Section 5: Leadership for Health Creation

The core elements and styles of leadership required for a health creating system, and for leading system change to embed Health Creation, are very different from traditional ideas of leadership. Leaders need to be adept at creating conditions for others to play roles using small amounts of funding to oil the wheels, not just driving large programmes with large budgets.

This requires courage to accept that some things need to fundamentally change and to move on from the 'charismatic' or 'hero leader' that characterises many senior NHS leaders.

A dispersed leadership model where everyone has a leadership role

One of the most significant features of health creating systems is that power is devolved to the lowest level possible:

- What does it look like for everyone to be a leader in their own health, within their families, neighbourhoods, networks?
- Community-led activity is valued, invested in and is part of the health and social care ecosystem.
- Frontline workers are given significant autonomy to respond to communities, to self-organise so they can play to team strengths and to make system requests to enable them to respond better to communities.
- The leadership role of middle managers involves building, maintaining and energising the ecosystem that serves the frontline and communities well.
- Senior leaders listen to and get behind communities, frontline workers and middle managers who are making progress in creating the conditions for Health Creation and support them to develop, enhance and spread their practices to others. They are comfortable talking directly to community leaders and to having them on their boards and they are comfortable with and can lead through the ambiguity that are inherent in complex systems.

Leadership humility

Perhaps the most significant trait of any leader in a health creating system is the quality of humility. Leaders need to be able to connect comfortably with aspects of their own lived experience, or that of people they are close to, giving them empathy to care. They need to be prepared to look through the community lens, to spend time with community members and frontline staff, to shift and share power and to be prepared to work with others across systems to reshape the architecture to support service and pathway redesign.

Relational skills, comfortable with ambiguity and 'unknown unknowns'

Health creating systems are connected across sectors, working as equal partners, playing to strengths and aligning their activity to provide a joined-up service offer that enables people to access the things they need when they need them. Those leading within organisations that are health creating are reaching outwards to other sectors without fear of the unknown and starting conversations that lead to change. They are comfortable leading through ambiguity, able to negotiate effectively and positively influence those around them, keeping people on board and knowing when to step back and allow others to take a lead.

The Health Creation 'Relationships First' approach points to a need for better relationships and more constructive partnerships, across at least four relationships (see Section 3). The six features of health creating relationships and practices will be embedded helping to make relationships trusting, strong and dynamic, enabling them to flex and respond according to the situation.

Transactional approaches, where vulnerable people are simply signposted or referred to another services, are no longer acceptable. As Amanda Pritchard, CEO of NHS England, said at the Kings Fund Annual Conference in 2023:

> *"The NHS needs to learn how to become a good partner."*

Removing barriers, unlearning unhelpful models of leadership

A significant role for system leaders is to spot and remove barriers that prevent systems from shifting to a health creating model. The types of barriers are covered more in Section 6.

For this to work optimally, each person needs to consider the leadership challenge starting with themselves. This means being prepared to review our own leadership practices and thinking, often developed over many years, and to unlearn unhelpful models and create the space to develop new leadership approaches needed for Health Creation. For example, many senior leaders in health and care in England have been trained and developed highly specialised skills for working in a competitive environment, where their personal success depended on their organisation's performance and success. Increasing recognition that what is needed is collaboration, and not competition, with other organisations across the wider system means that these years of behaviours learnt and finely honed for success now need to be unlearnt in order to refine the new skills needed for collaboration.[42] This requires time, support and training – but first it requires recognition that old ways are no longer helpful, and that unlearning is needed first to make space for the learning necessary to get this right.

For the charity and community sector organisations, or under-represented under-heard staff and community groups, the challenge is to trust statutory organisations after years of neglect or under-recognition about their sense of agency, power and contribution. This requires courage to now step into this space for partnership working as equals for integrated care efforts, trusting this time that their voice will be heard and will result in actual tangible improvements as a result.

Advocacy

Enabling people access to their right to the highest possible standard of health attainable will at times require leaders to stand with people and communities and advocate for them. Integrated Care Systems need to strengthen their ability to advocate to government for specific changes to policies and programmes that work against people being well.

Embedding new leadership models throughout organisations

A Health Creation approach is needed at all levels and in all parts of organisations and systems. It is not sufficient for this to be seen as necessary at one level only or for particular roles. Health Creation elements need to be embedded into workforce job descriptions, HR practices, education and training programmes, and within practice so that the workforce has a health creating mindset for the people that they work for and with as service users, clients, community members and others. It takes deep work and thinking to get this right; our Framework can help workforces to think through in practice what it takes in reality to deliver on this for and with staff and communities, and to resist the temptation to see this as a simple step or tick box for inclusion in a paper, policy or position. Examples of practices include: co-location to work across boundaries, digital enablement, support to develop shared priorities and language, creating a joint vision and tailored support, changing the culture and mindsets, helping people to see and enact Health Creation in practice, requiring sustained care and dedication from the very top to lead improvements in practice. This is the only way we will get a complete shift despite the challenges to creating a healthier and more sustainable model of care for all.

> *"We work hard to protect the user-led nature of it. It's easier not to… to write a strategy and implement it, but you'd never get the same engagement. It doesn't work if nobody engages."*
>
> *Housing provider participant in a THCA project*

The prize

It is easy to think that this is not a priority, not worthwhile, not attainable. But that would be to overlook what is possible, or more importantly why it is necessary. The reality is that the decision to take more health creating approaches can fundamentally enable people to access their right to the highest possible standard of health attainable. It can create a more enjoyable work environment with people connecting and working towards a more meaningful shared endeavour. It can ensure better use of resources as new sources of capacity are unlocked through partnerships and innovation. And it can improve workforce morale as people begin to see what is possible for improving people's lives and ensuring a greater sense of equity or fairness – often the motivators for people entering the workforce in the first place: a deep sense of care for people. Health Creation is capable of so much and it is up to each of us to see this prize and keep it as the motivation for us to work in new and different ways, leading through old mindsets and into a future that is capable of so much if we care to try.

EXAMPLE: Leadership for change

Example from Social Enterprise Kent, winners of 2022 Excellence in Health Creation Health Creator of the Year award.

Social Enterprise Kent (SEK) is a community interest company delivering a range of community projects, voluntary sector support, training and employability programmes.

The winning initiative was their Ageless Thanet project that successfully reduced social isolation and loneliness in people over the age of 50. Delivered between 2015-2022, SEK worked with 10 key partners, funded by the National Lottery Community Fund's Ageing Better programme.

Their project aligned with the Framework for Health Creation, moving beyond coproduction by shifting power to their 50+ population.

This resulted in over 11,000 people engaging in a range of health creating activities including wellbeing, life planning, social prescribing, and age-friendly business. In addition, their Ageless Entrepreneurs programme saw 146 older people complete a 13-week course to start their own business, while their Active Citizenship programme recruited 225 volunteers who, by playing to their strengths and self-organising, delivered over 11,500 volunteer hours. In 2021, SEK were awarded the Queen's Award for Voluntary service.

"Volunteering for Ageless Thanet has given me a new phase in my life. I've met lovely friends, some of whom I have been on holiday with. We also meet once a week to play cards, have takeaway and movie evenings and go to shows together. Three of us also meet for lunch every Sunday and it makes my weekend. None of this would have been possible without Ageless Thanet."

Volunteer

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