

Learning about place-based systems change in the Women's Sector

Insights Report 3

Smallwood Trust

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TSIP

THE
SOCIAL
INNOVATION
PARTNERSHIP

The Women’s Sector Resilience Fund Phase 2 – A place-based approach

Smallwood Trust’s approach to place-based systems change has developed through testing and funding networks of women’s organisations to work collaboratively to tackle the root causes of gendered poverty in their place. This began with funding the Coventry Women’s Partnership in 2018 and has now expanded, through the Women’s Sector Resilience Fund 2, to support two additional place-based networks: the Birmingham NRPF Women’s Support Network and Women of Wythenshawe (based in Manchester). This programme will contribute to Smallwood Trust’s Gendered Poverty Learning Programme and bring about key learning about how a place-based systems change approach can shift gendered poverty.

This report draws on progress updates and reflections that the three place-based networks in Birmingham, Coventry and Wythenshawe shared with Smallwood Trust and Renaisi-TSIP over August and September 2024, alongside insights collected by Renaisi-TSIP through their ongoing work with the networks. It leans on the learning questions and fund aims to summarise emerging impact and key areas of learning for each across the networks.

A summary of progress to date

How are the three networks achieving their goals?

Goals	Progress
Women of Wythenshawe	
Multiple disadvantaged women have the skills, confidence and relationships of trust required to participate in and benefit from a women-led poverty action network in Wythenshawe.	This goal has been achieved. The confidence and capacity building work that has been facilitated through WoW has benefited the women leaders in the network, who have lived experience of poverty. Women leaders have shared that they have more confidence to speak out in meetings, challenge service providers, decision-makers, representatives, and funded support agencies within the WoW process.
A diverse network of women have identified realisable priorities for action and change on gendered poverty in Wythenshawe.	WoW has achieved this goal. A network of diverse women leaders with lived experience of poverty has come together and formed three action groups around the following goals: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improving statutory responses to domestic abuse. This is being progressed through developing an online training portal on domestic abuse, which centres the lived experience of local women, and seeking the commitment of statutory partners to ensure their staff participate in the training. So far Wythenshawe Housing Group, who manages most of the local social housing stock and provide a range of associated services (e.g. financial

	<p>advice, debt services, tenancy support, employability) has committed to this.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Improving Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) provision within schools. This is being actioned through developing a "train the trainer" programme for SEND mothers with the Grange Special Educational School, equipping mothers to deliver inclusive education training in local schools. 3. Addressing the shortage of social housing for women and families This has progressed through the establishment of the Wythenshawe Central neighbourhood coalition, which unites community groups, projects, local ward Councillors and residents to have a collective voice on housing and land use decisions, alongside the WoW's participation in development of a city-wide Social Homes for Manchester campaign, which is calling for a policy change to include 30% social rent homes in new developments across Manchester.
<p>Two significant policy or systems change outcomes have been achieved and the network has a clear strategic direction and at least 12 months continuation funding</p>	<p>WoW is close to achieving a significant shift in policy and practice through Wythenshawe Housing Group's commitment to all staff undertaking training on domestic abuse. If this is implemented consistently it could contribute to local systems change, through enabling different attitudes, practices and policies around domestic abuse. While WoW's goals around social housing would bring significant policy change this work is at earlier stages. WoW's work around SEND focuses on support for mothers and improved service provision rather than policy change.</p> <p>WoW's achievement in building women-led advocacy and networks at a local level is their most significant systems change outcome, with this shift in attitudes, relationships and narratives about women in the place having the potential to drive long-term local change.</p> <p>The network currently does not have continuation funding or a clear strategic direction, but is intentionally developing both. Learning from their work to date has pointed towards the need for a strategic shift in the structure and resourcing of their work, as the diversity of approaches and agencies across three action groups has been too resource intensive for one organisation to facilitate. CLASS is facilitating ongoing conversations and reflections with the women leaders and support agencies to determine a strategic direction for WoW going forward and put together a proposal for further funding. WoW is currently exploring how the three action groups could potentially split into separate self-directed networks, and reflecting on the strategic benefit of these groups remaining under the umbrella of WoW. With serious concerns around their ongoing core funding, CLASS is also exploring how they</p>

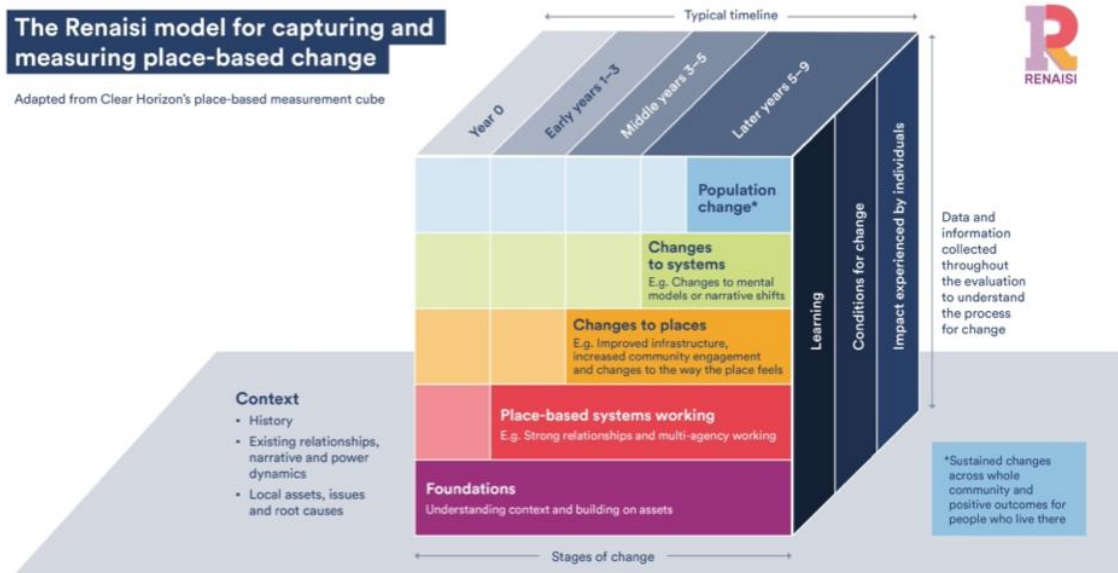
	can continue to support women-led action in Wythenshawe more efficiently, without staff time being pulled towards relationship management and coordination of a range of organisations as has been the case in WoW.
Birmingham NRPF Women's Support Network	
The Network will improve co-ordination of services alongside building capacity to provide trauma-informed, women-led services that prevent NRPF women experiencing DA from falling into destitution and homelessness and demonstrate the need for increased funding over the long-term.	<p>This goal has been achieved. The Network has developed a referral system that ensures NRPF women experiencing DA receive holistic, trauma-informed support to meet their basic needs and access their rights. Through the Network, NRPF women have accessed legal support and migration advice that they would not previously have accessed.</p> <p>The Network's work creating access to impactful support for highly women who the current mainstream system does not support has demonstrated the need for this work to be funded over the long term, as without the Network in place, many women would not be accessing support.</p>
The Network will increase awareness around how to support women with NRPF to access services and collect evidence that demonstrates the impact of the current system, to advocate for policy change.	The Birmingham NRPF Network has achieved this goal. Partners are working together to use their collective voice to consistently raise a lack of support for those with NRPF as an issue on a range of panels with local public and voluntary sector partners, which was not a dominant focus in partners' external engagement previously. Partners are using data and case studies from the Network to advocate for change and influence local and national policymaking. This has included the Central England Law Centre successfully making eligibility requirements for a Migrant Victims of Domestic Abuse Concession (MVDAC) more inclusive through a strategic litigation case against the Home Office that emerged from their work in the Network.
The Network will work with those with lived experience to understand how to ensure more women can access the services they need	This goal is still in progress. The Network has brought together a group of women with lived experience into an NRPF Advisory Group. It has taken time to embed this group and as it's role has been directed by the women in it, their initial sessions focused capacity building rather than influencing. However, over time this might shift into a more consultative or nonproductive role, as has begun with the Network engaging the Advisory Group in reviewing and commenting on the draft of the local authority's new domestic abuse strategy.
Coventry Women's Partnership	
Explore ways to sustain partnership after current funding ends in Aug 2025	CWP has progressed this goal. The Partnership is in conversations with other funders including the National Lottery Community Fund about long-term funding for its work.
Work with external researcher to undertake deep dive needs analysis to provide an evidence base of current and emerging needs of women in the city, identifying gaps and	This goal has been achieved. CWP has worked with Renaisi-TSIP this past year to carry out a needs analysis exploring systemic gaps and failings in provision for women in Coventry.

providing recommendations for use at a strategic level and for future funding.	
Continue to offer a seamless referral pathway to vulnerable women in the city so they can access specialist support (legal, domestic abuse, sexual violence, housing, employment) across the partnership, and to other external agencies as appropriate.	CWP has achieved this goal. The Partnership has continued to deliver a highly effective, relational referral pathway that ensures women can access a range of services that they might need without having to navigate multiple systems and repeat their stories.
Develop methods for continued engagement of wider stakeholders and strategic leads across sectors.	This goal is still in progress. CWP is reviewing the effectiveness of its wider steering group, which has been comprised of local voluntary sector stakeholders, as an influencing tool. This has focused on exploring how to engage local authority commissioners and policymakers in this work, but CWP has had limited responses and input so far.
Continue to advocate for women in the city through membership of statutory and voluntary steering groups and working groups, ensuring that the voices of women are heard, and challenging any concerns.	This goal has been achieved. The CWP Partnership Manager consistently attends local steering and working groups to represent the Partnership and advocate for the need for women's services.

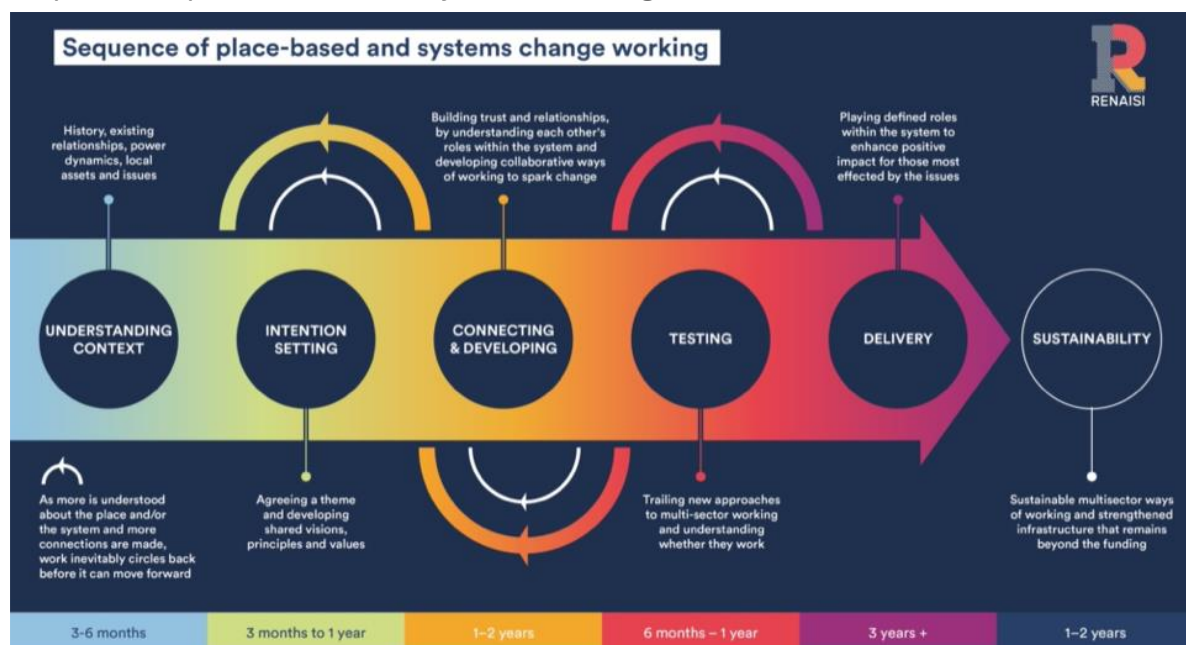
Where are the three networks on their journey in place-based systems change?

Drawing on over 25 years of experience working with organisations, individuals and partnerships aiming to drive long-term, deep-rooted social change, at Renaisi-TSIP we have developed a number of tools to design, learn about and measure place-based systems change. As the learning partner on this programme, we have brought these tools to the three networks to coproduce a learning approach, which supported the development of the learning questions and the themes that structure each network's story below. Drawing on insights from our role as an embedded learning partner and the tools that we have developed outside of this programme to measure place-based systems change, this section assesses how the three networks are laying the foundations for systemic change in their place beyond the timeline of their current funding.

The Renaisi-TSIP model for capturing and measuring place-based systems change¹ sets out five key stages of change (on the front of the cube) aligned to the timeframes that initiatives often spend in each stage (along the top), and three cross-cutting process related data points (on the right-hand side). The three networks in Coventry, Birmingham and Wythenshawe all currently sit in stage two of the model, “Place-based and systems working”.

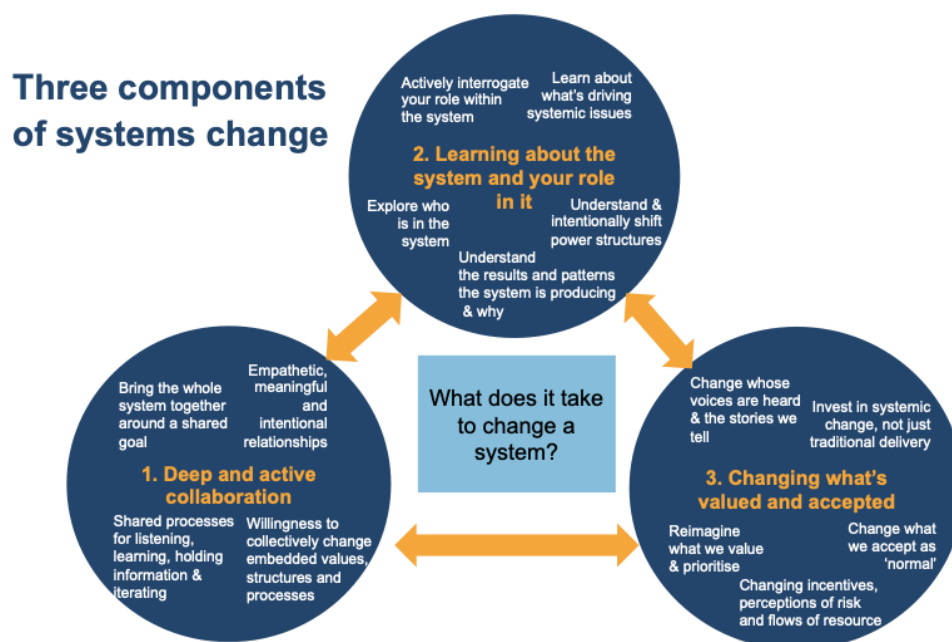


Much of Renaisi-TSIP’s work as a learning partner and developmental evaluator has focused on understanding and measuring how to identify and develop place-based systems working. Diving into this stage, we developed the tool below which sets out the sequence of place-based and systems working that we have encountered in our work.



¹ Renaisi-TSIP has often drawn on Australian consultancy [Clear Horizon](#)’s place-based measurement cube as a useful template for capturing and charting this data. With their blessing, over the past couple of years we’ve tweaked it to better meet the needs of the UK-based programmes we’re working on. We’ve aligned it with our new model of evaluation.

Finally, through our work supporting partners to design and plan for systemic change, we have developed and tested the tool below which sets out three components of systems change, and the elements that we have identified as enabling systemic change.



To appraise how the three networks are laying the foundations for systemic change in their place, this section sets out where each network currently is on the sequence of place-based systems working and how their approach to change aligns with the three components of systemic change.

Goals	Progress
Women of Wythenshawe	
Where are they on the journey of place-based systems change?	When WoW was first awarded funding, the network was at the “understanding context” step of place-based systems change working. Over the past two years they have moved through “intention setting” and “connecting and developing” to form the three action groups and begun “testing” the three groups’ approaches to social change.
How are they developing an approach that is intentionally contributing to systemic change?	WoW’s approach to systems change started from changing what is valued and accepted (Component 3). In our experience this is often the component that systems change initiatives struggle with the most, and so we believe that genuinely shifting whose voices are heard, the stories we tell and what is valued and prioritised across a coalition in a place is a solid foundation for system change. Their focus on this work means that their work around Components 1 and 2 has focused on work with the women leaders, building relationships across them and learning about their experiences of the system. However as work has progressed WoW has begun building allies and relationships with organisations outside the network and leaning on these to more deeply interrogate how the system works. While it is at

	early stages, the three components of systems change are showing up in their work.
Coventry Women’s Partnership	
Where are they on the journey of place-based systems change?	While CWP has been operating for six years, as the shift from a focus on service delivery to intentionally exploring place-based systems change is recent, the Partnership is still at early stages in this journey and so also currently sit in place-based systems working. Within the sequence of place-based systems working, CWP has progressed to “sustainability” in a number of areas of work (including joint capacity building and provision of a holistic system of support). However in CWP’s influencing work the Partnership is still at the “connecting and developing” and “testing” phase.
How are they developing an approach that is intentionally contributing to systemic change?	CWP has built deep and active collaboration and a solid understanding of the system through their six years of work. However, given the more narrow scope of CWP’s work this collaboration has been focused on delivery partners, and the Partnership has not intentionally focused on changing what is valued and accepted. Going forward, CWP could work more systemically by engaging more deeply and relationally with wider system stakeholders who could support them to build a coalition around systems change in the area. Exploring how to work with women with lived experience and support them to advocate for themselves locally could also support CWP to shift local attitudes and priorities. CWP has had challenges in engaging with statutory partners so far, which by contrast WoW has made more progress in as statutory partners have struggled to turn away local women advocating for themselves.
The Birmingham NRP Women’s Support Network	
Where are they on the journey of place-based systems change?	The Birmingham NRP Network began with a solid understanding of context, clear shared intentions and pre-existing relationships. The Network has been moving between “connecting and developing” and “testing” in the past two years of funding. Some aspects of their work (e.g. their referral pathway) have progressed to “delivery”, while other elements such as the capacity building and influencing work are still at the “testing” phase.
How are they developing an approach that is intentionally contributing to systemic change?	The Network has made the most progress in learning about the system and their role in it, with all partners having shared that working collaboratively with a clear focus on NRP has deepened their understanding of how the system around NRP works, and how to change it. While this is at earlier stages, the Network has also intentionally progressed in Components 1 and 3, through building close relationships

	across strategic leads, aligning processes to develop smooth referrals and convening a group of women with lived experience. Going forward the Network's systems work will strengthen through deepening collaborative relationships across organisations that are not held in single individuals, alongside centring the voice of those with lived experience in their advocacy to support shifts in attitudes and narratives about women with NRPF.
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All three networks have impacted the system that women experiencing poverty encounter in their local area, through improving the services and support on offer, driving collaboration, influencing shifts in practice and thinking about women's needs, facilitating coproduction, building capacity and developing methods to test and learn about their work.

With less than a year left in this round of funding, the three networks are focused on planning for the future, taking the learning, relationships and capacities that have been built through this programme to work for long-term systems change.

We are Renaisi-TSIP

We're passionate about creating the conditions for strong, inclusive communities to thrive.

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Get in touch: info@renaisi-tsip.com