



100

STORIES REPORT

2026



Dear Friends,

Real change rarely begins with policy. It begins with people! It begins in moments of hurt when we learn to care... in moments of hope when we learn that caring can matter, especially when shared... and in moments when we find the courage to risk acting in this uncertain world of ours. This is why we tell stories.

A story begins with disruption. The expected doesn't happen, but the unexpected does. We may experience this moment as a threat and react with fear: we may flee, we may freeze, or we may just strike out in desperation. Or we may experience this moment as a challenge to which we can respond hopefully, our curiosity provoked, our imagination stimulated, and possibilities explored.

Because we can identify with the protagonist in a story, we can experience and feel their fear, their courage, their losses, and their learning. That experience then becomes something we can draw on when we face disruptions of our own. Perhaps even more important, because stories speak from the heart, they enable us to share the experience of our values—to feel them—because values are feelings, not words on a flip chart. This is why we began telling stories before we had words—in dance, in images, in music. And when we had words, long before we had writing, we told stories, even sang them.

So when someone asks, “Why do we do what we do?” we respond with a story. And if they ask, “How?” that’s when the head takes over: we respond with strategy. And if they ask, “What can we do about it?” that’s where the hands come in.

Those numbers we collect, the measurements we make, and the analysis we do all matter. But they tell us what, not why. As St. Augustine observed, it’s one thing to know the good and quite another to love it. And loving it is what motivates action. The head alone is not enough. Knowledge doesn’t turn into action without the heart.

So the best response we can make to the young people who have chosen to share this series with us is to say thank you. With each story you share, you may spark one of ours. We become partners in learning.

This is the power of Public Narrative in practice. And this is what the 100 Stories project demonstrates. Rather than speaking about children, young people, families, and professionals, it creates space for them to speak for themselves. Their stories do more than describe problems. They reveal strengths, resilience, and possibilities for building systems that respond more effectively to the realities of people’s lives.

What makes this work so important is that it begins with listening, but does not end there. The voices brought together in this report have been translated into practical recommendations for those with the responsibility to shape services across North Wales. In doing so, the report reminds us that leadership is not simply about authority; it is about enabling people to transform shared values into purposeful action.

The challenges facing children, young people, and families cannot be solved by any one organization acting alone. They require collaboration built on trust, shared purpose, and a genuine willingness to learn from lived experience. The stories collected here offer not only insight into those experiences, but also an invitation to work differently—alongside those whose lives are most affected by the decisions we make.

My hope is that readers approach these stories with curiosity, humility, and a commitment to action. The measure of this report will not be how many people read it, but whether it helps create conversations, relationships, and decisions that lead to more responsive, compassionate, and equitable systems.

I congratulate everyone involved in bringing this work to life. It stands as an example of how insight can become action, and how stories, when shared with courage and purpose, can become a powerful force for leadership and change.



Marshall Ganz

Rita E. Hauser Senior Lecturer in Leadership,
Organizing, and Civil Society
Harvard Kennedy School, Harvard University

Over the past two years, it has been both a privilege and a responsibility to lead the 100 Stories Project alongside young people, parents, carers, professionals, Wrexham University, and partners across North Wales. What began as a commitment to listen more closely to the experiences of young people navigating the transition from children's to adult services has evolved into something much more significant.

The 100 Stories Project was designed to understand what it would take to build a robust, trusted evidence base grounded in a movement of courage and belief that lived experience should help shape the services intended to support them. The name 100 Stories Project reflected a question we asked ourselves at the outset... How many stories would it take to create meaningful change? Would it take 100, perhaps a thousand, before the experiences of young people, families and professionals were sufficiently understood to shape the way services are designed and delivered? As the project evolved, it became clear that the number itself was never what mattered. Rather it symbolised our belief that lasting change is built through listening deeply, consistently and collectively to lived experience.

At the heart of this report are 87 individuals who generously shared their experiences. Some spoke of frustration, uncertainty, and feeling unheard. Others spoke of resilience, determination, and hope. Together, their stories paint a vivid picture of the reality faced by many young people as they approach adulthood, particularly those with neurodevelopmental conditions or additional support needs. Their voices challenge us to think differently about transition, not as a moment in time defined by an eighteenth birthday, but as a developmental journey that requires ongoing support, understanding, and opportunity.

As a Patient Experience Lead, I have long believed that people are experts in their own lives.

Yet throughout this project, I have been continually reminded that stories achieve something that statistics alone cannot. Stories create connection. They build understanding. They help us see the human consequences of policy decisions and service design. Most importantly, they provide a foundation for meaningful change. I am proud to share that this is what we have achieved, and that this work has been recognised as a Bevan Exemplar by the Bevan Commission.

What has inspired me most is that the project has not only captured experiences; it has also created opportunities. Young people who initially questioned whether anyone would listen have gone on to speak with confidence in strategic forums, influence senior decision-makers, and advocate for themselves and others. The evidence presented in this report demonstrates that storytelling is not merely a method of gathering information; it is a mechanism for building agency, confidence, relationships, and collective action.

The findings in this report present us with both a challenge and an opportunity. The challenge is to acknowledge that many young people continue to experience a significant gap between children and adult services, often at a time when support is needed most. The opportunity is to use the evidence shared here to co-design a more compassionate, joined up, and socially progressive approach to transition, one that supports young people to thrive socially, educationally, and economically throughout early adulthood.

I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to every participant who trusted us with their story. Your honesty, courage, and generosity have created an evidence base that cannot be ignored. I would also like to thank our partners at Wrexham University, Public Service Boards, local authorities, community organisations, and colleagues across health and social care who have supported this work and recognised the value of listening differently.

This report belongs to the people whose stories it contains. My hope is that it will not only be read but acted upon. The voices within these pages have shown us what needs to change. The responsibility now sits with all of us to ensure that those voices continue to influence the systems that shape young people's lives.

Christy Hoskings

100 Stories Project Lead,
Regional Patient Experience Lead Officer, Children's
Neurodevelopmental Services, Betsi Cadwaladr
University Health Board.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary 100 Stories Project	5
Introduction	6
Framework and Methodology	7
Chapter 1 Storytelling	8
Chapter 2 Leadership	12
Chapter 3 The Stories	16
Conclusions and Next Steps	23
Acknowledgements	24
Bibliography	25

Abbreviations that we've used throughout this report

BCUHB	Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board
TrACE	Trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 100 STORIES PROJECT

This report presents the findings of the 100 Stories Project, a two-year, co-produced initiative led by the patient experience leads for children's services at Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB), in collaboration with Wrexham University, Public Service Boards, and community partners across Wales. The project involved the participation of 87 individuals, comprising 47 young adults, 23 parents and carers, and 17 professionals across the system, who shared their experiences regarding the transition from Children Neurodevelopmental Services, Learning Disability Services and Adolescent Mental Health Services to Adult Services.

Using a thoughtful mix of approaches, the 100 Stories Project began with Public Narrative as the theoretical foundation for storytelling, supported by a specially developed Storytelling Toolkit to ensure safe and inclusive practice. A Community Enquiry provided an independent, forward-looking perspective, while Theory of Change and Most Significant Change methods captured both the intended pathway to impact and the meaningful changes participants identified as most significant. Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis then systematically examined the content of the stories and the experience of sharing them.

Together, these approaches sought to amplify voices, encourage agency, and build a robust evidence base to positively influence the systems affecting young people's lives. This comprehensive framework produced ten participant-named themes and four key areas of change, supported by sixteen subthemes, forming the evidential backbone of this report.

These approaches were deliberately chosen: no single method could capture the relational, emotional, personal and collective change this project set out to achieve. Together, these approaches provide a complete picture not only of what changed, but also of how, for whom, and why it mattered.

Headline findings

Stories built trust where numbers alone could not.

Across every strand of the evidence base, including thematic analysis, qualitative evaluation, Most Significant Change, Community Enquiry, and focus group testimonies, one consistent finding is evident across all strands of the evidence: storytelling and co-production fostered the psychological safety essential for the success of all other processes.

The content of the stories names the problem.

Ten participant-named themes map a system that creates multiple challenges for young people at the age-18 cliff edge: namely fragmented support, underdeveloped self-advocacy skills, and missed opportunities to build a bridge to adult life and services.

The act of telling stories constructs the necessary foundation for addressing issues.

Storytelling has cultivated socio-cognitive skills and personal agency, representing a documented progression from private experience to strategic influence, as evidenced by four themes and sixteen subthemes.

The project moved young people from isolation to influence.

Participants progressed from 'I didn't think anyone would listen' to presenting to Public Service Boards and Regional Partnership Boards, directly influencing decisions about the services young people use.

Why it matters

If transitions from children's services to adult services remain unchanged, the evidence strongly indicates that history will repeat itself, and the issues shared will become more entrenched across future generations. Young people without continuity of support at 18 are more likely to become socially, educationally, and economically inactive, resulting in them not being in education, employment or training. The optimal solution does not entail a new service model imposed unilaterally; rather, it requires a graduated, co-designed bridge from children's services to adult services for young people aged 18 to 25. This should be developed collaboratively with young people and informed by the evidence they have contributed through the 100 Stories Project.

Young people have shared through their stories that they want to thrive in life, and they believe that they can do so with the support of a socially progressive service tailored for individuals aged 18 to 25 years, enabling them to achieve their full potential in life.

KEY TAKEAWAY: 100 Stories is more than a project; it serves as a proof of concept, demonstrating that when individuals are given the necessary space, support, and skills to articulate their stories, they can transform the systems that shape their lives.

Why this project exists, and who it is for

Every year in Wales, thousands of young people receiving children's services support turn 18 and suddenly find that the support services they've relied on throughout their childhood end. These services do not taper; they stop abruptly. At a time when young people feel least ready to handle adult responsibilities, our system treats age as a clear-cut milestone, even though young people do not experience it that way. The 100 Stories Project was born out of this understanding and hope for change.

The project was initiated by Christy Hoskings, the Regional Patient Experience Lead for Neurodevelopment Services at Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB) and led in partnership with the Civic Mission team at Wrexham University. Inspired by regional and national reports (Mind Cymru, 2022; TGP Cymru, 2022) that emphasise the need to improve the transition from children to adult services, the initiative also drew on stories from young people who experience a sudden loss of control and continuity during this transition. The 100 Stories Project was created to listen to the experiences of neurodivergent young people and those with learning disabilities, whose voices often go unheard. The goal was to understand what it truly takes to build a strong, trustworthy evidence base grounded in real-lived experience. These voices are incredibly valuable; they can inspire courage and foster the belief that lived experience should actively influence the services designed to support them. Approval for this report was granted by Wrexham University's Research Ethics Sub-Committee, and our research adheres to these guidelines to provide a thoughtful and comprehensive analysis that informs our findings.

The project's purpose was to amplify the voices of young people, families, and professionals; to build participants' skills and confidence through storytelling; and to create an evidence base capable of influencing the systems that shape young people's lives. It drew on Public Narrative as its theoretical foundation for storytelling skill development, delivered by the 100 Stories Project Lead at BCUHB and Do Well Ltd. The project used the Storytelling Toolkit as its practical framework and employed a mixed-methods evaluation approach, including Theory of Change, Most Significant Change, reflexive thematic analysis, and qualitative evaluation, to capture what happened, for whom, and why it mattered.

This report grounds our findings and frames the intent and purpose of the 100 Stories Project. In doing so, it is designed to support strategic leaders, commissioners, policymakers, and practitioners across health, education, and social care in Wales and beyond. It is also for the young people, parents, and professionals who generously shared their stories, many of whom are now in the rooms where important decisions are made, ensuring their voices are heard and understood.

KEY TAKEAWAY: This report provides the evidence base that the project set out to create. Every finding in it has been generated by, and belongs to, the people who shared their stories.

"We cannot always build a future for our youth, but we can always build our youth for the future."

This quote by Franklin D. Roosevelt was shared by a 100 Stories Participant



FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

The 100 Stories Project thoughtfully adopted five interconnected approaches, each carefully selected to explore different aspects of the question: How does storytelling foster change, who benefits from it, and what are the reasons behind its impact?

Public Narrative (Ganz, 2011; 2024)

Ganz's Story of Self, Story of Us, and Story of Now offered a wonderful theoretical foundation. It shows how storytelling can inspire change by creating relational power (People) for collective action (Power) to bring about transformation (Change). This approach is both a teaching method and a guiding framework, helping develop the skills to use stories meaningfully, not just to tell them.

Storytelling Toolkit (Robinson and Wales, 2026)

The Toolkit brought Public Narrative into a supportive, inclusive space. Its Trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences (TrACE) informed approach made storytelling with neurodivergent and vulnerable young people feel emotionally safe and grounded in genuine consent. Using a variety of methods, we ensured everyone could participate, enabling them to communicate in their preferred ways and to share stories that held meaning for them during their transition.

Theory of Change and Most Significant Change (Weiss, 1995; Davies and Dart, 2005)

The Theory of Change outlined the expected journey from activities through interventions to results. Most Significant Change highlighted what participants found most meaningful, including unexpected outcomes. Together, the two approaches provided a fuller understanding and a deeper experience. Most Significant Change complemented the Theory of Change, adding depth and detail to inform our findings.

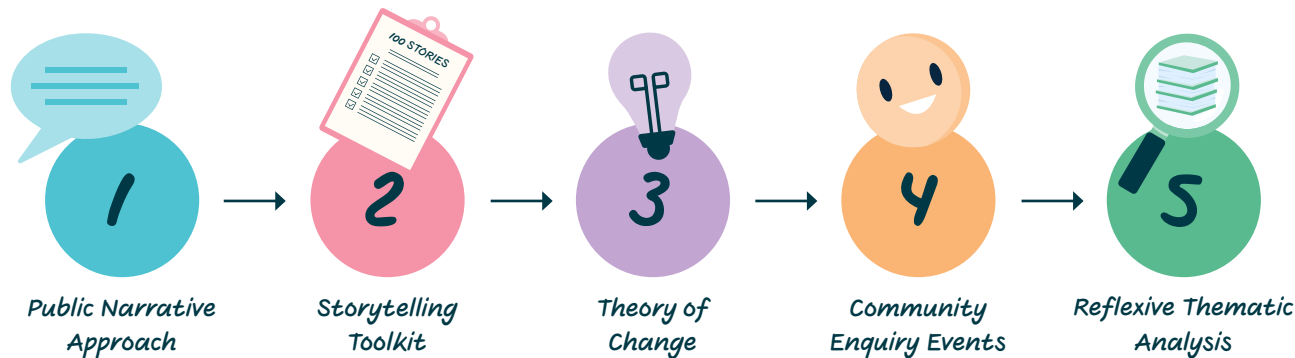
Community Enquiry Events facilitated by Sue Lyle (2024) and Mike Corcoran (2025)

Participants came together across two separate Community Enquiry events in North Wales to explore 'How can stories help us create positive change?' Their reflections brought an independent, forward-looking voice and gently encouraged senior leaders to respond not with a formal report but with authentic accounts of what they heard, what it meant, and what they are committing to do.

Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022)

The full narrative evidence base is examined at two meaningful levels: first, through the stories themselves, which produced ten participant-named themes highlighting what is broken; second, through the experience of sharing these stories, which produced four main themes and sixteen subthemes. Together, these two levels form the insightful and reflective heart of the report.

The 100 Stories Project is committed to being open and honest about what its evidence can tell us and where it may have limitations. Throughout the report, we openly discuss key constraints identified through our evaluations. The project initially used tools such as the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale and the General Self-Efficacy Scale to measure impact. As noted in the methodology footnote, these initial findings are not yet statistically significant, so we are working towards a more comprehensive, tracked-cohort methodology. Additionally, we recognise the inherent complexities of measuring relational change, understanding that standardised outcome measures may sometimes emphasise aspects that are more easily quantifiable rather than what holds significance, as discussed by Lowe and Wilson (2017).



KEY TAKEAWAY: The methodology was not chosen for convenience; it was chosen because conventional evaluation tools do not capture relational, emotional, or personal change well enough. The approaches chosen for the 100 Stories Project do.

Throughout the project, the 100 Stories Project collected data using the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale and the General Self-Efficacy Scale to assess impact. However, only a few participants appear in both the pre-and post-survey datasets, so the data are insufficient to achieve statistical significance on either measure and do not provide a reliable before-and-after comparison. For this reason, the data have not been included in the report's analysis, and a strengthened tracked cohort design is recommended for the next phase of the project.

"Theory of Change outlined the intended pathway to impact, while Most Significant Change captured real, lived, meaningful outcomes along that pathway. Together they create a complete picture of how change happens and why it matters."

100 Stories Participant

CHAPTER 1 STORYTELLING

Why stories are the mechanism, not just the method

People have an innate love for storytelling. Long before the era of data, policy papers, or formal debates, we've happily shared stories to make sense of our lives and inspire others. In this chapter, we explore the evidence that supports this natural instinct, delve into the ideas behind the 100 Stories Project, and introduce practical tools that help us use storytelling safely and meaningfully with young people, families, and professionals across North Wales.

"To speak a true word is to transform the world."

Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970)



KEY TAKEAWAY: Storytelling isn't just an extra tool for communication; it's the heart of how people connect, empower themselves, and make a difference.

Why storytelling matters

Decades of research across psychology, education, healthcare, and social movement theory all highlight the same wonderful truth: storytelling is a way that humans make sense of the world and a powerful source of social influence.

At the cognitive level, Bruner (1991) showed that storytelling is one of just two basic ways humans think, through which we make sense of our experiences. Damasio (1994) pointed out that emotion is deeply connected to decision-making, so stories, which uniquely blend feelings and thoughts, are more likely to shape our behaviour than facts alone. Herman (2007) extended this idea to social life, illustrating how storytelling during interactions helps build shared understanding, the essential foundation for any group working to face common challenges together.

In critical pedagogy, Freire (1973; 1996) emphasised that dialogue, sharing lived experiences through narrative, is at the heart of developing critical consciousness: the ability to understand and name the world in order to change it. In this tradition, storytelling isn't just passive reflection, but a powerful tool for active transformation.

Likewise, the widely acclaimed Bloom's (1956) educational approaches highlight the importance of the emotional side of learning, which storytelling naturally connects to and enriches.

In healthcare, Greenhalgh (2016) and Bate and Robert (2007) showed how patient stories reveal aspects of lived experience that numbers alone can't capture. When organisations truly listen to these stories, they see genuine improvements in services. Edmondson (2018) also highlighted that creating psychologically safe spaces encourages organisational learning and reflection, offering benefits that formal reports often lack.

Throughout these various fields, a common thread becomes clear: storytelling links the personal with the political, the emotional with the rational, and the individual with the collective. It's not just a helpful skill; it's a fundamental way we change and grow as people.

KEY TAKEAWAY: The evidence is clear and consistent: storytelling profoundly influences how people understand their experiences, connect with others, and take action.



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"Storytelling is not merely descriptive, but transformative, enabling individuals and groups to reinterpret their experiences, build shared understanding, and act collectively to influence complex systems."

100 Stories Participant

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Marshall Ganz's Public Narrative, the theory behind the project

Among the many evidence-based storytelling frameworks, the 100 Stories Project thoughtfully selected Marshall Ganz's Public Narrative model as its guiding framework. The choice of the 100 Stories Project was intentional, based on a clear understanding of what the transition challenge truly needed.

Ganz (2011; 2024), a Harvard Professor and passionate architect of grassroots organising for social movements, draws our attention to how social change organising arises from the dynamic interplay of three key elements: People, which includes relationships and shared identity; Power, the essential ability for collective action; and Change, the transformation of systems and conditions. In the 100 Stories Project, the Public Narrative Framework is known as the Story of Self, Us, and Now. This simple yet powerful storytelling approach highlights three key parts of Ganz's method, with Public Narrative serving as the link that connects them, helping to create stories that inspire and bring people together.

Ganz (2024) frames this idea within a broader concept of democratic renewal, suggesting that organising fosters an inclusive, interconnected citizenry capable of transforming the desire for change into the actual power to bring about that change.

The 100 Stories Project took this idea and applied it specifically to the transition from children to adult services. This is a crucial period when young people often face challenges and may lack the skills, confidence, and structural opportunities to advocate for themselves. Public Narrative provided not only a means to gather stories but also a nurturing approach to build the skills needed to use them effectively.

Public Narrative was chosen because it shows how storytelling can inspire change. It does this by building relational power and creating the conditions for reciprocal learning between participants and systems. The Theory of Change shows us what we hope to happen, while Most Significant Change reflects what actually transpired. Ganz helps us understand the reasons behind these changes. Together, these three frameworks provide a thorough and balanced way to evaluate the project, offering insights that no single approach could achieve on its own.

KEY TAKEAWAY: Public Narrative was chosen not as a storytelling exercise but as a theory of change: a structured approach to building the relational power needed to influence systems that have historically marginalised young people's voices.

"Storytelling is how we communicate why I care, why we care, and why we must choose to act now: a story of self, a story of us, and a story of now."

Marshall Ganz, People, Power, Change. (2024)



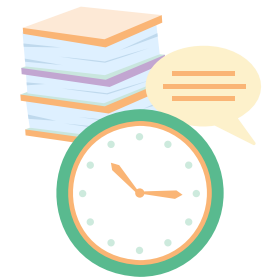
Story of
SELF

The Story of Self explains why the storyteller feels called to act. It's a headstrong personal narrative in which an individual shares their values, experiences, and motivations. Within Ganz's model, this is the moment when trust truly begins to grow, and people connect more with the person behind the story than with the arguments alone.



Story of
US

The Story of Us explains why the storyteller shares this. It's a collective story that helps us all feel more connected. When people see their own experiences reflected in others' stories, what might seem like a personal struggle turns into a shared mission. This is how we move from 'my problem' to 'our challenge,' creating a sense of community and understanding.



Story of
NOW

The Story of Now really shows us why it's so important to take action. It shares the heartfelt urgency of a particular challenge and gently encourages us to take meaningful steps. This journey takes us from simply understanding who we are to making a real difference, from awareness to action, and helps us decide what to do next.

The Storytelling Toolkit: A practical, ethical framework for storytelling with young people

Transforming the powerful concept of Public Narrative into a warm and welcoming practice for neurodivergent young people, their parents and carers, and professionals is about more than just providing a framework. It calls for a helpful toolkit to streamline the process.

That's why we developed the Storytelling Toolkit (2026) as part of the 100 Stories Project. Authored by Rosa Robinson and Helen Wales from Frame, in partnership with Wrexham University, BCUHB, and Flintshire County Council, the Storytelling Toolkit provides a friendly, evidence-based resource designed to support professionals every step of the way from planning and facilitation through to evaluation.

At its heart, the Toolkit views storytelling as a dynamic interaction among three key elements: the Storyteller, the Story, and the Audience. Through sharing, reflecting, and listening, these elements connect within a meaningful context that sparks change for individuals, services, and systems. This approach highlights that storytelling is a relational process that depends on who speaks, who listens, and how what is heard is transformed into something new and impactful.

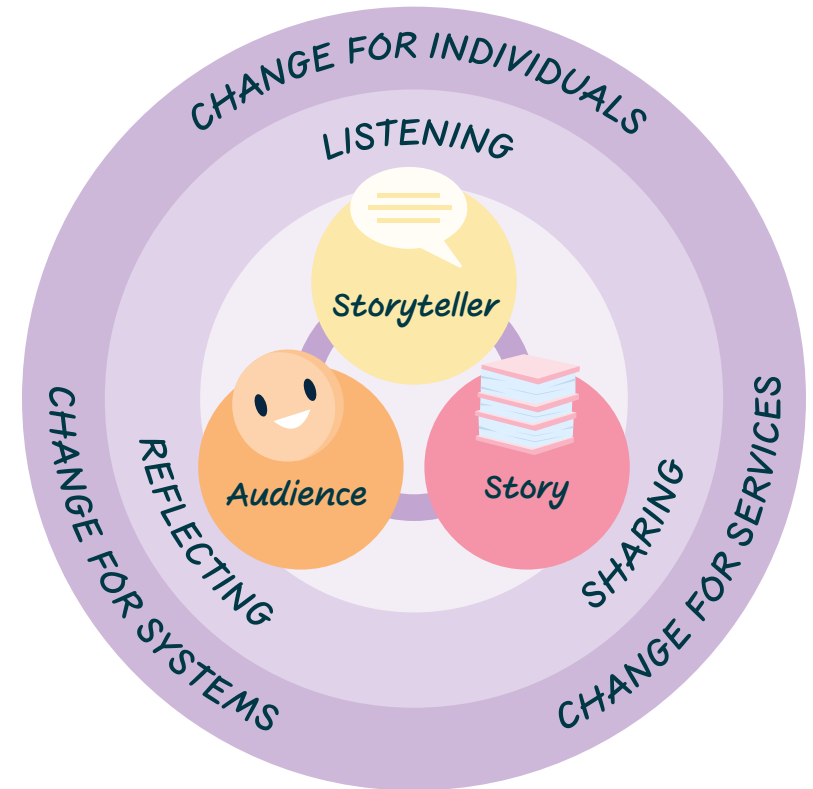
The Toolkit is grounded in core principles such as responsiveness to individual needs, strong ethical standards, thoughtful co-production, and a TrACE informed approach. These are integral parts of how storytelling is conducted, not just supplementary features. The 100 Stories Project deliberately incorporates TrACE methods because many of the young people involved have faced disruption, exclusion, and systems they feel have let them down. When engaging in storytelling projects like this, it's vital to establish a safe emotional environment, remain adaptable, obtain meaningful consent, ensure participants feel empowered, and remember that this is not therapy, as it may trigger deeply personal emotions.

The Toolkit intentionally adopts an inclusive approach to methods, showcasing diverse storytelling options such as verbal storytelling, digital media, Photovoice, Life Story Work, Story

Circles, and other collaborative creative techniques.

These methods recognise that each young person communicates in a unique way. For autistic and non-verbal young people, the Toolkit shares research indicating that digital and visual storytelling can open up new opportunities for expression that might be limited by verbal-only methods.

In the 100 Stories Project, these approaches were instrumental in helping practitioners create a space that participants described as a safe, warm and welcoming environment where they felt comfortable sharing their feelings, emotions and experiences. Participants confirmed this sense of safety, showing how trust was nurtured through consistency, openness, and facilitators who listened with care. This sense of safety was not a small detail; it was the foundation that made all the other positive outcomes achievable.



"Going through that process helps you understand that narrative that you might not have had at the time. You've got your memories, but you haven't actually analysed what that story is and how it's impacted you and others."

100 Stories Participant

KEY TAKEAWAY: The Storytelling Toolkit offers professionals an ethical, evidence-based, and inclusive framework that encourages young people to share their stories and guides them from the first session to strategic influence.

CHAPTER 2 LEADERSHIP

Turning opportunity into purpose and purpose into change

Leadership is the golden thread that holds everything together. It is the quality that determines whether a good idea turns into a project, a project evolves into a movement, and a movement results in lasting change. This chapter explores Marshall Ganz's social movement leadership theory. It illustrates what effective leadership entails, how the 100 Stories Project embodies these principles, and what insights from focus groups, the Theory of Change, the Most Significant Change method, and the Community Enquiries produced about the impact of strong leadership during one of the most challenging transitions in the health system for young people, families, and professionals.

"The capacity of a social movement for effective action depends largely on the depth, breadth, and quality of leadership able to turn opportunity to purpose."

Marshall Ganz, Public Narrative, Collective Action, and Power. (2011)

*"A fo ben,
bid bont"*

If you want to be a leader, be a bridge



KEY TAKEAWAY: Leadership in the 100 Stories Project was not a title or a structure; it was a sustained, relational commitment that enabled participants to discover their voices and be heard.

What Ganz tells us about leadership in social movements

Ganz (2011; 2024) argues that the effectiveness of any social movement relies heavily on the depth, breadth, and quality of its leadership. He explains that leadership goes beyond formal authority; it involves transforming opportunities into tangible actions, recognising pivotal moments, uniting people around shared values, and guiding collective efforts. Ganz views leadership as a continuous process of learning amid uncertainty.

This insight becomes valuable when we think about transition services, which often involve complex systems and long-standing challenges. No one person has all the solutions, so recognising this encourages patience and teamwork in addressing the issues.

Ganz clearly emphasises that developmental leadership, which actively finds, recruits, and nurtures leadership capacity throughout a community, is what truly distinguishes sustainable movements from those that fall apart. He gently cautions that without thoughtful effort to develop this widespread leadership, organisations can quickly become

overly dependent on a single individual at the core, holding everything together, which can be risky if that individual ever steps back. This isn't a theoretical warning for the 100 Stories Project; it's a real, lived experience.

The Theory of Change for the project identifies leadership and facilitation as a cross-cutting enabling condition, not a single input or outcome, but a thread running through every stage of the model. The Theory of Change analysis confirms that leadership and facilitation sustain momentum, build credibility, and maintain engagement at every level, from inputs through to long-term system impact.

KEY TAKEAWAY: Ganz's framework provides us with a clear way to understand what the 100 Stories Project's evidence confirms. Leadership depth without leadership breadth creates fragility, and breadth without depth creates nothing at all. The 100 Stories Project provides evidence that leadership depth drives transformation. The task now is to build breadth by distributing leadership capacity so that the movement belongs to everyone, not to any one individual.



"Leadership under conditions of uncertainty is therefore more about learning than about knowing. No one can know the future, so leadership is less about having answers than it is about knowing how to find answers."

Marshall Ganz, *People, Power, Change*. (2024)



Ganz's Depth, Breadth, Quality Leadership Model



The depth of leadership highlights the true character of individual leaders, how genuine they are, how dedicated, and how well they can foster trust and empower others.

The breadth of leadership emphasises sharing leadership skills widely within a group, ensuring many people develop their leadership abilities rather than limiting it to just a few.

The quality of leadership encompasses practices such as relationship building, storytelling, strategising, and structuring, which inspire and enable people to work together towards common goals.

CHAPTER 2 LEADERSHIP

Leadership in practice: what the 100 Stories Project shows

The 100 Stories Project illustrates how Ganz's leadership ideas come to life. Participants in focus groups often emphasise the importance of the project leader, describing them as central to the project's success. They see this not as dependence but as genuine leadership, which they say is rare to find. Their stories resonate with Ganz's core dimensions of depth, such as authenticity, commitment, and trust, and with breadth, by encouraging others to share their stories, and with quality, through training in Public Narrative, fostering safe spaces, and nurturing long-term relationships.

Their testimony highlights Ganz's idea of civic relationships built on a shared commitment. Participants reported that the 100 Stories Project leader's approach was consistently encouraging rather than controlling: they first shared their own story to foster openness, tailored communication to each person's comfort level, and made a heartfelt effort to reconnect personally after taking time off. Their willingness to show vulnerability, asking, "Who am I to say I won't do the same?" shines through, illustrating a genuine spirit of connection and understanding.

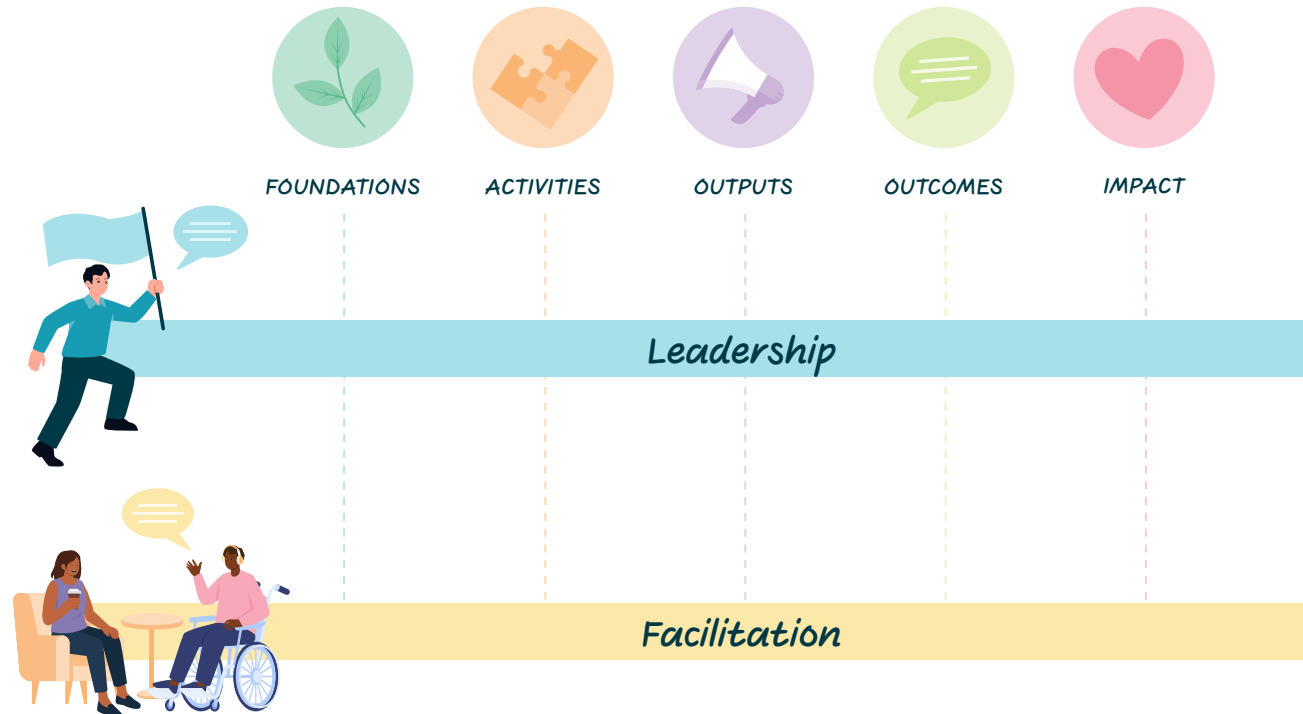
The Most Significant Change analysis shows that participants' trust grew significantly, particularly through genuine facilitator authenticity, visible dedication, and consistent follow-up. These findings clearly illustrate this positive progress. The Theory of Change supports these observations, showing that strong leadership and effective facilitation are key to shaping every stage, from initial efforts to lasting outcomes. When leadership isn't this strong, Ganz suggests that it doesn't just cause small problems; it can pose bigger risks to projects like these.

KEY TAKEAWAY: The evidence from the project strongly supports Ganz's theory that the depth of the project's leadership, its authenticity, consistency, and developmental intent were not merely coincidental with the results. Instead, they were the key mechanism that produced them.

"It's about having the right person for change to happen, but that person shouldn't be the only person. Change has to belong to all of us."

100 Stories Participant

Theory of Change enabling conditions



CHAPTER 2 LEADERSHIP

The leadership lesson: what the evidence now asks

The Community Enquiries (2024, 2025) provide independent, forward-looking perspectives and offers a unique approach that stands out from the focus group and Most Significant Change methods. It warmly invites senior leaders within the organisation to reflect on how the insights gained can influence and inspire future leadership.

Participants, including dedicated professionals from the Health Board, highlight the meaningful difference between listening and genuinely hearing. They share openly, "As a health board, we don't do enough of listening to stories and talking to people. We tend to think we know best." These compassionate professionals emphasise the value of role models and encourage leaders to go beyond formal reports. Instead, they invite leaders to share their own stories, expressing sincere reflections on their feelings and thoughts when they heard what families shared.

Ganz's framework offers a meaningful lens on the broader aspects of leadership. The Story of Now reminds us of the importance of taking meaningful action beyond feelings. The Community Enquiry 'What Next?' inspires us to set clear goals and deadlines and to maintain open, honest communication through 'you said, we did', which helps foster ongoing trust and shows that everyone's stories truly matter. Ganz invites us to consider: have we developed leadership capable of moving the work forward? The Community Enquiry asks: Did the leaders who listened demonstrate that they heard?

"A challenge to the decision makers to come up with a story on the back of these stories. Not a report, but something that's real. Are you lobbying enough on our behalf?"

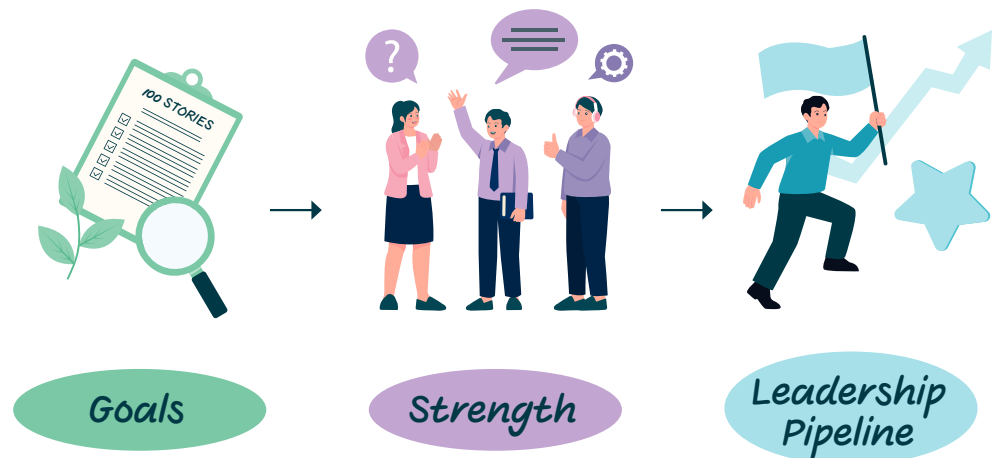
Community Enquiry Participant (2025)

KEY TAKEAWAY: Three separate sources, the focus group, the Most Significant Change analysis, and the Community Enquiry, all deliver a unified message: the project showcases what internal leadership can accomplish. The next step is for strategic leaders to step forward with honesty and accountability as they continue this inspiring journey.

"Consistency is key. This has been two years of consistency, meeting people and building understanding. If that has worked, and I think it has, then how can we keep building on that?"

Community Enquiry Participant (2025)

Ganz's Three Evaluative Questions



CHAPTER 3 THE STORIES

What the stories tell us, what they built, and what they ask

This chapter explores the thematic analysis of the 100 Stories Project's collection of narratives, divided into three sections.

In the first section, we delve into what the stories tell us, using Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis as our methodology. The second section focuses on the empowering act of storytelling, highlighting the social, cognitive, and personal skills that help young people to advocate for themselves. Finally, the third section brings to light what young people, families and professionals are sharing about the children to adult services transition, along with its wider structural implications, including its vital link to social, education and economic inactivity, and the age-18 services cliff edge.

Throughout all three sections, the same pattern is evident: the content of the stories helps us understand the problem; the act of telling them builds the solutions. These aren't separate steps; they are part of one connected process happening together, each at its own level.

KEY TAKEAWAY: Stories built trust where data alone could not, and trust is now reshaping the system. The content of the stories names the problem; the act of sharing them is the mechanism that builds the relationships needed to fix it.

Over two years, the 100 Stories Project moved young people, parents and carers, and professionals from isolation and scepticism towards connection, voice, and influence over real decisions. This finding is consistent across all elements of the research evidence.



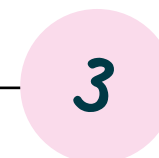
What the stories tell us



What storytelling builds



What the stories ask



VISIT THE VIRTUAL GALLERY

What the stories tell us

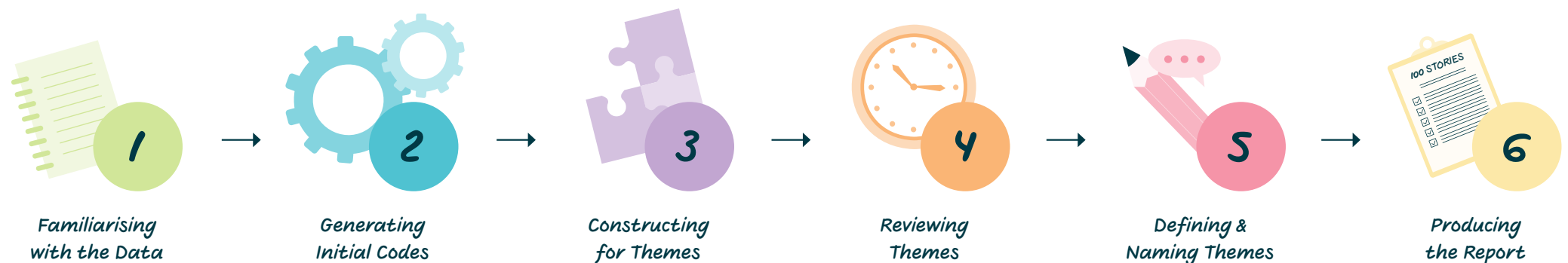
The thematic analysis of the 100 Stories Project's narrative evidence base was conducted using Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis framework. This approach is a widely used qualitative method in health and social care research, specifically designed to focus on participants' experiences, meanings, and perspectives.

Therefore, this approach is well suited to the 100 Stories Project. It is not confined to any particular way of understanding the world, nor does it rely on a fixed coding system. The central idea is that themes are not passively discovered in the data; they are actively constructed by researchers, shaped by their perspectives and theoretical views. This is particularly relevant to the 100 Stories Project, where Rosa Robinson from Frame completed a qualitative evaluation and Paula Wood from Wrexham University conducted thematic analysis grounded in rigorous academic and evaluative perspectives.

The six-phase process, familiarisation, generating codes, constructing themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and then producing the report, was applied to a collection of narrative evidence for which consent had been provided, which included written story abstracts, filmed and audio-recorded stories, facilitator journals, project reports, and the interim qualitative evaluation. This data represents the 100 Stories Project, in which data were gathered from 87 participants across North Wales, comprising 47 young adults, 23 parents and carers, and 17 professionals.

The data were thoughtfully organised into meaningful thematic clusters, carefully cross-checked against verbatim quotes, and then woven into vignettes that highlight key patterns. This process was completed on two levels to provide a fuller picture. First, it examined the stories themselves and named ten themes that participants shared about their transition experiences, highlighting what was important to young people and their families. Then, it explored participants' views on sharing their stories through qualitative evaluations, focus groups, and Community Enquiry. This part resulted in four main themes and sixteen subthemes. We present these two parts separately because the first focuses on what the stories tell us, while the second shows how sharing those stories impacts the participants.

Critically, Braun and Clarke (2022) highlight that reflexive thematic analysis goes beyond coding; it's a thoughtful process for exploring what the data really means, not just what it shows on the surface. This is exactly why it was a perfect fit for our project. The stories collected through the 100 Stories Project are not reports of events; they help us understand, interpret, and assign meaning to these experiences, making visible the deeper structural issues that any effective service response must address.



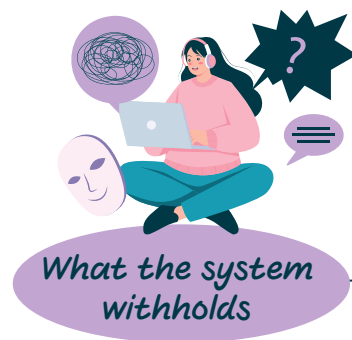
KEY TAKEAWAY: Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis was chosen specifically because it is designed for research where participant meaning making is itself the evidence, not a by-product.

The thematic analysis of the story content and abstracts developed ten participant-named themes. These themes, directly reflecting the voices of young people, parents, carers, and professionals, highlight important aspects of their transition experiences.

They are different from the evaluative themes related to participants' overall experience of the project, which are discussed in the second part. These ten themes represent what participants told us is currently not working and what needs to be improved. They provide a vital foundation for understanding and addressing the issues at hand, drawing on quotes from the 100 Stories Participants.

Across all ten themes, what stands out is not the variety of problems described, but the common story they tell: a system that does not fully consider young people's needs. Each theme highlights the same core issue, namely that at 18, transitions cut off support just when young people need it most, demonstrating a major structural flaw.

KEY TAKEAWAY: The ten themes name what the stories said. The content of the stories tells us where the system is faltering; the act of sharing them is the mechanism that builds the trust and relationships needed to fix it.



What the system withholds

- 1. Freedom:** Young people want futures shaped by their choices, not by labels. "Young people want their own dreams."
- 2. Battles:** Visiting too many clinics and navigating complex systems can feel overwhelming and disorganised. "Too many clinics and appointments to navigate."
- 3. Support:** Long waiting lists seem endless, and support suddenly disappears after age 18. "There is no support post 18."
- 4. Being young:** Young people often feel pushed into adult roles before they're developmentally ready. "Young people want to be young."
- 5. Unmasking:** Neurodivergent young people feel relentless pressure to hide or mask who they are just to fit in. "Young people don't want to mask themselves"; they want to advocate for themselves so they can share their experiences and expectations.



What the system fails to understand

- 6. Understanding:** When community and professional awareness of neurodiversity and learning disability is low, it has led to an over-reliance on diagnosis and medication, which can feel overwhelming for families. "Children shouldn't need to be medicated just to be assessed."
- 7. Education:** Educational settings struggle to include rather than exclude neurodivergent learners or those with a learning disability. "My disabilities have not hindered my talents, but my belief in the education system has."
- 8. Policy over people:** Sometimes, processes and eligibility rules take priority over the unique needs of individuals and families, creating unnecessary stress within family life. "Barriers create stress in the family home."



What young people want instead

- 9. Support:** Freely available, without stigma, and without needing a diagnosis to access it. Young people "don't want to be listened to only from those around them", they want services and professionals to listen.
- 10. Work and opportunity:** Real, meaningful opportunities to participate in work, not tokenistic schemes. "I want to work, I want to be productive, and I want to have friends."

The act of storytelling: developing agency to advocate for yourself

In addition to the ten themes constructed from the story content, analysis of participation, based on qualitative evaluations, focus groups, and Community Enquiry, produced four main themes as areas of change and sixteen subthemes. Rather than focusing on what the stories said, these themes highlight what the act of sharing them resulted in for individuals, relationships, and the system. This represents the second, equally important layer of the thematic analysis.



Human Experience

Emotion, vulnerability, loneliness, empowerment

The most powerful and consistent evaluative finding across all participant groups.

Themes: values-driven motivation, emotional processing through storytelling, empowerment and agency, isolation to collective belonging, wellbeing and psychosocial benefit. Loneliness, particularly for parents and carers, gave way to belonging. Participation was frequently described as the first time someone had felt safe enough to speak.



System Insight

Barriers, inconsistencies, structural challenges

Participants were precise about what isn't working

Themes: system constraints and shared frustration, practical and logistical barriers, sustainability, and continuity risk. The evaluative analysis confirmed recurring issues already noted in the story content, including waiting lists, support stopping at 18, and eligibility gaps, and added the organisational dimension: resources and staff turnover.



Relational Change

Trust, shared understanding, co-production, community

The shift from adversarial to collaborative dynamics between families and professionals

Themes: integration of lived and professional experience, mutual empathy and system understanding, scepticism to trust, and relational leadership as a critical success factor. Both groups recognised they were constrained by the same system, a breakthrough that disrupted blame and created space for shared ownership.



Mechanisms of Change

Storytelling, facilitation, leadership, mixed voices

How change happened

Themes: storytelling as influence, capacity building and skill development, and leadership authenticity as a trust mechanism. The Story of Self, Us and Now model functioned exactly as designed: stories engaged emotion (Heart), built shared understanding (Head), and created the foundation for action (Hands). The most significant finding is that storytelling develops the capacity to communicate, not just capture it, and this is examined in full on the next page.

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“Stories are more powerful than data alone. They create emotional connection and understanding, they make it real.”

Community Enquiry Participant (2025)

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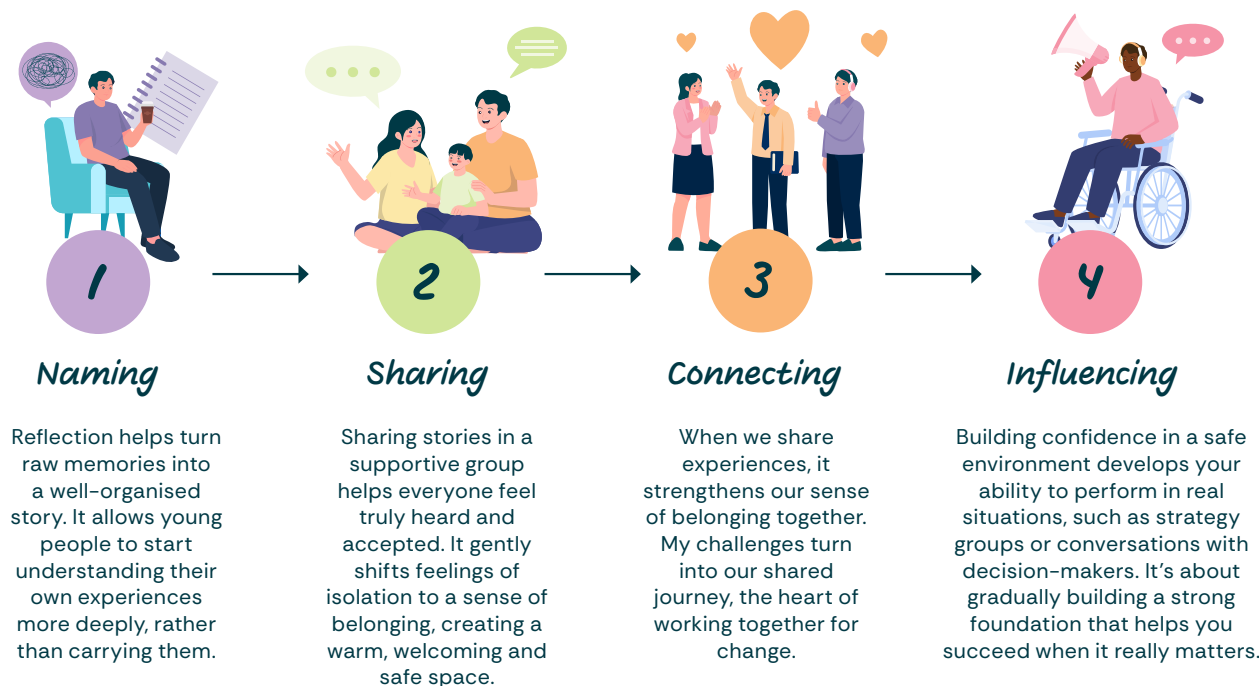
KEY TAKEAWAY: The sixteen subthemes confirm what the act of storytelling builds: trust, empathy, skills, voice, and relational power. These are the mechanisms through which the ten story-content themes move from naming the problem to fixing it.

From private experience to public voice: the evidenced progression

The analysis clearly highlights that young people often face challenges in advocacy and tend to mask their true feelings during the transition from children to adult services. Helping them develop skills through public narrative can be a wonderful way to empower them.

These skills help young people organise their thoughts and feelings into a story that truly reflects their needs and how they want to be understood. When they learn to share their voices effectively, they feel supported, valued, and acknowledged. It's important to remember that developing these skills takes time, but it's a meaningful journey towards better self-expression and understanding.

The project's evidence highlights a four-stage developmental journey. It's not just about feeling good but a carefully designed, step-by-step progression:



The 100 Stories Project offers heartfelt evidence of this journey. The Storytelling Toolkit brings together research showing that autobiographical storytelling empowers young people to resist being reduced to what they describe as diagnostic labels, helps them find words for self-advocacy, and enables them to share their needs in new and meaningful ways. The analysis highlights this through touching stories such as Isolation to Belonging, Silence to Voice, and Participation to System Momentum.

"It has given us HOPE. For the first time in his adult life, a step on the ladder has been offered."

100 Stories Participant

KEY TAKEAWAY: Building socio-cognitive skills through Public Narrative isn't just an extra step in transition support; it's the essential foundation that makes the whole process work. We believe that young people can't effectively advocate for themselves in a system if they haven't been given the chance to develop those self-advocacy skills first.

The focus group provides the clearest evidence. Participants share their journeys in their own words: shifting from 'I didn't think anyone would listen' to confidently influencing Public Service Boards and Regional Partnership Boards. One professional describes seeing a participant take her story directly to a local authority leader, who then became a passionate advocate for extending transition support from 18 to 25. This beautifully illustrates Ganz's concepts of Voice, Collective voice, Influence, and Power, demonstrating impact rather than theory.

What young people and families are telling us and what it means about the children to adult services transition: a system that feels like a cliff edge

The main message of the 100 Stories evidence base is clear and relatable. Young people, families, and professionals all recognise the same fundamental issue, though they may describe it differently.

That issue is the abrupt transition from children to adult services at age 18, which feels more like falling off a cliff than crossing a bridge. What would really help is a smooth, co-designed transition from 18 to 25, giving young people and families the time and support they need to build the skills, confidence, and independence for adult life. Whilst we acknowledge that there are examples of good transition practice, the evidence from this project reflects the stories that participants have shared.

The analysis names what is happening with precision: People feel they are being let down and are standing on a cliff edge, lost, isolated, on the margins of the life they could have had socially, educationally and economically. This is not a failure of individuals. It is a component of systems design.

"Hold young people's hand and lead the way, no signposting, as this is isolating. Focus on preventative measures to avoid crisis points which result in expensive, unhelpful crisis management"

100 Stories Participant

KEY TAKEAWAY: The stories do not describe a broken service; they describe a missing one. There is no provision specifically designed to support young people with neurodevelopmental conditions during the 18-to-25 developmental period; its absence is the finding in participants' stories.

"The service isn't working, so you need to fix with serious commitment, not boxes and ticks. Set achievable targets and listen to folk as they know what's not working and which bits are broke"

100 Stories Participant



What young people and families said

What it means

"I had literally turned 18 two days prior. How can that immediately make me a responsible adult?"

Transition is based on an age cutoff set for administrative purposes, rather than reflecting actual developmental stages. The system views 18 as a turning point that, in reality, no one truly passes through.

"I was told you will need to fight. The fight takes its toll."

Transition feels like a battle families have to win alone, not a service designed to support them.

"There is no support post 18."

Support does not taper; it stops. Young people who needed scaffolding to develop self-advocacy suddenly find themselves in a system that requires it of them without having provided the conditions to build it.

"Young people don't want to mask themselves."

Masking, the suppression of neurodivergent identity to pass in neurotypical environments, is an exhausting and damaging adaptive strategy. Its prevalence signals a system that demands conformity rather than inclusivity.

"We don't ask for much, just what our children deserve."

The ask is achievable: consistent commitment and visible action, not a perfect system overnight.

Building the bridge: from cliff edge to a socially progressive 18-to-25 service

The evidence from the 100 Stories Project clearly shows what is needed and what's currently missing. The shift from children's to adult services at age 18 isn't just a service gap; it's a fundamental lack of support.

Right now, there is no dedicated provision tailored to help young adults aged 18 to 25 during this critical developmental period. The stories shared highlight the long-term impact: social withdrawal, dropping out of education, not participating in the workforce, declining mental health, and young people feeling as if they're on the edge of a cliff, lost, isolated, and on the fringes of the life they could have had socially, educationally, and economically.

The overall evidence identifies three main challenges. First, neurodevelopmental needs often go unmet in childhood, leaving young people with unresolved issues as they enter adulthood. Second, during the transition, young people struggle to communicate their needs clearly and lack the self-advocacy skills the system expects. Developing these skills takes time, and the analysis shows this growth rarely occurs before age 18. Third, support typically ends suddenly at 18, just when young people are least prepared to navigate adult services independently.

Each challenge compounds the previous one, creating a trajectory from unmet needs, through reduced support, to social, educational, and economic inactivity.

The analysis identifies the consequence of this. If transitions do not change, the evidence strongly suggests that history will repeat itself, and the issues will become more entrenched across future generations. This leaves young people socially, educationally, and economically inactive, unable to advocate for themselves and not thriving. This is not a prediction; it is a pattern the stories have already documented. Young people who do not experience a socially progressive transition arrive at adulthood without the socio-cognitive skills, relational networks, or systemic support to participate socially, educationally, or economically in life.

What would the bridge look like in practice? Participants have told us through their stories, it looks like this:

KEY TAKEAWAY: The 100 Stories evidence not only highlights a broken transition but also, through participants' own words, clearly shows what an alternative should look like. Creating a co-designed, socially progressive bridge for 18- to 25-year-olds is a vital structural step to help young people find their place in the world, build confidence, and remain engaged socially, educationally and economically.

“

"Keep supporting young people to build confidence and social skills so they can feel part of a real community"

100 Stories Participant

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The 18 to 25 Bridge



Think of it as guiding young people gently along their journey. By fostering closer collaboration between children's and adult services, with shared eligibility criteria and a unified approach, we can provide a smoother, more supportive experience for everyone involved.



Adopting a whole-family approach during the entire transition, rather than only at the moment of transfer.



We should place greater emphasis on each person's unique needs and move away from relying solely on a diagnosis as the main pathway to support.



This is an ongoing and intentional opportunity to share stories, reminding us that storytelling isn't just the starting point of the journey but a continuous adventure.



As the evidence shows, it's the continuous process through which young people explore their place in the world, grow their sense of agency, and form the connections that help them navigate adult life.

CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

What the evidence means, and what can happen next

The 100 Stories Project has had a heartfelt impact. Young people, parents, carers, and professionals across North Wales wholeheartedly shared their stories, turning feelings of isolation into a sense of influence. These stories, beautifully documented by participants, highlight personal, relational, and strategic growth. Now, on behalf of everyone who contributed, 100 Stories participants ask: Will the system show the same level of dedication to continue this meaningful journey?

What the evidence concludes

Stories fostered trust in a way that data alone couldn't. The sense of psychological safety, nurtured through consistent, skilled, and genuine facilitation, was the key ingredient that made the other positive outcomes possible.

Storytelling develops agency. Public Narrative training builds socio-cognitive skills, including naming, sharing, connecting, and influencing, which young people do not develop when support is withdrawn at 18.

The transition at 18 can be seen as a structural challenge rather than an individual one. It's important to note that there isn't a dedicated support framework for the developmental period from 18 to 25. This gap leads to significant social, educational, and economic inactivity. Recognising this helps to understand the broader impact and the need for supportive measures during this critical period.

Strategic Partnership Actions

The Community Enquiry identified five priority actions that require collective leadership and coordinated action across organisational boundaries to improve support for young people aged 18–25 in North Wales. This project provides a comprehensive evidence base and presents an exciting opportunity for leaders across North Wales to embed learning in systems development and planning.

KEY TAKEAWAY: The 100 Stories Project proved that when people are given the space, support, and skills to tell their stories, they can reshape the systems that shape their lives. The evidence is here. The next steps belong to those with the power to act.

Next Steps

- 1. Resource the role, not just the project:** Fund facilitation continuity as a permanent organisational function, not a project activity. The evidence is clear: impact depends on consistent, relational, skilled leadership. When that is absent, progress stalls. The sustainability of this work is a resourcing decision, not a programme-management one.
- 2. Build the 18-to-25 bridge:** Design and commission a graduated, co-produced National Neurodevelopmental Transition Framework for Wales. This framework would bring together the Welsh Government, Health Boards, Local Authorities, educational institutions, third-sector organisations, and young people themselves. The goal? To establish clear, consistent principles and expectations for transition support across Wales. Do not signpost; participants ask that services “hold young people’s hands” and provide whole-family support throughout the transition period. Enable joint working between children’s and adult services, with aligned eligibility. Provide greater focus on individual needs rather than diagnosis-based access and continue structured storytelling as an ongoing mechanism for developing self-advocacy.
- 3. Demonstrate that the system heard:** Participants have asked that senior leaders should respond to this evidence not with a formal report but with their own authentic accounts of what they heard, what it meant, and what they are committing to do. The Community Enquiry asked: ‘Did the leaders who listened demonstrate that they heard?’ A clear, public ‘you said, we did’ response demonstrates an obligation of accountability and a trust-building act.
- 4. Widen the table:** Extend co-production structures to include more young people across all regions. Reduce practical barriers to participation, transport, time, emotional support, and access to digital formats. The stories that were hardest to hear came from those who found it hardest to be in the room. Their voices must be part of the next phase.
- 5. Strengthen the evidence cycle:** Move from indicative pre- and post-survey data to a tracked cohort methodology, paired with ongoing Most Significant Change storytelling. A stronger paired evaluation will complete the evidence picture and support future commissioning decisions.

*“Role models count.
Be one. Today.”*

100 Stories Participant

Our ASK

Include 100 Stories Learning as an evidence base to inform systems development.

Continue to engage with the project and build a legacy of learning.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project is dedicated to all the young people, parents, carers, and professionals who took part. We thank you for your honesty, integrity, and determination to make a difference now and for generations to come.

The 100 Stories Project was co-designed with a number of supporting partners and experts in the field; without their time and expertise the project would not have been possible. We feel it is important to recognise these contributions and to give special thanks to Nina Ruddle and the Civic Mission team at Wrexham University, Do Well Ltd, Ysgol Tir Morfa, Ysgol Pendalar, Swansea University, Conwy Connects, Stand North Wales, Art & Soul Tribe, Campfire Cymru, Your Space, HFT, The Coproduction Network for Wales, Frame Collective, Flintshire County Council, Wrexham County Borough Council, Cymru Gryf, Conwy County Council, Denbighshire County Council, Anglesey County Council, Gwynedd County Council, The North Wales Public Service Boards and North Wales Regional Partnership Board.

Finally, we give great thanks to Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board and Awr Las NHS Charitable Funds Committee. Your commitment to develop and support this project has ensured the voices of young people, parents, carers and professionals are influencing change across North Wales.

Thank you for reading our report. We hope it inspires you to listen differently, act boldly, and help build a future where every young person's story is not only heard but also acted upon. Please get in touch with any questions and access our Storytelling Toolkit to help more people share their experiences through storytelling.

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100 Stories Toolkit: Rosa Robinson and Helen Wales, Frame.

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STORIES

REPORT

2026

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