

The Relationship-Centred City

Building a better London by building better relationships



**RELATIONSHIPS
PROJECT**

2020

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relationshipsproject.org

**THANKS**

Acknowledgments

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Sam Firman was the lead report writer, with Immy Robinson co-writing and editing. David Robinson, who spearheads the Relationships Project, helped frame the report and offered valuable suggestions throughout. He will also lead conversations with the mayoral candidates.

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Contents

1. OPPORTUNITIES 06

- a. A disconnected society 07
- b. Seeds of change 08
- c. The right place 10
- d. The right time 11

2. PAVING THE WAY 12

- a. A London Relationships Commission 13
- b. Five steps to becoming a Relationship Maker 14

3. DIRECTIONS OF TRAVEL 20

- a. Community 22
- b. Democracy 26
- c. Work 29
- d. Services 32
- e. Disadvantage 36

4. THE ROAD AHEAD 40

- a. Calls to action 41
- b. Reflections 42
- c. Moving forwards 43

APPENDICES 44



**RELATIONSHIPS
PROJECT**

SUMMARY

Welcome to the Report

Imagine a London in which relationships were the central operating principle. What would change?

This report is the primary output of a piece of work, funded by Trust for London and undertaken by the Relationships Project, designed to respond to this question. We aim to:

1. MAKE THE CASE
for improving relationships in London, putting relationships at the heart of debates about how to improve the city.

2. UNEARTH EXAMPLES
of, and ideas for, relationship-centred practice to inspire change in how the city operates.

3. DEVELOP AN APPROACH
to help the Mayor of London and others across the city to put relationships at its heart.

NAVIGATING THE REPORT

There are four main sections to this report:

1. OPPORTUNITIES

Making the case for investing in relationships and putting them at the heart of debates about how to improve our city. Jump to this section if you want to explore the evidence on the importance of relationships and why we think London is the perfect place to experiment in search of better relationships.

2. PAVING THE WAY

Presenting two complementary and interconnected approaches to building a more relationship-centred London: a London Relationships Commission and a five-step framework for relationship-centred practice. Jump to this section to read about the underlying institutional and conceptual frameworks we think would help improve London's relationships.

3. DIRECTIONS OF TRAVEL

Unearthing examples of and ideas for the steps we can take to build a more relationship-centred city. Jump to this section if you want to be inspired by pioneering examples of relationship-centred practice from around the world.

4. THE ROAD AHEAD

Calling on the Mayor and other Londoners to take action, reflecting on this project and outlining our next steps as the Relationships Project. Jump to this section to find out how you can join us in improving relationships in London and beyond.



1. OPPORTUNITIES

1. OPPORTUNITIES

a. A Disconnected society

We believe that everything works better when relationships are valued. Schools nurture happier, more successful students. GP practices achieve better, more cost-effective health outcomes. And businesses have more loyal customers and staff.

Longitudinal [research](#)¹ shows that social relationships are crucial to our health and happiness. The [evidence](#)² for the importance of relationships to our health is particularly astonishing, with strong social relationships found to benefit our health as much as quitting smoking. Relationships are life-changing on a collective level, too. There are many profound [links](#)³ between neighbourly relationships, for example, and happiness, productivity and reducing crime. As a result, Cebr [estimates](#)³ that disconnected neighbourhoods cost the UK £32 billion per year. Ultimately, strong relationships are vital to our health, happiness and flourishing.

There are great examples of relationship-centred practice but these remain tucked away. We interact and transact more than ever, but meaningful relationships are being systematically neglected in favour of fast and shallow connections. Speed and scale are, in many places, displacing trust and community. Our political economy champions individual competition over community cooperation. Technology connects us ever more, but increasingly digitises human exchanges. And pubs, high streets and other public spaces are rapidly closing or commercialising, threatening the places in which we used to meet and socialise.

These changes touch us all, but disproportionately affect those who are most disadvantaged. Online shopping, digital services and efficient, transactional healthcare from unfamiliar clinicians may suit those with busy, active lives, but can compound the exclusion of more isolated and disadvantaged people.

Ultimately, strong relationships are vital to our health, happiness and flourishing

We can't rewind the clock, and even if we could it wouldn't be desirable. Equally, however, we should not accept a devaluation in the quality of our relationships as the price of advancement. If we are to benefit from progress in ways that don't diminish our humanity, but rather sustain and enrich it, we have to learn how to do things differently. To rebalance and offset, we must remove relationships only where, and for whom, technology is sufficient or even preferable, and we must reinvest where they are needed most. We must meet different needs in different ways at different times, delivering better outcomes for everybody.

1. OPPORTUNITIES

b. Seeds of change

Our mission at the Relationships Project is to build a better society by building better relationships. We're striving to create a world in which everyone acknowledges the importance of relationships in all walks of life, putting them at the heart of their businesses, services and communities.

Through our bank of [case studies](#),⁴ we have started unearthing pockets of good practice that highlight how organisations and services are practically realising these benefits by using relationships to improve outcomes that matter to them. We have seen that there are lots of things, both small and large, that can be done to promote a more relational way of working. We don't need to reinvent the wheel – there are answers out there.

In [Frome](#),⁵ for example, a model of healthcare rooted in social relationships has helped to improve wellbeing and reduce hospital admissions. [Men's Sheds](#),⁶ simply by offering a space for men to socialise, have helped men feel healthier, happier and more socially connected. Retailer [Timpson](#)⁷ has shown that valuing ex-offenders as trusted colleagues pays off, resulting in a loyal and skilled workforce. And across the UK, [The Big Lunch](#)⁸ has highlighted the power of nurturing neighbourly relationships to reduce loneliness and crime, improve health and wellbeing, and more besides.

The tumultuous decade between the financial crash and 2019's General Election

has also fostered much thinking on how to create a better society, including by improving our relationships. [IPPR](#),⁹ for example, convened leading thinkers on the challenge of building a more relational state in 2012. [Community Links](#) demonstrated¹⁰ how integral good relationships are to good services in 2011, and this year [re-emphasised](#)¹¹ that argument in the context of the social and technological developments of the last decade. Hilary Cottam¹² recently argued for '[Radical Help](#)': a relationship-centred model of support to replace our outdated welfare system.

Humans are innately social animals and forming relationships comes naturally to many. But organising places – whether classrooms, parks, workplaces or housing developments – in ways that promote relationships can feel challenging. This is why, by working in partnership with those leading the way in relationship-centred practice, we are developing a bank of ideas, resources and tools to help people everywhere make their place more relationship-centred. We will be building on and developing these models and methods over the coming months.



Humans are innately social animals and forming relationships comes naturally to many



1. OPPORTUNITIES

c. The Right Place

It is in cities that the simultaneous sense of crisis and opportunity stemming from our disconnection is most tangible. They offer powerful laboratories for experimenting in search of better relationships.

Nowhere is this more true than London. Our capital is renowned as one of the world’s most innovative cities, but is nonetheless beset by numerous problems in which relationships play a vital role. Striking statistics hint at the scale of opportunity for improving Londoners’ relationships. In a context in which over two million UK adults experience chronic loneliness,¹³ 32% of Londoners feel isolated.¹⁴ Nextdoor recently found that London is the least neighbourly region in the UK. And, despite its fantastic diversity, London’s institutions remain plagued by race and class prejudice,¹⁵ and police report far more racist incidents in London than in any other region in the UK¹⁶. The list could go on.

There are many possible ways to categorise these problems in relation to relationships. We have chosen five themes to focus on:

COMMUNITY

Relationships in our local neighbourhoods have potentially transformative effects, yet neighbours in London are divided by distrust or prejudice, or simply don’t know one another.³ Building stronger community networks in London is an urgent task.

DEMOCRACY

67% of Britons feel powerless to influence their MP,¹⁷ and dissatisfaction in UK democracy is at record levels.¹⁸ London sits centre stage in this political turmoil, making democratic relationships in our capital vitally important.

WORK

Londoners spend an average of 33 hours per week working, which is three weeks per year more than the rest of the UK.¹⁹ Getting workplace relationships right can help unlock the array of benefits strong workplace relationships bring.²⁰

SERVICES

Services make up 90% of London’s economy,²¹ and good relationships are proven to be key to customer satisfaction. Given the role that services play in the lives of the most vulnerable, we must do all we can to build services on strong relationships.

DISADVANTAGE

Global and local trends have led to huge disparities in relational capital. Whilst some enjoy rich, connected lives, others see opportunities to build meaningful connections increasingly undermined. This perpetuates marginalisation and amplifies disadvantage.

These themes are not exhaustive, but we feel they allow for a wide-ranging demonstration of the need and opportunities for better relationships. They emerged strongly through our research for the project, and were well-aligned with the expertise of the Londoners we collaborated with.

See Appendix 1 for an explanation of how we approached the project.

1. OPPORTUNITIES

d. The Right Time

With London’s forthcoming mayoral election in May 2020, the time is right for this work. The Mayor of London operates a number of powerful levers that can be directly applied to reshaping our capital.



PLANNER:
THE MAYOR’S LONDON PLAN²² SETS THE STRATEGIC AND POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR MOST AREAS OF LIFE IN THE CITY.



MANAGER:
THE MAYOR’S OFFICE ALSO HOLDS VARIOUS POWERS OVER THE FUNCTIONAL BODIES THAT HELP DELIVER THIS STRATEGY.



PURCHASER:
BEYOND SETTING THE £17BN PUBLIC SERVICES BUDGET, THE MAYOR CAN FUND IDEAS USING GRANTS AND PROCUREMENT.



CONVENOR:
THE MAYOR CAN CONVENE ORGANISATIONS AND GROUPS TO HELP UNDERSTAND ISSUES AND DEVELOP IDEAS TO ADDRESS THEM.



INFLUENCER:
THE MAYOR PLAYS A CENTRAL AND CRUCIAL ROLE IN ADVOCATING AND NEGOTIATING WITH CRITICAL STAKEHOLDERS ACROSS THE CITY.



AMPLIFIER:
THE MAYOR OWNS LONDON’S BIGGEST MEGAPHONE AND THEIR ABILITY TO DRAW PUBLIC ATTENTION TO AN ISSUE IS SECOND TO NONE.

We have all of these powers in mind as we present the ideas in this report. The power and potential of relationships mean they should be at the top of the new Mayor’s agenda, and the Mayor’s powers mean they will be an invaluable ally in improving relationships in London and beyond.

If we make relationships a common agenda across the city and all commit to making our place more relationship-centred, we can achieve much more.

There is no more crucial ingredient for human happiness than strong, positive social connections

The beacons of good practice cited in this report will only become commonplace when we are all actively thinking about relationships in the places we know best – from our neighbourhoods and businesses to our schools and hospitals. As the environmentalist David Fleming taught us: “Large-scale problems do not require large-scale solutions. They require small-scale solutions within a large-scale framework.” For this reason, the ideas in this report are not only aimed at the Mayor, but everybody across London.

The evidence supporting good relationships is compelling, London’s problems are clear, and May’s election offers a fresh start. The time is right for placing better relationships at the heart of London’s organisations and services – for heeding urbanist and Happy City²³ founder Charles Montgomery’s words: “There is no more crucial ingredient for human happiness than strong, positive social connections.”²⁴ How, then, can we do this?

2. PAVING THE WAY

This report presents initiatives for helping build a more relationship-centred city. But isolated ideas are not enough, no matter how impactful or inspiring. Truly putting better relationships at the heart of London life also requires a more systematic approach to policy and design – one that encourages cross-fertilisation and coherence between ideas, and generates new and better ideas in the first place. Before presenting individual ideas, we therefore offer two recommendations to this end: a formal London Relationships Commission and a five-step approach to help guide relationship-centred practice.



2. PAVING THE WAY

a. A London Relationships Commission



If the Mayor of London is to spearhead efforts to transform the city's relationships, a radical, deep-rooted policy approach to building better relationships is required. We think a formal Relationships Commission, modeled along the lines of the influential London Finance Commission,²⁵ has the potential to provide this.

Finance and relationships are the twin engines in a successful city. It is vital that they are both managed and supported by the best evidence available and the smartest ideas. A London Relationships Commission would need:

A BROAD REMIT

The Commission must develop programmes for joining up efforts into a coherent, city-wide relationship-building strategy.

A LONG-TERM BRIEF

This remit must be ongoing if the Commission is to fundamentally rethink, and help revitalise, London's relationships. Relationships are not built in a day.

ACCESS & INFLUENCE

To guarantee all of these attributes, the Mayor must believe in the value of the Commission and provide the political backing and resources required.

Ultimately, a London Relationships Commission would provide an overarching strategy for radically improving London's relationships by identifying, connecting and growing impactful ideas

2. PAVING THE WAY

5 steps to becoming a Relationship Maker

The London Relationships Commission wouldn't need to start from scratch. In this section we offer a framework for both thinking about and practically working to improve relationships.

This framework underpins our own work towards helping people and organisations create better relationships. It can also guide the Mayor, a potential London Relationships Commission and other leaders and citizens around London in improving relationships across the city.

The five steps in this framework are aimed at all of us, the new Mayor included. No doubt the framework will evolve as this work develops. But even at this stage we think it offers a valuable means of guiding the learning and innovations required to create a more relationship-centred London.



Ask the question: Why are you doing this? The benefits of strong relationships are wide-ranging, but nailing down what you want to achieve by investing in relationships helps provide focus.



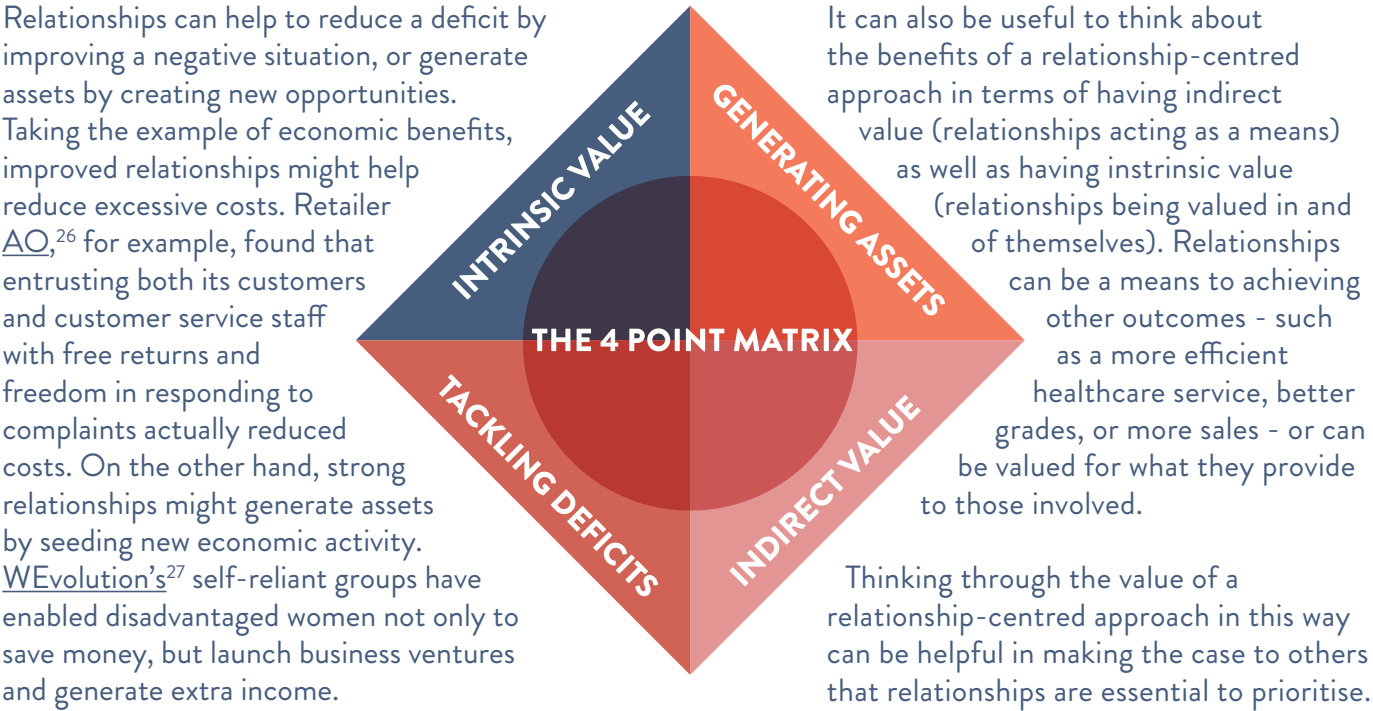
Agree the destination

We have identified some common benefits of a relational approach below. For more concrete examples, take a look at our bank of [case studies](#).⁴



THE 4 POINT MATRIX

The matrix below can be useful in helping to think through different types of relationship-centred outcomes



2

Know where to start

Ask the question: Which relationship should I focus on? In any place, many different relationships exist. Honing in on the ones that matter most in reaching your destination makes the task easier.

When thinking about which relationships are at play in a particular place – whether an organisation, service or space – the model below can be useful.

In any place, many different relationships exist between different types of stakeholders. A school, for example, will have relationships with parents and students (users), staff (employees) and the wider community. Relationships also exist within stakeholder groups. Parents and students, for instance, will have relationships with other parents and students, and the school as an organisation will have relationships with other organisations, such as schools in other areas and exam bodies.

Whilst all these relationships are likely to play an important role in the functioning of a place, choosing one type of relationship to focus on provides a useful starting point. Some simple questions can help identify where to begin:

Which relationships are most central to which aims?
Some relationships are probably more influential in realising given aims than others.

Which relationships have the potential to bring the most benefit? Beyond core aims, there might be wider benefits in improving a relationship. Whether individual wellbeing, cost savings or something else, it is useful to think widely about impact.

Which relationships can be most easily influenced?
Agency over different relationships differs. It's useful to think about which relationships can be influenced given the resources available.

Which relationships are currently weakest?
An alternative approach may be to focus on relationships that are particularly weak. Even if these wouldn't be the easiest to influence, it may feel fairest to address these relationships first.

When thinking through these questions – particularly in relation to a specific user group – the Circles of Support model can be useful. The model originated in Canada, and spread to the UK in the 1980s. It helps segment the different types of relationships people have and encourages reflection on the different functions and characteristics of different relationships as well as how a relationship might migrate from one segment to another. Though the boundaries are porous, people likely experience relationships differently depending on which segment they fall within.

■ PEOPLE WE DON'T KNOW

■ PEOPLE WE HAVE A PAID INTERACTION WITH

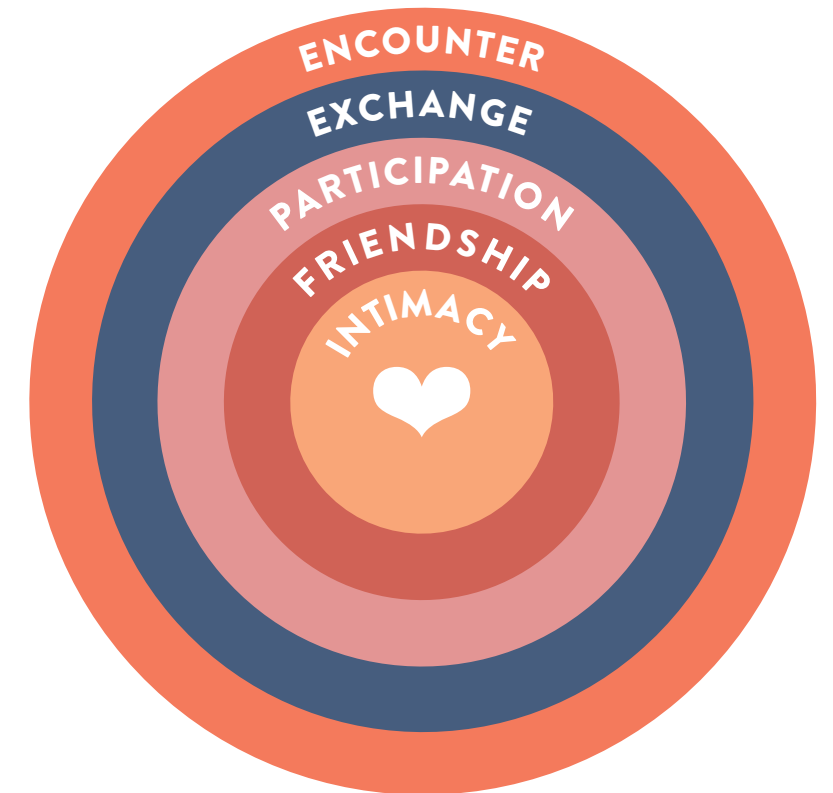
■ PEOPLE WE KNOW

■ PEOPLE WE'RE FRIENDS WITH

■ PEOPLE WE LOVE

Happy, healthy and fulfilling lives are likely to have some dots in every circle

CIRCLES OF SUPPORT



TYPES OF RELATIONSHIP

ORGANISATION / SERVICE

INDIVIDUAL / USER

EMPLOYEE / VOLUNTEER

WIDER COMMUNITY MEMBERS



Whilst professionals play an important role in patients' lives, they cannot fulfil all their needs

FILLING THE CIRCLE

■ The head of an adolescent mental health unit once told us that his patients typically had six to ten names stored on their phones and, more importantly, that most of these contacts were professional helpers like himself. In the Circles of Support model, their phone contacts would all be placed in the outer circles. Whilst professionals play an important role in these patients' lives, they cannot fill all of their needs. They are unlikely to be able to provide the friendships and peer support we all need to live flourishing lives. Happy, healthy and fulfilling lives are likely to have some dots in every circle. The head of the unit is therefore most interested in supporting relationships nearer the centre of the circle.

3

Identify priorities

Ask the question: What is a ‘good’ relationship? Relationships are idiosyncratic and context-dependent. Defining what ‘good’ looks like for you is an important step.

We believe that strong relationships should share some fundamental characteristics:

WEAK		STRONG
IMPERSONAL	>	PERSONAL
ONE-WAY	>	MUTUAL
SCRIPTED	>	ORGANIC
COLD	>	WARM
DOUBTING	>	TRUSTING

The exact balance of these characteristics will vary depending on context and the relationship at play. A good relationship between a GP and a patient, for instance, will be different to a good relationship between friends. A good relationship between a mental health support worker and a service user might be more reliant on trust than on mutuality, even if both are important. A strong teacher-student relationship is likely to be somewhat scripted, in the form of lesson plans, but still be personalised and trusting. Thinking through the nature of the relationships being nurtured is important in helping to think about how to create the conditions in which they can be improved.

4

Spot the breakers

Ask the question: What are the barriers? Lots of things potentially get in the way of developing strong relationships. Understanding what they are is the first step to addressing them.

The barriers to improving a relationship will vary, but some common issues crop up regularly:

SOME COMMON BARRIERS TO RELATIONSHIP-CENTRED PRACTICE:



FUNDING:
NOT ENOUGH MONEY TO COMMIT TO IMPROVING RELATIONSHIPS



TIME:
NOT ENOUGH TIME IN THE DAY TO WORK ON RELATIONSHIPS



SPACE:
NO SUITABLE PLACE IN WHICH TO BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER



SCEPTICISM:
DOUBT AS TO THE BENEFITS OF IMPROVING RELATIONSHIPS



SKILLS:
A LACK OF THE ABILITIES NEEDED TO IMPROVE RELATIONSHIPS



CULTURE:
NORMS, RULES OR VALUES THAT PRIORITISE OTHER THINGS

Connecting with others who are grappling with similar challenges can be useful and energising. With this in mind, [get in touch](#) if you would like to join our community of Relationship Makers.

5

Find the makers

Ask the question: What are the enablers? There are lots of things that help create the conditions for relationships to flourish. Find the ones that work for you.

We have seen that there are many things that can help build and sustain good relationships. We have also seen that there are lots of great examples of these enablers in action. Over the coming months we will be developing a

hub of resources that make good practice examples more accessible and actionable. In the meantime, our bank of [case studies](#)⁴ and the ideas presented in this report offer inspiration on how to build and sustain meaningful relationships in a range of contexts.

ACTIVITIES

Often people feel they need an ‘excuse’ to connect, which activities can provide. Events, games or other activities can catalyse new connections by bringing people together to do something enjoyable or bond over a shared interest.



NARRATIVES

Stories are important in changing our perception of and attitudes towards how we relate. Popular narratives promoting warmth can be effective in changing behaviours. This is particularly true when confronted with prejudicial or stubborn views.



CO-DESIGN

Co-design is when end users collaboratively design services with those who provide them. Designing in this way helps disrupt unequal power dynamics, generate trust, and provides the opportunity for service providers to really understand their users.



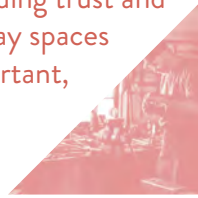
NORMS

Social norms are powerful in influencing how we think and behave. Norms that encourage us to prioritise good relationships help establish relationship-centred habits and desires. Norms take time and commitment to take root and must be reinforced.



SPACE

Suitable places are essential in facilitating connections. Spaces can be physical or digital, although physical proximity can help enormously in building trust and connection. The way spaces are laid out is important, and can make new connections more or less likely.



TRAINING

Relationships seem ‘natural’ to many of us, and the prospect of learning how to do something so organic may seem unnecessary. But creating the space to learn relationship-making skills can be valuable, particularly where relationships are being built across divides.



MEASUREMENT

Finding ways to demonstrate the value of better relationships can be key to justifying the use of time and resources in building them and gaining buy-in for doing so. However, it’s equally important that the value of relationships is not reduced to simplistic statistics.



INCENTIVES

Recognising and celebrating those who lead the way in building better relationships is important in encouraging its spread. There are a range of levers that can be used in different ways to incentivise, reward and celebrate relationship-centred behaviours.



REGULATIONS

Regulations can both help and hinder relationship-centred practice. Removing regulations which make it hard to build good relationships and replacing them with those that promote it can give people the confidence and permission to act in a relationship-centred way.



3. DIRECTIONS OF TRAVEL

3. DIRECTIONS OF TRAVEL

Ideas for a relationship-centred city

This section contains a selection of ideas for improving relationships in London. Some ideas are just that, whereas others have already been tested in cities around the world. We are less concerned with how original or grand an idea is and more with its potential for London.

The ideas emerged from both a literature review on what cities are currently doing to improve relationships and a co-creation day run with Londoners from different walks of life (please see Appendix 1 for a more detailed explanation of this approach). The process of extracting ideas from these strands was, in turn, guided by the five-step methodology presented in section 2b, and we have presented the ideas below with reference to these steps.

The ideas presented are not intended as detailed policy proposals, but starting points and provocations – seeds for people with the imagination and agency to help make them happen. With this in mind, we have chosen these ideas to share with the next Mayor and, we hope, a new London Relationships Commission, because:

- They are practical and doable
- They paint a picture of what London could look like if relationships were a central operating principle
- Collectively they provide sufficient substance to demonstrate value

We have grouped the ideas into five themes:

- a. COMMUNITY
- b. DEMOCRACY
- c. WORK
- d. SERVICES
- e. DISADVANTAGE

Many ideas could readily sit in multiple categories. As we present the ideas, we also argue the case for improving relationships in these areas. Alongside a brief description of each idea, we provide illustrative examples of each in action.

Finally, we also note the role(s) the Mayor could play in supporting each idea, drawing on the powers at the Mayor's disposal and the potential for a Relationships Commission to support these ideas. In some cases the Mayor might directly allocate funding to initiatives, such as with participatory budgeting. In others it may be preferable for the Mayor to take a behind-the-scenes role, for example by convening frontline organisations to collaborate on ways of working with disadvantaged groups that give those groups more agency.

3. DIRECTION OF TRAVEL

a. Community

Building better communities by building better relationships

WHY IMPROVE COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS?

The stronger these relationships are, the happier and more resilient communities become. Simply speaking with strangers is surprisingly good for us.²⁸ In Greater London alone, the Cebr estimates³ that increasing community cohesion could improve health (saving the NHS £587 million), reduce crime (saving £38 million), boost productivity via improved wellbeing (adding £1.34 billion to GDP) and save £1.6 billion by sharing resources and support.

The stronger these relationships are, the happier and more resilient communities become

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS?

Community relationships are the relationships we have with people we see regularly in our local neighbourhoods. This will include neighbours, the local shopkeeper, people we see in our favourite café and staff from local establishments we visit as we socialise, run errands or relax. Clearly relationships vary a great deal within our community and span every circle in the Circles of Support model. The common thread is that we know these people by virtue of living where they live or work.

BARRIERS TO STRONG COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

London is a fast-moving, diverse metropolis – seemingly a fantastic place to connect

with people. But this brings challenges. Busy, densely populated urban areas can leave many feeling disconnected, especially as technology reduces face-to-face interactions. Economic pressures also mean gentrification is rapidly transforming local communities, often displacing long-term residents and social spaces like pubs, of which over 50 closed in Greater London between January and June 2018 alone.²⁹ On top of this, community cohesion is undermined as news and media narratives draw necessary but disproportionate attention to social problems and divisions. And London's diversity, a wonderful thing in many ways, presents Londoners with the challenge of finding common ground with people from different cultural, linguistic and class backgrounds.

ENABLING STRONG COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

Whilst there are many challenges to building better community relationships, there are also many opportunities. The ideas in this section explore:

- Activities for bringing neighbours together, including neighbourly social events and supporting one another with day-to-day tasks.
- How physical spaces in local communities can provide the basis for new and deeper connections, whether through 'bumping spaces' that encourage more public interactions or more cooperative forms of housing.
- The role that co-design can play in creating these spaces, through more communal forms of designing and organising living arrangements.
- How these enablers can help create new narratives and norms around how we live with and connect with others in our local communities.
- The role regulations might play in helping create more relationship-centred housing and neighbourhoods.



Co-housing: Helping Londoners live more communally

Co-housing takes different forms, but essentially involves people living together in more communal ways than is typical. It offers a ready-made social network that brings the benefits of community into people's homes.

Co-housing can be particularly beneficial for social tenants and those who live alone (including over half of people over 75),³⁰ all of whom are disproportionately likely to experience loneliness.³¹ Despite the potential benefits, residents and developers face financial and cultural barriers to co-housing projects in London. The London Mayor should lead the way in tackling these.

CO-HOUSING PIONEERS

Older Women's Co-Housing (OWHC)³² serves women over 50 in High Barnet. Residents all enjoy private homes as well as shared spaces. Activity groups, shared duties and a supportive culture all help enable a close-knit social network.

OWHC represents "a way of retaining your independence and being among people who can be supportive of you at the same time," says resident Meredeen,³⁰ now 86. "It's almost like everyone in the community is signed up to be a good

neighbour," adds Mary Watkins, another resident.³⁰

This support can have dramatic benefits. When a resident had a heart attack but wanted to return home, OWCH members rallied and devised a rota of care, saving the NHS somewhere between £4,000 and £7,000 in the process.³³

But projects like OWCH, which took seventeen years to complete, face multiple barriers. OWCH required funding, a suitable site and support from housing associations and the local authority. On top of this, cultural scepticism about co-housing can make it a difficult sell. "We're not a bunch of hippies," one member reassured the Telegraph.³⁰

On a larger scale, Barcelona's Superblocks are city blocks re-designed according to relationship-centred logic.³⁴ They promote walkability, mixed-use spaces, shared facilities and sustainability.

THE LONDON MAYOR COULD

- Review planning regulations to make it easier for co-housing projects to secure land and funding and avoid unnecessary legal complications.
- Convene local councils, co-housing experts and other relevant organisations to work with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government on the development of a strategy for increasing co-housing in London. There is much good thinking on this already, such as the RSA's expanded notion of 'housing equity',³⁵ which imagines housing as a financial community asset and source of collaboration, and social capital.
- Influence Londoners' perception of the desirability of co-housing by promoting its benefits and talking about the steps that the Mayor is taking to facilitate co-housing.
- Work with the new Minister for London to identify new sources of funding for co-housing pilots, either with grants or subsidies that help secure suitable development sites.





Neighbourly activities: Providing excuses to connect

Londoners are less likely to trust their neighbours than anybody else in the UK.³⁶ To rectify this, people often require excuses to connect - something thoughtful activities in public spaces can provide.

We can all try to connect more with our neighbours, but resources and support can multiply these efforts. Landlords, housing associations and local businesses can offer space, facilities and marketing for activities. The Mayor can lead by promoting neighbourly activity and removing barriers to hosting community events.

THE PROJECTS GETTING NEIGHBOURS TALKING AGAIN

Each year, The Big Lunch³⁷ and The Great Get Together³⁸ connect millions of UK neighbours to demonstrate the potential of simple community gatherings to generate impact at scale. Both help neighbours organise events – often a summer lunch, but also Iftars, Eid celebrations and school gatherings.³⁹ Food features prominently, allowing participants not only to enjoy, but contribute to the occasion.

Both bring significant benefits. 71% of 2019 attendees felt the

Great Get Together helped unite the community. 51% met somebody new and 71% felt less lonely. Six million attended Big Lunches in 2019, forming four million new friendships. 66% feel they belong more in their community, and 78% that their neighbourhood is friendlier.⁴¹

Fun Palaces – an ongoing campaign to illuminate skills and activities thriving locally – is another example of neighbourhood activities delivering big impact. In 2018 433 Fun Palaces involved 100,000 participants and 7,000 Makers, 91% of whom observed stronger community spirit.⁴³

Other schemes – such as the Crystal Palace Library of Things – allow residents to share objects or tasks, building neighbourly support networks in the process.⁴⁴ The Human Library, originating in Copenhagen works by people ‘lending’ themselves as books to be ‘read’ (spoken with), offering a playful way to get to know each other.

THE LONDON MAYOR COULD

- Update planning regulations to include a “presumption of consent” whereby local authorities would be required to justify why a street could not be closed temporarily if there was demonstrable local enthusiasm for a social event. Reversing the burden of justification would make it easier for residents to run community events without neglecting the proper concerns around safety and community convenience.

- Promote the benefits of community gatherings through TfL. TfL has unparalleled visibility across London with its bus shelters and stations. Allocating a small proportion of advertising space, either for a pan-London campaign or promoting local activities, would be cheap, practical and immediately useful.

- Convene landlords and housing associations to determine how to support activities which reduce anti-social behaviour and enhance neighbourliness. This benefits property owners as well as tenants.

- Explore with London Funders a cross-London match-funding programme sponsoring community connectors in every community.



Bumping places: Nudging people to interact using physical spaces

Bumping places can come in many shapes and sizes, and can influence how we interact in both positive and negative ways. The common thread is the potential within each of these physical spaces to encourage, or even deter, connection.

The onus for creating positive bumping spaces falls primarily on organisations with existing spaces and the resources to use them to foster connection. The Mayor, through a Relationships Commission, could work to identify suitable public bumping spaces, and work with local authorities and businesses to promote and incentivise more localised efforts to create spaces of connection.

BUMPING SPACES LARGE AND SMALL

In Chicago, architect Jeanne Gang created a bumping space to encourage interaction across social divides. As part of a wider project⁴⁶ exploring “what a community-oriented police station can do and be in Chicago,” Studio Gang subverted a fortress-like police precinct and re-designed it as



a ‘Polis station’: a community space featuring a basketball court intended to encourage cops to shoot hoops with young people they would otherwise not meet, and between whom tensions were likely to exist.⁴⁷

The inspiration for the Polis station emerged through individual and collective conversations with police officers, community members and local teenagers. The court has become so popular that both the police department and community leaders have requested it be expanded into a full public park – something Gang studios are working on currently.

Bumping spaces need not involve ambitious architectural design. They might also re-imagine

Bumping places are everyday spaces in which people come together: the primary school gates, the chicken shop, the bus shelter, the doctors’ waiting room. Bumping places provide excuses to interact – sometimes through deliberate design and sometimes more passively, by virtue of their function.

traditional gathering places like cafes. Eggs and Bread⁴⁸ cafe in Walthamstow, for example, allows anybody to boil an egg, make a cup of tea and relax, free of charge.

Bumping spaces can also be transient. Pop-up listening, conversation or ideas booths can encourage connections. The GLA has already experimented with conversation booths,⁵⁰ but such initiatives could be more widespread and accessible.

THE LONDON MAYOR COULD

- Influence the way Londoners recognise, understand and think about new public spaces through a campaign to identify London’s ‘in between’ spaces and turn them into effective, positive bumping places.

- Create a map of existing bumping places to help ensure people take advantage of them.



Participatory budgeting: Allowing people to allocate public spending in their communities

Participatory budgeting would give Londoners more control over city-wide or local budget allocations. This can build a more collaborative, trusting relationship between citizens and the government.⁵³

Research suggests participatory budgeting can increase engagement and result in more popular budget allocations.⁵⁴ But participatory budgeting can be time-consuming, superficial and exclusionary.

Residents generate ideas and recruit Budget Delegates who then turn ideas into full proposals. These proposals are then put to a nine-day community vote, with winnings projects included in the upcoming budget.

Global experimentation has established some core principles. Effective participatory budgeting is accessible, transparent, tailored to local contexts and combined with other decentralised participatory processes. The Mayor should work with others in using these principles to develop a long-term, city-wide participatory budgeting strategy, linked to a wider strategy for improving democratic participation.

CITIES CHANGING THE WAY BUDGETS ARE MANAGED

The most instructive participatory budgeting experiments for London come from other cities. New York's participatory budgeting programme, for example, encompasses 34 Councils and a budget of at least \$35 million.⁵⁵ Through community meetings,

Evaluation suggests a number of benefits, including increased trust in government and better informed policy decisions.⁵³ The process has also expanded democratic participation, with the majority of voters being people of colour, under eighteen or born outside the US.

Elsewhere, in Paris in 2018, 5% of the city's investment budget – €100m per year – was allocated by citizens voting on projects put forward by citizens, including school children.⁵⁶ In Melbourne, a People's Panel comprised of a jury of 43 local people reviewed and provided recommendations on the City Council's ten-year, \$5 billion financial plan in 2014. All eleven of its recommendations were embedded into the final plan.⁵⁷

THE LONDON MAYOR COULD

- Set aside a budget allocation, offer a range of options and manage a process for engaging citizens in proposing and selecting ideas in a participatory budgeting experiment that is broad, transparent and imaginative.
- Task a new Relationships Commission to consider how best to improve democratic relationships through participatory budgeting, and how other participatory processes might complement this process.
- Celebrate this bold innovation and influence democratic culture in London by encouraging and enabling all Londoners to participate.
- Encourage the growth of participatory budgeting by allocating a further portion of the Mayor's budget to fund localised participatory experiments.



3. DIRECTION OF TRAVEL b. Democracy

Building a better democracy by building better relationships

WHY IMPROVE DEMOCRATIC RELATIONSHIPS?

Stronger democratic relationships can benefit citizens by creating a greater sense of agency. They can also foster more trust and empathy, traits that are lacking in our current political climate. On a more systemic level, stronger, more participatory political relationships would mean more diverse political input, helping produce more representative and creative policies. Politicians would also be more accountable and given closer scrutiny. Better democracy may even be better for our health, evidence suggests.⁵¹

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY DEMOCRATIC RELATIONSHIPS?

There are two key relationships at the heart of improving democracy in London. The first is that between politicians – whether MPs, the Mayor or other political officials – and citizens. The second is that between citizens themselves: friends, families, colleagues and acquaintances discussing and participating in politics together.

BARRIERS TO STRONG DEMOCRATIC RELATIONSHIPS

Crisis hangs over British democracy. Divisions over Brexit and the 2019 election are stark and political debate is coarse. Democratic dissatisfaction is at record levels.¹⁸ Political participation is also weak, with voter turnout having steadily fallen over 50 years (though we have seen a recent upturn).

Perhaps most significantly, people feel little trust or agency in politics. 67% of Brits feel they have no or very few opportunities to influence their MP's decisions in Westminster, and politicians are the least trusted profession in the country.¹⁷

These are not London's problems alone, but London is not exempt.

Trust and agency are the most important characteristics citizens lack in these relationships. Distrust and a sense of powerlessness are, in turn, barriers to change.

Our divisive political atmosphere also presents a barrier to interventions that foster warmer, more empathetic democratic relationships. Inequalities in political participation represent another challenge, creating the risk that even well-intentioned enablers serve to entrench, rather than reduce, inequalities in political representation.⁵²

ENABLING STRONG DEMOCRATIC RELATIONSHIPS

For these reasons, the ideas in this section recommend:

- Co-design in the form of activities like civic policy labs and participatory budgeting that facilitate participatory democratic relationships that give people greater political agency.
- New democratic spaces to host accessible and approachable activities.
- More transparent political norms and regulations, both around formal political processes and features of democratic life like our personal data.
- Creating new narratives about what it means, in terms of democratic participation, to be a citizen in London and the UK.



Participatory democratic forums:

Making democracy about more than occasional elections

Participatory democratic forums help to foster wider, deeper political participation and relationships by facilitating political dialogue.

Political conversations can of course be challenging, but wider participation is crucial in creating a democratic culture that replaces distrust and apathy with trust and agency. The Mayor should commit to giving Londoners more, and more meaningful, opportunities to influence political decision-making.

CITIZENS INFLUENCING POLICY DECISIONS

Citizen assemblies gather citizens to advise on political issues. They help reframe the power relationship and [evidence](#) suggests they produce more progressive policies.⁵⁸ Notably, in 2017, 99 Irish citizen jurors [decided](#) to remove the Eighth Amendment, prohibiting abortion, from the Irish constitution.⁵⁹

Public participation charity [Involve](#) has developed useful [guidelines](#) for running successful citizen assemblies.⁶⁰ It has also facilitated assemblies, including

the first to be commissioned and run by parliament, on sustainable funding for adult social care, which successfully influenced the Select Committee's [findings](#).⁶¹

Internationally, Seoul Mayor Park Won-Soon [experimented](#) with a mobile office as well as Cheong-Chek Forums: local meetings requiring officials to incorporate citizen feedback into decision-making.⁶²

Digital transparency can make existing forums more participatory. [vTaiwan](#) publishes detailed data online.⁶³ The London Mayor should match this openness, and help increase political awareness by working with the likes of [mySociety](#) to make democratic information more transparent.⁶⁴

If harnessed well, digital tools can create new democratic spaces. [Barcelona](#) is aiming to give citizens active roles in a digital democratic participation ecosystem.⁶⁵



THE LONDON MAYOR COULD

- Convene and partner with the London-based organisations championing participatory democracy – such as [Involve](#), [mySociety](#), the [RSA](#) and [The Democratic Society](#) – to produce the London Way: a fresh approach to participatory democracy drawing on the latest thinking and adapting it to London's needs.
- Challenge every London-wide body over which the Mayor has power or influence to significantly increase citizen engagement in every aspect of its work over the next four years.

3. DIRECTION OF TRAVEL

c. Work

Building better workplaces by building better relationships

WHY IMPROVE WORKPLACE RELATIONSHIPS?

Londoners spend an average of 33 hours per week working, which is three weeks per year more than the rest of the UK¹⁹. This is a lot of time, and strong workplace relationships bring many [benefits](#) to both employees and companies.²⁰ Given [research](#) shows that relationships are integral to our happiness and health¹, and happiness has been linked with a 12% boost in productivity,³ it stands that happy workers are more productive. Happy, healthy staff are also less likely to be stressed, absent, and more likely to be loyal and engaged in their work. Ultimately, wellbeing, performance and profit all benefit from strong workplace relationships.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY WORKPLACE RELATIONSHIPS?

By workplace relationships we mean relationships between colleagues within the workplace. This might be a relationship somebody has with a manager, a fellow intern, a colleague from a different team or a contractor from a partner company. The common thread is that workplace relationships entail working together in some way for work. Of course people may also have relationships with customers at work – something addressed more directly in the next section, on services.

BARRIERS TO STRONG WORKPLACE RELATIONSHIPS

Although workplace relationships in the UK are generally positive, they are not as strong as they should be. [CIPD](#) found that 30% of UK workers report at least one incident of harassment or bullying in the past 12 months, and 30% do not trust their employer to act in their best interests.¹⁵ The Runnymede Trust also [found](#) that London's labour markets are still plagued by race and class prejudice.¹⁵ These issues partly explain why mental health issues are a huge problem in our workplaces, with 12.7% of all sickness absence days in the UK attributable to mental health conditions.⁶⁷

These problems have many causes. Against a backdrop of austerity, high inequality and uncertainty over automation and the wider future of labour markets, London wages are failing to keep pace with [inflation](#),⁶⁸ and at least 10% of working Londoners are in insecure employment.⁶⁹ Better workplace relationships can't magic these forces away, but they do mediate them. Fostering more supportive, transparent, welcoming workplace relationships must be part of the London Mayor's response to these challenges.

ENABLING STRONG WORKPLACE RELATIONSHIPS

As spaces for learning, problem solving and continuous improvement, workplaces are excellent places in which to introduce new approaches that seek to strengthen relationships. The ideas in this section explore:

- The potential of collective ownership models to foster more engaged and empowered colleagues and more cooperative relationships.
- A range of incentives, norms and rules – including assessments, check-ins and hiring practices – that companies can deploy to encourage more relationship-centred behaviour.
- Training which focuses explicitly on improving workers' relationship-building skills and relationship-centred behaviours.

Happiness has been linked with a 12% boost in productivity



Cooperative companies: Business models fostering more mutual workplace relationships

The London Mayor can help create a business environment that incentivises cooperative models, initially by convening business experts to understand current barriers. These policy-level measures will be key to changing business culture, but individuals can also support cooperative businesses by buying from them.

COOPERATIVE MODELS OLD AND NEW

John Lewis is a well-known British department store. Less known is that it's the UK's largest employee-owned business, with a workforce of 83,900 'Partners'.

The Partnership's [constitution](#) outlines that Partners hold senior leadership to account and democratically input into how the company works through a Partnership Council.⁷⁰ The constitution also states the aim of the Partnership to be not profit, but "the happiness of all its members, through their satisfying employment in a successful business."

Cooperatives are businesses owned and operated by those providing and/or using its services. They reframe workplace relationships with members democratically inputting into how the company operates, giving everybody a more meaningful stake in the success of the company and creating a more productive, happy environment.



Although it's difficult to isolate causation, this model almost certainly brings [benefits](#) ranging from loyal staff, excellent customer service and a strong brand image.⁷¹ And these benefits are rooted in the relationships more cooperative working helps create. "There is a feeling of equality - you belong to the business, but it belongs to you too," one member of staff reported to the [Guardian](#).⁷¹

Cooperative ownership can also underpin new business models. [Platform cooperativism](#) is a growing movement championing 'sharing economy' business models rooted in collective ownership, democratic governance, and social justice. It aims to replace extractive

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- Set up an expert working group to consider the place of "social value" in tendering and purchasing across the GLA. Cooperative businesses can, at best, deliver benefits that go beyond price and profit.
- Convene business leaders to understand the barriers to more cooperative business models and to support the development of good practice.

workplace relationships - especially through the gig economy - with collaborative, democratic ones.

To this end, the Platform Cooperativism Consortium serves as a hub of research designed to help people "research, start, grow or convert to platform co-ops."⁷² The Mayor should heed this work.



Relationship-centred workplace cultures: Encouraging better relationships through working practices

We all have a role to play in improving workplace relationships. As individuals, we can bring warmth and humanity to our interactions, whilst managers and leaders - including the Mayor - can create the conditions for these relationships to flourish.

THE MANY LEVERS FOR REALISING A MORE RELATIONSHIP-CENTRED WORKPLACE

To identify areas for improvement, a workplace could look for ways to take a 'temperature check' of the strength of relationships across the organisation. Inspiration could be taken from the [Small Business Sustainability Audit](#),⁷³ which enables businesses to see how sustainable they are and identify areas in which they might improve.

Workplaces can also foster relationships by introducing things like check-ins that allow employees to openly discuss the emotional and social dimensions of their work. Participants of [Schwartz Rounds](#) - a check-in forum for healthcare staff - report feeling less stressed and 85% feel better able to care for patients.⁷⁴ Check-ins like this not only encourage employees to interact, but emphasise the workplace as a social environment. Expressing vulnerability can also, done carefully, strengthen bonds.

Workplaces might also include relationship-building ability in hiring criteria. [Timpson](#), for example, hires ex-offenders on the basis of their personality and attitude, over formal skills.⁷ This is suited to some roles more than

Workplaces are home to a range of levers which can influence how we view relationships at work. Encouraging good workplace relationships does not mean forcing staff to interact, but nudging employees to prioritise and encourage better relationships.

others, and it is important to guard against discriminating against those with quieter personalities. Nevertheless, hiring 'sticky people' who lead the way in forming warm workplace relationships should be an important consideration.

Incentive and reward schemes could also help. Organisations might include relationship building into assessments or even bonus scheme. This would offer a corrective to incentive

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- Require the GLA and related bodies to include relationship training in staff induction and in service workforce training and to expect the same from all contractors.
- Influence workplaces in London with a campaign to highlight and promote exceptional relationship-centred workplace initiatives and impact.

mechanisms that tend to narrowly focus on profit-oriented metrics.

Building relationships may seem natural to many, but is in fact a learned behaviour. Workplaces might therefore offer relationships training which could cover active listening and ideas for catalysing new connections. Training might also include activities such as [Human Libraries](#), which support empathy-building.⁴⁵

3. DIRECTION OF TRAVEL

d. Services

Building better services by building better relationships

WHY IMPROVE WORKPLACE RELATIONSHIPS?

London is dominated by services. Alongside public sector services such as transport, housing, health, policing and youth services – all of which fall under the Mayor's remit – over 90% of London's economy is made up by services.²¹

Strong relationships are integral to the efficacy of services. Research shows that a strong relationship with the service provider is a crucial factor not only in client satisfaction, but in outcomes spanning education, health and more.¹¹

Over 90% of London's economy is made up by services

Especially when it comes to public services, users are often vulnerable, and in need of help or reassurance. They may also face any number of barriers to benefitting from that service, such as digital illiteracy, language skills or mental health problems. An empathetic relationship with a service provider becomes particularly critical in these situations. Services are not only about providing information, but about inspiring confidence, reassurance and self-esteem when it is most needed.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY SERVICE RELATIONSHIPS?

By service relationships we primarily mean the relationship between a service, or a member of service staff, and the service user. Services can also provide spaces for service users to connect with

one another. The common thread is that these relationships are played out in the context of a service across all sectors.

BARRIERS TO STRONGER SERVICE RELATIONSHIPS

Austerity over the past decade has seen council budgets slashed, and research shows that this burden has fallen disproportionately on deprived London boroughs. Camden Council, for example, is spending 32% per year less than in 2010.⁷⁵ This means that services, and service staff, may lack the time or resources deemed necessary to build strong relationships. The Runnymede Trust and CLASS also found that both working class people and people of colour in London experience a particularly punitive service culture.¹⁵

ENABLING STRONG SERVICE RELATIONSHIPS

There are a number of ways we might improve relationships between service providers and service users, public and private alike. The ideas in this section focus on:

- Designing rules and norms to give service providers and users greater agency within their relationship.
- Co-designing services in a way that accounts for and takes advantage of service users' existing social relationships.
- Thinking about how services might provide space for users to build relationships with one another.
- Ultimately, creating a new narrative about the relationship-centredness of services.



Service organisations should be encouraged to afford both staff and users agency when interacting. Best practice must be developed and shared around how to allow service staff more freedom to safely respond to users, on the one hand, and how to involve service users in improving services, on the other.

SERVICES GIVING STAFF AND USERS MORE AGENCY

Buurtzorg is a model of holistic care, originating in the Netherlands.⁷⁶ The model is founded on giving the patient and the nurse a high degree of agency. The starting point is the patient's preferences, and in maximising the extent to which they can control their own life. The nurse is then empowered to deliver all the care the patient needs, finding solutions in collaboration with the patient's existing social networks. Solutions, or ways of working, are not prescribed.

This agency – allowing the nurse and the patient to collaborate as they see fit – has been at the heart of Buurtzorg's impact.

Collaborative services:
Working with service users & staff

Effective services rely on strong relationships¹¹. To provide an effective, personalised service which leaves staff and users feeling fulfilled, staff must be given the autonomy to safely and effectively deliver the service in collaboration with the user.

THE LONDON MAYOR COULD

- Establish meaningful user involvement as an expectation in every public service across the capital by 2022. Interpretation will vary from service to service, but a failure to recognise and reach for this important principle should be as unacceptable as a failure to consider equal opportunities or health and safety. This necessitates managing services under the Mayor's remit more collaboratively.

- Build this expectation into commissioning requirements in order to fund local councils and services pushing collaborative service provision.

As well as improving quality of care, the Buurtzorg model reduces required hours of care by 50% and costs by around 40%, versus the Dutch healthcare system. It has expanded into 24 new countries.

In a commercial context, retailer AO trusted both customers and customer service staff with an unusual degree of agency by allowing free returns and complete freedom in dealing with complaints. Despite concerns about mass product returns and botched customer service, neither came to pass. In fact AO saved money on management costs whilst making staff and customers happier.²⁶

There are plenty of other examples showing how affording a supposed 'problem' group agency can improve the services they use. Groundswell, for example, co designs solutions with people who have experienced homelessness.⁷⁷



Collective services: Embedding services within existing social relationships

Effective service relationships do not necessarily just involve a frontline service worker and a service user. Service provision can be enhanced, or even rendered unnecessary, if designed with existing social relationships in mind.

Without unnecessarily outsourcing work and burdening friends and family, service providers should consider how their users' existing relationships might improve their work. The ways in which this might be possible are likely to be highly context dependent. Nevertheless, organisations should endeavour to share what has worked well with other providers, especially those with similar cases. The Mayor, especially in services that fall under their remit, can get behind this.

USING SOCIALLY EMBEDDED SERVICES TO ADDRESS SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The Frome Model of Enhanced Primary Care, in Somerset, provides an example of how encouraging community relationships can, as part of a wider programme of activity, play a significant role in reducing the need for health services.⁵

The Frome model acknowledges that our social relationships influence our health. Accordingly, it works in three stages: mapping community services and activities, helping local people to fill gaps in provision and signposting patients to those services, for example by training 'Community Connectors'.

The results have been compelling. Partly thanks to this approach, hospital admissions in Frome reduced by 14% between April 2013 and December 2017, even as they increased by 28.5% in Somerset generally. Healthcare costs decreased by 21%, versus a 21% rise across Somerset.

THE LONDON MAYOR COULD

- Convene key players in the services under the Mayor's remit in order to determine opportunities for more collective, joined-up service provision.

Crime is another social problem with strong social drivers. This insight drives the work of the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit, started in 2005 in response to alarming rates of gang violence and homicides. Community relationships are integral to the model. From friends to barbers, community members are encouraged to help intervene through the relationships they have with perpetrators and victims of violence. This model explicitly recognises how violence, and so demand for services like policing, are rooted in social relationships. Although it is difficult to prove causality given the range of variables in violence statistics, the SVRU is widely accepted to have had a positive impact on the dramatic fall in murders and non-sexual violent crime since 2005.⁷⁹

Further examples abound. Social relationships are integral to Big Picture Learning, for example, which actively involves wider family members in students' learning.⁸⁰ And Buurtzorg regards patients' existing social relationships as integral to social care.⁷⁶

Services might provide spaces for practitioners, as well as service users, to connect and collaborate. The Walworth Living Room, for example, provides a space in which clinical and non-clinical organisations can connect and support people at risk of developing multiple long-term health conditions. Central to the idea is that different service providers can work together in tandem.⁸¹



Connective services: Designing services as spaces for interaction

Services do not only involve relationships between service providers and users. Services also provide space – either physical or digital – to allow service users to foster relationships with each other. Going to the shop or the post office, or even taking the bus between the two, is for many people a valued social experience.

To a large extent the responsibility for this lies with service providers themselves, who should endeavour to identify appropriate opportunities to encourage social interactions. But service providers also need to be aware of the benefits of and methods for doing so. The Mayor can help here, not only by designing the services under their remit in a relationship-centred way, but by promoting the benefits of doing so and sharing best practice.

UNLIKELY OPPORTUNITIES FOR RELATIONAL SERVICES

Supermarkets can be functional, manic, profit-oriented places – surely bad examples of relational services. Whilst often the case, supermarkets do provide an instructive, if unwitting, example of how everyday services can double as places for connection.

Tesco Maryhill, in Glasgow, for example, has become something of a community hub, partly because many customers also come in looking to chat and interact with long-term staff members. But a

THE LONDON MAYOR COULD

- Engage staff in the GLA and TfL in thinking about how management of their service would change if relationships were a central operating principle. What, for instance, might a tube station do to promote and support more connectedness?
- Influence the wider public with a campaign to back these interventions, so also helping to influence other services around London.

'culture of kindness' has also been deliberately fostered by store management, e.g. through kindness performance indicators.⁸²

There are other seeds that encourage the social aspect of shopping, such as the 'slow shopping' initiatives in Sainsbury's which allocate times during which shoppers who prefer moving slowly and chatting, over speed and efficiency, can do so without being hurried. These initiatives are particularly valuable for vulnerable service users who may have mobility issues, or who rely on those services as social environments. Similarly, Marks and Spencer's Frazzled Cafes scheme provided regular 'talk in' sessions for people feeling frazzled and in need of a chat.⁸³

The London Underground is famous for its lack of conversation. But research suggests speaking to strangers on transport is surprisingly beneficial, and commuters are surprisingly open to it.²⁸ London's transport systems could do more to encourage such connections. Ideas include designated 'chat carriages' on trains, conversation cards on buses and encouraging service announcements.⁸⁴

This final idea points to the role that 'sticky' people can play. Whether transport announcers or assistants in a job centre, these employees can help others connect by making introductions, using humour, or directing people towards physical spaces designated for new interactions.



3. DIRECTION OF TRAVEL

e. Disadvantage

WHY IMPROVE RELATIONSHIPS TO REDUCE DISADVANTAGE?

Put simply, strong relationships improve health and wellbeing. The Mayor has a particular responsibility to improve these outcomes for those struggling in London. But doing so also helps others. Reducing disadvantage alleviates care demands on friends and family. It also reduces pressure on our public services. Each isolated older person, for example, costs an estimated £6,000 in health and social care every ten years.⁸⁵ Adult reoffending costs London a whopping £2.25 billion per year.⁸⁶ The list could go on.

It is the breakdown of meaningful relationships which drive disadvantage.

Frequently, it is the breakdown or absence of meaningful relationships which drive disadvantage. To address this, building better relationships must form an integral part of organisational and policy responses to such inequalities.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY RELATIONSHIPS REDUCING DISADVANTAGE?

Disadvantage takes many forms and exists in all pockets of society. Widespread class and race discrimination, for example, exists throughout London.¹⁵ Disadvantages according to gender and physical abilities are also well documented. And, even though the number of over 50s experiencing loneliness in the UK is set to reach two million by 2026,⁸⁷ younger people are actually the most likely group in London to experience loneliness³¹. It is also

Tackling disadvantage by building better relationships

important to note that many Londoners experience multiple, compounding forms of disadvantage at once.

When discussing relationships that have the potential to address disadvantages, we are talking about relationships that seek to prevent, as well as 'cure'.

BARRIERS TO STRONGER RELATIONSHIPS REDUCING DISADVANTAGE

The most vulnerable people in society often face prejudice and discrimination which can act as barriers to forming a strong network of relationships. Disadvantage also often entails a relative lack of resources, knowledge or skills. Strong relationships can help both equip people with these assets and combat prejudicial attitudes.

ENABLING STRONGER RELATIONSHIPS TO REDUCE DISADVANTAGE

This section presents ideas that point to the role mutual, trusting, supportive relationships can play in this process. It would be difficult and dangerous to generalise across these forms of disadvantage. Rather, the ideas centre around three (compatible) types of individual relationship: mentoring, mutual support and relationships that explicitly grant marginalised people more agency – that could, if tailored to specific situations, provide a relationship-centred approach to reducing problems of disadvantage.

These relationships revolve around the need to create new narratives about the capacities of excluded groups and the importance of co-creation, norms and rules in seeding those narratives.

All organisations working with disadvantaged groups can work to ensure their services are designed in a way that recognises the agency of those that they serve, treating them as active participants rather than victims or villains. These organisations should also seek to share what they have learned – something the Mayor can help to facilitate.

ORGANISATIONS SHOWING US HOW TO TRUST

Timpson is a well-known British service retailer offering key cutting, repairs, cleaning and much more. Perhaps less known is that 10% of its workforce are ex-offenders or 'colleagues'. A key thread of Timpson's story is the unusual degree of trust it's given to its employees.⁸⁸

This trust starts from prison. Timpson hires ex-offenders based primarily on honesty and personality; who the candidate is now, rather than what they have done in the past. "For 10 years we have recruited personalities and then taught them the skills," says CEO James Timpson.⁸⁹ Training starts before release, and Timpson will find accommodation and pay the deposit if required. When work begins, Timpson's 'upside down management' approach means colleagues are strongly encouraged to do their jobs however they themselves think best, as the experts.⁹⁰

Radical trust: Building mutual relationships that recognise everybody's contributions

Feeling like you have something useful to contribute is essential to any relationship. We've seen numerous examples of relationships based on trust and agency transforming the lives of disadvantaged people.

Many at first regarded this approach as reckless, but the benefits have been profound. 3% of colleagues reoffend within two years, versus 61% nationwide, and the company enjoys a staff retention rate of 76%. Timpson believes hiring ex-offenders enhances its brand – something the Ministry of Justice estimates is true for 92% of firms who do so. Timpson also helps save on the UK's annual £13 billion reoffending costs, and has played a major role in removing the stigma around hiring ex-offenders, paving the way for others to follow suit.⁷

Too often, disadvantaged groups are treated as problems to be solved, rather than a key part of the solution. The London Mayor must take a leading role in encouraging London's organisations to follow these pioneers in building mutual, collaborative relationships with the groups they work with.

THE LONDON MAYOR COULD

- Convene diverse industry experts and leaders to devise ways to design, institutionalise and incentivise more collaborative relationships between services and service users.
- Influence organisations by highlighting good practice and leading from the front in terms of working with disadvantaged communities.

Too often, disadvantaged groups are treated as problems to be solved, rather than a key part of the solution



Mutual support:

Helping marginalised groups to support one another

Strong relationships often rest upon trust and shared experiences. For this reason, mutual support relationships between people undergoing similar challenges can prove extremely effective.

Organisations working with marginalised communities – whether public services providers, charities, housing associations or even cafes – should consider how they might leverage their resources to facilitate mutual support relationships, where appropriate. The Mayor can lead the way in championing and funding mutual support and helping to share best practice.

ORGANISATIONS SHOWING THE POTENTIAL OF MUTUAL SUPPORT

Organisations facilitating mutual support relationships don't necessarily label them as such. The Scottish Men's Sheds Association ([SMSA](#)), for example, testifies to the power of helping people – in this case men – to connect over shared interests.⁶

A Men's Shed is "a permanent meeting place for men where lots of good community and healthy 'self and group determined' experiences take place." Men's Sheds come in many shapes and sizes, and the SMSA helps men create and maintain them.

Men's Sheds make men feel healthier, happier, more confident

This seemingly humble premise belies the remarkable impact of Men's Sheds. Age Scotland found Men's Sheds make men feel healthier, happier, more confident and more connected to their communities. Economically, the social return on investment for the first Scottish Men's Shed, in Westhill, was calculated at £9.80 for every £1 invested.

Given a space, a nudge and a warm welcome, the SMSA shows that men – many of whom felt lonely, lost or unhappy – will connect and support one another. "After my wife passed away," [notes](#) one shedder, "life was just going to get food shopping and watching TV. Now I am working in my shed all the time."⁹¹

More formal examples of mutual support groups include [WEvolution](#),²⁷ which helps women from disadvantaged communities in Scotland to form self-reliant groups (SRGs): groups of people from similar social and economic backgrounds who support one another. SRGs have helped women improve their physical and mental health, learn new skills and save and earn money.

Here in London, North and South London [Cares](#) shows another model of mutual support which brings different groups together. By pairing older and younger people to hang out, both groups end up feeling happier and better connected.⁹²

THE LONDON MAYOR COULD

- Convene mutual support organisations and experts to inform a strategy for funding and otherwise supportive programmes.

- Fund relationship-centred mutual support programmes and pilots with high potential.

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Mentoring:

Making the most of one-to-one support relationships

Whilst not a novel approach, we think mentoring is a powerful idea worth championing. Mentoring can be a transformative method for helping people overcome challenges, providing affirmation and advice, and creating a sense of being valued.

Many Londoners can become mentors, either in their professional field or in their community. But it is organisations that must host thoughtful mentoring opportunities. Frontline support organisations should consider where mentoring relationships might improve their current offerings, and the Mayor of London must champion mentoring and convene organisations with expertise to share best practice.

LEADING MENTORING MODELS HERE IN THE UK

[Grandmentors](#) is an intergenerational mentoring programme that matches care leavers, aged 16-24, with older mentors, aged 50+.⁹³ The aim is to provide a supportive, trusting relationship to help improve the reduced life chances faced by care leavers.

Crucially, mentees are able to choose their mentors after attending 'soft matching events' and speaking with potential matches. Mentees then work

towards personal goals with their mentor through regular meetings for at least six months. This kind of continuous, non-professional, non-judgemental relationship can be [vital](#) for care leavers, who often interact with tens of statutory professionals but lack a reliable, supportive figure in their lives.⁹⁴

The model works for both mentees and mentors. 79% of Grandmentor mentees are NEET (not in education, employment or training) when they start the programme, but only 19% are when they finish. As for mentors, 73% report gaining a great sense of purpose, and 91% feeling more involved in the community.⁹³

Another fantastic mentoring organisation is [Switchback](#), an award-winning charity that supports men leaving prison to

THE LONDON MAYOR COULD

- Brief a new Relationships Commission to develop a London mentoring strategy, informed by the organisations leading the way.

- Influence frontline service culture by running a campaign championing best practice when it comes to mentoring in London.

build stable, rewarding lives.⁹⁵ 91% of Switchback Trainees do not reoffend within a year versus 51% nationally, and 59% reach the benchmark for [Real Lasting Change](#).⁹⁶ The centrepiece of Switchback's support is a long-term, non-judgemental relationship with a mentor who is there for Trainees on a daily basis, either side of the prison gates. This sort of support is a new experience for many Trainees.

Ten years' experience has taught Switchback the importance of trusting, human relationships for those in vulnerable positions. So much so that they are now championing a relationship-centred approach to policy in criminal justice and beyond – the kind of cross-sector work the Mayor should actively support.

The Mayor of London must play their role in championing frontline mentoring

4. THE ROAD AHEAD

4. THE ROAD AHEAD

a. Calls to action

Improving relationships in London requires a collective effort. The Mayor should lead the way in creating the conditions for relationships to flourish, but we all need to play our part in facilitating and maintaining better relationships in the places we live and work.

WE CALL ON THE NEXT MAYOR OF LONDON TO:

■ Launch a London Relationships Commission with the remit and resources to develop a deep, ongoing understanding of ways to improve relationships in London and support initiatives leading the way.

■ Commit to relationship-centred manifesto pledges, based on the ideas included in this report and other relationship-centred ideas.



Agree the destination



Know where to start



Identify priorities



Spot the breakers



Find the makers

TO OTHER PEOPLE ACROSS LONDON WITH THE AGENCY TO MAKE PLACES MORE RELATIONSHIP-CENTRED, WE INVITE YOU TO:

■ Use our five-step framework, and the ideas in this report, to think about how you can promote and support better relationships in your own places. Even small actions can change people's lives. And, if taken collectively, they can change the life of a city.

■ Join the conversation on [Twitter](#).

■ Subscribe to our monthly [newsletter](#), featuring updates on our work and examples of organisations leading the way in building better relationships.

■ [Contact us](#) about working together, either to make your place more relationship-centred or in some other way. We're always open to collaboration and ideas.

4. THE ROAD AHEAD

b. Reflections

We feel heartened by the enthusiasm and warmth that people across London, and indeed the UK, have expressed towards improving relationships and elevating them up the agenda. Given the scale of the challenge, it bodes well that people and organisations from diverse perspectives are committed.

The range of perspectives offered through this project has also presented challenges, both for our role as the Relationships Project and others working on relationships. In one sense the sheer number of ways relationships are lived and understood offers a daunting array of considerations and possible approaches when trying to develop practical methods for improving them. This was reflected in the often sprawling nature of the conversations we had during this project. Many of those we

to Jake Ferguson, of Hackney CVS, for moving this work in a more critical direction by offering to facilitate a conversation around relationships, racism and racial bias.

We are aware of other limitations to this London work – most notably that we have not offered thorough evaluations of the ideas presented here, or anything approaching detailed policy proposals. These are both directions in which we plan to move.

In focusing on the constructive potential of relationships, we cannot shy away from addressing bad relationships – particularly those involving prejudice and discrimination

have spoken with have felt a more focused approach would sometimes be valuable – something we will heed moving forwards.

We have also welcomed some critical challenges. This project made it particularly clear that, in focusing on the constructive potential of relationships, we cannot shy away from addressing bad relationships – particularly those involving prejudice and discrimination. We are particularly grateful

For now, our intention as the Relationships Project is to emphasise the case for better relationships, and to get more people – including those behind levers of power in London – talking seriously about creating a more relationship-centred city. The ideas in this report are intended as starting points and provocations. Likewise, the design process we present is a work in progress, but we hope a useful framework for supporting these discussions.

4. THE ROAD AHEAD

c. Moving forwards

We will take the thinking and ideas in this report into Mayoral candidate meetings over the Spring and will continue to promote both throughout 2020. We'll also be developing and pursuing many other strands to our work.



We will be undertaking projects investigating relationship-centredness in specific domains, comparable to this London work. And we will continue to surface, promote and learn from those leading the way to collaboratively develop practical ways to help others build better relationships.

Perhaps our most crucial task is to help grow the field around this work. Far from promising all the answers, or reinventing the wheel, we know that listening to, learning from and connecting others who are thinking critically about relationships is essential. Through our Joining the Dots blog, co-creation events, partnerships and our newsletter, we are doing what we can to bring these and many other voices into conversation and action.

GET INVOLVED

We would love for you to join us and really do welcome your involvement in this deeply collaborative work. Whether you have ideas, critiques, resources or something else to offer, please do get in touch.

SAY HELLO

WEBSITE:
www.relationshipsproject.org

TWITTER:
[@Rships_Project](https://twitter.com/Rships_Project)

SIGN UP:
For our monthly newsletter

EMAIL:
sam@relationshipsproject.org



APPENDICES

APPENDIX

Appendix 1: How did we imagine a more relationship-centred London?

Here we outline the process behind this project and this report.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

We started by delving into the academic, grey and media literature around relationships in cities. Our aim was to understand how urban governments and practitioners are currently working to improve relationships, and to curate a selection of ideas from around the world with the potential to do so.

2. CO-CREATION DAY

We then invited 40 Londoners - social sector workers, government officials, academics, entrepreneurs and more, all with deep experience of living and working in London - to a day of collaborative idea generation at Trust for London.

To focus the conversation, we divided the task into five topics: participating politically, living and socialising, growing up, growing old, and working. Drawing on our five-step approach to becoming a Relationship Maker, we created prompts to generate ideas and to discuss the relationships, barriers and enablers underpinning those ideas.

3. WRITE UP

This report, informed by the literature review and co-creation day and co-edited by a few event participants, distils the key opportunities. We will continue to promote these ideas through case studies and wider discussion via social media, our website, our newsletter and future events.

4. MAYORAL MEETINGS

As the Mayoral election campaign gathers pace, we will hold meetings with the leading candidates to promote both the ideas and thinking in this report. Our aim is to seed relationship-centred ideas and thinking into both manifestos and wider political discourse in the longer term.

5. GROWING THE FIELD

This project is not just about the Mayoral election. Through 2020 and beyond, it will continue to inform our efforts to gather knowledge, build practical tools and grow the field for work focused on improving our relationships.

APPENDIX

Appendix 2: Bibliography

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