TITLE: Ignite, Innovate and Embed. Three ways to create change and energy in the health and social care system.

I recently read a blog entitled ' Siloed, unsupported and hindered – the reality of innovation in the NHS and social care', from the Kings Fund (April 2024), Siloed, Unsupported And Hindered – The Reality Of Innovation In The NHS And Social Care | The King's Fund (kingsfund.org.uk) in which they describe a series of events that brought together over 100 people to connect and share experiences of innovation within a system described as "much under pressure".

The key messages from this blog that resonated with my own experiences were:
- Participants shared a sense of frustration around innovation and around making change happen felt very difficult.
- Innovation happens not because of, but in spite of the system and is only possible due to enthusiastic individuals "who go over and above". The system and its processes are seen as resistant to change due to workload pressures, culture, organisational structures and leadership.
- There feels like there is "bunker like" mentality that supports a culture in which there is no space or "head room" to do or think differently.
- There is a sense of isolation and siloed working often in teams, services, organisations and across the system. There is a sense that power dynamics, distrust and suspicion often perpetuates this sense of isolation.

The authors of the blog finish by saying "*But it doesn't have to be this way. Staff knowledge, expertise and passion to improve services is an untapped well of innovation energy. To have an NHS and social care that is able to innovate and thrive means changing how we make change happen.*"

And here at NICHE that is exactly what underpins the way we work. The three words that inspire our work are the values of :
- **IGNITE**ing people's passions, ideas, energy and collaboration with each other and across teams, organisations and systems.
- Creating safe psychological spaces for people to **INNOVATE**, develop new insights, knowledge and confidence to enable action with their ideas.
- Enabling people to stay as close to their existing roles in clinical practice and **EMBED** their research, evaluation, and innovation activities in their day to day work with their teams and the people they care for.

I have listed some examples of how NICHE is living these values to enable people to thrive and innovate within a number of different contexts.

Example 1
The Embedded Scholarship programme. Three Cohorts will have been funded by NICHE and led by the James Paget University Hospital (JPUH). Upon completion, circa 43 participants will have completed the programme from across the Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care System, with the opportunity to have one day a week, for 9 months to focus on an embedded local project of their choosing. Examples of projects that have emerged from this

programme are very varied and comprehensive and you can see some examples in the poster presentation brochure here from Cohort 1: Reports and Publications - Groups and Centres (uea.ac.uk) or read about them in the blog section.
https://www.uea.ac.uk/web/groups-and-centres/projects/niche/news

Example 2
THEO (Therpeutic Optimisation) is an exciting and complex intervention research study that will be working with two ward settings in real time. The participatory action research that forms part of the embedded intervention will involve recruiting volunteer co-researchers from the existing ward nursing team as experts in this innovation. The co-research team will have time and space to work in collaboration to "look" (i.e., gather evidence about a situation or context), "Think" (i.e., reflect together to critically analyse the evidence), then "Act" (i.e., develop a shared action plan, from which to take informed action). This process will generate both knowledge and action to improve the experience and care for both the ward staff and the people who receive care on the ward. It is hoped that the blended approach being taken with this research will provide a model for innovation as well as embedded research across the Norfolk and Waveney System.
For more Information:
https://www.uea.ac.uk/web/groups-and-centres/projects/niche/therapeutic-optimisation

Example 3
NICHE offers a five day residential programme, "Leading and Facilitating the Development of Person-Centred Care and Cultures" for participants who are working at team/ward leader level. The programme provides an intensive experiential period of learning and not 'just another teaching or training' event. Instead, the focus is on a safe facilitated space, uses an active learning approach and provides an infrastructure to enable supportive and connected relationships. The programme challenges leaders to explore embedding person-centred care and cultivating compassionate leadership whilst fostering a supportive and effective workplace culture. Following the programme, twelve months of mentorship was also provided to enable participants to take their learning back into their teams to further influence change focussing on their 'commitments to act'.

You can read the evaluation report of the programme that was commissioned by Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust and the former Norfolk and Waveney Clinical Commissioning Group in 2023 . 49b5a15a-3bf2-e769-6d5b-0f687b60b99c (uea.ac.uk)

In all the above examples, NICHE values shine through which are "working with people, rather than doing to people". We work with people in place, embedded within their local and existing contexts and roles, whilst they learn. Learning is dynamic and embedded in the workplace and their professional practice. We work to enable space for people to feel safe to challenge themselves and to find their "tribe", where they can grow and flourish. So finally going back to the Kings Fund blog I discussed earlier, at NICHE we are finding ways to "*tap into the well of innovation* energy" and are really starting to see the impact and outcomes spread across the Norfolk and Waveney system as highlighted in the NICHE latest Impact Assessment report. OneDrive (sharepoint.com)