5 key ingredients to sustain impact in health and care

At Guy’s and St Thomas’ Charity we support new ideas that tackle major health and care challenges in the London boroughs of Lambeth and Southwark.

The current context of rising demand, changing needs and reduced funding requires innovative ideas that improve the quality and efficiency of healthcare. However, even when innovations are evidence-based and have been proven to work, spreading and sustaining them is still difficult.

In our role as a catalyst for innovation in healthcare, we have taken a look at what it means and what it takes to sustain impact in health and care in our local area. With the help of independent experts, we have looked at hundreds of projects we have supported and have asked for the views of many directly involved in innovating in healthcare.

This is a summary of the key lessons we have learned, together with some illustrative case studies. They are designed to assist anyone leading innovation or interested in radical change in health and care.
1. Understand the problem you are trying to solve

It is easy to leap to a solution to a problem before really understanding the issue you are trying to solve. It is important to take time to tease out what the evidence actually reveals, and to ask the right people about what needs to change, how and why.

**TOP TIPS**

- Spend time understanding a wide range of perspectives as well as placing the idea within the wider context of the health and care system. Draw on new viewpoints and seek to understand what really underpins the problem you are seeking to solve. It is critically important to understand the problem from the perspective of the end user or patient.

- Consider a range of techniques for understanding the problem, such as data analysis, interviews and ethnographic observation of behaviour. Relying on only one risks you obtaining a narrow view of the problem.

- Don’t start from scratch. Think about what’s already in place to solve the problem, or what other attempts have been made to solve it. A full understanding of the problem cannot come without knowing why existing attempts to solve it are unsuccessful (or not wholly successful) and why. This may be as much about how past attempts aligned to the wider system as much as the intrinsic merits of the attempted solution.

**CASE STUDY The Knee High Design Challenge**

The Knee High Design Challenge is using innovation and creativity to improve the health and wellbeing of children under five in Lambeth and Southwark. It asked for people with creative ideas and new approaches to improving the lives of children to come forward and apply for support and funding to get their idea off the ground.

With our support, the programme invested six months to gather evidence to really understand the problems local families faced. This included a literature review to examine key themes and issues for parents and children; ethnographic research and activities that enabled families, children, early years professionals and other key stakeholders to contribute their experiences, perspectives and ideas. It also involved interviewing and shadowing professionals, and play specialists delivering child-led research.

Having looked at the multiple problems in depth, the project set out to find ideas under three major areas: connecting families to people and places beyond their homes; making it possible for more young children to learn and develop; and alleviating the stress, anxiety and depression experienced by parents during the ups and downs of everyday life.

Find out more about the [Knee High Design Challenge](#).
2. Stay focused on the impact you want to achieve

Policies, practices, people and priorities will all change over time. Your understanding of what does and doesn’t work will also evolve. This is why it is vital to keep an eye on the ultimate desired impact, adapting your approach as required, rather than delivering planned activity or reaching the next project milestone come what may.

TOP TIPS

▷ Build in time to pause and reflect at regular intervals to ensure your project stays aligned to emerging or shifting priorities, and other work going on locally and nationally. This will help ensure that your project delivers outcomes that are responsive to the needs of commissioners, decision-makers and patients.

▷ Be flexible and open to new approaches. Reflect on evaluation findings and the most current evidence base and ask whether you are on track to address the problem originally identified.

CASE STUDY Integrate Southwark

With one in three young offenders having an unmet mental health problem, Integrate Southwark set out to support vulnerable young people in Peckham in Southwark, and reduce serious violence and re-offending, by improving their access to mental health support.

The project built relationships with vulnerable young people and engaged them in the design of the programme and its ongoing evaluation. They also worked with the Centre for Mental Health to ensure a continuous evaluation of their emerging model. The growing evidence brought the challenge into focus. Whilst 40% of the young people would meet criteria for at least one mental health or behavioural problem, thresholds for accessing mainstream services remained too high for most. And there were also multiple and complex barriers to accessing services including mistrust, reluctance or inability to complete assessments and stigma.

As a result, the team re-evaluated one of its objectives of supporting these young people by bridging access to existing mainstream mental health services. Instead, they are refocusing efforts to carry on working with youngsters to address inhibiting personal barriers whilst continuing to build evidence to help get the right provision for this group in place.

Find out more about Integrate Southwark >>
3. Build the right team

Innovative ideas often come from the drive of one individual. However, this can limit wider organisational ownership of a new project and, at worst, can result in the project fizzling out if the lead moves on. Delivering long-term impact involves many different people. Strong leadership is vital, but so is acknowledging that design, delivery and embedding change may require different skills at different times.

TOP TIPS

› At the start of a project, consider the skills mix required across the project’s lifecycle. The people best able to innovate and rapidly prototype and test ideas are not necessarily the most able to scale up, spread and run a large-scale intervention.

› Consider when to buy in skills and when to invest in creating the capacity within the team. Creating internal capacity can be hugely positive when considering sustaining impact beyond Charity funding, but can take some time. An important test is how important the capability is likely to be if project impact is to be sustained.

CASE STUDY Breathe Magic

Breathe Magic is a programme that adapts magic tricks and performance skills into therapy for children. Through an intensive two-week programme and follow-up sessions, Breathe Magic helps children with hemiplegia, a form of cerebral palsy, to develop their skills and confidence through learning specially selected magic tricks to develop hand/arm strength, dexterity and coordination. The programme is run by Breathe Arts Health Research and we have supported Breathe Magic from the outset – providing almost £55k since 2009. The programme is receiving funding from NHS Lambeth and Wandsworth CCGs and is looking to create a pan-London and pan-regional commissioning model to benefit children with hemiplegia across the UK.

The programme director has successfully ensured that the right team with the right expertise is in place as the programme has grown and adapted, and plays an important role of ensuring that people work effectively together – respecting each other’s experiences and expertise and the role they play in the project. A critical aspect of this has been the continued presence of an academic as a core part of the team, even as the programme has moved from piloting to being a commissioned service. This academic expertise supports continued rigour in measuring impact, and strengthens the continuous improvement of the model.

Find out more about Breathe Magic >
4. Know what evidence is needed – and capture it

Assumptions are sometimes made about the type of evidence required to sustain the benefits of an innovation. Too often, project leaders conflate the requirements for disseminating results (for instance, through a peer-reviewed journal), with the requirements for sustaining impact. Whilst there is overlap they are not one and the same.

**TOP TIPS**

- Take time early on to understand the type of evidence decision-makers value, and agree the measurement tools that can robustly provide that evidence. Wherever possible, demonstrate costs, benefits, and potential returns on investment to commissioners, and try to be clear about potential cost savings if the project is sustained. Quantitative data are important, but so too are qualitative data in explaining how and why your project has worked.

- Give careful consideration to the resources required to deliver robust evidence of impact. Reflect on whether external support could provide the skills, capacity, independence, rigour and professional reputation required.

**CASE STUDY The Diabetes Modernisation Initiative (DMI)**

The Diabetes Modernisation Initiative (DMI) was a three-year initiative working across the local healthcare system to improve care and outcomes for people living with, or at risk of, diabetes in Lambeth and Southwark. The programme team worked with local people affected by diabetes and partners in acute, community and primary care to create a more accessible and efficient system of care.

The DMI team drew on a wide range of expertise and approaches to ensure that what they measured was valued by all of the stakeholders who would be vital to sustaining impact once the programme ended: from commissioners to patients and front-line staff. For example, patient-led measures of success were developed to accompany clinical standards. They drew comparisons of progress with local and national measures of quality and focused on population health to monitor changes in demand and need. This helped shine a light on performance and catalysed the changes needed to improve diabetes care.

This approach to the measurement of success created a shared purpose, ambition and a route map for all involved.

Find out more about DMI >
5. Establish and maintain the right relationships

It takes time and effort to build strong working relationships and trust in order to co-design and deliver a new project. It is easy to just focus on those relationships that are critical to delivering the project, and to forget about who is needed to sustain it. Only engaging people at the beginning and end of a project is not enough – the most successful projects take people along on their journey.

TOP TIPS

➢ Build and maintain groups/networks to help secure sustainability and involve them throughout the project. It is important to consider the most appropriate approach for different stakeholders. For instance, a sponsor group of senior stakeholders can build engagement of decision-makers. Seeking patient or service user views can be more challenging. The temptation can be to add one or two patient representatives to the governance structure but this is rarely sufficient – wider means of engagement such as roadshows or townhall meetings should also be considered.

➢ Communicate and raise awareness and understanding of what your project is and why it is important throughout the life of the project. Spreading the word about ongoing progress and lessons learnt will keep the project on the radar and help secure support. There is a natural temptation to hold back until the end, in case a project turns out to be unsuccessful. Whilst this approach can save blushes, if a project does actually work then a big reveal at the end is a weak way to engender support for sustaining the impact.

➢ Establishing links between your project and similar local and national priorities and initiatives will also help to create a supportive internal and external climate.

CASE STUDY KHP Pathway homeless project

Around 3,000 homeless people attend A&E each year in King’s Health Partners (KHP) – the highest figure in England. With our support, healthcare charity Pathway is introducing a model of enhanced care for homeless people that works by coordinating health services with specialist community services, and working with external agencies such as housing, social care and the voluntary sector to reduce the difficulties associated with managing and discharging homeless people from hospital.

From the outset, the project team identified those organisations that would be critical to achieving sustainability and, from this, a steering group was created, involving key clinical managers and commissioners from the beginning. Both the project team and steering group crafted tailored plans to engage the relevant groups, build relationships with local organisations and cement networks.

The team has continued to maintain and strengthen relationships throughout the project. They keep partners and stakeholders involved with what is happening through face-to-face events and tailored reports.

Find out more about the KHP Pathway Homeless project ➢
Find out more about our work as a catalyst for innovation in healthcare on our website www.gsttcharity.org.uk

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