

A commitment to kindness

“Human relationships matter and they matter enormously in times of change and challenge.”
(Julia Unwin DBE, [Kindness, emotions & human relationships](#))

Since its introduction in 1998, there has surely never been a World Kindness Day when there has been so much appetite to reflect on the value of kindness. Over the last 6 months, we’ve seen a public narrative of kindness and neighbourly support in response to Covid-19. And while we know that there are gaps and the strength of the community response it is not evenly spread, still a majority of us believe that our communities have become [more caring, connected and kinder](#) since February.

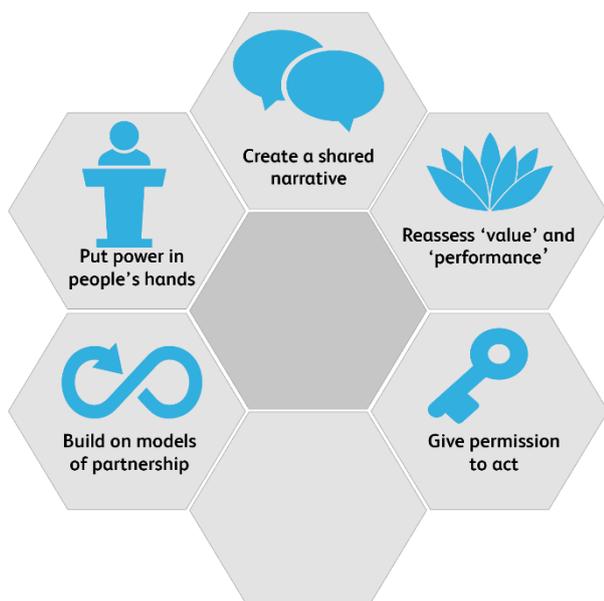
This is important. We know that the [everyday relationships](#) with people around us are at the heart of our wellbeing – and we have seen the power of informal acts of help and support in times when communities need it most. But while the public narrative focuses on individuals and communities, our work at the Carnegie UK Trust has shown that there is a vital role for organisations and public services – something that we are thrilled to see reflected in the No Child Left Behind community agreement.

Put simply, people do better when they experience human connection. Whether we are talking about a routine visit to a GP or the involvement of a social worker in a family’s life, the *experience* of the relationship matters. And, of course, GPs and nurses, social workers and teachers all understand that outcomes improve when people feel listened to and cared for – when they experience kindness. But we’ve found that there are often barriers within our organisations that inhibit an approach that is based on kindness and human relationships.

Through work with a range of partners on [kindness](#) over the last 5 years, we’ve heard how resource constraints can squeeze the time for human connection; how narrow targets and service-level priorities can get in the way of listening to what really matters to people; how attitudes towards risk and professionalism can prevent a holistic, intuitive response. Of course all of these things are important: our public services need to be efficient, transparent and safe. But these same systems and processes have also crowded out the space for kindness.

However, just as Covid has shone a light on kindness in communities, in our organisations too something has shifted. Because of the speed and scale of the crisis, and the level and complexity of support needs, organisations *have had to be* flexible, to make decisions based not on formal procedures, but on the skill and intuition of those working with people and communities. And, across a range of different organisations, we have heard how this approach of shifting autonomy and ‘giving permission to act’ has enabled organisations to respond at speed and deliver better outcomes.

Five priorities to sustain & embed radical kindness



In September, we published [A case study on kindness](#). Drawing on our experience of working in partnership with North Ayrshire Council, it highlighted five priorities for embedding kindness across the local authority. In allowing the time to build relationships, in its emphasis on creating a shared narrative to 'make kindness visible', and aligning decision making to its values and ways of working, the [NCLB Community Agreement](#) echoes these priorities. The Carnegie UK Trust is delighted to support and sign up to this commitment, and we look forward to being a part of this journey: supporting partners in Cheltenham to work in a way that reflects kindness, empathy and understanding.

Ben Thurman works for the Carnegie UK Trust, an organisation that seeks to improve the lives and wellbeing of people in the UK and Ireland. For the last five years, the Trust has been exploring the power of kindness to improve wellbeing outcomes, most recently through convening a Kindness Leadership Network, of which Cheltenham Borough Council is a member.