect, systemic challenges such as data sharing across organisations inhibits the collaborative process and ability to envision broader impacts, but these processes are not easy to challenge or change. This is not an overnight process, and progress can and should be made gradually to ensure that it is realistic, sustainable and adapted to its environment. In interviews, Emily Brook, Care City's Director of Innovation described the following three levels of system learning:

- **A useful version** of system learning happens when we identify a complex individual case and can get all relevant services around the table to resolve it.
- **A good version** is when those same partners ask: "Why are we seeing such cases at all?" What could have triggered a different response sooner? Was there an early sign that we should have acted on?
- **The great version** is integrated at the interface between services and residents, so concerns raised can be addressed rapidly and preventatively. Learning is actively prioritised to ensure that a broad range of systemic issues and organisational barriers are able to be reduced by reacting responsively, flexibly and swiftly whilst iteratively designing out barriers.

Dreams
Future Projects

The Community Innovation Partnership would be well suited to many other **place based**, **people centric** developments. This next section imagines what the partnership could look like in a completely new context, while still building on the model developed in Barking and Dagenham and piloted by Connect.

On leaving primary school in the UK, as many as **1 in 4 children experience a "steep and lasting" drop in engagement and enjoyment in education** (Weale, 2025). Engagement in education is a key indicator of educational success and positive later life outcomes, but it's lack is often symptomatic of broader social and personal challenges in a young persons life (Li & Xui, 2023). A child in a childrens home is 18 times more likely to attend a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) than those who live with parents or guardians (Social Work Today, 2021) and **85% of attendees of PRU's end up in Young Offenders Institutes** (Genuine Futures, 2025). Often, it is lack of engagement that lands children in PRU's in the first place.

Working with kids who struggle to engage by helping them build strong connections and engagement in their community could have far reaching benefits for them and their community throughout their lifetime. **Helping young people to find what matters to them**, where their dreams lie and what they need to overcome short term challenges to move forwards is an important **preventative** approach.

For young people who may be disempowered within their current networks, principles of **co-design** and **'mattering'** faciliatated by a Community Innovation Partnership, as well as 'connecting the dots' between different spaces they inhabit would be well suited to reengaging them in education.

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