



Bringing People Together Learning Partner

Year 1 report from NDTi

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National Development Team for **Inclusion**

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With thanks to:

With thanks to The National Lottery Community Fund for supporting our work as Learning Partner to the Bringing People Together (BPT) Programme; to all the BPT team at The National Lottery Community Fund, in particular our lead contact, Lisa Wells, for your advice and observations; to the teams at Neighbourly Lab and FODIP, our two case studies, who so openly and thoughtfully shared your experience with us and finally, to all the creative and pioneering projects that make up the BPT programme. This report is based on your wise insights, reflections and lush chats.

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Summary

The National Lottery Community Fund's Bringing People Together (BPT) Programme is seeking to understand what works in bringing people together. The Programme is funding projects that will enable communities to thrive and prosper by creating the conditions, infrastructure and social fabric that enable better and longer lasting ways of bringing people and communities together.

The National Development Team for Inclusion (NDTi) is working alongside the Programme to draw out and capture emerging learning, and our observations and insights from our first year in this role are set out below.

The Programme is helping to bring people and communities together in an exceptionally challenging context, with funded projects reporting many signs of change, for example:

- **helping to forge connections across divides** by creating new opportunities for rich, important conversations that help people increase mutual understanding and explore difficult issues
- **increasing positive micro-interactions** between people, leading to cumulative change
- **strengthening a sense of belonging** - what is sometimes referred to as social fabric or the glue that can help unite people around a common goal, shared vision, sense of purpose or passion

Some examples suggest that through their inclusive approach and design, projects are creating ripples of influence and are having a wider, and perhaps unexpected impact upon people, places, organisations and the community infrastructure such as:

- **building new partnerships and relationships** with other organisations, groups and networks across sectors as well as different communities
- supporting the third sector and businesses **to share scarce resources** for the benefit of communities
- helping to **shift power to communities and people** with more people stepping up to be local leaders for change
- **influencing what others do**, in particular statutory bodies, such as councils or transport services.

The projects are also learning how to bring people together, including identifying the critical success factors, as well as tackling the barriers that can get in the way of progress, including:

- **investing in relationships, building trust and finding the spark** that will ignite action and motivate people to take part
- **taking time to lay the foundations at the outset**, including finding and engaging the right people, identifying a compelling reason to connect, mapping what is already in place and co-designing what needs to happen
- increasing the skills and confidence of the **people and roles that help to reinforce the social fabric**
- **working flexibly and responsively** as circumstances and contexts change
- this flexibility **extending to funders** who listen and respond alongside the change makers, as part of the supportive environment we refer to in section 3 of this report.
- recognising the factors that can make it difficult to bring people together, including **the current context**, with the aftermath of the pandemic compounded by the cost of living crisis, and **friction and suspicion within partnerships**.
- **developing strategies and approaches** to maximise their chances of success by understanding the context and working in ways that make the most of the factors that enable change.

The report also reflects on the first year of the Learning Partnership between the Programme and NDTi, including highlighting successes and challenges, and setting out the priorities for the year to come. A notable success is the formation of the Programme's Learning Network. There is a growing sense that this is an active, dynamic network with projects embracing cross-pollination and recognising their inter-connectedness.



1. Introduction

1.1 What is this report about

“It’s a story about people, and relationships and place.”

(Quote from Reflection and Learning session)

This document draws together the emerging learning from the first year of the National Development Team for Inclusion’s (NDTi’s) work as Learning Partner to The National Lottery Community Fund’s Bringing People Together Programme. Its audience includes The National Lottery Community Fund, the projects and their partners who together make up the Programme, as well as all those organisations and funders with a shared interest in connecting people and communities. We anticipate that it will help to shape future project and programme design and delivery in this complex area.

The report looks at:

- Part 1: Introduction
- Part 2: What does the Programme look like now?
- Part 3: What signs of change are starting to occur?
- Part 4: What are we learning about how to strengthen connections through initiatives such as BPT?
- Part 5: What are we learning about the role of a learning partner?
- Part 6: Conclusions and looking forward to the next phase

The report brings together learning, insights and evidence from several different sources, including the outputs from learning sessions with the projects (as described in Appendix 5), two case study discussions, a funder’s focus group, and reports and other outputs such as blogs produced by the projects.

It draws primarily on the experiences of those projects that have been part of the Programme for around a year, and within these, the projects that have produced written materials about their work. However, all the projects, including those that have most recently joined the Programme, have enthusiastically contributed their early reflections to the group sessions and events described later, so the views of all BPT projects are represented in our analysis. As newer projects start their work and longer-established projects progress through their time in the Programme, we anticipate that Year 2 will bring a strong focus and growing evidence base on what works, for whom and under what circumstances in bringing people and communities together.

1.2 Brief description of the Bringing People Together Programme and what it set out to achieve

The National Lottery Community Fund launched Bringing People Together (BPT) in March 2021 during a time of unprecedented challenges and change for every community across the UK. In particular, the national lockdowns of 2020 and 2021 were having a profound and continuing impact on people and communities, fundamentally affecting our ability to connect with each other and starkly highlighting widespread inequalities. Against this backdrop, the BPT Programme is funding projects to enable communities to thrive and prosper by creating the conditions, infrastructure and social fabric that enable better and longer lasting ways of bringing people and communities together. The Programme is exploring how connections **between** different communities can be strengthened as well as those within the same community.

The Programme is part of The National Lottery Community Fund's UK Portfolio, which seeks to support innovation, to test out new ways of doing things and to fund activities that are future focused.

The Programme is made up of projects that meet at least one, if not all, of the following priorities

- build **connections across communities, not just within existing communities**, and foster a positive sense of belonging by reducing divisive 'us and them' attitudes
- support and explore **what's needed to connect communities** and enables stronger collaboration to bring people together and keep people together – for example, community infrastructure like networks, shared resources or coordinated approaches, or supporting infrastructure organisations that support the work of other groups
- focus on creating **longer-term change**. This could mean a focus on improving the conditions available to communities to help create this change (instead of only delivering services or a series of public events)

- **build collective action** and strengthen communities' own abilities to have control, influence and agency on the things that matter most to them.

Projects are required to deliver across **at least two UK countries** (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales), working in a network or partnership, and in addition:

- are **bold and experimental** responses to bringing people together using new approaches, or a new combination of approaches
- can demonstrate **clear positive impacts** for communities, including those communities most in need of support
- have a clear focus on **equality, diversity and inclusion**
- can demonstrate they can **learn and adapt** as they go.

Given the Programme's strong focus on innovation and flexibility, The National Lottery Community Fund anticipated from the outset that the activities and outcomes of projects were likely to develop, emerge or change over the timeframe of their project. This flexible approach has remained a hallmark of the Programme and is also mirrored in NDTi's activities as a Learning Partner.

1.3 What we were commissioned to do

In January 2022, The National Lottery Community Fund commissioned the National Development Team for Inclusion (NDTi) to work alongside the Programme as a Learning Partner.

The National Lottery Community Fund's aspiration was to appoint:

“A Learning Partner to enable and amplify the learning from the programme. They will connect and convene the projects (both current and new grant holders), design a learning approach, generate on-going learning and insights from the programme, and share openly with other organisations that work to bring communities together – including community organisations, funders, think tanks and government.”¹

The role comprises three key elements:

- Build a **strong peer network** across grant-holders and their key partners (discussed in part 5)
- Generate **learning and insights** across the projects and programme (set out in parts 3 and 4)
- Communicate learning and **engage a wider audience** (this report is one of the first steps, see too part 6, looking forward to the next phase).

The following sections of the report summarise the learning and insights that we have drawn together during our first year as Learning Partner to the Programme.

¹ ITT for the BPT Learning Partner role



2. What does the Programme look like now?

2.1 Introduction – about this section

Before moving on to look at the emerging learning from the past year, this section presents a brief snapshot of the BPT Programme as it looks at the time of writing, in Spring 2023.

The Programme was launched in March 2021, with the first funded project running from September 2021, while the most recent are due to continue through to Autumn 2026. The cohort of grantholders is therefore shifting over time, as the longest-established projects complete their work and newly funded projects join the Programme. The projects are extremely diverse, in terms of their geography, remit, focus, partnerships, scale and length (with projects ranging from 1 year to 3.5 years). Appendix 1 lists the projects, delivery organisations and timescales.

Although the scale and scope of the projects are strikingly varied, all share the focus on strengthening connections between people and communities. Projects are addressing this in different ways and at different levels. For example, projects are seeking to achieve change by:

- working intensively over time within and/or across small cohorts of people
- improving the number and quality of micro-interactions between people
- shining a light on people's life experiences to foster greater understanding by other, different communities.
- influencing the attitudes and behaviour of the wider population through national action.

All the projects are experimental to some degree - some because of who they are working with and why; some because of where they are working; some because of what they are doing and how; and some are a combination of all these elements.

We have found that projects cannot easily be categorised by viewing them through a single lens, as many cut across potential ways of working or topic areas. However, we will explore in the coming year whether it is useful, or possible to develop a fluid and dynamic way of understanding the range of approaches and areas of interest represented across the Programme.

2.2 What are projects hoping to achieve?

As noted above, the BPT programme has four key priority areas. Alongside this, as an early part of our work as Learning Partner, in May 2022 we explored with the BPT projects what, for them as a group, were the most significant changes they collectively hoped to see as a result of their work. We convened an initial, participative on-line workshop session with all the projects to explore:

- **What** the projects hoped collectively to achieve and **why** (including the wider drivers and contexts for change)
- **How** they aspired to work together, by agreeing a set of principles for the network

The output from the session was a one page, co-designed Learning Framework (see Appendix 2), which summarises discussions on these two areas, and provides an overarching structure to guide our thinking as a Learning Partner and to influence design of future learning events.

On the right, we have demonstrated the terrain on which the projects are working by mapping The National Lottery Community Fund's key priorities (the four blue bubbles) against the five dimensions identified by the projects themselves and captured in the Learning Framework (the orange bubbles). These align closely, as set out in the graphic on the right.



2.3 Where are BPT projects operating?

All BPT projects are delivering across at least two UK nations. The map below illustrates the spread across the UK.





3. What signs of change are starting to occur?

3.1 Introduction – about this section

This report focuses on the emerging learning from the first year of the BPT Learning Partnership. At the point of writing, some projects are ending, some are around halfway through their funding period and a small number of others are just starting.

The National Lottery Community Fund's aspiration for the BPT Programme was to support a range of bold and experimental projects that are testing out new ways of bringing people together. By its very nature this can be slow, long-term work, and the impacts difficult to predict and capture. This report draws together learning and evidence of the early signs of change primarily for those projects that have been running for around 12 months or more.

The co-produced Learning Framework (Appendix 2) has provided a useful structure to make sense of diverse sources of information shared by projects and Programme leads, and to organise the content of this report, to illustrate what has been happening, what is changing (or starting to change) and how. The previous section illustrates the close alignment between these five dimensions and The National Lottery Community Fund's four priorities. At this point, some areas within the framework are populated with more evidence of signs of change than others. We would anticipate that this will shift over time, as more projects capture the developing impact of their work and as sustained change starts to occur more widely.

3.2 Emerging signs of change:

“Small changes are having a significant impact ...”
(BPT Project member)

This section brings together thematically a range of the signs of change that are starting to emerge. It does not attempt to present a comprehensive overview, but highlights selected examples that illustrate the range of activity within the programme. The examples vary enormously in their scale and scope, reflecting the diversity of the projects that make up the Programme. Encouragingly, and

perhaps unexpectedly at this stage, some examples suggest that ripples are already spreading beyond the Programme to achieve a wider impact upon people, places and organisations.

(i) Conversations and connections

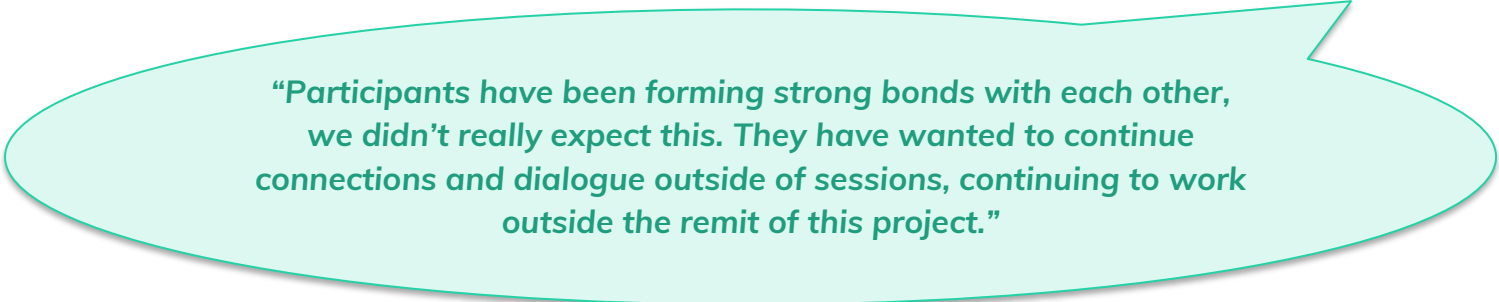
This dimension lies at the heart of the vision for BPT. It relates particularly to understanding what works in connecting across divides and across different groups and communities, as well as creating opportunities for conversations that seek to explore difficult issues.

All the BPT projects are active in this area and there is emerging evidence that change is starting to occur, both on a micro level, involving individuals and small groups, and also on a much wider scale.

For example:

- BPT projects are **helping to forge connections across divides**. Tough Options Moving Forward is working with young people to encourage active dialogue across faiths, and to bring together people from different backgrounds to improve understanding of each other's perspectives, cultures and identities. Participants have the opportunity to meet young people they would not otherwise encounter. For example, one young Muslim participant said that without the project, he would never have met an orthodox Jewish person.

The young people who are taking part have formed strong connections that extend beyond the project. As a project staff member reflected:



“Participants have been forming strong bonds with each other, we didn’t really expect this. They have wanted to continue connections and dialogue outside of sessions, continuing to work outside the remit of this project.”

Together Coalition’s evaluation of 2022’s Thank You Day, which formed part of the Programme, also found that the initiative had a **significant impact on social connection**. 53% of people who took part in a Thank You Day event felt that celebrating together made meeting new people easier, and 62% of attendees met somebody from a different background to themselves.

Interactions across divides included meeting people who are different from themselves in terms of class (29% of attendees), culture (29% of attendees), ethnicity (31% of attendees), or religion (27% of attendees).²

(ii) United communities and (iii) A sense of belonging

These two dimensions are closely related, as both touch on pride, trust, place and comfort with difference, as well as an awareness of the things that communities hold in common.

- BPT projects are increasing the skills and confidence of the **people and roles that help to reinforce the social fabric** within and across different communities. As a result of the skills development they received as part of The Essential Mix, Law Enforcement Officers in Hammersmith & Fulham are now more confident engaging with the local community, with officers who completed training reporting greater comfort speaking with residents and an increased sense of safety in their role. As one Officer commented:

“I think the biggest surprise for me was realising that I actually can talk to kids. This was never something I thought I’d be good at before but it was easy in the end.”³

At the same time, local people who attended community events that Officers were supported to run across the Borough also saw benefits in engaging with officers. 75% of people said they would be more likely to chat to an Officer in future, while 77% reported that they would be more likely to raise an issue with the team.

Plan for Peace are working with community leaders and are helping to tackle the burnout related to the pandemic and the cost of living crisis that are highlighted later. The space and support offered by the project have enabled community leaders to reflect and recharge, enabling them to connect with peers across divides. As one said, ‘It helped me to deal with my self-doubt.’

² Thank You Day 2022, Impact Evaluation Report /together coalition

³ More confident staff, more engaged residents: A summary report on LBHF LET Engagement Project, Neighbourly Lab

The Bold Dreams initiative, which is led by New Constellations, has brought together 17 leaders from different backgrounds and settings to find common ground in exploring different futures. Participants are drawing on the increased understanding and appreciation of difference and diversity in their own lives and organisations, for example by applying new ways of working in the community and via a CIC, and developing a new project to make end-of-life care more accessible.

- Some projects are enabling participants **to explore their differences** in a boundaried and safe way. Tough Options Moving Forward enables young people from different faith groups to share views and experiences which are sometimes ‘polarised’, and this is described as helpful, particularly when young people are addressing current events and difficult developments:

“It’s just fantastic, we had a fear this may impact and stifle conversation.”

- Together’s Thank You Day events in June 2022 reached 8,7000,000 people. Polling of participants suggests that the **impact on attitudes** of celebrating together is likely to be long-lasting:

“Nearly half of attendees feel more likely to speak to their neighbour in the future (49%), more likely to volunteer (37%), more likely to both host community events (33%), and take part in them (55%).”⁴

(iv) Promoting shared values

This dimension relates to universal human values such as kindness and compassion, as well as the cumulative contribution that multiple, small day to day interactions can have in weaving the social fabric of a community.

⁴ Thank You Day 2022, Impact Evaluation Report /together coalition

- BPT projects are **increasing positive micro-interactions** between people, for example by increasing the visibility of key workers. One element of the Essential Mix involved working with bus drivers in West London. As a result, signs were trialled in buses that encouraged passengers to acknowledge drivers. Interactions increased from 23% to 30% of passengers and drivers appreciated the difference:⁵

“Since having posters on the door that tell passengers to say thank you, they acknowledge us more... It’s nice, it reminds passengers that we are human beings as well.”⁵

- Give A Day is a partnership project between Give A Day Carlisle and Ratio, which is exploring how to both enable and spread the insights and learning from encouraging and supporting local people to give a day, or whatever time they have, in a specified week each year to their very local community. This is based on experiences in Carlisle that micro kindnesses accumulate over time and between people to create a critical mass of contributions which in turn strengthens communities. It’s fluid, organic and builds on what works for different people in different places, the learning from which is yet to emerge as Give a Day is spread to new places and communities through this project.

(v) A supportive environment

Sustainable change relies on a supportive environment, which enables shifts in attitudes or behaviours to take root and extend into the future. This dimension covers those changes, often long term, that need to occur so that BPT projects can achieve a lasting impact. It is noticeable and encouraging that it is already possible to highlight many positive early examples where projects are having a wider impact, whether on attitudes, community leadership, or the work of statutory bodies.

- BPT projects are helping to **shift power to communities and people** with several early examples of what one project described at a Reflection and Learning session as ‘people stepping up to take responsibility and moving away from a sense of **‘it’s not my job’**’. In Glasgow, a community engagement exercise, led by young people took place as part of Essential Mix. This created a sense of the potential impact they could have on the community in future, if they took their decision making role seriously. One young person commented **‘if we get this right, they’ll trust us again.’**

⁵ Encouraging greater interaction and kindness on London buses, Train findings and impact summary, Neighbourly Lab

As noted earlier, the young participants in Tough Choices Moving Forward also grew significantly as a result of their involvement, both as young leaders and as co-designers:

“It’s been really beautiful, it’s enabled young people to share this, they feel ‘we’re running this, not FODIP or the Lottery, it reflects our backgrounds and agendas as well..... They’re already making changes by being positive change makers, a really positive surprise.” (FODIP case study)

- Through building new networks and trusting relationships, BPT projects are encouraging the third sector and businesses **to make better use of scarce resources to boost the local infrastructure**, both out of necessity and choice. In Manchester, Groundswell has become an important source of support for struggling community groups, connecting groups together to share resources and increase capacity. The project’s community connectors are known and trusted local people with deep local knowledge and the capacity to act as brokers between very different groups. Essential Mix is working with Tesco in Glasgow to open up under-used space in stores for use by the community. Meanwhile, Understory has received feedback that their mapping process has provided a quick and easy means of collating the information communities need, in order to support their places to run more efficiently and effectively. As one community organiser commented:

“I’m new to this job and I’ve just spent four months doing what you’ve just done in one hour.”⁶

- BPT projects are also **influencing what others do**, in particular statutory bodies. Essential Mix is already influencing local authorities in London, as other Boroughs hear about and adopt their work with Local Enforcement Officers in Hammersmith & Fulham. Transport for London (TfL) are also keen to roll out the element of the project that has successfully increased positive

⁶ Understory end of year report, January 2023

interactions between bus drivers and passengers. Also in London, Groundswell is delivering training and sharing local insights with the Metropolitan Police that is starting to influence their approach. Understory has demonstrated the value of local maps as an evidence-based tool in making the case for increased investment in underserved areas:

“The map has provided a really useful tool to lobby Government, to ask for more public services, and support for their third / fourth sector organisations.”

- Communities Co-Creating Sustainable Tourism is exploring ways of empowering and building the confidence and capacity of local people to **increase their voice and influence decisions** impacting on local communities in rural areas. This combines the skills and experiences of coproducing a vision for change and actions to achieve it, whilst challenging dominant narratives about tourist hot spots that could inadvertently change the nature of that community. For example what and who is “remote”, and who decides? This also illustrates that projects span more than one theme, in this case about building the capacity of local communities to own the agendas that strengthen their communities (a supportive environment) through a greater sense of belonging and pride in their place.



4. What are we learning about how to strengthen connections through initiatives such as BPT?

4.1 Introduction – about this section

As noted previously, the BPT programme was launched into a time of unprecedented pressure on communities, following the pandemic and its continuing aftermath, compounded by the cost of living crisis. BPT projects are testing out innovative ways of promoting connection against this exceptionally challenging backdrop, so learning about **how** the signs of change described in the previous section are occurring is really important. We explore below the factors that can help or hinder efforts to strengthen connections through initiatives such as BPT, then summarise the actions that projects are taking to maximise their chances of success in the current tough climate.

4.2 What are the factors that help delivery?

The factors that the BPT projects have identified as helping delivery are primarily about relational and flexible ways of working, including between projects and The National Lottery Community Fund.

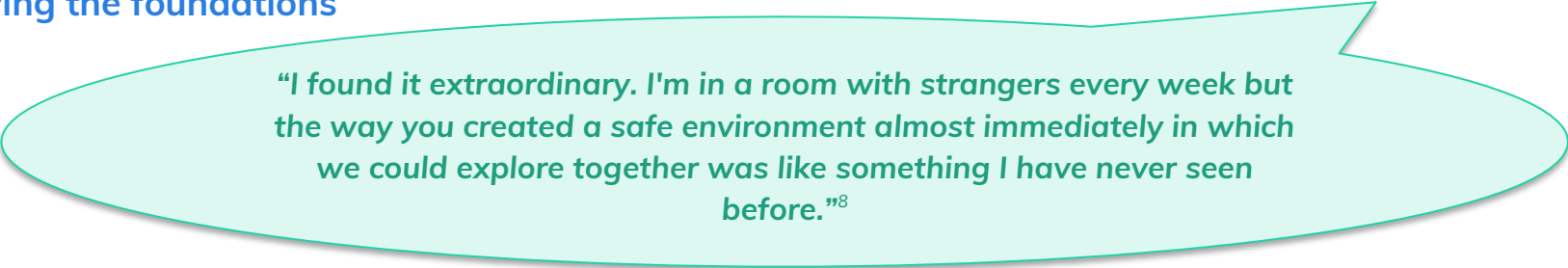
- **Investing in relationships and finding the spark**

“Every aspect of our learning has shown us that relationships and trust are key ... Every relationship matters to the process and the better the relationship, the richer the outcome.”⁷

⁷ Understory annual report

Most BPT projects rely upon building trusting relationships, whether with individual and diverse participants in a programme or event, with communities in a place and with community groups. Most explicitly focus on relationships as a key driver of their approach to achieving change, including intensive models and processes such as those pioneered by New Constellations or the relationship-centred practice promoted and spread by the Relationships Project. BPT projects are built upon local knowledge, knowhow and contacts. This is particularly the case when projects are scaling out to work in a new location. Give A Day emphasise the importance of finding the person who is the spark, who has the right connections, who is trusted, and who can help to kick things off. Key people could be employed in an enabling or networking role such as a community connector embedded within the communities or groups that are working together. They could alternatively be a community activist. For other projects, they might be someone who works for a partner organisation, sometimes in the statutory sector or a business. Design Differently highlight the potential for bringing people together across sectors and industries who wouldn't normally collaborate around a shared local endeavour; this requires more investment of time and energy in relationship building and cementing.

- **Laying the foundations**



“I found it extraordinary. I'm in a room with strangers every week but the way you created a safe environment almost immediately in which we could explore together was like something I have never seen before.”⁸

Projects underline the importance of being able to spend time and thought building a solid foundation for their work from the outset. As highlighted above, many of the projects rely on trusting relationships, which take time to establish. Other activities that need to happen alongside this in the early stages of the project include:

- Finding the people who can help the project happen in a particular place or a particular community
- Identifying a compelling hook or reason for connecting in the first place – such as climate change or building a greater understanding of different faiths and backgrounds

⁸ Quote from participant in Bold Dreams, included in New Constellations Year 1 Report

- Locating and engaging the people and groups who could benefit from taking part or contributing
- Mapping what is already in place
- Designing the project with care and thought, alongside participants and partners
- Creating safe spaces for people to come together
- Spending time at the beginning to co-create a shared vision about what needs to change, why and how (for example, Communities Co-Creating Sustainable Tourism, Design Differently).

- **Working flexibly and responsively**

“Small organisations have shown real resilience in a massively challenging environment. It’s really shown that the amount of work they can do is phenomenal.” (Source: Focus group with Fund team)

Flexibility, learning and adapting as you go have been the hallmarks of most BPT projects. Being responsive, fleet of foot, refining and changing the way projects operate has been crucial, especially when projects are extended from one location to another. Small organisations, in particular, have been able to respond extraordinarily quickly to changes in the environment, sometimes redesigning their approach more than once in the process of finding a way of making their project work.

- **Funders who support projects flexibly**

“The funding was core for us. We came to this with a hypothesis, now we have evidence. We’re forever grateful.” (BPT project member)

“Then (a researcher) had the chance to work with a funder that allowed more flexibility. When applying for funding, the planned project evolved through conversations with the funder. After funding was awarded, there was talk of sharing learning across the funded projects – which had never happened with any other research funders! And as the project progressed it changed shape in response to close working with the project partners, and their changing priorities and activities.”⁹

The flexibility and adaptation of the BPT projects is mirrored in the response of The National Lottery Community Fund. Many projects have highlighted how unusual it is to work with a funder that is prepared to work alongside projects to reshape what is delivered and the outcomes they are seeking to achieve.

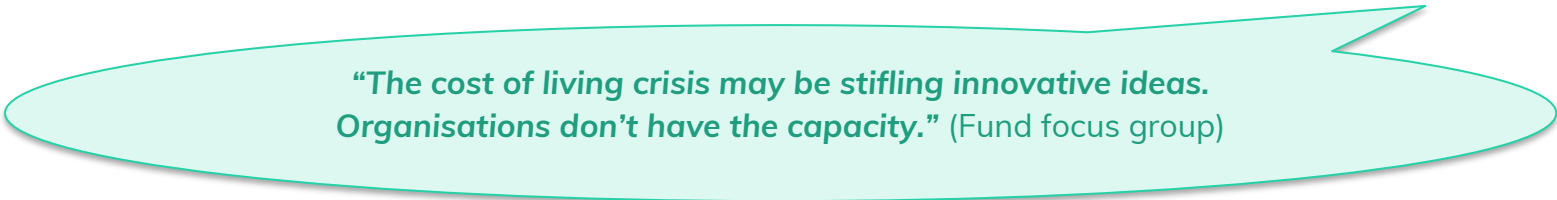
4.3 What are the factors that make delivery more difficult?

While the main barriers to delivery of the BPT projects relate to the wider context, and therefore affect activities in every sector and every organisation, the innovative and demanding nature of the BPT projects means that they are hit particularly hard by this.

- **A tough context for innovation**

“The fatigue and tiredness! Across the board. The pandemic was really tricky, but it does feel like people are completely exhausted now. Almost like resources are used up.” (BPT project member, Reflection and Learning session)

⁹ Source: Change Story from Good Grief Connects Progress Report



“The cost of living crisis may be stifling innovative ideas. Organisations don’t have the capacity.” (Fund focus group)

Every part of society and every sector has been affected to some degree by the challenges of the past few years, with the cost of living crisis compounding the continuing impact of the pandemic. But BPT projects are feeling the impact of this tough context particularly keenly. The projects are not about delivering a conventional service, which is aiming to meet an immediate need. Many BPT projects are aiming to support complex long-term change and can only operate if key people are available, interested and have the capacity to engage. This might involve committing to attending a group over a period of months, agreeing to take part in community action of some kind or to contribute to an activity or event. In many cases, the benefits to participants are not known at the start and the approach may demand a great deal from them, emotionally as well as practically. There is no blueprint for a lot of this work, with new approaches being introduced or tested – it is difficult work in difficult times.

However, as the quote that starts this section illustrates, the combination of the aftermath of the pandemic and the cost of living crisis has left communities and individuals over-burdened, burnt out and with little capacity for creativity and thinking differently, so engaging with programmes and projects can be extremely challenging. Some community groups that BPT projects were hoping to work with, for example, have been so badly affected by rising fuel costs that they are facing closure.

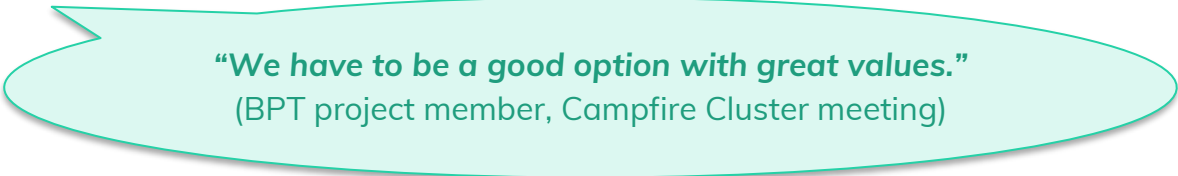
On a practical level, ways of working have been profoundly influenced by the pandemic so bringing people together in the current climate continues to be difficult. Projects have found that while some people are very keen to meet together in person (*‘craving connection’*), others continue to be committed to remote working (including some people who are still, in effect, shielding because of health conditions). But where projects depend on building rapport and trust between people, working online can make connection harder and even slower to achieve. The transition between on-line and face to face working creates additional complexity, what one participant at a Reflection and Learning session referred to as *‘a difficult place to work’*.

- **Friction in partnerships**

BPT projects are often designed and delivered in partnership. Some are seeking to connect with local authorities, as the lead or ‘anchor’ organisation in a place. However, local authorities have, in some cases, been difficult to engage, possibly at least in part

because they too are struggling with the contextual factors described above. For Understory, for example, the community mapping process that was anchored by a local authority was the least successful model so far, with limited engagement and genuine understanding of the value and purpose. Some of the projects have also encountered issues with power imbalances relating to race and gender as they seek to challenge the status quo. Other projects have experienced mistrust from third sector organisations. For example, the third sector in Glasgow were initially deeply suspicious of Groundswell, as a new initiative in the city, and argued that existing organisations should receive the funding, rather than a new and untested development. Tackling this required patient and sensitive persuasion and discussion with Groundswell's newly-appointed local community connector, who has a long track record of community activism in the area.

4.4 What are projects doing to maximise their chances of success, in the current context?



“We have to be a good option with great values.”
(BPT project member, Campfire Cluster meeting)

The BPT projects are showing great flexibility and resilience as they adapt to the challenging environment and build upon the factors that support delivery.

- **Growing roots in the communities we serve**

“We’re proud of the relationships we’ve built. It’s exciting and encouraging, particularly in the context of austerity’.”
(BPT project member)

“We’ve learned) the value of co-design. What do communities want?” (BPT project member, case study interview)

BPT projects are demonstrating the importance of being rooted, authentic and trusted by communities. Employing the right people, who already have a place in the community, and working alongside local people and networks are key (for example, Give A Day). Several projects have key staff who are deeply rooted in the communities where the project operates, and who have long-standing local knowledge and history (for example, Tough Options Moving Forward and Groundswell).

These local roots are enabling BPT projects to find ways of brokering relationships and building new partnerships across divides that connect groups and stakeholders who may not otherwise meet. In doing this, they are drawing on experience from elsewhere, such as the network building work of the Jo Cox Foundation.¹⁰ They are building on networks that are already in place and drawing on the personal connections of trusted local people, and making the most of the power of word of mouth.

Projects are also emphasising the importance of co-designing activities with communities to build local engagement and ownership, for example Communities Co-Creating Sustainable Tourism and the Essential Mix.

¹⁰ <https://www.jocoxfoundation.org/>

- **Designing thoughtfully and flexibly**

“I am struck by the need for time, space, not rushing on the one hand, and short focused time-bound interventions relying on a burst of energy on the other.” (BPT project member, Reflection and Learning session)

“We designed one of our processes this year in alignment with the seasons of the year and honouring the energy at each of those stages.” (BPT project member, Reflection and Learning session)

“It’s not all fixed, and that’s cool! You can’t always control how things will develop.” (BPT project member, Reflection and Learning session)

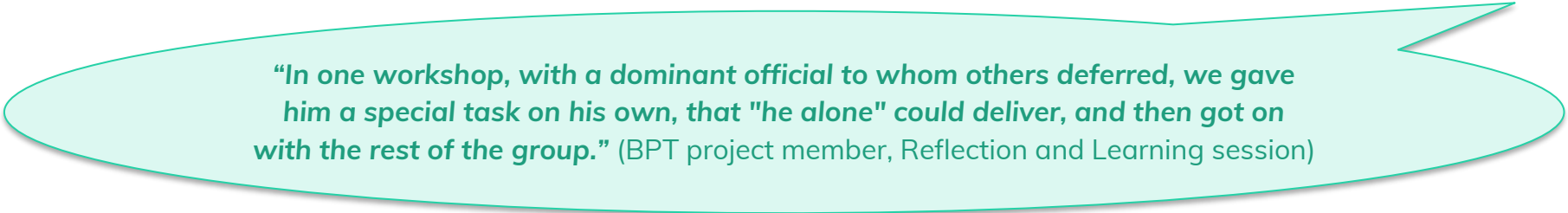
Responsive and flexible design has characterised the BPT approach. As noted earlier, relationships need to be given time to take root and form, at the pace of diverse groups of participants, including factoring in regular space to take stock and review progress. Projects are reflecting this in the design processes they use and/or adapt. Creating safety requires a slow period of building trust, and designing for equality and inclusion means that everyone joins and participates on an equal footing. Projects are also finding ways of keeping participants energised and engaged through having different ways of working together that include fun, and ‘designing in joy’.

At the same time, some projects are finding that participants are going ‘really deep, really quickly’. Some projects are redesigning what they offer to make the content more serious, because in the current challenging context, described earlier, people don’t want warm up or preamble – they are ‘sick of the fluff.’ Projects are therefore designing activities that are time light but challenging. They are also learning that when people are connecting over time, there are ebbs and flows of energy, so design also needs to be flexible and responsive enough to take these into account. At least one project has designed their programme to align with the seasons, reflecting energy levels at different times of the year.

Projects are exploring ways of tackling the practical challenge of how best to deliver complex activities, often on sensitive issues, at a time when ways of working are still fluid following the pandemic, as highlighted above. Projects are responding by using a hybrid approach, with a mix of online and offline contact, and are figuring out how to find a balance that works. Some have been spending more time speaking 1:1 with participants as one way of building trust and strengthening connection.

Flexible design is also important in allowing projects to respond quickly to different or changing circumstances. When transferring a model to another area, some projects have needed to redesign their offer (see particularly the Essential Mix case study in Appendix 3, in which activities successfully delivered in London needed to be completely redesigned for the very different local context in Glasgow). It is also important to be able to pick up on emerging issues for the community in which the project is operating. Groundswell, for example, have found that misogyny is an increasing concern in both Manchester and Glasgow, and are taking action to tackle this.

- **Delivering differently**



“In one workshop, with a dominant official to whom others deferred, we gave him a special task on his own, that "he alone" could deliver, and then got on with the rest of the group.” (BPT project member, Reflection and Learning session)

As well as developing flexible approaches to design, BPT projects are also experimenting with facilitation and delivery. This is an area where the Learning Network has played an important role in enabling projects to share experiences, tools and resources and to learn from each other.

Projects' approaches to delivery have been equally responsive. While a shared vision is always the starting point, spontaneity and opportunism in terms of delivery are important. Design Differently emphasise the need to sustain this commitment to inclusive engagement throughout the whole project and experience of collaboration. Projects have reflected on previous experiences where people may have been brought together to create a shared vision but this commitment is not sustained through to delivery and evidencing impact. They are keen for this to happen differently in their work through BPT.

Projects have raised the importance of dealing well with challenge from participants in groups or programmes, and of reframing challenge as an opportunity for learning and reflection on what you're doing. A challenge opens up opportunities for dialogue, engagement, understanding people better, and finding solutions to challenges encourages curiosity and bravery. However, this requires, as one project lead called it, *'Putting on your brave suit'*. Another called for the need for facilitation to *'bake in humanity'*, while others emphasise the role of humour in engaging with challenging group members.

Many BPT projects have used storytelling (told and shared in numerous ways) as a creative, accessible and inclusive way of sharing and exploring important messages and themes from their work. They describe the benefits and impacts of using stories as:

- healing through connections, with each other and local places;
- learning from ancient histories, adding to layers of knowledge and wisdom that have built up over time;
- celebrating each other's' strengths and contributions;
- finding the threads that bind people together;
- highlighting the central roles that relationships play in all community connections, and in developments designed to strengthen these.

Stories can show what's possible even in difficult times, recognising you may need to balance creative imagery for imagining better futures with current realities which may be difficult and dark. They can be a useful way of bringing people together when projects are new (getting to know each other and finding common ground), as well as for established developments (to renew, revisit and explore change over time).

- **Remaining realistic and kind**

Given the realities of the current context, BPT projects are increasingly aware that it is sometimes just not possible to engage everyone they hoped to engage, or to work as quickly as initially anticipated. There are inevitably tensions between what projects are hoping to achieve, and the day to day struggles of people's lives. Continuing to work with the willing is nevertheless valuable, and does not need to undermine the project's impact. At the same time, it is important to remove practical barriers to participation by for example, exploring the use of honorariums, stipends and covering childcare costs.

Work which aims to support and develop communities can be massively demanding, and BPT leads and staff members have spoken about the impact their projects can sometimes have on their own wellbeing. The projects have highlighted the importance of supporting their own staff members, as well as the individuals and communities with whom they are working.



5. What are we learning about the role of a learning partner?

5.1 Introduction – about this section

According to the Dartington Service Design Lab, a good Learning Partner “galvanises organisations to work together, making the most of their individual learning and sharing it with others, including the funder, collaborating towards their mutual goals.”¹¹

NDTi’s role alongside the BPT Programme includes three elements which align closely with this broad definition:

- Build a **strong peer network** across grant-holders and their key partners
- Generate **learning and insights** across the projects and programme
- Communicate learning and **engage a wider audience**

This section reflects on the successes and challenges of our first year as a Learning Partner to the Programme. A key focus of this initial phase has been the first element, that is building a peer network. The Learning Network is the foundation of the other two elements, and is the primary route for building a detailed and nuanced understanding of what works (and indeed, doesn’t work) in bringing people together. The year has included some notable successes, as well as one or two areas that have been slightly more difficult, as outlined below.

5.2 Year 1 Successes

- **Creating a learning community**

“The Lottery’s support in terms of the gatherings that NDTi have hosted have been extremely helpful and supportive, both in terms of the sessions themselves but also in the connections with other organisations working in the same field.”¹¹

¹¹<https://www.dartington.org.uk/ourblog/riseofthelearningpartner#:~:text=A%20good%20Learning%20Partner%20galvanises,collaborating%20towards%20their%20mutual%20goals>

“First campfire cluster - was really helpful to share learnings amongst others and feel in community with the other grantees. We’re all facing similar challenges so it was reassuring and affirming to have space to explore some of the shared challenges with the group.”¹²

Much of our early focus has been on building a strong Learning Network across BPT projects, as this represents the foundation and key vehicle for surfacing and capturing experience and learning across the Programme. The three elements that make up the Network (large Reflection and Learning meetings, smaller Campfire Cluster sessions and a digital platform, Slack) are described in Appendix 5.

The engagement of projects in these activities has been a significant success, according to the projects themselves, who have highlighted how unusual it is for funders to support learning and how much they appreciate the opportunities offered by the Learning Network. Projects clearly value meeting together in these complementary and related ways, but with a different purpose and style, co-designed with them. Attendance has remained high throughout the year, with several people attending from some projects, and most projects making sure that they are represented at sessions.

- **Working in a values led way – living our principles**

It was clear at an early stage that the projects and organisations involved in the Programme operate from a strong ethical and values base. Spending time at the outset articulating a shared set of values and principles to guide how we work together helped to develop a safe space, mutual trust and confidence.

The principles for working together offer a way of checking that the Learning Network continues to operate in a way that is positive and helpful to the projects. For example, we use them to take the temperature at the end of each Reflection and Learning session, allowing us to respond to any changes through the design of the next meeting, for example, by introducing the flexible open space session for projects to explore any immediate concerns.

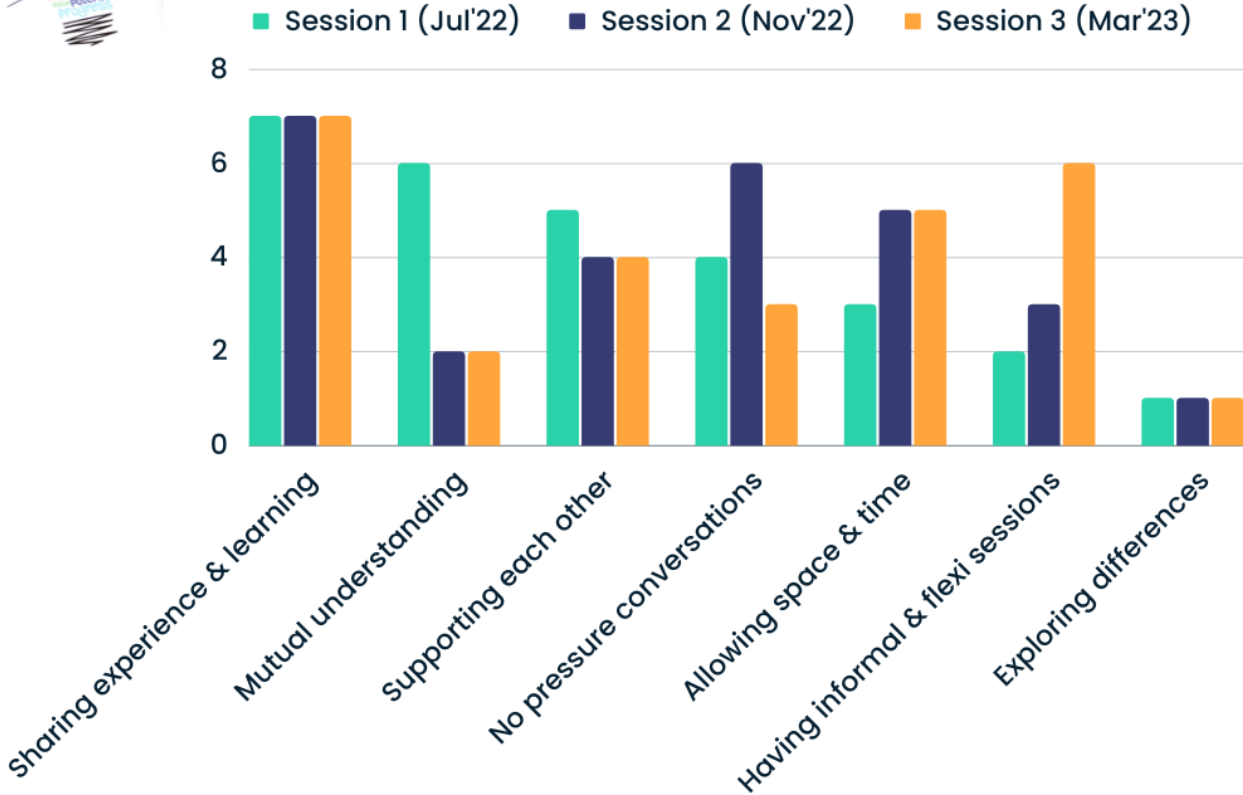
¹² New Constellations Year 1 report

The graphic below summarises how projects' views have shifted from session to session. Perceptions of the role of the sessions in enabling the sharing of learning and experience have consistently received the highest rating.

Which principles reflect the experiences of BPT learning events?



Are we living our principles? Which principles have we followed most during each of the sessions?



- **Supporting connections between projects**

“Projects have made connections as a result of (NDTi’s) work. It helps them focus and raises the ambitions of people who are struggling.” (Focus group with Fund team)

The connections that projects have made through the Learning Network have led to real life meetings and collaboration between projects outside these organised events, sharing skills and knowledge and contributing to each other’s projects. There is a growing sense that this is an active, dynamic network with projects embracing cross-pollination and recognising their inter-connectedness. Discussions at Campfire Cluster meetings, for example, have highlighted that two or three projects may be working in the same place, and those that are well established are offering to broker connections with key networks and people.

- **Using case studies and change stories to draw out learning**

As part of our evidence gathering for this Year 1 report, we have carried out case study discussions with the teams from FODIP and Neighbourly Lab (see Appendix 3). Their reflections have proved invaluable in deepening our understanding. These case studies illustrate the benefit of using a semi-structured approach to reflect and learn about individual project journeys and experiences to draw out important signs of change.

We have also worked with projects on generating and producing change stories, an approach to consistently capturing stories that illustrate the difference that interventions are making. We introduced them to the ‘Pixar pitch’, a model that some projects have tested out as part of their Year 1 reports. We will continue to encourage projects to record and share change stories in Year 2.

5.3 Year 1 Challenges

- **Increasing the contribution of projects to event design and delivery**

As noted above, projects are very engaged in the organised learning sessions and have played an active part in, for example, co-producing the Learning Framework. We anticipated that, over time, projects would take on greater responsibility for designing or running sessions, but their lack of capacity and thinking time may be acting as a barrier to this.

- **Capturing detailed examples**

The outputs from Reflection and Learning sessions and meetings of the campfire clusters summarise thematically the insights and issues that are emerging from the projects' discussions. These have provided a rich source of evidence for this report, particularly in relation to the challenges of bringing people and communities together in the current climate, and the strategies that maximise chances of success. However, it is possible that pressures on time and capacity are also affecting the ability of projects to find ways of capturing and sharing signs of the impact of their work. Although some are clearly reflecting on the difference they are making to people touched by their projects, in the main it has been a challenge to identify tangible examples to feature in this report. We will find ways of revisiting and continually reflecting on different sources and approaches to evidencing change during year 2.

- **Managing occasional tensions within the Learning Partner role**

The Learning Partner role includes some inherent tensions. For example, successfully co-producing a strong and supportive peer network, as described above, may not always lead to a clear articulation of the granular insights and themes from the work of the projects. However, shifting from a facilitative role to a directive one may undermine what makes the partnership work, so would require sensitive and explicit management. Balancing and at times blending the focus on learning and distilling evidence creates confusion about our role, although we suspect that this may be a feature of different interpretations of the terms “learning”, “evidence” and “impact”. Again, we will find ways of clarifying and exploring these issues with The National Lottery Community Fund and the network during year 2.



6. Conclusions and looking forward to the next phase

6.1 Introduction – about this section

This section pulls together a high level summary of the key points, lessons and messages from preceding sections of this report. It highlights the implications of this learning for the next phase of the programme, for projects and for NDTi, working in partnership with The National Lottery Community Fund and with the Learning Partnership.

6.2 Brief summary of key learning to date

Bringing People Together is a diverse, UK wide programme of creative endeavours for building stronger communities that make sense to people who live and experience them, across geographies, interests and lived experiences. The focus on creativity and experimentation has brought together a lively and resourceful network of committed and passionate change makers, who are learning what it takes to be impactful and effective in challenging times and increasing economic constraints.

Despite these challenges, there are early signs of change as well as important lessons about what is enabling – and hampering - these across the Programme. Examples of the wide range of changes include:

- New opportunities for and experience of rich, important conversations that help people meet (often for the first time), explore difficult issues and increase mutual understanding
- Cumulative micro level changes within and across communities
- A greater sense of belonging and being “in it together” – what is sometimes referred to as social fabric or the glue that can help not only bring people together but bind them around a common goal, shared vision, sense of purpose or experience
- New skills, or insights into and therefore greater use of the skills and wisdom that already exists within difference places
- A focus on shared values alongside a commitment to take action for the greater good
- Shifting power to communities and local people , with more people taking up opportunities to be local leaders for change, to contribute and/or to enable others to do the same

- New partnerships and relationships with other organisations, groups and networks including across sectors as well as different communities
- A sense of the potential for spreading what works and making better use of scarce resources in order to benefit local communities, out of necessity as well as choice.

There is also considerable learning about what is enabling these changes and is likely to bring sustained success over time, including:

- Investing in relationships, building trust and finding the spark that will ignite action and motivate people to join in and become part of the action
- Taking time to get things right, adapt when things don't work, and explore what is needed, what's working and what isn't working with fellow travellers (as a result of the investment in relationships above)
- Working flexibly, and responsively alongside communities
- This flexibility extending to funders who listen to and respond alongside the change makers, as part of the supportive environment we refer to in section 3 of this report.

6.3 What does this mean for the projects? What next for them?

A key message for projects resulting from these reflections so far, is to keep going and reflecting on what you're doing, with whom, and why; reflect together on what is working, and indeed not working, in bringing different groups and communities together; capture your changes and experiences on an ongoing basis and share these with your colleagues and partners, The National Lottery Community Fund and also your peers in this Network; participate in the Network as co-facilitators, bringing your extensive expertise to this forum as well as your project.

6.4 What does this mean for us as the Programme Learning Partner? What next for us?

Now that the Learning Network is well established, valued by participants and operating well, as described in the previous section, we will look to maximise its role as the primary mechanism for capturing learning on what works in bringing people and communities together so that these insights can be shared with the wider sector. A sharp focus on synthesis and communications will therefore be of increasing importance as the Programme generates new knowledge to feed into programme design and delivery across the UK.

We will continue to reflect on emerging learning with The National Lottery Community Fund Programme leads on an ongoing basis, as well as holding twice yearly formal reviews, and will explore with The National Lottery Community Fund what other channels and approaches may be useful in capturing the full range of impacts and wider influences of the BPT projects.

There are a number of areas in which we know The National Lottery Community Fund has a particular interest that do not receive sufficiently detailed attention in this report. These include, for example, the rurality/urban dimension and equality, diversity and inclusion (which is, however, a theme that implicitly underpins and runs through the work of all the projects). We have not featured these areas because in Year 1 very little explicit learning emerged on which we could confidently draw, but we will ensure a stronger focus in Year 2.

Following the production of this Year 1 report, the NDTi team will revisit the role of the Learning Framework both as a tool for us, and as themes that aid ongoing reflection and learning across the Programme; within this, continue to use the principles to ensure the Network is working both for the BPT projects and also for The National Lottery Community Fund, as the key route for capturing and sharing emerging learning. As part of this exercise, in collaboration with projects in a forthcoming Reflection and Learning event, and with The National Lottery Community Fund, we will share the headlines from this report and explore what these mean for where best we should focus our collective attention during the coming year, as the Programme moves into the next phase of learning what works in bringing people and communities together.

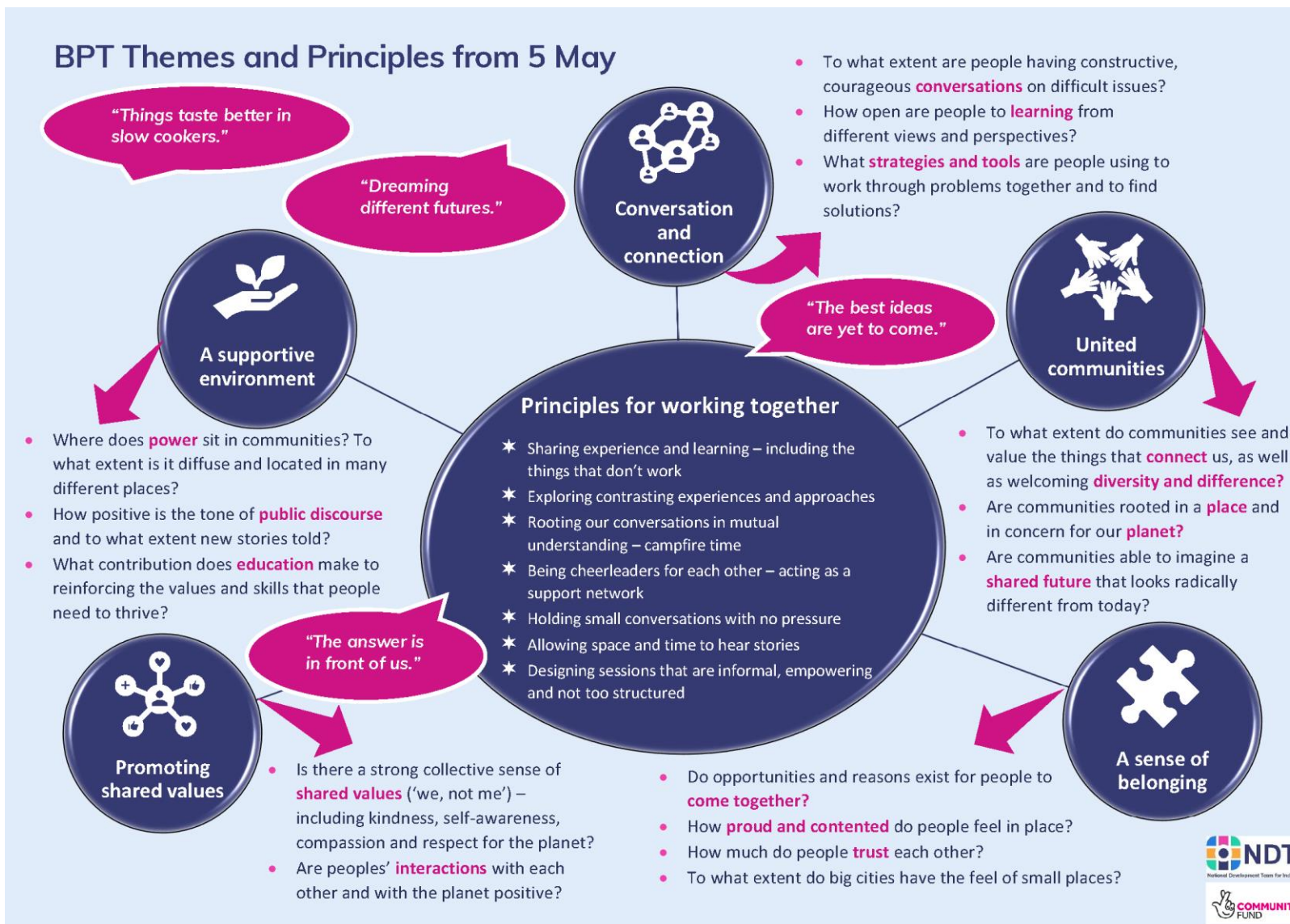


Appendix 1. List of BPT projects

	Project name	Organisation	Start date	Finish date
1.	Building Capacity to imagine and shape futures of connection, hope and possibility	New Constellations	01/10/2021	01/10/2023
2.	Understory	Onion Collective	21/12/2021	21/12/2023
3.	Essential Mix	Neighbourly Lab (The Lab)	01/09/2021	01/03/2023
4.	Tough Options Moving Forward	The Forum for Discussion of Israel and Palestine in partnership with Corrymeela (NI)	01/02/2022	01/02/2024
5.	Design Differently	Design Council	01/12/2021	01/04/2023
6.	Communities Co-creating Sustainable Tourism	Social Enterprise Academy	10/01/2022	10/07/2023
7.	Together We Are (TWA)	Groundswell	10/01/2022	10/01/2024
8.	Good Grief Connects	University of Bristol	28/03/2022	28/03/2024
9.	The Together Campaign	The Together Coalition	01/01/2022	01/01/2023
10.	Connecting Hearts, Connecting Minds, Connecting Community	Plan for Peace	01/07/2022	01/01/2024
11.	Give a Day (GAD)	Ratio	01/05/2022	01/05/2023
12.	Infrastructure for Relationship-Centred Practice	Shift Foundation - This project will be delivered by The Relationship Project a sub venture of The Shift Foundation	tbc	tbc
13.	The Roots Programme - Cultural Exchange	The Roots Programme	10/03/2022	10/03/2024
14.	Trees for Climate Action (TfCA)	Trees for Cities	01/10/2022	01/10/2025
15.	Creating Intergenerational Communities	Generations Working Together	03/04/2023	03/10/2025
16.	Rural/Urban Twinning Project	The Real Farming Trust	01/04/2023	01/10/2026



Appendix 2. BPT Learning Framework





Appendix 3. Case study - The Essential Mix (Neighbourly Lab)

“We were excited to see what kind of change we’d encourage with this work and what could be learned. Of course, there were barriers along the way, but we were flexible in our approach and that made each project a success.”

Background

Neighbourly Lab works to help build happier, healthier neighbourhoods with increased social connectedness and community participation, and reduced social exclusion, prejudice and loneliness. During the pandemic, many people felt renewed appreciation for the value and contribution of key workers in the NHS and social care, local authorities, transport, retail and other areas of work that many of us relied upon for human contact as well as practical help at a massively challenging time.

Through its project Essential Mix, Neighbourly Lab aimed to showcase the role of essential workers, make the most of their reach and encourage more engagement with them. Essential Mix was one of the first projects to be funded as part of the BPT programme, in September 2021, and planned to deliver their work in London (London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham) and Glasgow (Drumchapel, Maryhill and Port Glasgow).

The project has four strands, all of which aimed to increase interactions between key workers and their communities. These are working with:

- Bus drivers (Hammersmith & Fulham)
- The Law Enforcement Team (LET), which aims to tackle environmental crime and anti-social behaviour (Hammersmith & Fulham)
- Tesco (two Glasgow stores)

- Youth-led activities (Drumchapel)

What has happened?

“We thought it was a good idea. Would other people think it was?”

The early stages of Essential Mix involved prioritising the groups of key workers who should be included, considering particularly the number of people they reach and the opportunities for interaction. The London strands started first, with the intention of rolling out similar activities in Glasgow. The first step was to find the key people who could help make the work happen, using research and social media. Although it was not always easy to track down the right contacts, once they had, the reception was invariably positive: **‘This is exactly what we need! How did you know?’** (LET Team)

Developments in London

In London, Neighbourly Lab worked with bus drivers to ‘supercharge’ buses as a place for connecting with other people. They piloted on-board signs in several hundred buses to encourage passengers to interact with the driver, and observed the impact on passenger behaviour. They have also launched a driver appreciation campaign, in partnership with Transport for London (TfL), to celebrate the back stories of drivers.

Neighbourly Lab worked with the LET team over eight months to trial different approaches to community engagement. They hoped to help officers to feel confident and empowered to engage more informally with residents to build trust. Two key initiatives, co-designed with the team, were trialled during this period - bespoke community engagement training and community engagement events in local parks.

Evolution in Glasgow

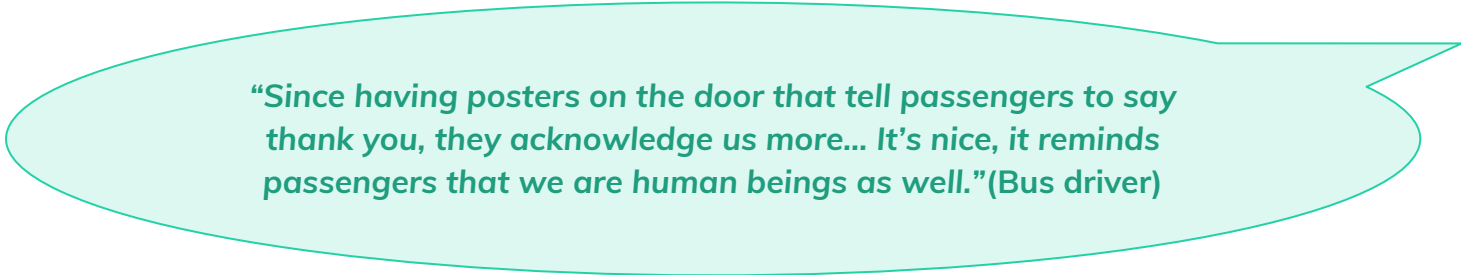
The Essential Mix project design was initially based on extending a similar approach to Glasgow, applied to Tesco supermarkets and a youth group. But the local worker they appointed to lead the work was doubtful about applying a model developed in London that was all about encouraging people to connect with each other – *‘People talk in Scotland!’*

With the support of The National Lottery Community Fund, Neighbourly Lab redesigned and refocused the Glasgow element of the project to include two different strands. In Tesco, unused spaces in two superstores were converted for community use as locations for pop-up sessions with local groups, who could then connect with people in an informal, non-stigmatised setting. Tesco staff were encouraged to attend, too, as a way of upskilling them to engage with customers in a different way, for example by signposting them to community groups. Tesco's Community Champions (staff with responsibility for building community connections) played a key role in supporting the work. Tesco hosted a series of in-store events over a period of several weeks and alongside this, local groups came in to talk to staff about what they offer.

The second Glasgow strand, in Drumchapel, involved a group of young people celebrating Drumchapel's 70th birthday through an intergenerational community art project, which included a celebration of the neighbourhood and a number of gratitude murals thanking veterans for their service. An engagement exercise also took place, led by young people, and focusing on identifying priority actions that would improve Drumchapel. All the work was shaped by young people. Although the focus of the work was initially intended to be on key workers, the young people had their own understanding of what this meant. They identified community activists and people working in the third sector as key workers, so the Drumchapel strand of the project adopted their definition.

What has been the impact?

Increased interactions



“Since having posters on the door that tell passengers to say thank you, they acknowledge us more... It’s nice, it reminds passengers that we are human beings as well.”(Bus driver)

Following the bus campaign, there were **significantly higher levels of interactions on buses with stickers** (30%) than on buses without (23%) and drivers appreciated the difference. If the increase was replicated across the UK, 14 million additional interactions could occur each year.

Skilling up key workers

“I think the biggest surprise for me was realising that I actually can talk to kids. This was never something I thought I’d be good at before but it was easy in the end.” (LET Officer)

Law Enforcement Officers in Hammersmith & Fulham who completed training report **greater comfort speaking with residents and an increased sense of safety in their role.**

Tesco workers gained **new knowledge about community resources** and the Community Champions extended and strengthened their networks. Customers were able to access the support they needed on for example, their mental health, as a result of the contacts they made at Tesco.

New connections - across different groups and with place

The mural painting in Drumchapel forged 70 new connections – and people report feeling **safer and more connected with their community** as working together across generations has broken down barriers and increased trust.

Following the community events in Hammersmith & Fulham, 75% of people who attended said they would be **more likely to chat to an Officer in future**, while 77% reported that they would be more likely to raise an issue with the team.

Developing young leaders

The engagement exercise with young people in Drumchapel created a sense of the potential **impact they could have on the community in future**, if they took their decision making role seriously.

“If we get this right, they’ll trust us again.”

¹³ More confident staff, more engaged residents: A summary report on LBHF LET Engagement Project, Neighbourly Lab

What have they learned?

Small interactions matter

The Essential Mix has underlined that positive micro interactions between key workers and local people can have a cumulative impact that helps people to feel more positive about where they live.

“The biggest takeaway is that small interactions matter. It’s easy to disregard micro interactions.”

A flexible approach is crucial

The context in Glasgow means that Neighbourly Lab had to redesign their approach to fit the local circumstances, which was only possible because of the deep local knowledge and networks of their Glasgow-based worker. The flexibility demonstrated by Neighbourly Lab was mirrored by that of The National Lottery Community Fund, who were supportive and understanding about the project’s shift in focus.

Co-design is powerful

In Drumchapel, young people shaped both aspects of the work and stepped up to take on a decision-making role. This left them with a greater sense of empowerment and investment in the area.

The right people make all the difference

“Without (the local worker in Glasgow) it would have failed.”

Finding people who understand and support what projects are trying to achieve, and who are willing to work as partners and champions, such as the LET in Hammersmith & Fulham, is crucial to success. Also, employing people who are rooted in the community and understand the local context (as in Glasgow) has meant that the project could start quickly and mistakes could be avoided.

Understanding the context influences everything

“We have a better understanding of the context of individuals, organisations and communities.”

Neighbourly Lab learned a great deal about the contextual factors that influence people’s lives, particularly in the case of key workers. For example, for Tesco staff, chatting with customers, or signposting them to a local group is not incentivised, as they tend to be judged on activities such as how quickly they re-stock shelves. Understanding the context means that projects can take a more realistic view of how best to achieve change.

What next?

LB Hammersmith & Fulham have been such positive champions of the LET work and the difference that it has made that they have been nominated for a national community engagement award and have also really enthused colleagues in other councils. As a result, Neighbourly Lab has now been commissioned by LB Tower Hamlets to work with their LET team.

Neighbourly Lab continue to work with TfL and others across the bus sector nationwide to think about how they might scale and grow these and other community engagement initiatives across the bus network.

In Glasgow, Neighbourly Lab are continuing to explore the potential of partnering with Tesco to provide a neutral space to bring groups together on sensitive issues such as men’s mental health and positive masculinity.

Building on the learning from the Tesco work, Neighbourly Lab have developed a new programme of work to unlock the power of the retail sector in providing new opportunities for people to come together locally and find support in their community. They were delighted to receive additional funding from The National Lottery Community Fund to pursue this important work as the next phase of their involvement in the BPT Programme.

Headlines from The Essential Mix

Four projects, across two nations...

500 shoppers engaged in local support services

Over 10,000 passengers involved in research

Hundreds of signs installed on buses

600 residents reached at summer events

Two murals created by **50+ local children and young people and local veterans**



For more information, go to: <https://www.theessentialmix.online/post/one-year-of-the-essential-mix>



Appendix 4. Case study – Tough Options Moving Forward (FODIP)

“Participants have been forming strong bonds with each other. We didn’t really expect this. They have wanted to continue connections and dialogue outside of sessions, continuing to work outside the remit of this project. They’re already making changes by being positive change makers - it’s a really positive surprise.”

Background

Tough Options Moving Forward helps young people reflect on their understanding of each other’s cultures and their own, including how to manage and overcome conflicts by learning about others’ experiences and identities. The aim of this 2 year project is to build a network of young leaders who will go on to become a catalyst for conflict resolution and management within their own communities. The host organisation is the Forum for Discussion of Israel and Palestine (FODIP), a Manchester-based organisation that aims to improve relations between faith communities in the UK through faith-based dialogue on the Israel Palestine situation (see <https://www.fodip.org.uk/>).

The project, which started in March 2022, has brought together two groups of 35 young people (aged between about 16 and 25), all of whom are people of faith of varying degrees. One group is based in Manchester and the North West (focusing on the conflict between Israel and Palestine), the other in Northern Ireland (focusing on experiences and legacies of the Northern Ireland Troubles). The project is being delivered in partnership with the Corrymeela Community in Northern Ireland, an ecumenical Christian Community committed to the work of reconciliation.

What has happened?

The young people who are taking part in Tough Options Moving Forward were recruited using a range of different approaches and routes. Both FODIP and the Corrymeela Community had a pool of young people they had previously worked with, so they and their extended networks were the first port of call. Martha, the project lead, also carried out a great deal of outreach work in 2022 with faith communities across the North West and Northern Ireland, including with Universities' religious societies, 6th form colleges, and in personal contacts, as well as promotional flyers and emails.

Some recruitment routes were more successful than others. People were frequently cautious in their initial response, concerned about hidden agendas and that the project was about promoting just one side of the argument. Challenging the suspicion took time, and recruitment was primarily through word of mouth.

In its first year, the project has held six workshops, some online and some in person in the two locations. Some sessions are based around dialogue and these take place in person. Some are more educational, with input and more structure, so it is easier to hold these online. One residential took place in the Corrymeela Community in summer 2022. This brought the Manchester and Northern Ireland groups together and focused on exploring the NI context together.

The young people play a key role in shaping the events by coming up with ideas, based on what they want and need.

What has been the impact?

Developing skills

The young participants are developing skills in critical thinking and dialogue. They have strategies and tools to draw on in the future and have greater awareness of conflict as well as enhanced skills in its resolution.

Changing attitudes

Hearing each other's fears and hopes has been very impactful for participants. The project is providing a space for healing and solidarity, as well as for challenging preconceptions. For example, most Jewish participants will never go to Palestine or meet a Palestinian, so to see them as a fellow human being rather than a terrorist, is a huge achievement. Participants are also showing greater consideration of each other's beliefs, for example by working together to agree how or if to have a drink after dinner during

the residential when some participants do not drink alcohol. Participants themselves worked out how best to handle this particular dilemma.

Building connections

Participants have been forming strong bonds with each other. They have wanted to continue connections and dialogue outside of the organised sessions, continuing to work outside the remit of the project. They are already acting as change makers – *'a really positive surprise.'*

What have they learned?

Building trust takes time

Both the initial recruitment process and the work within the two groups underline that it takes times to build trust. This is a gradual process, that relies on word of mouth (in the case of recruitment) flexing and responsiveness. In the case of Tough Options Moving Forward, trust means taking great care about the terminology and language that are used, as this can be a provocative and contentious area.

Co-design is crucial

Tough Options Moving Forward is about empowering young people to make change, so enabling and modelling this in the project through co-design is key. The potential scope of the project is so broad that it helps when the agenda is set by the participants. So far, feedback from participants on the approach has been extremely positive. They can see their influence and feel they are helping to shape the programme.

Quality matters more than quantity

FODIP has learned not to be overly concerned about recruiting high numbers of participants from the start, as getting the right young people involved, including the mix between people and groups, has been more important. In fact, the groups have grown over time, with initial participants actively engaged in encouraging others to join and in managing the introduction of new people to create a sense of belonging within this extended community of interest.

Young people are keen to explore difficult issues

Young people actively welcome the opportunity to talk about difficult issues, for example when there are points of conflict between their communities. This is particularly important and valued as these discussions are not encouraged (in fact they are actively discouraged) within their communities and families.

What next?

The final residential is due to take place in summer 2023. In the past, the project has avoided scheduling meetings on the sabbath, but the young people, of all faiths, want to experience sabbath together. This is a strong indication of an increased sense of safety and interest – *'This is huge!'*

Work is also underway to prepare participants for what they can do to sustain the learning from the project. FODIP is keen to identify coordinators within the project who can take on more of a central role in the project and beyond. Training for this would be provided. Training will also be available on how to reach out to different communities, such as initially their schools and universities.



Appendix 5. Elements of BPT Learning Network

The BPT Learning Network is made up of three complementary elements, each co-designed with projects. The first two sets of virtual meetings are a key route for highlighting and capturing learning.

Discussions at the initial workshop made it clear that participants had strong views about the style of the learning events, which they wanted to be informal, supportive, free-flowing and creative, with sufficient opportunities for small group discussion.

The three components of the network are:

- **Reflection and Learning sessions**

These on-line meetings bring together all the projects three times per year. They have an outline programme which is made up of a series of whole group and breakout sessions. Projects have an opportunity to shape the programme in advance. Each meeting includes an open space small group session for projects to raise and explore any current ideas, issues and challenges, and ends with participants assessing how well the network is operating according to the principles which are central to the BPT learning framework (see Appendix 2).

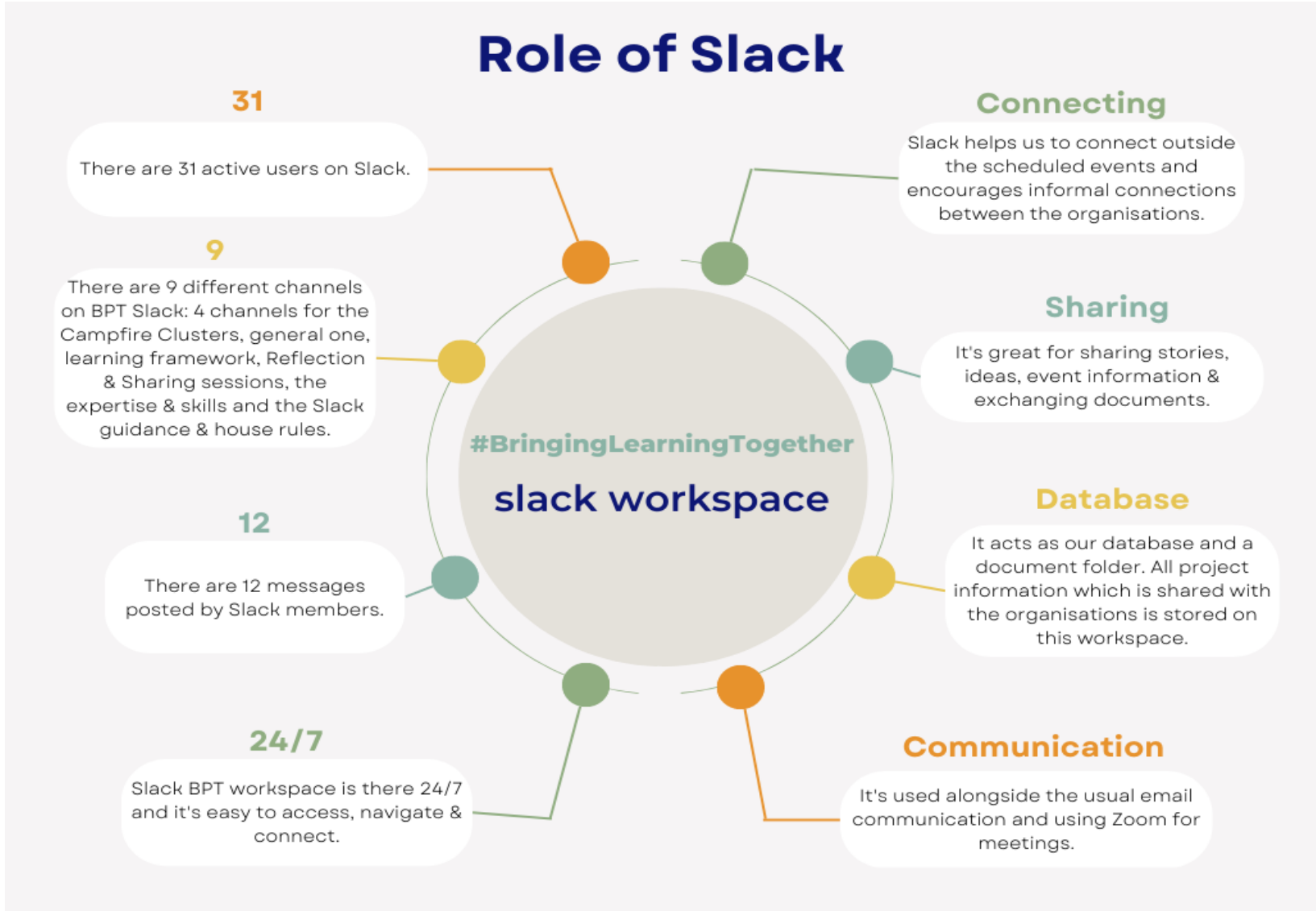
- **Campfire cluster meetings**

Campfire clusters were named by one of the project leads, who wanted to recreate the feel of an informal, story-telling discussion with friends and family gathered around a fire. There are four groups, each bringing together around four projects, and they meet without a formal agenda shortly before Reflection and Learning sessions. Any emerging themes are explored as part of the large meetings that follow.

- **A digital platform – Slack workspace**

At the start of the project, we set up a virtual workspace for this project on the digital platform called Slack. The aim of the 'Bringing Learning Together' Slack workspace is to allow people to stay connected in an informal way throughout the duration of the BPT project. This space has been working well for storing any project related documents as well as sharing ideas and

posting information about podcasts, news or events. This platform is used alongside the usual email communication and we also use Zoom for the online Reflection and Learning sessions.





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