

Wisdom from the PTS Partnership

Capturing the learning from
modelling person-led
change.



Person-led,
Transitional &
Strength-based
Response

By Mayday Trust



Introduction

By 2016 Mayday Trust had been prototyping a new **Person-led, Transitional and Strength-based Response (the PTS)** to working with people experiencing tough times for over four years and had started to see positive and statistically significant results.

People working with the PTS, formerly known as the Personal Transitions Service, reported an improved, more respectful experience; they were developing new networks, feeling more stable in their accommodation, and getting into work and training that built on their strengths and personal motivations. Early indications were that people weren't coming back into services as they were finally able to get on with their lives.

Mayday fully adopted the PTS as the sole response across all areas. This meant undergoing a complete organisational transformation to shift the culture, internal systems and structures toward being fully person-led, and implementing a unique way to measure impact based on assets instead of deficits. But, being a small organisation, evidencing the approach and modeling systemic change would require other like-minded organisations to join together to model a new system as a collective. It required PTS Partners. Together it was hoped that real and sustained change could be created by exposing the deficit system and the barriers it creates for people experiencing tough times.

Two national events were held in London and Manchester to share the evidence, the 'warts and all' learning and the potential of the approach with providers, funders and commissioners. Where this resonated, participants were invited to join Mayday to form the first PTS Partnership.

This required brave, passionate, mission-driven, and like-minded mavericks to take on the challenge with the aim of offering the PTS to 2000 people over an initial three year period. This was more than modelling a new approach; it required a commitment to listen and learn from the grassroots and the real, raw experiences of people in order to challenge and change internal culture and externally disrupt and influence the norm.

Seventy organisations expressed interest, and after a year of travelling up and down the country, the original PTS Partnership was formed. First to join was Changing Lives in the North East, followed by The Brick, Wigan; Derventio Housing Trust, Derby; Nomad Opening Doors in Sheffield; Cherry Tree also in Sheffield; SHYPP (now Citizen) in Herefordshire; 999 Club in Deptford and South Northamptonshire Council. Investment was provided by our trusted learning partners, Tudor Trust and Comic Relief.


Over the three years, the PTS Partnership and Mayday came together to test, learn and clarify what systems change meant, as well as uncover the ‘why and the how’ things needed to change. The PTS Response continued to evolve, highlighting the need for systems change, recognising systems failure and its causes, and finally uncovering the ‘system damage’ experienced by people.

The Partnership has achieved a huge amount over the years. This includes an evidenced strength-based data set, a robust PTS Response, a university-level PTS qualification for practitioners, new ways of attracting social investment through Social Impact Bonds, a PTS Accreditation and a strong Wisdoms methodology for exposing systemic barriers through deeply listening to people at the grassroots.

The following Wisdoms have been captured as a ‘psychology informed’ way of listening. They have derived from conversations, reflections, challenges and changes in many different organisations and contexts. These Wisdoms will be used to uncover what we need to consider and act upon if we are to achieve the mission of a full paradigm shift in the systems encountered by people experiencing tough times – leading to systems that work.

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The further decision making is from people, the less likely it is that organisations can identify the right problem and find the right solutions.

1 of 9 Listening to the grassroots

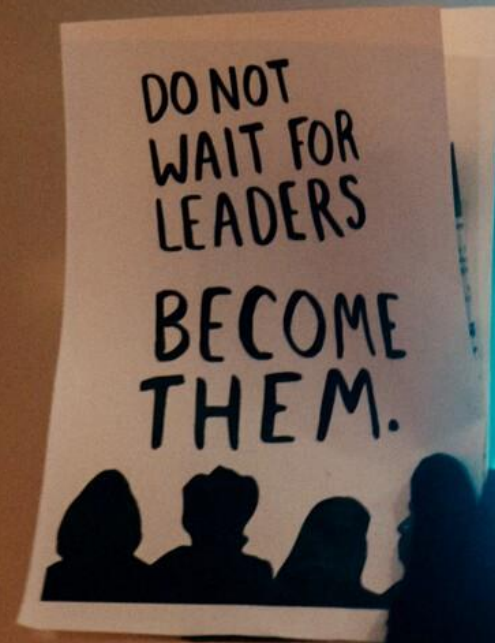
The grassroots-led nature of the PTS aims to level the power balance within organisations and presents an opportunity to listen to the experiences and nuances of person-led practice. This is done through the Wisdoms methodology which is a 'psychology informed' way of listening to people's experiences without othering or steering the agenda. This deep listening and reflection ensures that the systemic barriers identified inform organisational thinking and the right problem definition.

Carrying out specific local Wisdoms enquiries with people before starting the PTS Response would bring the voices of people into the heart of the organisational understanding and instil the grassroots learning culture.

Experience has shown that we need to be strategically led by the collective voice of people and not by the latest sector backed innovation. Only through listening at a grassroots level and reflecting on the current system can we find solutions for those trapped/damaged within the social care, homelessness, mental health and criminal justice systems. We can only radically change the system when we see and feel what the problems are.

Coaches, where they are encouraged to be politicised, have the freedom to be social activists so that people we work with are less likely to blame themselves and internalise symptoms as pathology when they understand the wider context of their situations and therefore can heal from their trauma.

Leaders who are interested and believe in the PTS show up and make efforts to change their organisation and the system.



2 of 9 Leadership - go big or go home

Developing a new culture by listening to the open and honest grassroots experience and using this listening to inform strategy and challenge externally certainly isn't for the faint-hearted! Leading transformative change is never easy, especially when organisational survival is always a struggle and when so much existing work is tied to rigid contracts and funding commitments.

What was clear across the partnership was that at the heart of everything it takes strong, committed, and brave leaders who are supported by full buy-in from everyone - practitioners through to Trustees. Such leadership needs to be driven autonomously, with the will and passion to take change forward and learning from their own unique experiences as they do so.

Throughout the three years working with the partnership there were changes to leadership, restructures and movements within teams which saw the PTS either remain a strong focus with the people involved, sitting at the core of organisational strategy, or it became more of a 'side project' in the case of new leaders being less invested in the PTS principles.

The PTS works best in the hands of passionate enthusiasts, social activists and systems changers that have a burning belief in the principles and a healthy appetite for risk, a commitment to learning uncomfortable lessons, the acceptance that you will not always be popular and the ability to make tough decisions for the greater mission of whole systems change.

Balancing the PTS with old systems and taking everyone on the same journey was a leadership challenge which highlighted that strength-based work is so hard to do within deficit-based structures and systems.

The approach gets diluted as everyone says they are doing strength-based work without understanding the level of change that's really involved.



3 of 9 The asset-based bandwagon

One thing that really stood out was the difference between saying you were doing something and really doing it.. The PTS has been developed as a whole framework for change, which requires a huge shift, not just in the delivery approach, but in data capture and measurement. HR processes and recruitment practices, income generation and marketing, how organisations listen and learn from the grassroots to inform wider strategy, and everything in between

The PTS is an approach, not a service model. Committing to this and making yourself and your organisation vulnerable to unlearn what you thought was best practice and re-evaluate every aspect of your culture and values is a personal journey, not just professional.

Articulating this, however, can be a struggle. To get across the difference to other providers, funders and commissioners that this way of implementing strength-based and person-led work is evidence-based, takes a positive approach to risk and is more respectful for people is tough; especially when many are unaware of the ripple effect that takes place once power is placed with Practitioners and the people they work alongside.

In response, the Partnership informed and developed the PTS Accreditation which captures the vast nuances of learning experienced by each organisation. This mark of fidelity represents that the approach, culture and willingness to positively influence through doing was person-led, transitional and strength-based and at the core of an organisation's mission.

Only when organisational culture changes
can the PTS have the autonomy and
understanding it needs to have a real
impact.

PASSION LED US HERE

4 of 9 Culture eats strategy for breakfast

Mayday saw that culture change is absolutely key for person-led work to be able to take place and have an impact. Where a learning culture was in place and the PTS was prioritised as a mechanism for uncovering systemic barriers, a shift towards more strength-based thinking and wider practice took place.

The PTS Partnership, as a collective, was able to share examples of change and difference and utilize the weight of the collective evidence and impact to influence through the doing.

PTS Coaching Teams needed to be free to undertake a significant amount of ‘unlearning’ and questioning of what had previously been embedded as ‘best practice’, traditional ways of working with people. Their role demands a much greater level of autonomy. They are required to challenge their own practice, their colleagues and the organisation to effect the changes that people and frontline teams need.

For this to work the culture of the organisations needs to shift to accommodate learning. This starts from the bravery to recruit the right people and to allow PTS Coaches to take the lead so that they are working for people and not for contracts or organisational blanket policies. Investing senior level time into learning and adaptation helped PTS Coaches to avoid falling back into default traditional practices.

Creating the environment for the PTS to work at the grassroots and adapting to the new learning that emerges leads to much greater impact for people we work with.

It doesn't matter how many people believe in it - if things don't change at a funding and local authority level, we just can't get a grip on it and it feels like we're treading water.

5 of 9 Comfortable funding or impactful investment?



The person-led, relational and human nature of the PTS lends itself to trust-based investment as opposed to traditional 'fundraising'. It requires individuals within funding bodies to invest in the principles, to come on the learning journey with us and to allow the money to follow the person, not predetermined outputs.

Packaged up projects and programmes don't fit this approach so securing funding within a traditional funding environment can be a challenge and it can feel like a choice between compromising the approach and organisational survival.

Success was seen where commissioners, social investors and, predominantly, independent trusts believed in the principles. They were willing to do something different and entered into a new power dynamic where learning, honesty and the freedom to reflect together to bring about change was prioritised. As one funder said, 'we are not funding your organisation, we are investing in you as individuals and buying your learning.'

Gaming for resources is still the predominant funding culture and it was difficult to set a balance between maintaining the fidelity of person-led work against the need for organisational survival. Seeking forgiveness, not permission in areas where organisations had a monopoly on delivery was not preferred, but wasn't uncommon.

For the PTS and other person-led approaches to become mainstream, it is evident that there needs to be a fundamental shift in the funding/commissioning practice and culture to allow for trust-based giving that follows the realities of people's lives and for learning to be a core driver of success.

We just want to be doing a good job and be able to say what we do and why we do it with conviction.

6 of 9 Data. The evidence

The PTS data set has developed to capture the internal and external assets of each individual through an asset development survey. The intention is to only capture hard outcomes that naturally occur and don't require deficit conversations or measurement.

Over the three years, the PTS Partnership as a collective has worked with 1700 individuals; 91.5% of those with a housing requirement have sustained accommodation, and 33.3% have engaged in employment, education, training or volunteering. Through the WEMWBS survey, 61% have increased their wellbeing. Through the Asset Survey, individuals' total assets increased by 4.5%.

Through analysing the data, it was found that people have higher internal asset scores (psychological) than external assets (sociological) indicating that it is often external situations and systems and not an individual's confidence/self-belief that has the biggest impact on people's situations. Focusing on building positive relationships and a purpose is key.

The vast range of asset scores that people have shown illustrates that there is also no correlation between 'complex needs' and individuals. Traditional assessments and data profiles don't capture or illustrate what people can do for themselves.

People chose to attend an average of 20 coaching sessions, but on an individual basis this varies greatly depending on what the person feels they need. This proves that time restrictions or dedicated support hours specified within contracts are not realistic. Offering unlimited time to access a PTS Coach isn't as unaffordable as first thought. The average take up of 20 hours of coaching reflects previous Supporting People funding.

Where services aren't default and time for support is not specified, people go on to thrive and achieve stability, sustainable networks and real-world solutions for themselves.

A close-up photograph of a hand tearing through a piece of white paper. The hand is positioned in the center, with fingers curled and the thumb pressing down to create a jagged tear. The background is a solid, muted blue-grey color. The lighting is soft, highlighting the texture of the skin and the fibers of the paper.

I worry that being disruptive would actually, at this point, be counter-productive and be seen as a little antagonistic.

7 of 9 To disrupt or not to disrupt?

When referring to disruption, it is important to note that the approach is to ‘influence through doing.’ Rather than trying to convince, change is modelled and what emerges is shared to show the impact of person-led, transitional and strength-based work that constantly questions and challenges the status quo. This is done in a supportive way, coming from a place of understanding the pressures that people are under as they operate within the current systems.

The language of disruption can feel like a difficult one to navigate because it may be interpreted as hostile rather than collaborative and inclusive. This can prevent people from feeling confident to challenge both internally with other departments and externally with commissioners, funders or other providers.

Building trusting relationships is at the core of being able to ‘influence through doing’ so that the impact of the work can speak for itself through sharing lessons learned in a congruent and collaborative way without the need for campaigning and convincing.

Working in this sector, we have seen firsthand that the system is failing and will continue to do so without radical change. This is not the fault of any one individual. However, we all have a responsibility to listen to people who have or are encountering tough times and to recognise the unnecessary systemic barriers they face.

Being comfortable with the uncomfortable is the reality of being able to influence change. Being humble and understanding as well as being positively disruptive don’t have to be mutually exclusive.

A row of white dominoes with black pips is arranged in a line on a reddish-brown surface. The dominoes are slightly tilted, and the background is a solid, muted red color. The text is overlaid on the upper left portion of the image.

Joining a movement is important
to get others to listen. It gives
individuals the strength to have a
voice and do something.

8 of 9 Principles vs framework

The PTS is a dynamic mechanism for individual, organisational, cultural and systemic transformation.

As such, it is based on a strong vision and set of unifying principles which allows partners to be guided by the fundamentals of the approach, whilst adapting to the local context and constantly learning from the frontline.

The nature of the partnership is to remain bespoke because this felt like the right way to ensure the organic development of the movement without suffocating what emerges through restrictive, mandatory processes. This allowed the individuals and organisations to apply the PTS to their unique contexts and make sense of what it was showing on their turf.

Being part of a collective helped to leverage credibility to have those challenging discussions and share the wider impact. Having individual ownership of the agenda to learn, reflect and influence ensured the nuances remained personal and not a blanket narrative which created the opportunity to develop independent solutions which informed our wider strategy.

Partnerships focused on mission, with a culture of openness, honesty and a healthy appetite for risk lend themselves to the real world nature of prototyping and emergent new systems.

Balancing the new, emerging system of the PTS with old systems, old power and traditional hierarchies is incredibly hard.

9 of 9 The role of the organisation



Working alongside PTS Partners, exposed how impossible it was to truly deliver ‘person-led’ approaches within a deficit system, including within traditional structures of organisations. This was an extremely critical point of learning for the Partnership. Each Partner was trying to deliver the PTS and system change within a wholly different set of circumstances and challenges.

Mayday was able to transform itself towards a person-led approach in such a radical way because of a committed Board of Trustees who had a healthy appetite for innovation and risk. Combined with a strong leadership team who focused fully on the vision, an organisational culture that supported prototyping, failure and risk. Motivated and mission-driven teams could then develop. This also required the ability to invest reserves, commitment from open-minded funders and investors who are willing to learn in partnership, not hold us to account against set performance targets.

Integrating systems change into the overarching organisational strategy is hugely important to keep it front and centre and not an optional pilot project. This helps to protect the PTS from wider organisational changes and the pull of survival over the mission.

If organisations are to ensure that they don’t become another part of the deficit system or another barrier for change, they have to be brave, listen and adapt alongside the people they work to be genuinely person-led and part of the paradigm shift that is needed.

The Learning

Transforming organisations through modelling person-led approaches continues to be necessary to bring about whole change as part of the wider systemic shift but it isn't easy! Being part of the movement certainly helps to hold nerve so we can learn, adapt and grow and live more comfortably within the permanent space of discomfort that brings about change.

The PTS movement continues to grow. If these Wisdoms have sparked a fire in your soul and you'd like to join us, please get in touch for a chat: Innovate@maydaytust.org.uk or visit www.maydaytrust.org.uk to find out more.



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