

POWER MEETS LOVE

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Written by Charles Leadbeater in collaboration with The Australian Centre for Social Innovation



Written by
Charles Leadbeater



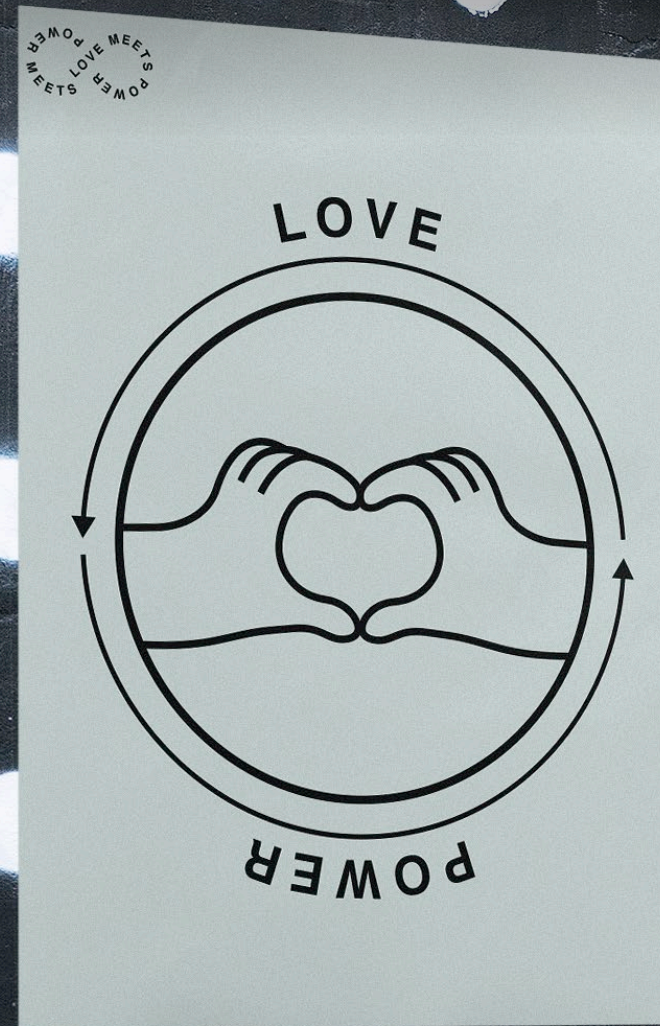
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Synopsis

"One of the great problems of history is that the concepts of love and power have usually been contrasted as opposites - polar opposites - so that love is identified with a resignation of power, and power with a denial of love... We've got to get this thing right. What is needed is a realisation that power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love."

Martin Luther King, Jr. August 16, 1967 "Where Do We Go From Here?"
Speech Delivered at the 11th Convention of the Southern Christian
Leadership Conference, Atlanta, GA



When Love meets Power

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Until very recently, we lived in a time of diminishing public civility, when the darker side of our tribalism was given freer rein. That created a sense of entitlement among some to feel hostile and angry, and to be dismissive and scornful of those weaker than themselves. The angry tone of much public debate was set by the trolls on social media, an echo of the bullying tone adopted by populist politicians. They opened a breach for a toxic flow of scorn and contempt for others.

It is easy to blame all of this on Facebook and Donald Trump. Yet one source of this shift in what was considered acceptable in public pronouncements lies in ourselves; in the sense of confusion, loss and betrayal many people feel as they come to terms with lives that confound and frustrate them. A shared hostility, even a mocking cruelty for outsiders, immigrants, welfare cheats, deviants and other 'contaminants' can give people a sense of pride and strength, to compensate for feelings of pain and loss, inadequacy and abandonment. Populism does not rally people to its cause by challenging the rich and powerful; it picks on those who are already weak and vulnerable. Until very recently a tide of hostility and anger seemed to be sweeping the world.

Then the threat posed by COVID-19 brought about an abrupt change in our priorities, the tone of public discourse and our sense of ourselves. Saving lives and supporting health care workers became the absolute priority rather than making profits. Generosity has become more important than selfishness. Our response has been a collective expression of love combined with power.

The power has been raw. Governments have had to instruct, direct, control, stop, mobilise and ration. Markets have been regulated, movement of people controlled, borders closed, production redirected and entire economies bankrolled through government action. Only the extraordinary powers of government to act for the sake of everyone will carry society through the crisis. The response to the crisis has called forth the often concealed power of government to direct society to do what is best.

Yet the crisis has also called forth an outpouring of love and care in millions of small acts of compassion and kindness by neighbours for one another. And the beating heart of this civic surge of empathy and generosity has been the bravery and sacrifice made by health care workers, to care for people we love, when we cannot care for them ourselves. When the UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson emerged from hospital on April 12th, after a period in intensive care he concluded a heartfelt message to the nation by reflecting that the National Health Service was "powered by love."

All this has changed not just how we see society, the role of government and health services, but also perhaps how we see ourselves, as it invites us to embrace a wider set of virtues – care, love, tenderness, nurture - as well as vulnerabilities, doubts and anxieties.

The virus reminds us that we are bodies, not just minds; that our lives are charged with feelings, not just rational calculations; that individuals are interdependent even when they are self-isolating. This charged shared emotional experience will be quickly forgotten by some people impatient to put it behind them and get on with life as normal. But for many it will leave a lasting mark created by a sense of shared frailty, trauma, grief and distress. The experience of being carried through by this combination of love and power will stay with us, not least because it brought out the best in us.

Which is why the people profiled in this essay may matter: an eclectic group of outliers who were already working with this combination of love and power, swimming against the current of meanness and hostility which had infected public life. They show us a completely different way of living and working, one which opens up our better selves. Their work - in public services, social enterprises, sports teams, communities and companies - is generous and committed, full of purpose and feeling. Yet it is also tough and demanding; they set high expectations for people to lift themselves up and achieve more; they excite aspirations to go further and build the capabilities to do so.



What kind of love and what kind of power do they deal in? The love is not instinctual, nor romantic; it is not wet and cloying, sentimental and nostalgic. It is love as a commitment to a person, relationship, community, company or team, so they can achieve their full potential.

It is love as a creative, generative force. And that is the link to power. To be committed to someone is to want to protect them, so they can flourish and grow. That commitment changes how we see power.

We are used to thinking of power as command over resources exercised by someone high up in a hierarchy or as a result of great wealth. To claim power you have to be ruthless; to exercise it impartially you have to be detached. To accept the trade-offs which come with the power to decide, you have to grow a thick skin. Occasionally you have to be heartless. Power and feeling do not go well together, it seems. Feeling makes you weak and vulnerable.

Yet commitment to a cause, person or community can bring into being a power that grows by being generous but also focussed, professional, efficient and prepared to learn new knowledge and skills. It comes from work that is not just a set of tasks but a calling. As Adam Kahane puts it in his brilliant account of the power and love dynamic: power is the drive to realise oneself with growing intensity, with a growth of purpose which is about what you cherish and love, what you give yourself over to. Populist leaders – Donald Trump is the prime example – are often narcissists, in love with themselves. The leaders profiled in this essay understand that love and power can be like a renewable, generative resource which grows outside themselves, by empowering others.

Once you start to look, one can see this generative dynamic at play in many different settings, from how some sporting coaches are growing their teams, to the politics of climate change. The power of love is perhaps especially clear in our response to trauma. This includes the collective trauma of bushfires and floods, terrorist attacks and natural disasters, viruses and pandemics, but it also includes personal trauma. Let's start the story there, with Shonagh.

Community Responders, mental health session



Kids Coaching session, Family by Family



Shonagh grew up in Butts Farm, a housing estate in Feltham, west London, which, to put it mildly, was a hectic place. For Shonagh it was home, and growing up she was not short of ambition and self-confidence: she was in the junior Great Britain weightlifting team, training hard three times a day. Shonagh's Mum died when she was young; sport was a passion she shared with her Dad.

So when her Dad died, two days before her fifteenth birthday, she lost herself as well as him, as the belief and commitment their relationship generated ebbed away. She went into a hostel, could barely talk and became both aggressive and defensive. Almost by chance, she came across a project called The Big House, a theatre company in which every production is created by a group of young people who have come from local authority care. Often none have acted before.

The Big House did not assess Shonagh. The staff did not label her needs; nor did they provide her with professional support services. They welcomed her, without judgement, to see what she had to contribute to the company. What struck Shonagh immediately was that The Big House felt like a family. It was warm and caring but also useful and practical. The team taught the young people how to resist drug and alcohol dependence, what to do if someone got stabbed, how to manage their money and how to counter depression. There was a strong sense of kinship because everyone had been through tough times. For the first time in months, Shonagh felt normal.

Yet it would be wrong to think that because The Big House deals in feeling it is soft. On the contrary, it is disciplined, demanding and structured. Shonagh quickly learned that she had to be on time for rehearsals, learn her lines and be prepared to take direction. She became more emotionally agile and self-controlled. When she slipped up, which happened more than once, the team showed her how not to make the same mistake twice.

Having performed in two hit productions, Shonagh now feels proud of who she has become: "When I first came to The Big House I didn't have dreams anymore. Now I really believe I can be what I want to be. I had that growing up and I lost it when my Dad died. It was one of the most painful things to me, losing the belief I had that I could be whatever I wanted to be. The Big House has brought that back."

That is because The Big House is a love + power solution.

The Big House gave Shonagh love: it committed to being on her side without asking for anything in return. Yet that love was not sentimental and soothing. It was structured, disciplined and demanding. The Big House team expected more of Shonagh because they believed in her. That is what restored her faith in herself, gave her the confidence to go on stage and renewed her sense of direction. As she became more confident, so she became more generous and was able to look out for other people rather than just being concerned with herself.



Love of the right kind can generate power that in turn creates more love. It is a renewable cycle. Scientists might call it a phase transition; the process through which water turns into steam and condenses back into water.

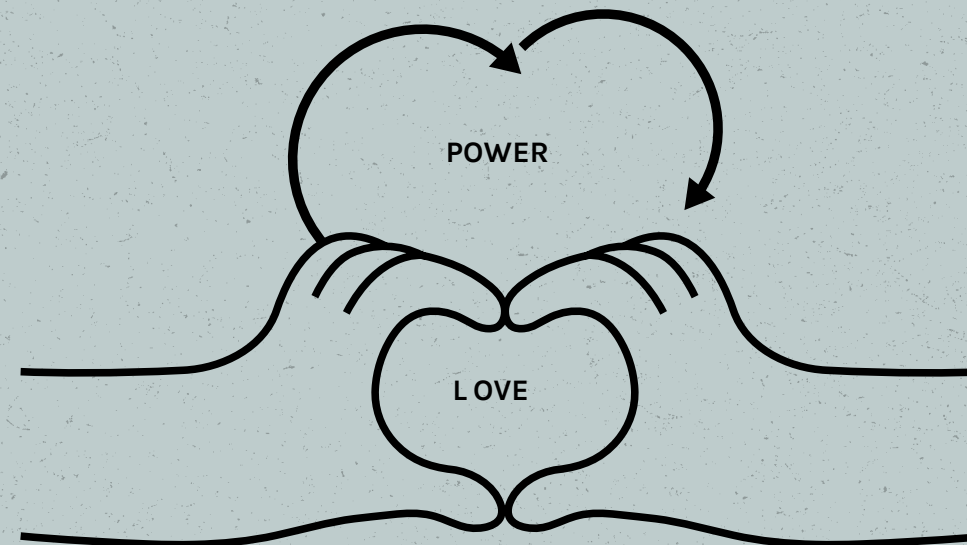
We are in urgent need of more love + power solutions, in our public services and policy, our daily lives and our wider political culture. Take public services as a prime example.

Many public services delivered by caring professionals assess people's needs and address their symptoms. Too few change people's lives for the better by breaking entrenched, debilitating and sometimes self-destructive patterns of behaviour. Many of the most intractable social challenges we face stem from social isolation, loneliness or dysfunctional and abusive relationships. To break out of these patterns people need an intimate, human-crafted response - a relationship to rely upon, not a service that comes once a week.

Many of the emerging social challenges we face - the near-epidemic of sadness, stress, anxiety and depression among young people, for example - stem from how people feel about themselves, their relationships and the world around them. Solutions might be found in psychiatric therapies, mental health services and drugs, but it may be that the causes and the solutions are more relational and emotional than medical and professional. In many instances we need both.

To tackle deeply entrenched and emerging social challenges we will need more love + power solutions and we will need them to operate at scale. The good news is that more such solutions were already emerging even before the COVID-19 crisis.

Sharing Family training, Family by Family



One is Family by Family, co-developed by The Australian Centre for Social Innovation and families, in which a volunteer 'Sharing Family' provides structured peer support to a family wanting to make change - a 'Seeking Family'. The goal is for families to make changes in their lives that they choose rather than the social care system dictating what they need to do. Allowing families choice creates ownership, motivation and self-efficacy. This, teamed with an opportunity to celebrate success and learn from failure with another family, helps shift behaviours, mindsets and practices, allowing for new futures to be re-imagined and created.

Another is Pause, a UK programme which supports women who have had their children removed by social services.

Pause helps women to take control of their lives, often for the first time, to break a cycle of multiple pregnancies and dependence upon abusive and unreliable men.

Little Village, also in the UK, works with mothers who are at their wits' end with financial and emotional worries, providing them with free second-hand baby clothes and toys which have been donated by other families. That is just a stepping-stone to creating a relationship with volunteers and peers. Shared Lives schemes support adults who need care by finding them a real home with a family trained to support them. The Canadian organisation Plan has been at the forefront of creating individual budgets for adults with learning disabilities to commission their own support packages, putting the power of money to work in the cause of what matters most to people. Hospices can be love + power places because the care they give people allows them to exert a degree of control in the last days of their life.

Many of the most impressive youth programmes such as Advocacy Academy, based in south London, embody the love + power dynamic by equipping young people to lead social change that counts for them. These approaches are based on the premise that young people are capable of having a voice, making decisions and committing to make change happen.



Love + Power + Transformation

Why are love + power solutions so transformational, especially in the field of welfare and care, youth and family services? And, if they do something so vital, allowing people to take charge of their lives by breaking out of entrenched disadvantage, how can these solutions be made to work at scale?

The kind of love involved in Family by Family, Pause, Little Village and Shared Lives is like the love an aunt or an uncle might have for a nephew or niece, or the kinship among a group of close friends. It is generous and kind; forgiving and understanding. But it is also demanding and ambitious. It does not seek a reward but it does set high expectations.

Making good on such a commitment, however, means taking the time to get to know someone - their full story, not just their presenting symptoms - and seeing the person 'in the round', not merely

the case or the condition. That requires building trust, because many of the people who engage with these solutions feel vulnerable and isolated. They have to be prepared to open up the defensive crust they have formed over themselves to expose what lies beneath, which is often a mixture of extreme fragility, unspoken aspirations and hidden strengths. Sophia Parker, the founder of Little Village, says, "The women who come to us arrive as warriors because they put so much effort into fighting for their families in hostile conditions. We train our volunteers to greet them with love, to try to put them at ease. If they don't feel they can open up to us, we cannot help them. That is the first step."

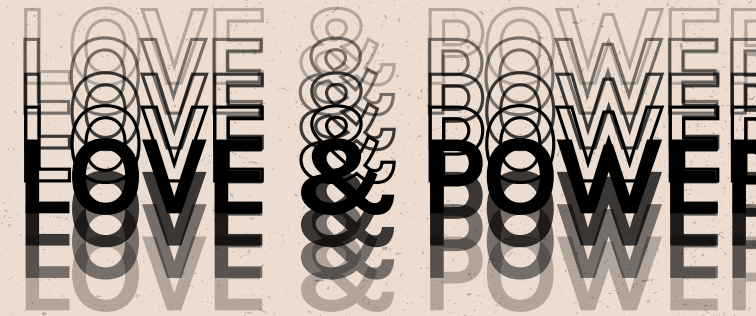
The initial emotional commitment can itself have a big impact on people who often feel lousy about themselves. They can feel a sense of self-belief flooding back, as it did for Shonagh. It would be easy to leave it there, with people feeling better about

themselves, their self-esteem enhanced. But what stands out about love + power solutions is that they go further than that. Love sets higher expectations and excites larger aspirations.

At The Big House, the team, led by artistic director Maggie Norris, expect to have a grownup relationship with the cast, one of give and take, in which people take responsibility for their work. At Reach Academy, in Feltham, they call this

combination warm-strict. The school is highly relational but it also demands a lot of self-discipline. The Action Foundation, which supports asylum seekers dispersed to the north-east of England with housing, education, training and employment support, sees its work as a combination of kindness and challenge. Too much kindness without any challenge is naïve; too much challenge without any kindness can be harsh. But when kindness and challenge are combined it can be transformational. (One criticism of Kids Company, the high profile collapsed British youth charity, which made its name based on its caring credentials, is that it did not attempt to get this combination right.)

How does this love which is generous and understanding yet ambitious and demanding turn itself into power?



At Broadmeadows school, on the outskirts of Melbourne, where many pupils' parents are recent arrivals to Australia, the veteran Principal, Keith McDougall, used to say it was not good enough to make the children feel better about themselves: they wanted to learn so they could achieve more. Only then would they have the chance to realise their ambitions. They did not want sympathy and understanding; they wanted to get on in life.

The relationships participants form in these programmes enables a flow of knowledge and learning. Learning is often hard work because it is difficult to get it right the first time. Learning requires grit and resilience which is more available to people who are supported by loving relationships. In Family by Family, that learning comes from the relationship between families who share their coping strategies with the acknowledgement that no one is perfect. When a family makes a mistake, a relapse into a harmful pattern of behaviour for example, it is treated as an opportunity for forgiveness and learning rather than punishment and sanctions.

Learning is also at the heart of Pause, which runs a structured programme in which women first learn from a skilled practitioner, then learn with them and finally learn by doing it with one another and by themselves. In time, the women start to contribute back to the relationships, to their peers and to the programme as a whole.

As relationships deepen, so people can take on more responsibility and bigger challenges. Vita Maiorano, who is part of the team working to scale Family by Family says, "It's remarkable to see the power and agency a family gains when they realise they have the resources to create a new future for themselves. The moment when you see a family lift its sights beyond what they have been told is possible to something more than they have ever dreamed is a critical point. That is when you know a transformation is underway."

Alex Fox, the CEO of Shared Lives Plus, the membership body that supports Shared Lives schemes, says these projects generate better outcomes because they allow the people involved to see a bigger shared goal. "There is a huge gap between people getting a good service and people having a good life. Love comes into this because you want people to have a good life that is mainly about who they live with, the sense of commitment and belonging they feel."

Love of the right kind can turn into power in the form of knowledge and learning, mobilising additional resources and generating higher productivity. Under the right conditions, love can become power and turn itself back into love in a cycle of growing capability and generosity. This is not alchemy; there is a method to the process.

Sharing Family coaching,
Family by Family



Mai, Sharing Family from
Family by Family



Leticia and Charlie, Sharing
Family, Family by Family

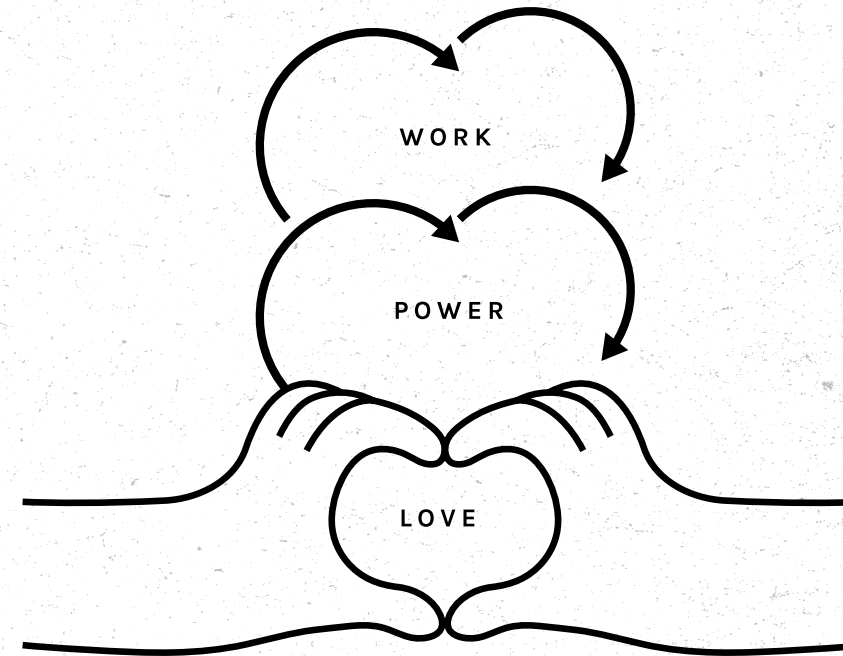


Love + Power at work

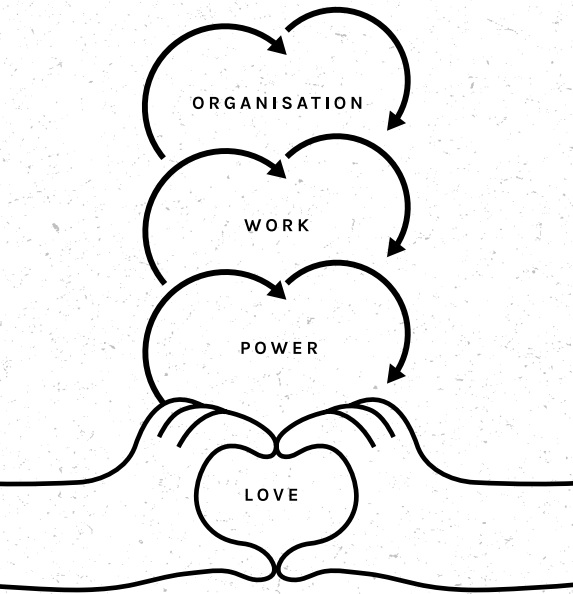
These solutions usually provide a formal framework for the relationships they create, which sets some ground rules. In Family by Family, all members of the Sharing and Seeking families sign a contract. The women who come onto the Pause programme have to commit to using contraception for a year, thereby creating the pause in their recurrent pregnancies which allows them to sort their lives out. This framework creates the space in which the relationship can be brought to life, which all depends on the work people put into it. Love + power solutions require love + power at work.

Professionals are central to that work, but they play a role quite different to the one they play in traditional service delivery. They have to learn to be participants rather than gatekeepers. Family by Family describes them as professional friends. The relationships they form with participants may be intense and involve a good deal of give and take, and yet they are not egalitarian. Professionals have to retain the ability to step back and, where necessary, make professional judgements. It is not an 'anything goes' situation.

Sophie Humphreys, the founder of Pause and former leader of Child Protection Services in the London Borough of Hackney, says the key to her organisation's effectiveness is the professional practice at the heart of the relationship: "We are working with people who have gone through a lot of trauma, so we need people who can exercise expert and experienced judgement and skills. The key thing is that we are looking for staff who really love the work and who are able to express love in a professional context."



To quote Dr Martin Luther King once more: such work should be long, because it takes time; broad, because it reaches out; deep because it is about what matters in life; and tall, because it aims for higher goals.



Yet most of the work in these solutions is not done by professionals; it is done by participants. Shared Lives carers are not professionals but they do undergo months of training before they are ready to take someone into their home. They are paid, but not on an hourly rate. They are neither employees nor volunteers but self-employed people running a family-caring business from their home, which gives them the scope to decide how much unpaid labour to put in (usually a lot). Invariably, these solutions create strong peer-to-peer relationships which draw on lived experience. Family by Family trains its Sharing families to identify what got them from the 'downs' to the 'ups' in their lives and to share those strategies with the Seeking family.

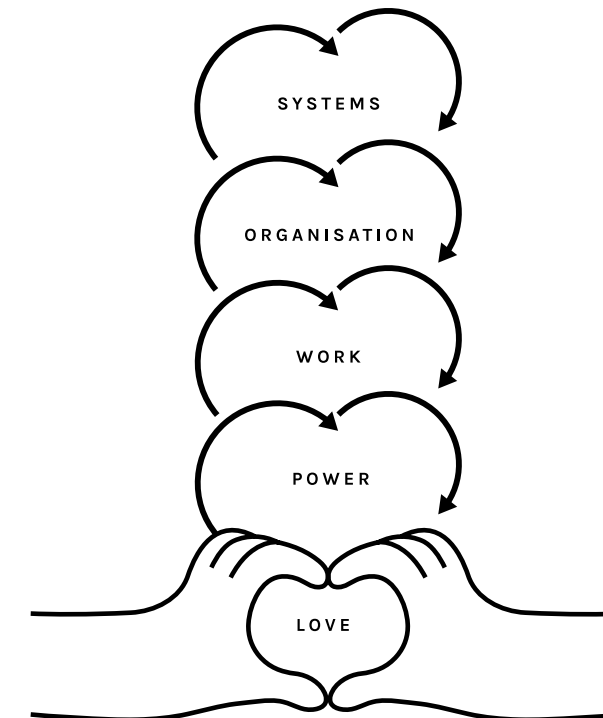
Love + power solutions depend on work which also embodies the love + power dynamic. People have to love the work they do. It is not a task; it is more like a calling.

It is impossible to reproduce that kind of work unless it is encouraged by an organisation that:

- Gives front-line workers the power to make judgements about what people they work with need;
- Values relationships rather than measuring activity and output;
- Mobilises lay, tacit knowledge alongside explicit, professional expertise;
- Promotes the thick, relational craft work of care rather than the thin, transactional work of lean processes and efficiently ticking boxes.

A prime example of an organisation that enables love + power work at scale is Buurtzorg, the largely self-organising care cooperative, in which skilled, committed staff are trusted to make the best decisions about how to deploy their time and resources, to understand their clients and build relationships. Buurtzorg is like a community organised around a shared cause of better care. That stands in sharp contrast to the kind of work that is possible in high-throughput care delivery systems. As Alex Fox remarked, "Many people working within big bureaucratic systems feel as powerless as the clients they serve. You can only create better solutions for the clients if you create better work for the staff and that means trusting them to make the judgement of what to do, for how long and when."

Love + power solutions require love + power work, and that requires organisations that embody that ethic in their culture and decision making. Can these approaches really prosper if they are part of wider systems which operate according to a logic which can seem unfeeling, mechanical and quantified? And, in their efforts to scale, how do these solutions avoid losing the intimacy which is at their core and become more like the standardised systems around them? Are they condemned to being small-scale?



Shared Lives provides one model for how a love + power solution can co-exist with those wider systems. Shared Lives schemes are very much part of the mainstream care system; they are commissioned by local authorities and inspected by the Care Quality Commission. About 15,000 people are involved in Shared Lives care. They have to run efficiently and manage risks responsibly. Yet Shared Lives establishes an enclave within the larger system in which a love + power solution can thrive. Shared Lives delivers on traditional yardsticks, which count for the larger care system - low risk, high-quality, reasonably priced care - but it does so by adhering to quite different operating principles. Sophie Humphreys says Pause constantly tries to influence the systems it interacts with - housing, social services, schools, the police - by showing the people in these services that they can achieve their goals more effectively by working in a different way with people. Bit by bit, Pause hopes its example will rub off and help these systems learn and adapt.

There are few better examples of that than the development of individual budgets for young adults with learning disabilities. Caroline Tomlinson, one of the early advocates of individual budgets in the UK, always argued that her love for and intimate knowledge of her son Joe meant she would make the resources used to support him far more productive. "You give me £10 to spend on Joe," she used to say, "and I will make sure it goes so much further than any local authority." For Caroline Tomlinson, love was not an excuse for indulgence but a reason for efficiency and effectiveness.

These solutions are both small and big at the same time. The principles behind them offer a practical vision of a quite different approach to care and welfare. The welfare systems created in the 20th century were immense, collective acts of care and generosity designed to relieve suffering and enhance human well-being on a vast scale. Yet, often, those reliant upon them experience them as unfeeling, alienating

Policy can play a critical role in creating the space for these solutions to grow.

and even humiliating. Solutions which turn love into power and back into love offer a different way of imagining what the welfare state could become - more like a creative community joined in the common cause of providing care and developing capabilities, enabling people to live fuller lives, than a machine for dispensing benefits and providing services. As Alex Fox puts it, "The critical thing is the connection test: are we connecting or disconnecting; are we

creating a space in which both love and power can thrive, in which people feel a sense of belonging and purpose? Or are we letting that drain away?"

Whether it does drain away will depend not just on these solutions but the wider political culture in which they operate. Here the complex, troubling dynamics of love + power come clearly into view.

Nothing about me without me' session with people with disability and their carers



Abigail, Sharing Family from Family by Family



Love + Power in politics

Power can work for good and for ill; love can be cruelly abused and betrayed. Politics, which used to be a question of left or right, market or state, is now much more about whether power works in the name of love and generosity or anger and hostility. After a period in which populism has directed politics towards anger and hostility, the COVID-19 crisis is renewing the claims upon us of love and generosity.

The politics of anger was in the ascendant for the last ten years partly because the alternatives seemed so tepid. Politicians who favour policies to promote inclusion, social justice and compassion found themselves cast as technocratic and managerial because they lack the emotional register of the populists, who play on the sense of abandonment people feel, especially those who lack a college education and live in small industrial towns. Progressives offer people manifestos stuffed with policies, many of them sensible and popular. But that does not work when the voters yearn for a sense of belonging and security. Progressive politics will renew itself only when it can offer people a more moving sense of who they are and what is possible. People do not just want more money in their pockets; they want more meaning in their lives.

As societies struggle to make sense of where we should be headed through the COVID-19 crisis, they can draw on plenty of hopeful examples that were already developing long before this crisis.

The love + power dynamic is at work in neighbourhoods and communities. People invest care and effort in places they are attached to; grassroots civic care is a signal for outsiders to invest as well. The transformation of the Richmond Football Club, in Melbourne, is the story of a coach who showed such love for his players that it instilled in them a passion and power which runs through the entire club. The New Zealand All Blacks, a cultural as much as a sporting force, are a prime example of love + power in harness.

The main cause for hope is that young people everywhere are drawn to the generative capacity of love + power. That is why they demand work that carries a sense of significance beyond making money, which is why so many are drawn to social enterprise. Love + power is at the heart of the social movements which are emerging in response to the Climate Emergency. Recurrent collective crises, whether that is the Australian bushfires or the terror attacks in Christchurch, call forth a kinder communal love and power, one which seeks to restore and renew broken relationships. The novel COVID-19 is the latest example of that. Greta Thunberg, the Swedish climate activist and Jacinda Ardern, the New Zealand Prime Minister, embody the leadership needed for this love and power dynamic to take hold. Many other young leaders are following in their wake. At the heart of all of this is a powerful care ethic; care for one another, for the place you live and for the planet, which could yet animate our institutions, companies and communities.

Amidst all the crises, turmoil, upheaval and uncertainty, look carefully and you will see an equal and opposing force: the renewable cycle of love + power generating hope and social change. The COVID-19 outbreak will leave a wake of terrible loss, grief and distress. But it could leave another lasting legacy, a deep understanding that we are at our best as individuals, governments and societies when power is mobilised in the name of generosity and care.

The big choice of the future is not between left and right, market and state, but between those who want to return us to a world powered by competition, profit and anger, and those who want it to be powered by love.

Written by Charles Leadbeater
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