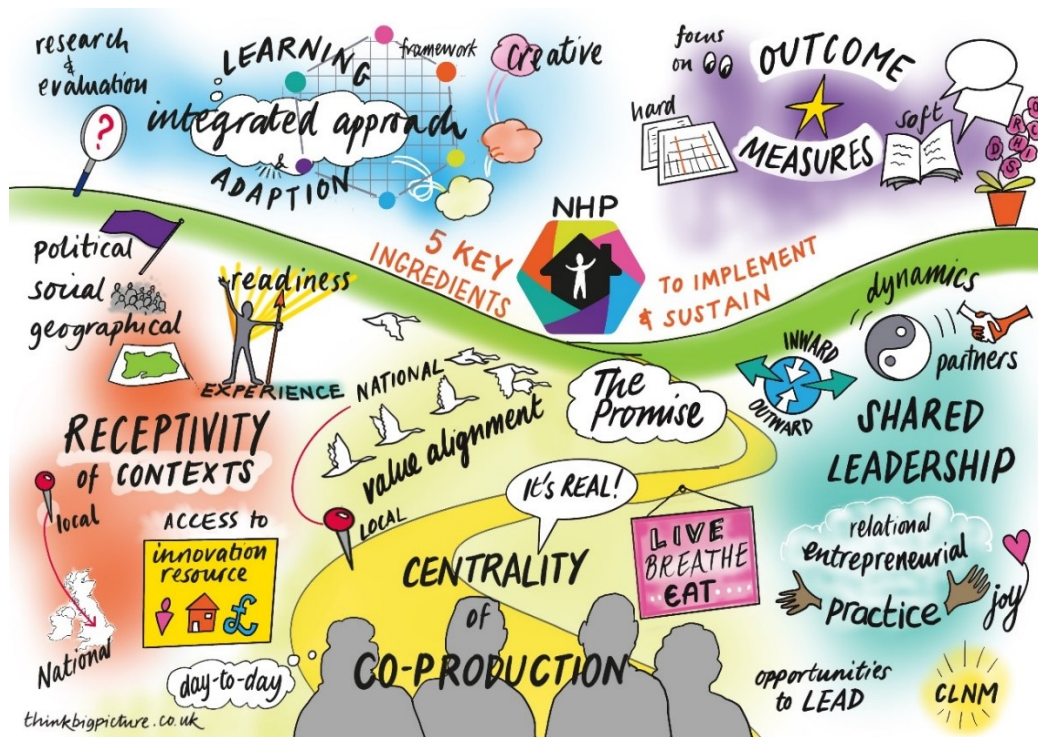# Exploring Innovation in Transitions
National House Project Case Study
Final Report

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Acknowledgements

EXIT-NHP Final Report June 2024

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1. Introduction

This report introduces the areas of learning from Exploring Innovation in Transitions (EXIT) – National House Project Case Study. EXIT, an inter-disciplinary UK research study, was a collaboration between researchers with expertise in social care, organisation science and public health from the universities of Warwick, Bedfordshire, Newcastle and Birmingham and included a team of Peer Researcher Research Associates (young people with care experience who were undertaking undergraduate or postgraduate study at one of the partner universities). Funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (2020-2023), EXIT focussed on innovations designed to improve outcomes for care leavers in the UK.

Research has demonstrated that care leavers experience challenges in the transition period (Stein, 2008) and experience social and health inequalities that continue into later life (Gypen et al., 2017; Sacker et al., 2021). Although UK legal frameworks governing care-leaving are robust and government funding has enabled organisations to innovate with the aim of improving outcomes for care leavers, there are challenges in implementing, embedding and sustaining interventions and innovations (Lefevre et al., 2022).

The EXIT study aimed to develop understanding of innovations designed to improve outcomes for care leavers. The study objectives were to identify what supports and hinders successful innovations for care leavers, to share learning to support the growth and sustainability of innovations and contribute towards positive impacts for young people who leave care. 'Innovation' was characterised as a 'journey' (Van de Ven, 1986) in which services, systems or outcomes were transformed beyond 'business as usual' (Harris and Albury, 2009). A broad conceptualisation of innovation journeys included a focus on policy-mandated interventions aiming to achieve transformational change (Brown, 2010) and introduction of practices across contexts, that although routine for practitioners in one context were experienced as novel and innovative in another (Anderson et al., 2014).

'House Project' is an innovation for care leavers that provides a psychological, relational, holistic approach to supporting young people as they move towards and into living in their own homes. Each Local House Project (LHP) is situated within a local authority ("LA", England) or Council (Scotland) as a service offer as a pathway from care for an annual cohort of around 8-12 young people. National House Project (NHP) is a national charity that aims to support the growth and development of House Project, and includes Care Leavers' National Movement (CLNM), which has developed from its origins as the young people steering group in NHP.

2. Research approach

Adopting a case study research-practice partnership approach, NHP featured as one of six innovations for care leavers in EXIT. Within NHP, a focus on three sites enabled exploration of House Project's innovation journey at a national and local level. Two LHPs were selected as 'exemplars' (and agreed to be named in the report). The three-site NHP nested case study comprised:

- NHP, National Charity
- LHP exemplar, England - Islington
- LHP exemplar, Scotland - Midlothian

The research period extended from March 2021 to August 2023, with the researchers attending monthly governance meetings with NHP senior staff. Ethical approval was granted by University of Warwick and University of Bedfordshire. Between October 2021 and August 2022, data was generated from 31 interviews and 13 observations of meetings that aimed to explore how the processes of innovation were enacted. Participants included members of the NHP community employed in strategic and operational roles at NHP, LAs/Councils and partner organisations including directors, practice leads, project leads, facilitators, participation officers and young people who were founders and current members of CLNM. Observations included national conferences and strategic meetings, community of practice and team meetings (Figure 2.1). Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed and observation data were recorded in a structured format.

Figure 2.1. NHP case study research data

Case Study	Participant group	NHP	LHP, England (Islington)	LHP, Scotland (Midlothian)	Overall
Research period		Oct 21 - Aug 22	Mar 22 – July 22	June 22 – Aug 22	Oct 21 – Aug 22
Number of Interviews	Young people – CLNM	1	2	1	4
	Professionals – operational	5	5	3	13
	Professionals – strategic	7	3	4	14
	Overall	**13**	**10**	**8**	**31**
Number of Observations	Operational meetings	3	1	1	5
	Strategic meetings	2	3	1	6
	National events	2	-	-	2
	Overall	**7**	**4**	**2**	**13**

The interviews and observations offered a deep and valuable insight into how members of the NHP community experienced and practiced the processes of innovation, with attention to the phases of design, implementation and sustaining. Inclusion of a broad set of perspectives, including young people in CLNM and professionals in operational and strategic roles, representing both English and Scottish national contexts, in local and national House Project and partner organisations further enhanced quality of the dataset.

Between August 2022 and August 2023, a focused one-year period of data analysis was guided by the thematic analysis method (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2021). Transcripts and observation sheets were reviewed and coded using an initial inductive approach to identify units of meaning. A series of analysis workshops with the wider inter-disciplinary EXIT research team and a process of member checking with the NHP team informed the development of themes across the dataset. Themes were developed in relation to innovation outcomes; core elements of the innovation design; and key ingredients of the innovation journey and in relation to areas of strength; opportunities; and areas of reflection. EXIT study's partnership with a graphic artist[1], involving a series of two research workshops attended by senior members of NHP staff, developed the themes visually to increase accessibility of the understanding developed in the case study.

The themes were synthesised and are represented in the following section as three areas of learning: 1) NHP outcomes; 2) the core fidelity elements of House Project innovation design; 3) key ingredients of the House Project innovation journey. Each area includes an overview of the key messages from the research, interview quotes and reflections, focused on opportunities. A thematic graphic illustration is included at the beginning of each thematic section.

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[1] https://thinkbigpicture.co.uk/

3. Areas of learning

Areas of learning focus on 1) NHP outcomes; 2) core fidelity elements of House Project innovation design; 3) key ingredients of the House Project innovation journey.

3.1 NHP outcomes: Three outcome domains

Figure 3.1.1. NHP Outcomes: Three outcome domains
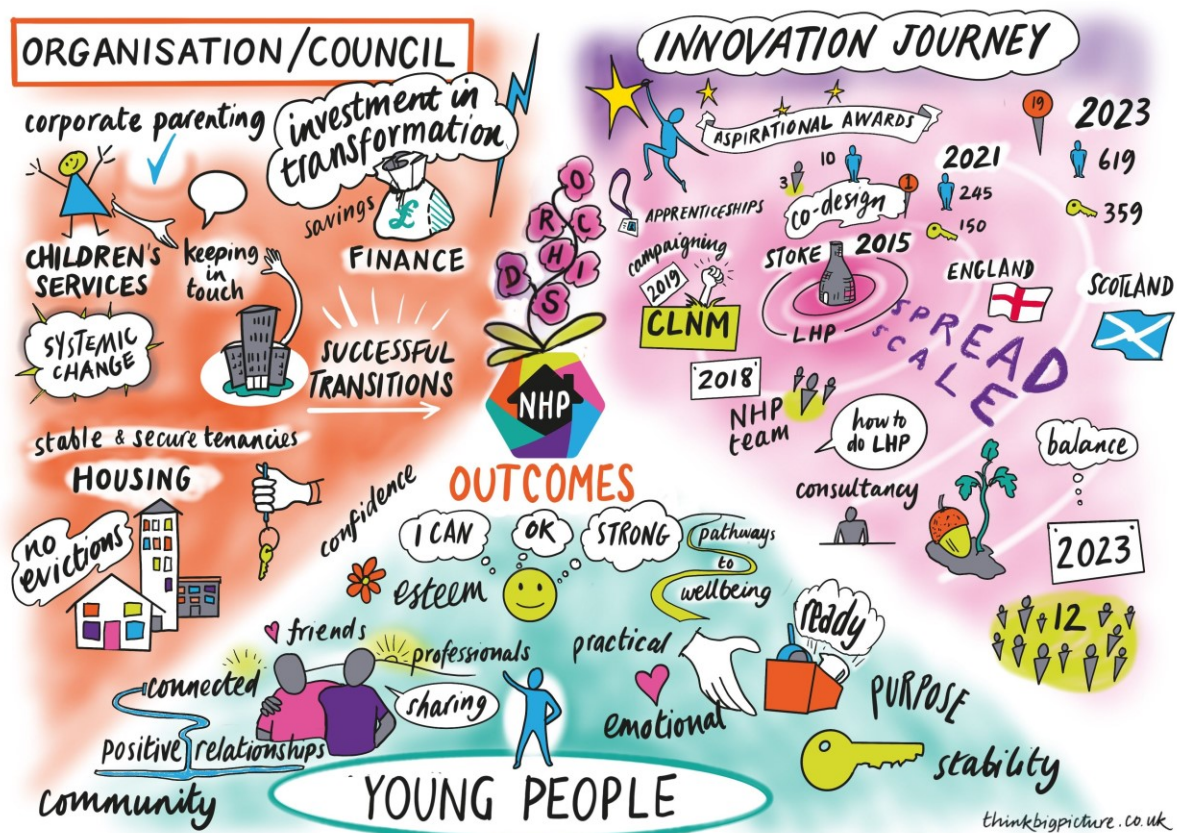
Three outcome domains were identified within the study: young people's experiences, organisational outcomes and innovation journey/process outcomes (illustrated in Figure 3.1.1). Whilst the EXIT study did not set out to 'measure' outcomes, the discourse within the NHP community, as evidenced in our interviews and observations, celebrated success across a range of inter-related, multi-level outcome areas. As a result, the analysis process extended to incorporate the inductive development of an NHP-EXIT study outcomes framework (Figure 3.1.2), which has potential for further application and development with the NHP community, in relation to broader outcome areas and measures (see Section 3.3.5).

Figure 3.1.2. NHP-EXIT study outcomes framework

Outcome Domain	Outcomes Areas		
YP: Young people's experiences	YP1: Developing supportive relationships	YP2: Developing pathways to positive mental health and sense of wellbeing	YP3: Moving into and living in own home
Org: LA/Council	Org1: Children's Services	Org2: Housing	Org3: Finance
IJ: Innovation journey/process	IJ1: National spread	IJ2: National scale	IJ3: LHP implementation, spread and scale

The framework guides the following three sections, focused on each outcome domain in turn, beginning with young people's experiences.

3.1.1 Young people's experiences

Young people's outcomes through being members of the NHP community related to positive experiences in the three inter-relating areas of developing supportive relationships, pathways to mental health and wellbeing and moving into and living in their own homes. Young people's friendships with each other, positive relationships with professionals, confidence in participating and joy at moving into their new homes were observed at events and meetings in which "*they exuded confidence*". These positive experiences echoed a summary within an Ofsted inspection report:

> "The House Project is an innovative and highly valued service that is making a significant difference for care leavers. The service helps young people to build confidence and make friends for life, through preparation for independence and the provision of secure and affordable accommodation. Young people said to inspectors that being involved in the project makes them feel like they have a family"
>
> (Islington LA Children's Services Ofsted Inspection Report, 2020, p.7)

Developing supportive relationships

Young people and professionals spoke passionately about NHP's important role in supporting young people to develop positive relationships and friendships, which was palpable in the interactions we observed across national events and meetings. Young people described their experiences of developing and sustaining positive friendships and supportive relationships with one another and professionals as transformative and empowering. One young person described their relationships with NHP professionals

as "*professional friendship*" and commented on how "*it's made me realise that there a lot of people out there that are willing to help you and just be there*". Professionals at LHPs and LAs described the sense of community and connections that young people had created and sustained with the support of the wider NHP community. They described how young people accessed support with day-to-day household tasks, including sharing cooking and cleaning tips and telephone calls with housing and utility agencies, engaged with empowering opportunities presented by CLNM and experienced a sense of reduced isolation and loneliness.

> "People I've met on my House Project are still extremely close friends of mine... It's amazing how that's happened and it's also made me realise it's not me against the world. It's not 'I'm completely independent' - I've got to look after myself and then I'll talk to others. It's made me realise that there are people out there that are willing to help you and just be there…Yeah, it just sort of helped me a lot because it made me realise the type of adult I wanted to be…it's been quite a powerful thing for me". Young Person, CLNM

> "We're there for each other because look at the community chat that we've got…they're sharing what they've been cooking, they've shared cleaning tips with each other, if somebody's selling something they'll put it up on there. And that was very heavily driven by us… now naturally they just do it themselves, which is amazing." Professional, LHP

> "We spoke about loneliness before; reduced isolation, reduced feeling of loneliness, how they're involved in the different national movements, or different national campaigns…that is a major outcome for me, for young people". Strategic Leader, Children's Services, LA/Council

> "We've got a young person he's doing so well, so it's not like he's contacting us because of a crisis, he's contacting us just to pop in and have a chat and fill us in on what he's doing. So it's that, and he's from the first cohort and he popped in last week just to tell us about this job that he'd got…things like that, that I think show the success". Professional, LHP

This strong sense of young people's connectivity and developing positive personal and professional relationships through their experience as members of the NHP and LHP communities is aligned with recent NHP evaluations (CLNM, 2021; Harvey et al, 2023). Perspectives from the NHP community offer a stark contrast with examples of young people's more negative experiences at transition from care that have been identified in wider research which indicated that many young people leaving care experienced feeling 'very lonely and social isolated', having lost contact with staff and support workers (Baker, 2017, p.16).

Developing pathways to positive mental health and sense of wellbeing

Young people and professionals discussed how being part of NHP and forming supportive relationships provided the foundations and pathways for young people to

develop positive mental health and a sense of wellbeing. Being part of the NHP community offered pathways for young people to develop awareness and understanding of their mental health needs, confidence and trust to share their experiences and seek support to access services. In addition to helping them to address areas of need relating to their challenges or concerns with mental health, NHP created empowering opportunities for young people to develop self-confidence and self-esteem and contribute towards social change.

A young person described how their facilitators offered them praise and helped them to develop confidence. They reflected how NHP and CLNM offered them a place where "*I can make change. I can make my life worth something by doing this*". We experienced young people's energy and enthusiasm and sensed their confidence and esteem as we interacted with and observed them engaging in empowering opportunities, presenting at LHP Steering Groups and chairing and presenting at NHP and CLNM national conferences.

> "The stuff that it helped me with is confidence and getting praise… with the National House Project I have an outlet. I have a place where I can control things. I can make change. I can make my life worth something by doing this". Young person, CLNM

> "Us young people…when we join we're not obviously the most talkative. But over time we break out of our shells" Young person, CLNM

The positivity around mental health and sense of wellbeing outcome areas aligned with findings from recent NHP evaluations, which outlined how young people valued practical and emotional support from their facilitators around their emotional and mental health (CLNM, 2021; Harvey et al, 2023). The positive outcomes identified within NHP offered a contrast to the difficulties young people can experience in accessing health services during transitions from care, in the wider research literature (Juliette et al, 2023; Munro et al., 2022; Smith, 2017).

Moving into a home

Young people and professionals discussed how being part of the NHP community had provided support to help young people to move into and live in their own homes. They recognised the importance of young people's homes as a stable base, as a foundation from which they were able to reach out and access educational and employment opportunities and described the pride and joy young people experienced when they decorated, received their keys, moved into and lived in their new homes.

> "Sometimes they just need to feel secure in knowing that once I'm in this place and it's mine, then it's kind of like a foundation that I can build on. Because some young people probably never will get in to work or education whilst they're moving from place to place because it's so unsettling...One of the young people who I support, when we took him for the viewing, he was in tears, "I can't believe this property is mine!" and he's so grateful…it's decorated now, it's carpeted,

he's in the property and we went to see him…he's just so appreciative of the journey and what's come at the end of the journey is a home where he feels secure, he's not having to move around and he said that he's at his happiest. It's really, really rewarding when you hear that coming from young people themselves". Professional, LHP

"I think we've been in a really, really good position with the kids that we have had move on, it has been really positive and they have managed and started maintaining their tenancies". Professional, Residential Care, Partner Organisation

These excerpts from the interviews highlight how young people in the NHP/LHP community experience a positive transition from care, emphasising how they are excited and ready to move into their property and able to maintain the tenancy on their home. House Project offers a positive contrast to the 'many challenges in accessing housing stability' that have been reported for care leavers including 'being forced to live in unsuitable conditions' and not reaching 'practical and emotional and readiness to live independently' (Gill and Daw, 2017 p. 26).

3.1.2 Organisational outcomes (LA/Council)

For implementing LAs/Councils, House Project was associated with positive organisational outcomes across three areas; children's social care, housing and finance.

Children's social care

In the domain of children's social care, House Project contributed to enabling LAs/Councils to fulfil their corporate parenting duties and deepen their alignment with the directorate's strategic values. Participants focused on how House Project offered LAs/Councils an opportunity to develop and maintain relationships with young people:

"Keeping in touch…obviously you're going to keep in touch if you're part of the House Project". Strategic Leader, LA/Council

"A lot of the young people from the first cohort in 2018, they are still in contact…you can see that there's still that relationship…they can still call on us. The fact that often we're the first point of call for young people shows the relationship and shows the trust." Professional, LHP

"I think the fact that we still have young people walking through the doors that have been in properties for a year and a half, I think that's a success that they feel they can still come through our door". Professional, LHP

The focus on keeping in touch for LHPs in England, related to the statutory measure of whether the LA is still 'in touch' with the young person after they have left care (annual 'SSDA 903 data'; Department for Education, 2023), as an enhanced form, and in Scotland to fulfilling 'The Promise' (The Promise, 2021).

Housing

For the domain of Housing, House Project offered LAs/Councils an opportunity to achieve a high proportion of stable and secure tenancies, by providing support to young people to prepare for and sustain their tenancies in the House Project community.

> "We have 75% of young people that we're working with have their own permanent properties…75% with no tenancy breakdowns and no evictions…We've had young people that have come from very disruptive backgrounds at loads of different places…so to then go on and manage their own permanent tenancies at quite a young age – you know, we're talking 17 year olds, I think is quite remarkable". Professional, LHP

> "House Project is working really well…it's helping sustain the person in the tenancy" Strategic Leader, Housing, LA/Council

> "No evictions!" Strategic Leader, Children's Services, LA/Council

> "They've all been sustained" Strategic Leader, LA/Council

The fantastic outcomes in the organisational Housing domain represent the collective outcomes for each young person's individual experiences outlined in 3.1.1. The importance of the successful outcomes related to the organisational housing domain are represented by the recent inclusion of Midlothian LHP as a case study in the Crisis charity report '75 ways to prevent homelessness' (Dunn, 2022), and link to the outcome indicator on 'suitable accommodation' in the national statistical returns (Department for Education, 2023).

Finance

In the area of finance, House Project offered LAs/Councils an opportunity to repurpose and/or reduce budgets for children's social care by creating an alternative to high-cost care placements for some young people who within the LHP community were ready to move into their own homes at the age of 17 years.

> "It's definitely not an increase in costs, and if anything over time, it's a saving". Strategic Leader, Children's Services, LA/Council

> "The House Project potentially enables somebody to come directly from residential into the House Project. We've had one young person…came from a £7,000 a week residential placement via our specialist foster carers". Strategic Leader, Children's Services, LA/Council

> "So, for this year, for example, we are projected to save about £150,000. So, I think it's just not the soft outcomes, but concrete evidence that the model does work". Strategic Leader, Children's Services, LA/Council

There was a strong sense from participants that investment in LHPs related to cost-savings for the LA/Council, even when these savings were not formally calculated.

3.1.3 House Project innovation journey outcomes

From an innovation journey perspective, House Project has successfully spread and scaled nationally in the UK and sustained and scaled locally. The growth of House Project has been supported by policy level funding from the Department for Education 'DfE' Children's Innovation Social Care Innovation Programme in England and the Life Changes Trust in Scotland. DfE funding supported the formation of NHP and the implementation of the first six LHPs in England (Dixon and Ward, 2017; Dixon et al, 2020) and the Life Changes Trust funding supported the development of the first three LHPs in Scotland (Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum, 2022).
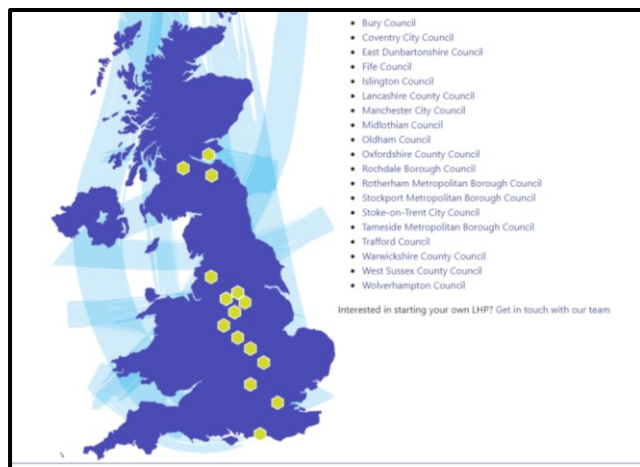
National innovation journey - spread

House Project has successfully moved through the design, pilot and initial implementation phases. House Project's innovation journey began in 2015 in Children's Services in Stoke-on-Trent LA, England, where a group of ten young people ("HP10") and three social work strategic and operational managers (two of whom founded NHP) initiated the co-design process. In the eight years following its initial design, by June 2023, House Project had been implemented in 19 organisations, 16 LAs in England and three Councils in Scotland (Figure 3.1.3). The strong outcomes narrative at NHP meetings and events focused on the growing number of young people who were members of the NHP community overall, and the growing number of young people who had moved into and were successfully maintaining the tenancies on their homes. We witnessed the growth during the period of the EXIT study:

- March 2021: 245 young people were members of the NHP community, of whom 160 had successfully moved into their homes (NHP Annual Report, 2020/21, p.5);
- August 2023: 619 young people were members of the NHP community, of whom 359 had successfully moved into their homes (NHP-EXIT meeting notes).

Figure 3.1.3. Local authorities/councils with a House Project (June 2023)

Source: National House Project Website

National innovation journey – scale

In 2018, House Project 'scaled' with the incorporation of the NHP charity. Led by two of House Project's professional founders, NHP aimed to support growth, implementation and development of LHPs with a young people's steering group (now CLNM), including members of "HP10" in addition to the Board of Trustees. NHP and CLNM share the vision 'to develop and implement a programme of support that enables young people leaving care to live connected and fulfilling lives' (NHP website, 2023).

NHP has grown from a team of three people in 2018 to 12 people in 2023 (NHP website, 2023). Across strategic, operational and administrative roles, the NHP team works with LHPs, LAs/ Councils and external partners, including with professionals and young people. CLNM, launched in 2019, aims to 'highlight success – to inspire, inform and influence; to test new ideas designed by young people; to raise challenges to improve things for young people and to peer evaluate all LHPs and make recommendations for improvement' (NHP website, 2023). CLNM comprises two young people from each LHP and from 2023 operated with two regional divisions, North and South, supported by two Participation and Development leads employed by NHP. CLNM delivers an annual conference to celebrate successes, conducts bi-annual peer research and offers expert adviser consultancy (e.g. to NHS) and campaigns for change (e.g. digital poverty campaign).

Next steps in NHP's innovation journey focus on growth and development. NHP implementation plans include more LA/Council sites in England and Scotland, with potential opportunities beyond these national borders. NHP leaders have identified the need to balance 'scale' and 'spread' to reach more young people and grow the House Project community whilst protecting 'quality' and ensuring 'sustainability'.

Current national scaling initiatives included supporting the growing role of CLNM through consultancy and campaigning, creating apprenticeship roles across the NHP

community and developing 'Aspirational Award' opportunities to offer to young people. Future opportunities related to developing NHP 'positioning' as a 'social movement', aligned with creating an impact on wider systemic change. This was reflected by NHP's strategic focus in a small-scale research collaboration with Warwick Business School and the experiences of LHP professionals, who discussed their involvement in local and 'bigger scale…culture change' as a 'big part' of NHP.

Local innovation journeys – sustain and scale

The case study exemplars in England and Scotland shared similar steps in their innovation journeys, moving from a funded pilot to a sustained permanent offer, with both LHPs demonstrating scaling, either in relation to an increase in the number of professionals employed and/or the number of young people who were invited to join the House Project community each year. Islington LHP's innovation journey included the DfE funded pilot in 2018, moving to a sustained permanent offer for young people in 2019 and scaling in 2020 to increase the number of annual cohorts from one to two, employing two more facilitators and offering the House Project approach to twenty young people each year. Midlothian LHP's innovation journey included the Life Changes Trust funded pilot in 2020, moving in 2023 to a sustained permanent offer for young people with confirmed plans for scaling in the form of employing an additional facilitator to support young people.

Opportunities participants identified for scaling at the local level included sharing elements of House Project with a broader and larger group of care leavers within LAs/Councils in the form of 'House Project Lite' and by extending the size of each annual cohort. In relation to both spread and scale, many participants discussed their desire to be able to offer the House Project opportunity to more young people, and their experiences of a sense of a troubling injustice in not being able to do so.

3.1.4 Reflection on NHP outcomes

The positive outcomes described in this section, drawing on narratives from members of the NHP community and two exemplar LHP communities present an evidence narrative for NHP to celebrate, share and build on. The EXIT-NHP outcomes framework (Figure 3.1.2) offers a potential framework for NHP to integrate with existing conceptualisations of outcomes and guide review and reflection on outcomes across the NHP community. Whilst the separation of outcomes in the framework is helpful to create a focus on each level and area, it is important to highlight inter-relationships between the areas and levels and the more peripheral areas and levels within the overall NHP narrative, that warrant further attention. There is an opportunity for NHP to increase its focus on outcomes through further research including the development of a Theory of Change (ToC) framework.

Focus on inter-relationships between outcomes might explore emotional wellbeing and mental health, enduring relationships, a secure tenancy and stable home,

accessing education, training and employment, in the short and longer-term, at an individual, organisational and national level. The inter-relationships between outcomes areas and levels were recognised by participants, who identified the importance of the wider social determinants of health, and the longer-term impact on costs of sustained tenancies.

> "One of the key things for health is to have, is having a safe house and a good community around about you." Strategic Lead, Health, Partner Organisation

> "You've got good outcomes, young people make really great tenants…you will ultimately save money… it's working in quite a number of places now and actually there's still no tenancy breakdowns" Professional, NHP

A focus on housing might emphasise how each '% stable tenancy' or '% no evictions' statutory statistic represents the community of young people who have experienced a positive transition from care, who are living in a stable home, representing a base in and from which each young person can develop and thrive within and beyond the NHP community.

At an organisational and NHP level, there is an opportunity to increase focus on young people's emotional wellbeing and mental health and education, employment and training. The absence of emotional wellbeing and mental health indicators and measures within the narrative around organisational outcomes was striking in contrast to the core focus as an outcome for individual young people. The absence of focus on collective organisational outcomes related to care leavers' health mirrors the absence of a focus on health in the DfE statistical returns (DfE, 2023). Further opportunities indicated in interviews with LHP health partners focused on overcoming challenges in measuring outcomes, which is returned to in 3.3.5.

> "I mean it's always difficult in health to determine outcomes because you've got to do it on an individual basis because every person is different and their journey is different." Strategic lead, Health, Partner organisation

Whilst outcome data on education, employment and training are collected for the national statistical returns in England (DfE, 2023), there was relatively less focus upon this as an outcome area within participants' narratives, both for individual young people, at an organisational and NHP level. Whilst there was less overall focus on education, employment and training, participants referred to the House Project Programme as a valuable training offer for young people and offered anecdotal examples of how individual young people had attained local apprenticeships through LHP and local partnerships, including within the LHP, a community organisation and children's nursery. The absence of focus might relate to how education and training are conceptualised, and a relatively short-term outcomes perspective, within which employment outcomes might be less achievable for young people. There is an opportunity for NHP to explore how to introduce a focus on young people's emotional

wellbeing and mental health and education, employment and training at an organisational and NHP level, including how to conceptualise outcomes, overcome potential measurement challenges and introduce a longer-term approach.

Further research opportunities focused on exploring how House Project has benefits for wider society might focus on:

- Mapping and exploring how to maximise the local availability and accessibility of houses and flats for larger cohorts of LHP young people;
- Developing understanding of the wider financial and societal benefits relating to LHP young people maintaining secure and stable tenancies;
- Exploring the challenges for young people around affordability, relating to rent, bills and employment.

The development of a Theory of Change framework and development of a suite of broad ranging outcome measures (see 3.3.5) would create opportunities for NHP to enhance the positioning and visibility of House Project in relation to national and societal priorities. Further strategic NHP 'positioning' opportunities include alignment with national priorities across health, housing, employment, education, social justice, adults and children's social care as a means to generate funding to support the sustainability of House Project at national and local levels within and beyond England and Scotland. Opportunities include positioning House Project as an intervention for care leavers as an 'inclusion health group' with aims to reduce health inequalities and social exclusion focused on social determinants of health (Buzelli et al, 2022) and emphasising the alignment with national priorities in England reflected by the introduction of Integrated Care Systems (Kings Fund, 2022). The NHP presentation delivered by the EXIT research team as part of Coventry City Council's Health Determinants Research Online Webinar, resonated with the Chair, Sir Michael Marmot, who indicated that House Project represented an example of an innovation that was successful in addressing complex health inequalities and social exclusion for care leavers (Coventry City Council, 2023).

3.2 House Project framework: Six core fidelity design elements

Figure 3.2.1. NHP Framework: Six core fidelity design elements (visual)
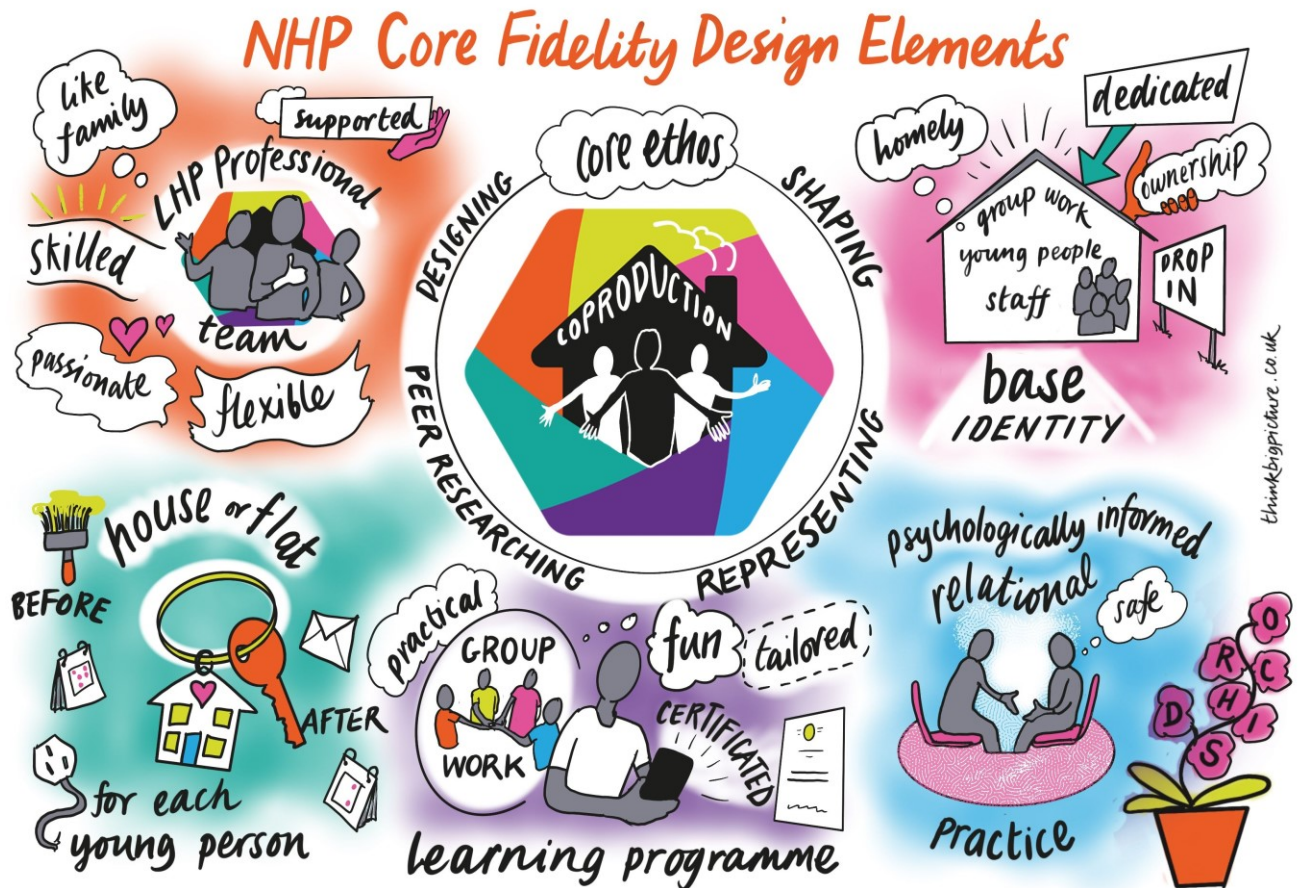
Six core fidelity design elements (illustrated in Figure 3.2.1) are central to the success and spirit of House Project. Participants described how these six inter-related elements of House Project together offered young people opportunities to develop readiness to move in to their allocated 'house' and thrive within and beyond their LHP community (more detail is provided in Figure 3.2.2). Participants in strategic NHP roles described how they positioned House Project as a 'framework not a model', indicating its potential for and anticipation of adaption and development in each LA/Council to align with the local context.

Figure 3.2.2. NHP Framework: Six core fidelity design elements (detail)

Fidelity element	Description
#1 Coproduction with young people at the centre	Co-designed with young people from the start who continue to lead and shape each LHP and NHP. Young people 'apply' to be part of the LHP, with each annual cohort of 8-12 young people creating an 'identity' e.g. cohort name/logo, developing a community, being part of CLNM and contributing to the development of the NHP community.
#2 Skilled, supported and flexible LHP professional team	Each LHP employs a professional team of two facilitators and a project lead to support young people. The LHP team's professional experiences include social care and youth work. Each LHP team is supported by a consultant clinical psychologist, LA/Council, partners and the NHP team. The team develops the LHP to meet local need, developing relationships and supporting young people, co-creating psychological formulations for young people, participating in group supervision, accessing training and development (e.g. Social Pedagogy) and sharing experiences, through a networked NHP 'community of practice', with other LHP teams.
#3 LHP 'base'	Each LHP has a physical 'base' where the professional team are situated. This provides a 'secure base' for young people to meet together and with the team to engage in the 'House Project Programme' and informally 'drop-in'. The 'base' is usually in a space separate to social care offices, e.g. community space, rented small shop space.
#4 Relational psychologically-informed practice framework (ORCHIDS)	Relational psychologically-informed practice with young people is guided by the 'ORCHIDS' framework. ORCHIDS, created and developed with young people, has theoretical foundations in trauma-informed theory (Golding and Hughes, 2012; Hughes, 2017) and self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci, 2000). 'ORCHIDS' recognises young people's complex relational histories as care leavers, with a focus on developing 'autonomy', 'competence' and 'relatedness'. It provides the framework for the development of each House Project community, including application within the learning programme. https://thehouseproject.org/orchids
#5 Certificated learning programme delivered through a group work approach	Through modules of the 'House Project Programme', young people engage in learning to develop confidence and practical and inter-relational skills. Upon successful completion, young people receive a certificate of learning, forming part of each young person's educational experiences and qualifications. A group work approach aims to develop young people's skills, knowledge and confidence through providing them with the opportunity to learn together and become friends. As a friendship group, young people support each other through their leaving care experience, moving into their homes and beyond, as members of the House Project community together. https://thehouseproject.org/the-house-project-programme
#6 A house or flat for each young person	Houses and flats are made available to young people who are members of each LHP through partnerships with housing providers (LA Housing departments, Housing Associations, ALMOs, private landlords, registered social landlords).Young people decorate and prepare ahead of moving in to make their first house a home.

3.2.1 Coproduction with young people at the centre

Participants articulated an ethos and practice of coproduction focused on young people at the centre of House Project as an essential fidelity element. This core ethos stemmed from the original design phases, when social care professionals and young people co-created the concept of 'House Project' which has been developed and strengthened by the NHP-designed processes and practices and the formation of CLNM. Participants outlined how young people continue to shape the NHP community at a local and national level. At a local level, participants described how young people actively apply to be part of a LHP, with young people from each cohort creating their own 'identity', including creating a name and logo. Participants outlined how two young people from each LHP are CLNM representatives and meet throughout the year with the NHP Participation and Development Workers, at NHP offices, LHP bases and a residential activity centre. CLNM representatives explained how through CLNM, young people share experiences and plan activities to inform national development of the House Project community including an annual conference, bi-annual peer research, expert adviser consultancy (e.g. to NHS) and campaigning (e.g. digital poverty campaign). This core ethos was striking at the national events and strategic meetings we observed, in how young people were quite literally 'centre-stage' and how professionals communicated and interacted with young people.

3.2.2 Skilled, supported and flexible professional LHP team

Participants across the NHP community identified the LHP team as crucial to the success of House Project, outlining diverse skills from youth work and social care, flexibility and commitment;

> ''I think they've got a really good team and I think they're very really passionate about what they do''. Health Partner, LA/Council

> ''I get the impression that she's there for the young people even outside of work times. You know like they're almost like her own family rather than just a project at work, so I definitely think that's a massive part of it''. Housing Partner, LA/Council

> "Almost like a parent in a way…if it wasn't for the people, this would just be a bunch of concrete and a roof, it wouldn't mean anything". Young person, CLNM

They outlined the importance of both the 'project lead' and 'facilitator' roles. The importance of the project lead role related to hybrid strategic-operational management position with the provision of managerial support to facilitators, development of relationships and provision of support to young people and the development of partnerships with local council and external partners.

> ''I think that an amazing project manager enables the House Project. Ours is amazing. You've got to get the right type of person in my view, who's very young person-focussed, can build relationships, and can be a project manager''. Strategic Lead, Children's Services, LA/Council

The core role of the facilitators is 'frontline practice' with each cohort of around ten young people. Relative to the wider social care context, the ratio of professional: young people of 'one to five' in each LHP permits facilitators to enact and develop relational practice with young people, with space to be flexible to adapt to young peoples' needs as they arise. Facilitators reflected on the need for and appreciated the opportunity offered them by their LHP to be flexible in their responses to young people. Young people described their relationships with facilitators as '*mean[ing] the world*' and '*making a massive difference*' to them.

> "Finding the right dynamics amongst the staff team…people who are willing to be flexible. Because working with young people I guess no day is going to be the same and their needs vary so much that you need a staff team who's going to understand that and be ready to change the plan for the day". Professional, LHP

> "A lot of people don't have those family or friends … that one worker can mean the whole world to that one person when they're just starting their house and their own independence and stuff and just knowing even that one person is there for you, it does make a massive difference." Young person, CLNM

The importance of the LHP team supports the findings from recent NHP evaluations, including the facilitators and project lead as the most important elements of House Project for young people (CLNM, 2021) and relates to core elements #3, the availability and accessibility at the 'base' and #4, enacting and embodying relational, psychologically-informed practice.

3.2.3 Provision of a Local House Project 'base'

The 'base' is a physical property or venue shared between LHP staff and young people. Young people visit to meet with their facilitators and one another and engage in group activities as part of the accredited learning programme. In Islington and Midlothian, the 'base' was located close to but separate from the LA/Council social care offices, in community housing and small rented commercial spaces. When we visited each base, we experienced them to be very welcoming spaces and saw how they offered a dedicated safe and secure physical environment for young people and professionals to develop relationships and build their House Project community. LHP professionals reflected on the importance of being '*in control*' of the base and its location. Being '*in control*' of their own space allowed members of each House Project community to develop a sense of '*ownership*' and '*identity*' (linking with ORCHIDS – see #4 below), even when the space was '*tiny*', with funding available for young people to apply for monies to make the space '*feel homely*'. A central location created opportunities for young people to '*pop in and out*' and despite being '*right next door to social work*' the separate entrance meant that '*young people feel far more at ease walking through this door than that door*'. The importance of the base was recognised as fundamental to supporting relationships and building a sense of community within each LHP;

"One of the things they flexed on and now won't flex on is there needs to be a base that's dedicated to House Project, there needs to be somewhere that they can commune and do the learning programme and above all be together. Because if you don't have that, you don't build the community". Trustee, NHP

The importance of the base supports findings from the recent NHP evaluation, as underpinning the core psychological relational approach in House Project (Harvey et al, 2023).

3.2.4 Relational psychologically-informed practice framework (ORCHIDS)

NHP leaders and expert consultants described the theoretical underpinning and practice approach which was valued by LHP teams and LA/Council leaders and has been explored in more depth with a focused evaluation study (Harvey et al, 2023). The approach, developed in consultation with a clinical psychologist in the early design phase of House Project, aimed to create a 'relational cornerstone' as a 'laser focus' for the innovation. The theory, integrating trauma-informed theory (Golding and Hughes, 2012; Hughes, 2017) and self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci, 2000) recognises young people's complex relational histories in relation to their care leaver positions. Represented in the 'ORCHIDS' framework, the theoretical focus on developing autonomy, competence and relatedness is translated as the values and practices of Ownership; Responsibility; Community; Home; Interdependence; Development; Sense of Wellbeing. 'ORCHIDS' provides a framework for the development of each LHP community, including application within the learning programme and as a guide for professional practice.

Professionals in LHPs and in the NHP core team described how they valued the input from consultant clinical psychologists to help them to develop and enact relational psychologically-informed practice, including supervision, consultations and development of psychological formulations for young people. Expert psychologists and LA/Council strategic leaders reflected how regular supervision, as a form of '*family therapy*,' provided essential support for teams to develop positive relationships with one another, manage anxieties and together with the formulations enabled them to '*hold and regulate*' young people.

"Those relationships of the adults are so, so important to maintain because they parent the system, they hold and regulate what happens underneath". Consultant Psychologist

"Once a young person is accepted, is they have a formulation … that really helps our staff to be able to navigate any difficulties...[we] can be more trauma-informed in our responses" Strategic Leader, Children's Services, LA/Council

Participants outlined how their development of relational psychologically-informed practice was further supported by a programme of training and opportunities offered by NHP and modelled and enacted in relationships between professionals and with young people. The core fidelity element of a relational practice approach as integral to the core fidelity of the innovation design was also identified as an area of concern

relating to impact on facilitators and future growth. Facilitators, Project Leads and CLNM representatives shared their concerns related to LHPs providing an '*open door*' for young people to access facilitators' ongoing support beyond the first year. Whilst they recognised that the intensity and frequency of support each young person required was likely to lessen following their first year with House Project, they expressed concern relating to the emotional impact on facilitators of offering flexible, relational support to a growing number of young people as the number of cohorts within each LHP community developed. They recognised the space and time that they needed to be able to offer young people the high quality of attuned relational support, which was so integral to the success of House Project.

> "Sometimes people do need that support outside of working hours and the great thing is they are there for those people but you can see the strain in their face sometimes... It can be almost worrying as a young person to see those cracks showing…They [young people] care about and get to know their facilitators so they do become like a parent. You're almost like, "Well I don't want to make you do these things because I know what it will cost you." Young person, CLNM

Responses to address the challenge of protecting quality of relational support as the number of young people increased has included increasing the level of support to young people from two alternative sources. The first response to address this challenge for relational support, in relation to designing a Peer Mentor scheme, as one of the recommendations from the Peer Evaluation (CLNM, 2021) was welcomed by LHP teams, with some reservation relating to the additional demands on facilitator time;

> "It's brilliant to give the young people the opportunities and the experiences, but making it happen is very resource intensive. It's very time consuming. So setting up a peer mentor scheme, you'd need to invest as much as you'd get out of it I think, in terms of it actually absorbing some of the demands on the service". Professional, LHP

The second response to increase relational support, as represented in Midlothian LHP, involved the Council providing funding for a third facilitator position. The employment of a third facilitator could be explored in other LHPs, alongside additional opportunities that identified by participants include exploring funding for participation- and mental health- focused roles at a local level.

3.2.5 Certificated learning programme through a flexible group-work approach
The 'House Project Programme', framed by 'ORCHIDS', was designed for young people to engage in learning to develop confidence and practical and relational skills to prepare them for moving into their first home. A group work approach taking place at the 'base' aims to develop young people's skills, knowledge and confidence and provide young people with an opportunity to learn together and become friends. Participants outlined characteristics of the design and delivery of the programme that contributed to its success. Facilitators valued modules focussed on aspects of helping young people to prepare to live 'safely and happily' including budgeting, healthy

relationships, looking after a home and a health partner suggested that they would welcome and would like to explore a new module focused on 'health and wellbeing'.

Facilitators outlined how they delivered each programme to suit the needs of each cohort, as a '*learning exchange*' characterised by being '*interactive*' '*informal*' and '*fun*' for young people, including '*laid back…activities, debates and discussions*'. They reflected on how group work was an opportunity for them to model and young people to develop healthy relationships, characterised by '*care, understanding and creating boundaries*'. They recognised that the beginnings of group work could be '*tricky [with] so many different personalities and so many different levels of need*'. They reflected on how they worked hard to '*accommodate everyone*' and '*find a balance*' to create a safe space for all young people in each cohort and it was really important to continue to consider group dynamics and the overall composition of the group at the start of each cohort's House Project journey.

> "Understanding and caring but while also setting firm boundaries so that the young person understands that we are working as a group and they have to be mindful of other young people as well…. make sure that the quieter young people also find their voice and their space…but not making young people who might be louder, more confident, feel like they need to shrink themselves, so it's kind of finding that balance". Professional, LHP

An operational leader reflected on the benefits of bringing young people together as a group, which '*sometimes LAs had shied away from…because of risks*' and valued House Project's group work approach;

> "Young people are going to form friendships, and actually it's better to teach them about social development, forming friendships, healthy relationships as a group, rather than to shy away from what could happen and what if this happens" Strategic Leader, Children's Services, LA/Council

Participants valued the programme's '*online portfolio*', representing '*tangible proof of young people's journey and what they've learned*', although there were sometimes challenges in finding the time for young people to record and upload their learning, which were overcome in some cohorts where young people participated in '*chilled portfolio days… with background music on*'.

> "We take them through a programme, they're also expected to complete an online portfolio…uploading pictures and synopses…to say, "I'm able to budget and this is why", "I'm able to travel independently, I planned this journey in to London" as…tangible proof of their journey and what they've learned". Professional, LHP

Strategic leaders valued certification of learning at the end of the programme, forming part of each young person's educational experiences and qualifications, as it aligned with their commitment to create '*aspiring*' opportunities for young people.

3.2.6 House or flat for each young person

Participants outlined the essential position of the house or flat within the innovation design in relation to the availability of the property, the process of young people preparing the property, the excitement of 'moving in' and the support from facilitators in the period after moving in, to help young people to manage and maintain successful tenancies through and beyond the period of transition:

> "The people that work in the House Project, they're happy to help you to paint the inside and they'll teach you how to set it all up, they'll teach you about electric meters". Young person, CLNM

> "I know that the cohorts, when someone moves in, half the cohort go round to the house and do a quick painting job! Do you see what I mean? It's amazing". Strategic Leader, Children's Services, LA/Council

> "If I was to say the hardest part of that journey, it was probably the first two months after I moved into my house. That's when obviously you start to realise you're by yourself now and reality starts to kick in…I had facilitators come to my house and check I was okay and make sure I'm up-to-date with everything…the support is definitely there". Young person, CLNM

3.2.7 Reflection on core fidelity elements of House Project design

The six core design elements presented here inter-relate and together create the House Project innovation. It has been challenging to identify which elements are most important, and there is a sense that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. There was an overall sense that the elements of the relational psychologically-informed practice framework of ORCHIDS and the group-work training programme were less visible and less tangible for some participants, including young people. It might be valuable for NHP to explore promoting the core design elements to emphasise the position of coproduction with young people at the core of House Project, whilst highlighting the less tangible and visible elements. There is an opportunity for NHP to apply and develop the six core fidelity elements as a framework or reflective tool to support and review the quality of implementation across new and existing LHPs.

3.3 House Project innovation journey: Five key ingredients

Figure 3.3.1 Successful implementation and sustaining of House Project: Five key ingredients
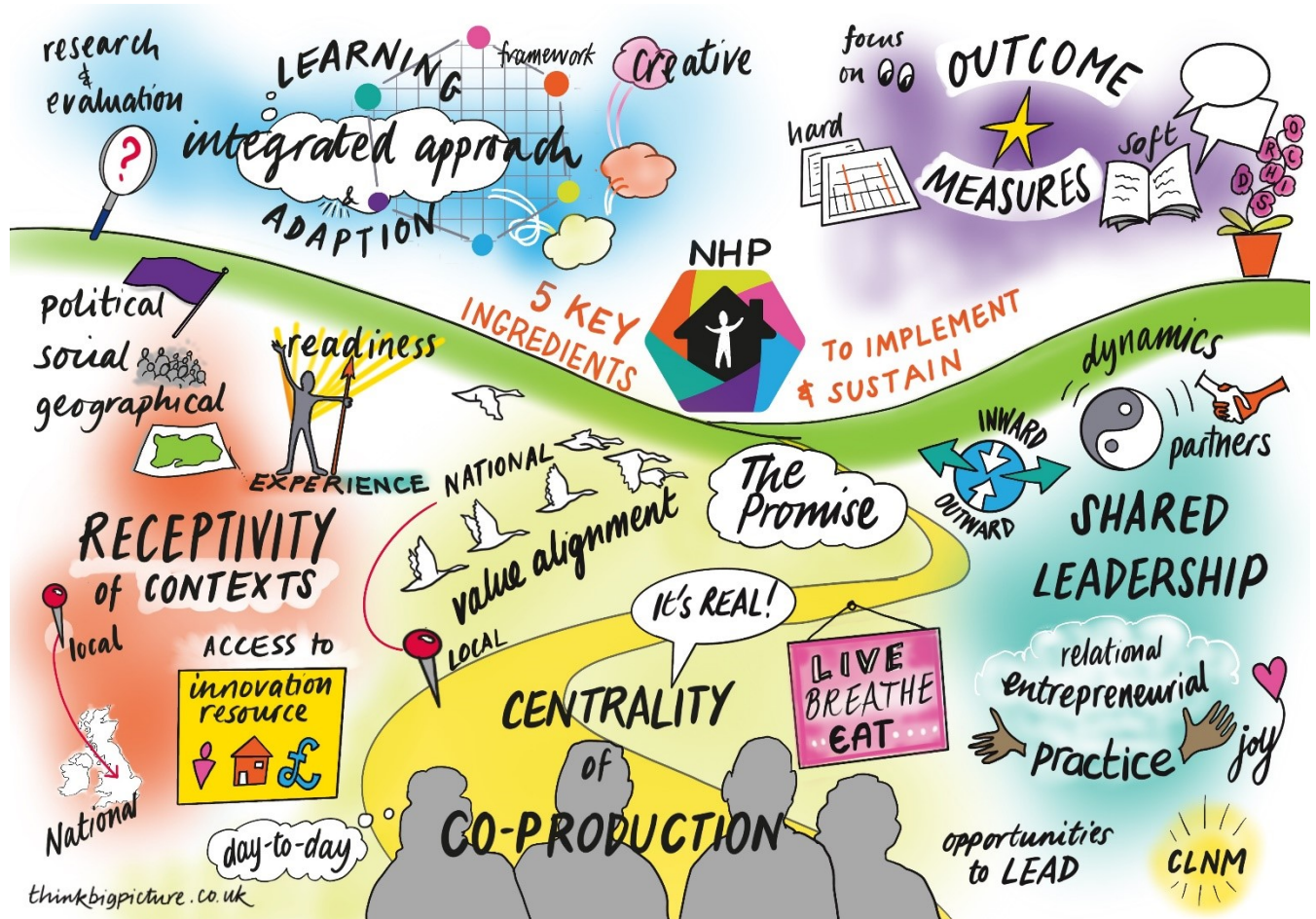
Together with fidelity to the core design elements of House Project, five further inter-related elements were identified as key ingredients that supported success in House Project's innovation journey:

1. Receptivity of national and local contexts
2. Shared leadership dynamics and practices
3. Centrality of co-production with young people
4. Integrated approach to adaption and learning
5. Focus on outcome measures

The following five sections outline each ingredient, with specific reflections on opportunities for NHP. Overall, there is an opportunity for NHP to incorporate the five ingredients within an implementation and review framework to support the quality of implementation and sustaining of LHPs.

3.3.1 Receptivity of national and local contexts

Receptivity of the national and local contexts in relation to political-socio-geographic factors, access to innovation resource, innovation-readiness and value-alignment were important enablers of successful implementation, represented by the exemplar case studies (Figure 3.3.2 and Figure 3.3.3).

Nationally, elements of the political context acted to both enable and constrain implementation of House Project within the Scottish and English systems. National policy initiatives aligned with the aims of House Project that acted to enable implementation included The Promise (2021) in Scotland and recommendations from The Independent Review of Children's Social Care (2022) in England. Austerity and a problematic supply of housing featured as a constraining feature in both national contexts, alleviated by access to government and charity funding at national and local levels, and a local shared leadership and partnership approach with internal and external finance and housing partners.

Locally, LA/Council receptivity towards House Project was related to four key factors:

- value-alignment: good fit between House Project values and the strategic aims of the LA and children's directorate
- access to innovation resource: funding through charity and government initiatives and housing stock through a local shared leadership and partnership approach with internal and external community and property partners to allocate housing stock to each cohort of young people and provide the property for the LHP base
- innovation-readiness: prior experience of implementing innovation
- political-socio-geographic contextual factors: size and geography of LA/Council area; political leadership; contextual safeguarding risks

Figure 3.3.2. Receptivity: Midlothian House Project, Scotland

> **+ Value-alignment**: good fit of House Project with national and local social care and homelessness strategies, including 'The Promise' and with the value-base of the council
>
> > "Where it fits into 'The Promise'… it totally does, that's something as a local council, we're streets ahead and the House Project framework does tick a lot of 'The Promise' boxes". Professional, LHP
> >
> > "The weight of … people in the council wanting it – I don't know anybody that didn't want it to happen…it's just such a good project, everybody wants to help people, and they want to help young people". Strategic Leader, LA/Council
>
> **+ Innovation-ready**: prior innovation experience developed through implementation of Housing First, an innovation that aimed to prevent homelessness, which was a '*really good opportunity. We could see what worked*'. Strategic Leader, LA/Council
>
> **+ Access to resources**: charity funding for initial three years; availability of housing stock through a partnership approach; availability and accessibility of shop space next door to the Council office as the 'base'

> **+/- Political-socio-geographic factors**: + small geographical local area with low turnover of strategic partners related to strong relationships and shared value-base identified as an enabler. Strong commitment of political leader. – Availability of housing stock.

Figure 3.3.3. Receptivity: Islington House Project, England

> **+ Value-alignment:** good fit between organisational and innovation strategy and values including lifelong corporate parenting; trauma-informed practice as a therapeutic psychologically-informed practice model
>
> > "It's a really good match…values, ethos…we're not battling against a system…we want to empower the young people, give them more independence…a say over how they live in their homes…if we were working with a local council that didn't have the same approach we would probably be meeting a lot more barriers and blocks. Whereas it's not often we do". Professional, LHP
>
> **+ Innovation readiness:** prior innovation experience of implementation of a new practice model within Children's Social Care Innovation Programme; existing organisational processes including Transformation Board; Ofsted ratings
>
> **+ Access to resources:** funding from central government for pilot, availability of housing stock through shared leadership with local council Housing partners, provision of community space for 'base' through shared leadership with community partners.
>
> **+/- Political-socio-geographic factors: +** Strong commitment of political leader. Flexibility required to overcome challenges presented by a small geographical area relating to the location of young people's home, such as concerns in relation to safeguarding. – Availability of housing stock.

A key, shared contextual challenge related to the availability of housing stock, identified as restricting the availability of accommodation to offer young people and limiting the scaling of House Project within each LHP:

> "We've got massive competing demands through our allocations policy about other people in tremendous need and people to who we owe a legal duty as well. So, we're only talking a dozen so a year, more or less, so far, so they're small numbers". Strategic Lead, Housing, LA/Council

There is an opportunity for NHP and LHPs to explore with LAs/Councils how they might identity and allocate more void properties to young people leaving care in a House Project, and explore this further at a national level.

3.3.2 Shared relational leadership dynamics and practices

Dynamics and practices of a strong and shared relational leadership across the NHP community featured as ingredients to the success of House Project's innovation journey from all participants' perspectives. The development of strong and shared

leadership across the House Project community was facilitated by the founders' outward- and inward-facing, strategic and operational roles, enacting a relational, shared leadership approach, bringing in expertise, forming external partnerships and integrating networking practices and mechanisms. This national relational, shared leadership approach was mirrored at the local level. The shared leadership approach included and integrated roles for young people in leadership positions at the national and local levels, which as a key ingredient is outlined in the following section, with a specific focus on the centrality of co-production with young people as an extension of the shared leadership approach.

Strong and shared relational leadership approach at the core

A shared relational leadership approach was an important enabler of the success of House Project's innovation journey, with a strong founder-leadership at the core. Characterised by an inspiring, creative, strategic, relational and value-led approach embodied by the two founders, as director and CEO at the core of NHP, participants across the House Project community recognised '*leadership*' as an integral part of House Project's success. A consultant described the core leadership as '*exceptional*' and '*entrepreneurial*' focusing on their strategic vision, operational delivery, securing of funding, effective working relationship, and their shared core values relating to supporting young people

> "They live and breathe and eat supporting young people with care experience and that is pretty phenomenal" Consultant, NHP

A trustee described how they perceived the value of the founders' position at the core as providing '*soft accountability*' in creating and developing the House Project community and acting as '*pollinators*' to share learning and ideas. The leaders sought input from experts and reached out to external partners to support the development of NHP. The expert team around the leaders included a Consultant Clinical and Forensic Psychologist to create and develop the psychologically informed relational practice approach and provide training and development, an innovation coach to offer support to guide early innovation journey decisions, and an educational consultant to support and share learning. External partnerships created new opportunities for young people in the NHP Community, such as with 'Suited and Booted', providing clothing for young people to wear at conferences, and the 'Madlug foundation', providing young people with opportunities in enterprise training.

The founder-leaders enacted a collaborative and shared model of leadership which was recognised and valued by the professionals in the core national team, who appreciated how the founders empowered them to lead;

> "They give us all the opportunity to lead, whether that is in a practice lead role, whether we've got two apprentices now, they lead on certain things. It's really empowering isn't it, just being allowed to be a leader and being allowed to be creative and see actually small things that you might want to do come to fruition

because you've been allowed the opportunity to do that, it's really empowering". Professional, NHP

Practices and mechanisms that supported a shared leadership and extended NHP leadership beyond the core team and the central charity to LHPs included the role of the NHP Practice Leads, the mechanism of 'Community of Practice' and 'Annual Review' practices. LHP leads valued their ongoing relationship and shared leadership with NHP. Observations of 'Community of Practice' and an Annual Review meeting demonstrated the shared leadership approach in action. Project leads welcomed developments to community of practice, enabling LHP facilitators and leads to share practice dilemmas and benefit from colleagues' experiences and insights, as well as a forum for sharing best practice.

The NHP founders' strategic focus on a relational collaborative partnership approach to enable the success of House Project extended to the local level. An early phase of each local innovation journey featured a meeting where NHP 'mandated' the attendance of LA partners including from social care, housing and finance to support a shared ownership and leadership of House Project within each LA from the outset in the form of a 'Steering Group'. The partnership approach to leadership was observed at Steering Groups, where in both LHPs, strategic and operational partners enacted supportive and active roles, including the elected council member, and partners from housing, health and residential care.

> "You have to have your elected member on board as they are your advocate across the system". Strategic leader, Children's Services, LA/Council

> "I do think that the House Project has been amazing in terms of working alongside residential and the staff are great at communicating information, we try and share as much information as we can and I think just having that relationship between the House Project and residential staff has been good for the young people". Residential Care Practitioner, Partner Organisation

The strong and shared relational leadership approach at the core of NHP was replicated in each exemplar LHP, acting as an ingredient of success at the local level. The strong core leadership as an ingredient of success related to the Project Lead and Facilitators. In both exemplars, the Project Lead position was hybrid, at the boundary of the leaving care service, with line-management from a leaving care service lead. In both exemplars, participants recognised the Project Lead's relational skills, enthusiasm for House Project and their commitment to young people. In both exemplars, the Project Lead enacted a relational, shared leadership approach, acting to support the cohesion of a network of strategic leaders from across the partnership through formal and informal mechanisms, including the Steering Group and Corporate Parenting Board, and supporting facilitators and young people to own and lead each LHP. Facilitators in both LHPs outlined how they appreciated the space and freedom, and the support that the Project Lead offered to them to create and develop each LHP with each cohort of young people.

Figure 3.3.4. Strong and Shared Leadership: Midlothian House Project, Scotland

+ House Project Lead: dual position with responsibilities for a leaving care team in addition to House Project responsibilities. High visibility across and connection with strategic and operational groups in children's social care enhanced development of House Projects' strong identity and profile.

+ Developing and nurturing strategic partnership including with Councillor, Housing, Health, Employment:

"For many years we've been working really hard to have that alliance between us all, and making sure everybody understands things, from each of our different services' sides. That's really helped buy-in to the project, and I know that there are some other areas that struggle with that element of it. Very much see it as "a housing problem - housing need to deal with it" or "it's a social work problem, social work need to deal with it", whereas we do work very closely to try and get the best scenario for the person, within the realms of what is available". Strategic Leader, LA/Council

Figure 3.3.5. Strong and Shared Leadership: Islington House Project, England

+ House Project Lead: dedicated to the LHP full-time, line-managed by the 'Head of leaving care service'. High visibility across and connection with strategic and operational groups in children's social care enhanced development of House Projects' strong identity and profile.

+ Developing and nurturing strategic partnerships including with Councillor; Children's Social Care, Housing and Communities:

"The House Project for me is joy, complete joy in the work that we do …everybody, my managers, everybody…it's so nice when you hear about the House Project and the work that they do…it's fabulous. We're really, really proud of it. I think it's a fantastic thing". Strategic Leader, LA/Council

"I would say partnerships with colleagues in social care are critical…I have regular meetings with my service director and the directors in social care to talk about how the project is progressing, any challenges…in various tiers of the local council there are meetings occurring to ensure that that project's successful". Strategic Leader, LA/Council

Opportunities to extend the shared leadership approach that NHP might consider include initiatives across all partnership domains and a specific focus on employment, finance, education, health and police partners. In relation to all partnership domains, at a national level, an opportunity was identified to extend the NHP Community of Practice model to professionals from Housing, Community, Health, Education and Employment to '*share best practice'*, learn from one another and explore new opportunities. At a local level, an opportunity was identified to explore the creation of a '*named link'* in each partner organisation to connect with the LHP professionals and young people.

Opportunities were identified to explore the development of local and national collaborations with employment, finance, education, health and police partners. Participants emphasised the importance of the provision of appropriate tailored support to enable young people to benefit from the opportunities. At a local level, opportunities were identified to build on and share learning from successful local partnerships with child care nurseries and develop new local partnerships to provide young people with tailored, supported learning and employment opportunities and local community volunteering pathways. Further opportunities might build on Midlothian LHP's partnerships with the local police and health, Islington LHP's partnerships with local football and creative organisations and NHP's partnerships with Madlug and Reconomy. Participants suggested that further potential national employment opportunities to explore might include the NHS and airport operators.

3.3.3 Centrality of co-production with young people

Leadership as shared with young people featured as a core ethos of NHP, with practices supporting co-production featuring across the phases of House Project's innovation journey, from design and to support implementation and sustainability, at a national and local level (Figure 3.3.6).

Figure 3.3.6. Shared leadership with young people as central through the House Project innovation journey
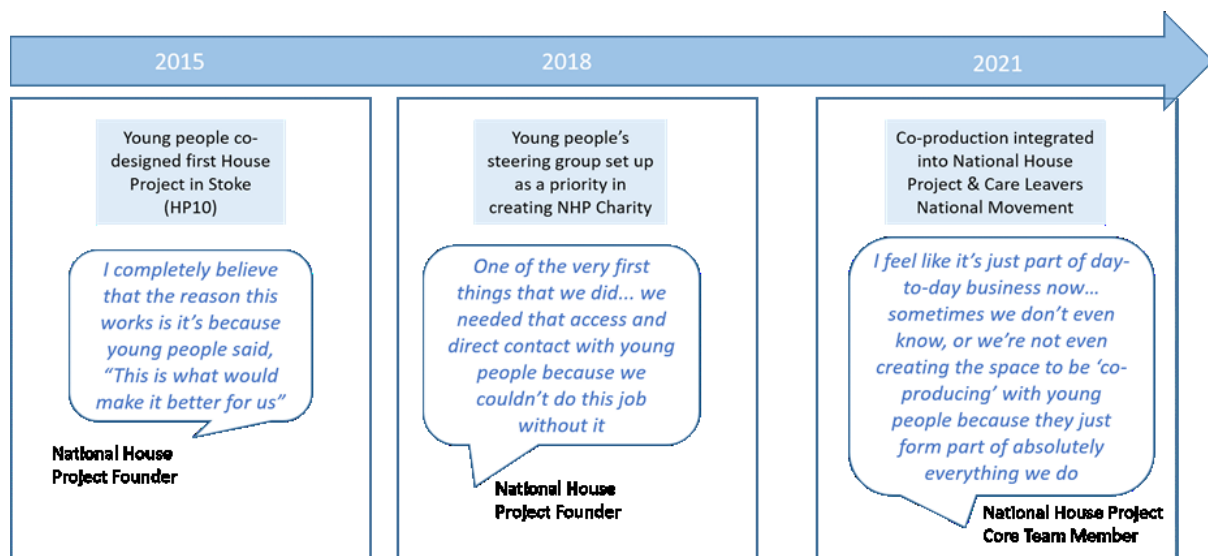
CLNM evolved from the young people's steering group and was identified as the mechanism that enabled NHP leadership to be shared with young people. CLNM was described as having an active, clear, funded, supported and integrated strategic and operational role within NHP. Participants described how CLNM leadership was enacted through regular and focused meetings and events in regional and national forums. In regular meetings, two representatives from each LHP, supported by an NHP Participation and Development Lead, discuss their experiences of focused areas

of strength and development, which the Lead and young people shared with NHP practice leads and LHP project leads and facilitators to action. In focused events, representatives of CLNM participate in training and development, offer consultancy, attend national policy meetings, conduct peer research, and plan and facilitate national events. The observation of CLNM National Conference in October 2021 highlighted how young people were empowered and confident to share their experiences of House Project with an audience of 200 members of national and LHP communities, including chairing and producing the conference and presenting the findings and recommendations of their first peer research study (CLNM, 2021). Interviews with young people, including founders and representatives of CLNM demonstrated the mutual value that participation created for young people and the wider House Project community.

> "The real shocking, I say 'shocking', the great thing … was, it was real, it was actually going to happen. It was being set up. It's not like you'd joined an eco-team in high school and they said, "We're going to try and get this much stuff recycled," but everyone leaves by the end of the first two months because they're going to miss their break time. It was good to see people come who actually wanted to do it and were genuinely invested…Now that we've established CLNM I've seen it make a difference. Like I say, it's not the eco-team, we're all there, we're all doing it. We're not just a name". Young Person, CLNM

The core ethos of co-production was integrated within the exemplar LHPs. The interviews and observations at each LHP site highlighted young people's enthusiasm relating to their ownership of House Project and their central positions in the design and shaping of House Project in Midlothian (Figure 3.3.7) and Islington (Figure 3.3.8), including through the mechanisms of CLNM and the Steering Group. In Midlothian, an opportunity was identified to explore how CLNM inter-related with the Champions Board, an initiative that was part of 'The Promise' nationally in Scotland, to identify synergies and optimise impact.

Figure 3.3.7. Centrality of co-production: Midlothian House Project, Scotland

Midlothian CLNM representatives were enthusiastic about the residential activity centres they had attended, the opportunities in peer research they had participated in including training, interviewing, and implementing recommendations; the national conference they had planned, participated in and presented at; and the forum of CLNM:

"They've got it to a tee…We go around each person … there's one or two reps from each House Project ….what they're experiencing and what each cohort is finding good….what's not so great…how can it be improved? And it's not just, "Oh how's the House Project going?...it's "How's your communication with staff? How's your communication with the actual place? Do you feel part of the community?"…we feed back on it all and that's how NHP kind of takes all that and then they go to the Trustee Board's meeting and then they discuss it further …and improve it that way… I think they take on board every single thing that you're saying and it feels great knowing that they're actually, they're listening to you and feeding back and actually meeting with other people to see how they can improve it. That's all we want, that's why we're there, that's why we're feeding back… to improve all the other House Projects and make this a wider thing and make sure everyone can benefit from it". Young person, CLNM

Figure 3.3.8. Centrality of co-production: Islington House Project, England

Islington Children's Social Care leaders reflected on the involvement of young people in leading and shaping House Project:

"*I was approached by young people who'd heard about the House Project up in Stoke and were really excited about it and wanted to bring it to Islington...I was involved in taking it forward with those two young people, and the rest of care council as well…We had to go and do this pitch … they did lots of planning and preparation work to prepare for that*". Strategic Manager, LA/Council

"*Thinking quite widely about young people's participation, and how we really involve them in the shaping of the project…they've been involved in delivering training and boot camps. They've been involved in that with other young people. We've had a Kickstart role in there.*" Strategic Manager, LA/Council

There is an opportunity for NHP, LHPs and CLNM to reflect on and share co-production best practices. Opportunities might include extending the focus on co-production to other LHPs beyond the two case study exemplars and the experiences of young people who are not part of CLNM. There is also an opportunity to explore how to position co-production and young people's participation within the NHP community in relation to a framework of participation, such as in relation to children and young people's rights and the four elements of the Lundy model: space, voice, audience and influence (European Commission, 2022; Lundy, 2022).

3.3.4 Integral approach to adaption and learning

> "As a learning organisation we want to focus on the evaluation findings so that we can start to tell the story of our work and how young people have contributed to and benefitted from our approach". NHP National Conference March 2022, Promotional Leaflet

At both national and local levels, an integral and focused approach to ongoing adaption and learning featured as an active ingredient to House Project's successful innovation journey. At a national level, this was enabled by the opportunities to embrace flexible and creative approaches arising from NHP's organisational status as a charity and access to resources across phases of the innovation journey.

> "Free of … local council control…that sense of liberation…they could move at speed…go out and engage with local authorities…flex and adjust" Consultant, NHP

NHP's access to resources in the form of funding and expertise from innovation consultants and evaluators in pilot implementations in England, as part of the DfE's Children's Social Care Innovation Programme in England and in Scotland, through funding from Life Changes Trust supported the development of learning and adaption opportunities. Each funder commissioned an evaluation alongside the pilot implementations, with learning and recommendations documented in publically available reports (Dixon and Ward, 2017; Dixon et al, 2020; Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum, 2022). NHP's openness and commitment to learning and adaption was characterised by a commitment to ongoing research and evaluation, both with external academic partners and through funding internal activities in addition to the two funders' requirements. A programme of external research and evaluation activity included an evaluation of the psychologically-informed relational model (Harvey et al, 2022) in parallel to the EXIT study. A programme of internal research and evaluation included funding for a cycle of Peer Evaluation activity, including training and resources for CLNM representatives to conduct interviews and surveys with young people in each Local House Project, conduct analysis, create a report and implement recommendations (CLNM, 2021).

Adaption as a central ingredient relation to House Project's conceptualisation as a 'framework' rather than a 'model', with an expectation from NHP that each House Project is adapted to fit the local context. Adaption was evident in the regional implementation of LHPs across Greater Manchester, where the NHP core team worked with LA staff, leaders and housing providers to adapt the core innovation design. The adaption focused on the core design of around ten young people in each cohort in each LA; moving to a shared cohort approach where two LAs 'shared' a LHP, each creating the opportunity for an annual cohort of five young people to join House Project. In Oxfordshire, where the housing supply restricted availability of houses suitable for one young person, the LHP offered shared accommodation, with each 'house' providing accommodation for either two or three young people. Adaption was recognised and celebrated in the two LHP exemplars (Figure 3.3.9 and Figure 3.3.10).

Figure 3.3.9. Adaption and learning: Islington House Project, England

Islington LHP team were excited about the adaption opportunities;

"There kind of wasn't a template of what the job role is…we could develop it 'How do you want it to be?' So that was really nice, and I think that's what excited me about it…that it hadn't existed before, so we could make it our own…create it together". Professional, LHP

LA leaders incorporated learning and adaption opportunities with each cohort;

"With each cohort that we've housed…we look back at what's worked, what hasn't worked and so if it hasn't worked we tweak according to what's happened on the ground and hopefully even more successful for the next group". Operational Manager, LA/Council

Figure 3.3.10. Adaption and learning: Midlothian House Project, Scotland

Midlothian LHP team recognised the opportunity to respond to young people's needs;

"House Project is a skeleton, it's not a rigid programme, so it's kind of looking at involving us to put the body on that bones, to make a House Project which is kind of bespoke to Midlothian and responds to our young people's needs." Professional, LHP

Council leaders incorporated learning and adaption opportunities with each cohort;

"We're constantly learning and I think as we learn, we do reshape, it's not that there's a fixed structure. Obviously, we have to stay within the realms of the Promise and the structure of the House Project and everything else but we are learning." Strategic Leader, LA/Council

There is an opportunity for NHP to reflect on, synthesise and share learning from across the research and evaluation activities, and from the wider group of LHPs that have adapted and flexed in their local journeys. Feeding in formal learning within a review cycle with members of the NHP community, including existing and potential LHPs, CLNM, Trustees and Partners will inform future strategic direction and operational activities in next phase of the House Project innovation journey.

3.3.5 Focus on outcome measures

Aligned with the three outcome domains outlined in Section 3.1, we identified a core focus on outcome measures across the House Project community as an ingredient of House Project's successful innovation journey and identified opportunities to build on strengths to enhance and extend the current focus. A shared focus on outcome measures at national and local levels was represented by a consistent reporting of both 'hard' and 'soft' outcomes and the development of a NHP 'outcomes and learning framework' ('OLF') in parallel with locally devised outcome measures.

'Hard' outcome measures related mostly to the domains of housing and finance. 'Hard outcomes' relating to housing featured the number of young people who had moved into their house and sustained their tenancy at a national and local level. Verbal and written reports of 'hard' housing outcomes were included at the NHP Conference, local strategic governance meetings and within the NHP 'Annual Report' and website. Hard outcomes in relation to finance included representations in organisational costing analysis to present a 'business case' to LAs/Councils to initiate and sustain their investment in a LHP. Financial business cases presented to LAs/Councils to support their decision to invest in House Project focused on costing analyses to show that House Project was an effective use of resource, as a cost-neutral, or cost-saving service, as part of *'invest-to save'* or *'transformation'* initiatives, in contrast to business as usual. Further hard outcome measures were reported and under-development at a local level;

> "A summary of outcomes shared with the House Project Board quarterly around education, training and employment, numbers we've housed, numbers that are accessing mental health services for example…stats on the diversity, number of young people we've got with additional learning needs…it's largely how many young people are we working with, of the young people we work with how many are we successfully getting through the programme and move into houses, and then from then on how many managed to sustain their tenancy". Professional, LHP

> "Evictions, police callouts, antisocial behaviour, property breakdowns…that's what we're looking at just now." Professional, LHP

'Soft' outcome measures were represented by a nuanced 'anecdotal' narrative account approach, reflecting a broader set of outcome domains framed by 'ORCHIDS', related to individual young people, their needs and their journeys, focused on their experiences within the LHP community. Young people's outcomes that were integrated within narratives included preparing for and moving into their homes, developing friendships, securing employment, attaining a university place, reaching out for mental health support, contacting their facilitator for advice and support relating to tenancies, mental health and life events.

A narrative approach to reporting young people's outcomes included young people directly sharing their experiences and representations in verbal and written reports, and through creative formats. We observed celebrations of young people's experiences and outcomes at House Project Steering Group meetings, a Corporate Parenting Board Meeting, an Annual Review meeting and presentations at national conferences. Creative formats that were used to share young people's experiences and outcomes included young people participating in a 'long table enquiry' method, creating a video animation (STAF, 2022) and through professionals sharing stories and photographs of young people's achievements, including painting their house, or with the keys to their new home in their hand (Figure 3.3.11).

Figure 3.3.11. Creative narrative formats to represent young people's journeys
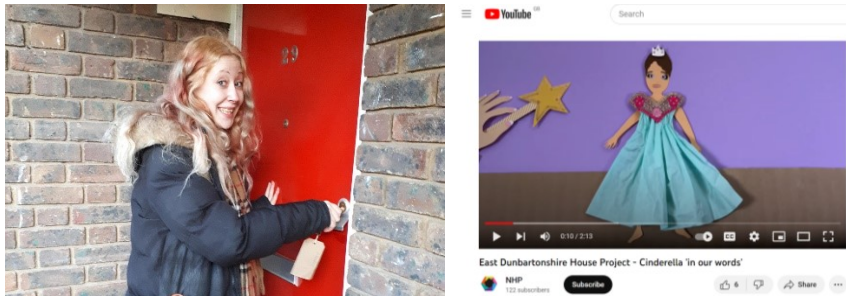
(Source: NHP website, 2023)

Participants identified opportunities to develop outcome measures, focused on longitudinal studies, cost-savings models and analyses and more nuanced measures. More nuanced measures that participants suggested included benefit to the Housing department at the LA/Council related to "*better tenants*, *less failure demand and cost savings*", the area of health related to increasing young people's awareness of and access to the health services available to them and development of availability and access to outcomes data at a cohort level.

> "A longitudinal study of the young people that go through the service in terms of their accessing of training, of employment, and tracking their sense of wellbeing, the qualitative aspects of the process, how do they feel now compared to a year ago, 18 months ago, in terms of mood, their outlook and prospects and how do they link that back if they do to having come through the project". Operational Manager, LA/Council

> "We evaluated outcomes in terms of the cohort of young people that we had worked with, so we presented all of that information alongside, with finance's help, really detailed analysis around potential cost avoidant savings". Strategic Leader, LA/Council

> "It's always difficult in health to determine outcomes because you've got to do it on an individual basis because every person is different and their journey is different and the places that they may go are different and if they change area…it is really difficult to trace one person". Strategic Leader, Partner organisation

> "Some knowledge on when it's appropriate to go to the pharmacy for a bit of help, when it's appropriate to go to the GP instead, really quite basic information which a lot of our young people are unaware of… there's been some youngsters attending A&E inappropriately when actually the GP could have helped." Strategic Leader, Partner organisation

As indicated in 3.1.4, there is additional scope for NHP to develop focus on outcomes and outcome measures, building on the frameworks of 'OLF' and 'ORCHIDS' and

creative approaches to enhance and extend the current focus. Development of outcome measures might include development and integration of high-level 'hard' outcome measures to satisfy accountability demands of funders and 'softer' young person level narratives to engage external stakeholders to invest and sustain innovation resources.

For example, there is an opportunity for increased emphasis and representation of the successful growth of NHP, building on the strong narrative of 'hard outcomes' relating to the increase in the number of young people who were members of the NHP community and had moved into their own homes. There was a strong sense that this quantitative focus offered a tangible, easily-grasped snapshot of the current size of the NHP family and a shortcut to understanding of the success of the House Project innovation overall, which could be extended to focus on successful growth. For example, the growth of NHP during the period of the EXIT study, from 245 young people were members of the NHP community in March 2021 to 619 in August 2023 could be represented and celebrated as an increase in reach of 374 young people, a growth of over 150% in less than three years. Similar calculations could be reported for the number of young people who had moved into their homes: from 160 to 359, an increase of 199 young people, a growth of 124%.

Possible further 'activities' that NHP could explore, with an academic partner, within an outcomes-focussed project, in addition to further research and the development of a ToC framework outlined in 3.1.4, include:

- Review 'OLF' and 'ORCHIDS' in relation to 'young people', 'organisational' and 'innovation journey' outcome areas (in Figure 3.1.2) incorporating a set of measures, outcome data generation, review and reporting processes and practices across extended areas with a focus on both 'hard' and 'soft' outcomes;
- Develop and implement a co-produced narrative approach with young people to reflect on and report young person- level outcomes as a means to overcome the ethical and practical challenges of 'measurement', with consideration to the methods of 'learning gallery', animations and 'long table enquiry';
- Generate longer-term outcome measures and create evidence for longer-term outcomes through commissioning or conducting a longitudinal study to explore how young people are thriving following their experiences within the House Project community;
- Create a costing+ analysis model for funders and LA/Councils to use to inform funding decisions that outlines the financial and wider social impact of investing in House Project across policy areas.

4. Summary of learning and conclusion

The EXIT-NHP Case Study has identified three outcome domains, six core design elements and five key ingredients related to House Project's successful innovation journey, including areas of strength to celebrate and build on (Figure 4.1) and areas of opportunity to explore (Figure 4.2) to support future growth, development and sustainability of NHP and LHPs.

Figure 4.1. Areas of strength for NHP to celebrate and build on

Area of learning	Areas of strength to celebrate, build on and support future growth, development and sustainability of NHP and LHPs
Outcome domains	1) Young people's experiences – developing supportive relationships, pathways to positive mental health and wellbeing and readiness to move into and live in their home 2) Organisational outcomes – enabling LAs/Councils to fulfil aims across children's social care, housing and finance departments 3) Innovation journey outcomes – design, spread and scale of House Project, through NHP community of NHP, CLNM, LHPs, LAs/Councils to reach and support more young people to lead connected and fulfilling lives
Core fidelity design elements	1) Coproduction with young people at the centre 2) Local house project 'base' 3) LHP professional team 4) Relational psychologically-informed practice framework (ORCHIDS) 5) Certified learning programme delivered through a flexible, needs-based group work approach 6) Access to a house or flat for each young person
Key innovation journey ingredients	1) Receptivity of national and local contexts 2) Fostering of shared leadership dynamics and practices 3) Centrality and integration of co-production with young people 4) Focused approach to adaption and learning 5) Focus on outcome measures

Aligned with NHP leaders' openness and commitment to learning and development, Figure 4.2 includes a summary of the ten opportunities that we outlined across the three areas of celebration and learning in sections 3.1 – 3.3. The EXIT team is eager to explore extending the EXIT-NHP partnership in the next phase of House Project's innovation journey with a focus on opportunities aligned with the involvement and support of a research partner.

Figure 4.2. Areas of opportunity for NHP to explore

Area of learning	Opportunities identified to explore to support future growth, development and sustainability of NHP and LHPs
Outcome domains	1. **Develop NHP-EXIT outcomes framework and a Theory of Change framework** with a focus across outcome domains and inter-relationships; broader range of outcome areas, including organisational outcomes for emotional wellbeing and mental health and employment, education and training; inclusion of short-, mid- and longer-term outcome perspectives. 2. **Explore alignment with national priorities** across health, housing, social justice and social care domains e.g. position as an intervention for an 'inclusion health group' with aims to reduce health inequalities and social exclusion focused on social determinants of health (Buzelli et al, 2022) and as aligned with priorities of the Integrated Care Systems in England (ICS; Kings Fund, 2022)
Core fidelity design elements	3. **Explore development of a 'design fidelity framework'**, including conceptualisation, promotion and positioning of the six core design elements to use as a practice tool to guide implementation and review as LHPs are implemented, sustained and scaled 4. **Explore development of specific design elements** including a Health and Wellbeing module in the learning programme and how to protect and increase facilitators' 'relational resource' as each LHP community grows e.g. provision of support to develop peer mentoring scheme; additional frontline practitioner roles such as a third facilitator or a role with a specific mental health focus
Key innovation journey ingredients	5. **Overall** – explore development of a 'key ingredients framework' to use as a practice tool to guide implementation and review as LHPs are implemented, sustained and scaled 6. **Receptivity of national and local contexts** – explore how to address the challenge of limited housing stock available for young people leaving care across LAs/Councils 7. **Shared leadership dynamics and practices** - extend the shared leadership approach including developing of Community of Practice; creating a 'named link' in each partner organisation; review and share learning from existing employment opportunities and explore new national and local employment partnerships 8. **Centrality of co-production with young people** - explore how CLNM inter-relates with the 'Champions Board' in Scotland to identify synergies and optimise impact; broaden focus on co-production across LHPs; reflect on how to position NHP's participation model 9. **Integral approach to adaption and learning** - synthesise and share learning from across research and evaluation activities to inform future strategic direction and operational activities as next steps in the innovation journey 10. **Focus on outcome measures** - build on 'ORCHIDS' and 'OLF' with an outcomes-focused project to include developing an outcomes framework and process

We hope the report offers helpful resource for all leaders across the NHP community to reflect on and celebrate the strengths and successes of House Project's innovation journey and to build on them in forthcoming phases, including how to balance 'spread and scale' and encourage adaption whilst protecting quality in existing LHPs through attention to core fidelity elements. In articulating outcome areas, core fidelity design elements and key innovation journey ingredients, we hope that the EXIT-NHP Case Study will contribute to more care leavers joining the House Project community and leading connected and fulfilling lives and support NHP in their journey towards changing the narrative around care leavers and inform systemic change.

We would like a young person from CLNM to have the last word in the study:

"I've managed to find somewhere and be a part of something that is the best part of life, which is friendship, which is love, which is hope, which is making the world a better place in our small way by making the passages through to adulthood from the care system that much better. Every single day I come here thinking that I'm making a young person in the future better and making sure that a life can actually start because a lot of young peoples' lives in the care system don't even start because of how they leave the care system".

Young person, CLNM

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EXIT Study

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