

Institution: University of Edinburgh		
Unit of Assessment: UoA 21 - Sociology		
Title of Case Study: Infrastructure of kindness: Kindness and public policy		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2014-2015		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Dr. Julie Brownlie	Senior Lecturer in Sociology	2013-present
Dr. Elisabeth J. Milne	Research Fellow	2014-2015
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2015-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1.Summary of the impact <p>Research by Brownlie and colleagues has challenged conventional wisdoms about kindness as individual and random. This research has played a fundamental role in catalysing policy developments and directly shaped how kindness is now understood and operationalised from the local to the national level and beyond. Through a longstanding and ongoing collaboration with the Carnegie UK Trust the following impacts have ensued:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The concept of kindness is being embedded within many Scottish voluntary, local authority and third sector organisations. 2. Kindness has become a central theme in Scottish Government public policy and public service reform and sits at the heart of Scotland's National Performance Framework (NPF) which outlines Scotland's vision for national wellbeing. 3. The Welsh government has explicitly committed to pursuing values of kindness within government and public policy. 		
2.Underpinning research <p>In 2014-15, funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF), Brownlie et al. (henceforth the Kindness Research Team - KRT) undertook the Liveable Lives project, a study of everyday help and support. Sociologically-informed and based on a large-scale multi-method qualitative design, it aimed to address the following question: how do acts and relationships of everyday help and support or kindness happen? Two JRF reports from the research were published in 2015 (3.1, 3.2). In the subsequent period, the KRT continued to investigate kindness through a series of academic publications (3.3, 3.4, 3.5). From late 2018, this was complemented by an invitation-only series of conversations - the Kindness Sessions – with senior managers, policy-makers and practitioners from Scottish Government (SG) and the public, private and third sectors, exploring what it would mean to make a reality of kindness as a public policy issue. In 2019, The KRT team then published a report entitled <i>Public Policy and the Infrastructure of Kindness in Scotland</i> (3.6). The above body of work provides the underpinning research. Its four key contributions are that it:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Challenged existing understandings of kindness in popular culture as random and individual and within the social sciences as universal, asocial and conflated with related concepts such as compassion. Through the intensive study of three diverse communities in and around Glasgow, it showed kindness to be deeply complex, patterned and socially significant (3.1, 3.3) and, as such, a potentially important focal point for policy. It demonstrated that – contra the cultural trope of 'random acts' – experiences of kindness are profoundly shaped by spaces, places and communities: for example, by architecture that offers people 		

opportunities for low-level, contingent social interaction; by individual, local and national narratives that are enabling or constraining of willingness to offer or accept help; by local culture and economic context; and by life events and life stage.

2. Distinguished kindness from other concepts at the heart of the National Performance Framework by emphasising its **unobligated character** (3.3, 3.6). While it may not be entirely unexpected, kindness cannot be demanded or it risks tipping into other relations which have been more systematically studied by sociology – obligation, duty, care and so on. This led to the KRT defining kindness as ‘the things that people do for one another (both practically and emotionally) in response to moments of perceived need, when there is the option to do nothing’.
3. Argued that kindness cannot be mandated without undermining its essentially voluntaristic character (3.3). Therefore, rather than ‘doing kindness’ directly, organisations need to focus on creating the **conditions for kindness** (3.1, 3.3, 3.6), or at least avoiding damaging them. *The Public Policy and the Infrastructure of Kindness in Scotland* report identified three specific areas – internal practices within organisations, externally-focused work within communities, and the narration of both – as the focus of a public policy approach to kindness (3.6). In other words, it challenged Government not simply to encourage kind acts by individuals but to create and support infrastructures that enable these acts. In doing so, it also identified the challenges of kindness in the context of public policy, including possible risks to notions of fairness and social justice (3.6).
4. Introduced the specific notion of **radical kindness** into policy debate (3.6). In deciding whose needs to recognise and respond to – whether to be kind or not – people are drawing boundaries of ‘kin’ or ‘kin-like’ recognition, rendering kindness a potentially radical and disruptive concept.

3. References to the research

3.1 Anderson S, Brownlie J. and Milne EJ (2015a) *The Liveable Lives Study. Understanding Everyday Help and Support*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

https://web.archive.org/web/20210115112034/https://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/default/files/jrf/migrate_d/files/liveable-lives-study.pdf

3.2 Anderson S, Brownlie J. and Milne EJ (2015b) *Between kith and kin and formal services: everyday help and support in the ‘middle layer’*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20201021101526/https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/between-kith-and-kin-and-formal-services>

3.3 Brownlie, J. and Anderson, S. (2017) ‘Thinking sociologically about kindness: puncturing the blasé in the ordinary city’ *Sociology* 51(6):1222 –1238. DOI: [10.1177/0038038516661266](https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038516661266)

3.4 Brownlie, J. (2019) ‘Out of the ordinary: research participants’ experiences of sharing the ‘insignificant’ *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 22(3):257-269. DOI: [10.1080/13645579.2018.1535880](https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2018.1535880)

3.5 Brownlie, J. and Spandler, H. (2018) ‘Materialities of mundane care and the art of holding one’s own’ *Sociology of Health and Illness* 40(2):256-269. DOI: [10.1111/1467-9566.12574](https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9566.12574)

3.6 Anderson, S. and Brownlie, J. (2019) *Public policy and infrastructure of kindness in Scotland*. Dunfermline: Carnegie UK Trust.

https://web.archive.org/web/20201202042325/https://d1ssu070pg2v9i.cloudfront.net/pex/carnegie_uk_trust/2019/10/08105859/Public-Policy-and-the-Infrastructure-of-Kindness-in-Scotland-Final-website-.pdf

4. Details of the impact

Underpinning the work of the Carnegie UK Trust

Much of the work to promote a focus on kindness within policy and practice has been mediated by the Carnegie UK Trust (CUKT). The Head of Policy at CUKT, described a ‘*direct connection*’

between Brownlie et al's key research message that governments, organisations and communities need to create the social conditions for kindness, and the Trust's investment of '£300,000 in understanding and promoting kindness as a novel way of approaching public service reform' (5.1). This investment has included the appointment of a Carnegie Fellow and a Carnegie Associate; the setting up of a Kindness Innovation Network (KIN) and a programme within one locality (North Ayrshire) to test ways of embedding kindness throughout a local authority (5.2).

KIN: Made up of over a hundred organisations and individuals from across Scotland, including members of the government's NPF team and senior managers from the NHS, KIN met five times in 2018-19 and was addressed by Government ministers and senior civil servants. Christina McKelvie, Minister for Older People and Inequalities, in a keynote speech to KIN on the 11th March 2019 drew on Brownlie et al's argument that public policy needed to focus on the conditions of kindness: *"The University team were especially helpful in framing the policy approach to 'creating the conditions' for kindness in public policy. This was particularly helpful in the drafting and development of a keynote speech for the Minister for Older People & Equalities"* (5.3). KIN participants who took part in a follow-up survey (n=66) confirmed that the network stimulated debate and new practices: 95% reported that participation had changed their understanding of kindness, 90% that it changed their own behaviour and 61% that it changed the wider culture, practice or policies of their organisation: *"My participation in KIN and further (spin off) conversations at Edinburgh University has given me more of an understanding of the part kindness plays in communities and organisation - both individual acts of kindness but also how kindness can be built into systems and structures"* (5.4).

North Ayrshire Council (pop 135,280 in 2018), influenced by the KRT's finding about the importance of narrative for cultural/practical change (3.1, 3.2), has now embedded kindness in its Council Plan. Specifically, A Kindness Promise (5.5) has been endorsed by chief officers of the Council, NHS Ayrshire and Arran, North Ayrshire Health and Social Care Partnership, Ayrshire Police, and Fire and Rescue (5.5). As a result, the North Ayrshire Communities Executive Director notes a shift in culture, including: increased trust in frontline staff to make connections and flexibility to respond accordingly; a holistic approach based on collaboration across public services; and an enhanced and equal partnership with communities and community organisations. She concluded that: *"The Kindness in North Ayrshire' programme of work has been a hugely significant initiative from our point of view, leading to concrete changes in culture and service delivery and informing (and reinforcing) local responses to the pandemic"* (5.5).

Turning kindness into a public policy issue

KRT organised the Kindness Sessions, invitation-only workshops bringing together senior policymakers and managers in Scottish Government and in the public, private and third sectors. These Sessions, held on the 13th November 2018, 11th December 2018 and 14th January 2019 at Edinburgh University, explored the public policy implications of kindness. Evaluation of these sessions was overwhelmingly positive, with one participant observing: *"...the sessions have made me look closely at how I worked personally, within the organisation, the organisational values, and how these operate in practice both within and outwith the organisation"* (5.6).

After the Sessions, the KRT were approached by the Head of Public Service Reform & Public Bodies at the Scottish Government, to help inform the integration of kindness into the NPF – a critical framework which guides discussion, collaboration and planning of policy and services across Scotland, encompassing the public sector, businesses, civil society and communities. Based on a set of outcomes, indicators and values, the NPF aims to cultivate a 'values based culture of outcomes' in government and in Scottish Society more broadly (5.7). Brownlie offered briefing papers and contributed to policy discussions about the specific role of kindness in the NPF. SG policy analysts subsequently reflected on this input and on the significance of Brownlie et al's Public Policy and the Infrastructure of Kindness in Scotland report: *"We were particularly interested in the more radical approach to kindness being promoted by the Edinburgh University"*

team and what the implications might be for creating the policy conditions for kindness in the Government context (...) The research was valuable in terms of helping us clarify our policy intention, vis-à-vis the wider NPF values work, that this work depends not on random kindness, but on kindness as socially embedded and therefore open to public policy intervention” (5.3).

The KRT Infrastructures report was formally launched at the Scottish Parliament after an introduction by Claudia Beamish (MSP) on the 8th of October 2019. It was subsequently welcomed by the SG Permanent Secretary, Scotland’s most senior civil servant: *“I am sure that the aspiration to build an ‘infrastructure of kindness’ will further support our collective work to embed the NPF across Scotland. I welcome the recommendations in the report on the three key areas [see Section 2] where the NPF might work to build and sustain that infrastructure” (5.8).*

The significance of the research in shaping the NPF has also been noted by the Scottish Government’s Chief Social Policy Adviser: *“The changes to public policy that are expressed in the refreshed NPF are partly based on a deeper understanding of the value that arises out of the distinct qualities of kindness in community, public service and organisational settings. Having a thoughtful, academic basis for this has been highly significant. Brownlie has worked with us in clarifying the place of kindness in the public sector, advising on briefings and providing evidence that has ensured an important shift in understanding from perceptions of kindness as depending on random acts, to being a value open to policy intervention. An example is the expanded framing and measurement of the ‘communities’ outcome in the NPF (...) This outcome more formally recognises the values of kindness in Scotland that Brownlie et al have described in terms of its infrastructural and capacity building qualities” (5.9).*

Further contributing to the question of how to link kindness to outcomes and indicators, Brownlie was subsequently invited to take part in a meeting with the Scottish Government’s Chief Social Policy Adviser on data, evidence and values to inform the work of the Scottish Leaders Forum – a network of Chief Executives and senior leaders from across the public sector. The research has influenced what constitutes evidence of wellbeing in Scotland and how kindness can be measured: *“The Scottish Government changed questions to measure social capital in the Scottish Household Survey to include experiences of kindness. The new Social Security department in Scotland is also committed to evaluating its work using kindness as an indicator of good customer service” (5.1).* These changes were also noted by Scotland’s Permanent Secretary (5.7). Relatedly, The Carnegie UK Trust subsequently commissioned members of the KRT in September 2020 to produce a guide on the measurement of kindness in organisational settings, to be published in early 2021.

Beyond Scotland, the Mental Health Foundation in April 2020 used Brownlie et al’s Infrastructure report to call for the UK Government to create a new social contract post COVID-19: *“Governments and citizens now have an opportunity to recreate a social contract rooted not only in the values of fairness, justice and equality, but also in what has been termed ‘radical kindness’” (5.10).*

The Edinburgh research has impacted on Welsh Government policy, as set out in a report from 2020: *“Following the Scottish Government example, and in seeking to implement the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act, the Welsh Government should be leading the way in instilling values of kindness at every level of government and in public policy” (5.11).* Carnegie has confirmed the significance of the Edinburgh research in the Welsh policy-making process: *“Our communications with Jack Sargeant AM led to a debate in the Welsh Assembly, conversations with senior civil servants and a high-level roundtable chaired by the Deputy Minister (Hutt) in early 2020. While these did not reference the original research from the University of Edinburgh, I can confirm a direct trajectory from the research, to our conversations with Jack Sargeant AM and Jane Hutt” (5.1).*

Addressing loneliness and making connections through kindness

The research has also influenced how third sector organisations, as well as central government, work towards 'connected communities' and respond to loneliness and social isolation. Specifically, the KRT has directly shaped the work of the Campaign to End Loneliness (a UK-wide organisation, established in 2010 by a consortium of third sector bodies, which aims to create connections in older age). The research team advised their Management Group and, subsequently, presented at the Campaign's national conference in 2018 on kindness. The research challenged the Campaign's conventional wisdom about kindness and played a critical role in informing the Campaign's engagement with a more sociological framing (5.12). In particular, it shaped the messaging of 'Be More Us', a public behaviour change campaign including social media films. The message subsequently went viral and was reposted on sites leading to millions of views. The Director of the Campaign noted: *"During development stages of our new public initiative on moments of connection, Be More Us, the Edinburgh University research was critical in informing our thinking, for example, around reciprocity, not relying on randomness for kindness and that small acts of help, support and kindness were often barely noticed, but had fundamental consequences for well-being. And then in 2018, when I was leading the public behaviour change initiative to its launch, we relayed the research to our team and advertising agency to shape the specific messaging and content of this new work, starting with our two beautifully moving films which between them, have now been viewed 186 million times"* (5.12).

5.Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- 5.1** Carnegie UK Trust Testimonial from Director of Policy, CTUK (2020)
- 5.2** Ferguson, Z, and Thurman, B. (2019) The Practice of Kindness: Learning from KIN and North Ayrshire. Dunfermline: Carnegie UK Trust, 1-36.
https://web.archive.org/web/20201202040927/https://d1ssu070pg2v9i.cloudfront.net/pex/carnegie_uk_trust/2019/06/25090227/Practice-of-Kindness-Report-WEB.pdf
- 5.3** Testimonial from Head of Public Service Reform, Scottish Government (2020)
- 5.4** Survey of KIN participants (2019)
- 5.5** Testimonial from North Ayrshire Interim Communities Executive Director (2020)
- 5.6** Survey of participants in the Kindness Sessions (2019)
- 5.7** Leslie Evans, Permanent Secretary, Scottish Government 2018 speech 'Keeping the Faith in an Uncertain World: Scotland's National Performance Framework'
- 5.8** Email from Leslie Evans Permanent Secretary, Scottish Government (2019)
- 5.9** Testimonial from Chief Social Policy Adviser to Scottish Government (2020)
- 5.10** Mental Health Foundation using Brownlie et al.'s Infrastructure report to call for the UK Government to create a new social contract post COVID-19
<https://web.archive.org/web/20201201153132/https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/campaigns/mental-health-awareness-week/kindness-policy-asks>
- 5.11** The Future Generations Report – Welsh Government (2020, p.107)
https://web.archive.org/web/20201201153253/https://www.futuregenerations.wales/public_info/the-future-generations-report-2020/
- 5.12** Testimonial from former Director of the Campaign to End Loneliness (2020).