

RELATIONSHIPS ARE BETTER THAN IMPERSONAL TRANSACTIONS

Deep value is generated through relationships between people and the commitments people make to each other. We find this first and foremost in families, communities and neighbourhoods, but organisations in every sector need to do more to treat people with humanity and as individuals and so generate deep value too.

CATTLE MACHINE = EDUCATION SYSTEM



A POEM BY ALICIA MOORE

is it that I'm just a waste of space, an oxymoron tiptoeing on the balance
it is that I can be replaced, upgraded perhaps by a robot in time,
or someone less stressed than I

is it that every time I cry, a part of me dies already, slips away in the tear
pieces of my skin

we're hear to help, says everyone

the college, the education system itself that does not adapt for those different
for those who cannot fit the mould

I am a square trying to fit through a circle

perhaps just a blot of ink on an otherwise perfect canvas

but I am unique, and have learned to appreciate my flaws

an obsession with time that maddens my brain everyday

an inability to socialise with a brain that turns white noise every time somebody's
voice hits it

it has come to a point where

I refuse to speak anymore because my voice has been silenced by the masses
because no one understands really do they? does anyone understand another
as much as they do themself?

an inability to empathise because it's all about money

so we can go to school, to go to college, to uni, to job to money, money, money

we're a cattle machine, a never ending cycle

we're every battery hen in a cage, we're on a conveyer belt of our making

life is for the taking

so every time someone tells you to just 'get over it'
remember that you, too, are human
and you should love yourself
put your mental health before a mindset of corruption and the taming of the
human being
the enslaving of every mind
I have missed five years of education yet I can still read and write, I wrote
this poem
in fact, in a test it is more a construction of who can remember the most than
who knows anything
who does know anything?
but know thyself
love thyself
all these years of education but no one is taught how to love, love ourselves,
love others,
know thyself
that is what it most important

Alicia Moore is 16 and likes to write poetry and songs. She missed five years of education on and off due to illness and struggled hugely to fit back in to the system and with her peer group. The poem is a reflection of her feelings about a system which she feels is inflexible and only adds to the stress young people feel on an almost daily basis.

IT'S RELATIONSHIPS, NOT TRANSACTIONS, THAT 'GET YOU THROUGH' THE BAD TIMES



A PERSONAL STORY BY JULIA UNWIN

Everyday life is full of transactions. Buy a ticket, jump on a train, pay for over-priced not very good coffee, tap an oyster card, rush to a meeting, text the next event to say I'm running late. And increasingly each of those transactions is done without even making eye contact, speaking or even handing over cash. A tap of a card, a wave of an e-ticket on a mobile phone – a daily life mediated by machines and technology has bought ever greater speed, and ever fewer human contacts.

And when life is going well, and the sun is shining, in every sense, that way of living has its own satisfaction.

'Everyday life is enriched by love and by friendship and laughter'

But everyday life is not always sunny and can never be made up of a series of transactions. Everyday life is muddled by sadness and loss, by

joy and by anxiety. It is enriched by love and by friendship and laughter. It responds to our full humanity, not the particular parts that we show to the world.

Ten years ago, one of my children, then fourteen, became seriously ill. In my busy professional transaction filled life I simply had to stop. I entered a whole new world of transactions – of blood tests and x-rays, of hospital appointments and complicated treatment plans. And I discovered, once again, that all my professionalism and all my skill and knowledge could not cope with the transaction led life. We faltered and missed appointments. I got confused by the drug charts. Members of the family were angry. Others couldn't talk about it. Others still wanted reassurance that it couldn't happen to them and looked for causes that kept them safe.

And through it all, and finally a good recovery, what I remember is the relationships. The teacher at school who first noticed something not quite right, and then made it easy for a sick child to come back to school. The nurses who managed not to call me 'mum' but to remember my name. The hospital porter who twinkled, teased us and made us laugh as we walked down the endlessly long corridor to the operating theatre. The GP who checked in to see how we were all doing, not just the patient. The hospital receptionist who always managed to tell us how good we were looking, when it was clearly not true! The consultant who referred us for brilliant counselling when all was better. But, of course, what united all those gestures were their humanity, and their recognition of our humanity. An understanding that we were more than a sick teenager, more than a troubled family, we were a complex mixture of feelings and fears, and that, if we were going to get through this we needed to be treated as the people we were, not the conditions we showed.

All that was a decade ago, and as I go to my GP for something much more trivial and tap in via a

reception screen which recognises me by date of birth and postcode, and pick up my automated prescription, I do wonder whether in the interests of speed and efficiency that kindness which helped our joint recovery might now be much more difficult to find. I wonder if the diagnosis might have taken longer, the treatment been less effective, and the long-term damage very much worse.

Transactions may be fine when you're buying a ticket to go on a train. But when you're sad, or angry, lonely or sick, it's the relationships that will get you through. In our much faster world we cannot take them for granted, but without them we will all risk being much more frail, much more vulnerable even if the component parts of our experience are dealt with perfectly professionally.

Julia Unwin was the Chief Executive of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation from 2007 until the end of 2016. She has been a Charity Commissioner, Chair of the Refugee Council and Deputy Chair of the Food Standards Agency and, amongst her many current roles, is chairing the Independent Inquiry into the Future of Civil Society, [Civil Society Futures](#).

A GOOD PUBLIC SERVANT



A PERSONAL STORY BY DAVID ROBINSON

I remember the date, December 17th, which is odd. I never remember dates.

All the consulting rooms were occupied so the young doctor took us to the corner of an almost empty waiting room. It's cancer. Just like that. Come back at 8.45 tomorrow. See the consultant. Talk then about treatment and prognosis.

We came back and saw the consultant and met Ann for the first time. She was already sitting in the room before the surgeon rattled through the diagnosis and the 'options', Grade 3 early stage, surgery before Christmas, chemo, radiotherapy...

Then he left.

'Is there anything you would like to ask?' said Ann.

Long pause.

'Grade 3' said Frances, my wife, 'is that good?'

Ann explained the numbers. 3 isn't good but she didn't say that. Nothing was ever good or bad, the right thing or the wrong thing, everything was part of a picture. No one had all the answers but everything that was known would be known to us and there was no choice that we wouldn't make together.

Ann was our Expert Nurse. She popped up at the appointments, there after surgery, first days in radiotherapy, with us in chemo, remembering our son's nativity play and the football, always asking after the girls, separately, by name. Actually of course probably not remembering anything at all but taking careful notes because when sensitivities are raw it is the tiny personal things that become the biggest and the most important.

We could, she assured us, ring her day or night. Of course, knowing that we could meant we almost never did. My wife was the patient but Ann was very clear – I too could

talk at any time. I was troubled by figures. If Frances had this treatment or that her chances of survival would improve by eighteen per cent or forty-six or twenty-seven. I wondered what it meant, what were the real choices, did the percentages add up? If she did everything would she live forever? I rang, a little sheepish about the questions.

'If I told you, David, that if we did these four things Frances would have a ninety-nine per cent chance of survival you would only ask another question: is she in the ninety nine or is she the one? I couldn't answer that. So let's talk about her and the treatments and what she wants to do, forget the numbers.'

I have been in and around public services all my life, mostly delivering not receiving them. It might seem strange that my story for this series should recount my experience as a service user but it is in this role, when relationships matter most and when the smallest consideration is a felt experience, that the Better Way principles become most visceral, vivid and powerfully evident.

'Deep value is generated through relationships'

We of the Better Way network believe that 'deep value is generated through relationships between people and the commitments people make to each other. We find this first and foremost in families, communities and neighbourhoods. But organisations in every sector need to do more to treat people with humanity and as individuals and so generate deep value too.

Of course caring relationships feel good but do they actually affect the outcome of the service – the real question for the commissioner and the tax payer? In the Community Links *Deep Value Literature Review* we considered the evidence on the role of effective relationships in employment services, education, health and legal advice. Revisiting this work six years on I am still thunderstruck by the sheer weight of the evidence. We discovered for example, that 'the relationship between the advisor and the client in employment services has

consistently been found to be a key element (in) helping people into employment', that 'pupils who develop positive relationships with teachers go on to achieve better academic results,' and that 'patients who experience a good relationship with their healthcare professional are more likely to engage in positive behaviour change'. Deep Value Literature Review. Smerdon M. Bell K. Community Links 2011

'A good public servant'

Several years on I understand: Ann wasn't an angel from heaven. She wasn't even our friend, not really. Ann was a good public servant thriving in a role and a context that enabled her to do an important job well. I value her work now, professionally and analytically. We valued it then, personally and profoundly.

David Robinson founded [Community Links](#) and is now Senior Adviser and chair of the Early Action Task Force. He is also a co-founder, now Chair, of [Shift](#) and a Fellow at the LSE's Marshall institute. His current work on relationships and the warm web can be viewed at <http://shiftdesign.org.uk/the-you-and-me-principle/>

OUR NEIGHBOUR



A PERSONAL STORY BY STEVE WYLAR

A few days after we moved in I started to clear the weeds in our back garden. As I worked I could hear an angry mumbling. It was our neighbour, a small and elderly woman with a withered arm. She stood at her back door and glared at me.

'Would you like me to cut down your weeds? I said after a bit. 'Why?' she asked suspiciously. 'They are quite high' I replied. That was an understatement. 'You can if you want,' she muttered, turned her back on me and went inside.

'She narrowed her eyes'

A few days later I saw her again. She narrowed her eyes. 'What were you doing in my garden?' she demanded. 'I was cutting back your weeds' I said. She looked at the stubble. 'You didn't do it very well' she snapped.

She thought for a bit. 'Come in and make me some tea,' she said.

So I sat there in her kitchen, drinking tea with her, after boiling the water in a pan on her stove which lit with a thump of hissing gas. Her bed was in the kitchen. It seemed it was the only room she used in the house. She hadn't been upstairs in at least ten years. I noticed there was no downstairs toilet, only an outhouse in the garden.

'I'm 93 and I'm not good on my feet any more' she told me, 'but I manage quite well, thanks to the dust.' 'The dust?' I asked. 'Yes, you know, Jimmy and Sarah.' Jimmy, it turned out, was a local dustman, and he and his wife did the shopping for her and came round and cooked her meals three or four times a week. She complained about them terribly. 'I pay them five pounds a week, but I think they're cheating me. And they are always telling tales about everyone. I don't like people who gossip.'

'Don't you get any help from the Council?' I asked. 'Oh I don't want

anything to do with them,' she said, getting quite agitated.

A few weeks later, her kitchen ceiling fell in, showering plaster over her bed. Along with Jimmy and Sarah we cleared up a bit, and tried to contact her landlord. It turned out that the landlord was based in an overseas tax haven, and the agent was a subsidiary of Lloyds Bank. We went to the agent's offices. 'We are very sorry this has happened' they said, 'we will arrange for the ceiling to be repaired but she will have to move out while we do it.' So we contacted Social Services. 'We are very sorry this has happened' they said, 'We will arrange for an assessment to be made.'

'She's not able to look after herself', they decided after the assessment, 'we'll have to put her into care.' So she ended up in a home. Within a few weeks she couldn't recognise anyone, and a few months later she died. I think she had even forgotten her own name. It was Marie.

'Often people don't want "services"'

This all happened twenty years ago. Why do I remember Marie today? Because she reminds me that it is all too easy for people to become isolated, neglected, avoided. People might need support and even

protection but often they don't want 'services'. What they really want is other people, people they can get to know a bit, and yes complain about, and who will accept them for what they are, and help them make the best of life.

'Relationships are better than transactions' says the Better Way but that is exactly what is so often missing. Thinking about our neighbour Marie, and how it was the local dustman and his wife who helped her most, for so many years, I wonder whether the best starting point is usually 'community'. Perhaps every service we design should start off by saying, could there be a community solution, which will at least help people make connections and build relationships, on their own terms? So that next time our neighbour's kitchen roof falls in, we are all a bit better prepared to deal with it, or perhaps even prevent it happening in the first place.

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.

GOOD HELP VERSUS BAD HELP: HOW TO GIVE IT



IDEAS FROM RICHARD WILSON

Whether people want to find work, improve their health or get the most out of education, 'good help' involves understanding what matters to each person, rather than pushing pre-packaged solutions. It's about treating people as people, and starting from them rather than impersonal processes.

Too many people are unnecessarily trapped in negative cycles and lost opportunities perpetuated by 'bad help', even though it may be delivered with the best intentions. These negative cycles have acute and obvious consequences, such as homelessness or addiction, but also chronic and subtle effects which erode confidence and mental health, making everyday activities such as parenting and healthy eating much harder, and sometimes impossible. In addition to the tremendous personal and social costs involved, there are the significant financial costs in getting it wrong.

'Good help' works. Ryan was on and off the streets for twelve years and felt

misunderstood by the people trying to help him. He explains how people 'Always tried to rush me. Telling me what I've got to do.' He was given advice and solutions that felt impersonal and irrelevant. He wasn't asked about his own motivations or what else was going on in his life. Then Ryan met Aisha from Mayday Trust who found out what motivated Ryan, what he cared about and what he felt confident doing.

This 'good help' inspired Ryan to take action. Every person will be different but we've looked at many positive case studies and found that there are three critical factors that enable people to take action:

'Helping people develop their own sense of purpose, confidence and a positive cycle of action'

- **Sense of purpose.** 'Good help' is all about helping people to identify and achieve their own sense of purpose.

- **Confidence to act.** 'Good help' is focused on helping people develop their confidence. Some or all of these things may play a part: encouragement; seeing or hearing about others, especially 'people like you', achieving a similar goal; personally experiencing some success related to the goal in question and experience that it 'feels good' when seeking to achieve your goal.
- **Life circumstances.** Our ability to act is powerfully shaped by the opportunities and barriers that arise in our lives. 'Good help' can support people to create a positive cycle of action that helps them move towards their goals. In time, this can lead to transformational changes in their life circumstances.

These are encapsulated by the cycle of action:



If you are involved in the design or delivery of services, whether in the public or voluntary sector, you might want to consider these seven characteristics of 'good help' to improve your existing practices.

1. **Power sharing.** The relationships between professionals and people should allow power to be shared rather than 'directing' people to do things. An adult-to-adult relationship needs to be established, in which each person's knowledge and ideas are considered equally.
2. **Enabling conversations.** The way that conversations are structured and that questions are asked can help people to think through what's important to them and to come up with their own solutions. These conversations build a sense of safety, trust, ownership and motivation for action.
3. **Tailoring.** For help to be transformational, it needs to be personalised. This can be achieved by helping people to define their own purpose and goals. This might sound obvious, but many programmes offer a standardised approach that can feel impersonal and mechanistic.

4. **Scaffolding.** Practitioners can start to step back as the people they help build enough confidence to take action alone. This ensures that change is sustained. Help may need to be ongoing for some people, but should create opportunities for people to take action themselves where possible.
5. **Role modelling and peer support.** Positive relationships expand our sense of what is possible and help us do things we wouldn't attempt alone. Often the most powerful relationships are with people we consider similar to ourselves.
6. **Opportunity making.** Sometimes opportunities need to be created or barriers need to be removed to help people take action. This may require help from an external source. Examples include brokering relationships which lead to new voluntary or paid work, or other health creating or educational activities.
7. **Transparency.** Having open and shared data is an important part of building an adult-adult relationship and supporting people to make informed decisions.

'Good help is about relationships'

'Good help' is about relationships. We focus on the mechanics of those relationships and in particular the touchpoints between services and people, and whether the points enable or disable action.

After publication of OSCA and Nesta's report, *Good Help and Bad Help: how purpose and confidence can transform lives*, we've been holding events across the UK, to bring together those of us offering and inspired by 'good help' and explore what can be done for our impact to be increased. We are finding a great deal of interest, including amongst Better Way members. That's unsurprising, as the approach puts into action so many of the Better Way propositions, and especially 'Human relationships are better than impersonal transactions.'

Richard Wilson is a Director of OSCA and an adviser to the WHO. In 2004, Rich was appointed as the first director of the charity *Involve*, which became a leading centre for public participation research, innovation and policy-making. He is a trustee of the Local Trust and a Clore Social Fellow.

YOU, ME AND THE 'WARM WEB'



IDEAS FROM DAVID ROBINSON

Two elderly women were living independently before they both caught the flu, stopped eating and forgot their regular medication. The first has now been moved, permanently, into a nursing home. The second had been in an allotment group for many years. When she fell sick other members cooked meals, ran errands, checked daily. Now she is back digging onions.

'The warm web: our personal tapestries of real, meaningful relationships'

No one involved would call themselves a carer or even a volunteer. They would say, – indeed did say for these are true stories – 'we did what anyone would do.' Such is the essence of the warm web – our personal tapestries of real, meaningful relationships that enable us to thrive individually and, that in aggregate, enable communities to succeed.

I worry that such bonds are dwindling. We may network

and transact more than ever but meaningful time together is being systematically displaced by fast and shallow connections. The consequential losses are registering daily in the quality of our lives, in our collective capacity, resilience and readiness and in the efficacy of our agencies and our services. I unpicked each of these 'consequential losses' in the LSE 'You and Me' lecture.

Most alarmingly, the sum of the parts in this 'relational poverty' is the kind of structural inequality and 'broken caravan' scenario with which we are already familiar on material poverty – the camels at the front of our society moving so much faster than those at the back that it eventually ceases to be one caravan, one society. Neighbourhoods, cities, nations are built from the interweaving of countless personal relationships – the world wide, warm web. When those ties fail that which is isolating individuals ultimately leaves

behind entire communities distrustful and polarised – fertile territory for xenophobic populism.

So it is that which makes social isolation a 21st century problem has also made Donald Trump the 45th President. When the foundational bonds are inadequate or dysfunctional, so inevitably is the national discourse, unstable and fractious. Trump is the flower in the button-hole of the invisible man.

'Imagine a place where meaningful relationships are the central operating principle'

If we are to benefit from progress in ways which *don't* diminish our humanity but sustain and enrich it, we need to invoke another Better Way principle and act earlier. We need to imagine and realise a place where meaningful relationships are the central operating principle running through everything we do – a 'relationship centred' business, city, school, funding programme, democracy.

In a [series of blogs](#) last year I began to look at what works, draw out some guiding principles, and imagine the 'doable' changes that would embed such relationships everywhere. Here are some examples

The principle: Having fun together builds strong relationships.

The allotment story illustrates well the power of participation. Allotments, choirs, sports clubs, play streets – all enable the building of meaningful connections. Events – street parties, socials, etc play the same role as a sort of social acupuncture – a localised pin prick with the power to catalyse a wider change. We could support more and not just with cash. Essex for example have opened eighty library buildings to 'community keyholders' and a 'Right to Space' could take us further, requiring all local authorities to accommodate such activity where ever there is interest and an open door.

Digital connections should be the beginning of real relationships, the 'fulfilment' not the end and certainly not the enemy. We might ask of existing applications how can we develop this for *everyone*? Tinder for instance – a marginally amended app with alternative branding could also be connecting new arrivals or unsupported carers.

Another principle: Some places enable relationships to thrive, some don't.

Parents know that their local networks improve when their children go to school but some improve more than others. A welcoming playground, a covered waiting area,

seats all make a difference. Just as playgrounds bring us together so do markets, cul de sacs, even shared dustbins. These are the bumping places that we can design properly into where we live or design out. A 'Common Ground Test' added to planning guidelines could ensure it is always in.

The fulfilment centre is the new staple popping up on every high street. How might we design it into our plan for a relationship centred community? What other needs might it 'fulfil' as a regular meeting place?

A third principle: Organisational protocols can obstruct relationships or help them to flourish. If I want my holiday jabs in a busy working day I'll be happy with a 7 am appointment and a clinician I don't know. If I need regular treatment for a chronic condition that keeps me housebound and alone for days I will want a doctor I trust and time for a conversation. GP caseloads could be segmented paying doctors more for patients who need more time. Based on the successful Buurtzorg model, social care might be better delivered by small local teams who are trained and trusted to manage themselves. More broadly services might never be commissioned without demonstrating how they will enable relationships to flourish for those that need them.

Segmentation even works on the high street. Sainsbury's are trialling quick shopping sessions optimising speed for the busy buyer and slow sessions for those who look for companionship. And shouldn't all supermarkets reimagine their cafes – isn't the typical afternoon customer, 1 per table, telling us something?

Now think about your influence.

You may not lead a local authority, commission public services or run a super market but you are a voter, a patient, a customer. And so are many people that you know. The better way – a relationship centred future – is nothing if not a collective effort.

And think about your place. It could be anything – a school, a classroom, a neighbourhood, a council department, a service, a business, the list is endless. How will it change when meaningful relationships are the central operating principle? We would love to know.

David Robinson founded Community Links and is now Senior Adviser and chair of the Early Action Task Force. He is also a co-founder, now Chair, of Shift and a Fellow at the LSE's Marshall institute. His current work on relationships and the warm web is here: <http://shiftdesign.org.uk/the-you-and-me-principle/>