



Conversations *FOR CHANGE*

LESSONS

from LOCKDOWN

A report by Platform

INTRODUCTION

During the 2020 lockdowns in Wales we at Platfform, like many others, spent more time than ever before connecting, talking and caring for each other. It felt so important to allow people to lead with and express their feelings that this quickly became the blueprint for how we navigated the challenges the pandemic brought (and continues to bring us). So both what we do and how we do it changed, and an irony emerged: despite the physical distance, interactions were more emotionally charged and led more by feelings and relationships than before. In many ways this new way of working felt like a huge stride towards living the Platfform values and putting ideas around 'system change' into practice. So this began a curiosity as-to what else had changed in the direction we were wanting to travel? What had other people, in different sectors to ours experienced? And so Lessons from Lockdown was launched as a listening exercise.

What we heard is perhaps not surprising. Much has been written and reflected on already and our findings echo much of that. We heard of unexpected digital warmth but also strain. We saw and heard inspirational stories of mutual aid and brave leadership; a surge of activity towards doing what really matters, cutting through red tape and bureaucracy with a shared mission. We heard the joy and pain of new and creative connections forged, but also the pain of connections lost and injured.

All of this is either a great leveller, building a more layered, contextual and environmental understanding of distress, or a great divider, polarising and isolating us.

This report pulls these themes together and reflects on what this means for the health of our current system and how this may fuel change.

Charlotte Waite

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WISDOMS FROM THE SYSTEM

We joined, and took inspiration from, Mayday Trust's Wisdoms series where listening without an agenda led them to hear in a different way (Wisdom from the System – It's Good To Talk. maydaytrust.org.uk). We are interested in system change. So, we listened with that in mind and believe that the gems we unearthed give heart to the people-centred creativity invigorated by lockdown. We also heard of barriers to change which, if paid attention to, can broaden our understanding of why 'the system' can exacerbate the problems it is intended to solve. We believe these are the conversations we need to be having, with compassion and honesty, unearthing why 'intention' alone won't cut it.

We heard from over 250 people, working and/or volunteering in public and third sector services and community groups in Wales.*

*We are still running a separate listening exercise for people who are using or have accessed services during lockdown.

ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES (ACE) SUPPORT HUB

We were only able to listen to so many people because of the support and partnership from the [ACE Support Hub](#) who worked alongside us to facilitate these conversations. Huge thanks to them for their support. The partnership represents their commitment to learning and listening to create a more trauma aware Wales. The learning from this work will directly inform the key priorities for the Hub for 2021 - 2022, including developing ACE and trauma informed communities and the delivery of a key strategic vision: the paradigm shift towards prevention and early intervention. This must include systemic change to integrate the way all public and third sectors, voluntary groups and communities contribute towards timely, kind, compassionate support and/or services when needed, backed up by leadership, prioritisation and policy commitment from government.

On the following pages is a reflection of what we've heard and learned from listening. We'd love to know what you think when you've read it.

Email your views to talk@platform.org

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1. A SHIFT TO WHAT MATTERS: AT SPEED AND TOGETHER

System Problem:

SILO WORKING

An often bemoaned ill of the 'broken system' is that people **work in silos**. From government to front line teams, despite good intentions people generally work within the boundaries of their funding and outcome frameworks. And frankly, they get too used to it: people know what they like and like what they know, and therefore form ideas around boundaries and hierarchies of knowledge and skills that inhibit collaboration. People can get very precious about their patch and invest energy in to holding on to it, decreasing opportunities for change and innovation.



System Problem:

BUREAUCRACY + PROCESS

Another regular criticism is **the slow pace of change** and lack of ability to react quickly, particularly in local authorities and health boards. This is largely due to over-bureaucratic processes that get in the way of what matters to citizens, and instead serve to justify the system.

System Tonic:

PERMISSION TO BE DIFFERENT

Creativity unleashed

There was a tangible feeling of excitement and possibility from the **creativity and fluidity** with which people had been not only allowed but encouraged to work. There was a rejuvenation within the workforce as people found new confidence to innovate and try things, not knowing what the outcome may be.

"I think not only have those boundaries been stretched a bit, but people are also being more receptive to working in a different way and being flexible... saying, OK I've never done this before but I'll give it a go because I want to feel useful and like I'm playing a part. It's demonstrated to me that there is a real sense of purpose around, and people feel that they really do value their roles, particularly in public service"

Prioritising to purpose

And walls came tumbling down between organisations, between organisations and communities, and within organisations themselves. Suddenly things were possible like never before, assessments, protocols, processes, procedures could be short-circuited to get to the heart of the matter at speed.

"We had an agile working policy that would have taken two years to negotiate in with staff associations and others. Everyone just recognised the crisis and responded to it"

People rejoiced at the greater flexibility around funding and outcomes and were able to offer examples of where this had been put to good use. This is particularly true in the housing and homelessness sectors where people had organised very quickly to get people off the streets and in to accommodation.

"And once you take away some of those structural things that are just holding us back, and treat each other as people and think about how we share that common sort of humanity - that's what I think has been really kind of life changing. And it just proves that we can do it"

Examples were not only local but national, with people feeling like the previously infamous and unchangeable silos were now giving agile, mission-driven partnership working a new meaning.

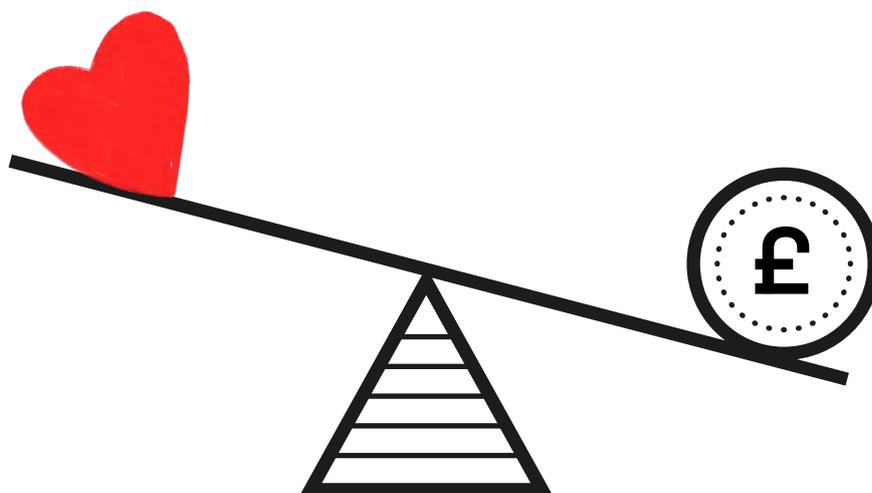
"From a Welsh perspective the engagement of local government on a political level is unprecedented and has been above and beyond anything else in other parts of the UK. That reflects the nature of our conversations, discussion and how we move forward together"

Barriers to the momentum for change:

THE IMBALANCE OF POWER INHIBITING COLLABORATION

Despite the obvious benefits of a clear focus, and the feeling of a refreshing change from what came before, **there wasn't a level playing field**. Many third sector organisations, charities or community groups continued to feel like they were still being 'done to' by the local authority/health board who did not view them or treat them as equal partners or contributors to the mission. This has intensified as lockdowns continue, and people feel the pull back into old dynamics, with less focus on 'what matters'.

Feeling 'done to' is a familiar criticism from people who use services, prompting 'nothing about me without me' campaigns and training courses designed to move practice towards 'doing with and not to'. Interestingly, the same feelings are experienced by non-local authority or health board staff towards these institutions, suggesting that the issue is perhaps cultural. It seems the power lies with the money, creating a power imbalance that is felt culturally by everyone who interacts with those institutions. That is not to say that third sector organisations also wield power that can be experienced as a barrier to accessing services. **The notion of 'within' and 'without' of services, public or third sector, was a strong and implicit understanding by all participants.**





System Problem:

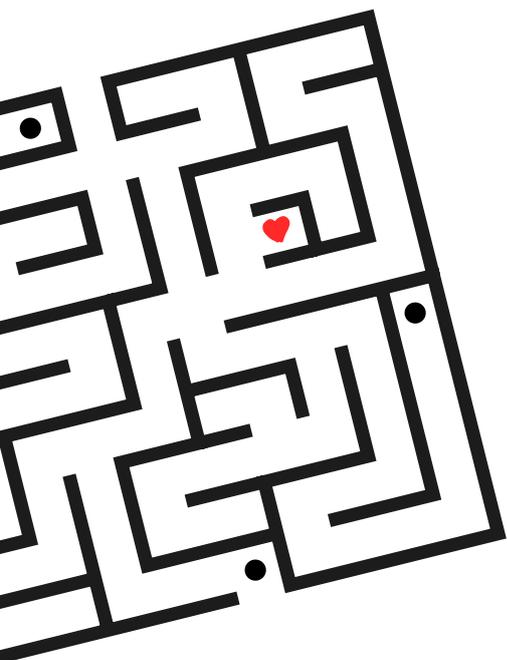
THE INDIVIDUALISATION OF PROBLEMS

Our 'helping services' and systems have a narrative that runs like this: *assess me, refer me, fix and/or manage me*. This narrative carries massive assumptions about what 'help' should look and feel like and whether and how **people need to be fixed and/or managed**. These ideas have largely evolved with the welfare state and so derive from the commendable position of wanting to help and protect the most vulnerable. But they mean we have inherited a **systemic preoccupation with who makes the 'vulnerability' cut** - both in terms of needs and rationing sparse services. One of the outcomes of helping services evolve in this way has been the **individualisation of problems**. Examples of this are everywhere: people are assessed as a sum/score of their issues, people are described and labelled as their problem e.g. "personality disorder", "addict" etc, people are offered interventions or medications from a drop-down-menu to help fix a specific ailment/problem they may have in one part of their life and so on...

System Problem:

IT CAN'T COPE WITH COMPLEXITY

Allied to siloed commissioning is siloed working. This creates a siloed view of problems leading to a reductionist approach, meaning we all become specific experts, with no one focusing on the wider picture. Or we become individual problem experts with no one specialising in a whole life that exists within the context of a whole community.



System Problem:

UNKIND SERVICES i.e. NON-RELATIONAL, NOT VERY HUMAN

Services have evolved in such a way that emotional detachment becomes necessary when workers are tasked with carrying out the vulnerability cut and prescribing/rationing/delivering the individualised fix/intervention. 'Detached' becomes the safest way to do the job if a worker is 'burnt out' from compassion fatigue or vicarious trauma. Detachment also feels safe to workers who may be held responsible for failures of an intervention where a target isn't hit or a child is harmed. An 'us' and 'them'-ness inevitably flourishes within this inherent power imbalance and moves us away from co-production, person-centred, asset-based working.

System Tonic:

COLLECTIVE EXPERIENCES

We saw and felt our different experiences.

Mental health and wellbeing were talked about by nearly everyone who participated. People were either observing their own struggles, or those of someone they know or are working to support. An implicit understanding emerged that the environment and context of our lives affects us greatly but also differently depending on our life experience, support network, wealth, family, gender, culture etc. It became obvious that we were not all being affected equally – and so the shift in perception from the individualisation of people's problems to a contextual understanding of distress developed.

"COVID-19 has shown to everybody that mental health is about our circumstances, not about the individual. And therefore individual solutions are not what we should be seeking"

Emotional literacy and awareness

A new and different openness and honesty about feelings also became apparent, recognising the importance of operating at a feelings level so as to connect to the heart of the matter.

"I think we are definitely having much more explicit conversations about how are you, and in a real genuine way, 'how are you?' I think there's definitely been a shift towards people feeling able to say, 'do you know what, I'm having a real bad day today'"

People observed how naturally more reflective everyone was being as 'home' and 'work' selves became increasingly enmeshed for most. This appears to be especially true for women, who made the most references to juggling child care, home-schooling and work.

Barriers to a collective understanding of distress:

INABILITY TO SIT WITH DISCOMFORT

The flip side of working at the level of intensity that these circumstances fostered is that **being authentic and relational takes a toll in the current system**. There was a real feeling of 'containment' – that people were storing up or internalising their distress, within themselves or in their households, as there were few other places available to put this. There was a fear about what this would mean for people's wellbeing in the future. The levels of commitment and energy brought by so many to their work was a recurring theme as was the strain this was taking on people to maintain.

"Every single one of my team other than myself is undergoing, while still working, some really significant challenges, from bereavements to family members suicide. I don't quite know what to do with it all"



Some people felt they were struggling with being confronted with what their daily lives at work were triggering, and being left with these feelings at home with nowhere to put them, having lost either the time to transition from work to home that a commute allows and/or the face to face human contact that would often help process these feelings.

"It's tricky. there's nobody to hand off to whereas if I was in the office, I could then have that twenty minute cup of tea conversation, and maybe it will have done a lot for me. Now it's difficult and you don't want to put the burden on other colleagues"

Feeling the strain while soldiering on was felt to be exacerbated by watching ourselves on screens so often, keeping us starkly connected to either our mask or our decline and feeling like we could not escape ourselves.

"The vulnerability of being upset and being able to see yourself on a screen - actually that's really weird. It would be like sitting in a counselling session with a mirror in front of you, you know, nobody really wants to look at themselves cry"

Related to this was a struggle with the enmeshed nature of work and life e.g. attending case conferences from the kitchen with the kids around.

This all exposes an **emotional support and sensitivity shaped hole in the current system**. It seems that offers of supervision were slow to catch up with the emotional charge or indeed were non-existent, as were more informal forums as safe spaces to put this stuff. People spoke of the loss of connections, which would ordinarily help them regulate and process their feelings about their daily work, but worse they also spoke of **lack of safety they felt in airing their real feelings**, even in well-meaning 'wellbeing' forums. It is clear there are cultural strides to take if we are to get to a place where sitting with distress and discomfort can become a normal element of our daily work. When we are hearing workers feel like this in relation to their own feelings it is no wonder then that they cannot sustain, or sometimes even attempt to pass on, such notions as authentic relational working that is comfortable sitting with distress – when they have little or no support to do so themselves.

3.
DISRUPTING
The Balance
of
POWER

System Problem:

ORGANISATIONAL HIERARCHIES

Many organisations have evolved **hierarchies and structures so as to perform well in the system**. Rationed services need to be worth the money and so the dominance of the 'New Public Management' framework for public services has thrived.

'Its ideological contours are: a central elite know best; strong top down management is the key to quality and performance; the standardisation of processes and explicit targets drive quality and these are ensured by rigorous micromanagement using performance indicators'

(Feathersone, B; Gupta, A; Morris, K and White, S. (2019) *Protecting Children: A Social Model*).

This ideological framework removes autonomy and self-determination, not just from communities, but from any support or social/care worker within it. This approach encourages a reductive response to complex issues so (as already discussed) promotes the individualisation of problems. People become a sum of their problems that need 'fixing' or educating around 'better' choices – **better choices for the system**. It is in that context that we heard comments like this:

"For those families where parents have jumped on that 'drinking-hot-tub-party' bandwagon, and the children have been left to be quite unsupervised I think that could be a bit of a problem for services as those children try to get back into school structure and school behaviours"

This approach also supports a **hierarchical leadership approach**, where command and control interactions feel the safest way to operate – for leaders. Despite open acknowledgement and awareness of dispersed leadership and a 'safe-to-fail' cultures nurturing the best solution-focussed collaborative work, this was not always apparent in how workers experienced their leaders.

"I would like to see my senior leadership team stop being so risk averse, stop fiddling about with spreadsheets and start maintaining that sense of - a 'need to achieve' mindset rather than a need to avoid failure"

System Problem:

LEADERSHIP AND TRUST

Some conversations uncovered practice within organisations completely at odds with trauma informed, asset based or coaching approaches. We heard examples of lack of trust, autonomy, choice or collaboration experienced by the workforce. These are bed-rock principles of good trauma sensitive practice. It's no wonder that **if workers do not experience it themselves, they are unable either to recognise that they are working at odds to these principles or to practice in this way.**

Those organisations that were not trusting became more transactional and less relational. Trust was a big theme in conversations, with some feeling less trusted than they did before, sensing that regular Zoom check-ins/welfare calls were in fact veiled surveillance to check up on what work they were doing. This increased people's anxieties in general, and left people feeling unable to be authentic about their feelings, ideas and work. Instead they found themselves putting thought and energy in to ways of 'proving' they were working.



"Zoom is an awful way to work because you are constantly on. Game is constantly on. And there is never an excuse to say to someone, well actually I can't meet you then or I can't talk to you today - you have to be very bold to do that"

It is of note that most of the social care 'frontline' workers who spoke to us were female. Little wonder then that feeling isolated with rising anxiety was a theme, particularly around the stress of blurring home and sometimes challenging work such as child protection or mental health crises. Layer this on top of not feeling trusted and an increase in 'command and control' leadership, and we begin to understand the context within which we hear of practice at odds with person-centred values. For example there was trepidation expressed by many social care workers about entering 'clients' homes again, preferring to work in a remote way because of fears of bearing the brunt of rising anxieties, sometimes manifested as aggression.

There was great awareness that workers' usual resilience had been shaken. Workers/organisations, under the directives of their leaders, prioritised protecting themselves from the people they viewed as most risky to them.

A paradox seems to have emerged where, despite feeling heightened risks around their own safety, more arms-length practice has made social care workers less risk averse in terms of thresholds for intervention. Families have been left to fend for themselves far more than before, as pre-COVID interventions for thresholds have been reduced until a video or phone call is now considered 'enough'. Some workers expressed relief at not being so emotionally involved in their 'clients' lives, particularly where they were responsible for making high stake decisions/assessment about them.

Although we did not ask about it directly, it is important to contextualise the fact **there was little or close to no understanding, empathy or acknowledgement of our roles in services being privileged and holding power over people by those working within them** as products of a broken system.

System Tonic:

A DIGITAL REVOLUTION

A great leveller

Whilst Zoom was not everyone's favourite and undoubtedly has its drawbacks, it was also an invaluable tool for connection. Spending time dancing, quizzing, singing, exercising brought people together despite their physical distance.

It also enabled 'support work' to continue with people creatively moving their group sessions, training and counselling online.

Young people in particular spoke of the opportunities to move into a world usually dominated by adults, process and structure, and the chance to reach out to other young people. People who work with young people also spoke about Zoom offering an anonymity to young people which they felt kept them engaged in a way that was non-threatening, enabling young people to set the pace/intensity of the interaction by being in control of their mute button and camera.

Many people felt relieved at not having to travel so much for meetings and people in national roles felt that the North/South divide been bridged by the new way of doing things. Organisations with national remits felt freed with the extra time and felt this had been put to good use to achieve more than was thought possible before.

"We don't have to commute for an hour and a half to two hours to sit in a meeting for two hours to discuss something that we already knew the outcome of"

Meetings felt more democratic with everyone being more present in the meeting than they were before with everyone having a voice. People spoke about feeling more confident to speak up and to attend because of the safety of the meeting structure:

"I have noticed our steering group meetings are much better attended than they have ever been now that they have moved online. Our meeting etiquette has improved massively and it seems to be easier to make sure everybody is included than when you are all face to face"

More than one local authority told us they have used WhatsApp as their main vehicle for keeping in touch with 'vulnerable' families, including those on child protection caseloads. This has offered greater control to those families as to what they choose to present to support workers/professionals and when they allow them into their days.

A levelling of the balance of power via mutual aid

It has been well documented elsewhere that we heard of the explosion of energy towards mutual aid and everyone wanting to play a part. People built new connections and relationships that fostered a sense of community and collective endeavours.

"I live really rurally and connecting with older people that literally live a minute from me, that I have never met, has probably been the best thing that I've done. I've made new friends from these people who - I am twenty-five, they have fifty maybe sixty years on me - I think that's honestly been my favourite thing"



**Barriers to a levelling of the balance of power
via a tech revolution:**

DIGITAL EXCLUSION

While reaching people via tech and the widespread use of WhatsApp kept many people in touch with support services, this was only possible where the technology allowed. Not everyone has smart phones, access to unlimited Wi-Fi, or their own devices. This caused concerns for services who were unable to contact women and children they knew were living with domestic abuse or at least not able to have safe conversations with them, as they were under constant surveillance in their homes and sharing tech.

Other examples of social work practice include 'virtual' case conferences and family court proceedings where families either do not have the technology or the technological language to be able to engage fully in the process. Children were registered as 'at risk' either in their parents' absence or with the parents on the phone listening as professionals talk about them and decide their fate.

**Barriers to a levelling of the balance of power
via a tech revolution:**

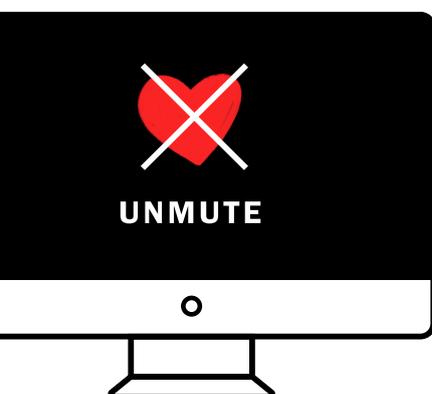
TECH ENCOURAGING A RETREAT TO PROCESS

Again and again we heard how much people missed face-to-face contact and in particular those informal moments in the margins of the working day where people share their lives and chat about work. Zoom/Microsoft Teams sometimes felt like a blunt instrument as people complained about not being able to read people on Zoom, missing the ability to feel the mood or others' feelings.

Many support/social workers had not seen people in the context of their homes, families, and relationships. There was a clear move away from relational, person-centred ways of working towards more transactional, with an 'us' checking on 'them' dynamic. Just as social care workers felt the limitations of the emotional connection that Zoom was able to offer them from their teammates and managers, they in turn were unable to feel the people they were working to support. This exacerbated the transactional nature of this relationship.

The dominance and unquestioning acceptance of a model where workers are tied to the intervention they are commissioned to deliver is evident, as some support workers expressed surprise at what people had been capable of in their absence:

"What has surprised me is the lack of phone calls from people with problems. I do wonder now if the people I work with actually need a support worker like myself, or if they would be better served by a free telephone number with advice on tap. If a problem arises then someone could go and visit. Otherwise, they can go on living independently without someone calling to see them once a week, whether they require and want a visit or not"



If we're to realise claims of 'asset based', 'person led' support models that are creative, community-focussed and transient, then we will have to work hard to dismantle power-imbalanced relationships.

Barriers to a levelling of the balance of power via mutual aid:

NOT MUTUAL, JUST 'AID'

It was apparent that 'mutual aid' was not always mutual nor available to everyone. Not everyone wanting to be involved in mutual aid was able to do so, and the power dynamics played out in 'organising' people in the usual ways.

There was a huge rise in volunteering across Wales – with striking rise in male working age volunteers (WCVA, 2020). This is curious when juxtaposed alongside things we heard like:

"And it was interesting that as soon as local councils and people who have normally been in some form of power structure wanted to get involved, suddenly there's conversations about money and 'have you applied for this? Have you got funding? Have you got this?..."

"...And I am sitting there saying 'no we haven't.' What I was bringing to the table was my work experience and how I operate as a person, and how I like to connect with people didn't seem to hold as much weight around that table. It made me think a lot about how much people are going to be willing to let go"

And we heard it as a very white experience:

"In a really multi-cultural community like Riverside, very few of our volunteers have been from Black Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds so that's really interesting. I suspect that's because culturally a lot of communities in the area will take care of each other"

And some people just didn't feel safe to contribute:

"I had a rant about other charities who had furloughed its staff, - none would help me, cos they'd been furloughed. Where does the human compassion, the human empathy come into this? Don't worry about being furloughed, you are helping somebody else out! People are too conscious of going back to the red tape"

Again, the dominance of the hierarchical paradigm is evident as **'mutual aid' became bureaucratised**. Local people are clearly excellent at reaching and supporting local people but this is immediately slowed and changed in to something, more service like, once organisations, particularly those used to 'delivering help to the most vulnerable', organise people around a table.

We also heard examples of groups having more volunteers than they knew what to do with and the demand for some 'rescue' missions just not being there, particularly where these had not taken in to account the cultural context of the local neighbourhood. This highlights that there is **much work to do around community participation and cohesion, even amongst people who are motivated to 'help'** who have their own ideas about what this should be, rather than asking, listening to and being inclusive.



4. A FOCUS ON LEADERSHIP

System Problem:

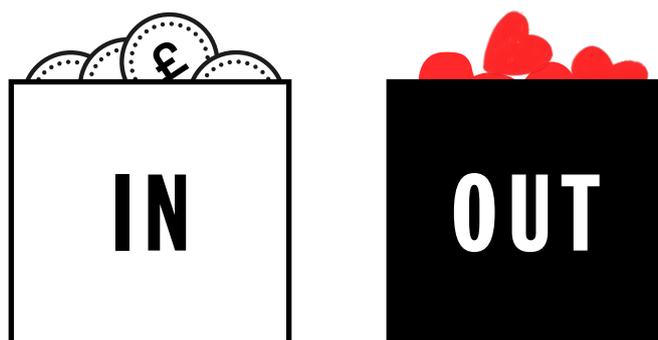
WE HAVE TO BE SEEN TO BE EFFECTIVE

In the current social care/helping system we all need to justify our existence. As a person you need to be sick enough/bad enough/ needy enough to get the service/help. As a service you need people to be needy and vulnerable so that you can exist. And round and round we go. This very real pressure forces people to further invest in to their (now defined for them) problem, instead of putting energy in to getting well. It forces services to put energy and attention in to proving they are worthy. We know that what we focus on grows and so **an industry of measures and matrixes serves to nurture a competitive environment for service providers.**

Services are necessarily distracted by proving they offer the best bang for bucks, to the detriment of creativity and collaboration. This has become tricky in the pandemic as usual measures of success have changed. We have already illustrated how some organisational hierarchies have steepened rather than flattened as a result of leader /manager reverting to more command and control ways of being – the need to check work is being done more than usual. Some teams, organisations and leaders clearly felt a powerlessness once their pre-COVID19 mission and purpose was no longer seemed.

"I think like a lot of organisations, mine is going through a massive 'long night of the soul' trying to work out what it needs to do next in order to be effective in whatever this new universe looks like.

And although that would have happened anyway it's become really kind of poignant and sharp and rather painful in the current world"



System Tonic:

DISPERSED LEADERSHIP

As already described people have felt rejuvenated by the trust and autonomy that they have both given and received from their leaders and teams. Innovation and, crucially, resilience has thrived and continues to do so in these organisations:

"What has been enabled in a way that I think is usually systemically and bureaucratically barriered, is that people and leaders have been able to enable teams to do the right thing. and respond to what they feel is right. Normally that might need fifteen business cases, seventeen reports, three different discussions, twenty two committee meetings, but actually there hasn't been the time for all that. I think it will raise an interesting question in the future because I think it may have adapted some leadership styles"

We heard examples of leadership that was not 'leading from the front' or leading because the job is 'leader', but rather leadership that mobilises people's strengths, supports by providing the right resources at the right time, is eager to learn and grow, and is able to act with humility:

"It's our job to remove the barriers to enable people to do what matters, but there's a massive temptation to go into 'hero mode', coming in to fix everybody's problems. And we've stepped back from that and done the things that might help our community organisations and all our partners around the borough to do stuff. We are part of the solution, we don't have to lead it. We don't have to swoop in and take applause as rescuers because all the skills and assets are out there in the community"

System Tonic:

BEING HEARD

People reported that they enjoyed having the opportunity to share their authentic stories, with no other agenda than that. This was a listening exercise and it was freeing not to have to draw conclusions immediately or create action plans. There was a recognition that capturing the learning and reflecting as we move through the various stages of recovery has been useful. There was a desire to capitalise on this 'safe to fail' moment, where trying and 'failing' is able to be shared and learned from, not forgotten and hidden.

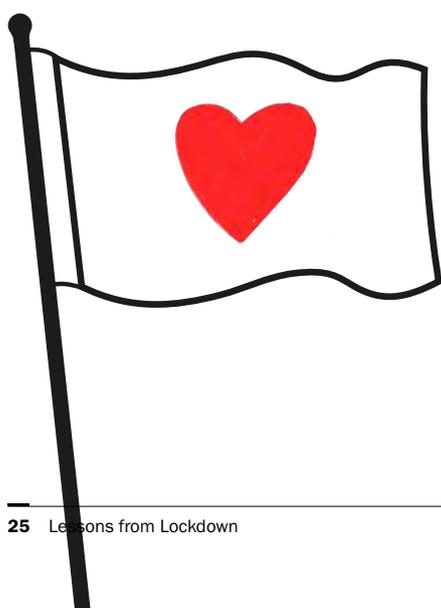
Many participants, leaders and others, expressed an interest in wanting to be part of a movement for change, a desire to maintain the opportunity for reflection and ability to grow through the recovery in solidarity with one another, rather than in competition.

Barriers to leadership for system change:

IT'S HARD TO BE A VULNERABLE LEADER

The powerlessness some leaders experienced was tangible as their changed roles as leaders felt more detached from the more visible 'front line' push to 'keep the show on the road'. This may go some way to explaining the retreat to more command and control ways of managing and leading – a justification for roles and positions. It's very human to need to be needed and feel that we have a purpose but not all leaders felt that they could be vulnerable and open about their feelings. Some express loneliness and isolation in their roles in 'keeping the ship sailing'. Finding the resources within to motivate teams was sometimes difficult when it felt like their own resources were depleted with few sources to replenish them.

Similarly, despite open acknowledgement that failing is learning and a celebration of the 'try it and see what happens' approach to responding to the pandemic, there was reticence about being exposed for failing. Understandably, given the strong system forces as discussed in this paper, it doesn't always feel like 'safe-to-fail' culture is thriving, and so opportunities to learn and grow from failure are being lost.



CONCLUSIONS

Lessons from Lockdown has shown that the time is right to bring more honesty to our conversations: we're ready for some straight talking. The challenge and authenticity that many participants brought to this exercise was inspirational and it felt like a new freedom to get to the heart of the matter and collaborate on missions has woken people up from the familiar – from the system operating as it always has.

There is much heart to be taken from the deep wells of commitment, passion and care that drive many people working in public and third-sector services in Wales.

Where isolation and loneliness were coupled with lack of meaningful support we heard of practices at odds with being human and relational. Power, and who holds it and exercises it was a huge theme, leading to some uncomfortable truths about the system we work in nurturing a lack of consciousness about who wields power and why. Indeed we heard how sometimes oppression is perpetuated by us and how we operate within the system.

But where high energy was coupled with leadership that was enabling, supportive and kind, creativity flourished and system barriers were unblocked. New solutions emerged through new listening and glimmers of a different relationship between communities and services shone. Activism felt alive. Mostly we heard about how much people missed human connection, and a new appreciation for how much this connection is valued.

This is our call to action at Platform: we must find ways to meaningfully connect with each other. It is our mission to enable, nurture and grow connections everywhere. Connections for listening, connections for learning, or for getting stuff done. Or connections purely for their own sake, that allow us to feel human. This is the thread that works across systems, within systems, amongst people – in every realm. This is how we believe systems will be dismantled and changed. By connecting people with each other, with shared missions and energy until we are a movement too big and gorgeous to stop.

And there is real hope for systemic transformation in Wales and beyond as a result of this learning; which as a result of our partnership with the [ACE Support Hub](#), [Mayday Trust](#) and others can now directly inform policy discussions to ensure we keep what works and leave behind what doesn't.



Thank you to everyone who contributed to Lessons from Lockdown in Wales. We look forward to connecting and listening more soon.

**Interested in System Change?
Have something to share?**

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