

Synopsis

The Torbay team has come a long way since facing the 'double blank sheet' moment of designing our own process and content. Early sceptics are now champions of how it is developing, bringing people together, building trust and collaboration as people of all ages step in and feel heard and valued. Together, we are creating action change experiments as mechanisms of change. We're enabling people from all perspectives to come into the work, design together and develop leadership, building confidence through experimenting with ideas and approaches. We've provided the conditions for a range of people, professions, and ages to collaborate, challenge ourselves and each other, hold space, share power, develop capability, and think differently into the long term. Young people are energised, connected and are using their new found power to make change happen. We are looking deeply at our own processes and behaviour, constantly challenging ourselves about how we hold or steward power.

About Torbay

Our LocalMotion dream is to have a **connected Torbay** where people, groups and organisations come together to solve problems collaboratively and creatively, with equality and where people thrive, taking ownership of their community, avoiding points of crisis and reducing the need for public services.

Torbay comprises three towns and several villages, each with its own character. The combined population is over 136,000, with 4.5 million visitors each year. Poverty is rife and social mobility is low; business growth and value of goods and services is one-third of national levels. Torbay is the most deprived upper-tier local authority area in the South West, with nearly double the number of cared for children than the England average and a high number of unpaid carers. There is little ethnic diversity: 96% of residents are white.

People are supported by more than 1,000 community-focused organisations and hundreds more small community groups, many linked through networks and partnerships. Professionals have a will to work collaboratively and to promote asset-based community development but efforts are often hamstrung by dictated agendas, timescales and processes. Through LocalMotion many community organisations and services have come together; better and broader ways of working together are developing, leading to improved capacity building in the community.

What we're doing

Our work addresses 3 overlapping theme areas, **strengthening families**, **food inequality** and **financial wellbeing** using principles of codesign, understanding root causes, and distributing power in the form of money, leadership and decision-making. Working initially through trusted relationships we're reaching across the community to draw people into transforming Torbay. Partners and individuals are invited to 'step into the work' and take action, a marked contrast to system norms of being consulted or 'having a voice' which leads to action by others, or none.

What we're learning

Reflecting on early steps, we recognise a shift in existing power dynamics in three ways; in each we can identify what we have learned and how we want to prioritise our efforts going forward:

1. Power over agenda setting: We are supporting people to take the power of determining and framing challenges to be addressed. Although we have structured our conversations around three themes, we have engaged with people to identify directions within those themes.

The young people and parents drawn into the work on strengthening families have taken the lead in identifying and making changes for themselves and their communities. The developing work in financial wellbeing draws on a wide variety of people and organisations; these people have identified several possible approaches and are being supported to develop them. Grassroots development of the food agenda is coming from three action projects across Torbay.

A participatory action process - when the agenda is not predetermined or constrained by a service paradigm - is a powerful and sometimes intimidating experience. Through facilitator training and practice, we are learning how not to hold too much power in a facilitator role and how and when to get out of the way. We have learned that many people need certainty of process to participate, so we are providing that structure. We aspire to build confidence and capacity so that we can take off the process 'stabilisers' in the future. We see this approach as critical

grassroots movement building and also as a powerful way to influence how participation and consultation could be radically different, evolving into collective action.

An important next step is to support working across themes and be true to the actions arising from the connections. As our themes overlap, it follows that the community action may benefit from avoiding a siloed approach.

2. Power over resources: We aspire to create and demonstrate wider local decision making over a collectively owned resource. Thus far, we have fallen into the standard hierarchical approach to decision making, with the Core Group holding the power and decisions, based on advice from working groups. The system we want to create is one where people asking for financial resource are part of the decision-making process.

We're finding that rather than coming to a fund to get money for an organisation and making their work fit a brief, people are coming to get involved with the work first, and talking about resources where needed. We allocated funds transparently to partners who were able to bring people in their trusted relationships into the process. Partner organisations hold the money and the process, but participants lead, or are learning to lead, the work. Our focus on what the work is, rather than how much money we have, has sparked in-depth discussions about how money is accessed and devolved. Alternative mechanisms around money decisions are starting to emerge from the work, rather than the Core Group having to devise them separately.

We've had tension around different approaches of 'grassroots' versus 'big system' that has paralysed our food inequality work. Some believe sustainable, systemic change is more likely when money goes to a community to enable action. Others feel a strategic approach, supported with salaried staff, is needed. We want to learn about the systemic effectiveness of these approaches and have freed up our paralysis by planning to test both.

Our next step is to use this insight and all we have learned about participation and how resource decisions could be made differently to help the Core Group transition towards a stewardship role, where it can hold a process but not the decision-making power over the resources. We'll also further evaluate activities and approaches we have used and learn from them.

3. Power to get things done: This form of power is discrete but oppressive. Community-led action is often stalled by the controls, rules and processes put in place, with good intentions, by anchor institutions. Although controls are about managing risk, we want to challenge whose risk is this managing.

The anchor institutions involved in LocalMotion recognise that it is often the organisational risk managed through controls and rules, rather than risk to citizens. We are leading by example, trusting citizens to determine and act on change. Young people in our strengthening families work aspire to change the national education system and we are nurturing their ambition and leadership capacity while facilitating step-by-step practical action. We can do more in collaboration with anchor institutions who want to change but are unsure how to.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion

In Torbay, diversity, equity and inclusion spans a range of characteristics that affect people's experience of power and participation. Through our networks we have found it easier to draw in and learn from neurodiverse people, LGBTQ+ people, young people, those affected by multi-generational trauma and care-experienced people. Our relationships are not yet as strong with ethnically diverse networks but are building, through Ubuntu education and mentoring, Imagine multicultural group, Torbay Multicultural Forum and [Olive Project](#).

Budget

In our budget of £3,330,800 we have prioritised investing in time and space for people to meet, expertise for our development and growing our capacity, and experimentation of ideas. Salaries in the first phase will cover initial coordination and a food system change lead, the former to reduce and the latter to include making its future cost sustainable in a circular food system. Collaborating with Food Plymouth CIC already on this journey and joining networks such as Sustainable Food Places will help. The coordinator role will decrease through this period, allowing for payment for local experts to increase and embed the work in our system. While LocalMotion enables us to create the conditions to devise and test, we will invite other partners to fund further work arising.

While we have not yet thoroughly explored social investment potential, through the LocalMotion relationship, investment has been made in People's Parkfield CIC, enabling it to become an operational example of community ownership and collaboration. There are further emerging opportunities in Torbay where social investment may help, for example with a power shift from commercial development to community ownership and enterprise or supporting development of the food system.