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Collaboration Systems Change Trusts/Foundation

Co-designed systems change: Summer Foundation's journey

by Di Winkler November 30, 2016

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As the Summer Foundation celebrates its tenth anniversary, Di Winkler shares insights from the foundation's experience of co-designing systems change to keep young people out of nursing homes.



The not for profit and philanthropic sectors tend to underestimate the time, energy and resources required to take a piece of work from a pilot, or research, to systemic change. Without policy reform or embedding change, philanthropy can create a flash in the pan, rather than an enduring impact.

Serious and enduring social impact requires the philanthropic sector to not just think about systems change, but to co-design systems change with governments.

The Summer Foundation is 10 years old this year. It has been a challenging and rewarding decade

with a huge learning curve and along our journey we have learnt that evidence is necessary, but not sufficient.

We exist to resolve the issue of young people in nursing homes. However, changing policy and practice is harder than it looks.

Initially, we focused on research to provide an evidence base to change policy. Our early research found that young people in nursing homes are one of the most marginalised groups in our society with 53 per cent receiving a visit from a friend less than once a year.

While research is a key element of our overall theory of change, research alone is not enough. Without an explicit plan to engage government and other stakeholders, research is unlikely to have an impact on public policy.

CREATING A CASE FOR CHANGE

Listening to young people in nursing homes and families—and supporting them to tell their stories—is fundamental to developing solutions and changing systems.

Over the past seven years we have supported 130 young people in nursing homes to document their stories. We have produced 51 digital stories and supported young people to participate in 115 media engagements. We have had the privilege of supporting 88 people in public speaking engagements, including opportunities to speak directly to government.

Real life stories complement the research and make the case for prototyping new ways of working. Policy makers (politicians and public servants) are people too, and creating a case for change means telling compelling stories about real people that resonate with policy makers.

The Summer Foundation designs and prototypes solutions in collaboration with young people in nursing homes, families and other stakeholders. For example, after many years of research, listening and workshops, we completed our first housing project in inner Melbourne in 2013.

This year, we completed our second housing project with 10 apartments designed for people with



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Norm Anderson Young People's Trust to Inner North Community Foundation \$192,024

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disability peppered throughout a 110 apartment development in the Hunter region of NSW. One additional apartment for support workers provides our tenants with access to 24 hour on-call support. This housing enables people with disability to be part of the community. The design and smart home and communications technology incorporated into the apartments fosters independence and decreases reliance on paid supports.



Prototypes show that another world is possible. We are changing thinking about **what housing is possible for people with severe disabilities in Australia**. This brings our evidence and storytelling to life by not just showing why change is needed, but the profound impact that positive change is having on people's lives.

MEASURING IMPACT

Action research is an integral part of our housing projects. We have developed an evaluation framework to evaluate and iteratively improve the design, support and technology incorporated into our apartments.

In partnership with La Trobe University, we are documenting the costs and measuring the outcomes of tenants and impact on the liability of the **National Disability Insurance Scheme**.

We have an open source approach to the intellectual property generated through these projects. To us, this means being honest in sharing outcomes and evaluations, and providing the **resources** that enable others to replicate our work.

At the Summer Foundation, we are evaluating and capturing the knowledge generated by our prototypes to influence policy and practice and empower people with disability. Our **position statements** on key areas of policy enable us to be nimble and ready to make the most of any opportunities to influence government or engage media.

The Summer Foundation is also exploring new co-design strategies through our partnership with Telstra and we're also developing a model of **social investment to replicate and scale** our housing projects. We plan to leverage the 12 apartments we own to fund new housing for young people in nursing homes or at risk of entry. We are partnering with developers and community housing providers to replicate our housing projects in major cities across Australia.

Nonprofits and philanthropy cannot leave systemic change to chance. They need to develop and implement an explicit strategy for scaling pilots and changing policy and practice. Influencing decision makers and engaging and resourcing people with disability, families and practitioners are critical elements of policy change.

Designing and running pilots is often the easy part. Getting government to change is difficult.

Few nonprofits seem to have a well thought out plan to get from pilot or research to policy and practice change. Few philanthropic trusts are willing to resource the critical part of systems change, they tend to fund the pilot or research but not the plan for influence and scale.

Systems change requires considerable time, effort and resources. Nonprofits need a sophisticated communications strategy and resources to not only engage and influence decision makers, but involve and resource consumers and practitioners at the grass roots level. Changing the big picture is harder than it looks.



Dr Di Winkler is CEO and founder of **Summer Foundation**. She is currently a Commonwealth Government Specialist Disability Accommodation Industry Advisory Group Member, Victorian Government NDIS Implementation Taskforce Housing Working Group Member, NDIS Independent Advisory Council Housing Innovations Reference Group and a participant of the Disability Housing Futures Part II Working Group. Di completed the six-week Stanford Executive Program in 2014 after being awarded the 2014 Stanford Australia Foundation Dyson Bequest Scholarship.

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