

**With**

Relationships and The Public Good

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## **Living a Full Life**

What is the difference between an empty life and a full one? The anthropologist Daniel Miller set out to answer this question by interviewing in depth 36 people on a single south London street several times over many months. The people on Miller's street reflected the diversity of modern London which makes the city so rich but also seems to fray it at the edges. <sup>1</sup>They were gay and straight, single and in couples, married and divorced, young and old, born in the UK and not. They had lived very different lives – one had been a mercenary, another an actor. But they told a remarkably consistent story. A full life does not come from being rich, filling your house with a lot of things, nor from being busy, and filling your day with lots of activity. A full life comes from having a number of significant and fulfilling relationships that support you and give your life purpose, someone to share experiences with, good and bad.

Miller found few people who believed in or were prepared to work for an abstract and distant ideal of civic society. There was no such thing as society on this street, indeed many neighbours barely knew one another. But nor were they rampant individualists. Without exception they regarded living life as an isolated individual as a failure. Instead what they cherished were their relationships: the social networks which sustained them, provided a sense of identity, purpose and rhythm to their lives. Happiness and well being does not come from our freedom to break free of bonds but instead to commit ourselves to relationships. <sup>2</sup>Our sense identity does not simply come from within - what we want to be – but from our interconnectedness and interdependence. Miller concluded that we were becoming a society of mini tribes, each household with its supporting networking of relationships, sometimes stretched around the globe. Those tribes and networks are the basic building blocks of the society on his street, not isolated individuals. People on Miller's street most wanted to keep their relationships in a sense of order and balance. Individuals are in large measure a product of their relationships and not merely the agents of them.

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<sup>1</sup> The Comfort of Things

<sup>2</sup> Happiness Paradox

The quality of our relationships are what distinguish a full life from an empty one. If public policy towards children, ageing, care, learning, crime, health, community were to start from Miller's street it would start from the quality and nature of relationships, not from the idea of the individual or society.

### **Changing Lives**

Atul Gawande, set off with a different question : to find out when medicine achieved its goal of making people better. Gawande, a neuroscientist and gifted writer, started his examination of health system with a nagging frustration that the hopes invested in medicine's ability to make us better were so often disappointed.<sup>3</sup> He wanted to work out when medicine worked for people and when it did not. Gawande examined good and bad practice across health systems in the US and elsewhere, from the way hospitals deal with the MRSA super bug to the global campaign against malaria. He found effective medicine was a mixture of extreme diligence, ingenuity and moral purpose, a wish to do the right thing. But perhaps the most important factor in cases that really changed people's live chances was the relationship between a clinician and their patient.

This emerged most powerful in the case of cystic fibrosis. The most effective cystic fibrosis clinic in the US claims to extend the life of its patients several decades longer than normal approaches. It achieves this through the intense, demanding, driven relationship that clinicians form with their patients, to understand in daily detail how to best manage their condition, sharing information, testing ideas, developing solutions together.

Not all public services can or should be relationships. People do not turn to public services to start a relationship, when what they want is an efficiently delivered rubbish disposal service or a mass transit system that runs on time. But at critical junctures in their lives – childbirth, a child starting school, changing jobs, death and bereavement, a crippling illness – they often want relationships with professionals who can support them. In those situations they do not just want an efficiently delivered transactional service.

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<sup>3</sup> Better

Public services can transform people's lives and life chances when people can form a relationship with a teacher, doctor, community worker, which can set them on a different path, allowing them to develop new capabilities and skills, to see life in a different light.

Public services can transform people's lives and indeed entire communities when they create powerful relationships that equip and motivate people to change: the teacher inspiring a child, a community worker helping a single mother back into work, a care worker helping an old person regain their independence after a spell in hospital.<sup>4</sup>

Relationships are central to both living a full life and to public services that can transform people's lives, setting them on a new path. The connections do not end there.

### **The Social Ills of Relationships**

Many of the most difficult issues public services have to deal with stem from the absence or breakdown of relationships that Miller found sustained people. The people in society with the most pressing needs are those who are socially isolated and lonely, especially the growing numbers of frail old people who live alone, rarely moving beyond the confines of their houses, often depressed and in poor health. The extension of our normal life span has exposed us to a later life in which relationships crumble away. Family breakdown and poor parenting are blamed for a range of social disorders, from knife crime and anti-social behaviour to low attainment at school, poor job prospects, teenage pregnancy, poverty in later life and poor health. The education system cannot make good these social deficits. Tens of thousands of children leave school each year to become Neet: not in education, employment or training, with blighted life chances. A recent UNICEF report found the UK was the worst place in the developed world for children to grow up. Families find it increasingly difficult to balance the demands of care, for children and elderly relatives, and the need to work and earn. Beneath all of this is a more generalised worry that trust and civility are in decline, relationships are more contingent and

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<sup>4</sup> The Man in the Caravan

transactional, fleeting and flimsy. Politicians draw a direct connection between relationships failing, family breakdown and what some call a social recession. That dynamic is at its most powerful and damaging in places and families that have been left behind by the decline of industry and the rise of the knowledge based service economy, where social order seems to have broken down, the state is merely a distant player, many people live on benefits or in the cash in hand economy. Many of these places – and perhaps especially white working class former industrial areas – seem to be hanging on to the edge of society by their finger tips. The surest sign of this mounting social toll are the rising numbers of people – often lacking basic skills of literacy and numeracy - kept in prisons, some of which date from the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The public sector was designed to provide a mix of collectively funded universal services – education and health – and specialist services to those in acute need – social and welfare services. Yet now it is dealing with what seem to be chronic social problems: families straining to make ends meet while caring for children and relatives; long term chronic conditions; inequalities in education and life chances that seem more deep seated than ever; young people drawn into destructive relationships in gangs that provide them with a sense of reputation and recognition they do not get elsewhere.

The implication is that this rising tide of chronic social ills will not be met by a set of more efficient public services. It needs something more than that. The state needs to undertake as its key mission the rebuilding of relationships in society. That requires more than delivering better services or even building better schools, prisons and hospitals. It would require public services and public policy to get into the bloodstream of society, to change attitudes and the way people behave, how they relate to one another as much as how they relate to public services. Once again, we are back to relationships.

Significant, fulfilling relationships, which provide us with care, recognition and purpose are vital to leading a full life. Public services that transform people's lives depend, above all, on the relationships people make with the professionals trying to help them. Our most significant social ills arise from the breakdown of relationships in society. To fight this social recession the state needs to help people to generate,

rebuild and sustain relationships in society, rather than just delivering services to them. At the core of a good society, a fulfilling life and an effective state are relationships among people, between citizens, with public services that provide care, recognition, purpose and motivation.

The conclusion seems inescapable: promoting relationships, within families, wider social networks, peer groups and neighbourhoods, should be central to politics, public policy and public services.

Is that a challenge our political system and public services are ready to rise to?

In this paper we focus on three, linked, questions, which are at the heart of that challenge.

First, how and when public services can be redesigned around relationships between professional and service users, as well as among the service users themselves? Very simply public services are most effective when they work *with* people rather than just delivering services to and for them.

Second, how public policy, and in particular public services, can be designed to support relationships in society of the kind that make it more likely that people will be able to sustain themselves and prevent problems arising that mean they have to turn to public services for a solution. Can the state really act as a relationship generator, so that families are more likely to stay together, children are more likely to look after elderly parents, teenagers to look out for one another's safety?

Third, how a focus on relationships and social networks, as society's basic building block, changes the framework for political debate? Political philosophy is largely organised around issues in the relationship between the individual and society, how : individuals choose to aggregate resources and power in the state; individual rights are guaranteed by political processes; the state can constraint individual freedom. The main players in political philosophy are the idealised, autonomous individual, on the one hand, and the larger society to which they belong, on the other. Yet if relationships, networks and tribes are the basic building blocks of society, rather than

the solitary individual, this provides a different starting point for political philosophy. We are not trying to govern a society of individuals but a society of tribes (gangs even.) Society is too distant and abstract an idea for most people to subscribe to. But individualism is too narrow. Instead what most people seek to develop, protect and keep in order, what they most value, are their significant relationships, their interdependence. What would it mean to our ideas of justice, rights, equality, freedom – the basic stuff of political philosophy – if we put relationships at the centre of political debate, rather than the individual?

### **Relationships and Public Services**

There are good reasons why public services are not based on personal relationships between citizens and public servants. The modern state emerged from a hotch potch of voluntary, local and charitable health, welfare and educational activities which varied hugely in their quality, coverage and inclusion.

The modern state seeks to treat people fairly and impartially, regardless of the person's background or social connections. Who you know – what relationships you have should not determine what kind of public service you get. Fairness and impartiality requires depersonalised relationships, so that like cases should be treated in like manner, regardless of whether someone is a friend, colleague or family member. The only way to extend the obligation of care to complete strangers – which is what collective institutions of welfare and health do – is for relationships to be replaced by rules of entitlement, fairly administered. Otherwise the bonds of obligation and support would stretch only as far as your immediate family or social circle. A modern economy and society, which depends on high levels of mobility, requires rules of entitlement and treatment that are the same everywhere, not dependent on whose clan you belong to.

The process of serving people at scale is also possible only with a high degree of depersonalisation. Most days the public sector delivers millions of maths lessons and doctors consultations, processes millions of benefit claims and tax payments. If each of these transactions and exchanges came with a requirement to have a relationship with a public servant it would be grossly inefficient. The efficient collective provision of services to tens of millions of people a day depends on robust processes that can

operate at scale without relying on the goodwill or relationships of the protagonists. In Daniel Miller's south London street the state was an effective but distant presence in most people's lives, but not one they wanted to engage with very much and certainly not the embodiment of a sense of mutual obligation and support. The state is seen as a system for delivering tax funded services at scale. The public service reforms of the last ten years, focussed on making the delivery of services more efficient, higher quality, more timely and responsive, through a panoply of targets, standards and inspection regimes, has only served to push further this sense that public services are not a set of relationships but a system.

The trouble is that standards and target driven approach to public services improvement is running out of steam. The initial improvements in service performance in the early years of the New Labour government have proven difficult to maintain, in part because the target-driven approach to improvement has failed to engage and motivate front line staff to innovate and improve. Beneath this is a nagging worry that even when services hit targets, they might still be missing the point. Targets that measure the number of operations performed, beds filled, forms filled out measure transactions and outputs. Yet what people – and politicians – seek are ultimate outcomes – a safer, healthier, greener society.

Shortfalls in performance are linked to the inability of traditional public services, even when made more efficient, to crack deep seated social problems linked to inequality. Despite sustained investment in education the attainment gap between pupils from different social backgrounds remains at much the same level as in 1996. About three quarters of 16-year olds are leaving school with useful qualifications. That still leaves many who fall below that level and a minority – 90,000 with little or nothing to show for it. Only 19.5% of those eligible for free school meals get five good GCSE's including English and Maths. <sup>1</sup> Despite significant increased in spending per child since 1997, improved investment in child care, SureStart and Children's Centres, improvements in educational attainment are proving difficult to maintain in large part because it is proving difficult to crack deep seated social inequalities. And that is in part due to the failure of traditional services to reach deep into communities to change people's aspirations, motivation and capabilities. Traditional services do not change culture and aspiration.

Nor are traditional service solutions well designed to deal with the emerging challenges of public conduct, character and behaviour. Whether it is binge drinking, recycling or healthy eating, the answer is not smarter delivery of a traditional, top down service. Whatever the answer is, the challenge in these issues of public behaviour is to change motivation and capability among citizens, so they seek better solutions in their own lives, rather than relying on a service to deliver it to them. The most effective solutions to these issues turn on the mobilisation of citizens energy and commitment to bring about change, in their lives, families, networks, rather than hoping the state will devise a service solution. Traditional public services – mass, impartial, collective, rule bounded, delivered in silos to waiting citizens – seem ill matched for the problems they face, which often turn on changing culture, aspiration and behaviour, so that citizens together might be more able to look after their health, make their neighbourhood safe, reduce their carbon footprint.

Part of the challenge is to deliver services at mass scale that can feel intimate and animating to those involved, whether a young child in a class room or someone receiving social care. Often the impartial systems that make mass services possible rob them of their humanity. Care becomes a standardised 30 minute cleaning visit by a poorly paid, demoralised care assistant. Education becomes the pursuit of Sats results. As Charles Taylor, the philosopher, puts it: “Ours is a civilisation conceived to relieve suffering and enhance human well-being on a universal scale, unprecedented in human history... Yet we also feel that the very systems can imprison us in forms that turn alien and dehumanising.” Avishai Margalit, the Israeli philosopher, in *The Decent Society* warns that public systems can be fair and just but also humiliate those who depend on them, robbing them of self respect and dignity at the same time as helping them.

One aspect of this seems to be that services that should turn on relationships and conversation are increasingly seen as transactions or packages of service, to be delivered to contract. When someone in need wants a conversation – with a teacher, doctor, nurse, care worker – to try to resolve a problem they face, to build a relationship – often they find they get a pre-configured service, which pays little attention to their distinctive needs.

When people want a relationship with a public servant they get a service. Public services seem too often to be delivered to and for people rather than with them.

**Care.** To care for someone means being attentive and responsive to their needs and treating them with respect and dignity even when they are vulnerable. Yet most people find the official, public care system inflexible, bureaucratic and inflexible, often delivering only the most basic kind of physical and personal care. Care depends on the relationship between the person being cared for and the carer. The official publically funded social care system rarely provides much scope for that.

**Crime.** The government is building more large scale Titan prisons to house more prisoners, more efficiently. Yet reoffending rates among former prisoners remain stubbornly high, often because most men in prison lack basic skills of literacy and numeracy, are often prey to addiction and disconnected from their families and work. By 2014 the prison population is likely to reach 96,000, many housed in larger prisons that will leave little room for individualised programmes of rehabilitation. What works to cut reoffending rates are programmes to reconnect inmates to meaningful work and opportunities to acquire skills, both social and practical. Prisons designed to cut reoffending rather than just house prisoners would need to be refashioned around learning, work and relationships.<sup>5</sup>

**Neets.** At the end of 2007 about 217,000 young people in England were not in education, employment or training, the so-called Neets. About 10% of the Greater Manchester school population leave without qualifications or plans for further education, employment or training. In Leeds 4,000 young people a year leave the school system Neet. The economic costs of this failure are significant: the Princes's Trust calculates the direct and indirect economic costs, in terms of public spending and lost productivity, to be £10m a day. The social costs are just as large. Young people who are Neet are more likely to be unemployed later in life, to be teenage parents, to have poor physical and mental health. These young people often carry social and emotional baggage which schools are often not equipped to deal with.

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<sup>5</sup> Prisons pamphlet, Self Policing Society; Civic Entrepreneurship, restorative justice.

Many end up in Pupil Referral Units or excluded from school altogether. Traditional schooling, with rigid timetables, lessons, large classes and an academic focus does not connect with or motivate these young people. The most effective solutions usually involve providing them with close relationships with an older peer or mentor, often in a small setting, with a small group of other young people. What is most likely to stop a child becoming Neet are relationships.

**Learning.** Children learn when they have the right relationships. Those relationships make them feel cared for; give them recognition for who they are, where they come from and what they have achieved; motivate them to learn; engage them to be participants in learning. They need those relationships at school but also at home and in their communities.

Instead of seeing schooling as a system of years and grades, with key stages and examinations, targets and regulators, it should be seen as a set of relationships between teachers, pupils, parents and the wider community.

The idea that education is just a system of schooling invites the idea that the best way to improve it is through the techniques of mass customisation, efficiency and quality improvement, driven on by central targets, national strategies and inspection regimes. Many schools now developing more personalised approaches to learning, particularly for the children most disaffected from traditional approaches to schooling, are refashioning themselves as “communities of learning” akin to villages or neighbourhoods, in which children are more likely to find the kinds of relationships, with teachers, mentors and other pupils, that equip them to learn. Providing children with the right kinds of relationships to enable them to learn should be at the heart of modern learning policy.<sup>6</sup>

**Health** Relationships should be at the heart of future health policy as well. Following decades of success in treating acute illnesses the biggest challenges facing the health of the nation are now chronic diseases often linked to lifestyle and ageing: diabetes, heart conditions, alzheimers and others. Meeting this wave of chronic, lifestyle

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<sup>6</sup> What's Next

diseases with services delivered by hospitals and doctors will be extremely expensive and probably ineffective. Instead the best way forward seems to be to focus on new relationships so that people can take more responsibility for their own health – co-creating solutions – with professionals, but also with their peers, expert patients and family. The public health will be made up of millions of little private health decisions. That is why motivation is the new medicine. The key to the future of health care in which the public is more fully engaged in shaping their own health will be the kinds of relationships people have to support and guide them. All too often, however, relationships and conversation have been driven out of the NHS in the name of efficiency. Most people can only see their GP for less than ten minutes.<sup>7</sup>

Across these disparate areas – care, crime, young people, learning, health - the same themes emerge. Through public services the state provides service solutions which it is desperately trying to make more joined up, efficient and personalised. Yet the costs of these solutions are going up and demand for them is also rising, especially for care and health. Yet these service solutions rarely get into the underlying causes of the most intractable and costly social problems; they usually deal with the symptoms; rarely do they seem to change the behaviour, culture or circumstances which lie at the heart of the problems. The most effective solutions however seem to turn on providing people with relationships that allow them to develop more personalised approaches.

These approaches generally work with people and allow solutions to be devised by them rather than delivering a service to and for people. Public services that work with people can transform their lives. Public services that deliver to and for people rarely do.

What features of those relationships – between professionals and service users, among service users themselves – matter? Five stand out.

First, they are relationships of **learning**, information and knowledge is transacted and built up. The diabetic learns more about how to treat their condition through

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<sup>7</sup> The Talking Cure: Why Conversation is the Future of Healthcare...Demos

conversation with peers, voluntary advisers and doctors. The young offender learns through their relationship with a mentor.

Second, they are relationships that build **participation**, they encourage children to become participants in their own learning, setting objectives, choosing the tools they want to use to learn and ways to present their work; diabetics to become participants in managing their own condition. They see the person not as a passive recipient of an expert service but as a vital contributor to the outcome.

Third, they are relationships that provide people with a sense **recognition**. In learning children need to be recognised for who they are, where they come from, their goals, contributions and achievements. The same is true for anyone with a difficult, chronic or complex condition or problem that the public sector has to deal with. People with complex care needs, dislocated family background, drug dependency problems want recognition for who they are : they want to be treated as a person not as a condition to be managed.

Fourth, they are relationships that make people feel **cared** for, safe and secure. Feeling cared for depends on your distinctive needs being attended to, having a voice in what happens to you and being treated with dignity and respect. Providing care<sup>ii</sup> generally involves: being attentive, sensitive, noticing or even anticipating when someone might be in need; being responsive, engaging with the person to understand what they need; respectful of them as a person. An ethic of care should infuse most public services as much as choice and efficiency. Mentoring programmes for young people from dislocated families are partly designed to provide them with relationships they did not have with their parents.

Fifth, and most importantly, they are relationships that will **motivate** people to take initiatives that will make them better off but also in the process help to generate the public good, whether through managing a long term condition more effectively, changing diet or a young offender committing to study and learn. Understanding motivation (and demotivation) is highly personal, lengthy undertaking. Motivating someone often requires building up confidence and capability; setting realistic but stretching goals; widening aspiration and ambition; setting structured challenges;

offering relevant rewards and recognition. We need more public services that motivate people to want to carrying on learning, caring, exercising. Services that work with people are more likely to lead to people devising their own solutions. Children who learn with teachers collaboratively are more likely to be able and want to learn independently, by themselves. Services that create solutions with people are more likely to lead to solutions being created by people.

Some public services are just transactions: claiming a benefit. Others are delivered to us by experts: an operation in a hospital. But many depend – or should depend – on relationships between professionals and their clients, among service users themselves. Those relationships should build learning, participation, recognition, care and motivation. Then they stand a chance of doing more than merely serving people but allowing them to change their lives in significant ways.

After more than a decade pursuing the goals of efficiency and quality, relationships should be at the forefront of the next generation of public service reforms: relationships people form with publicly funded services that allow them to change their lives for the better.

### **Relationships and the Public Good**

While it may be clear why public services should be remodelled to allow more creative and dynamic relationships to develop between public services and their users, its less clear that the relationships we have in everyday life should become the objects of public policy. At every turn there is the danger that public policy might over stepping the mark and clumsily interfere in areas best left to private discretion, conscience and choice. Politicians moralising about the values of family and fidelity are all too quickly open to accusations of hypocrisy. Mrs Thatcher's neo-liberal reforms of the 1980s were supposed to have drawn a clear line between public and private, reducing the scale of the public, increasing the scope for private action. The national state has withdrawn from or disclaimed its powers to shape many aspects of life, especially the globalised economy.

Yet the truth is the state remains as much a force in society as ever, but in a different way. The economic levers of the old nation state may no longer work and the welfare

state may be under strain, but in many respects public policy is infiltrating many more aspects of our lives, from what we drink and eat, to how much carbon we use, what we recycle and how we parent our children. The line between public and private has become more blurred as the state has increasingly sort to influence private behaviour, especially where private actions have clear public consequences. In a society which prizes individual autonomy, diversity and choice, the state cannot easily imposed ways of behaving top down. Many of the intermediate institutions that used to regulate behaviour – large employers, trade unions, churches and clubs – are also less powerful. Yet nor can the state declare itself neutral when the collective outcome of many private choices damages public goods. Indeed politicians often face a clamour from the media to intervene and do something to stop forms of behaviour that are seen as anti social. In a liberal, open, society in which individuals prize their right to make choices, the state walks a narrow line between being accused of neglect and being too interfering. There is a broad political consensus that in international terms Britain is a liberal society which aims to enlarge the area for free choice. Yet it is also a society which faces huge collective challenges to : reduce carbon, provide for an ageing population, support families, regenerate communities disrupted by economic change, maintain a sense of stability in a highly turbulent world and stay safe. As a result government is constantly having to confront its own citizens with the consequences of their own choices and to find ways to encourage them to make choices as individuals which collectively generate public goods. Private choices have public costs: alcohol related crime and disorder are estimated to cost £7.3bn a year. If people adopted low carbon lightbulbs it would save %m tonnes of CO2 a year.

The Cabinet Office has argued that individual responsibility should be a theme across many government priorities. Defra runs a behaviour change forum. The DCSF is increasingly concerned not just with the delivery of teaching and learning in schools but in how families raise children. The Department of Health in various guises continues to be interested in promoting behaviour change to influence what we eat. The Prime Minister's Strategy Unit estimates that differences in behaviour - smoking, drinking, eating and exercise – account for most of the health inequalities in the UK. David Cameron's Conservatives are making social responsibility and mass behaviour change central to their idea of a post-bureaucratic state. Nick Clegg the

Liberal Democrat leader has put mass behaviour change – especially to achieve targets to reduce carbon usage – at the heart of a Lib Dem version of the small state.

All parties believe that to govern has to influence the choices we make. Government is necessarily not just delivering services, running departments but perhaps most importantly about governing our conduct. And one of the best ways to govern our conduct and shape our choices is through the kinds of relationships we have with parents, peers, siblings, mentors and role models. That is why the growing interest politics has in influence individual behaviour at scale will bring politicians back to the nature of relationships in society.

That is because changing behaviour at scale, en mass is so tricky. The main tools of government are media and information campaigns – to remind people to secure their cars, to stop smoking, eat healthily; indirect taxation and charging, to put up the price of undesirable behaviours – driving into London, buying cigarettes; regulation to enforce a change in behaviour over a long period, for example the phase out of analogue television.

But these approaches only get policy makers so far. Often people do not respond rationally to economic incentives. Even if people are exposed to media messages and understand them, they choose to ignore them. Not everything deemed bad can be regulated out of existence. Often even if people want to change their behaviour – give up smoking – they find they lack the capacity to do so. It is not enough to build an appetite for changed behaviour, policy makers also have to consider whether people are capable of enacting that change.

One of the most durable, cost effective ways to influence people's behaviour is through the social motivation of peer influence and networks. Social norms and expectations matter hugely to what people see as desirable. One of the most common explanations for a change in behaviour is that someone the person knew and respected also changed their behaviour. People who together commit to change their behaviour – a family, network, club, gang – are more likely to get the kind of peer support they need to succeed. Peers and mentors are often vital sources of advice and encouragement. Social norms, transmitted through networks and relationships, are the

hidden forces of social change, operating somewhere between government policy and the individual. Working on the relationships and networks that people have is one of the best ways to get people together to help themselves. Public policy can change | most effectively by helping people to develop supportive networks and relationships. Take the following examples:

### **Families and Parents**

How people are brought up is vital to their self-esteem and character, aspirations and behaviour.

In some families parents struggle to develop supportive, caring relationships with one another and with their children. These problems often stretch over generations. These families suffer a different kind of poverty: a poverty of parent – child experience rather than a material poverty. The poverty of those relationships leads to poor outcomes for children and as adults. It is possible to improve relationships in these families, which are often dislocated and disordered, with practical skills. The key however is for services and support workers to get alongside the families, with practical steps, rather than expecting the families to turn up for a service. The scale of need for these parenting programmes could be huge. Manchester Council spends £1m on parenting programmes which reach just 1% of the families the council needs to reach.

Improving the conditions for family life, particularly the amount and quality of time parents can spend with children through parenting leave, flexible and home working. Reshaping the labour market around families and relationships.

Measures to help adult children to look after their ageing parents more effectively. Many elderly parents live alone at a distance from their grown up children, who want to know that they are being supported properly where they live but cannot be present.

Policy should make family relationships central to make it easier for families to develop and sustain the relations of care. The kinds of relationships we seek to

promote – which involve learning, participation, care, motivation – start from and are most effective within families.

### **Isolated and lonely older and young people**

The most vulnerable people are older people, who are both socially isolated, probably living alone and deeply lonely, sometimes going days without having a proper conversation with someone. Chronic loneliness is a significant issue among older people especially those whose spouse has died. One third of older people say they are lonely. Two thirds of older people living alone say they are lonely. The most effective strategies to reconnect older people to relationships are not services but small, peer to peer group activities which they can engage in. People age well when they have relationships and activities. Older people desire to remain independent and want to be able to feel useful, giving something to a reciprocal relationship. Yet many solutions really target services at and to older people rather than working with them.

Much of the same can be said for marginalised and excluded young people. Lonely, depressed young people crave sustainable peer-to-peer support. Successful programmes such as the Inspire/Reach Out network created in Australia are based on the principle of working alongside young people and being led by them. The antidote to the destructive peer influences of gangs is to provide alternative, authentic relationships with mentors and peers. Young people see anyone who is paid to engage with them as inauthentic and so untrustworthy. Paid for service solutions often fail.

### **Education and relational capacity**

Research by Nobel Prize winning economist James Heckman shows that non-cognitive skills are as important as technical skills in determining employability, earnings and career success.<sup>iii</sup> There is a growing recognition that many children lack the social, emotional and entrepreneurial skills they need to develop relationships for learning and move into employment. A significant minority have to withstand upheaval and disruption in their lives – family breakdown, drug dependency – which makes it difficult for them to learn. Schools and policymakers have recognised this

with the spread of SEAL programmes and the growing stress on “expressive” aspects of a child’s development as a counter balance to the focus on teaching, learning and academic attainment.

Something much more sustained is needed however than a few PHSE lessons a week. Several local authorities said they estimated that 30-40% of the children they deal with needed support with social and aspects of their lives and all children would benefit from some provision. Manchester, South Tyneside and Hertfordshire are leading the way with emotional resilience programmes to promote well being for all children. Social and emotional skills for learning should be central to the curriculum in for children between the ages of 10 to 13.

### **Personal budgets and relationships**

Traditional service solutions often cut people off from the relationships that sustain them: day care centres, prisons, schools, hospitals. Early evidence from experiments with personal budgets in social care suggests that people with personal budgets tend to participate more in society, see their friend more and sustain their relationships. That is because personal budgets allow them to mix formal and informal care in creative ways that sustain their support networks and relationships and integrate services into their lifestyles. Personal budgets are good for relationships where traditional top down service solutions are often destructive. Personal budgets could be extended to other areas from families at risk, Needs to mental health and maternity services.

### **Creating New Platforms of Mutual Self Help**

Creating mutual self help support networks for care, health and learning. The Southwark Circle model...

Public services can work in a way that helps people to develop relationships which support people and which can also develop or change behaviour in socially beneficial ways. What are some of the design principles behind these approaches:

- The services must work with people.
- They must build up learning and capabilities so people can do things for themselves.
- They must connect people together in ways that make sense for them so they can support one another.
- They treat people not just as recipients but as contributors, which allows a reciprocal relationship to be created.
- Budgets must be devolved to people as far as possible to allow for distributed solutions.
- People need to be able to mix formal and informal supports so that services can fit into their lives.

Martha Nussbaum's goal – that public institutions should create capabilities in us that allows us to strengthen relationships in society – is realisable if we can find ways to bridge the huge gap between our public institutions and systems and the delicacy and particularity of people's lives. The bridge between the macro and the micro are relationships, the tribes, clans and communities of modern life.

Ironically, but perhaps predictably, as the state's economic role has contracted its social role has had to expand.

## **The Logic of With**

**With** – is an organising idea for more effective public services. **With** – gives us a way into what makes life valuable, full and rich for people: a life with significant relationships. But **With** is more than that, we believe. It can be an organising idea for politics and society. It gives us an insight into not just what makes for a good experience, service or even life but what makes for a good society.

**With** is a way of working – with people rather than to or for them. It is also an underlying principle of organisational design: the emerging, effective models of organisation are all based on the idea of with – networks, partnerships, collaboratives, creative communities. But the idea of with – working with, living with – has values written into it. **With** has a different political and social logic written into it.

To put it crudely we are seeking to move from a world where knowledge, power, production, authority is organised in a way that is to and for people. This world of “to and for” is under growing challenge and strain.

Often even when private and public services claim to be working for people it feels as if people are being done to. Public services and the market often leave people feeling powerless and done to. Traditional approaches to education and learning stress the transfer of knowledge from experts and teachers to waiting pupils. Conventional industrial corporation and public service hierarchies centralise power and authority top and down: people working at the bottom of these hierarchies often feel done to. Modern party politics broadcasts messages to us, targets us and then speaks for us. Value is created by transfer, transaction and exchange, from producers to consumers. The industrial era model of production does to the environment, extracting resources from it, leaving it polluted. The world of to and for is based on the idea of unmet needs (deficits which the state meets through its services) or unconsummated desires (which the market meets through commercial production.)

### **The to and for world ...**

Knowledge and learning from experts to people

Organisations as hierarchies

Authority top down

Services that deliver for and do to you

Politics that speaks for you, broadcasts to you

Value created by transaction and exchange

Generating and meeting unmet need/deficits

The logic of with is quite different. A world organised around the idea of working with people, rather than to or for them, has a subtlety different logic.

### **The world of With ...**

Knowledge and learning co-created, ProAm

Organisations as networks, partnerships

Authority earned peer to peer, negotiated

Solutions that co-produced

Politics in which you have voice in conversations

Value created through interaction, between people

Generating capabilities/building on assets

In the world of **With**, learning is a collaborative activity that can take place in many settings with many people. The prime organisational form is collaborative, based on networks and partnerships. Authority is far more distributed, earned peer to peer and have to be constantly negotiated. Solutions are most often co-produced and co-created. The politics of with is one in which people have a voice rather than being spoken for or to. The dominant mode of discourse is more conversational. Value is not created just by transfer and transaction, exchange. Instead it is created between people, it cannot be fully appropriated, it has to be shared, to some extent. The world of **With** focuses on building people's lasting capabilities to provide for and support themselves. **With** lays the groundwork for solutions that are done by people not to and for them. Services that work with people are more likely to enable people to

create solutions by themselves; solutions done by people. That is why with solutions create capabilities in people rather than just serving them. These are capabilities to prevent and manage issues; to respond to uncertainty and turmoil in a way that allows people to recover and recuperate.

The **With** approach is not just to improve public services, it provides a new lens for understand the kind of society we are trying to create. We want to highlight these features of a with society and politics:

- A **With** politics would be built on a sense of interconnection and interdependence. Most political theory starts from an abstract idea of the individual and rights and explains how individual come together to create a social contract. John Rawls' Theory of Justice was just the most recent of these. A politics of With starts instead from the idea that people live interconnected, interdependent lives, in families, tribes, clans. These social networks are the basic units of political organisation not individuals or the abstract collective entities of class and society.
- A **With** politics has to start with people and their actually existing relationships, rather than an idealised notion of the free, autonomous, theoretically equal individuals. The whole notion of self-interest, on which so much of economics and politics is based is thrown into question by a politics that starts from the realistic assumption is that people are primarily interested in the relationships they have. The starting point for With politics is shared interests in social networks, rather than individual self interest.
- A **With** politics makes us think differently about the boundaries between the public and the private. Mrs Thatcher's liberal vision was based on a distinct boundary between the state – which was supposed to get smaller – and an expanded sphere of private life, free from state control. The social democratic vision of society, was based on the incorporation of collective interests – business and trade unions – into a state led consensus about society. The politics of With is based on a deep blurring of the line between what is counted as a public issue – for the state – and what is a private issue for

individuals and families. As a result the politics of With creates new political hybrids: liberal paternalism.

- **With** politics puts fundamental values – of justice, equity and autonomy in a different focus. Autonomy cannot be the overriding value in a society built on the necessity of interdependence and interconnection. Traditional theories of justice stress the rights of individuals, but a With political theory would start from key sets of relationships that need to be protected. Nor would justice be the sole or even the overriding value of a **With** politics. It would place care and decency – how people are treated alongside justice as a value. Justice and equality can be dispensed in ways that are humiliating and even indecent. A With society would put address stress of how people are treated, how values are enacted. The logic of working with people is very different from the logic and values implicit in working for them or to them. The values of With stress mutuality, reciprocity, collaborative, respect and democracy. You cannot be committed to working with people only to ride roughshod over them. **With** puts the idea of care – being attentive, responsive, respectful – at the heart of politics alongside justice. In a **With** politics care and decency should determine how justice is dispensed.
- The social comes first. In traditional view of society material needs – for food and shelter are satisfied first before higher level emotional and social needs can be satisfied. **With** politics inverts this pyramid. It puts social relations at the heart of what sustains people and often determines what access people have to resources: people often get jobs for example, as well as care, through networks of relationships. The social determines access to the material, not the other way around.
- Finally, a **With** politics would make us rethink our notions of value. In traditional economics value is created in transactions, by transfer and exchange, when a seller sells a product to a consumer. In the With economy value is created not by transfer but through interaction and collaboration. But more than that, relationships and what they bring – care, love, respect, recognition - cannot be bought and sold. One cannot buy recognition from

peers; it has to be earned. One can buy personal services but not care which implies a level of attention that goes beyond labour. In the With world value is created and sustained in a completely different way compared with the market. Lasting value comes from reciprocity that builds relationships rather than transactions.

## **With Participle**

**With** is at the core of our work at Participle, as a way of working with people, as a way of organising ourselves and as a set of values that guide us to :

Identify and understand challenges and opportunities with the people they affect, people often who are done to by government and markets (because they lack of financial or political clout) and we develop solutions with people so they have the capabilities to enact them and take more control of their lives, together.

That, put simply is our mission: to think and act with people to solve social problems.

Our With approach also helps to explain many of the challenges we face to:

- Reach and include people at the margins of society.
- Equip and motivate people to enact with solutions.
- Deepen participation.
- Scale up solutions that are not products or services but based on relationships.

**With** is both a hugely potent and a difficult way to work.

We want to expand and deepen the people we work with; find new methods to work with them more effectively; deepen and extend our participation and collaboration with them; do more to enable solutions devised with people to lead to solutions enacted by them.

This is our philosophy: not solutions or politics delivered to people, but solutions that work with and by them.

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<sup>i</sup> P Marshall, Centreforum Policy Paper, Tackling Educational Inequality, 2007

<sup>ii</sup> D Engster, *The Heart of Justice: care, ethics and political theory*, OUP 2007

<sup>iii</sup> For an overview of Heckman's work go to <http://jenni.uchicago.edu/human-inequality/>