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The Practice of Kindness

Learning from the Kindness Innovation Network and North Ayrshire

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Enabling Wellbeing

Practice

The Practice of Kindness   2019

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When we started KIN and our partnership in North Ayrshire, we didn't know how many people would want to join us on this journey. What we have discovered is that there are a lot of people in Scotland who are interested in having a conversation about kindness. We would like to thank all those who have given so generously their time, thought and emotion to our work on kindness over the past 12 months. This report would not have been possible without the passion and commitment of hundreds of people; it is enriched by the stories, ideas and actions they have shared along the way. For all of this, we are incredibly grateful.

This report is printed on paper that is FSC certified.

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1. Introduction

When we published our first report on kindness in October 2016, it felt tentative. We were unsure how the ideas we were exploring would be received, and we felt under pressure to explain why kindness is important and to justify its place in policy discussions. We are in a very different place now.

In Scotland, kindness is recognised as a key element in tackling social isolation and loneliness (Scottish Government, 2018), is discussed widely in varied professional debates, and sits alongside values of dignity and compassion at the heart of the new National Performance Framework (Scottish Government, 2018).

The acceptance of kindness in public policy owes much to the work undertaken by Julia Unwin as a Carnegie Fellow over the last two years. It also sits alongside a wider, developing narrative around the place of values. The response to New Zealand Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern, described as 'a leader with love on full display' (Nagesh, 2019), feels like a gut reaction to a growing politics of fear and division. We no longer feel the need to justify the importance of kindness at the outset of every discussion, it can be taken as given.

However, we have found that while the notion of kindness is becoming accepted, there is still much to do to understand what needs to be done to make kindness more commonly part of people's experiences in communities and in their relationships with organisations and institutions. This report explores learning from the Kindness Innovation Network (KIN) and our partnership with North Ayrshire Council. It brings together thinking from our work on what it takes to build kinder communities and the role of kindness at a public policy level.

Building on initial research funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Anderson, et al., 2015a), *The Place of Kindness* (Ferguson, 2017) started from the perspective of individuals and communities, where there is increasing concern about loneliness and social isolation, and a growing dependence on services. *Kindness, emotions and human relationships: The blindspot in public policy* (Unwin, 2018) looked at kindness from the perspective of public policy and power, where the major challenges relate to falling levels of trust in institutions, alongside the twin dynamics of increased demand for services and reductions in public expenditure. In both cases, relationships – whether between individuals in communities or between service provider and citizen – have a powerful impact on wellbeing. In addition, the move from a welfare to an enabling state (Wallace, 2013), underpinned by empowerment of individuals and communities, depends fundamentally on people knowing and caring about those around them.

What do we mean by kindness?

There is a popular narrative about the power of random acts of kindness. Buying coffee for the next customer, leaving positive messages or gifts to be discovered, and other small and often 'anonymous' acts of kindness seem to catch imaginations. They are shared widely on social media, perhaps counteracting the fear that can be felt in the face of wider evidence of unkindness in society. These 'random acts' have the potential to brighten someone's day, perhaps even create a sense of shared humanity. But campaigns that focus on 'randomness' also risk assuming that kindness is easy: they don't account for the complexities of people's lives, nor the riskiness of human relationships. (Arguably they may actually occur as a result of a sense of risk towards meaningful human connection.)

FIGURE 1: WHY IS KINDNESS IMPORTANT?
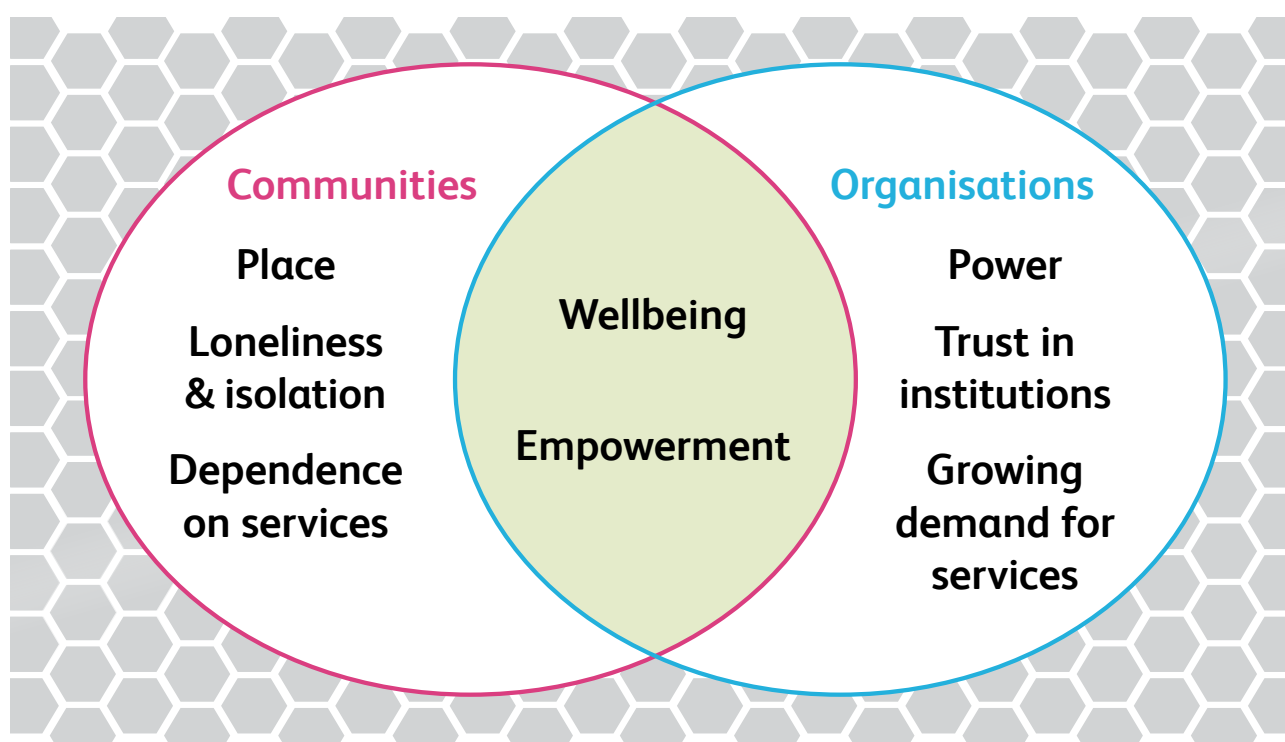
The Carnegie UK Trust has focused on relational kindness, as something that acknowledges the vulnerabilities and complexities of relationships and allows deep, meaningful connection between individuals. It can be found in communities, in places where people take more risks to connect than might be considered normal, and where kindness and relationships create a sense of belonging (Ferguson, 2017). It can also be found in organisations, with people performing at the limits of, or beyond, their autonomy – in many cases ignoring guidelines or breaking rules to do the right thing, the kind thing.

Julie Brownlie and Simon Anderson prompted us to think about the radical potential of kindness (Brownlie & Anderson, 2018). Radical kindness requires connection across differences and a recognition that some people's needs are greater because of structural disadvantage. As such it sees a role for kindness as a collective and state enabled response to inequality. In other words, it 'demands institutional change.

It requires a difference in the ways in which things are run and managed. It challenges long established norms and has the potential to be highly disruptive' (Unwin, 2018). The National Performance Framework could be seen as an acknowledgement of this view of the state's role, and a commitment to having the difficult conversations about what kindness in policy really means (Brownlie & Anderson, 2018).

Our discussions have shifted across this spectrum over the last year, recognising the impact of questioning behaviours and the role of individual acts of kindness; exploring the context for relational kindness; and, increasingly, looking at systems and structures and delving into the more challenging concept of radical kindness. Kindness has an unobligated nature: it cannot be forced into being, and if it is, it becomes something else entirely (Brownlie & Anderson, 2017; Brownlie & Anderson, 2018). And so, throughout, these discussions have focused on the way that systems, cultures and environments encourage, or inhibit, individual behaviours.

FIGURE 2: MAPPING THE REACH OF THE CARNEGIE UK TRUST'S WORK ON KINDNESS
(Topic discussed, type of organisation)

SCOTLAND

1 Ardrossan
Community enterprise, NGO

2 Ayr
Loneliness, public sector

3 Bathgate
Poverty, local government

4 Carstairs
Criminal justice, NGO

5 Cumbernauld
Young people, NGO

6 Dumfries
NHS, public sector

7 Dundee
Care system, public sector
Community development, cross-sector
NHS, public sector

8 Dunfermline
Disability, NGO
Intergenerational work, NGO

9 Edinburgh
Architecture & design, cross-sector
Befriending, NGO
Children & families, cross-sector
Citizenship, NGO
Civil service, national government
Community development, NGO
Disability, NGO
Employability, cross-sector
Healthcare improvement, national government
Higher education, academia
Leadership, cross-sector
Local government, professional body
Loneliness & social isolation, national government
Mental health, national government
National Performance Framework, national government
National Services Scotland, public sector
NHS, public sector
Nursing, professional body
Procurement & commissioning, cross-sector
Public libraries, professional body
Public policy, national government
Pupil inclusion, NGO
Social care, NGO
Social isolation, NGO
Social research, national government
Social security, national government
Social policy, academia
Youth work, NGO

10 Glasgow
Disability, NGO
Employability, cross-sector
Fairer Scotland, local government
Health & safety, academia
Housing, public sector
Independent Care Review, cross-sector
NHS, public sector
Public libraries, professional body
Public policy, NGO
Procurement & commissioning, public sector

11 Glenrothes
Student support, academia

12 Greenock
Palliative care, NGO

13 Irvine
Community development, cross-sector
Community justice, public sector
Customer services, local government
Health & social care, public sector
Health care, NGO
Mental health, public sector
Poverty & inequality, local government
Youth work, local government

14 Kilmarnock
Allied health professionals, public sector
Community development, NGO
Performing arts, NGO

15 Kilwinning
Community development, cross-sector
Health & social care, public sector
Trauma-informed work, public sector

16 Lairg
Befriending, NGO

17 Livingston
Employability, private sector
Social inclusion, public sector

18 Lochgilphead
Befriending, NGO

19 North Berwick
Youth work, NGO

20 Perth
Education, public sector
Poverty & inequality, local government
Staff development, local government

21 Saltcoats
Community development, NGO
Local government, cross-sector

22 St Andrews
Loneliness, academia

23 Stirling
Allied health professionals, public sector
Health & social care leadership, professional body
Volunteering, NGO

ENGLAND

24 Batley
Loneliness, NGO

25 Bradford
Compassionate communities, NGO

26 Brighton
Digital communications, cross-sector
Higher education, academia
Local government, academia

27 Cheltenham
Leadership, cross-sector

28 Devizes
Independent living, NGO

29 Halifax
Public policy, local government

30 Leeds
Local government, cross-sector

31 Liverpool
Independent living, NGO
Nursing, professional body
Social isolation, NGO

32 London
Digital communication, cross-sector
Health & health care, NGO
Leadership, NGO
Public sector leadership, local government
Loneliness & social isolation, NGO
Social integration, local government
Politics, NGO
Procurement & commissioning, NGO
Public policy, cross-sector
Public services, NGO
Social care, cross-sector

33 Manchester
Public services, NGO
Social isolation, NGO

34 Newcastle
Procurement & commissioning, NGO

35 Northamptonshire
Public policy, cross-sector

36 Oldham
Public policy, cross-sector

37 Somerton
Mental health, NGO

38 Totnes
Wellbeing, NGO

39 Windsor
Health & wellbeing, cross-sector

WALES

40 Cardiff
Adverse childhood experiences, public sector
Future generations, national government
Loneliness & social isolation, national government
Politics, national government
Procurement & commissioning, professional body
Public health, public sector
Public policy, cross-sector
Social prescribing, NGO

41 Chepstow
Community development, local government

42 Pontypridd
Housing, private sector

43 Swansea
Health & social care, academia

NORTHERN IRELAND

44 Belfast
Ombudsman, professional body
Public policy, cross-sector

45 Lisburn
Leadership, public sector

IRELAND

46 Callan, Co. Kilkenny
Housing, NGO

47 Dublin
Community development, NGO

INTERNATIONAL

Santa Monica, CA, USA
Wellbeing, NGO

Princeton, NJ, USA
Health & wellbeing, NGO

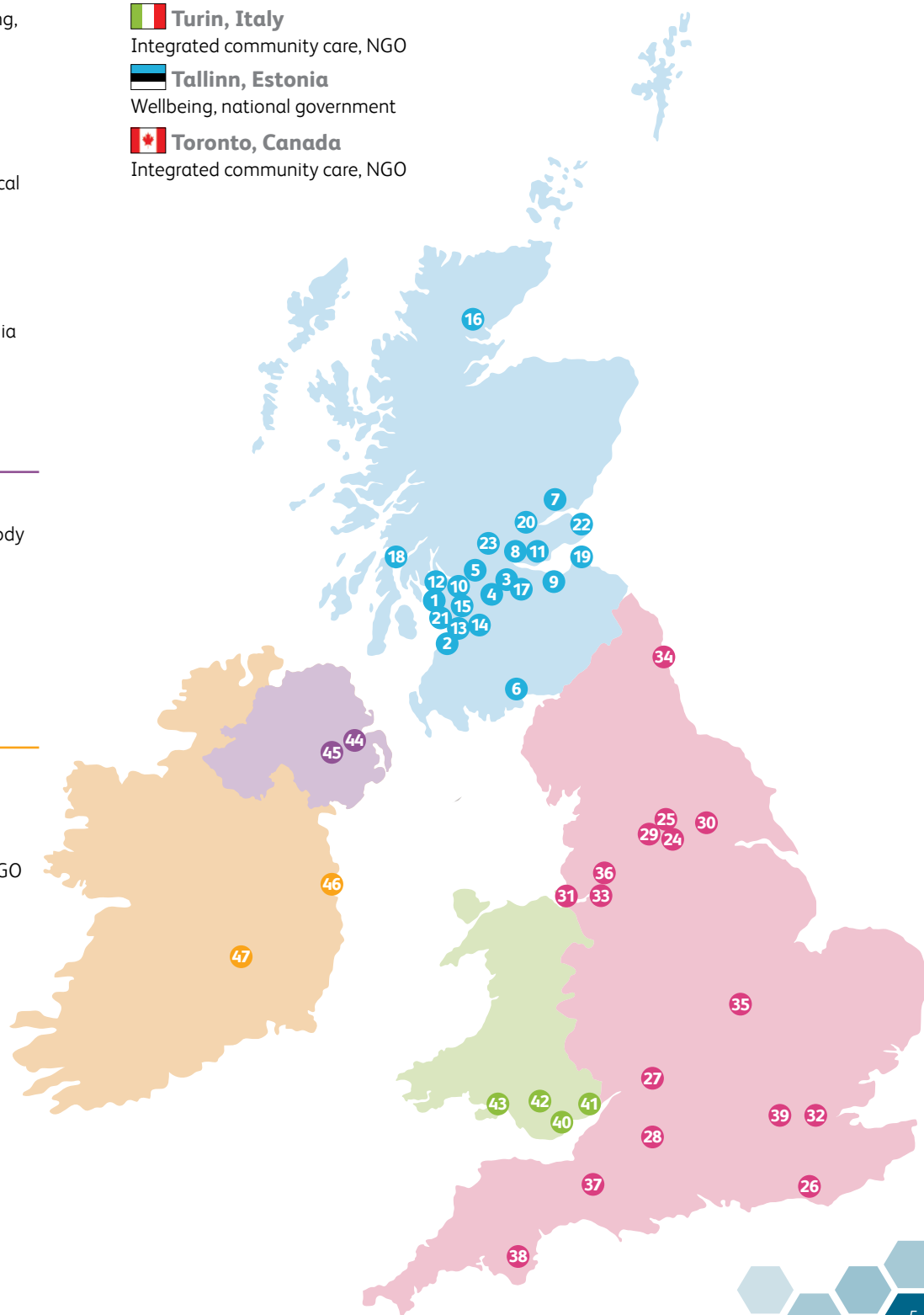**Brussels, Belgium**
Community development, NGO

Turin, Italy
Integrated community care, NGO

Tallinn, Estonia
Wellbeing, national government

Toronto, Canada
Integrated community care, NGO

In communities, we think that there are good reasons why people might not engage or act in kindness; and that there is more to be gained in looking at what might help create the conditions for connections and kindness, and what gets in the way, than in encouraging individuals to be kinder people. Indeed, that might well be a dangerous, divisive message in communities struggling with the impacts of poverty, austerity and inequality. Similarly, whilst acknowledging that organisations are made up of the people in them and their behaviours, we think there is more to creating a kind organisation than encouraging kindness between individuals. Systems and structures define cultural norms and may enable or inhibit kindness between colleagues and between 'professionals' and citizens.

Whether starting from the perspective of the individual or the institution, we have found strong connections between the factors that help to create the conditions for kindness, and perhaps even more so in the things which can get in the way. Through our work with KIN and in North Ayrshire, we have learnt more about the complicated and blurred relationship between organisations and communities, and begun to understand the extent to which organisational cultures and practices affect behaviours and outcomes.

This report is based on our work in Scotland, but has relevance to a wider audience across the UK, and further afield. Over the course of this work, we have been contacted by people from academia, politics, local government and civil society across the UK, and internationally. Collectively, the Trust and its partners in KIN and North Ayrshire have spoken to thousands of people at events and conferences, covering topics from health and social care to community regeneration, architecture and planning to education, management and leadership to community justice.

We believe that there is a growing movement of people, that cuts across sectors and geography, who recognise the fundamental importance of human relationships. And we hope that the learning in this report will be relevant to all those who are committed to thinking through the challenges of enabling kindness in communities and organisations.
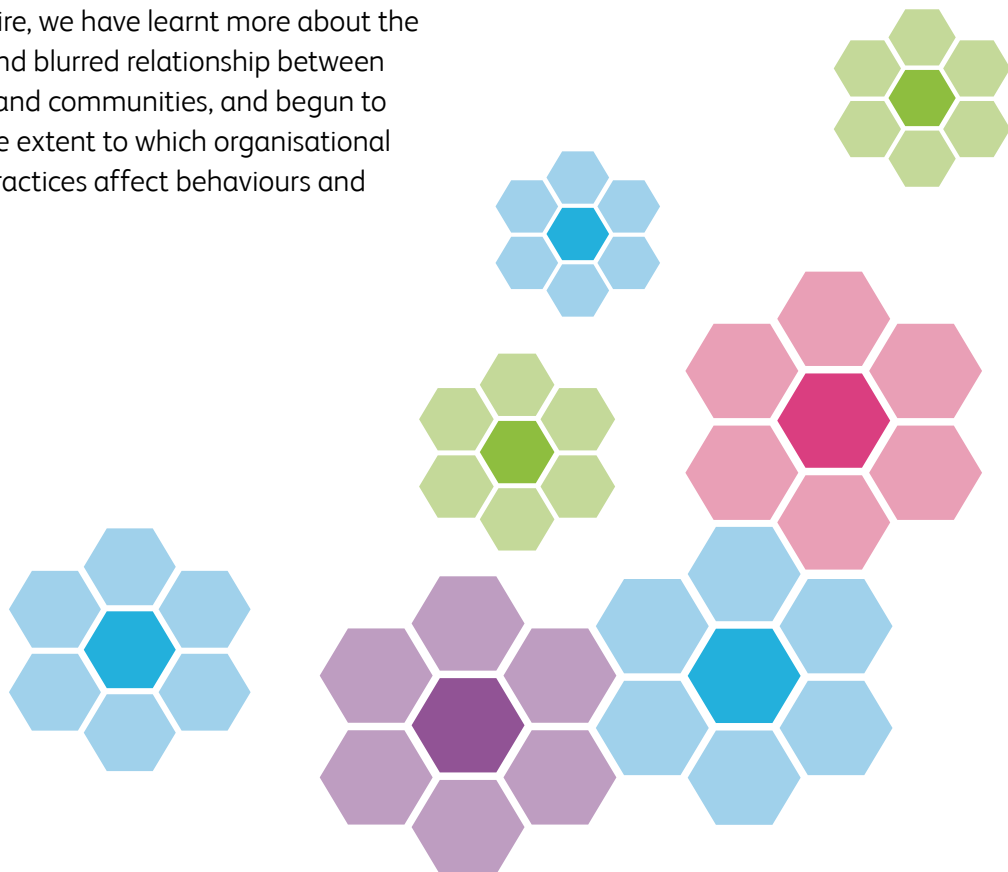
2. What we did

From March 2018 to March 2019 the Carnegie UK Trust sought to build practical learning on what it might take to encourage kindness, through coordinating a Kindness Innovation Network (KIN) and working in partnership with North Ayrshire Council.

The Kindness Innovation Network

KIN built on the interest generated in Scotland through *The Place of Kindness* (Ferguson, 2017), and brought together over a hundred people from a wide range of personal and professional backgrounds throughout Scotland. It aimed to build on evidence from the first phase of our work, by identifying and testing practical approaches to encourage kindness in communities and organisations; but also to provide a space for people to have a different conversation, to promote cross-sectoral collaboration and shared learning. KIN was structured around five events held in central Glasgow spread across the year.

From the outset, we wanted KIN to be owned as much by participant members as the Trust. We therefore adopted an action learning approach that encouraged members to learn together and to drive activities forward. At the first meeting, we asked members to identify areas where they felt the network could contribute to understandings of kindness, and to form 'mini-KINs' to explore these themes. Each mini-KIN

nominated a 'host' to coordinate meetings and activities in between KIN events, with support from the Trust, where needed.

KIN was designed in this way to draw on the knowledge and strengths of a coalition of people who were already engaged in the Trust's work on kindness. We recognised the challenge of doing things differently to encourage kindness in communities and organisations – particularly doing this alongside existing paid and voluntary roles – and therefore endeavoured to create a diverse, collaborative and creative environment. In doing so, we expected a drop-off in engagement, and a 'U-shape' model of development as members grappled with the complexities of change. While we supported and encouraged mini-KINs, we were also happy to allow them to come to a natural close if there was no-one willing to move them forward.

At the end of the 12 month process, KIN brought forward learning from six mini-KINs, which focused on a spectrum of activities ranging from community interventions to organisational policy:

💬 **#ConversationsForKindness** looked at normalising the value and practice of kindness. The mini-KIN explored the use of different tools (such as messaging, visual cues, social media campaigns) to encourage and facilitate interactions between individuals; but also moved on to think about the importance of authentic connections between service providers and citizens.

🤲 **Food sharing** explored food as a way to create connections. The mini-KIN examined what makes it work and why: highlighting that the food itself has a story, which can bring people of different ages and backgrounds together; and that the act of sharing food is a practice that builds trust and enables kindness.

🏠 **Activating spaces** catalogued a range of existing innovations to think about the importance of the physical environment, what creates 'a kind space', and what can be done to encourage everyday relationships and human connections, whether in public or private spaces.

👥 **Management & leadership for kindness** brought together professionals from national government, local government, higher education and the voluntary sector with an interest in the way organisational cultures affect behaviour, to share learning and challenges and discuss what it means to be a 'kind organisation'.

🤝 **Kindness in procurement & commissioning** aimed to promote 'kindness by design'. The mini-KIN engaged with commissioners, procurement professionals and providers to gather evidence of 'kind procurement' practices, and advocate for the importance of human relationships in contract design and management.

⚖️ **Kindness for societal justice** considered the role of language, data and performance management in delivering public policy with kindness at the centre. In considering the importance of language, and the value of conversations in creating a movement for change, it brings the mini-KIN themes full circle back to the 💬 **#Conversations** mini-KIN.

Kindness in North Ayrshire

In parallel to KIN, the Trust was invited to work in partnership with North Ayrshire Council. North Ayrshire sits on the west coast of Scotland, thirty minutes from Glasgow. It contrasts a beautiful coastline and islands attracting tens of thousands of visitors, with the lasting impact of deindustrialisation, lack of economic growth and high levels of unemployment. The Council and Community Planning Partners recognise poverty and inequality as the greatest challenge they face, with one in three children growing up in poverty. Our partnership was established firmly in the context of their *Fair for All* strategy (North Ayrshire CPP, 2016) to tackle poverty and inequality, and aimed to build on work that the Council was already undertaking, which recognised the importance of relationships both between individuals in communities and between citizens and those providing services.

In North Ayrshire, we sought to actively apply our learning on kindness within the context of existing collaborations across the public, private and third sectors, and with individuals and communities. Here, our role was more facilitative: unlike KIN, where there was an existing network of people who already championed the value of kindness, we were more actively involved in partnership building and shaping activities. The partnership with North Ayrshire was therefore more practice-based and aimed to explore what the Council could do to embed kindness as a value.

Kindness in North Ayrshire began with a meeting at Saltcoats Town Hall in March 2018, which identified the following themes to explore throughout the year:

FIGURE 3: WHAT WE DID
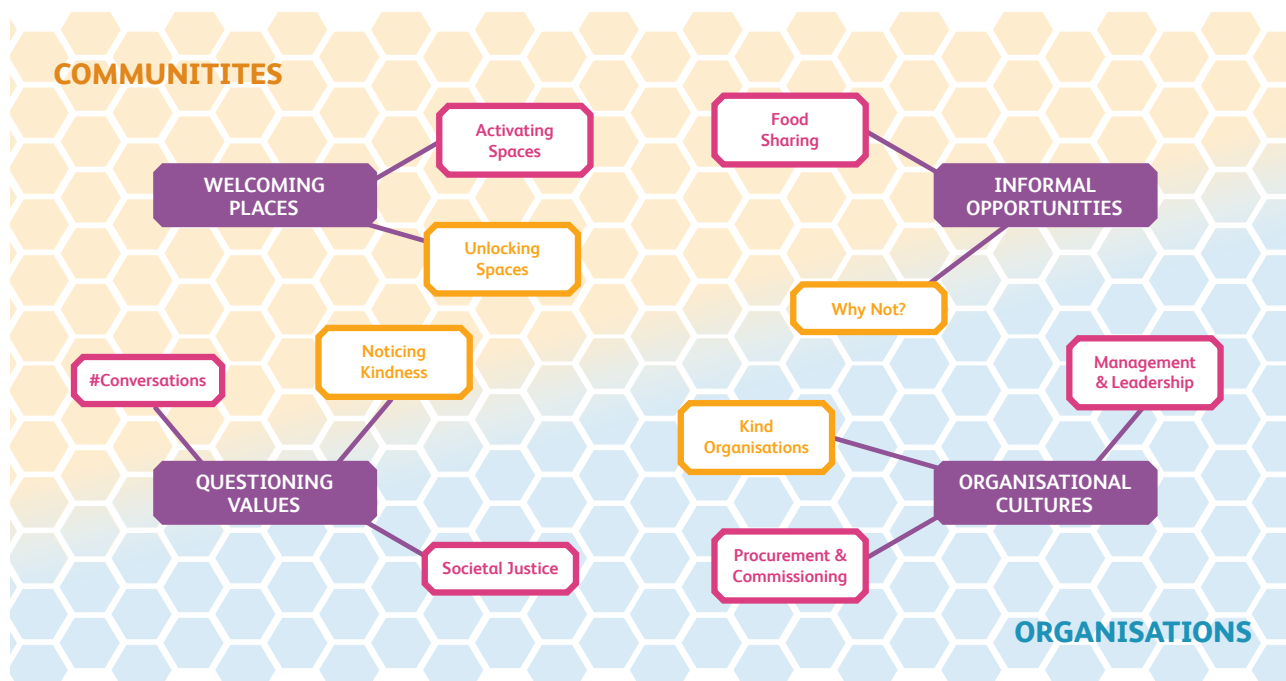
🔑 **Unlocking spaces** aimed to enable greater use of indoor and outdoor spaces in communities, making those spaces agenda and stigma free, creating welcoming settings for interactions and relationships focused on informal community use, rather than service provision.

❓ **Why not?** explored the barriers to opportunities to come together, building understanding and confidence in interpretation of regulations, potentially challenging actual regulations, and reducing and simplifying policies and procedures.

💜 **Kind organisations** sought to build an expectation of kindness into how people treat themselves, those they work with, and the communities they serve.

👁 **Noticing kindness** recognised the value of creating visible opportunities to question values and give permission for greater kindness in community settings.

The KIN programme came to an end in March 2019. However, we will continue to work with North Ayrshire until the end of 2019, focusing on implementing the practical steps to organisational change that have been developed over the past year, and supporting the network of individuals involved so far to take ownership for ongoing action. Despite the different contexts of each project, the themes identified and developed over the course of the year were very similar (see Figure 3). They also mapped onto the key domains identified in *The Place of Kindness* (Ferguson, 2017).

In addition, KIN and North Ayrshire also encountered similar challenges. Early on, we identified simple things that could be done to encourage kindness; and yet we noticed a difficulty in moving from thoughtful discussion to practical action. In almost all cases, whether people were working in the sphere of 'communities' or 'organisations', the barriers that emerged were found in systems, procedures and regulations. Building on Julia Unwin's work, this has only strengthened our appreciation of the scale of the challenge: kindness is not an easy, 'fluffy' topic, but something that questions the very heart of what is valued in society.

Because of the commonality between themes, learning and challenges, we report on KIN and North Ayrshire as one coherent narrative. We do so in the knowledge that we were not independent observers, but facilitators and, at times, active participants in the process. We are also aware that change is messy, and we do not claim credit for all or any of the changes that have been made: what we do hope, is that by creating time and space, we have helped to cultivate ideas and thinking; and that by sharing learning in this report, we can continue to build a coalition of people who are committed to kindness as a value and practice that can improve wellbeing for all.

This report is enriched by the conversations, stories and practical initiatives of some of the people we have worked with over the last 12 months. We could not possibly include everything we have heard; and yet it has all contributed to our understanding and thinking. For this reason, we decided not to name individual people, and instead retell their experiences in the collective 'we'. But we would like to express our gratitude to the hundreds of people who have engaged with our work over the past 12 months, and provided the opportunity to think deeply about the role of kindness in such a wide range of contexts.

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3. Creating the conditions for kindness in communities

The Place of Kindness (Ferguson, 2017) charted work with seven organisations in different communities across Scotland to try to identify what helps to encourage kindness. The key factors that emerged were 'informal opportunities', 'welcoming places' and 'values of kindness'.

We have further explored these themes in KIN and North Ayrshire: we have gathered evidence and created examples that point to ways in which we can help to create the conditions for kindness (an important distinction in language, as we realised this was not about telling people *how* to be kind, but rather allowing kindness to be expressed). Importantly, too, we have learnt ever more about the limitations, and some of the barriers that make enabling kindness in communities particularly difficult.

Informal opportunities

Our work over the last 12 months has built on the understanding of kindness as essentially unobligated, and yet contingent on the social and physical characteristics of places and spaces, and the opportunities that people have for social interaction (Anderson, et al., 2015a; Brownlie & Anderson, 2017). As we highlighted in *The Place of Kindness* (Ferguson, 2017), it is often the informal nature of interactions that provide the opportunity for authentic connection. Over the course of this work, we have asked many people who are socially isolated or lonely if they go to any groups or activities to meet others, and often the answer is 'that's not for me' or 'I don't like anything organised'. There is a big gap between being isolated or lonely and taking up the very opportunities designed to help you participate in society. We think that informal opportunities to engage and interact are important. People we spoke to valued the interactions they experienced

shopping each day at their local supermarket, or passing time with a neighbour in a shared garden. Those interactions had value in themselves but also often built into more significant relationships and enabled people to connect with others and activities in the community.

At KIN, the theme of 'kindness on a plate' allowed us to explore the unique power of food to create these informal opportunities, and act as a catalyst for relationships. That food brings people together is not new, but the 🤝 **Food sharing** mini-KIN were able to examine *what it is* about sharing food that is so powerful. We realised that, without being explicit, food is a key component of so many of our relationships – and it is perhaps the informal nature of a shared meal that enables kindness. As well as this, we noticed that the food itself has a story, one that is personal and therefore has the capacity to create connection and understanding between people from different backgrounds. There is something about the act of *sharing* food, where people are vulnerable, and which allows everyone to contribute something and feel valued, that fosters trust and acceptance in a way that does not necessarily happen in other social activities.

A number of examples point to the impact of sharing food in communities and organisations, as well as the 'key ingredients' for success. A regular shared lunch at the Port of Leith Housing Association has built meaningful relationships between local residents who did not really know each other, and many of whom were socially isolated and did not engage in community

activities. Importantly, its success had much to do with the support of the housing association to get things off the ground, the drive of one local resident who championed the lunch and the community, and the availability of a 'welcoming space' – provided by a local community trust – in which to congregate.

We have also seen how shared eating can change the culture of workplaces. At the Grassmarket Community Project, employees and volunteers at all levels of the organisation stop work at the same time every day to eat lunch together; they report an enormous difference in how people feel about each other, which has led to a happier, more productive and collaborative workplace. This initiative is obviously made easier by the presence of a commercial kitchen on site, and it would not be feasible for this to be a daily activity at many organisations. But it does also point to the importance of creating space and time for people, and the power of food to create a more informal and comfortable environment that builds trust, relationships and kindness.

In North Ayrshire, the ❓ **Why not?** group wanted to challenge the risk culture that can often get in the way of people coming together. We contacted around 400 people who had participated in interviews in various community settings in the first stages of the Ayrshire Community Trust's 'Be Inspired' bid to the Scottish Government and stated that they would be keen to be more involved in their community. We only got a handful of tentatively positive responses and decided to hold open community meetings. When we did not get take up for those meetings, we decided to go back to first principles. Recognising that what we were trying to do was encourage informal interactions, rather than provide organised opportunities, we decided to hold high teas in the street in Saltcoats, Irvine and Kilwinning, to chat to people about their experiences of connections and kindness in communities. We had some fascinating conversations confirming much of what we had been discussing about why people do not engage as much as they might informally, but mostly some lovely random chat over tea and cake. On reflection after our high teas, we felt it had been fun and maybe even important to start just talking to people very informally, but that to initiate any kind of meaningful change would require some form of organisation.

Throughout these activities, a complex interplay emerged between the importance of informality and the need for somebody or something to

initiate and drive things forward. Many people spoke to us about a lack of connectedness in their communities – and complained that 'nobody is doing anything about it'. The idea that this sense of togetherness, of kindness, is somebody's job to provide, may seem to contradict the narrative around informal opportunities. But rather, it points to the structural factors that enable kindness.

In the examples above, there were two key factors that created the conditions for kindness. Firstly, 'informal' opportunities often depend on someone to drive things forward, lead by example, and champion a set of shared values. Secondly, opportunities for connection are contingent on our physical environment. Simple interventions around sharing food, activities and conversations can have a powerful impact on bringing people together; but fundamentally they rely on the presence of neutral spaces in which people feel comfortable. And so, as we think about the value of informal opportunities, it is equally important to think about the places and spaces in which they happen.

Welcoming places

The places people have to meet, gather or simply bump into each other are important. We know that people need 'agenda free' places; they need to just be, have a cup of tea, and chat (Ferguson, 2017).

Building on themes that emerged in *The Liveable Lives Study* (Anderson, et al., 2015b), both KIN and North Ayrshire looked at how to create those neutral spaces, in both communities and public spaces, and within workplaces and institutions. Our work on 'activating' and 'unlocking' spaces highlighted examples of low key interventions that can change perceptions of places and encourage connections.

The **Activating spaces** mini-KIN started by thinking about the community value of 'sitooteries' – shared spaces that allow the possibility for connection – and recognising that there are ever fewer physical spaces to be together. We have seen how initiatives like 'Breathing Space' benches, The Friendly Bench™, and 'public living rooms' can change the nature of places and 'give people permission' to be kind.

However, while these initiatives seem simple and easy to do, they can become tied up in more complicated decision-making processes around transport and infrastructure planning. For example, Living Streets told us about Burnfoot in Hawick, where older residents were not participating in wider community life because the area was too hilly. Looking carefully at how the space worked, they were able to identify strategic locations for twelve benches, so that residents could stop and rest on the way to accessing public transport. The intervention itself will provide access to transport and increase places to sit and connect; but the process of engaging with the community has already helped to build relationships between residents and bus drivers, and connect older residents to their neighbours. It is a simple change, but

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one that demonstrates that kindness requires a significant investment in building relationships and understanding the needs of people (Architecture & Design Scotland, 2019).

We also saw the impact of physical space and how simple interventions to adapt our environment can change the nature of interactions within organisations. In *Conversations with young people about kindness* (Young Scot, 2019), which was run alongside KIN, participants spoke about furniture, uniforms and design that reinforced the rules, structures and culture of the school environment. They believed that simple things, such as colour, comfortable seating, and a creative and flexible approach to space would increase positivity and improve relationships. They encouraged us to 'write the rules with kindness in mind'.

At the University of Glasgow Library, working in partnership with the University's Student

Representative Council, they aimed to do just that, by introducing a number of initiatives – a 'kindness wall', a family study room and a community fridge – as part of a broader culture shift to make the library a more comfortable, informal space that encouraged interaction between staff and students. These activities were valuable in themselves, creating spaces for connection. But they were also part of a wider shift in attitudes, which broke down perceived barriers and 'enabled people to be kind to each other'. The example of the University of Glasgow Library highlighted how small initiatives and visual cues can provide the opportunities for kindness; yet they are also dependent on wider organisational cultures that govern those spaces (which can be harder to achieve in some organisations than others).

In North Ayrshire, the 🔑 **Unlocking spaces** group also identified a number of initiatives to transform perceptions of a place. In one

village Co-Op, on a Friday morning before ten the alcohol aisle becomes a cafe with tea and cake available to anyone who wants to sit down and chat. The libraries team at North Ayrshire Council have run a number of library sleepovers for groups of children and young people. While these initiatives only change the space for a contained period of time, there is something about the uniqueness and peculiarity that encourages, and gives permission, to connect with people in a different way.

We also found some differences between volunteer and statutory run spaces in communities. We noticed that volunteer led spaces tended to be open longer and had more 'agenda free' use in terms of people just coming in to spend time with others. Local authority run spaces tended to be used more for specific groups at set times due to lack of resources. The greater freedom in the third sector, relying often on volunteers, was noted in many of our conversations as the basis of positive, inclusive spaces. (However, this was not always the case: in one example relayed to us, a volunteer-led community space was returned to local authority management due to tensions between the organising committee and the community as a whole.)

We have come across a range of creative examples of welcoming places; however, it has proved much harder to apply some of the features that 'activate' or 'unlock' spaces in environments that do not work as settings for interactions and relationships. A crucial discussion about the relationship between the local authority and citizens started from thinking about the Bridgegate Customer Service Centre as a place. The atmosphere there can be tense, as customers can be dealing with difficult circumstances and issues with services. Staff are the point of contact with the Council but rely on other departments to resolve problems.

We discussed the possibility of changing the atmosphere by changing the way the place looks. We used the example of Markinch railway station, in basic respects a standard ScotRail station, all glass, tiles and stainless steel furniture. However, it also has, courtesy of its award winning manager: a lending library, pictures, a toy corner, flowers in the bathroom and music coming from a vinyl record player. When we visited, by chance, the station was busy with people chatting as they bought tickets: noticeably, no one used the machine to buy a ticket, and in fact some people appeared to not be using the station for travel at all, but just popping in for a chat.

Staff involved in consultation on changes to the customer service centre in North Ayrshire, however, had a strong preference for limiting access and controlling the environment. The staff wanted barriers between themselves and customers, a security guard, and a private room for those registering births and deaths to provide privacy. Concerns about safety have to been considered in detail, and managers have a duty to protect staff from violence, bullying and harassment from customers. On the other hand, we are aware of cases where high pressure environments have been opened up with a result in lowering the incidence of negative behaviour. One example we came across was the community hub model in Monmouthshire, Wales, which has successfully integrated the core provision of a service centre or 'one stop shop' with library and community education, combining this with a more flexible and responsive approach to 'customer service'. This suggests that the balance is not fixed but something that can be addressed by careful design and management. Creating a welcoming place in a high pressure environment like a local authority customer service centre, where people often come with problems, is without doubt more challenging than doing so in the relatively benign environments of a train station or university library, but that does not mean that it cannot be done. We pick up on this example again later on.

Questioning values

Questioning what sort of society and communities people want to live in has emerged as important in our work. Many older people we spoke to in the first phase talked about missing a sense of neighbourliness which goes beyond what many of us would think of as normal nowadays. This generational view of the past is supported, to some extent, by data that suggests older people are more likely to experience and reciprocate kindness than younger age groups (Wallace & Thurman, 2018). It is important not to get caught up in nostalgia and to recognise that (primarily) women cared for others because they were less likely to be working, and caring was part of the societal expectation of their role in the community. But also, that people cared for each other because there was no safety net of state welfare – and in those circumstances many went uncared for. Changes in the labour market combined with an ageing population and shifting expectations of equality (both in terms of women's roles and the provision of care), have made this unsustainable. However, it is also true that many people, not just older people, have spoken to us about a lack of connectedness in their communities.

Young people, too, recognised the importance of kindness and told us about the influence of social norms on behaviour (Young Scot, 2019). Picking up on the idea that kindness might not be seen as 'cool', they identified a need to talk about kindness – with peers, parents, teachers – to improve relationships and influence behaviour. We have found that simply thinking about kindness has an effect on what we notice and how we act; and conversations are an important part of encouraging and validating kindness.

We have prompted thinking and conversations directly through our continuing exploration, and we have also noted other examples of a growing movement. In general there is a lot of goodwill around the message of kindness. Young

people involved in North Ayrshire Youth Services, including Modern Apprentices and Year of Young People Ambassadors, began last summer to paint and hide 'Kindness Rocks' for people to find. When found, people posted on social media and replaced the rock for someone else to find, or kept it and painted their own to hide. They were found as far away as the United States and prompted many to think about kindness.

The theme of 'Kindness Rocks' was picked up by two clergymen in North Ayrshire for their annual Christmas video (Irvine Times, 2018), which aimed to challenge perceptions of people through a storyline where a gang of bikers stop to help an elderly lady cross the road (footage which was captured by a bystander and subsequently viewed several million times on social media across the globe). We see this goodwill mirrored in the 2018 St Andrew's Day celebrations, which focused on 'making someone's day' (Visit Scotland, n.d.); and in the trial of an app to encourage visitors during Edinburgh's festival season to carry out 'small acts of kindness', such as picking up litter or giving someone directions, and use their phones to track and record their 'good deeds' (BBC news, 2018).

There is clear evidence of the ability of random (and often anonymous) acts of kindness to capture public imagination. But we have been keen in our work to prompt deeper thinking about enabling human connections and kindness. In North Ayrshire, when a member of staff returned to work after a period of sick leave, they found someone had placed a 'Kindness Rock' on their desk, and this eased the anxiety around their return. This was an anonymous act, but it was not random; and the reason it had such a positive impact was the knowledge that someone in their team was thinking about them on their first day back. And it was this, the relational quality of kindness, that we were keen to build on.

In North Ayrshire, the actual rocks have become part of a wider 'Kindness Rocks' movement with people who have been involved in a wide range of ways wearing badges that signify:

- I recognise the importance of kindness to myself, those around me, those I work with and those I serve
- I listen to people's needs and work with others to try to help in the round, not just doing my bit of the picture
- I share stories of kindness and call out unkindness

The young people have taken kindness as a theme for discussion through their Youth Council and other events and, supported by a Cabinet commitment to the Year of Young People legacy, are establishing 'Kindness Ambassadors' in schools across North Ayrshire.

Within North Ayrshire Council itself, from an away day discussion in the Economy and Communities Directorate in May last year, a group of around forty people volunteered to become Kindness Peer Researchers. They began by interviewing people in a wide range of areas and roles across the local authority about their experiences and thoughts on kindness. They have been critical in developing an in-depth understanding, which has guided developing approaches and also encouraged others to think about their roles and relationships. Just as participants in *The Liveable Lives Study* (Anderson, et al., 2015a) found that the act of noticing connections and small kindnesses began to change the way they thought and behaved, people engaging in interviews have often reported that they actually think differently about the focus on kindness, seeing it as more relevant and positive, having had a discussion with a peer researcher.

The question of values also occupied the thinking of many of our mini-KINs. Like the young people who spearheaded 'Kindness Rocks', **#Conversations** aimed to normalise kindness. Their discussions explored the use of campaigns, such as the Random Acts of Kindness Foundation's 'Random Acts of Kindness Day'; and the use of visual tools, such as postcard conversation prompts and 'gratitude walls'. But, while recognising that prompts and tools can act as catalysts, they increasingly looked at using conversations to ensure that kindness was a value that influenced the behaviour of people in organisations and the culture in communities.

Similarly, **Management & leadership**, built on the values in the National Performance Framework, and explored how to give people the confidence to 'bring their whole self to work' and to negotiate the complexities of human relationships without being bound by rules and procedures. For KIN participants from large, complex organisations, including the University of Edinburgh and the Scottish Government, creating space for those conversations was both a challenging (in terms of finding time) and critical activity – one that allowed people to question existing hierarchies and ways of working, and begin to develop a shared understanding across the organisation of what is important.

Societal justice, too, picked up many of the themes outlined in *Kindness emotions and human relationships* (Unwin, 2018) to explore how institutions have established working norms – often for very good reasons – that have unintentionally inhibited relationships and allowed certain people to be excluded. They looked at the importance of language: how talking about 'offenders' or 'the unemployed' can reduce people to labels; and how thinking about 'housing units' instead of 'homes' can disengage our emotional intelligence, and encourage artificial and transactional behaviours. This sort of

language can disincentivise kindness, especially in environments where relationships are more challenging due to the level of risk, need and demand. In the context of a national vision to be a society that treats *all* our people with kindness, there is a clear risk, then, that kindness is something that is experienced least by those who, arguably, need it most. Questioning the use of language is therefore at the heart of the shift in values and behaviours.

Exploring the tensions of kindness

Wider discussions at KIN, in North Ayrshire and at numerous conferences and gatherings over the last year have shaped our thinking and highlighted some of the tensions inherent in the way that we talk about kindness.

We have been concerned about talking about kindness in the midst of rising inequality and the broader context of austerity – and indeed it has, at times, been challenging to talk about kindness alongside unavoidable cuts to services. And yet, we have found a receptiveness to think about kindness in relation to poverty. Kindness is a value that is important for North Ayrshire – and for other local authorities, such as Calderdale Council (2019) – *because* poverty persists, despite their award-winning innovation.

There is a sense, therefore, that a focus on kindness might just provide a different framework that enables local and national government to improve outcomes and reduce inequalities. However, alongside this hope is a recognition that it is not just a means to an end but of value in its own right. Even if material outcomes do not change, North Ayrshire Council can still make a difference to day-to-day experiences.

This raises another tension: when we talk about informal opportunities and the public sector 'getting out of the way', there is a risk that the responsibility for kindness is abdicated to communities, that this encourages greater individual responsibility – for example in volunteers stocking and running food banks – and, in doing so, neglects structural inequalities. It is vital that communities have the space and support to act for themselves, but equally, they should not be expected to pick up the responsibility for tackling basic injustice.

Many have noted their continuing faith in the kindness of individuals and resisted a more complex discussion about structural barriers, both as a perceived criticism of communities and as a negation of the power of individuals. Whilst we agree that the values and behaviours of individuals are fundamentally important to making kindness more prevalent, we do not think we can rely solely on the individual. We have been clear that our work has not been about encouraging kindness in individuals where it does not exist, but about creating the conditions in which kindness is more likely. We know that – across the UK and Ireland – there are inequalities in experiences of kindness based on age, gender, social grade and ethnicity (Wallace & Thurman, 2018); all of which suggests that, left to individual responsibility, our kindness might be random and relational, but is far less likely to be a radical concept that links to attempts to tackle structural inequalities.

We have thought deeply about the role of systems and institutions in creating the conditions for kindness. In the evaluation of KIN, 61% respondents said that their behaviour had changed a great deal as a result of the process; yet only 16% reported that the culture of their communities and organisations had changed to
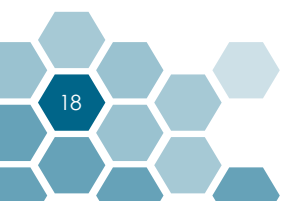
the same extent (Murray, 2019). This suggests, unsurprisingly, that organisational change is more difficult than individual change. But if a system is a collection of individuals, can it not be changed through individual behaviours, rather than overcomplicating things by thinking about institutions?

The next chapter focuses on some of the conversations that we had around influencing organisational culture. These discussions have been harder than we might have expected; we have come up against disagreement and challenge, including amongst those who are engaged in work on kindness. What perhaps

has validated these conversations, and the importance of kindness, is the leadership from the Scottish Government. At our final KIN event, Christina McKelvie, Minister for Older People and Equalities, told us that the 'government seeks both to encourage and be defined by kindness'; and noted that kindness is not something that can be mandated, but must instead by enabled. In both those points it is clear, then, that what the National Performance Framework is defining as kindness is beyond 'scaling up' acts of kindness between individuals (Anderson & Brownlie, forthcoming). It acknowledges that systems and structures have a role in enabling a culture in which kindness is more prevalent.

4. Developing organisational cultures to enable kindness

In KIN and North Ayrshire we have actively tried to tackle the barriers to kindness that we identified in *The Place of Kindness* (Ferguson, 2017) and *Kindness, emotions and human relationships* (Unwin, 2018).

We have learned more about the practical implications and challenges of our attitudes to risk, the impact of regulation and guidance, our reluctance to let go of performance management, and, perhaps as an addition to our earlier thinking, a sense of fear of radical kindness. We will discuss these before ending the chapter by highlighting practical steps to influence organisational culture in North Ayrshire Council, and elsewhere.

Attitude to risk

Over the last year we have regularly come across a reluctance to take risks in organisations. We have acknowledged the variability in attitudes to risk, the contrast in decisions and, in many cases, the detrimental impact on the ability for people to connect with each other, both in community and organisational settings.

In North Ayrshire we have noted contrasting approaches to risk between the public sector and community organisations. In the first instance, volunteers from the community with a donation of paint were not allowed to paint Whitlees Community Centre and instead had to wait for the Council to do it. In contrast, at the Three Towns Growers in Ardrossan, they served up barbecued deer, which a member shot and skinned, for Sunday breakfast for anyone who wanted to come along. What is surprising is not so much that these examples exist alongside each other – any time you mention them people will come up with any number of similar stories –

but that where it exists, the attitude to risk it so hard to shift.

A senior manager in community development in North Ayrshire talked with frustration about the, at times unnecessary, but particularly uneven approach to risk. They pointed to the lack of wider knowledge and time amongst frontline staff and volunteers to appropriately navigate the channels to challenge what are often historical rules or interpretation of rules. Where we found positive approaches, it seemed to rely on the ability to see the bigger picture, and confidence in taking decisions to support an inclusive ethos. The Three Towns Growers talked passionately about the space they wanted to create for the community and how that impacted on seemingly very simple decisions, such as ensuring the gates to the allotments were open every day from early to late, to allow anyone access. At first, they had to challenge views of some members who were afraid of vandalism. But that initial decision has shaped others and grown into a shared ethos, which has created a widely used and valued community space, recognised in its positive impact by a substantial award of funding from the National Lottery Community Fund to develop a learning resource on site. In both our 🔑 **Unlocking spaces** and ❓ **Why not?** groups, we hoped to challenge some of this thinking and to find examples where people were 'feeling the fear and doing it anyway'; but again, found it difficult to move from highlighting examples of more positive approaches to risk, to changing overly cautious attitudes where they exist.

Another feature we have noticed in the way people think about risk is that, where risk is high, it tends to be better managed. At a forensic mental health unit in North Ayrshire, we were struck by how much thought goes into the importance of connections and relationships for patients. The manager talked about one patient who had been convicted of homicide and, in doing so, cut himself off from relationships with his mother and siblings. They talked about the damage both done by and done to this patient and, ultimately, the lifelong sentence of destroying any existing relationships and being unable to make others. They also viewed modern nursing, particularly in forensic mental health, as being about far more than kindness and, in fact, challenged whether that is a relevant central concept at all. Having said that, within very tight regulation and procedures to manage safety, the team do go as far as they can to enable connections and to provide hope, resulting in at first glance perhaps surprising decisions, and amongst the lowest rates of violent incidents and need for restraint in any unit in Scotland. That feels like kindness, but perhaps the word doesn't sit well in an environment where people have come to be valued on specialist skill and professionalism.

In contrast, where the risk is lower, we perceived that decisions tend to err on the side of caution. We have wondered if when the risk is higher the benefit of creating connections and kindness might also be higher, making it a more worthwhile investment to think about. In so many cases like Whitlees Community Centre, it feels like much could be achieved by even a small investment in thinking about potential benefits – or the risk of *not* doing something – rather than risk management. Where the risk is high, it is easy to articulate the importance of kindness: as professionals, we know that it is relationships that help people recover, and we can balance the risk accordingly. We are less proficient at conveying the importance of *everyday* relationships (Anderson, et al., 2015a).

But if Scotland is to achieve its aim of creating 'inclusive, empowered, resilient communities' (Scottish Government, 2018), there is a need to appraise the potential benefits of community action, as well as the possible risks; accept a measure of uncertainty, and, at times, simply 'get out of the way'.

Centrestage Communities, working across Ayrshire, provides a masterclass in the impact of thinking differently about risk. They bring together young people who are disengaged from school, people with dementia and people with experience of the justice system, with the wider community to participate in a range of arts-based activities. The simple decision to bring together diverse groups, challenging our knee-jerk reactions about potential harm between those groups, creates a dynamic and connections which nurture all those involved. Their energetic Chief Executive talks passionately about her inability to teach the way she wanted to in mainstream education, and her need to challenge the rules. She is now recognised as an award winning leader. We have wondered if there is value in focusing less on what makes such leaders extraordinary, and more about what would make that behaviour normal across services.

Impact of regulation and professional guidelines

It has been fascinating to hear so many stories of people breaking the rules to do the right thing. In discussion with frontline health and social care teams in North Ayrshire, one woman working with young people in the criminal justice system talked about how she often saw young people at rock bottom and although her guidelines said not to, the only human reaction was to hug them. She wondered, with great insight, how many interactions those young people might have had in the previous week, month or even years, in their community but particularly with

services; and if each of those interactions had been just a little more human, perhaps the crisis could have been avoided. It is hard for someone dealing with the crisis to avoid the relational, it is right there at the surface, and often people are trusting judgement and instinct rather than guidelines or procedures. But shifting from transactional to relational behaviours further upstream – in Jobcentres and GP surgeries, from social workers and housing officers – might just help to avoid the pressure on those dealing with crisis.

It is one thing to break rules as an exemplary leader of an innovative organisation like Centrestage; it is quite another in a frontline service position to feel that doing the right thing is contrary to the professional code. In conversation with health and social care staff, some felt that it was easy to ignore the rules and trust their judgement, but that seemed to depend very much on experience and confidence. For many, being confronted with an emotional situation, the fear of doing the wrong thing might lead to the safety of acting within guidelines. It is also interesting to note that, even those who appear confident in relying on their judgement can feel that there are boundaries which are never crossed, for example giving a client a personal phone number. This indicates that the answer cannot lie solely in developing confidence and leadership in professional groups, but that rules and guidelines can have an impact beyond encouragement to apply judgement.

Examples in *Kindness, emotions and human relationships* (Unwin, 2018) also highlight that in choosing to break the rules, many frontline staff are putting themselves at risk of disciplinary action. Research on love in early learning and childcare adds another dimension to this, finding that staff who provide 'love-led practice' often feel that in doing so, they are undermining their professional integrity (Malcolm, 2019).

Reluctance to let go of performance management

The issue of whether you can, or should, measure kindness, came up in many of our conversations with managers. The current system of public services, and contract management with third and private sector providers, privileges what can be measured, leading many to argue that 'what matters is what gets measured.' Within a system, leaders can flip this logic and measure what actually matters, focusing on improvements to people's lives (Stiglitz, et al., 2009). Kindness is interesting within the conversation about public sector performance management because it is both a value espoused by leaders, and a way of measuring something that is often considered intangible – how a service feels to those who use it. This is quite different from a satisfaction measure, and a question more easily transferable to service settings than questions focusing on dignity, respect and fairness (as important as those are). The counter argument is that kindness is still too subjective, too personal to be taken seriously as a measure of performance.

In 2018, the Trust published data showing that we can measure kindness in a statistically valid way (Wallace & Thurman, 2018). Following this experiment, the Scottish Household Survey now contains a question that asks whether people agree that people are kind to each other in their neighbourhood (Evans, 2018). This doesn't measure whether the services people receive are kind, but it does show a willingness from the Scottish Government to consider the quality of relationships as an important contributor to national wellbeing.

Over the past 12 months, we have heard many conversations around the impact of an overreliance on targets and performance measures as a barrier to delivering services that meet the needs of people. Particularly in the public sector, performance management places people under pressure to deliver under

increasingly difficult circumstances, crowding out the space for innovation. Our analysis is that traditional performance management indicators drive out a focus on relationships. The question then becomes, whether to change the indicators or, change the system.

The impact of narrow performance management indicators was a particularly prevalent theme in the work of the 🤝 **Procurement & commissioning** mini-KIN, which spoke to a wide range of service providers and procurement professionals. In the delivery of Fair Start Scotland, we heard about the challenge of delivering policy ambitions, which emphasise a flexible and personalised approach, and are underpinned by values of kindness and dignity; and the reality of contract management, which is bound by specific and restrictive KPIs that can limit the autonomy that is required to provide a service that is tailored to individual circumstances.

This was a story that was echoed in a range of case studies and conversations. Some service providers, such as Start Scotland and Cornerstone (Lowe & Plimmer, 2019), are working alongside commissioners to convey the value of a different approach to measuring 'success'. However, in general, kindness in frontline services continues to happen in spite of procurement and commissioning practices, rather than because of them, and many providers feel constrained by a focus on targets and outcomes.

This is particularly important in a context where the majority of public spend is by the private hand, and a primary indicator of value appears to be unit cost (CLES, 2018). Discussions about 'the human aspect of procurement' focused on questioning what we mean by 'value', and advocating greater investment in relationships – both between commissioners and service providers, and service providers and citizens – in order to embed kindness in service delivery and improve experiences and outcomes.

Fear of radical kindness

At KIN, we heard how the University of Glasgow Library was able to create welcoming, inclusive spaces through very low-level changes and by prioritising kindness and relationships. However, this became more challenging and complex in other settings, where the nature of the service, relationships and workload pressure affected the way that people responded to ideas around kindness.

Returning to the example of the Bridgegate Customer Service Centre, the staff's expressed need for barriers and security, rather than a more informal feel, appears to raise questions about radical kindness – at least in contexts where staff might not expect to have those demands placed on them. On the surface of it, the Customer Service Centre is about transactions: high volumes of people with lots of queries from different parts of the Council to be sorted out. It is designed for efficient flow to manage those transactions. Except that it is often not about simple transactions: it is about people's lives, and often about a problem which has become the last straw, on top of circumstances made ever more difficult by austerity. When the response to the problem is that it cannot be easily resolved, or that it has to be referred elsewhere, it is not surprising that tempers are lost. It's easy to understand the desire of staff to feel safe and to maintain some distance.

It is important to recognise that it's not as simple as applying lessons learnt in the University of Glasgow Library, where the level and diversity of need, and consequent distress and antagonism, do not compare. Kindness is a far more radical concept at the Customer Service Centre than in a university library. Yet, if we could combine some of this with the attitudes towards risk and professionalism demonstrated by those who deal with crisis, and provide the support and flexibility to make each interaction more human, it could have a significant impact both on the wellbeing of the team and on avoiding crises further downstream.

We have spoken to many people who understand and recognise the importance of embedding relational values in services. For example, much work has been done to listen to how people feel they are treated in the development of Scotland's social security services. While this is well-articulated at a policy level, we found that it was much more challenging to take the (considerable) risks that are required to change the systems and structures that currently govern organisations.

Among leaders, there can be a conflation of kindness as weakness, particularly in environments where there is pressure to reduce costs and meet targets (Murray & Gill, 2018). This pressure can also affect the decisions of those commissioning services, where we have seen an unwillingness to let go of the traditional metrics that measure success. Among middle management, too, allowing frontline staff the flexibility to 'step outside' formal roles and move away from rules and procedures feels risky (Anderson, et al., 2015b). Not disregarding the complexity of balancing procedure and human response, flexibility and targets, there is a sense of 'fear' about embracing radical kindness.

Practical steps

It is important to recognise the scale of the challenge, which demands rethinking the systems and structures of over three decades of new public management that, collectively, have crowded out kindness (Unwin, 2018). Despite this, discussions at KIN have focused on what can be done at an organisational level to make kindness real.

Within the 👥 **Management & leadership** mini-KIN – and indeed driven by 💬 **#Conversations** – we have recognised the central importance of conversations. Over the course of the year, more and more people have told us about creating space within their organisation for conversations about values, and about different initiatives to challenge existing hierarchies and structures. The Trust has at times been a part of this, helping to facilitate conversations around how to make these values real.

Similarly, 🤝 **Procurement & commissioning** have taken conversations about kindness to national conferences, to contract managers, and to departments within the Scottish Government. This work has highlighted that investing in relationships throughout the process can reduce the impact of competition and the focus on price as the primary indicator of value, and ultimately deliver better outcomes. All of these conversations have recognised that, if kindness is to become a value that is present in frontline services, it is something that has to run through organisations' processes.

KIN has validated these conversations. By taking people out of their normal environments and creating the space to share experiences and ask difficult questions, it has provided the assurance that other people are on the same journey, and thereby the confidence to challenge existing structures. It has also been lent significant weight by the National Performance Framework, which was published mid-way through the project. The inclusion of kindness as a central value, the visible support from the Permanent Secretary, as well as the wider global movement, has given kindness credibility, and afforded people the permission to have serious conversations about kindness in organisations, in leadership, and in public policy.

In North Ayrshire, we have looked at the influence of organisational behaviours on communities and increasingly recognised shifting organisational culture as the key to creating the conditions for kindness. Involving a wide range of people from public and third sector organisations and communities, we articulated what we think it might take in practical terms to make kindness feel real for people in workplaces and communities. This is set out in the North Ayrshire Kindness Promise.

FIGURE 4: NORTH AYRSHIRE 'KINDNESS PROMISE'

NORTH AYRSHIRE 'KINDNESS PROMISE'

We will strive to create the conditions for kindness in our organisations and for the people we serve by:

- trusting our staff to make meaningful connections with people
- protecting time and creating spaces for people to come together
- listening to people's needs and finding solutions in the round, not just addressing our bit of the picture
- creating opportunities to recognise and celebrate kindness
- creating a culture where people are more important than processes and enabling unkindness to be called out
- ensuring our performance management aligns with our values and committing to ask our staff and those we serve if they experience kindness

The Promise is a set of principles for organisations in North Ayrshire to 'strive towards' – language that recognises that this culture shift is something that will take time and significant work. It foregrounds the importance of trust and flexibility in enabling staff to act in kindness, recognising that organisations and services are at their best when frontline staff have the autonomy to relate to people as individuals (Anderson, et al., 2015b). By putting 'people over processes', it provides a platform for organisations to find a balance between procedure and flexibility, taking into account the range of organisational and service provision contexts.

It is clear, then, that this comes not from teaching people to be kind, but trusting them to be themselves, creating room for judgement, and acting beyond the transactional and the procedural. We recognise that it needs permission and time to grow, and that creating a culture of kindness requires spaces and opportunities to recognise, reward and value the actions of staff and colleagues.

During 2019, our focus is on implementing this promise. We will build on the networks that we have developed so far, engaging widely across public, private and third sector organisations. We will encourage and support organisations to make these initial practical steps towards a different approach, and to share stories of change.

5. Tackling what gets in the way

Thinking about how to overcome some of the barriers in organisational culture as we continue our work in North Ayrshire, it seems worth focusing particularly on the issue of risk and asking how we might prompt a shift in thinking.

In doing so, we are indebted to Larraine Miles, who spoke freely about the emerging themes from her research on risk and local government; and to Professor Roger Willey, who talked in depth about a career in risk management, stemming from his childhood in the Rhondda Valley and a desire to do something about the chronic illnesses which had blighted the lives of so many of his family.
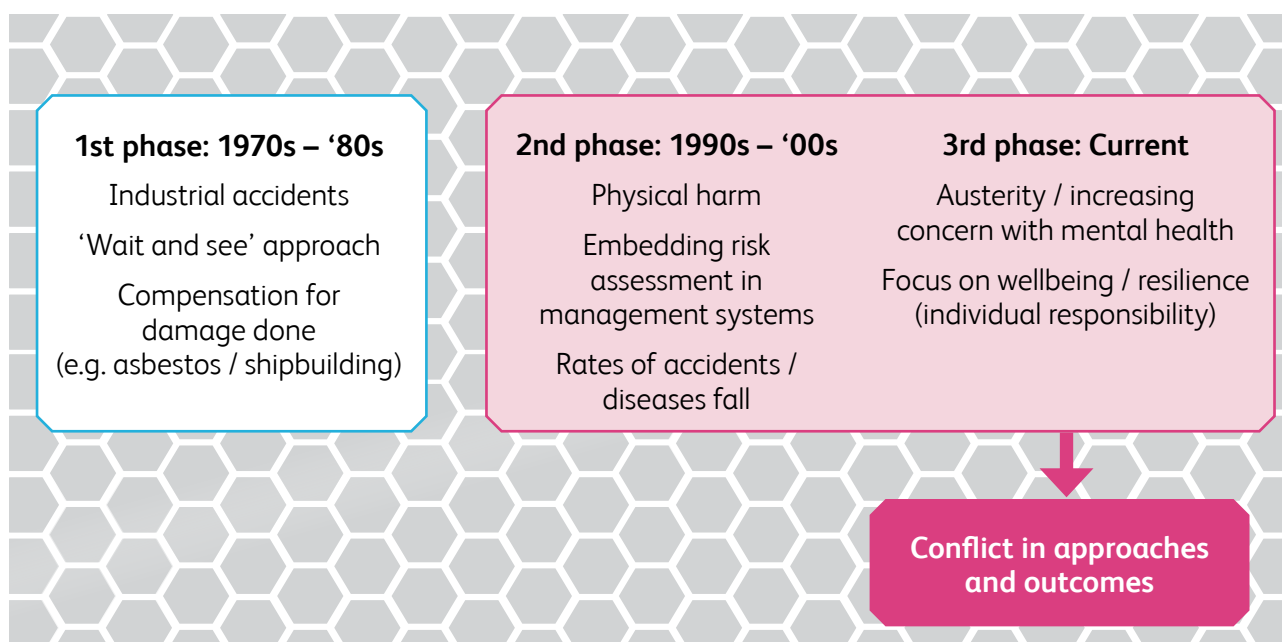
In the late twentieth century, risk has emerged as an increasingly influential driver of decision-making, particularly in (public sector) organisations providing goods and services, which is linked to the falling levels of trust in institutions (Beck, 1992). Looking at how attitudes have evolved, in the first phase, following industrialisation, organisations were concerned with accidents and the impact of hazardous substances. We see the development of legislation to make industry responsible but a 'wait and see' approach of compensation for damage done.

In the second phase, from the 1990s, driven by the increased awareness of professional errors and rising costs, risk assessment was embedded in management (Horlick-Jones, 2005). In the public sector, amid the wider context of new public management techniques, this was achieved through the appointment of 'professional risk managers', and an increase in regulation and surveillance. As the corresponding fall in levels of harm attests, this has been largely successful.

Yet, in the third phase, we see the impact of de-industrialisation, compounded by the financial collapse and subsequent austerity. Mental health problems have become an increasing concern in society, which, for employers, have been prioritised over some of the older diseases that risk management protected against. To some extent this has been recognised in an increasing focus on wellbeing at work – although this is largely couched as organisations supporting what is ultimately an individual responsibility, and their interest is arguably primarily resilience rather than wellbeing.

As a result, there is now a gap between what is perceived as risk and what organisations seek to manage. Our conversations around kindness suggest that we are still using approaches appropriate to the second phase, to avoid physical harm, without addressing harm to mental wellbeing. In many cases, what you might do to avoid the former conflicts directly with what you might do to avoid the latter. Further, because risk management is so embedded in organisational culture, frontline workers – and even senior officers – no longer have the autonomy to appraise *different* risks and make decisions according to a more emotionally intelligent assessment (Horlick-Jones, 2005). Returning to the example of the Whitlees Community Centre, the benefit that could have been achieved in terms of mental health and wellbeing by the community painting the hall themselves – building relationships, having fun, sharing a sense of achievement – does not seem to have been considered in the assessment of risk.

FIGURE 5: THE THREE PHASES OF RISK

1st phase: 1970s – '80s

Industrial accidents

'Wait and see' approach

Compensation for damage done (e.g. asbestos / shipbuilding)

2nd phase: 1990s – '00s

Physical harm

Embedding risk assessment in management systems

Rates of accidents / diseases fall

3rd phase: Current

Austerity / increasing concern with mental health

Focus on wellbeing / resilience (individual responsibility)

Conflict in approaches and outcomes

One of the drivers of this attitude towards risk, which emerged in discussions with public sector leaders across the UK, is its individualised nature. Society invests huge amounts of authority and accountability in individuals (both professional risk managers and chief officers). Because of the extent of public challenge when something 'goes wrong', and because all of this risk and responsibility is held by so few people, there is perhaps little wonder that there is a default adherence to rules and regulations and a general absence of flexibility. Radical kindness, therefore, demands both shared leadership, and a more nuanced conversation about risk: one that includes the public and media, and articulates risk not as something that can be prevented, but as something to be balanced and negotiated.

Austerity has also had an impact on the way in which organisations perceive risk. In North Ayrshire, we heard a presentation from What Works Scotland, outlining evidence of the impact of holiday hunger on the attainment gap (Campbell, et al., 2015). Colleagues around the table recognised the story of children returning to school, noticeably thinner and unable to concentrate, with the cumulative impact on them being significantly behind in attainment throughout their school career.

In North Ayrshire, there have been significant efforts to mitigate the impact of holidays on attainment, providing activities and food for children from families who cannot afford holidays and day trips. Local organisations were able to provide morning and afternoon holiday programmes; but to run over lunchtime, they would have been classed as a childcare facility, and as such subject to more stringent regulation, which would have made it prohibitively expensive.

When we discussed risk in relation to this example, the senior responsible officer acknowledged that it had to be their primary responsibility to ensure that regulations were followed to ensure safety; and others around the table agreed that, although in the past we might have provided care and food much more informally, it would not be appropriate to break from the regulations that are in place. This example highlights both the effect of individualised responsibility for safety within the context of existing regulations, and raises questions about the relevance of existing regulations, given the impact of austerity.

We need to be able to challenge the thinking behind such regulations. In this particular case, organisations were balancing the risk of potential harm in providing care and food outside of stringent regulation, with the known harm to a whole cohort of children, not just due to them going hungry, but of them not achieving their potential and that impact on their whole life experience. Rules that were developed when public budgets were plentiful and growing are being used to make decisions in a completely different context. This of course raises big questions about the morality of austerity, but in the absence of any immediate change in public resources, it surely also raises questions about what is considered to be 'a risk'.

In this vastly different context, there is an urgent need to rethink attitudes towards risk.

There is a growing recognition of these issues, which are often described as a need for more 'proportionate' risk behaviour, or an approach to thinking about risk 'appetite' rather than management. The problem in these approaches, though, is that they present the shift required as taking *more* risk – and as such many people do not feel comfortable. While organisations must continue to build on success in assessing and managing risk, there is a need to be more careful in analysing what is perceived as risk. If, as in North Ayrshire, the primary concern is tackling poverty and inequality, and within that, people have identified mental health as their biggest worry, then surely this should be at the forefront of risk assessment and decision making.

The Fairer Scotland Duty (Scottish Goverment, 2018) in fact provides a legislative basis and mandate to do this. In the context of unprecedented levels of public scrutiny and the (understandable) drive to protect professionals and organisations from reputational damage, it provides a framework to evaluate the impact of rules and regulations, and assess the risk of *not* doing something. The significance of the challenges created by poverty and austerity mean that the Fairer Scotland Duty needs to be used to support individual officers to make different decisions – decisions which may on the face of it appear to be riskier but, in fact, are just about reprioritising organisational values and outcomes.

6. Conclusion

We have learnt a lot in the last year about what we mean by kindness, why it is important and what can be done to encourage it in communities and organisations. KIN and North Ayrshire have both made valuable contributions to thinking and practice in this developing field: the former through the diversity and richness of conversations between a wide range of stakeholders, and the latter in its focus on poverty and the need for organisational change.

We have delved deeper into why this is so difficult, framing kindness as something that is radical. Radical in the sense that kindness is something to be discussed in the context of poverty and austerity, not as a distraction or even as mitigation, but integral to decision making. And radical in the sense that kindness demands rethinking the way that things are run and managed. When we started thinking about kindness in 2016, we looked at it through the lens of communities, wellbeing and resilience (Ferguson, 2016). We perhaps did not fully appreciate the scale of the challenge presented by kindness as a value: we do now.

Our work with KIN and in North Ayrshire has built on the work of Julia Unwin (2018), and helped to understand how embedded systems and structures inhibit kindness – in communities, equally as in organisations. While kindness *is* radical, and full of complexity and challenge, we have found that providing the time and space for conversations about doing things differently is a critical step towards change.

Our practical learning has taken place within the context of a vastly changing policy discourse. Bringing the two together, it is clear that the changes that can be made at a community and local level are limited by the need to make bigger shifts in attitudes and institutional structures. The practical examples that encourage kindness in communities and organisations – from informal opportunities and welcoming spaces, to

questioning values – can only achieve so much: they are contingent on 'organisational cultures', and thus, kindness demands institutional change. With the introduction of the new National Performance Framework, public bodies and other organisations in Scotland now have a license – and indeed a responsibility – to be bold in thinking about how they do this.

What started as a performance framework in 2007, looks on relaunch last year, more like a vision for Scotland. It has built on a wide range of views to become a statement of what kind of nation its people want to be. Kindness sits at the heart of it, expressing a new concern to see relational values at the heart of public policy, but also reflecting a much older story of Scotland's national identity that can be traced back to the Enlightenment. This contrasts with the paternalistic and instrumental language of the traditional welfare state, further signalling a shift to an 'enabling state'. These ideas were developed at the Kindness Sessions – a series of discussions about kindness and policy held at the University of Edinburgh (Anderson & Brownlie, forthcoming).

The language of vision is inspiring: the new Social Security Agency makes much of its commitment to dignity and respect; kindness appears increasingly as an objective of public policies; and, perhaps most notable in this space, the Independent Care Review and First Minister, very visibly, are calling for love in 'the care system'.
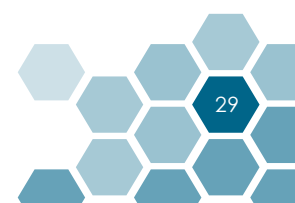
FIGURE 6: NATIONAL PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK (SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT, 2018)

The leadership statements around kindness and values are an important signal: crucially, they provide permission which did not exist when we started out with KIN and in North Ayrshire. But alone, they are not sufficient. Our work on 🤝 **Procurement & commissioning** and ⚖️ **Societal justice**, in particular, highlighted that there is currently a gap between what is stated as vision and what is measured and prioritised by performance management. We know that what we measure has a significant impact on behaviours (Stiglitz, et al., 2009). However, more needs to be done to fully understand what it takes to make values feel real, and to connect the leadership and vision with structural change.

What the National Performance Framework, the words of the First Minister and visible support from the Permanent Secretary have done, is given kindness credibility in serious discussions about policy and practice. It has given people

the confidence to challenge management styles, to take kindness to the heart of decision making of major institutions like the NHS, Procurement Scotland and North Ayrshire Council.

Yet, there is a tension between viewing kindness through a lens of individuals and communities versus institutions and structures. The need for systemic change should not cause inertia, nor diminish the importance of individual action: these are important, and do make a difference. At a global level, we have seen how a groundswell of individuals can power a wider movement towards compassion, love and kindness (see Figure 2). Through KIN and North Ayrshire, we have built a coalition of champions who are committed to driving kindness forward, through action in their communities, by challenging their organisations to think differently, and by bringing their humanity to their daily lives and work.

When we embarked on these projects we, perhaps unrealistically, anticipated practical application of learning, tests of change and, subsequently, guidance and toolkits. We have learnt so much more about what it is that helps to create the conditions for kindness; but we have also seen that this is not something that will be achieved through a checklist of actions. At KIN and North Ayrshire we have had wider, deeper and more challenging conversations about the type of communities, organisations and society we are striving towards. And while there is no silver bullet to extrapolate the tensions between kindness and relationships, risk and performance management, we know that, through these conversations, we have and will continue to move towards meaningful change.

So, we end not with recommendations, but with a call to action. To join us and continue this conversation, to refocus on what matters, to think radically, and to put kindness at the heart of the way we live and work.
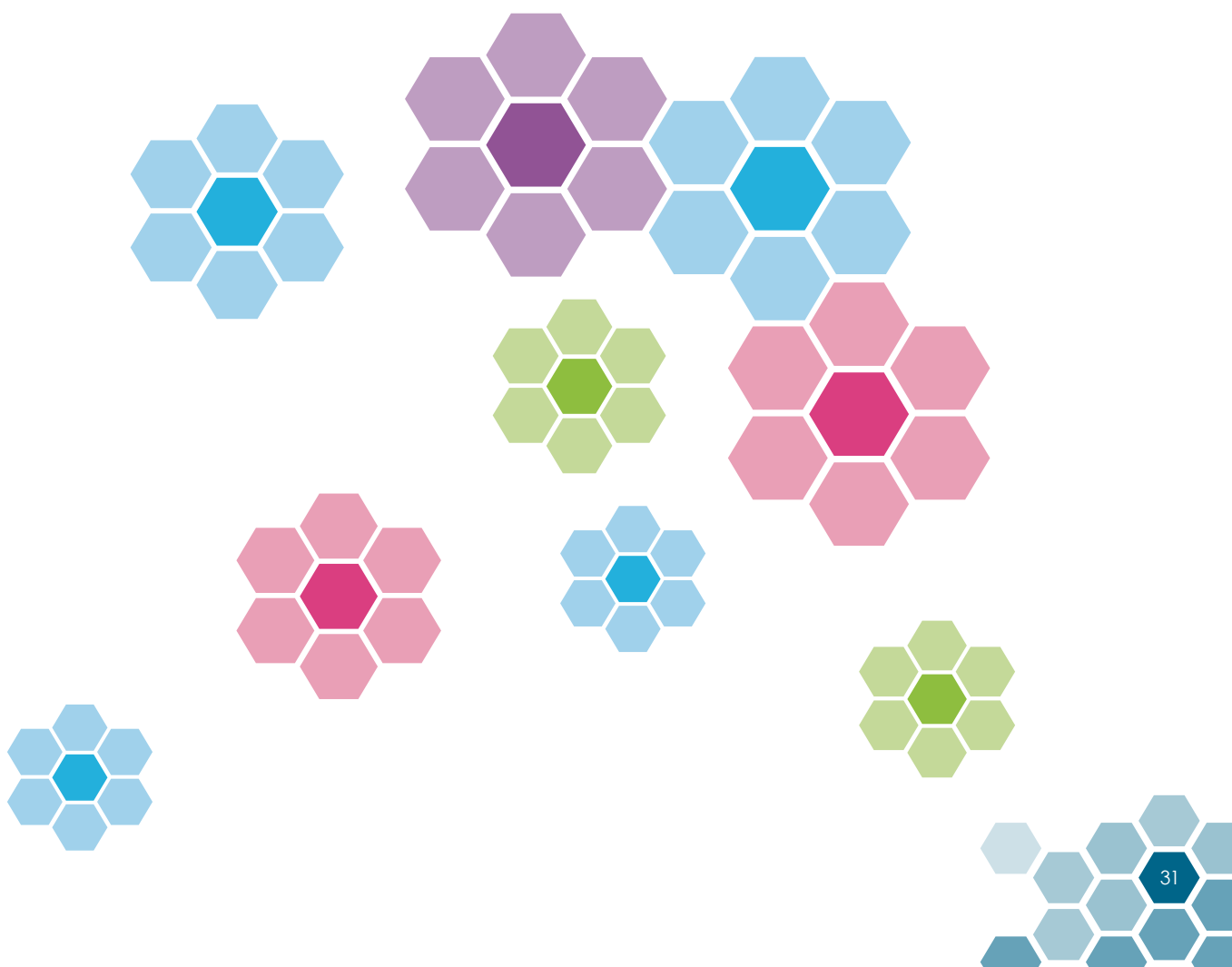
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organisational cultures professionalism trust dignity systems safety compassion inequality
performance management KIN organisations risk
conversations innovation Scotland place
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