

CHANGING OURSELVES IS BETTER THAN DEMANDING CHANGE FROM OTHERS

The best starting point is what we ourselves can do, putting the common good first and our vested interests last. The more we achieve, the more others will follow.

HOW DO WE MAKE CHANGE HAPPEN IN OUR OWN ORGANISATIONS?

INSIGHTS FROM BETTER WAY DISCUSSIONS

In 2017, we discussed in our London cells what it meant to be a Better Way organisation, or to lead one, and we quickly found ourselves radically challenging how things are done in the voluntary sector.

Many social sector organisations are part of the problem, we thought, bolstering a 'them and us' status quo, reinforcing deficit thinking, protecting their own privileges, and colluding with funders and policy makers to protect themselves as institutions rather than putting the interests of the people they work with first.

We also recognised that many organisations are trying hard to overcome this:

- Some do so by deliberately blurring the lines between staff, volunteers, service users, and creating a broad community united by a shared endeavour.

- Some are pushing against the boundaries of traditional organisational forms, creating flatter structures, focusing more on relationships, networks and collaborations, rather than 'professional' functions.
- Others are intentionally sharing knowledge and skills, adopting an 'open source' approach, and discovering that they can achieve more in that way.

'Organisations without walls'

Looking at this best practice, we concluded that we should be creating 'organisations without walls', whereby inherent competitive instincts and self-interest can be channelled towards collaborative and generous behaviours which are mutually advantageous. But changing organisational culture and behaviour is difficult. Resistance can come from

many quarters, and we need to be tactically astute, with a willingness to be tough and determined but also pragmatic, recognising that we are operating within an ever-changing and imperfect world.

We also thought we needed to practice 'radical listening' where our focus of attention is directed towards communities rather than government and funders. A willingness to attract and engage with diversity, building bridges within and across communities and identities, is not a nice-to-have, but a necessary condition for success, as to ignore this is to constrain and restrict the potential for social change.

The language we use to describe our organisations, our roles within them, and our purpose, can be instrumental in driving change, for good or for bad, our members thought.

'We need to tell a more honest story'

We need to tell a more honest story about what we can achieve. We should move away from making inherently spurious claims about our outcomes and impacts. Better to acknowledge that 'we sow seeds' which may or may not flourish, and that at best 'we walk with people' and with communities, help them take the direction they want, and take action to clear the paths of some of the obstacles they encounter.

To describe our work in these terms is not to diminish our efforts. Doing these things well is what drives and sustains social change. And excellence will not be achieved through imposed quality assurance frameworks, but rather through reflective practice based on an internal culture of honesty and clarity of purpose.

The essays in this section illustrate many of these and indeed other points.

'NO SPACE IN YOUR CERTAINTY FOR YOUR VOICE TO BE HEARD'



A PERSONAL STORY BY KATE WELCH

I'm a Southerner. I talk 'high faluting' according to a local councillor. I also know I'm not a naturally good listener, I'm full of good ideas – after all my Dad was a research and development electronics engineer so was always thinking of new inventions and I must have inherited some of that from him. He taught me to sing the Lambton Worm before we moved North. The words of the chorus go 'Whisht! lads, haad yor gobs', (=Be quiet, boys, shut your mouths) and are a great reminder of how to learn more from other people

Last year we were looking for premises for Gateway Wheelers, and came across the tithe barn in Houghton Rectory Park which was ideal for their new bike workshop. It was owned by Sunderland Council but in discussions the council told us that they would only consider a community asset transfer if we

took on the whole of the Grade 2* listed site of the Old Rectory and the tithe barn. After a short period of deliberation and a lot of work putting a business case and business plan together we negotiated a thirty year lease with an option to buy within five years. We've set up a new charitable company and applied for and already received grant funding from the Architectural Heritage Fund to explore the options for a full restoration programme into an enterprising building.

You might think that is great progress and a real achievement. A building was empty and is now in use and the council are delighted that an organisation with skills and experience has taken over the building.

Sounds like a perfect ending doesn't it? But perhaps not. While the

building was empty local people wanted to save it from going into private hands or worst of all being demolished.

The Friends of Rectory Park, a small community group of volunteers, made a bid to the council which went unanswered and were very anxious about what was going to happen to the building once we'd taken it over.

As you know I'm not from Houghton-le-Spring or even the North East. In order to be sure that we could become part of the community we started to listen as much as we could. We walked round Rectory Park with the Chair of the Friends and listened to all Sheila had to say. We invited the Mother's Union to afternoon tea with scones and cakes and even more listening. We've opened the doors to the community on several weekend events and we've already had over 5,000 visitors. We invited a number of local community leaders to an event to find out what was already happening, what the main issues were and to hear the ideas people had.

'I know I need to hear the voices of others so I stop myself rushing to solutions'

We've listened as much we can because although we have lots of experience we don't know what's best for people in Houghton-le-Spring. I heard a wonderful expression from Dr Louise Van Rhyn of Symphonia for Africa this week. 'No space in your certainty for my voice to be heard' and I've taken it to heart. I know I need to hear the voices of others so I stop myself rushing to the solutions that I think will work and just give others space to share their ideas and make their voices heard.

Changing ourselves is better than demanding change from others.

Kate Welch founded her first social enterprise, Acumen Development Trust, in County Durham in 2003. It has supported over 16,000 people to find jobs. Kate now runs [Social Enterprise Acumen CIC](#) which supports the start up growth and development of social enterprises in the UK and many other countries.

THE CATCH22 ENDGAME



A CASE STUDY BY CHRIS WRIGHT

Over the last 10 years Catch22 has established itself as a credible provider of a range of public services from Children's Social Care to Offender Management – a cradle to career proposition. The majority of this work is delivered through contracts procured via government (local and central) and government agencies. Much of it is heavily prescribed by the commissioner, overly specified, input-orientated with a focus on measuring outputs. This reflects adherence to an orthodoxy that's taken hold over the last 30 years, which is the antithesis to a relational, strength-based, approach. It's driven by a centralising, risk averse, statist philosophy, which 'designs out' trust, reciprocity and human agency. Self-reliance as the ultimate goal is undermined.

This is also the framework that governs the wider approach to public service delivery regardless of who delivers it. Success occurs more often in spite of the system than as a

facilitated consequence of it. Within this context we have tried to inculcate a culture across the organisation that recognises the pre-eminence of human relationships; that believes in doing what we say we are going to do; and values the wider capability which exists in the communities in which we work, and in those we work with.

'Treating people as recipients, processing their need, and measuring transactional outputs was not the way to change lives for good'

Last year we pivoted Catch22's business model to focus explicitly on the Endgame of 'government adoption', defined broadly. Through our public service delivery we would earn the authority and insight to improve the way things were done overall. This was informed by a paper co-authored by Alice Gugelev and Andrew Stern, published in 2015 by the Stanford Innovation Review: *'What's your Endgame'*. We

have long held a view that things need to be different, that our service delivery experience and exposure to those in receipt of our services consistently demonstrated that treating people as recipients, processing their need, and measuring transactional outputs, was not the way to change lives for good.

'Let's invest in testing and proving different approaches so in time the DNA of public policy is infected by practice and process that works – we can go viral!'

The Stanford paper provides a framework to re-imagine public services. It has informed a 'theory of change' which validates our delivery model. We are credible, we are efficient, we contribute to improving lives at the micro-local level, and we do this across the full range of possible life needs, cradle to career. This allows us to show policymakers that there are other ways of doing things: let's invest in testing and proving different approaches so in time the DNA of public policy is infected by practice and process that works – we can go viral!

An example of this is a project we delivered in partnership with Cheshire East Council, calling it Fact22. Project Crewe worked with children designated as children in

need under section 17 of the 1989 Children and Young People's Act. We made a modest change to the way this cohort of children were engaged in the care system: we worked directly with them and their families through practitioners and volunteers who didn't have to be social work qualified. The focus was on what was needed in their lives at that moment, and supporting them through community networks. The fact that this was considered radical shows how far the constraints of professional social work have moved us away from the vocation many of us trained in. It works. As of today this radical model has shown a thirty per cent reduction in social work caseloads, and more importantly deflected many children from acute intervention or entering the formal care system. The savings, in terms of resources and life-chances, are significant. By thinking differently, by recognising relationships matter most, and that there is capacity in the community that can be unlocked, we've not only helped to improve lives but demonstrated that a more human and less transactional approach delivers outcomes.

We have taken what we learnt in Crewe and expanded it into other areas of Cheshire, and more recently into Coventry. The Fact22 model exemplifies the three operating

principles that govern our approach to public service redesign. We have to be more human, we need to unlock the capacity that exists in our communities, while always ensuring we are locally accountable. My hope is that in a few years we can stop talking about Fact22 as a new model because it's just the way things are done.

The antidote to centralised, transactional, input focused service design and delivery is to transfer accountability to the most local level, believe in people's capacity to contribute, and to unlock the enormous amount of resources and capacity that exist across all our communities.

The Endgame for us all should be a re-imagining of the way public services support us, based on notions of trust, reciprocity, capacity and individual potential, and the importance of the relationship. To quote William Blake 'what is now proved was once only imagined.' Onwards.

Chris Wright is Chief Executive of [Catch22](#), the social business driving public service reform, and advocates for radical reform of a wide range of public services. Under his leadership, Catch22 has grown its work supporting others to transform their services, from advising government through to supporting and investing in big ideas and small delivery charities.

SOCIAL POWER: 'BE THE CHANGE YOU WISH TO SEE IN THE WORLD'



IDEAS FROM SUE TIBBALLS

It slips easily off the tongue to say these are not easy times for civil society. There are real challenges: funding cuts, money flowing to the top of the sector, almost daily attacks on charities in the press, the Lobbying Act, 'gagging-clauses' and so on. All of this has led to us demanding a lot of change from others – the Government, usually – and mostly without much effect.

So, this is a good time to pause and re-consider.

First, is it all as bad as we think? And, if there are things that are wrong, who is best placed to make it better? My answers to these two questions are: 'no' and 'us'.

There is no doubt, there has been a vigorous shaking of the tree in the last few years. Some good organisations have gone down. But most would also say that some

over-ripe and even bad apples have fallen. And that's no bad thing.

Total revenue to the sector is at record levels. Public appetite for social change is at a peak. There is a lot to play for politically. And despite the best efforts of *The Daily Mail*, the public still trusts charities more than business or politicians. We have a unique 'licence to operate' – civil society's most valuable asset.

So, things are certainly changing around us, but there is still a great deal to work with and the best of civil society is responding to the challenge. And they are achieving some truly remarkable things.

This is the headline finding from The Social Change Project – an initiative SMK has been running for the last eighteen months. Its remit was to understand how social

change is happening today, in order to strengthen civil society's future efforts. The project brought together a community of practice drawn from right across civil society – from service re-design to social movements – to consider this question.

The story that has emerged is that civil society is driving some extraordinarily powerful social change and is, indeed, where most significant change originates. At best, civil society is resourceful, innovative, thoughtful and kind. It gets upstream of problems, unlocks value, shares power and saves money. It does things in ways that both the state and the private sector struggle to do.

'We believe civil society holds huge untapped potential – a capacity for change that we have called *Social Power*.'

The evidence suggests that civil society holds the key to some of society's most pressing challenges: from issues like climate change to knife crime and street homelessness. Working optimally, we believe civil society holds huge untapped potential – a capacity for change that we have called **Social Power**. Yet this latent power is constrained.

Some of these constraints are external – notably challenges to

voice and campaigning from the current administration and also, and maybe even more fundamental, a misunderstanding of *value*. To see civil society as being the same as the private sector, and to have internalised the language and behaviours of commercial markets, has distorted and fundamentally de-valued civil society's work. Our report argues that civil society, when delivering genuinely transformative change (as opposed to transacting services) does not work in the same way as the private sector and should not be commissioned on the same basis.

However, the Social Change Project report identifies even more internal constraints. It argues that realising the full potential of civil society – unlocking Social Power – is something that sits with us more than with those around us.

These constraints include:

- a lack of focus on mission – organisations that have become more driven by money and model, than by what they exist to do. When fundraising is king, both principle and purpose are lost.
- internal cultures that are too focused on performance management rather than impact

–tracking of outcomes can distract from focus on mission, slow organisations down and prevent them from being flexible, adaptive and responsive.

- a lack of inclusivity and diversity in the sector, and not enough connection with the grass roots. If civil society does not reflect those we purport to serve, then we cannot do the work. Legitimacy is compromised, our learning weakened and capacity to effect change reduced.
- a lack of bold leadership. Change happens when civil society thinks big, and dares to challenge. There was a strong feeling in our community of practice that civil society needs more leaders willing to do this.

‘Not to call on others. But to take the lead ourselves. And take others with us’

The final report of the project, *Social Power: how Civil Society Can ‘Play Big’ and Truly Effect Change*, does give recommendations for ‘others’ – for government and for funders. But it has more for those of us in civil

society. The report encourages us to use our knowledge, our experience, our resources – our power – to drive the change we want to see. Not to call on others. But to take the lead ourselves. And take others with us.

The report gives recommendations to strengthen organisational reputation, strategy and culture for those who run organisations and for all of us it has also identified ‘The Twelve Habits of Effective Change-Makers’.

In the words of Ghandi:

‘If we could change ourselves, the tendencies in the world would also change. As a man changes his own nature, so does the attitude of the world change towards him... We need not wait to see what others do.’ That is our call to civil society today: ‘Be the change you wish to see in the world.’

Sue Tibballs is the Chief Executive of the [Sheila McKechnie Foundation](#) and has worked in the social change sector for twenty five years, chiefly in the areas of gender equality and environmental sustainability, both here in the UK and abroad, and in the private as well as voluntary sector.



How Civil Society can Truly Create Change

Drawn during an awayday to discuss SMK's Social Change Project, depicting how participants saw the opportunities and challenges
Illustration by Mel. Twitter @FeelGoodMel. Instagram @FeelGoodInsta

<https://feelgoodcom.org>

WHY WE NEED THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR'S COLLECTIVE EXPERTISE



IDEAS FROM MATT KEPPLER

You don't have to look far to see that our society is in decline. We have a government that imposes cuts. We have a population that donates charitably but is not giving anywhere near enough for us to meet the demand for our services. Worst of all, we see a growing demand for our services because the outlook for the most vulnerable people in our society is getting worse and it is happening on our watch.

'We have a wealth of expertise but are we harnessing it to its full potential?'

But we are a people to whom history hands moments like these as opportunities for significant turnarounds. Society owes much of what it takes for granted to the efforts of charities. Yet as individual people in individual organisations with individual priorities, we are stretched to the seams working to deliver positive outcomes with limited time and resources. Which means that

as a collective force for good, we are not well enough organised to catalyse social change on the scale we know our world requires. We have a wealth of expertise but are we harnessing it to its full potential?

My career has been in innovation, startups and charities. When assessing the likelihood of an initiative to succeed, you have to examine the initiative's ability to iterate; i.e. to receive feedback, learn from it and have the creative freedom to try again with an adapted idea. Take James Dyson, it took 5,100 iterations of the vacuum cleaner before it became the market leader in multiple countries. Iteration is about having the boldness to try something new, which can seem daunting in the charity sector given we rely on the goodwill of others to finance our operations and work in situations with little margin for error. We have to strike a balance between iteration and business as usual.

As with any collective undertaking, the key to achieving better outcomes often lies in smarter communication. As a sector, the world is our laboratory. Everything we do with every beneficiary we encounter is an experiment. We sincerely hope that our efforts will work but whatever we do will likely generate a mix of results; some positive, some negative, others neutral. How effective is the communication our sector uses to learn from this? We have conferences, training sessions, reports, social and traditional media, but how much of the stuff we hear really sticks? No-one monitors whether it does. We restrict the voices to whom we give a platform, to the tiny fraction of our collective workforce whom we consider to be the experts; the CEOs who speak on panels, the consultants who run training sessions, the heads of department whose opinions appear in articles.

In doing so we miss out on the expertise of over half a million people working in our sector who are experimenting everyday in their roles at the frontline of engagement with beneficiaries and stakeholders. How can we be surprised at the state of our society when our expertise as a sector is so fragmented? We have siloed our expertise in so many ways; by sector, organisation, department, seniority level and most sobering of all, at an individual level too. How many people working on the

frontline feel empowered to share their expertise with funders, policy makers, other organisations or even within their own organisation? And what faith would they have in that expertise being listened to and applied?

'Where is our Wikipedia for social change?'

Consider Wikipedia: the world's encyclopedia. Non-profit run, volunteer-powered and the fifth most visited website in the world. Wikipedia has democratised knowledge. Now anyone can find information on just about anything. Where is our Wikipedia for social change? Where is our aggregated expertise based on each of our interactions with beneficiaries and stakeholders. Where is our library of lessons learned, our repository of best practice, our online store of successes, our shared folder of failures? We live in a digital age where in our personal lives we experience the benefits of small seemingly irrelevant bits of data being brought together on a gigantic scale to make life easier on a daily basis. Products that match our interests are recommended to us by Amazon, our optimum route to work is scheduled by Google Maps, songs we've never heard before but are likely to love are easily discoverable on Spotify, new shows similar to ones we've enjoyed previously are suggested to us on Netflix.

Each of those recommendations are informed by data on what has and hasn't worked before, sourced from millions of interactions by millions of people with a similar goal. Are we not under a moral obligation to apply that same dedication to harnessing our collective expertise in order to inform the approaches we take with society's most vulnerable people?

The problem is that our expertise about beneficiaries and stakeholders is scattered across so many different places; our heads, our conversations with line managers, on pieces of paper, in multiple versions of the same spreadsheet, on databases we use grudgingly. What if it was all in one place? What if everyone in our sector could contribute their expertise, discover other people's, rate it, review it, apply it to their beneficiaries and stakeholders; and then share fresh expertise learned from the process? If we did that, imagine what kind of springboard for ideas, collaboration and most importantly, iteration, it would be. Imagine the effect it would have on public trust in charities and the support we receive through grants, donations and contracts. We have a golden opportunity to accelerate the pace with which we bring about social change. Yes there are challenges such as confidentiality but none that cannot be overcome with smarter privacy controls and anonymisation.

'Will we be the generation that failed to use technological advancements for the greater good?'

The question we need to ask ourselves as a sector is this: will we be the generation that lived through an era with the greatest technological advancements the world has ever known and failed to use those advancements for the greater good? We must not let that be our legacy. None of us want it to be. Which means we need to change. We need to find digital ways to share our successes, our failures and our lessons learned. That is the only way our collective expertise can be fully harnessed for the benefit of ourselves, our sector and society.

Every person I meet in this sector is so full of expertise which too often goes unshared. Together we have so much potential which is not yet fully realised. The path we have chosen, social change, is not easy, but if we commit to learning, sharing and adapting, a better way is possible.

Matt Kepple is the founder of [Makeable.com](https://www.makeable.com) which accelerates social progress. He created World Animal Protection's global Pawprint campaign and co-founded the Youth Funding Network and the Commission for Youth Social Enterprise. He gave a TEDx Talk at Cambridge University and has won awards from Channel4, Deloitte and The RSA.

INSIGHTS FROM A BLACK VETERAN CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND LATENT ACTIVIST



IDEAS FROM KARIN WOODLEY

Sankofa – ‘it is not taboo to fetch what’s at risk of being left behind’

Remembering our roots are people not organisations is hard when our finances are diminishing, we are negatively scrutinised and we fear public scandals. In this adverse environment, we risk leaving our communities and people behind while we pursue business sustainability using public and private sector frameworks; sectors and frameworks whose failings we were first established to address.

As organisations born from community-based social activism, ‘polemics to policy’ is part of our DNA – we were skilled at taking radical ideas from the margins of society to the mainstream and we changed society for the better.

Fostering the innovation of our pioneering days means each of our organisations must return to a

structure unified by a strong vision grounded in an equally strong community voice. This is the only way we will meet the needs of the people we serve and find new developmental paths.

‘Keeping our organisations personal’

Social activism is intrinsically a change management process that relies on us keeping our organisations personal – we forget this at our peril.

Horrible histories

Decades of chasing growth has left us with structures that have lost their focus, are organisationally siloed, financially at risk and more reactive to changes in the operating environment than the changing needs of our communities.

We’ve allowed funders to have too great an influence on the direction

of our organisations' strategies and we're now browbeaten into complying with onerous regulatory reform – all in the hope it will help to turn the tide of apparently declining public trust.

Our organisations increasingly pursue self-preservation at all costs and our institutional structures are not fit for purpose – our legal and regulatory frameworks are arguably defunct. We've unwittingly, unstrategically, naively and sometimes disastrously participated in the privatisation of the state, aiding the transfer of risk from the state to individuals and communities while abetting the 'race to the bottom' in the provision of public services.

As a sector we're still not institutionally diverse and inclusive, our organisations are not classless and our narratives too frequently rely on deficit model perspectives that stigmatise the people we were established to serve.

So, what's a knackered chief executive to do?

Radical listening: To ensure our futures are defined by our communities' experience, knowledge and appetite for progressive transformation, we should treat our

communities less as 'consumers of services' and more as partners and participants. We need to reconnect with our communities by actively listening to them – a theory of change model is just a pretty picture if it's purely based on demographic desk-research and outcomes based on 'what we've always done'.

'We can stop "vampires" from draining our life blood – hand back the contract!'

Divestment: An unpopular word that conjures up the horrors of restructures and redundancies. Divestment is a positive tool that enables us to deploy resources strategically and helps us to be more self-determining. We can stop 'vampires' from draining our life blood: if you're being expected to do the impossible at bargain-basement prices and own all the risk, hand back the contract!

Grow-your own: We're used to nurturing and empowering our service users but often fall short when it comes to coaching and mentoring our own teams. There is no formula that ensures we recruit fully-blown social activists who can count, communicate well and consider our service users to be part of 'the family' – but driving radical inclusivity will reap long-term benefits.

'Inbreeding based on class, race, gender etc leads to several organisational disorders'

Inbreeding based on class, race, gender etc leads to several organisational disorders and mutations – it stops our internal structures from being inclusive, stops our communities from seeing themselves reflected in our teams and fuels a 'them and us' discourse that distances trustees and staff from service users.

Have skin in the game: Don't protect leadership and management at the expense of frontline services. For example, Merger – 'yuk'; reduce your Chief Executive's salary – 'wot?'; share profit and loss accountability – 'eh...' Financial literacy and understanding is important for the whole team because it helps us to make socially responsible financial decisions.

'We need to be leaders, not bosses'

Collegiality: Leadership dependency soothes Chief Executives' egos

but undermines our sustainability. We can't save the world or our organisation on our own – we need to be leaders, not bosses, and give our teams autonomy and the ability to be masters of their own (and the organisation's) fates. Collegiality is not an easy or gentle process; it pushes us to share power, demands cultural competence and, by emphasising a shared vision, creates the right environment for creativity and innovation.

At Cambridge House we've done all the above 'for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer' – as we become more honest with ourselves we are more confidently radical.

Karin Woodley is CEO of [Cambridge House](#), a Southwark-based social action charity. She is a board member of Locality, Community Southwark and the Economic and Social Research Council. Karin was previously CEO of ContinYou, the Stephen Lawrence Charitable Trust, the Tabernacle Centre and the Minorities' Arts Advisory Service.

'NEVER DOUBT A SMALL GROUP OF COMMITTED INDIVIDUALS CAN CHANGE THE WORLD'



A CASE STUDY BY STEVE WYLER

When we started the Better Way network, we did so because we believed that there were a great many people who shared our wish to improve services and strengthen communities. They're already doing great things in their different ways and want to do more (as illustrated by this volume). But often it's a real struggle – we all find ourselves constantly working against the grain of institutional behaviour and it can be a hard and lonely road. Perhaps we could be stronger together?

So we brought together a small group of people who we believed would find each other stimulating, and who were all in their different ways social activists. We invited them to imagine the changes they would like to see, in how services are designed and delivered. And to imagine what good communities might look like. We certainly didn't agree on everything. We came from

across the political spectrum, and our debates were lively. But we found that we had a surprising amount in common and a set of core ideas soon emerged which are now the propositions included in this book.

'We wanted to stimulate enquiry, exchange, debate, and challenge and learn from others'

These are propositions, not prescriptions, or rules, or even principles, because we knew that telling people what to do would at best produce lip service and there is already plenty of that about. We wanted to connect to a deeper and more fundamental shift in mind-set and behaviour. We wanted to stimulate enquiry, exchange, debate, and challenge and learn from others. In other words, to involve people as actors and contributors in the Better Way project, not as passive recipients.

There is an old Chinese saying: 'Tell me and I'll forget, show me and I'll remember, involve me and I'll understand.' We hoped that if we could involve people in the Better Way thinking, not tell them, perhaps mutual understanding and change might flow from that involvement.

We remembered Margaret Mead's famous words: 'never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.' We had already begun with a small group, and that way of working felt productive and invigorating. So we started to build up a wider network made up of small groups of people.

'There are surprisingly few opportunities for people pursuing social change to come together in a reflective and invigorating space'

We realised very quickly that conviviality helps. There are more than enough meetings as it is. But there are surprisingly few opportunities for people pursuing social change to step back from immediate pressures and come together in a reflective and invigorating space, outside of the usual office environment. Meeting at regular intervals over a meal, with everyone paying their own way, seemed to work well.

We called the Better Way groups 'cells'. They are like guerrilla cells, said someone, because our intention is radical and revolutionary. But they are also like biological cells, said another: the DNA of the Better Way propositions runs through every cell, even though they may take different forms, and over time the cells will replicate and grow a much bigger connected organism with a life of its own. Whichever metaphors we prefer it is exciting to see how people are organising themselves in different ways around the country, and how more and more cross-cell activities are taking place.

There are inevitably temptations to build a formal organisation, with its own institutional life. We want to resist that, and have tried to keep the whole operation as light touch as possible. We have two convenors, Caroline Slocock and myself, and the initiative is hosted by Civil Exchange, the organisation Caroline runs. We have attracted modest amounts of funding, from the Carnegie UK Trust and the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, to contribute towards our time and expenses, as well as to provide a small fund to help with member activities, and the Carnegie UK Trust has provided administrative, research and communications support too.

Can a network be a catalyst for change and create a shift in favour of Better Way thinking and practice? Based on experience so far, we think it can give people inspiration and ideas and it also helps to know that there are others travelling the same road. We hope we are creating a growing momentum for change.

Robert Louis Stevenson said 'to travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive' and the very act of travelling hopefully

together, but also purposefully, is more likely to bring about the kinds of change we want to see.

Steve Wyler is an independent consultant and writer in the social sector and is the co-convenor of a Better Way. From 2000 to 2014 Steve was Chief Executive of Locality (previously the Development Trusts Association), bringing together local organisations dedicated to community enterprise, community ownership, and social change.