

I've been thinking about what it takes to build relationships and trust, and if the Feel-Good Packs have helped us do this?



The world feels like it has gone a little bit mad, and 'normal' has gone out the window, so our ability to develop and maintain relationships and trust through our work is even more important. But has the way we do that fundamentally changed, or just feel a little different?

I asked my son what he thought was the most important part of building trust and relationships, and without hesitation he said **listening and being kind**. I think he is right, and in this Coronavirus-crazy world we need to consider how to best listen and understand what our partners are now doing to support people in our communities. Listen and understand the issues being faced, particularly by those in our priority groups and target areas, demonstrate empathy and understanding, and then help and respond accordingly.

The Feel-Good Packs (which look different in every place!) are an attempt to do that- respond effectively and creatively to what is needed, working collectively with new and existing partners with shared purpose and values.

We've heard from partners in education, health and social care, and the voluntary sector, that many people in communities with higher health inequalities are, at times, finding it harder to cope with lockdown. Lack of indoor space, limited outdoor space, larger households, underlying health problems, lower income, lack of resources and digital exclusion are just some of the reasons.



So, of course, the most obvious value of the Feel-Good Packs and the work behind them is that we have reached some of the most vulnerable families in our counties and helped them in some way to get through crisis.

But the Feel-Good Packs have also been a tool for building trust and relationships.

When I and colleagues reflected, there was unanimous agreement that this work and simple investment has helped us position ourselves as a trusted partner, and developed our understanding of people and place.



When we explored further, whether we knew it or not, we all deployed some key principles:

\* Working collaboratively – all playing our part and taking a shared responsibility to make things happen. Being part of the journey, not just a funding partner

\* Identifying where trust lies in our communities and enabling these partners to be the "front facing" organisation. Taking an egoless approach to the work. (For the majority this has been through primary schools)

\* Asking for help from partners in a place to help us understand how people were feeling and what needed to be done. Acknowledging that partners have skills, knowledge and qualities we need, empowering them and making them feel valued

\* Offering help. Not just understanding what was needed, but helping meet that need. This has connected us into the work and we are now playing a different role in the evolving relationships

\* Really understanding what is going on and what is possible, making sure we have a full picture of partners and communities' thoughts and opinions

\* Enabling and encouraging different offers. The packs have been led by resources and needs locally, with each place needing a slightly different response

\* Connecting partners with the same values and motivations together - some for the first time and for others changing previous negative opinions of each other

New relationships and collaborative partnerships have evolved that can be built on for the future, with a true willingness to work together to make a difference. These are strong because we have been through something and created something together.

Working together with partners we have had real experience in working more effectively together as we try to collaborate over a common goal. Together we have considered our thinking and ways of working, demonstrating flexibility, working differently and being brave when needed to make sure the right thing is done. We have all learnt when to lead, to make things happen and when to step back, to guide and support. Foundations for further insight gathering and place-based working have been built, we have aligned other areas of ours and partners' work and enabled things to happen, such as community use of schools and the Young People's Fund, and identified new community champions and volunteers who are stepping forward to be involved.

The first packs gave us an opportunity to engage and start a connection and conversation with local families. Now there are plans to build on these connections; be it with more packs to reach different demographics, holiday activities for local children in schools, or the local community shaping new health hubs. Our role in the next phase of the work will probably look and feel very different. A new norm is establishing and through this, it is important that we are still on the Feel-Good pack journey - guiding, supporting, questioning and learning as we go, stepping in when needed but also being happy to step back!



So has how we build trust and relationships at this time fundamentally changed? Well I would say no and yes! We are still working in the same way but perhaps have experienced, some for the first time, that we have had to be prepared to step in, to take the lead, to make something happen. Something that on the face of it seemed like "doing to" but has really demonstrated some of the new ways of working we are striving to achieve, but hey, we're open for further discussion...