people know How

Unlocking Your ideas

Connect Four Journal

Social Innovation Model:
Positive Transitions

Debbie MacAulay

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Abstract

People Know How follow an approach called the Social Innovation Model to design and implement services. This model is used to understand the needs of children and young people, and subsequently design a service to meet their needs. By consistently renewing this understanding through cycles of the model, People Know How can continue to support children, young people and their families in Edinburgh and East Lothian to achieve positive outcomes that address current needs. This article will seek to detail the way this model is used in relation to the Positive Transitions service.

Keywords

Social Innovation, Positive Transitions; consultation, children and young people

Key points

- The Social Innovation Model is at the heart of People Know How.

- The Social Innovation Model is used to identify and understand the needs of children and young people.

- The model helps to facilitate discussions to create and continually develop the Positive Transitions service, to meet the needs of children and young people in East Lothian and Edinburgh.

What is the Social Innovation Model?

People Know How use an approach they have called their 'Social Innovation Model'. The model is cyclical, and moves through the following stages:

- Ask

- Research

- Do

- Share

Each stage is a separate part of the process, but all intertwine, forming a cycle. The cyclical nature of this model means that improvements and changes can be made continuously to best meet the needs of the people who access the services. People Know How use this model as they believe that "if we are to achieve our vision for the future, we must also make it our mission to empower people with tools, resources and a framework to deliver positive social change themselves" (People Know How 2020a). Miren Ochoa Sagues is the Head of Service & Research at People Know How and has been involved with the charity and Positive Transitions from early in its development. Ochoa Sagues (2021) states that the Social Innovation Model differs from other co-produced approaches to participation in which "consultation is typically just ask, then do". Although this is not necessarily true about all consultations as they can be fully co-produced and changes implemented and reviewed alongside participants, Arnstein (1968) has long argued that consultation can be tokenistic. The difference between consultation and the Social Innovation Model is that the latter has clear stages to be progressed through to help inform the next step. Mulgan (2007:8) states that social innovation, although usually given complex definitions, is "new ideas that work" and differs from 'improvement' as it relates to new ways of doing things, rather than small changes over time. People Know How says that "social innovation means supporting and championing new ideas which lead to systematic change for the benefit of all" (Vickers and Robinson 2019:4)

The Positive Transitions service was designed and implemented using the Social Innovation Model. The projects that make up the service, as well as all projects within People Know How, continue to be influenced by this model. Therefore, this article will seek to identify the ways the model has worked to bring forward new ideas for working with children, young people, and their families. To help articulate how the model has been used, this article will look at each stage separately, whilst linking them together in the same way the cyclical model does.

The Social Innovation Model and People Know How

Ask

The 'Ask' stage of the Social Innovation Model is about finding out what is happening in people's lives. People Know How state that they "begin every project by asking people to share their ideas, needs, strengths and assets. We believe that people know how to identify their needs and the solutions that will help them fulfil their potential and solve social issues" (People Know How 2020). The ask stage has some similarities to the 'plan' step in a PDSA approach to quality improvement and change. This stage looks at what change needs to take place, and what the possible outcomes will be (Donnelly and Kirk 2015). The PDSA (plan, do, study, act) approach "is a commonly used improvement process in health care settings" (Coury et al 2017). The ACT Academy (2018) say that the PDSA approach "is based in scientific method and moderates the impulse to take immediate action with the wisdom of careful study". The key difference, and the one that moves the model used by People Know How further towards a social innovation approach, is the involvement of the stakeholders that the change is designed to support and help. "Social innovation is seen as a way of looking to the systems as a whole" (Vickers and Robinson 2019:3) and this cannot be truly achieved without involving all the participants of a system.

In 2014, People Know How began a

consultation process with children and young people in Edinburgh. This involved asking one hundred and fifty-one young people what it was like growing up in Edinburgh (Ochoa Sagues 2021). The subsequent report, published in 2015, raised several issues being experienced by these children and young people, ranging from being able to do more the things they like, to changing schools to make learning more accessible (Ahluwalia 2015). A further consultation of over 500 more young people highlighted the transition from primary to secondary school as the uniting factor between all these issues. This was due to children and young people stating that in school, they felt supported in Primary 7, but needed more support in Secondary 1 (People Know How 2017). This paved the way to the establishment of the Positive Transitions service.

When creating a service to meet the needs of children and young people, asking them for their thoughts may seem simply the right thing to do. However, it is also an obligation under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Article 12 of the UNCRC clearly states that children and young people should be consulted about decisions being made about them (OHCHR 2021). The process that People Know How engaged in to ascertain the ideas, thoughts and feelings was in line with Article 12, and took into consideration the differing levels of ability to communicate. Ochoa Sagues (2021) shared their experiences of consulting with the children and young people, and how arts and expressive and creative approaches were used to hear the voices of all participants. Ahluwalia (2015) detailed in a consultation report, for example, that the children and young people were given 'pizza slices' to reflect upon and consider their thoughts. These slices reflected the Wellbeing Indicators that form part of the Getting it Right for Every Child framework used in Scotland to support children and young people to achieve their highest potential.

Research

The next stage of the Social Innovation Model used by People Know How is 'Research'. This stage involves the reviewing of "literature and best practice guidance to inform people's ideas and ensure there is an evidence base before proceeding with a project" (People Know How 2020a).

Research at People Know How is undertaken through the Connect Four Journal (previously called Research Briefings) as well as individual research around specific findings and analysis from the consultation process. For example the Connect Four Journal includes a team of volunteer writers and editors who help collate and create the articles that help guide the practice at the agency (People Know How 2020g).

Ochoa Sagues (2021) describes key research around befriending for children and young people that was one of the first projects to develop within the service. According to Befriending Networks (2021), befriending "offers supportive, reliable relationships through volunteer befrienders to people who would otherwise be socially isolated". Balaam (2014) suggests that befriending includes the following attributes: a relationship that is 'friend-like' with a volunteer, an organisational oversight of the support, and a co-produced relationship between befriendee and befriender. This approach is used by People Know How within their Positive Transitions service, with children and young people being matched to a suitable volunteer to help them achieve their goals and access support (People Know How 2020b). Siette et al (2017) found that befriending had a small impact upon people, whereas McDonald and Greggans (2010) found that children who had worked alongside a befriender found it beneficial. However, the research around befriending with children and young people, particularly during their transition from primary to secondary school is limited, certainly within peer reviewed literature.

Do

The third stage of the Social Innovation Model used by People Know How is 'Do'. During this stage they "run projects and deliver activities, putting ideas into practice" and have "developed a framework of monitoring

and evaluation tools which are built into [their] activities so that [they] are constantly gathering data to assess [their] progress and performance" (People Know How 2020a). This is the same, in principle, as the 'Do' stage (the second step) within the PDSA model. At this stage, changes are implemented, or new trials run, to understand what is achieved, with data being gathered to understand these potential improvements in service delivery and outcomes (Donnelly and Kirk 2015). This stage can be seen in action through the variety of projects run by People Know How's Positive Transitions service.

Befriending

Befriending matches children and young people with a volunteer befriender, who spends time with them each week to help them overcome any challenges they are experiencing and achieve their goals. This service "works closely with schools to provide young people with a befriender, providing a safe, supportive environment where young people and their befrienders can talk, play games, learn, and share stories" (People Know How 2020c)

Arts Therapies

This project "provides opportunities for young people to explore and express their emotions through the arts" and matches children and young people with a therapy student (specialising in art, music, drama etc.) to help introduce them to a creative way to express themselves (People Know How 2020d).

Family Support

This project is achieved by working with social work students on placement at the organisation. The students "consider the needs of the young people, and how best to support them and help them engage with family, school and their community" and work with the child or young person, their family, their school, and any other relevant organisation (People Know How 2020e).

Pupils Know How

Pupils Know How uses group work with children and young people on topics ranging from drama, science or art to school transitions or friendship building. "Each group is designed from the experiences and input of young people themselves, based on aims identified during our work with them" (People Know How 2020f)

Share

The final step of the Social Innovation Model used by People Know How is 'Share'. The organisation shares "the approaches and impact of [their] work to recognise and celebrate the positive outcomes, whilst identifying where improvements can be made. [They] then ask people for feedback on what [they] have shared, thus creating a cycle which drives continuous improvement" (People Know How 2020a).

As part of this step, VIPs (volunteers, interns and placement students) at People Know How provide the project coordinators with weekly diaries or case logs that detail the work that is carried out during each session, as well as areas of concern or focusses for upcoming work. Coordinators use this information to support VIPs, but also to create case studies that show the projects in action. Not only do these case studies help highlight the successes of the projects and individual work with people, but they also provide strong evidence that is shared with funders and stakeholders. Finally, this evidence is used to monitor and evaluate the projects successes and identify any areas of change required.

Collaboration is also very important to People Know How and forms another part of the 'Share' step. Within Positive Transitions alone they collaborate with 21 schools in Edinburgh and 11 schools in East Lothian, universities across Scotland and Edinburgh College and a multitude of community centres, community groups and third sector organisations. In short, the service collaborates across the four sectors – public, business, third and academic.

This cross-sectoral collaboration is enshrined in their 'Connect Four' initiative. The core concept of Connect Four is to share findings

and experiences, and to collaborate with people from all four sectors (public, business, third and academic). Through events, networking, and their open access Connect Four Journal article database, the organisation shares their practice, identifying partnerships and developing models of practice that can be applied by other projects beyond the Lothians (People Know How 2020g). In 2019, People Know How launched a social innovation network as part of Connect Four. This network brings together people from all sectors to combine the expertise from each section to drive change (People Know How 2019). The organisation also ensures the service user voice is carried through to this step by continually referring to the previous steps of the model through case studies, analysis from monitoring and evaluation and interactive social media campaigns.

Ochoa Sagues (2021) describes that the service has seen how (within their cluster of schools) the work carried out by Positive Transitions has had a positive impact on the lives of children and young people (and their families). The organisation is therefore looking for a way to share their learning nationwide, to promote working together across the education system and support services. There are other services that provide this kind of work, but all in their own ways. Ochoa Sagues (2021) describes the idea of bringing all the learning and evidence together, to improve practice for all children and young people, because everyone is travelling down "different rivers, but were going to the same sea".

The second tier of the model

While the first tier of the Social Innovation Model focuses on work in the local community, People Know How have now created a second tier that focuses on impacting change on a national level. This is made up of 'Action-research' and 'Campaigning & Lobbying' In this way, 'Share' forms a stepping-stone to the second tier of the Social Innovation Model, in which the findings from People Know How's local work in the community are used towards affecting change on a national level (People

Know How 2020a).

One example of action-research is the charity's recent collaboration with the University of Edinburgh. This project will recruit a PhD student who will seek to identify best practice for positive transitions across Scotland, fulfilling People Know How's aim that "every child in Scotland will have a good transition" (Ochoa Sagues 2021). People Know How are using a 'participatory action-research' approach to this (People Know How 2020b). Action-research is a complex and collaborative approach to research, with and for people, and should focus not only on seeking to answer the question, but in involving the people who the research relates to as active participants (Gredig and Marsh 2010). The project will look at practice and policy, to understand how this can be used to improve outcomes (attendance, wellbeing and attainment), with the goal of creating a model of practice that can be shared around the nation to "improve pupil transitions into secondary school across the UK" (Baldacchino 2021). Once the action-research takes place, the charity intends to develop a campaign to lobby the government to make policy change that will ensure every child has a positive transition to secondary school.

Another example of this step in the model can be seen in People Know How's 'Connectivity Now' campaign (People Know How 2021). Derived from their Reconnect service, this campaign vows to combat 'data poverty' as a step towards digital inclusion. Though not directly developed from the Positive Transitions service, the charity's digital work during the pandemic intertwined with their work with children, young people, and families, supporting them to access support online by providing families with digital devices.

Conclusion

As can be seen, each stage of the Social Innovation Model plays its own unique part in the design of and implementation of the Positive Transitions service. However, it has also been shown how each stage links to

the next. The 'Do' stage, for example, cannot effectively be achieved without first finding out what might work and why. Similarly, 'Share' cannot happen without the 'Doing'. By asking the stakeholders in a situation, the model aims to centre the voices of people who use services.

The cyclical nature of the Social Innovation Model must also be emphasised. Like all People Know How's work, Positive Transitions has undergone multiple cycles and iterations of the model, bringing in new findings, research and collaborations and ensuring the projects remain current. One example is 'Whit Dae Ye Hink?' a consultation which looked at direct work with parents to understand their perspectives on situations experienced by their child or young person, and how to support them. This allowed the team to begin integrating further work with families as well as the young people themselves and also led to the development of working in school clusters.

People Know How show how they use their Social Innovation Model throughout their resources and how it influences the future thinking of the organisation. It is, therefore, a robust model that helps ensure that services are designed with people, and for people, and provides a space for dissemination of evidence with a wider audience.

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People Know How

525 Ferry Road
Edinburgh
EH5 2FF

www.peopleknowhow.org

0131 569 0525

connect.four@peopleknowhow.org

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