

# OXFORD EARLY YEARS

## Rapid Action Lab Report

June - December 2018

How can we work together  
in addressing priority  
needs for children 0-5 in  
Oxford?



**The Oxford Early Years is a bold new initiative bringing together parents, professionals, educators, local representatives and funders to work together and take action to address priority needs for children under 5 in Oxford.**

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# Foreword

by Sara Fernandez, Oxford Hub

The Early Years Rapid Action Lab is a bold new initiative bringing together parents, professionals, educators, local representatives and funders to work together and take action to address priority needs for children under 5 in Oxford. The Lab was designed to increase the quality and quantity of universal provision for children under 5 and their families in Oxford City. Participants in the Lab focused on supporting Oxford's regeneration<sup>1</sup> areas, where social mobility is less prevalent, and strengthening the network of Early Years professionals and venues across the city.

This work was a direct response to the changing landscape of Early Years provision and the Social Mobility State of the Nation Report<sup>2</sup> identifying Oxford City as a particular 'cold spot' of social mobility, ranking 19th from the bottom amongst over 200 local authorities. Some of the causes of this social mobility challenge are structural and rooted in national policy decisions. However, there is encouraging evidence that policies and initiatives by local authorities can influence these deprivation outcomes, and effectively tackle place-based inequality.

During the course of the first cycle of the Oxford Early Years Rapid Action Lab, participants worked together to develop a shared understanding of the challenges facing children in Oxford. We built this understanding by dialoguing with each other, learning from community leaders and visiting organisations in the community. Together, we came up with a number of ideas for how to address priority needs for Oxford's children. Over the course of the six months, we tested five ideas, through an approach known as "prototyping." This involved small teams designing and launching an initial version of their idea to determine its impact in supporting children under 5 and their families. This work was supported by an Innovation Fund of £25,000 provided by Oxford City Council, which enabled participants to test their ideas.

This evaluation reviews the work of the first cycle of the Early Years Rapid Action Lab, delivered through a partnership between Oxford City Council, Oxford Hub, Roller strategies, Oxfordshire County Council, Early Years professionals, and parents, which took place between June and December 2018.

<sup>1 2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/social-mobility-in-great-britain-fifth-state-of-the-nation-report>

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# Changing the Landscape



# The Early Years Lab as a strategic experiment

The Early Years Rapid Action Lab was an experiment. In launching the Lab we set out to determine if there was a need for a collaborative platform in the Early Years sector for the City. The Lab was deliberately designed as a low-cost, rapid, participatory experiment. It was designed to test demand for such a platform and the efficacy of this platform as a potential strategy.

It is important to understand our ambitions as being limited in scope. The Lab was not launched to provide long term solutions to the myriad of challenges faced by the sector but rather to test a strategic direction of collaboration. We believe that the long term challenges of the sector will only be addressed through acts of deliberate and sustained collaboration, which transcend individuals and organisations. Perhaps the key components of this Lab were to test the

willingness of actors in the sector to work collaboratively over time. As one participant of the Lab, a veteran of the Early Years space, commented, “The Early Years Rapid Action Lab is one of the few rays of hope we have.”

Our conclusion is that there will never be enough financial capital in the Early Years sector to buy, outright, solutions. Instead the financial capital that we are able to deploy must be leveraged to bring other forms of capital to bear on the substantial challenges we face. The Rapid Action Lab demonstrates that a collaborative platform is a good strategic response to the challenges the Early Years sector faces. Ensuring that such a collaborative platform can significantly impact the long-term challenges the sector faces requires overcoming a number of challenges.

**“The Early Years Rapid Action Lab is one of the few rays of hope we have.”**

# Mobilising Multiple Capitals

Oxford is a city blessed with abundant capital. We boast two of the world’s best known universities, we are home to multiple world class non-governmental organisations and while austerity has hit the public sector, we are still one of the most financially stable cities in the country.

Despite this abundance the challenge of capital mobilisation is significant. Key actors in the city need to launch a campaign focused on mobilising the resources of the city in order to unlock greater potential beyond the current situation.

# Increasing Diversity

Oxford is a diverse city, growing even more diverse. This diversity represents latent capacity that remains largely unrealised. The Early Years Sector represents a small community in the wider Oxford landscape. The challenge of bridging multi-cultural

barriers will need to be addressed for any Early Years strategy to succeed. The Lab demonstrated that there is appetite in the city for such barriers to be overcome, to work across sectors and bridge the gaps between many people in our society.



# Under Promising, Over Delivering

Naomi Eisenstadt, one of the architects of Sure Start, visited the Lab to coach some of the teams. In her closing remarks she commented that the broad challenge for the Early Years sector is to stop over promising and under delivering.

The premise of Early Years intervention is tremendous. Effective Early Years could dramatically impact downstream demand for a number of services.

A platform based approach represents a sound strategic bet in the context of declining resources and increasing demand for services. A successful strategic response would need to address the challenges of over promising and under delivery, to instead become realistic and pragmatic about the support that can be offered to children and their families.

## Looking ahead

The work of the Early Years Rapid Action Lab has only just begun. We have big hopes for the work supporting children under 5, as research evidence shows that positive outcomes at this stage can have a large effect throughout their lives, and so this work can be really transformative as a way to address inequality in Oxford City.

The experience of other Social Lab initiatives across the world shows that the most value comes from Labs which develop into long-term, stable platforms for addressing challenges collaboratively. Beyond the duration of this cycle, we want to work towards building a more stable Social Lab.

This long-term intention requires a different type of philanthropy and support, one that is open minded about

the work being delivered, puts Early Years partners in control, and enables them to test and learn as they work on the challenge. It also requires an Early Years Innovation Fund which matches the scale of the challenge we are facing. We believe that raising £1m over three years would enable Early Years parents and practitioners to change the odds for children in Oxford's areas of regeneration, and come off the 'cold spot' social mobility list.

While we work on the overall strategic goal of tackling social mobility across the city, we are encouraged by the value that the different prototypes have created, and the value that they will continue to create working on the ground with parents and children.



# 2

Going from  
symptoms to  
root causes



# Imagine a thriving Early Years system in Oxford

Oxford was identified in the 2017 Social Mobility Report as the 19th worst locality in Early Years' social mobility indicators for disadvantaged children. Some of the causes of this social mobility challenge are structural and rooted in national policy decisions that cause deprivation outcomes and inequalities. It is the disadvantaged areas in the city which are in focus with these issues, where there are high numbers of vulnerable families and children.

It is becoming more and more evident that early intervention as a way of addressing societal and social problems,

is a long term but potentially high impact solution; working with the root cause. Early Years are an extremely important time in the emotional and social development of a child. We know that a good start with learning and personal support has a profound effect on the educational experience and development of a child, carrying well into their adult lives. Supporting families with young children in their community is a vital way of addressing the greater picture of social mobility, poverty, and the current challenges faced by our country, county and city.

## Unlock greater potential in children and their families

With a great deal of changes to the Early Years statutory services and funding over the last two years, the landscape has shifted significantly. Voluntary initiatives and community-led children's centres have taken on a bigger role, supported by transition funding from Oxfordshire County Council. However, these children centres cannot sustainably provide the

necessary support to vulnerable children and families on their own. As highlighted in research that pre-dated the Lab, partnerships among children centres and across other service providers such as health, education and the voluntary sector are essential in effective provision for families in Oxford.

## A children and young people's strategy

The 2018-2022 strategy<sup>3</sup> in Oxford for young people draws upon the Ready by 21<sup>4</sup> framework to work toward supporting every child and young person in reaching their full potential. A big part of this strategy is in supporting youth and young people in developing healthy relationships and preparing them for studies or employment. Most initiatives focus on youth and older children, which has been the focus of the Oxford Youth Strategy for the past five years. As part

of the Ready by 21 implementation, the Council's strategy has begun to also focus on Early Years. This recognises that there is an important developmental window, both when children are mostly dependant on parental support up to 5 years old, and also during primary school age. The Rapid Action Lab has begun to mobilise the Early Years sector in the City to contribute to the Ready by 21 strategy.

## A Rapid Action Lab in Oxford

The Early Years Lab has been working with the following challenge statement:

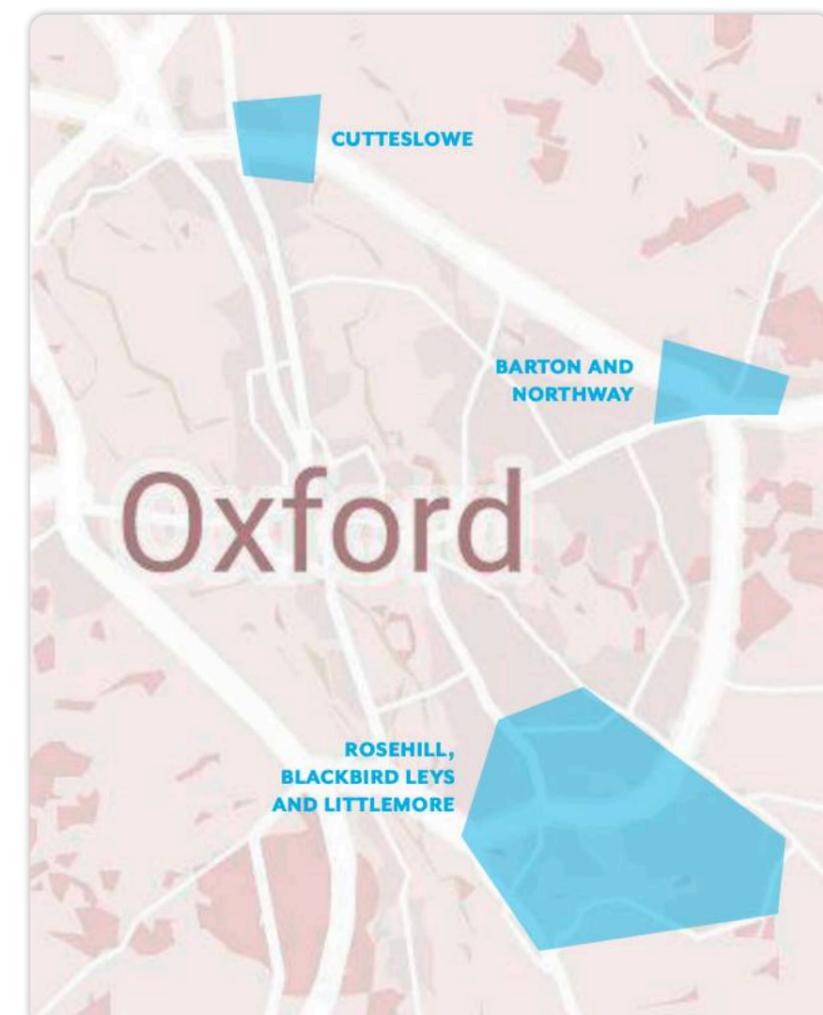
### How can we work together in addressing priority needs for children 0-5 in Oxford?

The Lab has been focused in the following areas, identified as regeneration areas:

- Rose Hill
- Blackbird Leys
- Barton
- Northway
- Cotteslowe
- Littlemore

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.oxford.gov.uk/news/article/881/oxford-city-council-sets-out-future-strategy-for-young-people>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.readyby21.org/what-ready-21>



# Priority needs according to 'A Better Start'

The priority needs that have been identified draw upon research done by the Dartington institute as part of The Big Lottery's A Better Start programme <sup>5</sup>. These needs are:



## 1. Diet and Nutrition

This is particularly linked to the health and diet of an infant's mother, with a great deal of effects being passed onto a child during the time in the womb. Beyond this, breastfeeding is the optimal way of feeding babies, something which is less common in the UK than other countries

and even more so in mothers from lower socio-economic backgrounds. The success of breastfeeding has as much to do with the support and environment the mother lives within as it does with her own health.

## 2. Positive social and emotional development

Social and emotional development of a child begins at birth and is greatly influenced by the environment they are born into, and their relationship with primary care-givers. A positive experience in these foundational years is strongly linked to mental health, successful

relationships, contribution within a community and performance in school and work. Again, the well-being of the parents is a key factor here, and the surrounding environment the family lives within.

## 3. Speech, language and communication

Communication is the heart of all relationships and ability with speech and communication patterns begin as soon as a baby is born. This development plays a huge part in a child's ability to participate in school and their language level and communication proficiency upon

beginning preschool will have a huge influence on their entire schooling experience and continue into their adult life. A child's vocabulary at the age of five has been found to be the best predictor of whether a disadvantaged child can lead a fulfilling life.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/global-content/programmes/england/fulfilling-lives-a-better-start>

# How will we get there?

## Design Principles

In line with the Children and Young People's strategy, the principles with which the current challenge is being addressed are:

### 1. Preventative-led provision

The focus is on providing universal provision of services which supports children and young people to develop healthy patterns, relationships and other conditions which enable them to thrive. It speaks to addressing the root, rather than treating the symptoms of the issue. Early

intervention is this by definition; aiming to help support young children and their families in this essential time, in order to create a foundation which their childhood and youth will build off.

### 2. Equality and inclusion and engagement of young people and their families

In the case of Early Years it is vital to engage the parents of young children, to include them in the process of developing solutions and ensure that provisions are reaching families in need. This also speaks to working universally, engaging different families and diverse communities

### 3. Facilitate excellent partnership working

Effective cross-sector partnership has been identified as a key way to support the Ready by 21 strategy, especially in the context of financial austerity. This speaks to supporting and facilitating existing relationships to be strengthened and new ones to be formed. This will result in increased

communication and cooperation across different service providers to be able to provide a more comprehensive, consistent and united Early Years strategy than what could be done independently.

With these three principles in mind, a strategy was decided upon to take collaborative action in addressing the priority needs of children under 5, in the form of a Rapid Action Lab.



# What is a Rapid Action Lab?

A Rapid Action Lab (RAL) is a strategy for quickly achieving coordinated action. It is designed to support situations where rapid intervention is necessary, where there are a range of diverse stakeholders actively working, or attempting to work, but are often doing so siloed and struggling to coordinate across organisations or sectors. The RAL is a collaborative process which relies on building trust and connection within the sector to create sustainable impact. It is a strategy for quickly coming up with and testing out possible solutions to a stated challenge and is designed to address complex social situations, where changes can happen rapidly and the stakes are high for the people involved.

The Rapid Action Lab centres on involving the people most connected to the issue in developing the solutions. This includes those experiencing the challenge, those working on the challenge, professionals in the field and others who are deeply committed to the challenge locally and/or through personal connections. This mix of participants is key to ensuring a deep knowledge of the challenge and in having a diversity of opinions, ideas and abilities.

Though the focus in the Rapid Action Lab is on the solutions which the team of participants is developing, the foundation off which these solutions are built and the effects that may outlast the prototypes, are the relationships developed and strengthened during the process.

A Rapid Action Lab, has three core elements which characterise it. The first is that it is Systemic meaning the focus is on root causes rather than systems: this is aligned with principle #1 listed above, preventative-led provision. The second characteristic is that they are Social, being focused on bringing together a diverse group of stakeholders. This speaks to principles #2 and #3: Inclusion, engagement and the facilitating of partnerships. The third characteristic of an RAL is that it is Experimental, iterative in its approach to addressing the challenge.

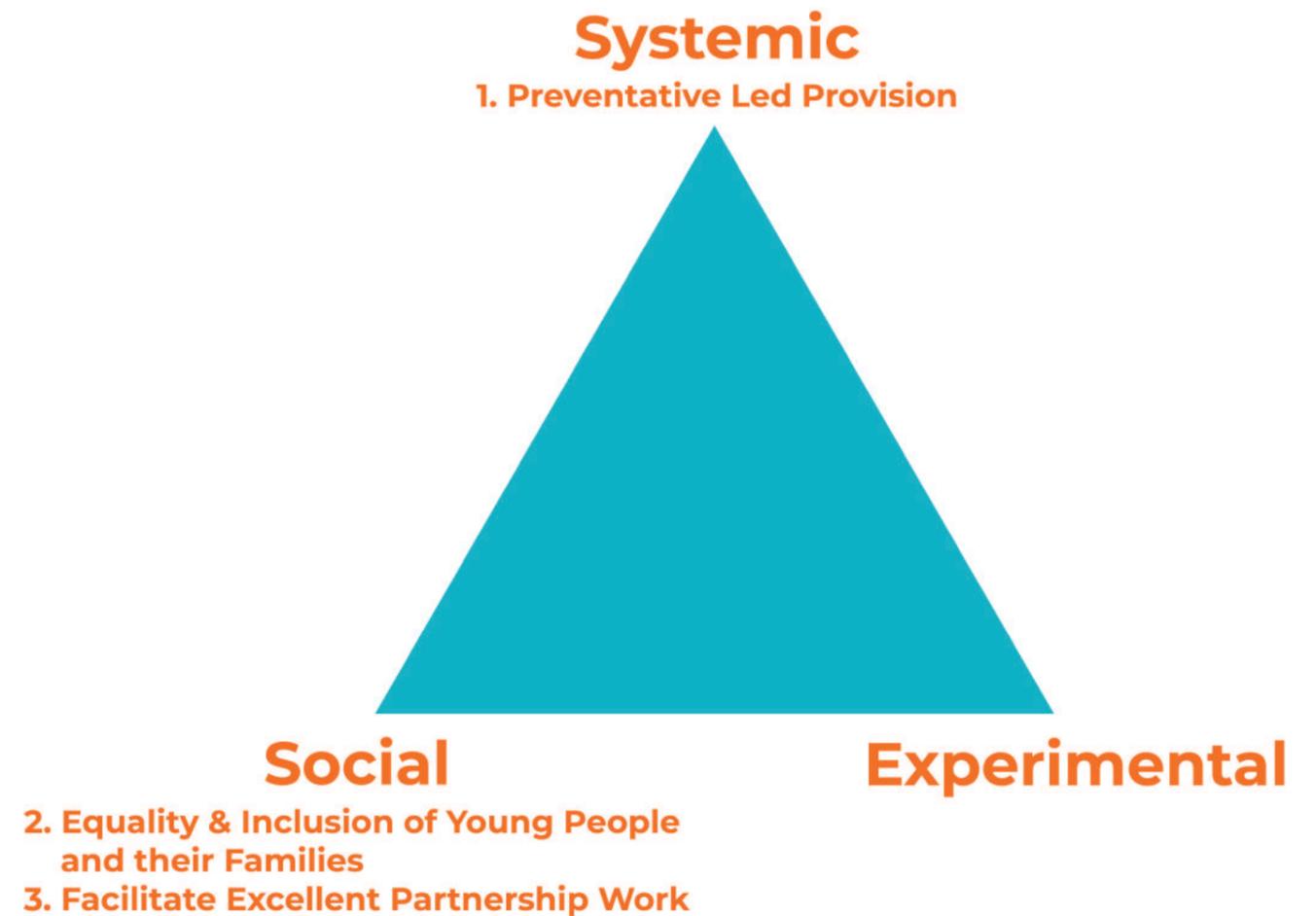


Figure 1: The cross over between RAL core elements and the design principles

# Shift from planning to experimental and action based work

This principle speaks to the nature of prototypes, and a process focused around having the participants work to develop ideas and rapidly implement them with the stakeholders - in this case children and families in the identified areas. There is a great deal of research and data around Early Years, different interventions and the state of affairs; however in these types of complex social settings, context is everything. Solutions need to be developed to address the area and families specifically whom we are trying to support. And so, the best approach for this is to move into an action mode, to be able to quickly implement and see the results

of the approaches we are taking through involving parents in the process, having their input on whether or not the services are having a positive impact for them and their communities.

A key part of supporting this shift into action is having an "Innovation Fund" for the Lab team to work with. This fund is purely for the purpose of implementing prototypes developed by the team, and is not for planning or administrative costs. In the case of the Early Years RAL, the Lab team had a £25,000 Innovation fund with which to build and test their prototypes.

## Beyond financial resources

Another characteristic of a RAL is growth in impact, rather than a sole focus on financial gains. It is quite clear that the narrow traditional economic definition of capital does not cover what needs to be in place for a thriving society. There are sources of capital beyond simply the traditional assets of production and economic output.

Development is considered to be sustainable if more capitals beyond the

financial are maintained or increased over time. In order to assess sustainable development five capitals have in this case been the starting point; Social, Human, Physical, Intellectual and Financial. Changes in the five capitals have during this cycle been monitored using sustainable development indicators such as well-being, productive potential of individual, human well-being on a societal level as well as new solutions and ideas.

# Timeline

The process for a Rapid Action Lab has 3 key steps, which have been enacted over the course of 2018 (see Figure 3, page 26).

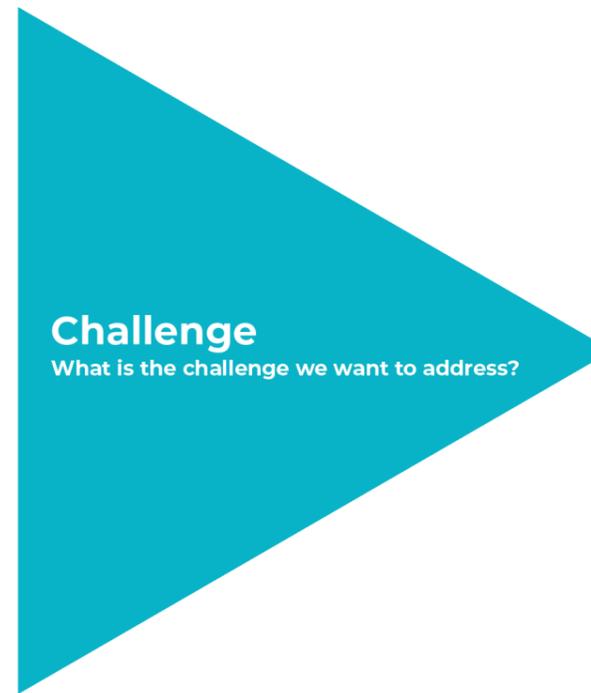
## Step one/ Bringing in the community

*Between 30 to 40 key stakeholders are identified and invited to come together. The aim is to bring in a wide range of people who are connected to the challenge in different ways.*

This stage is known as the "Preconditions phase", and for the Early Years RAL it took place between January and May 2018. The work during this time was to ensure the necessary conditions were in place to kick off the Rapid Action Lab. These conditions are:

### Resources

What resources do we need?



### Challenge

What is the challenge we want to address?

### Strategic Direction

What direction should we take?

### People

What do we need to address the challenge?

Figure 2: The preconditions of a Rapid Action Lab

## Who needs to be on board?

Key people in the sector were identified and invited into the process, along with a wide range of stakeholders in the Early Years system, including the statutory sector, social sector organisations, health visitors, state maintained nurseries, faith groups and parents. The Lab process was introduced to these potential participants and lab champions at a workshop in April as part of Marmalade, the fringe event to the Skoll World Forum. The aim of this Marmalade gathering was to test interest in participation in an RAL, begin to explore themes and opportunities in the system and demonstrate what the process would look like. 17 people came to this gathering

## Step two/ Lab delivery phase: Cycle one

*The identified stakeholders spend three days together in a workshop process to deepen their knowledge on the topic, ideate on and develop 4-6 different solutions to the challenge, forming smaller teams around each solution. Each of the teams then begin working on creating their solution to the challenge. This process runs over a period of 3-6 months, during which they will have coaching from a support team and regular touch points with the other Lab teams. The process is done in iterative cycles, meaning they create a fast prototype solution, test it out, evaluate the results, make changes, test again and so on.*

The kick-off workshop took place between the 6th and 8th of June, when 32 participants came together and organised into 5 teams with a different solution in focus. The workshop included various Learning Journeys. Learning Journeys are trips through which a team can develop a shared, grounded understanding of the

and eight of those became participants in the Lab.

The Marmalade event marked the start of official invitation to participate in the RAL. This recruitment process happened between April and June, and was led by Sara Fernandez at the Oxford Hub. Potential participants were invited to join the Lab team, to commit 90 hours between June and September including the workshops which would happen, to work within the Lab team with other participants who were passionate about the Early Years system.

system they are trying to influence. In this case the participants visited different locations of relevance such as the Slade nursery or Donnington Doorstep Children's centre, to speak to people on the ground who are directly involved in the challenge. The findings from the Learning Journeys, as well as some of the immense knowledge of the system that was present in the room were shared, and used as a starting point to develop potential interventions.

Once divided into five teams the participants further developed upon these interventions to decide a solution they would then test out, in prototype form, during the next month. Each team created an action plan and was given a budget of £5,000 out of the innovation fund with which to begin implementing their idea. This workshop marked the start of the first cycle of the RAL.

This first cycle ran between June and September 2018. During this time the

Lab team worked on their prototypes and initiatives within the local community. They have met together regularly within their teams to work on their prototypes, and then all together once a month in workshops which are referred to as

studios. Each studio workshop represents the start and end of a new iteration cycle of their idea. It involves getting feedback from other Lab teams as well as external guests, adjusting their work and plans for the next iteration cycle.

## Step three/ Sustaining collaboration: The Inter-cycle

*During the Inter-cycle period, teams may continue to work on their prototypes and maintain progress. The delivery team reviews learnings and designs the next Lab cycle. Preconditions work for the next cycle will commence including redefining the Lab challenge, assessing readiness for the next cycle, convening and recruiting new partners and participants, and preparing to launch the next delivery cycle.*

While the initial cycle ran between June and September, the aim was to extend the activity of the Lab beyond this, with beginning a second cycle shortly afterwards. With the prototypes gaining more traction, and the Lab team strongly engaged it made sense to extend the existing activities beyond September, and so ensued the 'Inter-cycle', an extension of cycle one.

The objective of this period of time was to further develop the existing prototypes with the remaining funds and ongoing

support. From October the RAL benefited from additional support to the Lab teams from a group of Kaospilot students, who provided more involved coaching and support for the different teams during the last three months of the process.

Much like the first cycle, this period from October and December was structured around monthly studios, between which the Lab teams worked to develop and strengthen their prototypes with the additional support from the Kaospilots.

During this time preconditions work for cycle two was done, seeking funding opportunities and assessing the strategy of the RAL.

The closing studio took place in early December, where the six months of work was consolidated, and the lab team were brought together a final time to close off and look at how the initiatives could continue.

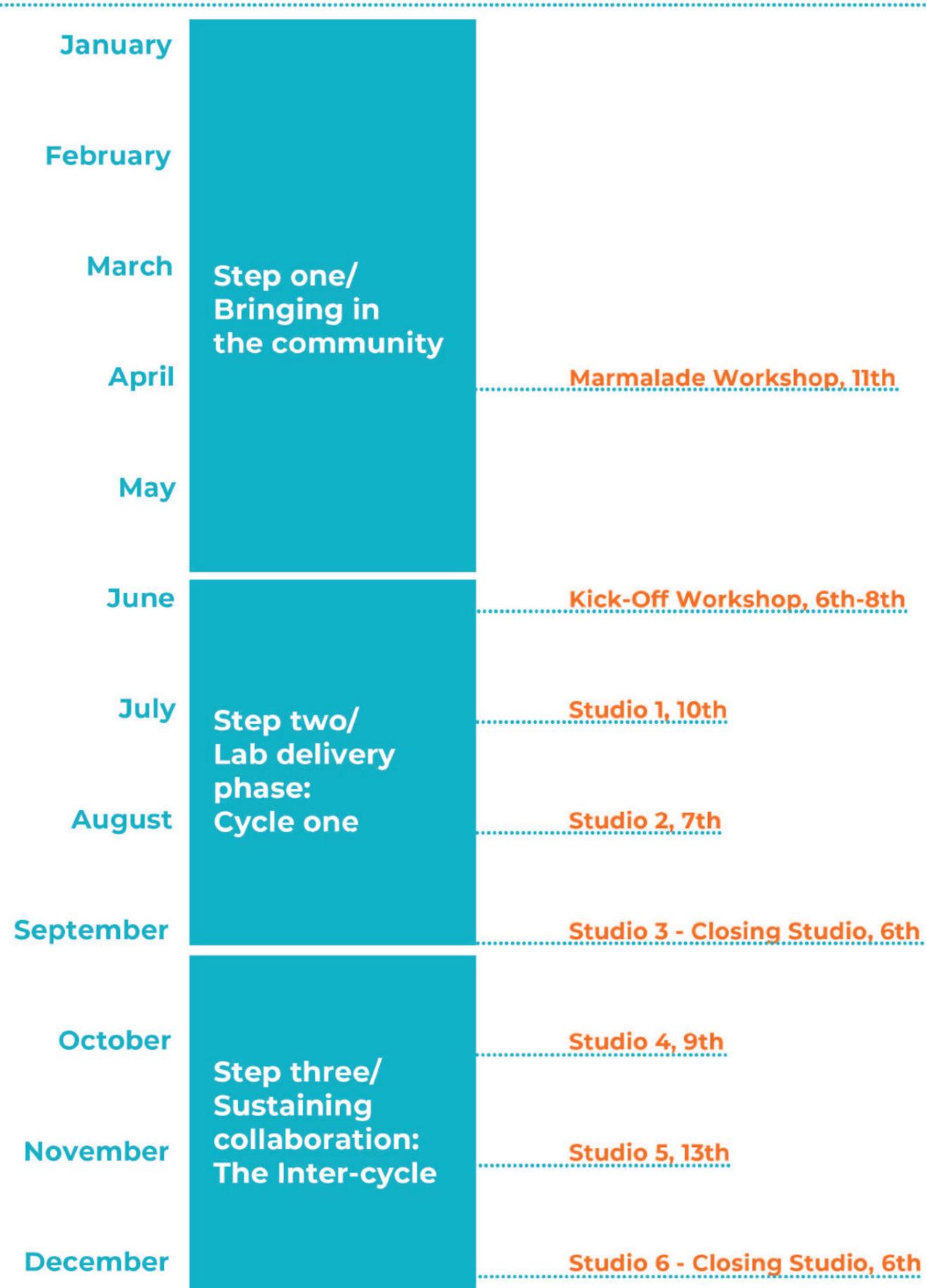
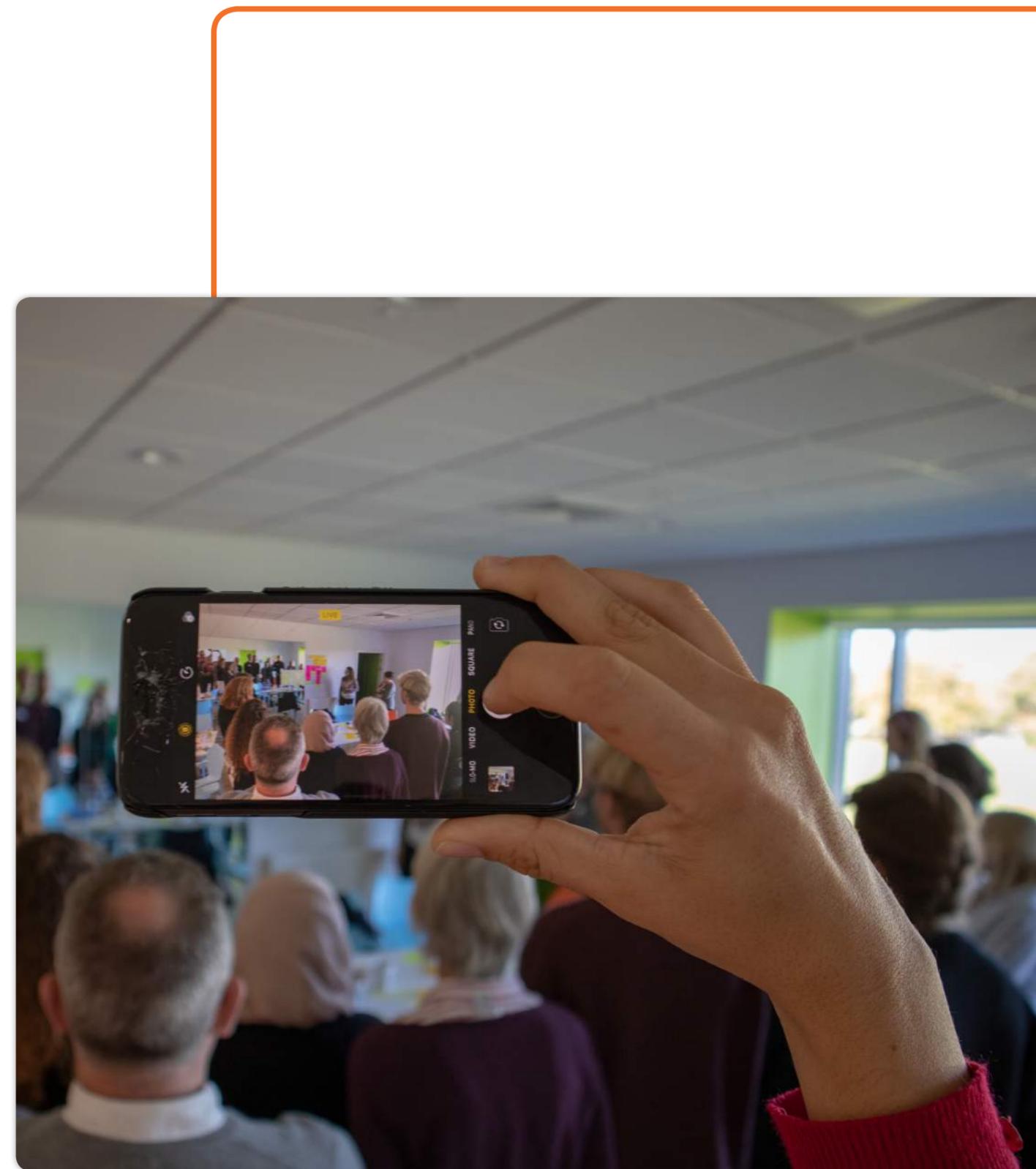


Figure 3: Oxford Early Years RAL timeline



# A good reason for collaboration

The process for this Rapid Action Lab has been coordinated and run in partnership with three organisations.

## Oxford hub

The Oxford Hub has been the initiator and 'convenor' for the lab. This convening role involves identifying key stakeholders, communicating and engaging them in the process.

## Roller Strategies

Roller is a professional services firm focused on next-gen solutions to the world's most complex challenges. Believing that people want to solve their own problems, they focus on helping them figure out how. They have spent 15

years testing and developing a practice for addressing complex challenges. The Rapid Action Lab strategy is part of this practice. Roller has partnered with the Oxford Hub to strategise and deliver this Lab process.

## Kaospilots

The Kaospilots is an educational program in Denmark, focused on project management, process and business design and centred around social change and systemic leadership. A group of third year students joined Roller as members of the delivery team for the design and delivery of the Early Years Lab over the course of this year. Two of these Kaospilot

students were involved in the RAL in Oxford commencing in February, while a further five joined the delivery team in October for the Inter-cycle period. They have been coordinating and running the workshops as well as being the primary support for the Lab teams between October and December.

## Governance of the Lab

A governance group has been established, for the purpose of decision making on a strategic level. This group consists of representatives from the above three partner organisations, as well as Lab participants from different prototyping teams.

The Governance team met monthly to review the direction of the Lab, set priorities and ensure the design and decisions are being made in collaboration and with consideration for the Lab team.

### Governance team member:

Rebecca Matthews	Oxford Brookes University
Anna Thorne	OXPIP (Oxford Parent Infant Project)
Valerie Knight	Oxfordshire County Council
Sara Fernandez	Oxford Hub
Zaid Hassan	Roller Strategies
Tessa Antonelli	Kaospilots

## Lab Participants

The Lab team was made up of a group of 37 participants throughout the Lab process, from across the Early Years system. The size of these teams have fluctuated throughout the process, with

some participants leaving and new ones joining during the six months. Below is a list of all participants throughout the process, in the five teams.

### Joining The Tots

Cheryl Huntbach	Oxfordshire County Council
Dave Tullett	Saïd Business School, University of Oxford & Moving Edge
Clare Crossley	Oxfordshire County Council
Lydia Hodgins	Oxford Hub
Ben Hamilton	Emmanuel Church

### Explorers

Carol Lister	Slade Nursery School
Beth Knighton	Donnington Doorstep
Anna Thorne	OXPIP
Lisa Fern	Grandpont Nursery School and Childcare
Fiona Brimson	Grandpont Nursery School and Childcare
Lisa Mansour	Baby Cafe
Farhan Samanani	Oxford University
Simon Barnard	Oxford Community Trust

## In The Loop

Ginnie Herbert	Formerly of Rose hill Children's Centre, now parents support volunteer
Ellie Clarke-Jacques	Oxford Hub
Suffia Hussain	Mother
Alive Weaver	Mother
Nuha Abdo	Mother
Shaz Ajmal	Mother
Tina Gordon	Mother
Emily Grant	Oxford Brookes
Kathy Peto	Family Links
Maysa Mustafa	Oxford Policy Management
Karen Porter	Home Start

## LOLAH

Daisy Brown	Oxford Brookes University, Early Childhood studies graduate
Siobhan Salter	Oxford Brookes University
Rebecca Matthews	Oxford Brookes University
Lindsey Heart	Peepie
Valerie Knight	Oxfordshire County Council
Sally Smith	Peepie
Mary Taylor	Family Links

## OxNest

Doireann Lalor	The Children's Allotment
Fiona Henderson	Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust
Shiploha Bhatt	Formally Children Centre Manager, consultant and equality advocate
Annie Davy	The Nature Effect
Laura White	Saïd Business School, Mba student
Nicola Taylor	Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust



# 3

## The State Of Play



# Monitoring a shift in the system

As mentioned in Design Principles, the Lab was created to address the priority needs of children under 5 in Oxford in a preventative and systemic way.

## Objective 1: Addressing priority needs of children under 5

A process was created to support the team to rapidly prototype solutions on how to address priority needs of children under 5 according to A Better Start's key development areas of children<sup>6</sup>, with a focus on universal interventions in Oxford's regeneration areas.

This section will analyse the effect of the Lab based on the two key objectives and describe how the generated outputs from these have been assessed and measured.

## Objective 1

### How to address the priority needs of children under 5

#### A holistic approach

In order to ensure the quality, scale and impact of the prototypes on social mobility in areas of regeneration in Oxford, four criteria were developed. The criteria made it possible to judge the strength and overall balance of different types of impact, and to diagnose

Based on these aims the Lab process has worked towards facilitating systemic change on two levels.

## Objective 2: Generating multiple capitals in the Early Years system in Oxford

This collaborative and inclusive process, also had the purpose of building trust among the diverse group of stakeholders from the Early Years system, and their capacity to address the challenge in the context of austerity and complexity. The trust and capacity is the foundation that made it possible to work on objective 1.

where developments or changes were required in order to make meaningful improvements. It was also a way to indicate what needed to be prioritised during the different iterations, in order for the Lab teams to deliver a coherent prototype in the time given for this cycle.

## Criteria and indicators for a thriving Early Years

A proposal is that these four criteria need to be in place to have a thriving Early Years system. In order for the efforts to be sustainable, improvements need to be created across all four areas. The criteria

are part of the Rapid Action Lab's holistic approach and delivering within these has been identified as a requirement to create impact in Early Years system.

### Criteria 1

#### How can the prototype serve the needs of one or more of the target areas?

Support with universal provisions in an area of deprivation, being Blackbird Leys, Rosehill, Cutteslowe, Littlemore, Northway and Barton.

### Criteria 2

#### How can the prototype address priority needs for children under 5 as identified by A Better Start research, with a particular focus on improving social mobility markers?

An intervention that would significantly meet the needs and help the development of children under 5

### Criteria 3

#### How can the prototype be a necessity within the given context?

Working within the given context of austerity and complexity

### Criteria 4

#### How can the prototype sustain over a longer period of time?

An intervention which is sustainable beyond the confines of the Lab as well as scalable or replicable in other localities

## Finding a way

One of the main characteristics of a Rapid Action Lab is that they are experimental in their nature. This means that the team doing the work takes an iterative approach to the challenges it wants to address, prototyping interventions and managing several solutions. This reflects the experimental nature of a Rapid Action Lab as opposed to the project-based nature of many other social interventions.

The five different prototype teams have spent the past six months developing a prototype and exploring how to test it. It

is the grounding foundation to what each team is proposing as their solution to the four criteria and the challenge statement How can we work together in addressing priority needs for children 0-5 in Oxford?

A summary of what each team has been working on between June and December 2018, capturing the essence of the different ideas and the value they propose related to the four criterias can be found in the Appendix<sup>7</sup>.

# Output 1

## How to make a systemic impact

Since the Lab was initiated with the intention of creating a systemic impact, the assessment of the overall results is based on the four criterias as described in the section above. Basing the assessment on the criteria, it is possible to get a better sense of the systemic impact of the Lab activities.

Each of the prototyping teams have had the responsibility of assessing their own performance using a self-assessment framework. Appointing the teams to assess their own work has been a way for the Lab team to learn from their own

experimentation and implement those reflections into their next steps.

To work in this developmental way is part of the RAL strategy to build capacity. It is a process that builds resilience in the Early Years system, in order to tackle setbacks creatively and intelligently.

The results from the self-assessment are presented in an Appendix<sup>8</sup>, together with examples of the teams experimental and developmental way of working and concrete actions steps that the teams initiated based on their own assessment.

<sup>6</sup> See page 60

<sup>7</sup> See page 68

# Conclusion objective 1

## What do we now know?

One of the main characteristics of a Rapid Action Lab is that they are experimental in their nature. This means that the team doing the work takes an iterative approach to the challenges it wants to address, prototyping interventions and managing several solutions. This reflects the experimental nature of a Rapid Action Lab as opposed to the project-based nature of many other social interventions.

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# Objective 2

## How to generate new capital in the Early Years system in Oxford

### Multiple capitals

There are five capitals that need to be in place in the Early Years system in order to have a healthy and thriving community. In order for the efforts to be sustainable, wealth needs to be created across all of them. The capitals are interconnected as Social, Human, Physical, Intellectual and Financial.

#### Human Capital

Human capital refers to how the process and its interventions have qualified and empowered the participants of the Rapid Action Lab to work with confidence and resilience around collaboration and processes, as well as a willingness to step up as leaders in the system.

#### Social Capital

Social capital is generated when there is a common understanding of cooperation and reciprocity within the Early Years community and in the relationships that exist in the system.

#### Physical Capital

Physical capital refers to the infrastructure and new services or products that have been tested and implemented in the Early Years system. The physical capital explains the tangible response to the societal needs and how the innovation is being integrated in the system.

The strategy of the Lab has been to invest financial capital through the Innovation fund to get a return of investment in the shape of the Social, Human, Physical and Intellectual and Financial capital. The definition of the capitals being used is as following:

#### Intellectual Capital

Intellectual capital refers to the intangible assets such as the collective knowledge and produced information within the Lab. The intellectual capacity can include tacit knowledge, new produced material, knowledge, websites and communication material.

#### Financial Capital

Financial capital refers to any economic resource that is needed or generated in order to develop new solutions to meet the needs in the Early Years system.

### Activities

To capture the value created from June to December 2018, the participants have rated their own capacity as change-makers on a monthly basis and tracked

their activities. Parallel to this, qualitative interviews have been conducted to capture the stories and experience of the people participating in the lab.

## Output 2

In this section the results from objective 2 and its activities will be presented to provide a picture of how the Lab has contributed to the development of Human, Social, Physical, Intellectual and Financial capital in the Early Years System in Oxford.

### Human capital

In times of uncertainty and change, the Early Years system needs to be able to develop and adapt to new situations and contexts in order for it to sustainably

support families and children. In this report the term Human capital is used to describe this ability, and it is defined as following:

**Ability to create and innovate**

**Ability to transfer learning and knowledge to new settings**

**Knowledge of how to work with time and people**

The Early Years system has been under stress lately due to budget cuts, changing in provision for children's centres and an increasing local need for services. As a response to these changes, the Lab team has been through a process which has focused on supporting them to take action, experiment and learn collaborative methods and innovative tools.

It's our hope that such training can help create the resilience necessary for the system to overcome its challenges, and to empower leaders, community workers and volunteers by increasing their capacity to respond to the complexity and austerity they are facing.

A key element of the Lab is its emergent strategy, which is guided by a policy of experimentation, taking action and testing assumptions. The goal is to take coherent action that makes sense to the challenge at hand. After each studio the participants have rated their own ability to address complex social challenges using this prototype based approach. Figure 4 shows data of the participants development throughout the process. The data shows that half of the participants before joining the Lab had a low ability to work from this approach. Already after the first workshop all participants scored themselves medium or above, which indicates that the strategy

was well received by the participants. Here two participants gives their impression of working this way:

**“The whole Social Lab approach is totally new to me - and a bit bonkers. I have actually used things with my team at work too”**

**“Being action oriented has been revolutionary for me - someone who likes to plan, plan, plan”**

### Ability to address social challenges through a prototyping based approach

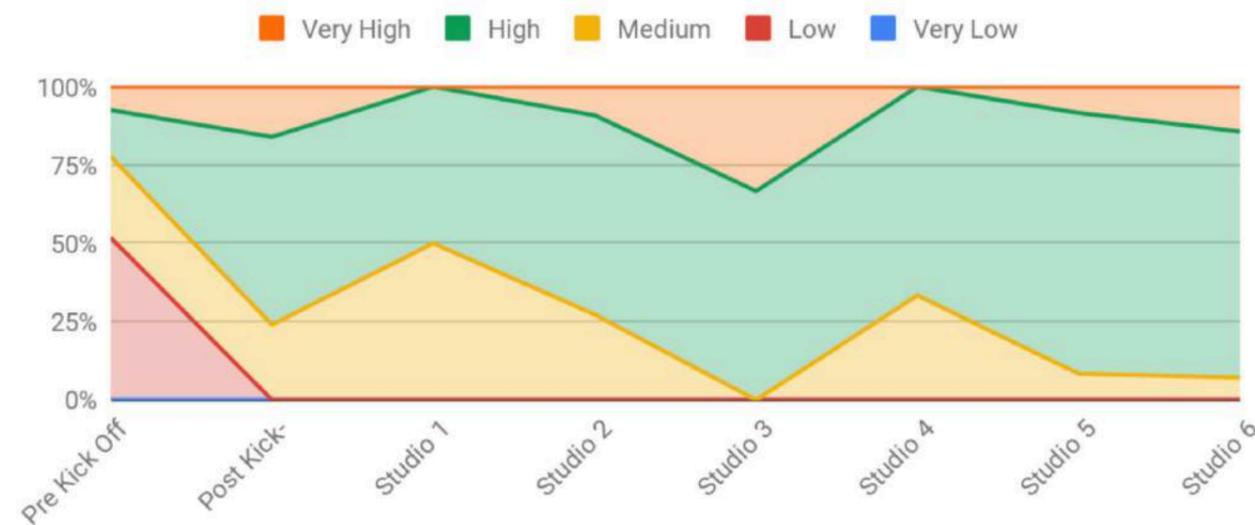


Figure 4: How would you rate your current level of ability to work to address social challenges through a prototyping based approach?

**“We understood that our team had to gather feedback from the system and the hypothesis method helped us know why we are doing this in the first place. The thought provoking questions arising from the Lab process have also been vital in our project.”**

A key element of the prototyping approach consists of making sure the prototype responds to a need in the area its targeting. Gathering feedback and

testing assumptions naturally builds in a learning element to the process, as described above by an participant.

This learning happens both in regards to the people the prototype is serving, and internally with the Lab team as part of

a self-development process. Here a Lab participant describes her experience.

**“Collaboration is about dispelling assumptions and being open to taking risks. If you don’t communicate you don’t get further - I learned this from my experience in the Lab. It is important to simply ask - I have been amazed with how receptive other people are.”**

**“People have been very willing to collaborate. The Lab opened my understanding of whom I can collaborate with and what I can offer.”**

### Collaboration for change

In the process the participants have been encouraged to take action, experiment and test assumptions. They have built their prototypes around this strategy and the result has been that a majority today feel they have a high or very high ability to address complex social challenges using

a prototype based approach. This ability is a step in the right direction toward a resilient Early Years system that is able to respond to the challenges facing it at the moment.

**“I wanted to redefine the nursery school ethos, so I used the modeling process from the studio on a theme day at school and made each group come up with one model each”**

**“Difficult finding great new ways to communicate, it has been increasingly overwhelming. Can’t remember where and who the communication came from makes it much more difficult and complicated. Interested in how we simplify communication”.**

**“We have had excellent support. But there is a question of capacity: coach or facilitator, what we would have liked more of, someone full time to do practical work, or use funding to find people to do some of the work. Looking forward that might be what we want to work toward”.**

**“Real value of time - so the real cost has not been thought about in terms of people giving time”**

# Social capital

The Early Years system's ability to respond effectively to the challenges it is facing, depends on the relationships and networks within the sector. This social

element can be conceptualised using the term Social capital, which in this report has been defined as:

**Number of relationships within the system each individual has**  
**The will for cooperation and collective movement**  
**The strength and trust of the relationships**

We believe there are a number of incentives that mean collaboration in the system is hindered rather than enhanced. One of these being how social impact work and charities are funded. Lab participants reported that lack of funding has historically driven competition amongst them in the Oxford context.

people from the system together around a shared purpose has the potential to enhance the individual and collective well-being needed to build will for collective action and movement.

By creating a common innovation fund that is available to a diverse group of stakeholders, the Lab proposes a new model of bringing leaders, community workers and volunteers from the system together. The approach automatically builds new relationships and networks across organisations and sectors. The philosophy of the Lab is that bringing

An important principle of the Lab strategy is that it requires active participation of the stakeholders. This participation takes place within a team, and the process is therefore inherently social. This social nature of the strategy builds relationships among the participants as they work together to come up with new solutions to the shared challenge. A participant describes her experience working in a team, and how it affected her being:

**“Through experimentation the relationships grew and developed, and that changed me as a person. Normally if experimentation blows up in your face, you would stop trying, but this process made it easier to try again.”**

Another deliberate principle of the Lab strategy is to create diverse teams, since this increases the probability of coming up with innovative solutions. A participant

describes how this approach has helped open up new possibilities:

**“People have been doing different projects than normal, and together all these different skills and relationships have created new possibilities. Karen, for example, is a teacher, but by being part of the process she has been able to help get a broader sense of the system and work in different areas than normally.”**

Bringing together diverse participants to work in a team also has the advantage that it can create a sense of collectiveness. Since they are drawn from different sections of society who rarely interact,

it becomes possible to build trust and share knowledge across sectors, such as government, civil society, and health. Here a participant describes her experience:

**“The relationships also helped. Developing and improving the prototypes through just using all the expertise within the network of this room.”**

After each studio the Lab team was asked to answer how many people in the Oxford Early Years Lab team they currently would feel comfortable asking for help if they needed support with an Early Years initiative. Figure 5 shows the development over the course of the entire process. It shows that the participants quickly gained new relationships from joining the Lab. By studio 2 the number of

people the participants could ask for help decreased, as people left and new people came. At the end of the process there was an even distribution between the different categories, with a large majority knowing six or more people they could ask for help. Overall, a large improvement during the course of the process.

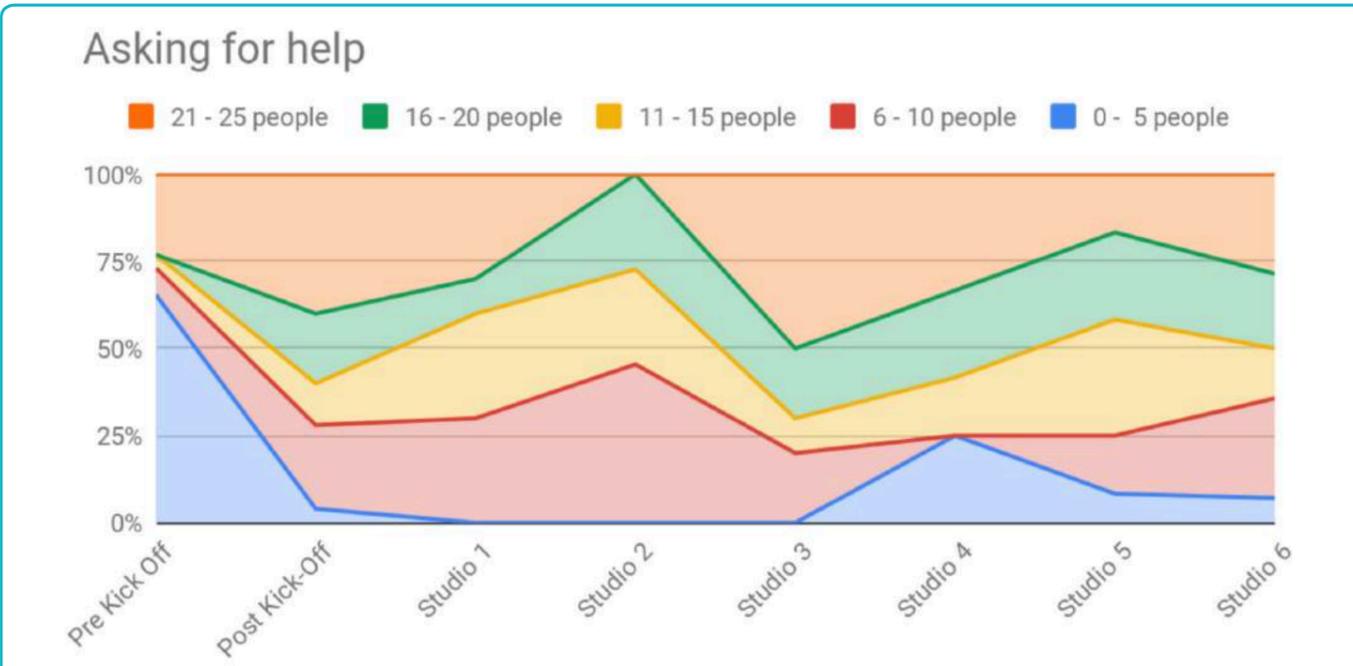


Figure 5: How many people in the Oxford Early Years lab team would you currently feel comfortable asking for help if you needed support with an Early Years initiative?

Building Social capital requires good infrastructure and communication, and connecting a large group of diverse stakeholders is naturally challenging. Looking ahead the delivery team suggests

that the Lab team members are invited to create a strategy of how to simplify their ways of communicating across teams. Here is a quote from one of the participants describing her experience:

**“Finding the different ways to communicate increasingly overwhelming. Can’t remember where and who the communication came from. Made the work much more difficult and complicated. I’m interested in how we simplify communication”**

### Relationships as a medium for change

The Lab has focused on being diverse and social as a way of building relationships and network within the Early Years system. Based on the data and feedback, it seems that the Lab has contributed to creating new relationships and

strengthened the network across the system. Looking ahead, there is a need for building better communication infrastructure and a culture to support the system in collaborating effectively.

**“At the lab you get the chance to connect”**

**“We are all very passionate about this. We just have a lot of responsibility at our jobs”**

**“Known people for a long time. But I’ve met some new parents. Ashamed I haven’t made an effort to get to know more people I knew less well”**

**A lot of the communication has been on e-mail, which makes it a little hard to build relationships**

**“It is all about relationships isn’t it?”**

**“Outside the lab you only meet your own team. It is a little bit frustrating”**

**I am now able to communicate with people in a new ways than before. Less formal now than before.**

**“Didn’t know anybody before I came”**



## Physical capital

In order to create innovative solutions to the priority needs of children under 5 in Oxford the system needs to generate products or services that can succeed the

current infrastructure. Overall this can be conceptualised as Physical capital, which has a tangible element. In this report it is defined as:

### New ideas and prototypes

The most tangible part of the Lab is in the prototypes that have been created. Depending on the purpose they may manifest themselves physically, for example as events and physical objects. By building and sharing awareness the groups have identified new approaches to improving social mobility. This increased awareness has enabled prototypes to reach families that otherwise wouldn't have been identified.

It has been a priority of the delivery team to encourage the teams to document their work so they can communicate

what they are doing externally to potential partners, funders or volunteers, and the delivery team has supported this by creating posters, brochures and a website. The teams have been experimenting and testing their solutions, and have by now a greater awareness of their concepts and the impact of the prototypes. Looking ahead, it is encouraged that a new delivery team is available to help the teams professionalise their communication so they are able to capture and communicate the value of their prototypes.

### Something new

**“Slightly worried that we buy into the idea that we have taken children centres away, but now we have all these people doing all this work for free, and it's going really well.”**

The above quote from a participant reflects the significant part of why a Lab became the response and strategy to this challenge. To prototype new services. The Early Years sector has a history of deprived physical capital which has caused a loss

of infrastructure and services for children under 5. This Lab was an attempt to test how different solutions and tangible outcomes could substitute the missing gap of services.

**“We've been wittling around the edges of the giant elephant in the room, which is that we need more children centres. This process has been about facilitating that cross-sector collaboration which is not happening anymore.”**

**“From the first meeting to this meeting - all of us have been transformed in some way. The value comes from the transformation and change in the people who will go out and do stuff.”**

**“There has been generated enough knowledge and there's still more to do but I'm not sure if there's enough to seek more funding.”**

**“The knowledge was there and we were able to park some of the frustration at the damage done and because of this been able to reframe what we can do.”**

**“Transition funding is coming to an end soon - and who's going to measure the wider success or results of that funding, and the damage and loss - the impact on the families.”**

**“We've been wittling around the edges of the giant elephant in the room, which is that we need more children centres. This process has been about facilitating that cross-sector collaboration which is not happening anymore.”**

**“Could take a huge amount of our energies to achieve that - but holding along-side a need to just take action, which is what we can do here. Sucks energy away from action.”**

**“From the point of where it can go - we're not going to let go. Bigger challenge: how do we shift the thinking, how do we do that? From needing the finance. We need to carry on shouting about it.”**

**“A lot of us are aware that things can improve, but the challenge is - where does the funding come from? Where things can be improved, you have to follow set procedures. It's hard to move forward when there isn't set funding.”**

**“Slightly worried that we buy into the idea that we have taken children centres away, but now we have all these people doing all this work for free, and it's going really well.”**

**“Not sure all the stakeholders know what we have been doing. Also funders have not been measuring the loss of universal services.”**

## Intellectual capital

Intellectual capital is a key element in the future of the Early Years system. It helps create clarity by providing a common narrative which explain issues such as why the Early Years is a nodal point for increased social mobility in Oxford. The internal documentation has become the backbone of how to communicate

externally what the Lab is all about. The Intellectual capital includes higher degree of awareness of the challenge among the participants as well as any outputs from the Lab such as this report, website and stakeholder map. In this report Intellectual capital is defined as:

### Tacit knowledge

### New information

Tacit knowledge consists of ideas and experiences that people have but are not codified and may not necessarily be easily expressed. The Lab has worked with tacit knowledge in two ways. Part of the process has been focused on generating tacit knowledge by taking the participants on Learning Journeys and encouraging them to immerse themselves in the

community they are working within. Another part has focused on transferring tacit knowledge by arranging regular personal contact and interactions between participants, establishing social networks, building trust in a diverse group of people. Here a participant describes how the studios supported this exchange of knowledge:

**“The process of continuously evaluating during the studios enabled us to get an overview of what knowledge we’ve gained from each other.”**

At each studio the participants have been asked to rate their current understanding of Oxford’s Early Years sector and its challenges. As shown in Figure 6, a majority of the participants have, since the beginning of the process had a high or very high understanding of the sector. This comes as no surprise, since all the participants voluntarily have joined the

Lab out of interest in and passion for the sector. Still, analysing the graph shows some positive developments, especially after the kick-off workshop where more than 25 percent went from medium to high understanding; and at the end of studio six where more than 25 percent rated their understanding as very high.

## Current understanding of the Oxford's Early Years sector and its challenges

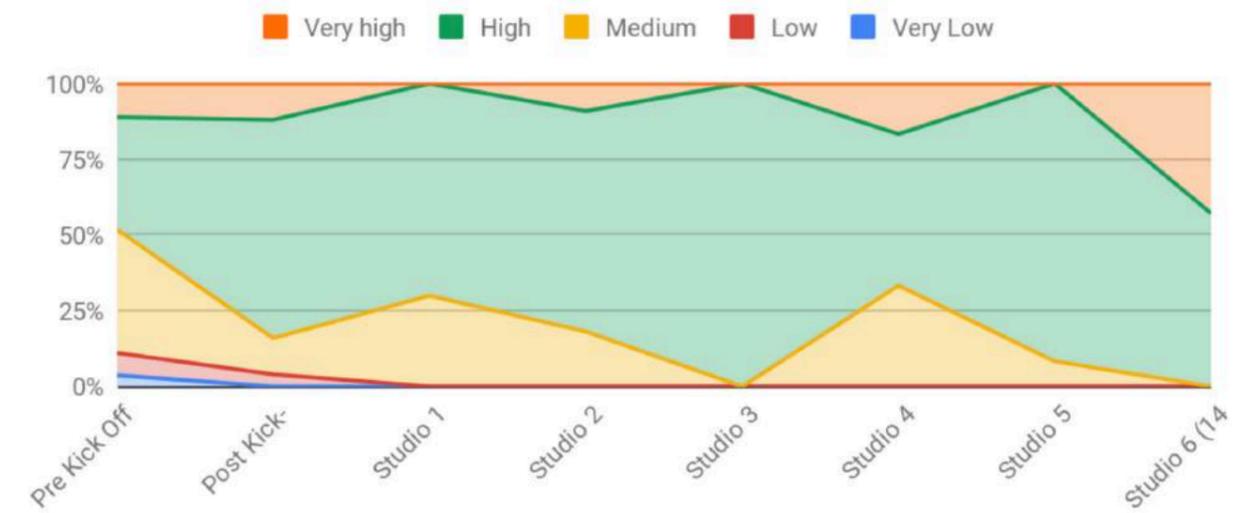


Figure 6: How would you rate your current understanding of work across Oxford’s Early Years sector and its challenges?

## Collective knowledge

Bringing people together who have a high degree of knowledge on the same challenge, from different points of view allows for a sharing of tacit knowledge, which otherwise wouldn’t have happened. Creating a shared experience around a challenge also generates a common understanding that is valuable when trying to create change. Looking ahead

it’s important that the teams continue to share knowledge that can enable them to reach more vulnerable families. Additionally it is important that the teams are able to communicate this knowledge externally to be able to attract funders and motivate new volunteers.



## Financial capital

In order for the Early Year system to meet the priority needs of children in Oxford it needs Financial capital. Financial capital refers to any economic resource that is needed in order to develop and

implement new solutions for families and children under 5. In this report financial capital is defined as

**“We experimented with social vouchers to see if that would improve social immobilisation. We had some response to it and have some further things planned.”**

### Funding

This process has aimed for the Lab participants to use the financial resources in a way that links the expenses to the target group directly. This has enabled the participants to experiment with rapid implementation, and for the activities to show immediate response in order to

be reiterated. The studios have aimed to create awareness of how the Lab participants with their prototypes have potential to grow and generate new funding opportunities, cash flow from profitable activities or something that can exist without further funding.

**“Some funding will be needed. The events can work, but you will need someone to plan it, and the good will to run it.”**

**“We’ve used it as much as we can to make as much impact as we can - but it’s expensive. Each member of our team has grown as well.”**

**“I think I could take the work I’ve been doing to my own work setting and use it quite readily without further funding - it would be with people’s time though - so would be more effective if I had funding to fund people’s time.”**

**“We used the money to actually pay someone to do what we needed doing, and that was a really sensible thing to do - because we were very time poor. It’s been very successful.”**

**“Further funding is hugely important to what we do. Oxford is expensive - just to do a normal family outing is extortionate - it cost way more than we realised.”**

### How to sustain

This process has been an example of how it is possible to generate alternative capitals with a limited amount of Financial capital if the right strategy is in place. Still, this process has been dependent on the generosity and passion of the participants, who for many months have

set aside other activities to be a part of the Lab. New networks, self-empowerment and motivation is key, if the teams are to sustain their efforts over a longer time period, additional financial resources is needed.

**“A lot of the work I have been doing has been outreach work, which doesn’t really cost much - but time is very precious.”**

**“We’re already looking at ways of generating funding. That next step needs a bit more funding to grow. Potential to find funding in all kinds of ways - enterprise, grants and so on.”**

# Conclusion objective 2

## A framework to assess sustainable development

To address the priority needs of children under 5 in Oxford in a preventative and systemic way a collaborative process was initiated. The purpose of the Lab was, among other things, to support the development of a healthy and thriving Early Years system. To obtain this goal Human, Social, Physical, Intellectual and Financial capital needs to be available. This section has shown how the Lab process has supported the building of

these capitals. The conclusion is that there has been a return on investment in the shape of multiple intangible assets. These are a necessity in order to maintain will, motivation, collaboration and skill development. These are crucial to have in place when addressing these challenges. The Lab is dependent on additional financial resources to be able to keep momentum and continue positive development.



**This experiment shows how collaboration can be an effective response to our Early Years challenges. By taking action together, drastic improvements can happen and increase both quality and reliability within the system. This work could never have been done without the contribution from each participant, champion and sponsor. A great thank you and appreciation towards your dedication and compassion. Your many shared perspectives shape the future of our children and unlocks greater potential for the Early Years system in Oxford.**

## Thank You

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Carol Lister, Slade Nursery School  
Cheryl Huntbach, Oxfordshire County Council  
Clare Crossley, Oxfordshire County Council  
Cllr Marie Tidball, Oxford City Council  
Daisy Brown, Oxford Brookes University, Early Childhood studies graduate  
Dave Tullett, Moving Edge (Coaching and Leadership)  
Doireann Lalor, The Children's Allotment  
Ellie Clarke-Jacques, Oxford Hub  
Emily Grant, Oxford Brookes  
Farhan Samanani, Oxford University  
Fiona Brimson, Grandpont Nursery School and Childcare  
Fiona Henderson, Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust  
Ginnie Herbert, Formerly of Rose hill Children's Centre, now parents support volunteer  
Ian Brooke, Oxford City Council  
Karen Porter, Home Start  
Kathy Peto, Family Links  
Laura White  
Leo Eisenstadt, Roller Strategies  
Lindsey Heart, Peeple  
Lisa Fern, Grandpont Nursery School and Childcare  
Lisa Mansour, Baby Cafe  
Lucy Butler, Oxfordshire County Council  
Lydia Hodgins, Oxford Hub  
Maria Godfrey, Oxfordshire County Council  
Mary Taylor, Family Links  
Maysa Mustafa, Oxford Policy Management  
Naomi Eisenstadt, one of the architects of Sure Start  
Nicola Taylor, Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust  
Nuha Abdo, Mother  
Oxford City Council  
Oxfordshire County Council  
Rebecca Matthews, Oxford Brookes University  
Sally Smith, Peeple  
Sara Fernandez, Oxford Hub  
Shaz Ajmal, Mother  
Shiploha Bhatt, Formally Children Centre Manager, consultant and equality advocate  
Simon Barnard, Oxford Community Foundation  
Siobhan Salter, Oxford Brookes University  
Suffia Hussain, Mother  
Tina Gordon, Mother  
Valerie Knight, Oxfordshire County Council  
Zaid Hassan, Roller Strategies

And baby Saoirse, for keeping it real

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# Appendix

## I. The Prototypes / Value Proposition

Explorers

Joining the Tots

OxNest

In the Loop

LOLAH

## II. Output 1: Addressing priority needs of children under 5 in Oxford

Results from the survey



## The Prototypes / Value Proposition

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### Prototype 1: Explorers

#### **Who's behind Explorers**

*Anna Thorne, Carol Lister, Lisa Fern, Beth Knighton, Fiona Brimson*

*A group of people passionate about a healthy and striving Early Years system that is wider than the work related to it. Our role in the Lab has been to design and develop Explorers using our joint knowledge and understanding of how to increase social mobility by widening ownership, building stronger relationships and collective well being.*

#### **Mission statement:**

*"A buddy network for professionals or people engaged with children to learn how to facilitate spaces in Oxford for any families to come together to explore, experience and build memories"*

#### **Vision:**

*"An opportunity to create a more accessible Oxford for many!"*

#### **Background**

One of the challenges in social mobility is related to the inequality in access of services and spaces in Oxford. This becomes most evident for hard to reach families that don't feel entitled to engage with services that exist and become vulnerable because of this.

#### **Idea**

This opportunity sets a foundation to create a more accessible Oxford for families and children under 5 in Oxford. A buddy framework for professionals to support hard to reach families to gain confidence by taking them to places in Oxford and creating memorable experiences that will increase social interaction and ownership of public and shared spaces. Becoming part of this buddy network can widen horizons for socially isolated families to connect and have somewhere to turn for support.

The activities around Oxford will stimulate the child's natural curiosity and joys of discovery and can enhance their wellbeing and responsibility for what's around them. By taking part in the multiple stories and mysteries around town they will also develop their language skills.

Bits and pieces are already happening around this but nothing is steadily positioned. A framework could create more consistency and evolve capacity over a longer period of time. It makes it easy for anyone to tap in, be guided and get access to a network that feels comfortable

for them, no matter their background or ethnicity. This is a way to get people who are interested but not able to initiate this alone to take part.

#### **Some voices from the experiences:**

*My experience is that parents want to engage with other families, but without a framework it is difficult to know how much time you can afford to spend. A framework that is simple enough to follow pulls people into a community and creates lovely groups. Explorer's focus is to continue developing this framework going forward.*

*Mum, network event at the Oxford Hub*

*Families coming together creates a shared understanding among parents that more children than your own have high energy that can play out in both temper and running around.*

*Teacher, Pitt Rivers museum visit*

*Usually meet with other parents and kids at centers but we don't go out on experiences like this.*

*Mother, Pitt Rivers museum visit*

### Prototype 2: Joining the Tots

#### **Who's behind Joining the Tots?**

*Cheryl Huntbach, Clare Crossley, Dave Tullett*

*As a team we represent voices and expertise from the Early Years sector. Our role in the Lab has been to design and develop our idea and share it more broadly across the Lab teams.*

#### **Mission statement:**

*"A way to make more visible and accessible information about the services that already exist to support under 5's in Cutteslowe."*

#### **Vision:**

*"If only one 'invisible' child is able to access services and improve their social and emotional development - that seems like a big impact."*

#### **Idea**

There are a number of high quality services for under 5's in the Cutteslowe area. The issue is that some families are not aware of these services or don't feel able to venture out to use them. The services are excellent, the challenge is that they don't have the time or resources to reach out to these families.

By showing families where the services are they may feel more confident to venture out and use

them. This will have a positive effect on their social and emotional development and provide opportunities to find a sense of connection and well-being in the community.

The first iteration is a physical map showing the location and opening times of under 5 services and activities in the Cutteslowe area.

The map stems from wanting to create an initiative for “invisible” children and families who are not able to access the services and support that they need to build social confidence, connection and feel integrated into their community. The belief is that parents and children will gain social and personal communication skills; feel more integrated into their community and will benefit from increased socialisation by accessing local services.

## Prototype 3: OxNest

### **Who’s behind OxNest?**

*Laura White, Doireann Lalor, Shilpa Bhatt, Fiona Henderson and Annie Davy*

*Our main focus has been to involve community groups, locations, and Early Years professionals and parents to deliver the models in order to increase social mobility in Oxford, create more confident and resilient parents and carers of children under 5 as well as increase wellbeing for children under 5.*

### **Mission statement:**

*“To develop capacity and remove barriers for those who care for children aged 0 - 5 through training, support and events”*

### **Vision:**

- More confident and resilient parents and carers of children under 5
- Increased wellbeing for children under 5
- Increased social mobility in the Early Years system of Oxford

### **Background**

There is a lack of available early support for new parents and carers due to the closure of children’s centres as well as a lack of innovative and accessible training due to reduced public spending (documented through OxNEST interviews, surveys and local intelligence).

Based on these facts, the hypotheses that OxNEST has been working from is that well designed events and programmes for carers of under 5s will increase the confidence and wellbeing in adults and this will positively impact the children. Sustainability and inclusivity of such programmes can be achieved through a mixed model of income generation through social enterprise and social prescriptions funded through public and charitable sources.

### **Idea**

Community and peer led events and training for carers of children under 5.

Making the most of local and community capital and social enterprise, the idea has been to create new kinds of support through a programme of events and training by supporting existing groups and working with a range of organisations to deliver events that are both inclusive and accessible.

Recognising how training by statutory bodies is often focused on statutory requirements rather than broader responses to health and wellbeing, as well as how some courses might not be affordable for everyone and thereby not inclusive, OxNEST has actively worked on developing a model that offers events which are inclusive and reach the population that the mainstream programmes don’t reach. OxNEST has done so by developing their events from within the community, creating feedback structures to ensure that the events are flexible and responsive to the needs of those doing the job, building on a social enterprise model which considers sustainability as well as using social prescription vouchers, peer to peer parent networks and other incentives. An example of these events has been the popular “Flourish at Flo’s” events held at Florence Park that have received hundreds of visitors from the targeted areas.

The goal for the future that OxNEST is already moving towards is a vibrant new training and resource centre established with a regular programme of funded and paid for events and programmes where local outcomes for young children are showing an upward trend. Looking further into the future, the aim is a centre that offers popular events and courses across the city and developing community owned products which are replicable across the city and beyond.

### **Some voices from the experiences:**

“Amazing training! Informative, practical, supportive. Brilliant! Lots of information and activities”

- Perinatal and Infant Mental Health

“Having a crèche in the space was absolutely fantastic. The carers were engaging with the kids but the kids could also approach us if needed. It gave me confidence to focus on the learning without wondering how my baby was coping”

- Parent

“The stay and play sessions felt safe, they always asked how you were, and they would talk to you quietly on the side if you had a concern.”

- Childminder

“There are lots of barriers everywhere and learning how to recognize the barriers is important.”

- Building bridges: Identity, Culture, Community

## Prototype 4: In the Loop

### Who's behind In the Loop?

Suffia Hussain, Ellie Clarke-Jacques, Alice Weaver, Nuha Abdo, Shaz Ajmal, Tina Gordon, Kathy and Ginnie Herbert

Our role in the Lab has been to design and develop In the Loop using our joint knowledge and understanding of positive experiences for children under 5 as well as confidence in parents and volunteers.

### Mission statement

"In the Loop exists to empower parents to empower other families and to build community support networks. In the Loop offers training and support programme for parents wanting to support families with children aged 0-5"

### Vision

"In the Loop wants to help create a world where under 5's get to have positive experiences that build resilience and relationships, and where parents, including the volunteers, grow in confidence."

### Background

Austerity has massively reduced resources available in the Early Years system. Families are unable to reach out in a way that builds community, and there is little or no community development attached to the services provided.

We have identified that families need support and resources in getting out and connecting to community activities and services. The reality is that many families are isolated and lacking resources and support (mental, physical and financial) to get out of the house and meet others. And that there is very little outreach work done now in the Early Years system.

### The idea

In the Loop is organised as a 'bottom up' community driven response to the situation that vulnerable families are experiencing in Oxford. The group consists of other parents that volunteer to reach out to families and provide enjoyable experiences for children.

Providing experiences for families helps increase confidence, resilience, community spirit and lessen mental health issues amongst families. As parents volunteer they build their capacity, realise their strengths, and start providing solutions within their own communities. Slowly communities are enriched, and the empowerment of community champions takes place.

At the moment In the Loop operates in the area of Rosehill. Long term, with sustainable funding, it's possible to build robust local networks in several deprived areas in Oxford that prioritise the needs of families and very young children, and reduce sharp end social services intervention.

### Some voices from the experiences:

'Good to have the opportunity to be outside with my family without worrying about the kids running off as there was so much support provided. Feel like... I was comfortable with the people, wasn't being judged, I felt at ease. I felt free, I don't have the opportunity to go outside like this. The area that was chosen was really nice'

- Mum with 3 children aged 3,2 and 1

'Family time together, the staff helped us a lot. It was sunny! Every 3 months something like this! Good memories today'

- Two Syrian teenagers with mother and father

### Texts from parents:

"JazakAllah for taking him, he had a fantastic day maashaAllah 🤗"

- Parent

"I was going to message you and say a big Jazakallah khayr for inviting us along. I had a lovely time alhumdulillah and my girls came back smiling. Allah reward you for organising and taking us along. It was a lovely day. The company was excellent."

- Parent

"Asalam aleikum sis thank you so much for giving us the opportunity to be part of the wonderful day today. Me and the boys had so much fun. Jazakallah"

- Parent

## Prototype 5: LOLAH

### Who's behind LOLAH?

Valerie Knight; Rebecca Matthews; Lindsey Hart; Daisy Brown

As a team we represent voices and expertise from the Early Years sector, primary education and library provision. Our role in the Lab has been to design and develop LOLAH using our joint knowledge and understanding of supporting early language and communication.

### Mission statement:

"Little Ones Learning At Home supports parent-child interactions by promoting parental understanding of ways to support the language and communication development of their child (aged 0-2) by offering interactive library-based sessions, and a pop-up concept which visits community projects and environments. LOLAH aims to develop a parent-led approach."

### Vision:

“That the language and communication development of 0-2 year olds in Oxford will be actively promoted by the families and the community in order to boost receptive and expressive language outcomes at school entry.”

### **Background**

The social mobility gap in Oxford is historical and many existing solutions (for example the Early Years training offering, and third sector providers) do not appear to have bridged this gap sufficiently, so it is clear that there is a need for something which brings together Early Years theory, knowledge and experience, evidence-based strategies, and active parent/carer involvement.

### **The idea**

LOLAH aims to support families living in regeneration areas in Oxford by offering freely accessible sessions which foster positive parent-child relationships, develop parental understanding of ways to promote their child’s language and communication, and enhance the existing Early Years offerings in Oxford.

The sessions are executed in two different ways.

1. A pop-up concept which will visit toddler groups, stay and play sessions, community groups, health clinics (etc.) in order to share evidence-driven ideas for enhancing language and communication.
2. A series of parent-led sessions on language and communication; parents trained in evidence-driven techniques and activities which can then be shared in LOLAH sessions run by parents for parents.

### **Some voices from the experiences:**

“We joined the library for the LOLAH session and now we read more books”

*Parent*

“In the session I realised that I’m not just a good or a bad parent - there are things I can learn about being a parent”

*Parent*

“We now have more confidence with play and learning”

*Parent*

## Output 1: Addressing priority needs of children under 5 in Oxford

### Results from the survey

A survey was created based on the original four criteria of the Lab. For each criteria, statements were presented that each team needed to answer using following ranking:

#### Green

*Very confident, we are providing just what is needed and called for*

#### Yellow

*Not so confident, there is some activity or potential for this to happen*

#### Red

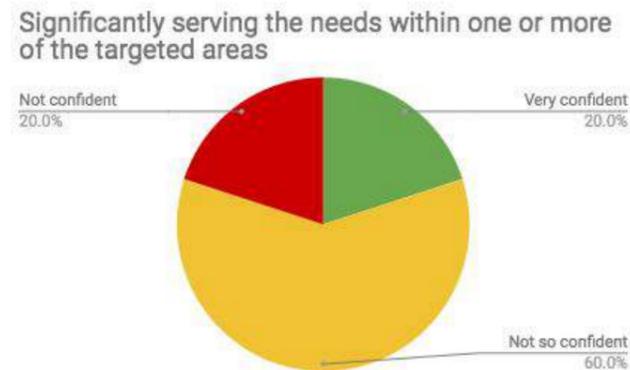
*Not confident, there is no or very little activity or potential*

The teams were additionally asked to make a brief grounding statement to support their rating.

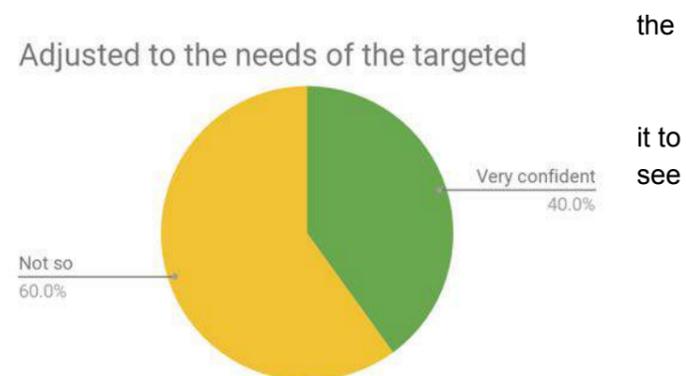
#### Criteria #1

##### How can the prototype serve the needs of one or more of the target areas?

When asked to rank whether their prototype is serving the needs within one or more of the targeted areas, a majority of the five teams ranked their prototype yellow stating that there is potential greater impact in the area.



When asked if the intervention is adjusted accordingly to the needs of targeted areas, three out of five teams rated yellow, explaining that they have done some work adjusting the needs of the targeted areas, but it as a continuous process and that their prototypes have potential for



serving the needs of these areas more precisely.

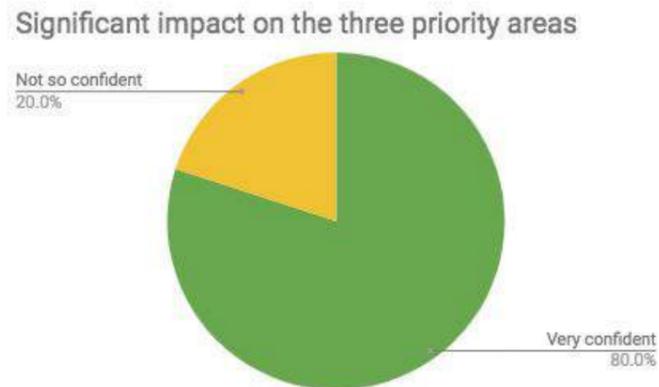
#### Example of action steps taken to improve prototypes

During the lab OxNest has successfully hosted events under the name of 'Flourish at Flo's' at Flo's Community Centre in Florence Park, each time attracting hundreds of parents and children. Flo's lies outside the deprived areas targeted by the Lab, and to reach a broader demographic, OxNest started a collaboration with In the Loop, who throughout the Lab has built trust and relationships with vulnerable families that otherwise normally wouldn't attend events at Flo's. Through the collaboration an event took place on the 12th of December called Flourish at Flo's: Winter Warmer, which provided families with winter survival baskets and workshops on how to alleviate fuel poverty.

**Criteria #2**

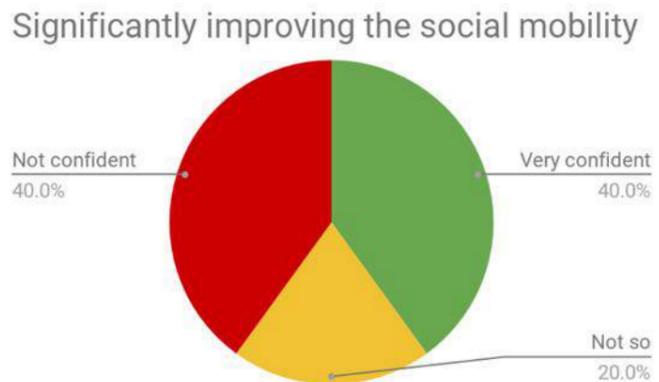
**How can the prototype address priority needs for children under 5 as identified by A Better Start research, with a particular focus on improving social mobility markers?**

Four out of five teams scored their prototype green when asked if the prototype has potential to have significant impact on the three priority areas: social and cognitive development, nutrition and/or language development.



Ranking whether or not the prototype significantly improves social mobility for children under 5, split the teams in two. Two teams ranked their prototype green; In the Loop grounds their ranking by stating that

'Volunteer training has huge impact on social mobility.' and LOLAH states that training language and communication and building parent to child relationships enhances social mobility. Two teams ranked their prototype red stating, that they have no way of knowing, since they would need to track the families for years to have proper data.



**Example of action steps taken to improve prototypes**

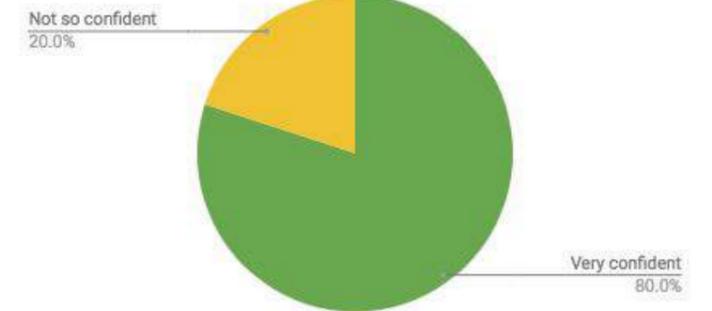
After hosting a series of events, In the Loop, discovered that some of the parents and families that attended the events expressed a need of meeting up on a more regular basis. To address this need, In the Loop started to look for a space where their families could come on a weekly basis. In the Loop also hopes that this initiative can help structure the services they provide within their community and alleviate workload from their volunteers, who until now have supported families by making time consuming house visits.

**Criteria #3**

**How can the prototype be a necessity within the given context?**

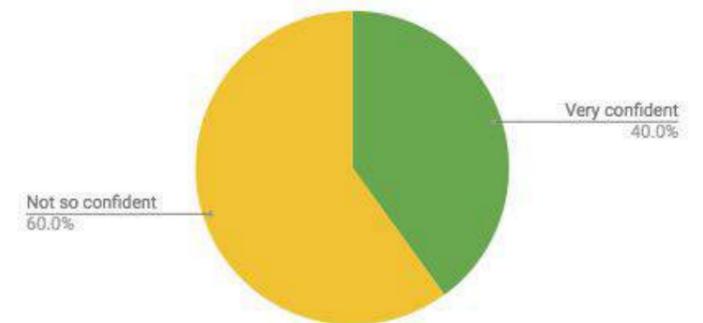
All teams ranked their prototype yellow and green when asked to state if the prototype has been tested and adapted according to the needs in the economic context of the early year system in Oxford. The teams have adapted their prototype in different ways. Some like In the Loop have emphasised volunteering and a "do it yourself attitude". Others like Joining the Tots have, with their map, sought to make more visible the services that currently exist. Explorers has focused on making their services more available and inclusive by organising free transport.

**Tested and adapted according to the needs in the economic context**



When asked to rank whether they are actively testing assumptions and collecting feedback, and if necessary adjustments of the prototypes are being made, all teams score green or yellow. Some teams have a very structured process of collecting feedback (using forms and surveys), others are more unplanned (talking to parents and sharing feedback to the rest of the team on Whatsapp). Although the teams have worked in an experimental manner, the ranking indicates that their process hasn't been random. A large part of the capacity building that has been in focus in the studios has provided the teams with methods on how to incorporate feedback and make necessary adjustments to the prototypes, in order to accurately impact the needs in the system.

**Actively testing assumptions and collecting feedback**



**Example of action steps taken to improve prototypes**

Joining the Tots created a map to give families an overview of already existing services and activities in the area of Cutteslowe. Joining the Tots wanted to be able to reach vulnerable families who otherwise wouldn't make use of what's already being offered. By researching who the vulnerable families of Cutteslowe are, Joining the Tots realised that many of them speak

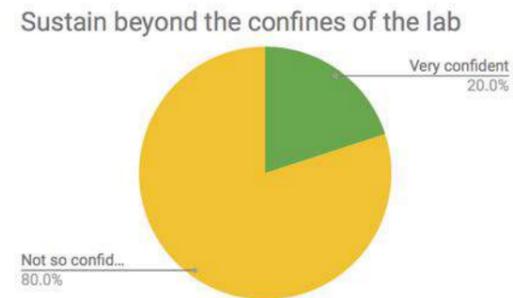
little english. Based on this insight the map is now being translated into Arabic, with the hope of reaching more families.

#### Criteria #4

##### How can the prototype be sustained over a longer period of time?

The main resource for the prototypes is the Lab participants that help plan and facilitate the services. Still, it is up to the teams to find funding to be able to deliver the same or higher quality in the future. This uncertainty is

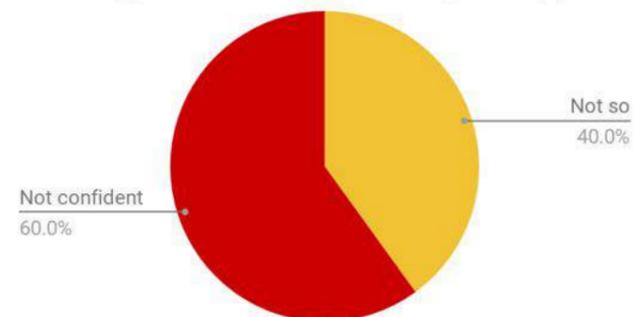
expressed in the teams own ranking, where four out of five teams ranked their prototype yellow when asked if the intervention can live beyond the confines of the Lab. From this ranking it's possible to conclude that there is potential, and in the grounding statements many teams state that they already have started to look for alternative funding or looked into how to reshape to their services to adapt to the new situation.



When asked if the team has a strategy or framework of how to scale and replicate the prototype three teams rank their intervention red and two yellow. The teams have adapted the prototypes to the current economic situation of austerity by relying on, for example, volunteering. Scaling this bottom-up approach demands an innovative strategy that includes a way of motivating other people and communities to start

similar initiatives. If the Lab is to continue for a second cycle it's clear that this an area with potentially high leverage. None of the teams have so far had much activity within this parameter, and it is a recommendation that a new delivery team makes this an integrated part of their coaching strategy moving forward.

##### Strategy of how to scale the prototype



##### Example of action steps taken to improve prototypes

An approach on how to scale and build motivation can be by establishing connections and relationships within the Early Years sector. On the 26th of November a network event for the Lab participants and their collaborators was held at Oxford Hub in Turl Street Kitchen. The event was co-created and co-facilitated by the Lab delivery team, as well as members from the Explorer and LOLAH teams.