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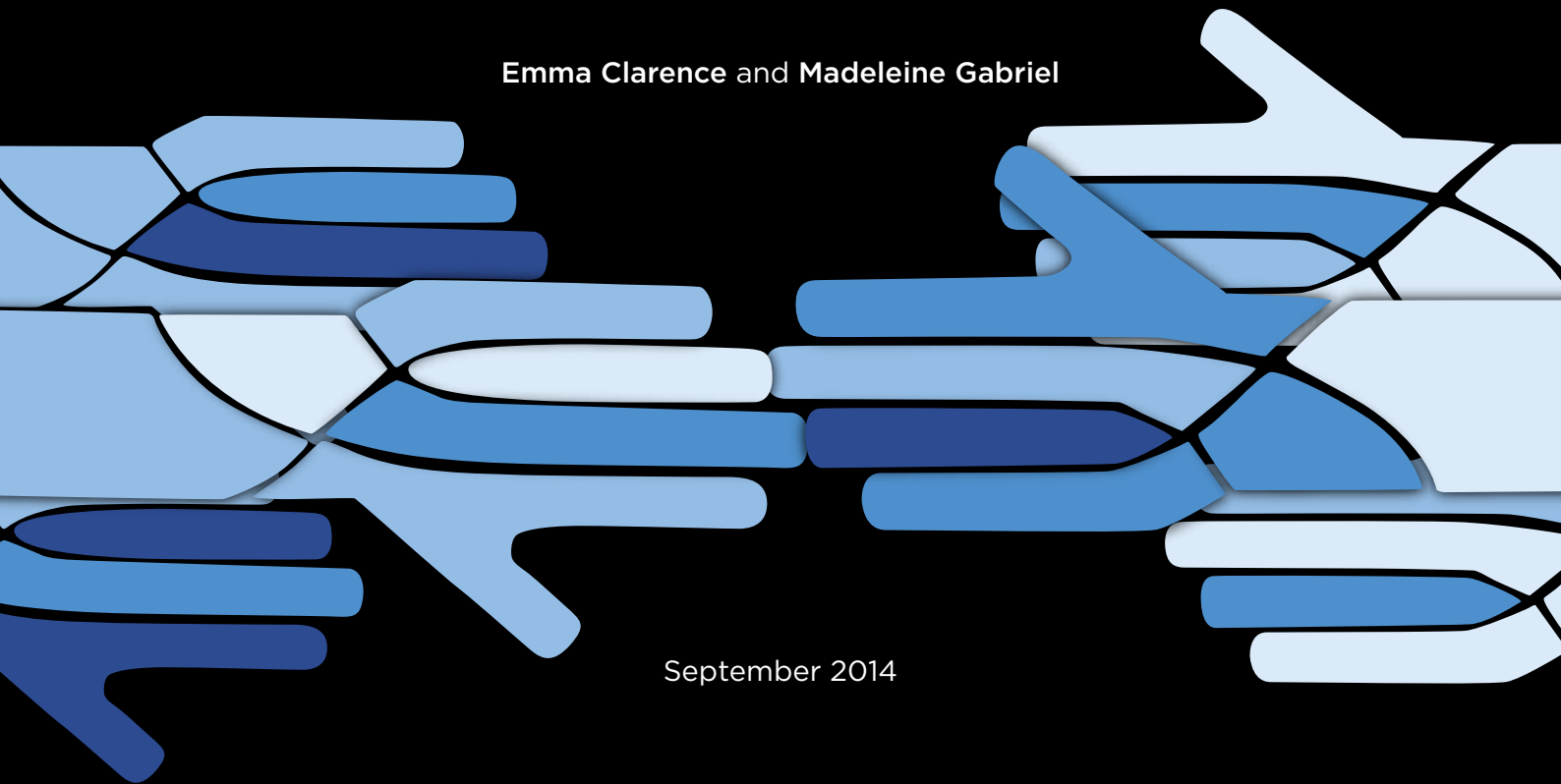
# PEOPLE HELPING PEOPLE

## the future of public services

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September 2014

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## About Nesta

**Nesta is the UK's innovation foundation.**

An independent charity, we help people and organisations bring great ideas to life. We do this by providing investments and grants and mobilising research, networks and skills.

Nesta runs the £14 million Centre for Social Action Innovation Fund, in partnership with the Cabinet Office, to support the growth of innovations that mobilise people's energy and talents to help each other, working alongside public services.
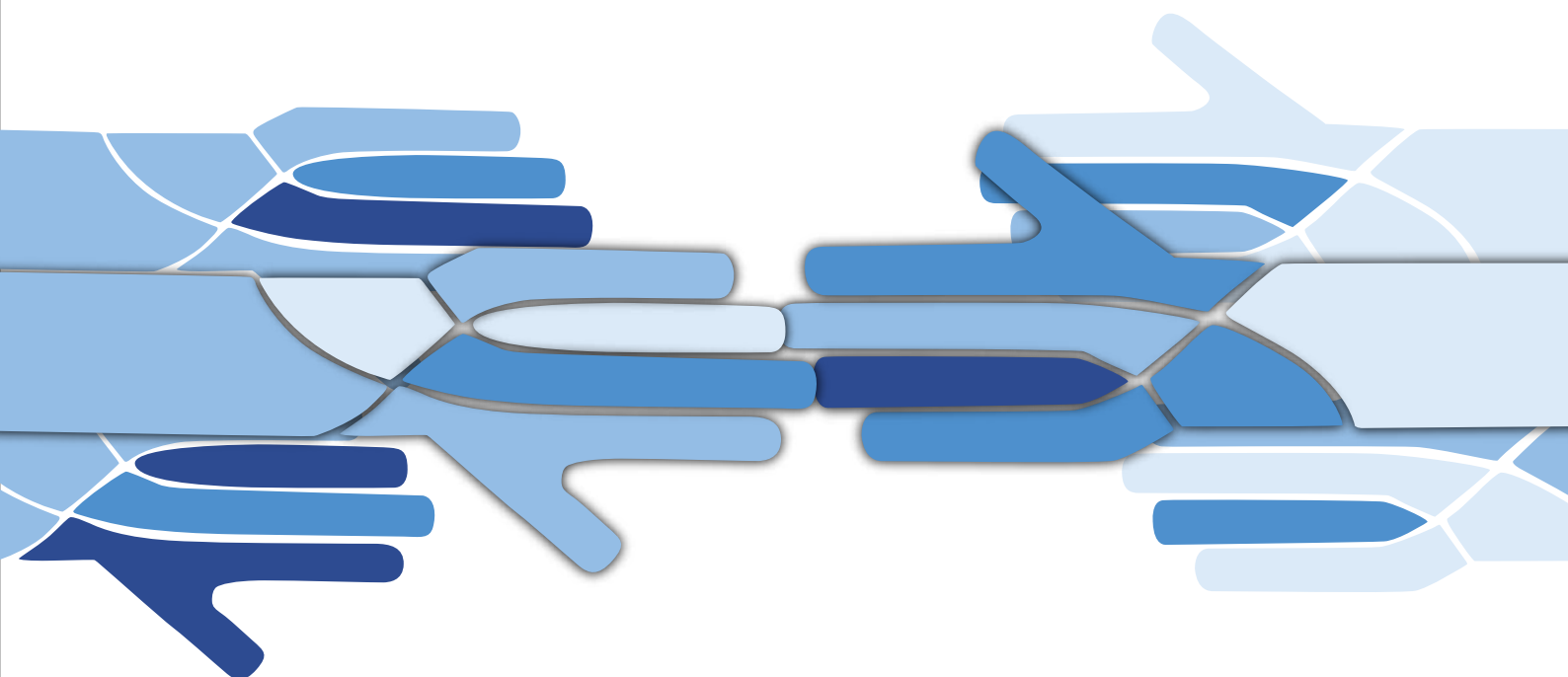See: **www.nesta.org.uk/project/centre-social-action-innovation-fund**

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# PEOPLE HELPING PEOPLE
## the future of public services

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# FOREWORD

S ocial action is changing lives. Whether it is communities mobilising themselves to tackle local challenges, inspirational volunteers offering support to people in need or simply people helping people through every day acts, social action is playing an increasingly important role in meeting the challenges that Britain faces and shaping and contributing to the services that the public want.

That's why through the Centre for Social Action, in partnership with Nesta, we're proud to be supporting more than 150 projects which are putting social action into practice. These projects are exploring new models of public service delivery and harnessing the passion and skill of individuals and communities. With the Centre's backing, they are now growing their reach and demonstrating their impact, from improving patient satisfaction in hospitals and creating a national movement on dementia, to enabling many more young people to reach their potential.

The Centre's work is part of the ambitious vision we have for realising the opportunity that social action represents. Alongside our work in the Centre, we've recruited and trained more than 3,500 community organisers – individuals inspiring grassroots social action and helping identify local leaders, projects and opportunities. They are empowering communities to act on the issues that are most important to them. We've also supported more than 14,000 local social action projects through our innovative, volunteer-led Community First programme.

As this report recognises, social action is not a panacea for the challenges public services face. However, putting these programmes together creates a window into the immense human, social and community capital that can be unlocked through social action – indeed this report uses new research that estimates the value of regular social action in public services to be around £34 billion per year.

But while in some areas social action has long been a fundamental part of the fabric of life – like school governors or special constables – in many others the work we are doing is only at the start of that journey.

That's why I'd like to thank Nesta for producing this stimulating report, which highlights the transformative potential of this agenda and provides a wealth of practical examples of our work. Most importantly it lays down the challenge, but also the opportunity, ahead of us – to think differently about how we design services to mobilise the energy and contributions of the extraordinary citizens, communities and businesses who readily give their time to support others.

**Brooks Newmark MP, Minister for Civil Society**

# 1. INTRODUCTION

Citizen engagement has always been at the heart of public services. Before the development of the post–war welfare state, many key services, such as housing, health, and education, were provided by benevolent philanthropists, charities and other types of voluntary organisations. Even as services became increasingly professionalised and systematised, voluntary action continued to play a key role. From the Peabody Donation Fund, established in 1862, which provided decent housing for London's poor and continues today as the Peabody Trust,[1] through to the 50,000 plus children in England who in 2013 were being looked after by foster carers, there is a long tradition in the UK of people helping people.[2]

Today, the contribution of members of the public has become so integral to many public services that it can easily be overlooked. Many of the magistrates in front of whom criminal cases start within the court system are volunteers, as are the members of the Independent Monitoring Boards who check the day–to–day running of prisons. Special Constables have become an integral part of the police force in many parts of the UK. Over three million people volunteer across the health and social care sectors. School governors, at around 300,000, are one of the biggest groups of volunteers in the country.

But while there is significant citizen engagement in many areas, public services are not, on the whole, oriented around mobilising people to help each other. Jobcentres, for example, give few opportunities for people who've successfully found work to support others into jobs. The time available for GP consultations leaves little room for doctors to engage with patients and to explore the opportunities in the wider community that could improve their health and wellbeing.

This report argues that mobilising the energy and contributions of members of the public should become a core organising principle for public services.

Doing so would increase the resources available to achieve social goals, such as by offering tutoring to children and young people to increase their educational attainment. It would give public services access to new expertise and knowledge; people with long–term health issues, such as diabetes, could find support from those in a similar position, drawing on their understanding of managing their condition. It would provide a way of reaching people who public services cannot reach, or giving them more support than public services can offer. Community First Responders already provide first aid to people in their areas before paramedics get to the scene of an emergency; isolation and loneliness can't be tackled by paid professionals alone, but could be mitigated by people visiting their neighbours who live alone. Putting citizens' contributions at the core of public services could fundamentally change the way

*Putting citizens' contributions at the core of public services could fundamentally change the way we respond to social needs and challenges.*

we respond to social needs and challenges, as happened with the first steps towards foster care for children in the 1850s, when children in workhouses began being placed with families instead. In short, social action would help to create better services, improving people's experiences and outcomes.

According to the Community Life Survey 2013–2014, 48 per cent of people in England volunteer formally or informally at least once per month, while 74 per cent do so at least once per year. We know that when people help other people it creates stronger communities and higher levels of social capital – with all of the associated economic, social, and health and wellbeing benefits that brings.[3] In the long run such ties can help public services, by reducing demands on them. At the same time, we know that benefits flow back to people who participate in social action, from a positive impact on their health and wellbeing,[4] through to gaining valuable skills and experience.

There are compelling reasons to redesign public services so that they more actively engage citizens. Demographic changes, in particular the ageing population, means that demand for services is increasing, and there is wide acknowledgement that existing resources will be unable to meet this growing demand. At the same time, the way in which people want to engage with public services has changed. When the welfare state was being developed, in the years following the Second World War, services were designed around the idea of doing things *to* people, with professionals 'knowing best'. This shifted over time to services being conceived as doing things *for* people (and citizens being seen under New Public Management as 'service users' or 'customers').[5]

Now, the public increasingly expects more responsive, more personalised public services; services that do things *with* people. Discussions around co-production, and using new methods such as user-centred design and ethnography to understand the experience of services from the individual's perspective, have begun to explore how public services can be redesigned with citizens at their heart.

Redesigning public services to mobilise people to help each other alongside paid professionals is not a simple task. It requires some significant shifts: from managing resources to mobilising them; from delivering to facilitating; from thinking about what a particular service can provide to exploring how to tap into resources out of the public sector's direct control. To do this means making human relations integral to the way in which public services are designed and delivered, such as by focusing less on what public services can do for a person leaving hospital, and more on mobilising networks in the community that can support people at home as they continue to recover.[6]

*We need to put the public back into the heart of public services.*

This will not be easy. And there is no single blueprint to follow. But we know that public services cannot continue as they are. We need to rethink, reconfigure and redesign the relationship that exists between people and public services, and the paid professionals who are committed to providing excellent services. In short, we need to put the public back into the heart of public services.

This report examines how public services can become more open and engage citizens more actively. It calls for public services to think more creatively about how they can collaborate with the public to make better use of the energy and enthusiasm that people can and want to offer. It explores the challenges that public services face in mobilising resources that are by nature voluntary and cannot be mandated. It shows how doing this creates shared value and suggests steps that public services can take in order to reorient themselves towards mobilising people. At the end of the report, we include ten case studies, showing how public services are improving and being transformed by engaging people with what they do.
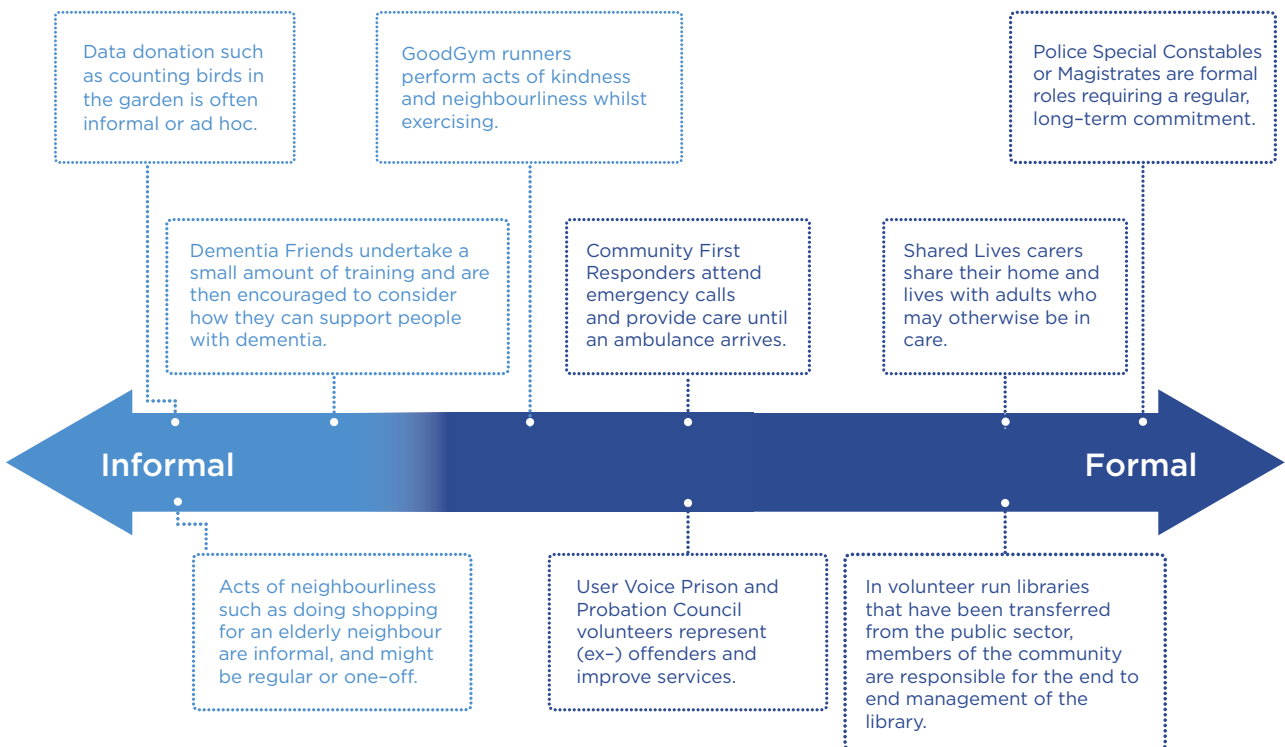
# 2.  SOCIAL ACTION AND PUBLIC SERVICES: LONG TRADITION, NEW OPPORTUNITIES

Mobilising citizens alongside and in public services is not a new phenomenon. Nor is it a niche activity. Economic analysis undertaken for this report suggests that the value of time that people voluntarily give in support of public services is equal to £34 billion each year. But enabling people to help other is not yet a central organising principle for public services. Its transformative potential remains underdeveloped and there is much more that could be done.

## Mobilising citizens: the spectrum of social action

Volunteering, giving, neighbourliness, reciprocity, pro–social behaviour, people–powered public services: what underpins the myriad of such terms is the simple idea of people helping people, of individuals freely taking action to benefit others.

Data donation such as counting birds in the garden is often informal or ad hoc.

GoodGym runners perform acts of kindness and neighbourliness whilst exercising.

Police Special Constables or Magistrates are formal roles requiring a regular, long–term commitment.

Dementia Friends undertake a small amount of training and are then encouraged to consider how they can support people with dementia.

Community First Responders attend emergency calls and provide care until an ambulance arrives.

Shared Lives carers share their home and lives with adults who may otherwise be in care.

Informal

Formal

Acts of neighbourliness such as doing shopping for an elderly neighbour are informal, and might be regular or one–off.

User Voice Prison and Probation Council volunteers represent (ex–) offenders and improve services.

In volunteer run libraries that have been transferred from the public sector, members of the community are responsible for the end to end management of the library.

One term to describe this type of activity is social action. Social action refers to a wide array of activities undertaken voluntarily to benefit others. These can include, for example, small acts of kindness and neighbourliness, one–off volunteering in a time of crisis or in response to a specific request, through to regular, formal volunteering.

Many of the activities that people undertake are unpaid, but not all. From the rewards provided by the timebank Spice, to the small stipends Shared Lives carers receive, social action can provide material rewards, but these are always far outweighed by the contribution given.

## The Centre for Social Action

The Centre for Social Action is a collaboration between the Cabinet Office and Nesta, the UK's innovation foundation, to support the growth of programmes that encourage people to make positive change through social action.

Over two years, the Centre is investing £40 million in supporting innovative programmes to increase their reach and demonstrate their impact through evidence of what works. It has already mobilised more than 250,000 volunteers and supporters to help one another across England.

The defining feature of social action is the creation of shared value. The benefits accrue not only to those who give time, money or resources, but to beneficiaries and service users, professionals, and institutions that are able to have a greater impact in the way they work.

Finding the right language to describe this activity is not easy. The term 'social action', although entering the policy community's lexicon, is not widely shared or understood. And 'volunteering' conjures up particular images that may not reflect the diversity of people or opportunities for action that exist – nor draw people in. Finding a term that encapsulates the richness of what people helping people can mean is still a work in progress.

Acknowledging that there is no single, shared term yet, we use 'social action' in this report. In particular, we focus on social action that augments or transforms public services. This means, for example, that we don't focus on activities like campaigning, or voluntary activity that might only have a very indirect link with public service goals, such as teaching children how to sail. Even so, there's a wide range of activity that is happening, and that could happen, directly relevant to public services, from volunteering in public institutions to giving informal help to a vulnerable person.

## Social action: language and definitions

Although social action itself may not be new, the use of the phrase has increased over the past decade.

In the UK, the Council on Social Action (CoSA) (2007–2009) brought together innovators from every sector to generate ideas and initiatives, and defined social action as: *"The wide range of ways in which individuals, communities, organisations and businesses can seek through their choices, actions and commitments to address the social issues they care about."*

Although the main political parties may use different language (such as 'people powered public services' as well as 'social action'), there is wide–ranging consensus as to the need for people to play a greater role in transforming and contributing to public services in ways that bring about benefits for people and communities.[8]
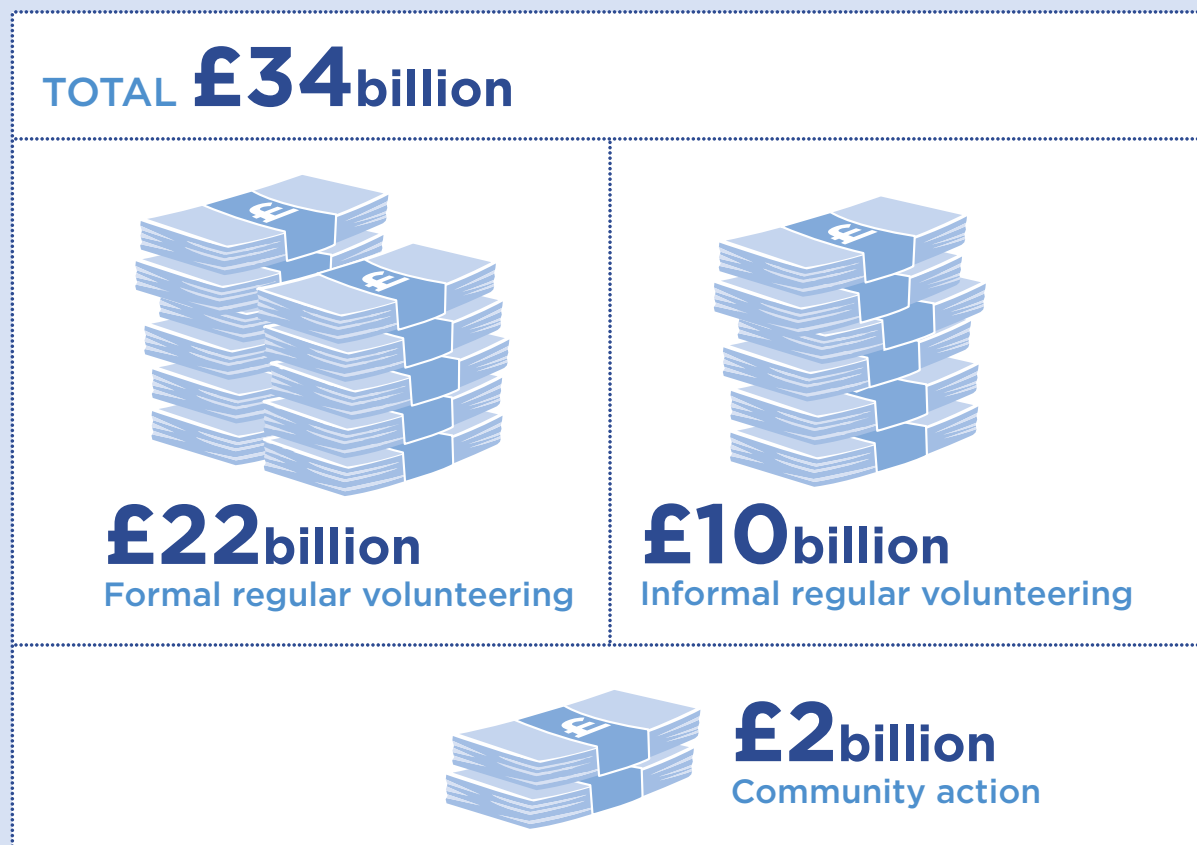
## Social action in public services is well established and widespread

There is a long history in the UK of people helping people alongside public services, from the faith–based volunteering organisations of the 19th century, such as the St John Ambulance Association, to the Voluntary Aid Detachment nurses formed in the years prior to the First World War, to household names like the Citizens Advice Bureaux established in 1939.[9]

This tradition continues today. New analysis for this report estimates that the annual value of time voluntarily given by members of the public in activity that supports public services is £34 billion. That is more than the total UK public sector spending on primary and pre–primary education (£32 billion).[10]

### Estimating the economic contribution of social action in and alongside public services

In analysis for this report, Tooley Street Research estimated the annual value of regular social action in and alongside public services in England to be around £34 billion. This is equivalent to around 5 per cent of total government expenditure, or 2.2 per cent of GDP. This breaks down as follows:

TOTAL **£34**billion

**£22**billion
Formal regular volunteering

**£10**billion
Informal regular volunteering

**£2**billion
Community action

The researchers used the Community Life Survey 2012–13 as a starting point for the estimate, focusing on three types of social action:

- **Regular formal volunteering:** giving unpaid help through groups, clubs or organisations to benefit other people or the environment, at least once per month.
- **Regular informal volunteering:** giving unpaid help as an individual to people who are not relatives, at least once per month.
- **Community action:**[11] giving unpaid help to support a community event, campaign or project run by neighbours.

To estimate the value of volunteering and community action, the researchers adapted an existing Office for National Statistics (ONS) model. The Community Life Survey gives information on the types of voluntary activities that people do. The researchers focused on sub-categories that they judged related to public services, excluding others such as 'campaigning' and 'looking after a property or pet for someone who is away'. They then estimated the person hours spent on these activities each month. Data on the total time spent on average by each individual on volunteering and community action is available, but the amount of time spent on each sub-category of activity is not published. For simplicity, the researchers assumed an equal amount of is time spent on each sub-category of activity. They then identified an hourly rate for each task, based on the ONS model. This ascribes voluntary activities an hourly rate, based on the median wage that people employed to do similar tasks receive. Most of the activity is classified as being in the caring 'personal' services, with an equivalent hourly rate of £8.32. Multiplying the hours spent by the hourly rate produced an estimate of the economic value of social action related to public services. Further detail of the methodology is available in a separate paper.

The figure of £34 billion is an estimate of the economic output value of social action. It does not equate to taxpayer savings – there are considerable recognised difficulties in determining how far the activities are complementary to, or substitute for, existing budget lines.

The figure excludes irregular one–off actions of volunteering, as well as the value for charitable giving, estimated at £10 billion per year, since it's not possible to determine how far this giving relates to public services.

It also excludes:

- The value to the public services of wellbeing effects on the individuals donating time and money.

- The long–term impact on the effectiveness of the public services that arises from higher productivity, including investment in preventative activities, wellbeing effects for recipients of public services, and savings this brings for the taxpayer.

Both these effects, however, are indisputably large: probably several orders of magnitude higher than the annual economic effect indicated above.

Although there's no single source of data on the numbers of volunteers working within public services, there are some instructive examples. For example:

- It's estimated that over three million people volunteer regularly across health and social care – equivalent to the number of paid employees in the NHS and social care sectors combined.[12]

- There are approximately 300,000 school governors in England.[13]

- A survey by the King's Fund estimated that there are 78,000 people volunteering regularly in NHS acute trusts across England, an average of 471 per trust.[14]

- The Coastguard Rescue Service is delivered by 3,500 volunteers, a group over three times as large as the Maritime and Coastguard Agency's paid staff.

Regular volunteering within or alongside public services, as in the examples above, is one model through which social action and public services interact, but there are many others. Charities and social enterprises play a major role in mobilising people to help each other alongside public services. Some deliver these activities in partnership with public services, often underpinned by contractual arrangements. For example, schools pay for City Year's teams of young people

*Charities and social enterprises play a major role in mobilising social action in support of public services.*

to come and volunteer full–time with them for a year. Partnerships often involve exchanges of other resources, such as space or staff time, instead of, or as well as, money. Code Club doesn't charge primary schools to set up clubs, but relies on schools offering classrooms and teachers to co–host the clubs. Code Club has so far mobilised 2,000 volunteer programmers to teach children to code. In other cases social action and public services operate separately but cooperate, for example by making referrals between services. And then there's the huge realm of mainly under–the–radar social action, such as grassroots community activity, informal actions by individuals to support others and ad hoc 'movements', such as people volunteering to help clean up after the riots in London in 2011 or the floods of early 2014.

Social action already plays a role in areas as diverse as education, health, rehabilitation, policing, criminal justice, parks and environment, libraries and leisure, emergency services, social care and defence. And as the examples above suggest, there is a wide range of roles that people play. Some need a high level of training and give considerable responsibility to the individuals taking part, like St John Ambulance first aiders or Shared Lives carers. Some roles
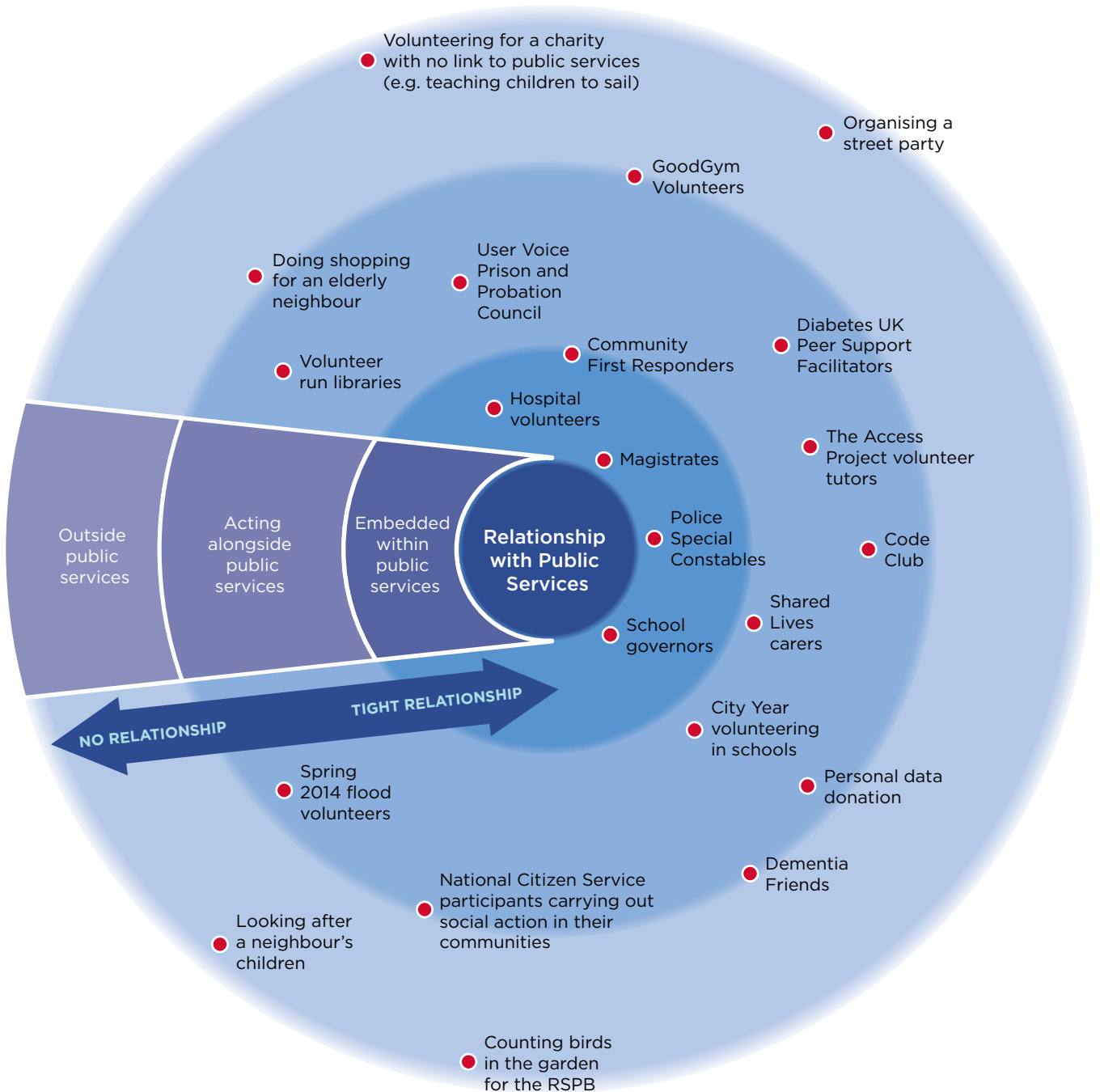
simply require empathy and energy, like GoodGym's runners who visit older people and clean up community gardens. Social action may demand a regular time commitment, but it can also take the form of everyday activities like looking in on a neighbour, or ad hoc or occasional voluntary activity.

## But social action can play a bigger role

Although there are already many examples of people helping people alongside public services, this is not yet central to the way most services are planned, commissioned and delivered. Many social action initiatives are currently operating at a small scale, with potential to grow if demand for them amongst public services increased. Commissioners are often interested, but talk about the difficulties they face in finding out about new schemes, initiatives and approaches, comparing effectiveness and having enough evidence to make a case to their organisations.

If public services were to make mobilising citizens more central to the way they are designed and delivered, would there be the 'supply' of people willing to take part? We argue that there's potential to create more impact from the activity already going on. Valued at £34 billion, the current level of social action is an enormous asset and it is worth exploring how this existing contribution could be mobilised in ways that would create even greater benefits for society. We know that some well–intentioned voluntary efforts simply aren't being deployed in the most effective ways, or at the best time. To address this, the 'impact volunteering' approach being promoted through the Cities of Service programme places a strong emphasis on testing and evaluating social action initiatives, so that they can be improved or discontinued if they don't have their intended effect.

### Impact volunteering in Cities of Service

Cities of Service focuses on 'impact volunteering'. Cities create 'service plans', strategies to mobilise volunteers in the most impactful way possible to meet the city's most pressing needs. A key part of the approach is testing ways to deploy volunteers to create most impact and developing an evidence base to inform future activities. Cities of Service has created a series of 'blueprints' that codify the most effective initiatives so that others can replicate them more easily.

There also seems to be potential to increase the scale of activity. Currently, 48 per cent of people in England volunteer formally or informally at least once per month, while 74 per cent do so at least once per year.[15] Rates vary between different areas and population groups, with factors such as employment status and income affecting people's likelihood to take part. If barriers to participation could be removed, so that all rates in all English regions were as high as in the South East, there would be an extra 2.7 million people volunteering formally or informally at least once per year.[16]
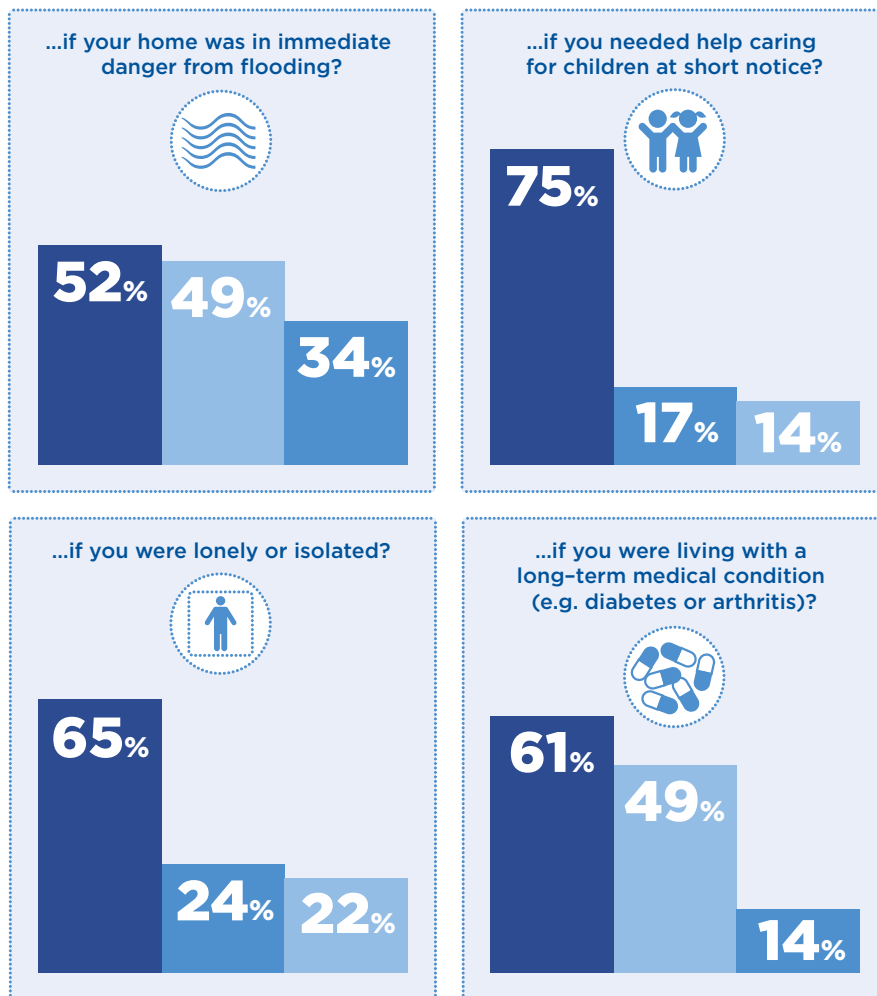
Removing barriers to participation isn't easy, but some social action initiatives show the potential of reaching out to groups within the population whose capacity might be under–utilised or unrecognised. In Baltimore (USA), for example, the municipal government created the 'Recovery Corps' programme 2011 after noticing how people who had recovered from addiction were already helping others informally. The programme trains people who have been through recovery to become peer mentors and links them with treatment facilities so that they get more formal support in their role.[17] In the UK, User Voice works with those in prison and on probation by setting up voluntary Councils to voice collective problems and identify potential solutions. Think tank Demos has argued that there is an opportunity to support more young people in schools, colleges and universities to take part in social action,[18] while the Encore movement advocates for people in the second half of life to find 'passion and purpose' through social action.[19]

There is also potential to explore new types of opportunity for participation. David Halpern of the Behavioural Insights Team, for example, argues that there is considerable scope to do more to harness the power of reciprocity. Public services could be making small asks of people who have benefited, improving outcomes for other service users – for example, Jobcentre Plus could ask people who have been supported into work to spend an hour meeting job seekers looking for work in the same field – helping to build the social capital and 'weak ties' that are so important in finding employment.[20]

Meanwhile, research commissioned from Ipsos MORI for this report highlights people's interest in giving and receiving help from their neighbours.[21] Of a representative sample of adults in the UK, 60 per cent said they would be very or fairly interested in doing shopping for an older neighbour and 58 per cent would be interested in joining a team of volunteers to help clean up, if there were freak storms in their area. Sixty–three per cent of people agreed with the statement 'I have skills that my neighbours might find useful'. And when asked where they would like to get help from in a range of different situations, 'help from other people in my area (e.g. neighbours)' consistently appeared in the top three responses.

## Which would you find most useful in these situations? Top three preferences[22]

**...if your home was in immediate danger from flooding?**

52%  49%  34%

**...if you needed help caring for children at short notice?**

75%  17%  14%

**...if you were lonely or isolated?**

65%  24%  22%

**...if you were living with a long–term medical condition (e.g. diabetes or arthritis)?**

61%  49%  14%

■ Help from friends or family    ■ Help from local public services    ■ Help from other people in your area (e.g. neighbours)

Ipsos MORI carried out a face-to-face survey of 999 adults in the UK. Respondents were asked 'Which two or three, if any, of the following do you think you would find most useful in these situations?' They were given a list of 11 options and could pick as many as applied to them. Since respondents could pick multiple options, percentages do not add up to 100 per cent. Responses were weighted to the known profile of the population.
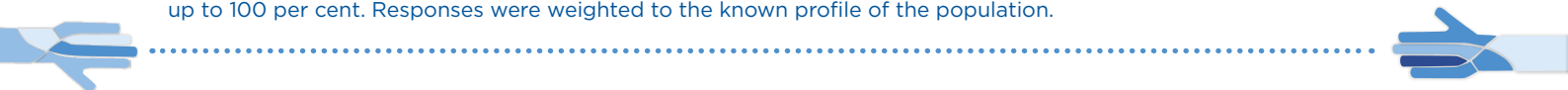
Technology is also creating new opportunities, providing more and different ways for people to get involved. Digital technologies are already helping communities during emergencies, by providing ways to coordinate activities, such as in the flooding emergencies in England in early 2014. Meanwhile the internet can provide new platforms for volunteering or peer support. The Big White Wall, for example, is a website where people with mental health and wellbeing difficulties can access a mix of peer and clinically supported conversations, alongside a wide range of information.[23] Technology can also facilitate 'micro–volunteering' opportunities, 'bite–size' activities that are easy to access and don't require a formal agreement between organisation and volunteer.[24] The 'Help from Home' website, for example, offers opportunities, some of which can be done online (such as completing an online survey) and some offline (such as knitting scarves for homeless people).[25]

## Flooding in south–west England: technology in action

In 2014 when severe flooding affected parts of south–west England, the power of technology in mobilising people became clear. Residents within affected communities coordinated their activities, using social media to keep each other informed and to identify needs. As the crisis developed help came from increasingly further afield: a group from the technology community gathered in London to devise digital solutions to help communities, such as geo–targeting those in affected communities on Facebook; young farmers responded to a request for help on Twitter during the clean–up, bringing equipment and giving their time to help other farmers in need. Accompanying this was a website set up to match volunteers with what was needed, with targeted messages on Facebook directing people to the website in flooded areas.

The combination of Facebook and the website, alongside social media campaigns to promote the website, saw more than 800 people registered on the site within a few days of its launch.

Another opportunity lies in exploring a greater role for business. Businesses are increasingly focused on ensuring their corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities create impact. Not all CSR activities involve social action, but their potential to do so is an opportunity to tap into a pool of talented individuals. For some organisations, such as The Access Project, companies' desire to have an impact is increasing the numbers of volunteers available to tutor students. Other businesses are acting directly, such as Barclays' 'Digital Eagles'. 'Tea and Teach' sessions are held in local Barclays' branches, and Digital Eagles provide support to anyone who needs assistance with the internet, whether it be emails, setting up a community on–line club noticeboard, or online banking.[26]

## The Access Project: accelerating learning through volunteer tutors

Matching volunteer tutors with disadvantaged students, The Access Project helps young people to improve their educational attainment and enable them to successfully apply to Russell Group and other highly selective universities. Sixty–three per cent of participants progress to selective universities.

Tutors donate an hour a week to tutor a young person in a specific subject. Tutors meet students in their offices for the sessions. For example Slaughter and May, an international law firm, invites students to their central London offices. This helps to build young people's aspirations and confidence as well as their subject–specific knowledge.

Prestigious private sector firms encourage staff to volunteer as tutors and many also match fund the cost of the programme for participating schools. The firms involved value the benefits of volunteering for their staff, as well as the impact the tutoring has on the grades and outcomes of the young people involved in the programme.

Christopher Saul, Senior Partner at Slaughter and May comments, *"Social mobility is an important issue for the firm. Working in partnership with The Access Project, the Key Project reinforces our commitment to help young people from average or below average income families raise their career aspirations and gain the academic results to achieve these aspirations."*

## What does this mean for people and for public services?

We have argued that social action isn't new, that there is a lot already taking place, and that it could become integral to public services. But what does this mean more generally for people, and for public services?

*Social action can be seen as integral to the radical reshaping of public services that a relational state would demand.*

The way in which people want to engage with public services has changed. And the demands being placed upon public services are growing. The need for public services to change presents many challenges, not only to public services themselves, but also in relation to people's expectations of what public services should look like. The idea of the 'relational state' can be useful for rethinking the relationship between people and public services, as well as the way in which public services need to be redesigned and reshaped.

The relational state heralds a shift away from the delivery model that has dominated public services in the post–Second World War era. It is no longer about public services being done to, or for, somebody, but rather with them. It is about putting relations at the heart of what governments do, with all of the radical reshaping of public services that this demands.[27] And it is also about people recognising that they have a contribution to make to public services and being willing to get involved in public services, in a myriad of different ways.

### Derry–Londonderry's community planning process – 'relational' working in action

In Northern Ireland, Derry–Londonderry's regeneration agency, ILEX, spent 18 months working with the public and private sectors, the social economy, volunteers and communities to develop the regeneration plan for the city. This wasn't just about community buy–in, but a focus on people taking ownership of the future of their city and seeing themselves as 'agents of change' – a role that continues into the implementation phase and which required a rethinking of the relationships between different actors within the city.[28]

Social action can be seen as integral to the radical reshaping of public services that a relational state would demand. It would bring in new kinds of expertise, capacity and resources that can help tackle the complex problems society confronts – such as chronic health conditions, the consequences of an ageing population and long–term unemployment – as well as enable the creation of more personalised services.[29]

# 3. WHY SHOULD PUBLIC SERVICES EMBRACE SOCIAL ACTION?

n this report we argue that mobilising people should be a core organising principle for public services. We think there are five compelling reasons to do this:

• Increase the resources available to achieve social goals.

• Give public services access to new expertise and knowledge.

• Reach people and places that public services cannot reach.

• Lead to a fundamental change in the way we respond to social needs and challenges.

• Create better services and reciprocal value for the people who give their time.

## Social action can increase the resources available to achieve social goals

Demand for public services is increasing faster than spending. The Local Government Association predicts an expenditure gap – the gap between demand for spending and funding – of £14.4 billion for local councils by 2020.[30] Meanwhile, analysis by the Institute for Fiscal Studies and Nuffield Trust estimates that even if the NHS is able to make its target efficiency savings, it will still face a funding gap of £28–£34 billion by 2021/22.[31] This is driven partly by austerity measures, but also by long–term drivers of demand, such as demographic changes and an increase in long–term health conditions. As a result, these gaps are predicted to persist, regardless of whether government policies towards public service spending change. It is now widely acknowledged that public services will have to think creatively about how to meet social goals.

In this context, many commissioners are exploring how they can draw on people's willingness to get involved, help each other or 'give something back'. In museums and libraries, for example, a number of different models are emerging, from bringing volunteers in to support the roles of paid staff to transferring services to the community to run. In other areas, as services have needed to focus increasingly on people with the highest levels of need, commissioners have looked at the potential role of social action in providing low–level support and preventative services. In adult social care, for example, commissioners are exploring how volunteers can help to reduce the need for formal services, such as by reducing people's isolation and loneliness.

When services have faced reductions in funding, these approaches have sometimes been controversial. However, opening up services to get people involved need not only be a response to cuts; it can also be a way of delivering a level of support that paid staff could never have done alone. The Access Project's volunteer tutors deliver 30 hours of one–to–one tuition with each young person they work with, a level of support that teachers simply do not have the capacity to provide.

Through social action, it's often possible to do things that staff find difficult to do because of constraints on their time, or things that are not core to service delivery and would therefore be difficult to fund, but which people value. Volunteers, for example, can help people navigate buildings, provide emotional support, spend more time with service users than professionals are able to, or bring their local or specialist knowledge to services.

## Social action can give public services access to new expertise and knowledge

When members of the public get involved in public services, they often bring skills, knowledge and experience that paid staff may not have. Schools are now explicitly encouraged to consider governors' skills and experience when appointing and recruiting,[32] recognising that effective governing bodies tend to have skills that complement those of the school's leadership team, such as financial or legal knowledge.[33] Across the country job clubs are springing up that match job seekers with volunteers who have found work recently or who have access to networks and contacts in specific fields. Smart Works and Dress for Success go one step further giving job seekers a free new outfit for interviews, a one–to–one coaching session with a volunteer to build their confidence and access to advice from a network of volunteers and those who've found work.

People with particular experience can support others going through the same or similar things. Home–Start, for example, links volunteers with families with young children. The volunteers – who are parents themselves – visit families each week and help them cope with 'whatever life throws at them'. Founded in the 1970s, Home–Start now supports 32,000 families each year.[34] In Australia, the valuable role social action can play in accessing different types of knowledge is being shown by the Family by Family programme. The programme matches families going through difficult times with those who have been in similar circumstances, with professional support available, albeit in the background.

### Family by Family: working through difficulties with peer support

Family by Family is peer support with a 'whole family' focus integral to its approach. Running in parts of Australia, the programme matches families who have worked through their own difficulties with families going through tough times who want to improve things. They are supported by a professional behind the scenes, but the focus is on the families working together. The programme aims to intervene before families experience more serious problems such as family breakdown, domestic violence, child abuse or neglect. Its preventative approach is cost–effective: Family by Family estimates that it can help nearly 100 families in a community for the cost of putting three children into alternative (residential) care.

The first evaluation of the programme, whilst acknowledging its youthfulness, found that the programme was engaging families, including those with child protection issues and who may have been found 'difficult' traditionally, and that there were positive outcomes for all members of the families being supported. This had particularly important implications for children's long–term development.[35]

Facilitating peers to share knowledge is a way for public services to access new expertise and skills to help people. Public services can also play this facilitation role informally, helping to make services more personal and building stronger community links. For example, NHS antenatal classes bring people together at a similar stage in a life–changing event and provide opportunities for informal networks to develop that will provide on–going support.

## Social action can reach people and places that public services cannot reach

Sometimes it's about being in the right place at the right time. Many ambulance services have 'Community First Responder' schemes, training people in first aid so that they can provide help in an emergency, before an ambulance can get there. In Moffatt, Scotland, the community came together to tackle the problem of flooding, driven in part by blocked drains, after repeated complaints had gone unheeded. Working together with the local council, residents

agreed to 'adopt' drains, monitoring them and reporting problems to the local council as they emerged. The local riverbank was also mapped, with flooding threats being noted and reported to landowners.[36]

And sometimes it's about being there more of the time. The average GP appointment lasts 12 minutes,[37] so peer support provides a way for people living with long-term conditions to get far more support than they could from their primary care provider alone, contributing to better outcomes. For example, the Service User Network (SUN) programme for people with long-term emotional and behavioural problems reduced the total time its cohort spent in hospital by 51 per cent.[38]

Meanwhile, loneliness and isolation is a growing problem amongst older people. Small acts of kindness can help break the isolation felt by many, and achieve things that public services cannot. This might be neighbours dropping in and offering ad hoc support, or something more formal, such as GoodGym, which matches runners with isolated older people, or 'coaches'. Runners commit to a weekly visit, perhaps taking with them something small, such as a newspaper, and staying for a chat.

## Social action can fundamentally change the way we respond to social needs and challenges

By designing public services around people's willingness to help each other, it is sometimes possible to find radically better and more cost-effective solutions to meeting people's needs. In 1853 concern at children being put in workhouses led to their being removed and placed with families, who were paid an amount equal to the cost of maintaining the child in the workhouse. This began a process of transformation that now sees fostering as the dominant way of looking after children who are in the care of the local authority. In 2013, some 75 per cent of children under the care of local authorities were placed with foster carers.

In 1967, Dame Cicely Saunders opened St Christopher's hospice, starting the modern hospice movement with its emphasis on palliative care and the holistic treatment of people at the end of their lives. Prior to this, the increasing availability of treatments meant many people died in hospitals, without the wider support they needed. Ideas developed at St Christopher's not only spurred on the development of the hospice movement, but its principles of care were also applied to other settings, including hospitals.[39] These two examples highlight the potential of social action to fundamentally change what public services do.

### Shared Lives: transforming social care

Shared Lives matches individuals, couples and families who are willing to give their time and share their homes with vulnerable adults who need help to live independently, providing support, housing and, most importantly, a sense of belonging.

Shared Lives represents a radical innovation in the way older people and those with learning disabilities are supported, with positive outcomes for people's wellbeing, including the formation of new friendships, going on holidays and becoming part of the wider community.

In the UK, nearly 7,000 volunteers are supporting close to 10,000 vulnerable adults, most of whom have learning disabilities, through a mixture of permanent, day and respite care.[40] By inviting a vulnerable adult to live with them, rather than in institutional care, Shared Lives carers provide net cost savings of £26,000 per annum for people with learning disabilities and £8,000 for people with mental health issues.[41]

## Social action can create better services and reciprocal value for people who give their time

Mobilising people's energies alongside public services can improve outcomes. In some instances, there's already strong evidence of its value. For example, a systematic review of 21 studies in the United States found that volunteer tutoring in schools helps improve pupils' attainment.[42] Peer support and befriending schemes have been found to act as effective preventive interventions for people with mental health issues, bringing significant savings when wellbeing and quality of life measures are accounted for.[43] Meanwhile, emerging evidence from initiatives supported through the Centre for Social Action Innovation Fund suggests that social action can help improve outcomes in a range of areas, from improving outcomes in prison (User Voice) to helping long–term unemployed people find jobs (Manchester Cathedral Volunteering Project). There is still a need for more evidence, which is why the Centre for Social Action Innovation Fund is supporting initiatives to evaluate their activities and build their evidence base.[44]

There are also subtler ways in which getting people involved can improve service outcomes. For example, volunteers can influence the way that services are delivered, make them more responsive to their communities or hold them to account. Some roles, such as school governors, are designed specifically with these aims in mind, yet this can come about as a spin–off benefit of other types of role as well. An evaluation of King's College Hospital's volunteering programme, for example, found that patients often felt more comfortable being open about their views to volunteers than to staff. Volunteers were then able to feed patients' concerns back to managers.[45]

Reflecting the shift to a demand for more 'relational' public services, there is evidence that the public values the way services treat them, as well as the outcomes. For example, research by Ipsos MORI for Collaborate found that 79 per cent of people agreed that 'Public services treating people with dignity and respect is as important as giving people the final outcome they need'.[46] By getting people involved, services can improve the way they relate to users. King's College Hospital has found that patient satisfaction is higher in wards that have volunteers.[47] King's Volunteers do things that staff don't have time to do like helping people find their way around buildings, sitting with patients as they're waiting for surgery and playing with children on inpatient wards, giving parents and carers time for a break.

Getting more closely involved with the way services are delivered can also help users to get a better understanding of how services work and develop more empathy for staff, changing how they feel about services. At the same time, they can have more influence and improve the way that services operate. When this happens, user experience is improved not only because services work better but because they feel more ownership over them. User Voice's Prison Councils focus on positively addressing prison life, leading to a greater understanding of what can be achieved within the prison community and how it can be done. Realistic problem solving, and involvement in that process, appears to be having a positive process not only on the individuals involved, but on the wider prison community.

So social action can improve service outcomes and user experience. But the value created goes much wider than that, with those giving their time also benefiting. From the positive impact on wellbeing that volunteering brings,[48] through to increasing skills and confidence, the benefit of social action is reciprocal. Young people participating in social action were found to have increased their employability,[49] and volunteering has been found to have a positive impact psychologically on people and improve their wellbeing at work.[50]

## Manchester Cathedral Volunteering Programme: creating a pathway from volunteering to work

Manchester Cathedral Volunteering Programme has harnessed the potential of volunteering to help long-term unemployed people gain the skills and confidence they need to return to the labour market. Volunteering forms a core part of the wider package of activities, including training and a work club, to support people back into work. As well as helping people into work, individuals benefit in softer, more intangible ways. There is evidence of increased confidence, raised aspirations and improved health, with all the attendant positive impacts of these on removing barriers to work.

Looking more widely, creating opportunities for people to participate in social action can help to build 'bridging' social capital, creating links across social groups. This helps individuals – social capital is important in everything from getting a job to staying healthy in old age – and in doing so generates further benefits for public services, by reducing the need for services to intervene.[51]

# 4.  EMBRACING SOCIAL ACTION: CHALLENGES FOR PUBLIC SERVICES

So far, this report has focused on the benefits of mobilising citizens to help others, in and alongside public services. But we know that doing so isn't always easy. It challenges public services to work in very different ways and raises difficult questions about how to manage risk and what the roles of the state and the public, and of professionals and volunteers, should be. There are no simple answers to these questions. But while there are dilemmas inherent in engaging with citizens, there are also many practical examples where these dilemmas have been successfully managed.

## Challenging public services to work in a different way

By its nature, social action is voluntary. Much of it takes place informally and 'under the radar'. It's often not connected to public services, and people have a wide range of motivations for getting involved. For the public sector, mobilising people means working with resources outside of its direct control. This challenges staff to take a different approach to planning and designing services, managing quality and risk, and ensuring accountability. It also creates a shift in power relationships between professionals, people who give their time and people who use services, which can be uncomfortable at first. For example, taking ex–offenders into prisons to develop prison Councils, as User Voice does, requires significant work to build trust across the wider prison community.

Leaders involved in this field tend to talk about 'culture change' as the main challenge: encouraging staff to see engaging and mobilising citizens as a central part of their role. While this might be a prerequisite, in practice there is often a need to explore how existing processes and ways of working can be adapted to allow social action to play a bigger part. This can be complicated, especially when it involves working across different service areas. But with strong leadership, it can be done, as the example of Baltimore's Power in Dirt initiative shows.

> *There's a huge cultural change piece around public service ethos and attitudes to volunteers and social action. It needs to be a genuine relationship. I won't even say an equal relationship – social action needs to be the stronger part.*
>
> **Adrian Lythgo, Chief Executive, Kirklees Council**

### Power in Dirt: opening up public services to tackle urban blight in Baltimore

Baltimore's 'Power in Dirt' initiative aims to tackle blight caused by large numbers of vacant lots, by making it possible for residents to adapt these for a range of uses, from community gardens to play areas or concert spaces. Led by a Chief Service Officer reporting directly to the city's Mayor, the initiative involved working with the housing department to identify and map vacant lots and create a method to allow citizens legal right of entry, and working with utility providers to come up with a way of providing water to the lots at a reasonable cost. The city has created an online portal that citizens can use to search for lots, apply to 'adopt' them and request a water supply. So far, more than 1,100 lots have been adopted, 79 per cent of which have been revitalised and maintained.[52]

*"There was guerrilla greening going on before Power in Dirt, but we systematised this by creating the adoption process and the watering process. This was informed by talking to people about the barriers they faced in doing good. It was like a flood gate opening up. People just started adopting lots. "*

**Vu Dang, Assistant Deputy Mayor of Health, Human Services, Education and Youth, Baltimore County Council**

Concerns about risk are frequently raised in relation to getting people more involved in service delivery. Those involved in social action initiatives often argue that what's needed is a proportionate approach to managing risk and a willingness to explore effective ways of doing this. In setting up peer support programmes for people with diabetes, for example, Diabetes UK ensures that Diabetes Specialist Nurses are involved as well as peer facilitators, so that people receive good clinical advice along with the more informal support of their peers. Code Club's volunteers all receive DBS (criminal records) checks, and always run their coding clubs alongside a teacher. For User Voice, and the prisons that contract them, it means challenging perceptions of ex–offenders within the wider prison community and changing rules around the way in which ex–offenders can enter and engage with prisons and prisoners.

Another specific challenge is in working out how to align people's motivations, energies and existing activities with local priorities and channel them to create the most impact. In creating formal volunteering opportunities, for example, public services have had to think about how to make these appealing to people as well as impactful, recognising the different ways in which people want to get involved.

Meanwhile, informal social action – people simply helping each other out – can provide a network of support for vulnerable people and help to tackle big challenges such as isolation and loneliness. However, research shows that people react badly to 'imposition of government agendas and intentions on (their) existing activities'.[53] Public services therefore need to think carefully about how to engage with existing informal activity and finding ways to support it without putting people off. The Dementia Friends programme, launched by the Alzheimer's Society, aims to give people enough confidence to feel they can act to help people with dementia, without requiring them to take on a longer term or more formal role.

*Informal social action – people simply helping each other out – can provide a network of support for vulnerable people and help to tackle big challenges such as isolation and loneliness.*

## Dementia Friends: giving people confidence to help others through bite–size training

About 670,000 people in England are living with dementia and this number is expected to double over the next 30 years.[54] The financial and social impact is significant – it costs the NHS £1.3 billion each year[55] and two–thirds of people living with dementia do not feel part of their community.[56]

Launched in February 2013 by the Alzheimer's Society, Dementia Friends aims to create one million Dementia Friends by March 2015. People can become a Dementia Friend by attending a 45 minute face–to–face session, or by completing a ten minute online session – both of which are free. At the end of the information sessions, new Friends are encouraged to consider a number of ways they could lend their support through social action, from making efforts to visit a friend or relative living with dementia to making a commitment to volunteering.

## The challenges of evidence

Most social action initiatives have good anecdotal evidence. Some initiatives also have a strong evidence base that captures the impact of the social action. For example, many programmes that provide volunteer tutoring in schools can demonstrate the difference their intervention makes on exam grades and some peer support groups have shown clinically significant changes in health outcomes like blood pressure and weight.

But despite these exemplars, many social action initiatives lack the strong evidence base needed to demonstrate that their intervention leads to markedly better outcomes compared to a control group or existing (often non–social action) intervention. This lack of quality evidence forms a barrier to take–up, making it difficult for commissioners to convince their organisations of the value of adopting social action–based approaches and making it difficult for social action initiatives to demonstrate their value for money.
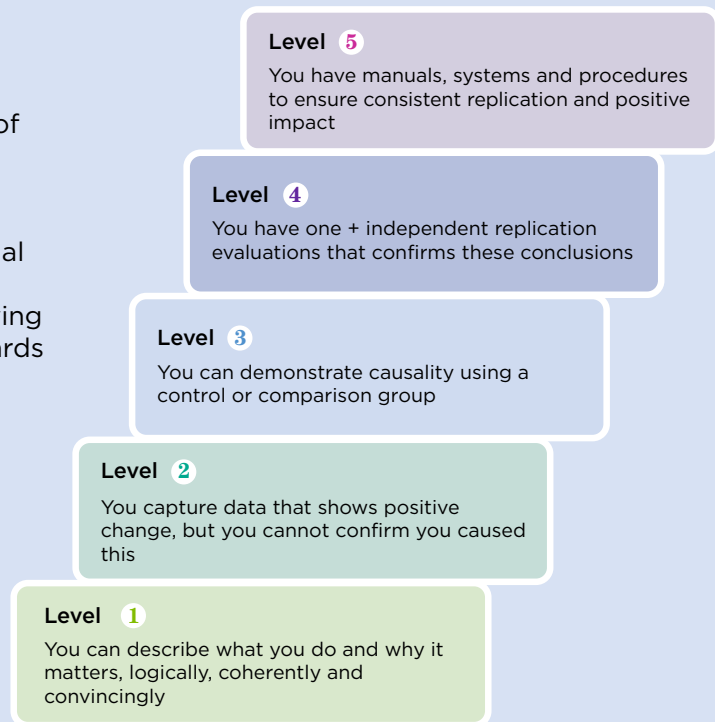
The nature of social action brings some particular challenges in getting the types of evidence that commissioners need, though. For example, the types of outcomes that people who are giving their time value might be different – perhaps more subjective and relational – from those that commissioners are interested in. Code Club's goal is to get primary school age children interacting with technology and developing problem solving skills. It doesn't specifically set out to improve educational attainment, but this might be a more important outcome from some schools' perspective. When social action takes place informally, its impact can be difficult to measure. The Alzheimer's Society provides bite–size training sessions to help people become 'Dementia Friends', and encourages them to lend support to people with dementia, but this informal help is hard to track. Social action initiatives often cut across service boundaries, meaning different types of evidence are needed to persuade different organisations to buy in.

Commissioners are increasingly demanding high quality evidence of a programme's impact before buying or funding services. In order to successfully grow and compete in these conditions, organisations must develop their evaluation capabilities accordingly. However, some argue that commissioners also need to shift their perspective, so that they value the wider relational and wellbeing benefits that social action generates alongside harder measures like clinical or attainment outcomes.[57]

## Evaluating social action

Evaluation and evidence is a key focus of the Cabinet Office and Nesta's Centre for Social Action Innovation Fund. The Fund has adopted the Nesta Standards of Evidence, developed in partnership with Project Oracle.[58] With financial support to commission research and evaluation and non–financial support from The Social Innovation Partnership, grantees are improving their evidence bases and moving up the levels of evidence that the standards set out.

**Level 5**
You have manuals, systems and procedures to ensure consistent replication and positive impact

**Level 4**
You have one + independent replication evaluations that confirms these conclusions

**Level 3**
You can demonstrate causality using a control or comparison group

**Level 2**
You capture data that shows positive change, but you cannot confirm you caused this

**Level 1**
You can describe what you do and why it matters, logically, coherently and convincingly

## Negotiating boundaries

Thinking about designing public services around people helping each other raises questions about what the respective roles and responsibilities of the state and the public should be. It would be naïve to ignore the fact that in many cases, budget cuts have been the prompt for public services to start exploring how they can mobilise people more fully. While public service commissioners and leaders involved in this area tend to argue that they would have wanted to explore a wider role for social action irrespective of cuts, the context of budgetary constraints means that social action can easily become politicised. There are sensitive issues around job substitution or paid roles being 'deskilled', and concern about social action being a 'cover for cuts'.

Negotiating these issues can be fraught, especially because people's views on what public services should do and what roles can be played through social action tend to be historically determined, rather than based on clear principles, and vary over time. It's probably fair to argue, for example, that if air ambulance services had always been state–funded, it would be highly controversial to talk about transferring them into the voluntary sector. In England and Wales, they have, however, always operated through voluntary funding.

This means it is difficult to draw hard and fast rules about the appropriate boundaries between citizens and staff and how they can and should work together. Organisations including Volunteering England and the TUC,[59] and the National Association of Volunteer Service Managers working in the NHS,[60] have produced guidance setting out principles for volunteer management in public services, such as that volunteers should complement and not replace the roles of paid staff, and that volunteers should not do roles that are crucial in order for core services to function. In practice, however, we can see that volunteers sometimes can, and are willing to, carry out 'core' roles, such as in the provision of community libraries (although critics would argue that the quality of service might not be the same as when it was

delivered by professionals). Similarly, it's not simple to use skill levels to say what roles should be performed by whom; plenty of voluntary roles are highly skilled, such as services provided by pro–bono lawyers. So while all but the most extreme small–government thinkers would agree that paid roles must remain central to public services, the details of who does what need to be negotiated.

There are also some tensions within the public's attitudes towards services and the role of citizens within them. The idea of a 'postcode lottery', for example, has been particularly controversial in some service areas, such as healthcare,[61] but at the same time, people want services to be responsive to their needs and local context. Shifts to greater involvement of people in services place new responsibilities and demands on the public and also raise questions about fair expectations: if services are provided by volunteers, for example, to what extent can we demand a good service from them?

Nevertheless, while the role of social action in and alongside public services can sometimes be controversial, it is also striking that in many cases, service users, staff and the wider public readily accept it. Interviews with people involved in social action give many examples about how these issues can be addressed on a case–by–case basis. King's College Hospital, for instance, involved staff closely in determining what volunteers should and shouldn't do, prepared clear role descriptions for volunteers and has commissioned evaluation to help find out how the programme has worked in practice. City Year, which places groups of people aged 18–25 in schools to volunteer full–time for a year, has set out clear contracts with schools that ensure that its volunteer 'corps' cannot replace administrative roles, and reports that in practice, there has been little concern about job replacement from staff or parents.

So, whilst mobilising people to help each other raises some big issues about the roles of public services that still need to be debated, in practice it's also been possible for individual services to embrace social action by carefully negotiating its parameters at a local level.

# 5.  MAKING SOCIAL ACTION THE NEW NORMAL

We know that social action has long been enhancing and transforming public services. From the initial St John Ambulance first aiders in 1877 through to the modern hospice movement, people have long mobilised to support each other. But there is the scope for this to happen much more than it does at present.

This report has argued that mobilising the energy and contributions of members of the public should become a core design and organising principle for public services.

We need public services that are open not closed, facilitating not just managing, and rewarding and recognising. It won't always be easy to do this. There is no single blueprint or checklist for public managers to follow. The context for each service and each local area will differ, as will the assets available.

In each case, though, putting social action at the core will require public services to place a greater focus on relationships. We have previously described this as a shift to a 'relational state'.

| Old model of public services: the delivery state[62] | New model of public services: the relational state |
| --- | --- |
| Done to: led by professionals, citizens disempowered, passive consumers | Act with: citizens as equal, collaborative partners, active co-producers |
| Top–down organisational decision making | Recognising insights of frontline staff and the public |
| Closed | Open, transparent, listening, responsive |
| Delivering | Facilitating |
| Services delivered through large institutions | Services embedded in homes and communities |
| One–size–fits–all, standardised, prescriptive | Personalised, flexible, holistic, diverse solutions |
| Disjointed service episodes | Services integrated with people's lives |
| Defining people by problems and needs | Starting with people's assets |

Putting this into practice requires iteration and experimentation, rather than top–down policy or legislation. We argue that:

- **Cultural change is required to make social action a central design principle for public services.** This needs to be led from the top, championed by local and national politicians and senior leaders in public services. Leaders need to make the case both to public servants and to members of the public. Those working in public services need to see mobilising people as

core to their role, while members of the public may need to change their attitudes around what their role should be in relation to public services. For example, rather than simply complaining when services don't meet their expectations, people need to be willing to highlight opportunities for change and get involved in making services more effective.[63]

- **Mobilising citizens needs to become a part of staff roles at all levels.** Creating senior roles with the capacity to design and implement a strategy for change might be useful in some cases. This approach is being tested in the four UK 'partner cities' taking part in the Cities of Service initiative, each of which has employed a Chief Service Office to prepare a service strategy, champion and coordinate citizen service within their local authority areas.

- **Social action needs to be factored into service planning.** Public services should map community assets and resources that they don't directly control, identifying how they could open up and enable people to get involved. King's College Hospital worked with staff to identify what they would have liked to do to support patients. Mobilising the enthusiasm and willingness of people to help others, King's College Hospital has been to make social action an integral part of what they do.

- **Staff will need different skills.** Future public services will require a different set of workforce roles from the past and these roles will be more 'relational',[64] with a greater emphasis on communication, empathy, facilitation and the ability to mobilise people.[65] Staff will also need skills to support and manage volunteers within their organisation, with clear roles and responsibilities articulated for both.

- **Staff need to be empowered to identify areas where social action would contribute to improving both the experience of public services and the outcomes for individuals.** It might be through working alongside existing staff to provide additional support, such as in the mobilisation of people during the floods of early 2014 and the reconstruction period that followed, or it might be where social action could help address a need that would reduce the demand for public service intervention or make such interventions more effective. To that end, frontline staff should have the right to ask for social action.[66]

- **Public services need to think creatively about the opportunities they offer for people to get involved.** Opportunities should reflect the range of motivations people have for taking part and the different ways they might want to engage. This might include, for example, making small asks of people who've benefited from services to help others in a similar position, or creating occasional or one–off, as well as 'traditional' regular, volunteering opportunities. These opportunities need to be promoted in a way that makes them accessible and appealing to people. Public services can successfully 'make the ask' – King's College Hospital's volunteering programme is a good example of this – but in some cases peers, social sector organisations or businesses will be better placed to draw people in.

- **Evidence is needed to demonstrate the contribution of social action.** By putting people at the centre of public services, the types of evidence for public services performance shift. The Centre for Social Action Innovation Fund is showing how evidence can be strengthened and works with beneficiaries of the Fund to develop increasingly stronger levels of evidence in line with Nesta's standards of evidence.[67]

- **Social action will need to be valued and recognised publicly.** From the more traditional Honours List recognition through to Hull City Council's offer to resident police special constables of a 50 per cent discount on their council tax, to 'loud and clear' thank yous, such as hosting receptions and tea parties, or using social media to thank people individually, recognising the contribution of people (whether staff of volunteers) is important to making them feel valued, and encouraging them to continue. There is also the opportunity to use awards to support public service innovation in the area of social action, which can help to incentivise an intrinsic motivation to innovation. Such awards can also help address concerns about risk. Publicity, acknowledgement and positive examples of innovation risk–taking can contribute to the development of a greater willingness to innovation.[68]

### Using alternative currencies to accelerate culture change

Already, in the UK, the timebank, Spice, awards credits to volunteers in public services that can be redeemed from local partners. Alternative currencies could be used to support social action, and made more integral to the life of a community – for example, by linking them into tax and welfare systems at the level of individual cities (so that members of the public and businesses might be able to pay tax in a combination of sterling and complementary currencies, and welfare recipients might also receive a mix).

Ideas of this kind need to be tested out in practice, and government could support three to four experiments in medium-sized cities, with specific goals to test out the potential of new currencies to mobilise additional resources for public ends, for example by rewarding various kinds of work, such as care.

The system wide changes needed to open up public services to social action won't be easy to make. There are many challenges and tensions that are not simple to resolve. And social action is not a panacea to the increasing demands being placed upon public services and the resource constraints they face. But public services that are open not closed to social action, that mobilise not just manage resources, and which recognise and reward people who contribute voluntarily, will have access to more resources, greater knowledge and expertise and may reduce the demand on some services through preventative approaches. Redesigning public services to make social action an integral part is an opportunity too important to miss.

# 6.  CASE STUDIES

## THE ACCESS PROJECT

**The Access Project matches disadvantaged students with volunteer tutors to help them achieve their educational aspirations. Targeting students in schools where more than 30 per cent of students receive free school meals, volunteers from businesses, universities and other organisations are paired with a student looking to improve their chances of a higher grade at GCSE or A level in a specific subject enabling them to go to a top university.**

Recognising that many schools have been successful in addressing the needs of students with lower levels of educational attainment, the key challenge identified by The Access Project is how to help schools replicate such achievements at the top end of the spectrum. There is long–standing evidence demonstrating the positive impact of one–to–one or small group tutoring on educational attainment. However, the provision of such support is beyond the capacity of teachers and schools themselves. Working alongside schools, and seeing their role as complementary within the wider educational ecosystem, The Access Project focuses on optimising the performance of motivated, able students and helping them to achieve their goals.

The Access Project has been extremely successful at leveraging support from the private sector, both in terms of volunteers and financial resources. Working with prestigious companies from sectors such as law and professional services, The Access Project asks employees to donate an hour a week to tutor a young person in a specific subject. One of the factors identified as crucial to gaining support from the private sector has been the ability of The Access Project to engage with firms and convince them of the benefits which both they, and their staff, will gain from participating. In particular, The Access Project has been able to highlight how firms can help staff fulfil their desire to engage with, and make a positive, long–term contribution to society in ways that harness their skills and talents.

Christopher Saul, Senior Partner at Slaughter and May notes, *"Social mobility is an important issue for the firm. Working in partnership with The Access Project, the Key Project reinforces our commitment to help young people from average or below average income families raise their career aspirations and gain the academic results to achieve these aspirations."*



### KEY FACTS

#### Current scale

In 2013/14 academic year, 13 London schools were involved with 600 volunteers providing weekly tutoring sessions.

#### Aim

In 2014/15 expand and embed the project in Birmingham and increase the number of tutees supported in London.

#### Impact

63 per cent of The Access Project participants progress to top universities.

Accompanying the one-to-one tutorial sessions is a wider array of support mechanisms, including a member of The Access Project's staff based in schools helping students prepare university applications and others skills required to enable them to succeed.

Beneficiaries of The Access Project 'make two-thirds of a grade per subject more progress than their peers' and 63 per cent of students go on to highly selective universities.[69]

Utilising existing evidence of what works in effective tutoring, The Access Project regularly monitors and evaluates their work, drawing on what works in the training of their volunteers and structuring of tuition sessions and monitoring the delivery of the programme and student satisfaction.

## CITY YEAR

**Where are you going to do your service year? City Year's ambition is to make a year of service such a normal experience that this will become the most commonly asked question of a young person. City Year recruits 18–25 year olds for 11 months of full-time volunteering as near-peer role models, mentors and tutors in schools in disadvantaged areas.**

The UK is one of the richest countries in the world. Yet according to UNICEF, 10 per cent of children aged 0–17 live below the poverty line. Poverty is closely linked to educational attainment and life chances. In 2012/13, only 38 per cent of pupils eligible for free school meals achieved five or more GCSEs at grade A* to C including English and maths, compared with 65 per cent not eligible for free school meals.

City Year recruits 18–25 year olds for 11 months of full-time volunteering as near-peer role models, mentors and tutors in schools in deprived areas. Teams of eight to 17 'corps members' spend Monday to Thursday in schools, doing a variety of activities, such as running breakfast clubs and providing one-to-one tuition. They spend each Friday receiving professional development and leadership training. Corps members receive expenses and each team is led by a paid team leader, employed by City Year.

City Year in the UK is based on the successful US initiative, which now works in 26 cities and has led to the creation of AmeriCorps, a programme of the Corporation for National and Community Service in the US. Inspired by its counterpart, City Year has a distinctive ethos and identity. Volunteers wear red uniforms and the organisation promotes a strong 'culture of idealism' and positivity.

### KEY FACTS

#### Current scale

143 volunteers in 19 schools in London and Birmingham, benefiting approximately 12,000 young people

#### Aim

1,000 volunteers in 100 schools in five cities by 2020

#### Impact

92 per cent of pupils think City Year 'helps with their learning' and 88 per cent say that it 'helps them to behave better'. City Year is now conducting a more detailed process evaluation, to refine and enhance quality and standardisation of delivery across schools

City Year works with schools on three improvement areas: attendance and punctuality; behaviour; and curriculum support. Within these areas, schools specify priorities for corps members to focus on. Some of the teams' activities support the whole school while others are directed towards a 'focus list' of pupils who need additional help, identified by the school.

External programme evaluation over the first three years of delivery has helped City Year identify the types of initiatives that corps members are well placed to deliver, so it's now starting to proactively offer these to schools rather than leaving it up to schools to decide how to use the teams. City Year specifies that all the team's work must be child–focused, enabling schools to use teachers' and teaching assistants' time more effectively. This also ensures corps members cannot displace non–teaching staff such as administrators or cleaners.

Schools contribute towards the cost of a City Year team. The external evaluation showed that while schools saw this as a significant investment, they also perceived that City Year provided good value for money. The 'renewal rate' for City Year is very high, with almost all schools so far having decided to renew their contracts each year.

Feedback from teachers, pupils and parents has been very positive so far – for example, 92 per cent of pupils think City Year corps members 'help with their learning' and 88 per cent say that corps members 'help them to behave better'. Head teachers and members of schools' senior leadership teams also think City Year makes a difference, especially in improving students' enjoyment of school. Feedback from corps members themselves is also very positive and suggests they benefit from the experience. Ninety–three per cent of corps members go into work or study at the end of the year.

## CODE CLUB

**Code Club is a network of volunteer–led after school coding clubs, teaching young people how to build digital products like websites, animations or computer games.**

Britain's schools teach children how to use computers, but until recently, children haven't been taught how they work, or how to make digital products themselves.

This makes children passive consumers of digital technologies, rather than empowering them to take control. It is also leading to skills shortages that could stop the UK from building on its success in digital industries. A study commissioned by O2 in 2013 found that Britain will need 750,000 additional workers with digital skills by 2017, and predicted that if this growth cannot be supported, it could cost the UK between £1.6 billion and £2.4 billion each year in lost economic output.[70]

Code Club volunteers are programmers and industry professionals who go to their local primary school and spend an hour a week helping groups of ten to 15 children to do coding projects. These projects, produced by Code Club, teach children how to make computer games, animations, multimedia storyboards and websites. They are designed for independent

learning with a small amount of support from the volunteer when a child becomes stuck, or has extra questions.

Code Club facilitates a network of clubs to develop, rather than managing or setting each one up directly. Its primary role is to make it easy for a volunteer to establish a club nearby. Code Club does this by running an online platform to connect up schools with volunteers, and by developing materials such as template letters that parents can send to their school asking for club to be set up. Code Club insists that volunteers have Disclosure and Barring Service certification and insurance, and provides advice on how to get this. The aim is to make it really simple for clubs to get going. It's free for schools and children to take part, with central costs funded through grant funding, donations and corporate sponsorship. Code Club's project materials are freely available to participants under a Creative Commons licence.

Code Club's volunteer–led, networked model has allowed it to grow quickly, but also brings some risks. The central team can't ensure the quality of delivery directly, for example. It has published terms of service that guide the use of open source project materials, but these are difficult to enforce. Code Club is addressing these challenges by putting greater resource into community management (for example, organising meet–ups of volunteers), developing an online training course for volunteers and evaluating its impact more extensively.

Code Club has been growing rapidly, currently adding clubs at a rate of 100 – 200 per month. In two years, over 2,000 clubs have been established – half of these in the last six months. Right now there are Code Clubs in around 12 per cent of UK primary schools.

## KEY FACTS

### Current scale

2,000 Code Clubs reaching an estimated 30,000 children, 40 per cent of whom are girls.

### Aim

Code Clubs in 5,000 primary schools by the end of 2015.

### Impact

Feedback from children and teachers is positive. Code Club is currently developing ways of assessing children's progress in coding and other skills over the course of their time at the club and a survey to track ongoing engagement with coding for at least one year after they've finished Code Club, with a suitable comparison group.

## DIABETES UK'S PEER SUPPORT FACILITATION NETWORK

**Self-care is important for helping people with diabetes to manage their condition and reduce further complications. Cambridge University Hospitals recently carried out the largest randomised control trial (RCT) of a peer support model for diabetes. The results were very promising, showing clinically significant improvements in blood pressure. Indeed they were promising enough that Diabetes UK, the largest diabetes charity in the UK, plans to adopt this as the model of peer support that they wish to use nationally.**

Over 3.2 million people in the UK have been diagnosed with diabetes, and an estimated 630,000 people have the condition but don't know it. By some estimates, treating the condition and its complications, which can include heart attack, stroke, blindness and kidney failure, absorbs more than 10 per cent of the NHS budget.[71]

Between 2011 and 2013, Cambridge University Hospitals designed a peer support programme for people with Type 2 diabetes and tested it using a large-scale randomised controlled trial (RCT). Diabetes UK has formed a partnership with Cambridge University Hospitals to scale up the peer support programme, adding an educational element to it.

The RCT showed that the programme led to a clinically significant improvement in blood pressure, a key determinant of heart attack and stroke. The evidence, which has not yet been peer reviewed, suggests that the peer support facilitation model can lead to a 2–4 per cent reduction in diabetes-related deaths and a 4–6 per cent in reduction in incidence of stroke.[72]

The peer support programme engages people who have recently been diagnosed with diabetes with Peer Support Facilitators – volunteers from the local community who have longer experience of living with diabetes and have good control of their condition. The Peer Support Facilitators are given training to facilitate peer support groups and provide encouragement for those recently diagnosed to adapt their lifestyle, diet and exercise regime to manage their diabetes well.

Each group is linked with a Diabetes Specialist Nurse who provides clinical support to the group and also gets involved in recruiting and training the Peer Support Facilitators. Alongside GPs, the Diabetes Specialist Nurse plays a crucial role in promoting the programme and encouraging people living with diabetes to take part.

With support from the Centre for Social Action, Diabetes UK is taking the model to eight new Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs), focusing on areas in the East of England and the West Midlands. This will involve recruiting and training a further 284 Peer Support Facilitators, who'll support approximately 5,000–7,000 people living with diabetes. In the longer term, Diabetes UK aims to roll the programme out across the country.

### KEY FACTS

#### Current scale

64 Peer Support Facilitators in Cambridge.

#### Aim

Diabetes UK aims to recruit 284 Peer Support Facilitators, reaching 5,000 to 7,000 people living with diabetes in eight Clinical Commissioning Group areas by the end of 2015.

#### Impact

While findings are awaiting peer review, an RCT has shown that the peer support facilitation model can lead to a 2–4 per cent reduction in diabetes-related deaths and a 4–6 per cent in reduction in incidence of stroke.

# KING'S COLLEGE HOSPITAL VOLUNTEERS

**In 2010, King's College Hospital (KCH) transformed the way it involves volunteers. It asked staff what they would like to do for patients, but didn't have time to do. As a result the hospital started deploying volunteers in more frontline roles – welcoming patients, guiding them around the hospital, providing comfort, support and reassurance in wards, sitting with them and holding their hands during operations. Volunteers also help with open days and collect patient experience survey data.**



## KEY FACTS

### Current scale

Over 1,500 volunteers giving more than 250,000 volunteering hours a year.

### Aim

KCH aims to expand volunteering outside the hospital, for example through a 'Hospital to Home' service and is sharing learning more widely with other trusts through the Helping in Hospitals programme.

### Impact

Patient satisfaction is 3.34 points higher among those who've had contact with a volunteer.

There is a long history of volunteering in hospitals, with survey data suggesting that acute trusts have nearly 500 volunteers on average, equating to some 78,000 across England.[73] Yet often their roles are not fully integrated into the wider running of the hospital. Too many are deployed in back office functions or shops, rather than working directly with patients.

In contrast, at King's College Hospital, over 60 per cent of volunteers are based in wards, with 24 per cent in outpatients.[74] More recently, KCH has started piloting volunteer roles outside of the hospital building, including a 'hospital to home' service to support patients returning home after a hospital stay.

From a base of 500 in 2010, it the hospital now has over 1,500 volunteers giving more than 250,000 volunteering hours a year. To scale up its volunteering programme, KCH introduced a rigorous online recruitment process and started requesting a minimum time commitment from volunteers of 16 hours a month. It also developed formal role descriptions and gave volunteers uniforms, signalling their integration into the hospital.

Evidence suggests the volunteers are making a positive impact. The hospital's data shows that those patients with access to a volunteer scored the Trust 3.34 points higher on the Friends and Family Test than those who did not.[75] The King's Fund estimated that Kings College Hospital's volunteering service generated a return on investment of between £5.40 and £16.40 for each £1 spent.

Volunteers tend to be attracted to get involved with KCH by the opportunity to 'give something back' and for some, to gain experience to help them progress onto a course or into a job. KCH was very careful to involve staff and unions closely as it expanded its volunteer service, involving them in designing volunteer role descriptions, recruitment and training processes. KCH is clear that volunteers should not do anything that is part of someone's paid role, or that is crucial to the running of core services. Nevertheless, it requires continued effort by management to maintain clarity between roles.[76]

Through the Helping in Hospitals Fund, the Centre for Social Action is supporting a small number of hospitals to expand their impact volunteering programmes, in part by sharing learning from KCH's approach. The Centre, with NHS England and the National Tripartite Group, also recently announced new funding which will help community and volunteer–led projects to provide extra support to older people next winter, reducing pressures on A&E and hospitals.

## MANCHESTER CATHEDRAL VOLUNTEER PROGRAMME

**Through a structured volunteering and placement programme, Manchester Cathedral Volunteer Programme supports people, some 75 per cent of whom have been unemployed for over six months, to transition back to work.**

Participants in the Manchester Cathedral Volunteer Programme are referred by Jobcentre Plus, although following the initial meeting, their decision to remain on the programme is completely voluntary. Each person receives a ten week programme mixing volunteering with coaching and accredited training. The focus of the programme is on providing a mix of opportunities that seek to address the complex barriers that individuals may confront en route to the labour market.

Each week, participants complete at least a half day of volunteering with the Cathedral, or one of its partners, such as the National Trust or Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue, to build their confidence and skills. They also join a work club and participate in a day's vocational training each week delivered by Manchester College at the Cathedral.

Volunteers who are identified as being ready are given guaranteed interviews by large employers in the city, including Crowne Plaza Hotel and the Manchester Arndale. Some employers also offer shadowing, mentoring and training opportunities to programme participants. The Cathedral has a network of 35 partners across the private and public sectors engaged in this way, something made possible by the Cathedral's unique position in city life.

Manchester Cathedral has been able to utilise its presence within the city as a way of leveraging support from both the public and private sectors, alongside social action, to reduce the cost to the public sector of tackling unemployment amongst vulnerable individuals some distance from the labour market and where public sector intervention has previously approved unsuccessful. As well as helping people into work, there is evidence of individuals improving soft, intangible outcomes. These include increased confidence, raised aspirations and improved health, with all the attendant positive impacts of these on removing barriers to work. Current evidence also suggests that people who participate in the programme continue to volunteer, either at the Cathedral or in other opportunities, once they have finished.

The short time in which the programme has been running means that only limited evidence is available. However, with more than 50 per cent of participants entering employment what evidence is available suggests that the programme is successful at helping people who have been unemployed for a long period of time to find work.



### KEY FACTS

#### Current scale

Since its inception in 2012, the programme has supported around 85 people per annum within the Manchester area.

#### Aim

The programme will be expanding to Liverpool Cathedral in 2014/15 and other Cathedrals have expressed an interest.

#### Impact

On average more than 50 per cent of participants have found work within 12 months of completing the programme.

## SHARED LIVES PLUS

**Shared Lives matches individuals, couples and families who are willing to give their time and share their homes with vulnerable adults who need help to live independently, providing support and accommodation, and, most importantly, a sense of belonging. Although there is some provision of respite and day care, the majority of carers share their homes permanently with someone who requires help to live outside of an institution or formal care setting.**

Shared Lives is transforming the care of vulnerable adults. An alternative to the provision of residential and day care for vulnerable adults, what lies at the heart of Shared Lives is the belief that ideas of choice and independence should be central to the social care sector. Living in such a setting has a positive effect on the quality of life and wellbeing of the vulnerable adults – many report joining clubs or making new friends for the first time and some have been supported to volunteer or work themselves.

Shared Lives carers are no ordinary volunteers. Though they receive a small weekly stipend for the care they give, given the significant care and time required from a volunteer to both share a home and build a real relationship with the person living with them, the payment is far outstripped by the intensity of what is offered.

Carers receive regular training and support, and are also subject to a comprehensive regulatory oversight framework. In 2010, the Care Quality Commission, England's care inspectors, gave 38 per cent of Shared Lives schemes the top rating of excellent. This was double the percentage for other forms of regulated care.

Shared Lives is transforming the way in which services are provided in order to improve the outcomes for vulnerable adults. At the same time, it is also reducing costs for the public sector, estimated at £26,000 per annum for a person with learning disabilities and £8,000 for people with mental health issues.



### KEY FACTS

#### Current scale

In the UK, nearly 7,000 volunteers are supporting close to 10,000 vulnerable adults, most of whom have learning disabilities, through a mixture of permanent, day and respite care provision.[77]

#### Aim

The goal is to double the number of people receiving support and increase by 40 per cent the number of carers volunteering over the next five years.

#### Impact

Shared Lives carers provide net cost savings of £26,000 per annum for people with learning disabilities and £8,000 for people with mental health issues.[78]

Shared Lives is a radical social innovation, which provides a family model of care to vulnerable adults, with the care provided by volunteers. The model offered by Shared Lives could be extended to incorporate a wide range of different vulnerable adults, such as older people needing intermediate care, young disabled people, care leavers in transition to adulthood, and a larger number of people with mental health issues. The adoption of Shared Lives in these areas has the potential to transform the way in which public services are delivered.

# USER VOICE PRISON AND PROBATION COUNCILS

**Run by ex–offenders, User Voice's Prison and Probation Councils work with offenders who volunteer their participation in the governance of prisons and the probation service with the aim of improving positive rehabilitation outcomes.**

Central to the User Voice Prison and Probation Councils is the idea that engaging offenders through volunteering can improve the experience and outcomes of prison and probation. User Voice, an independent organisation, is contracted by prison and probation services to institute and support a Council whose function is to provide a structured means by which those in prison and on probation can voice collective problems and also identify potential solutions.

Whilst the approach can be adapted to the circumstances of each prison or probation setting, the principles underpinning User Voice Councils include the utilisation of a democratic process, clearly structured, with the aims, objectives and boundaries clearly identified, issue based, and focused on identifying solutions and adding value to the criminal justice system.

Prisoners and probationers who participate in User Voice Councils volunteer their time. They receive training and support to enable them to participate effectively in the democratic and representative processes that underpin the User Voice Council model, and to contribute on a wide range of issues, including how to make the prison and probation experience safer for staff and offenders, how to improve wellbeing and how to reduce recidivism rates. Those who provide the training and support are ex–offenders themselves and are able to engage more effectively, especially with the hardest to reach, whilst also acting as positive role models.

Establishing structures through which (ex–)offenders can provide feedback is aimed at creating more effective and efficient services. Although stronger evidence is needed, User Voice's early evidence suggests that prison and probation Councils are having a positive impact, this includes reduced rates of violence within prisons, decreased segregation days (down from 160 to 47 days in one prison) and increased returns on investment. Whilst in probation trusts there have been improvements in communication, increased effectiveness in the areas of monitoring and contact, contributing to reductions in recalls to prison.

At the same time, (ex–)offenders' involvement in meaningful democratic processes appears to enhance their self–esteem. Such positive outcomes have also been identified by staff who suggest that volunteers on User Voice Councils have continued to improve in behaviour,

## KEY FACTS

### Current scale

User Voice currently works in seven prisons and six probation trusts across England.

### Aim

User Voice Prison and Probation Councils aim to improve services and promote active citizenship through collaboration.

### Impact

Although evaluation is at an early stage, evidence suggests User Voice councils have a positive impact on violence and the use of segregation in prisons, and within probation services recalls to prison have declined. There is also early evidence suggesting participating prisoners and ex–offenders have higher levels of self–esteem.

greater maturity and increased prisoner/staff respect. Staff have also benefited from the positive outcomes of the User Voice Council model, with evidence suggesting that there are higher levels of staff satisfaction with reduced levels of sickness and unauthorised leave.[79]

## CITIES OF SERVICE

**The Cities of Service movement was launched in 2009 in New York by the then Mayor Bloomberg and 16 other mayors from across the United States. In the US, the Cities of Service coalition now includes over 180 mayors, representing over 40 million Americans. With support from Cities of Service in the US, the Cabinet Office and Nesta are now bringing the Cities of Service model to the UK.**



At its core, Cities of Service engages citizens to create real and measurable impact in their own communities. Citizen volunteers work to lower school drop-out rates, improve energy efficiency in homes, revitalise neighbourhoods, and more. Coalition cities develop a comprehensive service plan and a coordinated strategy focused on matching volunteers and established community partners to the areas of greatest local need. Additionally, coalition cities use specific metrics for each service initiative to measure outcomes and impact, allowing Cities of Service and its member cities to learn where successes and challenges exist, and improve initiatives for future implementation.

Visible, senior leadership is a fundamental feature of the approach. Many US mayors employ a Chief Service Officer, reporting directly to the mayor, to lead and co-ordinate the work. Developing a high-impact service plan requires mayoral support, effective outreach and collaboration, innovative thinking and strong planning for successful implementation.

### Baltimore (USA) – embedding citizen service across municipal agencies

Baltimore's Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake joined the Cities of Service coalition in 2010 and employed Chief Service Officer Vu Dang to implement a programme of citizen service. Starting by creating a service plan, Vu examined data from annual citizen surveys and carried out extensive stakeholder and community consultation. This process identified citizens' top priorities: tackling drug addiction, crime and urban blight.

Vu brought together stakeholder groups focusing on each of the priority areas and worked with them to develop citizen service initiatives. He explains that key focus in doing this was on *"how can we involve regular folks: real people, and people who society doesn't usually see as volunteers".* One of the initiatives that came from this was 'Recovery Corps', which engages people who've recovered from addiction as peer recovery advocates. Over 100 of these volunteers have so far helped more than 600 individuals to enter, stay in, complete and/or manage their recovery after treatment for addiction. Twenty-one corps members who were unemployed have since found work.

As the programme developed, it became increasingly clear that to make citizen service effective, public services would need to change their systems. Another initiative, 'Power in Dirt', aims to tackle blight caused by large numbers of vacant lots, by making it possible for

residents to turn them into community gardens. To get 'Power in Dirt' up and running, it was necessary to create an online system to map vacant lots, a new method to allow citizens legal right of entry and a procedure for getting, providing and paying for water services to the lots. Once these systems were put in place, the programme took off rapidly. So far, more than 1,100 lots have been adopted.[80]

Baltimore's approach to embedding citizen service has evolved over time. Vu Dang is now Assistant Deputy Mayor rather than Chief Service Officer, and no longer manages citizen service initiatives directly; instead, agents in the voluntary sector do this. Vu sees this as a way of making initiatives more sustainable, by getting others to take ownership. In a similar vein, Vu has used the city's outcome budgeting process to incentivise municipal agencies (like the health department) by rewarding them for building citizen service into their budget proposals. Agencies can request an Americorps VISTA member to create a volunteer service within their agency, if they can show how this will help achieve the outcomes they have committed to in their budget proposal.

### Cities of Services in the UK

As part of the Cities of Service UK initiative, four 'partner cities' – Bristol, Kirklees, Plymouth and Portsmouth – are receiving funding to recruit a Chief Service Officer and develop a service plan. Meanwhile, three 'associate cities', Barnsley, Swindon and Telford & Wrekin, are being supported to set up new initiatives to mobilise citizens to tackle specific challenges.

The model is being adapted to reflect the UK context – for example, Chief Service Officers can report to an elected mayor, chief executive or leader of the council. Some of the US blueprints are being adapted for the UK, while the cities are also developing and testing new initiatives.

Kirklees has a strong tradition of community participation – for example, it has three voluntary orchestras that were originally set up and funded by mill owners. Chief Service Office Rachael Loftus aims to build on this tradition and look at how to align existing community activity with local priorities, such as tackling loneliness. Rachael argues that social action can do this much better than public services alone: *"For someone who is lonely, but with only very moderate care needs we might only be able to afford a 20 minute visit once a week from a social worker– and I don't think it would have much effect on their loneliness. But if we're really smart and spend a bit of money supporting volunteers we can have much bigger impact, and we can then use the social workers' skills and knowledge to best effect."* To achieve this, Kirklees is planning initiatives that will involve whole communities, not just targeting older people, as building networks of support requires whole communities to come together. Chief Executive Adrian Lythgo explains, *"our job is to create conditions where social action can happen"*.

## SOCIAL ACTION: RESPONDING TO FLOODING IN THE SOMERSET LEVELS AND MOORS

**In early 2014, parts of the UK were severely affected by flooding. Work commissioned by Nesta[81] explored what role social action played in the response to the floods, and focused on events in the Somerset Levels and Moors.**



Creative Commons, The flooded River Avon near Keynsham by Matt Buck

Volunteers played a critical role in the response to the floods and were found working alongside public services and large charities to meet the challenges presented. Often the response of volunteers was the first people received as the crisis developed, and volunteers offered help that public services alone could not offer as demand increased. Such volunteers weren't just local people; people and businesses from across the UK offered immediate help and long–term assistance with reconstruction as the scale of the problems emerged in both the news media and through social media.

Harnessing people on the ground and through technology, volunteers were able to help in a diverse number of ways. The Floodvolunteers website helped people find local services, and matched people offering help with those in need, whether it was for food, water and medical supplies, a place to house a pet or temporary accommodation. Within a few days of it being set up in February, over 800 people had registered on the site.

While the site was simple to use, the Floodvolunteers team found that there were some people needing greater support. Working on the ground, with both volunteers and local government, was crucial to meeting these needs, and emphasised the importance of ensuring links between the technology enabled opportunities and off–line resources.

Facebook linked people to the Floodvolunteers website. Making use of almost real–time data on the floods, Facebook used geo–targeting to target messages in users' news feeds and link through to the Floodvolunteers website. People not affected by flooding did not receive any message. As a result of the initiative, more than 25,000 people visited the Floodvolunteers website within a few days.

The initiative arose after an event exploring how technology could be used to help with the flood relief effort. Volunteers from across the tech community, including individuals and developers and engineers from tech companies, came together in London to devise digital solutions to aid communities hit by the severe weather and floods.

The role of social media in engaging wider public support should also not be overlooked. Initial requests for help on Facebook and Twitter brought in local support, but as the crisis grew help came from across the UK. People came to help those affected and to support other volunteers, such as by cooking and delivering meals. Farmers responded to requests by sending forage and bedding to those farmers with no way of feeding their animals, others evacuated animals to safe places where they could be cared for. In the aftermath, a group of young farmers from Essex travelled to Somerset to help clean up farms. Businesses also responded, providing goods, money and workers during the immediate crisis, and then during the clean–up to those affected.

Volunteers were crucial to supporting people both practically and emotionally during the flood crisis, but the volunteers have also reported benefiting from the process. It wasn't just the knowledge that they were helping others, but new skills, friendship and resilience that developed as a result of their involvement.

The example of the spontaneous response to the floods amongst people – who simply wanted to help and support others – highlights the contribution social action can make. People worked alongside public services, enhancing their capacity, resources and expertise available to them, as well as responding to people in need, and providing practical support during the long clearing–up process.

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