



# Evaluation Report

Exploring the role of governance and capacity building in establishing, embedding and sustaining locally-led collective impact work

North Birkenhead Cradle to Career Programme

January 2024



# Table of Contents



<b>Table of Contents</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Glossary</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Summary</b>	<b>3</b>
Findings & Implications	3
Reflection	5
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>6</b>
The Programme	6
The Evaluation	6
This Report	7
<b>Findings</b>	<b>8</b>
Governance	8
Capacity Building Support	13
Impact Case Study	14
<b>Implications</b>	<b>15</b>
Conditions for Collective Impact	15
The Sustainability of the Model	16
Closing Reflections	21
<b>Method</b>	<b>22</b>
Process	22
Limitations	23

## Glossary

We define some key terms throughout the body of the report. Here, we provide some definitions for specific roles within the Right to Succeed, North Birkenhead Cradle to Career and programme's local partnership ecosystem.

**Right to Succeed:** A national charity that supports communities in areas of high deprivation through place-based initiatives. [North Birkenhead Cradle to Career](#) is one such programme.

**The Cradle to Career (C2C) Backbone Team:** A team of staff who work to bring together partners in education, services and community through stakeholder management, programme development and delivery. Having a community-based backbone team is a key element of a collective impact model.

**Right to Succeed staff:** These staff members provided core support for the Cradle to Career backbone team, including on data, programme design, communications, finance and fundraising.

**The Youth Offer:** The Youth Offer is composed of four delivery partners: The Hive Wirral Youth Zone, Equilibrium North West CIC, Egan Road Church, Gautby Road Play & Community Centre. Members of the Youth Offer form part of the Community and Services Working Group, described in the body of the report below.

**Local Partners:** Individuals from local social sector organisations that are collaborating on the Cradle-to-Career programme. Most of the local partners we spoke to for this evaluation were members of the Working Groups and Steering Group, described in the body of the report below.

## Summary

Between May and September 2023, Renaisi conducted a formative evaluation of the [North Birkenhead Cradle to Career](#) programme. The programme brings together residents, local services, professionals and community members to support children and young people in the area.

The evaluation explored the implementation of a place-based collective impact model through a focused examination of its **governance structures** and **capacity building approach** within four programme workstreams. This was a narrowly focused formative and qualitative evaluation that aimed to support the programme team learn and develop their ways of working as the programme prepared to shift into the next three years of delivery. Evaluation activities consisted of a co-design session, 21 interviews with programme staff and partners and a facilitated a co-analysis session with programme staff. The evaluation did not aim to provide a comprehensive picture, nor did it focus on measuring impact.

In the context of the rising profile of place-based approaches, the fact that this is a relatively novel instance of collective impact working in the UK, and the recent launch of the Liverpool City region expansion of the Cradle to Career model, we believe learnings generated during this evaluation partnership will prove valuable for others seeking to engage in related efforts.

## Findings & Implications

While place-based change work is known for being challenging and complex, this evaluation presents a picture of a programme that has made great strides to embed key elements of a collective impact approach in North Birkenhead. Our findings indicate that the programme has successfully created the conditions for partnership learning, built local knowledge and created structures that support effective local decision-making. While defining and fully embedding the role of the Steering Group and engaging all local residents in decision-making has proven challenging, Right to Succeed staff and local partners have treated these as learning opportunities that will feed into the programme's future, as well as their work on other place-based change initiatives.

## Implementation of Collective Impact

This evaluation examined two elements of the North Birkenhead Cradle to Career programme's implementation of a collective impact model.

**1) Starting with a common agenda:** The C2C backbone team has effectively broken down existing siloes among social sector professionals. There is enthusiasm among the team to build on early successes to facilitate greater community engagement going forward.

**2) Having a strong backbone:** Partners had overwhelmingly positive experiences engaging with the C2C backbone team, though their work has been resource intensive. Given that a strong backbone is a key condition for collective impact, a priority for the next three years will be for the C2C backbone team to distribute and embed the work they currently hold among partner organisations.

## Governance

### 1) The Working Groups

**FINDINGS:** From the perspective of working group members, the programme has effectively enabled locally led decision-making. A key ambition of the C2C backbone team was to continue to build on these strong foundations and facilitate even greater collective ownership going forward.

**IMPLICATIONS:** Moving into the next phase of the programme, Renaisi and the C2C backbone team jointly identified the importance of building greater visibility into and ownership over evidence-gathering and decision-making. The C2C backbone team has begun to define the key elements of capacity building required to support this shift moving forward.

### 2) The Steering Group

**FINDINGS:** The C2C backbone team and Steering Group members voiced a mix of successes and challenges. As is common in place-based working, it has taken time to develop trust, relationships and ways of working. The development of the Steering Group has provided rich learning that has carried forward both into the programme, the scaled-up approach across Liverpool City Region and Right to Succeed's work in other areas.

**IMPLICATIONS:** The C2C backbone team has made several adjustments to strengthen the work of the Steering Group. Right to Succeed and the programme's current evaluation partner should play a role in supporting the continued collective learning of the Steering Group.

### 3) Local Residents

**FINDINGS:** There is clear passion among the C2C backbone team and local partners for enabling engagement for a wider range of local residents, particularly those who are most vulnerable. This first phase has supplied useful learning around the numerous barriers to community engagement and the potential solutions to overcome this issue.

**IMPLICATIONS:** On pages 17-18 of the report, we present recommendations from our experience of engaging local residents in place-based change.

## Capacity Building

**FINDINGS:** Participants felt that the North Birkenhead Cradle to Career programme has been effective at building capacity for partnership working in North Birkenhead. Local partners found the training and funding provided by the C2C backbone team highly valuable. C2C backbone team members identified ways in which their offer built sustainable capacity in local providers.

**IMPLICATIONS:** The C2C backbone team has hypothesised that in order to support programme sustainability, they would need to clearly define and communicate to local partners what the capacity building approach consists of and provide them greater ownership in identifying and driving forward solutions.

## Reflection

The North Birkenhead Cradle to Career programme has successfully established a place-based model by getting well embedded within the community and building capacity for collective change. Given the success of the model, the programme design and roles of the C2C backbone team must now evolve further to support programme sustainability by building ever greater ownership over the programme model within the wider community.

# Introduction

Renaisi partnered with Right to Succeed and North Birkenhead Cradle to Career between May and September 2023 to conduct a formative evaluation focusing on specific programme elements.

## The Programme

**Right to Succeed** is a national charity that supports communities in areas of high deprivation through place-based initiatives. [North Birkenhead Cradle to Career](#) is one such programme. It brings together residents, local services, professionals and community members to **support children and young people in the area**. The programme aims to significantly improve literacy standards among children, give families easy access to the support they need, improve the quality of life for all and create new opportunities for children and young people.

North Birkenhead Cradle to Career is **place-based collective impact<sup>1</sup> model**, supported by [Steve Morgan Foundation](#), [SHINE](#), [UBS Optimus](#) and [Wirral Council](#), and administered by [Right to Succeed](#).

Since its establishment in 2021, the programme has been led by a locally-based C2C backbone team, which has worked with over 41 local partners in the area, aiming to bring about change through the following.

- **Education:** supporting schools to become world class at identifying and meeting the needs of their learners.
- **Community & Services:** supporting the community to take ownership of the development of their local culture and the local offer, and to address the key issues affecting them.
- **Family Services:** improving the engagement and support of North Birkenhead's most vulnerable families, giving them the opportunities they need to be healthy and happy; and by supporting the delivery of services in partnership with the local community, driving collaboration through the system.

## The Evaluation

The C2C backbone team commissioned a formative and narrowly-focused evaluation, to help the team **learn and develop their ways of working** as they shift into years four-to-six of delivery. Overarching this evaluation was an examination of the programme's adherence to good practice in place-based and collective impact working. The evaluation focused on the role of the **governance structures** in supporting locally led decision-making, the programme's approach to **capacity building**, and the role of the C2C **backbone team** with regards to each. The evaluation focused on four workstreams within the model:

1. Improving literacy and language development, which provides support to schools on early years language development, targeted interventions, and assessment.
2. The Youth Offer, which supports two youth hubs and consults with young people to shape youth programming

---

<sup>1</sup> Collective impact is an approach that brings people together in a structured way to achieve social change. Collective impact approaches convene a network of community members, organisations and institutions to agree and advance shared goals for systems- and population-level change.

3. The Multi-disciplinary team, which helps provide integrated support for local families through Wirral Council.
4. The Steering Group, a governance team that oversees the work of the two programme working groups.

The sequence of the evaluation activities was as follows:

- **Review and design:** Renaisi conducted a desk review and co-constructed the evaluation framework with the C2C backbone team and Right to Succeed staff.
- **Data collection:** Renaisi conducted 21 interviews: six with the C2C backbone team and Right to Succeed staff, and 15 with local community stakeholders.
- **Analysis:** Renaisi conducted analysis on an ongoing basis, and in August 2023 facilitated a co-analysis workshop with the C2C backbone team. The co-analysis workshop focused on exploring and extending emergent themes around the sustainability of the programme model.
- **Reporting:** In October 2023, the Renaisi team compiled an internal report for Right to Succeed. The purpose of this first report was to summarise findings and share implications for the next phase of the North Birkenhead Cradle to Career programme. In the [Findings](#) section of this report, we present the results of our analysis, and in the [Implications](#) section we present a synthesis of our findings and recommendations, paired with insights contributed by the C2C backbone team during and following the co-analysis session.

It is important to note that this evaluation was not commissioned or designed to be comprehensive or to focus on value or impact. It did not directly examine programme impact (quantitatively or otherwise) on the participating organisations, local individuals or children and young people. While the Renaisi team heard about the experience of participants in our interviews, it is not the purpose of this report to provide an assessment of the social value or impact of the programme.

The Renaisi project team for this partnership was: Cathy Hearn, Project Director & Manager; Ben Andrews, Researcher; and John Hitchin, Advisor for Place-Based Change Strategy.

You can find more information about our evaluation approach in the [Method](#) section at the end of this report.

## This Report

As we were finalising the internal report described above, the Renaisi and Right to Succeed teams agreed that there was a wider audience for our findings and their implications. The context for this is the rising profile of place-based working and evaluation; the fact that North Birkenhead Cradle to Career is a relatively novel instance of a collective impact approach in the UK that has demonstrated impressive results in its first years; and the recent expansion of the Cradle to Career model into the Liverpool City region.

The resultant report is the result of a joint effort by the Renaisi and Right to Succeed teams to add the context and framing that would make the findings accessible and useful for a wider audience of: (1) potential and existing funders of place-based or collective impact approaches, (2) those engaging or seeking to engage in place-based or collective impact initiatives, and (3) those undertaking the evaluation of place-based or collective impact approaches.



## Findings

The evaluation aimed to explore the following three questions, in line with the collective impact and place-based change frameworks:

1. Does the programme's **governance structure** facilitate effective locally led decision-making?
  - a. What role has the C2C backbone team played in locally led decision-making?
2. Does the programme's approach and practice facilitate effective **capacity building**?
  - a. What role has the C2C backbone team played in facilitating effective capacity building?
3. What are the key enablers, challenges and barriers to **governance and capacity building** in the programme?

## Governance

There are two kinds of governance teams in place to oversee and guide the programme: two working groups and a Steering Group.

### The Working Groups

The working groups are designed to provide **strategic oversight** over specific elements of the programme. There are two groups, the Education Working Group and Community and Services Working Group. The Community and Services Working Group was formed when a Community and a Family and Services Working Group were combined.

The **Education Working Group** is formed of school leads from eight education settings and representatives from the local authority and strategic organisations. The group supports place-based collective impact by bringing together schools to improve capacity to support students.

The **Community and Services Working Group** is formed of community leads from four community-focused delivery partners, and over fourteen representatives from local community organisations, services and the local authority. The group brings together community organisations to shape and influence the Local Offer.

Interview participants had overwhelmingly positive reflections on the role of working groups and on the ways in which the C2C backbone team supported these, feeling that they brought together social sector professionals in ways that were **novel for the area**. Education Working Group members reflected that this has had a **significant impact on local organisations' ability to overcome challenges**. For example, in empowering schools to use tools to measure mental health and wellbeing of their students more effectively.



*I'm in a room with other practitioners meeting the same barriers further along their journey and they actually offered their **interventions that worked**, and their literacy strategies that were **functioning and high value**."*

– Education Working Group member

Education Working Group members would surface common challenges in termly meetings. They would conduct site visits to each-other’s schools, a practice that had not occurred before the programme. Members would **work together to identify or propose solutions** that they had used or seen applied effectively in the past.

Community and Services Working Group members had similar reflections about the influence of the programme on their work. The emphasis on and support for collective working supported organisations to **generate new working relationships and improve existing relationships**.

Community and Services Working Group members felt that collective working enabled local providers to support families and young people in a **more coordinated and straightforward way**. By strengthening communications between different groups and organisations, issues could be identified and addressed much more efficiently and effectively than when working in siloed ways, as was the norm before Cradle to Career.

“*Young people have come in generally wanting to talk to somebody [...] we can then feed that information back into the MDT team: “Do we know what’s happening with this family?” So, I think even that that offer is **enabled by other conversations and wider partnership working.**”*

– Community and Services Working Group member

By breaking down silos, providers in North Birkenhead are working towards **common and mutually-agreed priorities**. When challenges occur, groups come together and work on overcoming them collaboratively rather than competing with each other for funding.

“*[We bring] people together, getting that kind of sense of **ownership over a shared issue** and how we’re going to tackle it as a place and then being able to put in the infrastructure and the processes that can maintain momentum and **allow local stakeholders to lead that change** and to implement it within their spaces.”*

– Right to Succeed staff member

## The Role of the C2C Backbone Team

The support of the C2C backbone team emerged as a **key enabler** in supporting Working Groups to embed locally led decision-making.

Community and Services Working Group members reflected that one of the ways in which the backbone team has enabled change is through **challenging providers to approach their work differently**. This holds them to account and encourages them to push themselves out of historically siloed work patterns.

“*They’ve not allowed any of us to be that **siloed** organisation. And they **challenge** when they’re not happy. And I think that’s quite refreshing.”*

– Community and Services Working Group member

Working group members appreciated the ways in which the C2C backbone team identified solutions to shared problems and worked with their organisation to agree upon the path forward. They emphasised that these approaches are **solution-oriented and avoid placing blame** on organisations for prior challenges with delivery.



*Nobody comes with an agenda. It's just how are you finding it? An example was that they had feedback that some of the comms we were putting out wasn't as relevant. So again, it was **how can we help support it.**"*

– Community & Services Working Group member

## The Steering Group

The Steering Group is composed of over 13 representatives from project funders, academic institutions, the chairs of Working Groups and the local authority. The group is responsible for **strategic oversight of the programme**.

Initially, the Steering Group was responsible for **setting up the working groups and ensuring that the project was delivering the desired outcomes**. With a diversity of members, key issues were identified, and the Steering Group was able to assist the C2C backbone team in finding the right stakeholders to engage in these groups.

Dedicating the required time to fully engage in supporting the high level of ambition of the project proved to be challenging for some steering group members. However, for those members that were able to engage on a consistent basis, **levels of trust and buy-in were developed enabling the group to collectively adapt and learn**, leading to greater collaboration and support for the local community.

A common challenge of place-based collaborative approaches is navigating the inherent power dynamics between group members who all bring different lenses and approaches to addressing collectively identified challenges. Some interview participants described how the Steering Committee navigated such challenges in its early months.

The initial steering group primarily consisted of a coalition of willing participants, who were all passionate about positive community change. Right to Succeed staff described how as the project progressed, the membership of the group was reviewed by the C2C backbone team, and group members **developed greater levels of understanding around the crucial roles they all play in enabling the collective model** to deliver on outcomes for the community.

Right to Succeed staff believe that local leadership of the group has strengthened over time and, and this remains a key priority to ensure the future sustainability of the work.

Some interview participants voiced challenges around some members' expectations for quick and quantifiable change, whereas others acknowledged that place-based efforts can take years to embed, develop and shift system-level outcomes. Right to Succeed staff and the C2C backbone team have emphasised that the enthusiasm for quick change in itself is not negative, and stems from passionate convictions and urgency and severity of the issues that the steering group is working collectively to address. Moreover, spaces like the

Steering Group provide **opportunities for members to learn about the time and relational capacity needed to embed long-term place-based change and to co-develop a culture and shared way of working**. Right to Succeed staff described how what they learned through working to establish the North Birkenhead Cradle to Career Steering Group proved **valuable learning for establishing governance structures for other place-based programming** they were engaged in, such as the scaled up C2C approach across Liverpool City Region.

## Locally Led Decision-Making

Partners engaged in the programme's governance structures felt that they effectively facilitated locally led decision-making. They felt that their voices have been heard and considered, that they have driven the change that had taken place, and that they have been able to decide on the direction the work has taken.



*I feel like my voice is heard within the working group."*

– Working Group member

The local partners interviewed described the individual professional attributes and work of the C2C **backbone team as the main enabler of locally led decision-making**. While stakeholders make the decisions, the backbone team facilitates the collective working. C2C backbone team members also offer support to individual stakeholders through one-to-one sessions where they explore challenges that stakeholders are facing.

Members of the C2C backbone team felt that there was further progress to be made towards fully embedding locally led decision-making with the working groups.

Early in the programme, the Education Working Group lead moved on from their school and therefore the working group. This left a gap in the leadership of the group that was filled by a member of the C2C backbone team. Members of the Working Group felt that the group benefited from the support of the backbone team members. A member of the C2C backbone team, however, felt that in the short term this shift placed limits on their team's capacity, and made the Working Group less self-sufficient.

During these first years of the partnership, the C2C backbone team conducted a significant proportion of the work in identifying and researching new ideas to discuss with the group, and expressed ambitions to progress into a model where Working Group members could assume more of these responsibilities. In part, this is a window into the development of the early stages of a place-based partnership: **it was important for the C2C backbone team to establish and role model this approach before gradually shifting responsibilities** more onto working group members in future years.

It was apparent that some working group members may not have been aware that there were plans to shift responsibilities in the future, and **C2C backbone team members raised concerns about limited capacity** (in terms of available time) at this stage among working group members to assume greater responsibility.

## Engaging Local Residents

The C2C backbone team, wider Right to Succeed staff and local partners display **clear passion around engaging more residents and children and young people** in the work of the Cradle to Career programme and its governance structure. The programme has made notable progress in engaging local community members, but—as is typical with community engagement work—this has proven more challenging than engaging social sector staff and will take longer to embed.

Successes in engaging local residents has included the programme's support of the establishment of a small grant programme for residents. **Grants have resulted in some hyperlocal and meaningful projects**, such as a community allotment for adults with disabilities and a women's wellbeing support group, which have helped spread the word about Cradle to Career in the area.

Both working group members and C2C backbone team members felt there was further progress to be made in engaging more local residents in their work. Members of the Education Working Group reflected that they have encountered challenges engaging young people in decision-making. They believe that **continuing to work to increase the engagement of children and young people would mean that they would be more effective at improving educational outcomes**. As the objectives for the project over the next few years are shifting more towards engaging young people with special educational needs and disabilities, they felt that these voices will be increasingly important.

The C2C backbone team reflected on the importance of ensuring that the voices of the most **vulnerable and historically disempowered community members** were elevated through their work, and on the concept that these relationships are often harder to build due to the need to develop greater trust. They emphasised the risk that following paths-of-least-resistance to engage residents—for example, by identifying local residents known to local partners—often results in uplifting the voices of those who are already equipped and empowered to advocate for themselves.

The C2C backbone team has pushed for more local residents to be involved in the Steering Group; however, this has proved challenging. Difficulties have included communicating the purpose and relevance of the group and time demands on local residents. One interviewee raised the point that while other Steering Group members engage as representatives of organisations, local residents tend to attend as individuals, which complicates group dynamics. The C2C backbone team and wider **Right to Succeed staff have raised the question of whether the Steering Group is the appropriate vehicle for engaging local residents**.

These discussions represent **important practice-based learning about what it takes to effectively engage local residents**, which is a crucial part of building long-term and place-based change initiatives. Based on this learning, alternative models for local resident engagement are currently being explored and developed.

## Capacity Building Support

In addition to providing incredibly valuable learning for Right to Succeed, the Cradle to Career programme has built capacity in North Birkenhead in two interrelated ways.

The first is through **increasing the capacity of local providers to engage in the partnership working that enables collective impact work**. The Cradle to Career programme has created a collaborative environment where stakeholders work together and receive support from each other to progress shared goals. Interviewees felt that local providers can address challenges more effectively and cohesively because of this support.

The second is through increasing the capacity of individual stakeholders to undertake their roles more effectively. This has involved the C2C backbone team meeting with local partners, identifying areas for development, and identifying providers who can offer this support and fund partners' participation in this support. Local partners reflected that this support has been crucial in **building their understanding of issues and their self-efficacy in tackling them**. Many partners now feel a lot more confident in their ability to do their work effectively and support young people with the challenges that they face.

Local partners were not aware of the overarching plan for or structure of the capacity building support. While they found the training useful and important to their work, some saw this as a distinct offer from the Cradle to Career programme. While not all local partners may conceive of the capacity building support as part of the Cradle to Career programme, **C2C backbone team members themselves described how providing capacity support was one of the more time and resource intensive elements of their work**.

The C2C backbone team and wider Right to Succeed staff felt that **the nature of the capacity building support offered was the most important factor to consider when thinking about the sustainability of the programme going forward**. For example, they considered the ways in which training key staff members across different sites would then enable those staff to upskill their colleagues. The quote below describes the way in which an educator embedded her learning from engaging in Cradle to Career Capacity Building in her school:



*She spent the last year upskilling everybody else and again, that is **capacity building for sustainability**. Because next year, when she goes back to the classroom, she's still there, she still has the expertise."*

– Backbone team member

# Impact Case Study

## The Multi-disciplinary Team

The Multi-disciplinary team (MDT) is a model through which Cradle to Career-funded Family Connectors work with Wirral council staff to provide **integrated support for local families**. The team consists of 16 professionals working across disciplines including social care, employment family support and school readiness. As part of the local council, the team has replaced the area's child protective services with a new way of working.

Evaluation activities conducted by Right to Succeed find that the work of the multi-disciplinary team has been a great success. While our evaluation did not set out to assess the impact of the Cradle to Career model, or that of the MDT, participants shared reflections on their work that feel important to highlight as an example of the early success of the model.

Rather than waiting for young people to interface with the care system, the MDT approaches child protection from a **preventative** point of view. Working with families, schools and youth provisions in the area, the team offers support to young people and families in need before they would usually have to intervene.

This proactive approach has **significantly shifted perceptions** of the service. Instead of avoiding them, families refer themselves and others to the service because they see it as a way to support themselves instead of risking having their children removed from their households.

This collaborative approach has enabled the authority to **access more families** and more young people than before. Through their partnership with schools, the MDT is **providing support that would not have been possible in the past**.

They also have access to more data to support an **evidence-informed approach**. This means that they have a better understanding of the needs of the children and young people they are working with.

This has resulted in a **drop in the number of cases being escalated**, and the team has been approached by other local authorities who would like to learn about the model.

# Implications

## Conditions for Collective Impact

This evaluation examined two elements of the Cradle to Career programme’s implementation of a collective impact model: (1) starting with a common agenda; and (2) having a strong backbone. In the table below, we provide an assessment of the progress so far, and our suggestions for future development or adaptation.

COLLECTIVE IMPACT CONDITION	HOW IT’S WORKING	SUGGESTIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT OR ADAPTATION
Starting with a common agenda	<p>The Cradle to Career model <b>has broken down siloes</b> and <b>enabled</b> social sector professionals from across the community to work towards mutually agreed priorities.</p> <p>The C2C backbone team, wider Right to Succeed staff and local partners are <b>passionate about engaging local residents</b> in the work, but they recognise that building buy-in and awareness among the wider community is challenging and will take time.</p>	<p>Where collective impact approaches have drawn criticism, this has often stemmed from perceptions that the approach has felt top-down and has failed to authentically <b>engage the grassroots</b> within communities (<a href="#">example</a>).</p> <p>Evidence from our evaluation points to the Cradle to Career project being well embedded within the local community. There is enthusiasm and energy among the C2C backbone team and wider Right to Succeed staff to <b>build on early successes</b> to the approach and engage more community members going forward, building on what they have learned in the first few years.</p> <p>We share some reflections in the next table below under the “Governance” section.</p>
Having a strong backbone	<p>The local partners were effusive in their praise of the C2C backbone team and their effectiveness in supporting <b>locally led decision-making</b> and <b>building local capacity</b>.</p>	<p>Given that a strong backbone is a core component of the collective impact model, a key task for Right to Succeed as they look to withdraw from North Birkenhead will be to <b>distribute and embed</b> the</p>



Partners named **individual C2C backbone team members** as instrumental in the success of the model so far. However, the work conducted by the backbone team has been resource intensive.

responsibilities, know-how and capacities that currently reside within the current C2C backbone team among partner organisations.

We share some reflections in the tables below to support the Right to Succeed team in re-imagining the C2C backbone team’s composition.

## The Sustainability of the Model

In the two tables below, we present a summary of our findings alongside a set of implications for the future of the Cradle to Career model. These implications represent a synthesis of reflections from the Cradle to Career team during and after our co-analysis session in August 2023, and recommendations from the Renaisi team, drawing on our experience supporting organisations in collective impact and place-based change.

### Governance

LOOKING BACKWARDS	LOOKING FORWARDS
<p><b>The Working Groups</b></p> <p>To date, decision-making has taken the form of the C2C backbone team assuming responsibility for investigating potential solutions to local issues and presenting them to the working groups to come to a collective decision. This represents important groundwork in creating the conditions for place-based collaboration, with team modelling and acculturating collective impact ways of working with the wider group.</p> <p>From the perspective of local partners engaged in working groups, the programme’s ways of working have effectively enabled locally led decision-making.</p>	<p>During our co-analysis session, the C2C backbone team put forward the idea that to build greater programme sustainability, partners need to be able to have greater <b>visibility into the model</b>, not just a shared way of working.</p> <p>The working theory that emerged from this discussion is that providing greater visibility would be a step towards <b>building greater ownership</b> among the working groups. It would help reduce the working groups’ dependence on the C2C backbone team and encourage them to more <b>proactively gather and present evidence</b> for decision-making.</p>

---

From the perspective of the C2C backbone team, there is now work to be done in making sure the locally-led aspect of the work continues to develop further through working group members taking increased ownership over the identification of solutions.

Alongside conversations around shifting visibility and ownership into the model, it will also be important to grapple with the question of how to **create capacity** (whether time, expertise, self-efficacy) for working group members to take on more proactive roles in leading locally led decision-making.

---

### The Steering Group

There have been successes in implementing a programme Steering Group, but the C2C backbone team has faced some challenges in its implementation. This has included group members struggling to make time to engage fully, difficulties navigating intragroup power dynamics, and differences in expectations around the speed of the work, all of which are common challenges within collective place-based approaches.

The C2C backbone team and wider Right to Succeed staff have underscored that it takes time to develop the trust, relationships and shared ways of working that are key to successful place-based working.

At the same time, they have learned a lot from the process – much of which has been applied within the programme and their work on other place-based initiatives.

The C2C backbone team and wider Right to Succeed staff are aware of challenges relating to the Steering Group and have implemented steps to strengthen this element of the governance structure.

Right to Succeed and the Cradle to Career evaluation partner will have a continued role to play in **supporting the experiential learning of the Steering Group** to ensure that they can continue to iterate upon and develop the role and structure of the Steering Group.

---

### Engaging Local Residents

The C2C backbone team, wider Right to Succeed staff and local partners are passionate about engaging local residents in decision-making, and there has been some success in the form of the establishment of a small grants programme.

The experience of C2C backbone team members in working to engage local residents has provoked useful learning around barriers

The C2C backbone team and wider Right to Succeed staff have reflected that engaging local residents is one of the more challenging elements of place-based working, and takes time, but that **early successes will help them progress** this in the future.

When engaging with local residents and those with lived experience in place-based change work, Renaisi has learnt the following:

to engagement, including around what form of engagement feels most appropriate for community members.

C2C backbone team members are sensitive to the need to reach and elevate the voices of the most vulnerable residents, including children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities.

- It's vital to ensure residents have a **clearly defined role** and are well briefed, enabling them to enter collective spaces with confidence.
  - It can be effective to engage local people in **setting a vision** for change. Engaging people further down the line can feel disempowering, as though they have been included as an afterthought and have not had an opportunity to contribute to the overall approach or design.
  - It's important to understand that many local residents **may not have the same professional skills** that social sector partners have, and they may need additional training or upskilling to be engaged in technical activities. Many local residents may not be interested in getting involved in more technical elements of the work, as long as they can guide its direction.
  - **Community organising** approaches can be effective for engaging and empowering local residents.
  - It's crucial to emphasise the **assets and skills** that residents bring to local partnerships, and the relationships that they will have within the place.
  - It may be a good idea to encourage residents to consider the **informal constituencies** they might be representing through their engagement (as opposed to being engaged solely as an individual), for example, being a parent associated with a local school, a small business owner, or a disabled person.
  - It's critical to be mindful of the **power dynamics** inherent in engaging a range of local stakeholders in one space – especially in the presence of funders. Build shared spaces that feel safe and
-

---

welcoming and facilitate conversations with an eye to not letting singular voices dominate.

- Identify **alternative opportunities** with varying levels of commitment and ease-of-entry for residents to feed into the work, for example, by participating in research.
-

## Capacity Building

### LOOKING BACKWARDS

#### Partnership Working

Interviewees felt that the Cradle to Career programme has been effective at building the relational capacity between stakeholders to enable collective impact to occur. While local stakeholders do not describe this as capacity building, we believe that this work is important to call attention to and define as a fundamental step for establishing a place-based partnership.

#### Skills and Knowledge Building

Partners have found the career and professional development training and funding they received from Cradle to Career highly valuable. They felt it had been crucial in enabling them to build understanding and self-efficacy around the key issues that they were working on.

C2C backbone team members described the ways in which upskilling key staff across the place is a mechanism for sustainable capacity building, as these individuals go on to train their colleagues and embed the learning in their organisation.

Local partners tended not to be fully aware of the wider capacity building strategy or plan, and some saw the offer as distinct from the Cradle to Career programme.

C2C backbone team members emphasised that providing capacity building support has been one of the more time and resource intensive elements of their work on the programme.

### LOOKING FORWARDS

#### Capacity Building as a Whole

Based on discussions during our co-analysis session, the C2C backbone team arrived at the following hypothesis to guide their future work.

*For the programme model to become sustainable, capacity building needs to look like:*

- A clear **definition** and **communication** of what capacity building is; and
- Giving our partners more **ownership** in identifying shared gaps in knowledge, agreeing what solutions are and implementing them themselves.

Even with more shared understanding and ownership over the capacity building approach, the matter of capacity to engage in capacity building is something to address. It will be important to ask what it will take to **free up the time** of local partners and have them view it as a **part of their professional** roles to drive Cradle to Career capacity building work – as opposed to an add-on to their full-time work.

## Closing Reflections

Our interviews with key stakeholders, conversations with Right to Succeed staff and the C2C backbone team have presented a picture of a programme that has made **great strides to embed key elements of a place-based collective impact approach** in North Birkenhead over the past three years and is now **ready to shift into a new phase of work**, embedding sustainability through building ever greater local ownership.

The strengths of the programme have included the C2C backbone team's successes in **building capacity for partnership working**, building **local skills and knowledge**, and **creating structures that enable effective locally led decision-making**. The most challenging elements of the work included building trust and momentum among the Steering Group and engaging local residents in decision-making. These kinds of challenges are commonplace in place-based change partnerships and have **spurred valuable learning** that the Cradle to Career programme is carrying forward into the future.

This evaluation brought to light questions around the **sustainability of the programme model** – this was already a key priority for the C2C backbone team and wider Right to Succeed staff but felt less so for local partners at this stage. During our co-analysis session, we worked with the C2C backbone team to consider together the ways in which the programme model will need to shift over the next three years to realise the aim of having the programme be self-sustaining and fully community-led.

A central learning from this partnership is that in order to help ensure future sustainability, **local partners and wider community members need to have more visibility into the model**, and in turn need to be supported to **build more ownership** over the Cradle to Career programme moving forward.

## Method

Renaisi conducted a formative and narrowly-focused evaluation of the North Birkenhead Cradle to Career programme between May and September 2023. The purpose of the evaluation was to help the team **learn and develop their ways of working** as they shift into years four-to-six of delivery.

The aims of the study were to examine the following evaluation questions.

*In line with the collective impact and place-based change frameworks:*

1. Does the programme's **governance structure** facilitate effective locally led decision-making?
  - a. What role has the C2C backbone team played in locally led decision-making?
2. Does the programme's approach and practice facilitate effective **capacity building**?
  - a. What role has the C2C backbone team played in facilitating effective capacity building?
3. What are the **key enablers, challenges and barriers** to governance and capacity building in the programme?

The evaluation focused on four programme workstreams:

1. **Improving literacy and language development**, which provides support to schools on early years language development, targeted interventions, and assessment.
2. **The Youth Offer**, which maintains two youth hubs and consults with young people to shape youth programming
3. **The Multi-disciplinary team**, which helps provide integrated support for local families through Wirral Council.
4. **The Steering Group**, a governance team that oversees the work of the two programme working groups.

## Process

The evaluation activities consisted of five stages.

### 1) Inception

In May 2023, the Renaisi and C2C backbone team participated in an inception meeting where we laid out the aims of the evaluation and agreed on the overarching method and ways of working. The C2C backbone team provided a package of key programme documents and Renaisi conducted a document review.

### 2) Design

Based on our initial meetings and desk review, the Renaisi team developed a draft evaluation and learning framework. On 6<sup>th</sup> June, we facilitated a co-design workshop with the C2C backbone team and wider Right to Succeed staff to confirm our goals for the work,

gather input on the framework and review interview logistics. Following this workshop, we finalised the framework and began arranging the fieldwork.

### 3) Data Collection

Between June and July 2023, the Renaisi team conducted 21 interviews with Cradle to Career stakeholders. Four of these interviews were conducted in-person in North Birkenhead, the remaining 17 were conducted online.

Group	Number of Interviews
Right to Succeed staff & Backbone Team	6
Steering Group	5
Literacy and Language Development Workstream	4
Multidisciplinary Team	3
Community and Services Workstream	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>

### 4) Analysis

Renaisi conducted a thematic qualitative analysis of the interview data. The project team met regularly during the data collection period, identifying key themes and discussing the implications. On 21<sup>st</sup> August, we facilitated a co-analysis workshop with members of the C2C backbone team to present findings and discuss the implications.

The Renaisi team's analysis of the interview data surfaced important considerations around the sustainability of the programme model. We therefore designed the co-analysis session to focus on exploring the ways in which the model may need to adapt in order to become sustainable.

### 5) Reporting

Our initial reporting represented a synthesis of the Renaisi team's analysis of the interview data and our co-analysis workshop with the C2C backbone team. This initial set of outputs consisted of an internal report for Right to Succeed, an external-facing summary and a separate appendix.

This report reflects a collective decision between Right to Succeed and Renaisi to create a full external-facing report to meet growing interest in place-based change and the expansion of the Cradle to Career model into the Liverpool City region. This report integrates further data in the form of additional context provided by Right to Succeed after their review of the internal report.

### Limitations

This was a relatively small evaluation, and the Renaisi team only spoke to a small cross-section of the people engaged in the Cradle to Career programme. While we worked with the



Cradle to Career staff to intentionally sample a broad range of stakeholders, it is inevitable that our small sample will reflect some of the biases and individual opinions held by the people we spoke to and does not represent the constituencies we didn't speak to such as local residents and children and young people. If the team would like to further explore the themes raised in this evaluation, it may be worth triangulating these findings through a mixed-methods approach or conducting interviews on a larger scale.



## Contact details

Find out more at [renaisi.com](https://renaisi.com)

Follow us on LinkedIn and get in touch at:

T +44 (0) 20 7033 2600

E [info@renaisi.com](mailto:info@renaisi.com)

Unit 1.2, 244-254 Cambridge Heath Rd, London E2 9DA