



How can we nurture human flourishing? Seeds of hope in Scotland today and lessons from the Peckham Experiment

Friday 19th May, ALLIANCE offices, Venlaw Building, 349 Bath Street, Glasgow, G2 4AA Event Notes

This event was the result of a partnership between the Pioneer Health Foundation (PHF) and the Health and Social Care Academy (the Academy) to explore how we can nurture human flourishing and identify some seeds of hope we can support here in Scotland. The Academy is a programme of the ALLIANCE which supports transformational change using the lens of lived experience to focus on the relational and human aspects of change in health and social care. The Pioneer Health Foundation is a charity which keeps alive the legacy of the Peckham Experiment.

It was recognised that both organisations see their role as extending beyond improving health and care to enabling health and wellbeing.

The afternoon took the form of a conversation about what we can all do to create the conditions for human flourishing - in public policy, in services, but most of all on the ground in our communities. What would a society where people could flourish look like? Where do we recognise it occurring today? And what can we all do to protect and nourish developments that contribute to human flourishing? Widening the boundaries of realistic medicine we were keen to explore what else we need to transform health and enable all to flourish.

Following a shared meal, the conversation was opened and chaired by Audrey Birt who is the Associate Director of the Academy and a trustee of TheWEL which studies and works to enable human flourishing.

As a conversation starter, Dr Lisa Curtice, ALLIANCE Associate Director and also a trustee of the Pioneer Health Foundation outlined some key features of the Peckham Experiment which, in 1930s London, launched an enquiry into the conditions for health with the collaboration of a community of families and which continues to inspire thinkers and activists throughout the world.

Our lead Conversation Partners were Dr Margaret Hannah, Director of Public Health for NHS Fife, author of 'Humanising Healthcare' and a trustee of Pioneer Health

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Foundation and Eileen Conn MBE a community activist in Peckham and founder of Peckham Vision who has found inspiration in the Peckham Experiment,

Discussion focused on what a flourishing Scotland might look like and the opportunities for transformational change. Taking part in the conversation were an invited audience who spanned the whole of the UK and public, third sectors as well as social enterprises and community groups and included people who have taken Peckham principles into their thinking and practice in art, education, primary care and farming.

We hope that this note will serve as a stimulus for further conversation and we invite you to add your reflections and create further outputs. Engage at #flourishing

At the beginning of the event the scene was set by described the work of the Peckham and the Five Provocations.

[The Peckham Experiment](#)

What was the Peckham Experiment?



The Peckham Experiment was an investigation into the nature of health and living. It ran from 1926 – 1950 in Peckham, south London. It operated from the Pioneer Health Centre, a purpose-built centre in which doctors and staff observed families interacting in a social setting. At the Centre a self-organising, intergenerational community developed. The Experiment concluded that health is more than just an

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absence of disease, and identified the crucial role played by the social environment in promoting health.



Why is it of interest today?

The research undertaken at the Pioneer Health Centre was a unique study into the health of individuals, families and a community, which has never been repeated. Its findings have had an impact around the world on professionals and communities seeking to improve health and wellbeing.

The Experiment was holistic and therefore touches many fields. It has lessons for, and connections with, those involved in architecture, the built environment and designing for health; ecological design and wellbeing; health promotion and health education; community health, humanising healthcare and personalised health; early years, play, child development and education; food and nutrition; co-operation co-production and community development; arts, creativity and wellbeing and research methodology.

Its history raises the wider issue of why radical initiatives often fail to influence the mainstream. However it also demonstrates how a network of pioneers can keep alive inspiration to connect with the experience of others and ensure that the principles that promote human flourishing continue to be developed.

What did the researchers find?

The relevant findings were:

- Health is a process that has to be cultivated if it is to thrive.
- If people are given information about themselves and their families in the context of a shared life in a community they will attempt to make decisions that are in the best interests of their families.
- People thrive when they are given the freedom to make choices about their activities and will choose those that help in their development.
- When people are given resources in a community to enable them to grow they will be active in their community for the benefit of that community.

The Five Provocations



Following the Academy's inaugural [Think Tank](#) in October 2015, we launched the Five Provocations for the Future of Health and Social Care. This publication explores each of the themes that emerged from the Think Tank and provides context and a narrative for how change in each of these areas could transform health and social care in Scotland. [Download the paper here.](#) These provocations have shaped the Academy's future work, and through this we aim to incite conversation, debate, new ideas and action around these themes. This event into human flourishing relates most especially to the crucial theme around emphasising humanity and also the importance of the provocation to cede power to people and communities.

Seeds of hope

Under the title 'How do we pattern hope?' Margaret Hannah then presented her work on [Humanising Healthcare](#). Her talk and book aims to provide a practical strategy for transforming the UK and other healthcare systems and makes the case for offering an affordable, sustainable and compassionate alternative to the present situation.



The International Future Forum's [Three Horizons Framework](#) provides a way of charting a path towards a transformed future in turbulent times. The SHINE project in Fife exemplifies how culture change can happen. Over time a shift in thinking and practice has occurred

which puts the older person and their family at the centre, co creating support in relationship with professionals and others in the community. A change that began with a new way of having conversations has now been scaled up and is embedded in practice with over 15 000 patients. This patient work in Fife over many years

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shows how different the outcomes can be when a small group of people remain tenacious to their values and vision, despite the persistence of bureaucratic obstacles and received (first horizon) thinking and practices and work alongside those they serve to put joy and fulfilment at the centre of their ambitions for themselves and their families.

Living Structures and local power

Later in the afternoon Eileen Conn, the Chair and Coordinator of [Peckham Vision](#) explained how she had developed over time a vibrant network of over 12,000 local contacts which provided a 'space of possibility' where social information was shared to enable local people to take action, for example to challenge planning decisions in the interests of their community. She finds inspiration in the Peckham Experiment in her work in the same locality today. In particular, she has come to understand how sustainable change and powerful community action are part of the living structure of society that exists beneath the layers of bureaucratic control. She also gave a message of hope – how people locally can organise and nurture and strengthen each other by acting together to bring about a more humane physical and social environment. Images of successful developments for the community, such as that of the Bussey Building, told the story of the difference an engaged community can bring about. She posed a challenge into the discussion – how do we nurture and sustain these living systems, characterised by peer relationships, as against the powerful interests, traditional systems and organisational processes that sap energy from communities and quash initiative and imagination?

These introductions all set the context for the afternoon discussions. The rich diversity of the audience and the stimuli for discussion allowed a number of interesting themes to emerge.

They are highlighted below and are merely a snapshot of what was covered.

What does community mean?



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The Peckham Experiment was based on a 'place' as being key to community. The relationship between community and place was discussed, with one participant expressing caution regarding when a community is being made 'better' and another community is displaced.

How can we improve living conditions for everyone without pushing some people out? Homebaked Anfield was shared as an example of this – a membership organisation that allows local people to collectively buy, develop and manage land and buildings.

What opportunities are there to nourish human flourishing?

Political challenges can present opportunities and galvanise community action. At policy level the Community Empowerment Act, the Good Food Nation Bill and interest in participatory budgeting provide such opportunities. Examples in Glasgow include the Kinning Park Complex and Govanhill Baths, which brought together a diverse community around a common cause. Also libraries which are no longer funded and taken on by volunteers. Interfaith Glasgow shows the energy that can be released when people come together for a common purpose. [Postcards from Scotland](#) are publications that show how different futures are being imagined and put into practice.

From elsewhere [Burtzog](#) is an example of a neighbourhood based way of organising care, as an alternative to providing a service. International networks are important in sustaining new ways of thinking and being.

Other opportunities include economic freedom to help people flourish and the power of the arts to release energy and creativity.

What would Scotland look like it were #flourishing?

- Greenspace
- Communities being listened to
- Storytelling flourishes
- Time to engage in community
- Not having to leave your community for work
- Leaving behind a 'this belongs to me' mentality
- Diversity – in environment and population

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- A range of resources, which are collectively managed – including education and recreation
- A different approach to mental health
- More street life – street parties, children playing in the street
- Community space and buildings for meetings and interactions
- Less materialistic consumption
- Nature and access to green spaces
- Collaborative healthcare
- Opportunities for creativity to release imagination that change is possible
- Time for ideas to develop and flourish
- Tenacious innovators supported
- Recognising communities have skills and don't need 'experts' to come in
- New models of community government



Reflections

This quote resonates powerfully with the tapestry of discussion at this event.

“The world is mainly a vast leaf colony, growing on and forming a leafy soil, not a mere mineral mass; and we live not by the jingling of our coins, but by the fullness of our harvests” – Patrick Geddes

There was a shared recognition of the challenge of patterning hope in these complex political times but also an acknowledgement that such times can create counter movements which can lead to long term change. The reflections below suggest some strategies to move forward to help our communities and our people to flourish.

Importantly this last contribution compels us not to wait but to do what we can do and to be the change we want to see.

‘Just do it – with other people – don’t wait for the system to change’

- ‘Finding new ways to tell and listen to stories’
- ‘Listen – really listen – and then act positively. Support others to act and have influence’
- ‘Subsidiarity – give more power back to local communities’
- ‘Professional/workers getting out of the way to allow communities to flourish’
- ‘Let community work in partnership. Move from top down approach’
- ‘How do we scale effectively without turning local kitchen gardens into industrial farming...and make neighbourhoods make sense for the people that live in them’

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- ‘Really bring the language and ethos and practice of compassion to our services – for people and staff’
- ‘House of Care – building Scottish capacity for a person centred approach where the person is in the driving seat of their own care and support; accessing community strengths’
- ‘Making connections with organising bodies in the professions who need to develop understanding of the nature of living society – and the implication for their work and professions’
- ‘Make strong connections to planning structures and the council roles’
- ‘To bring together the ‘Radicals’ to help move from horizon 1 to 3. To shift beliefs in order to provide care. Patients/people really need to remain healthy’
- ‘The medical model has a lot to answer for! But not about medical education – consultants are often the furthest from this thinking and they model to younger generations...’
- ‘The Community Empowerment Act represents a huge opportunity but also a potential thread to flourishing for all, not just the land, voiced and already active’
- ‘The power of engaging in the arts – the sense that change is possible, building confidence’
- ‘By leaves we live’

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Please take this conversation into your own groups and networks and share with us your examples of flourishing.

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