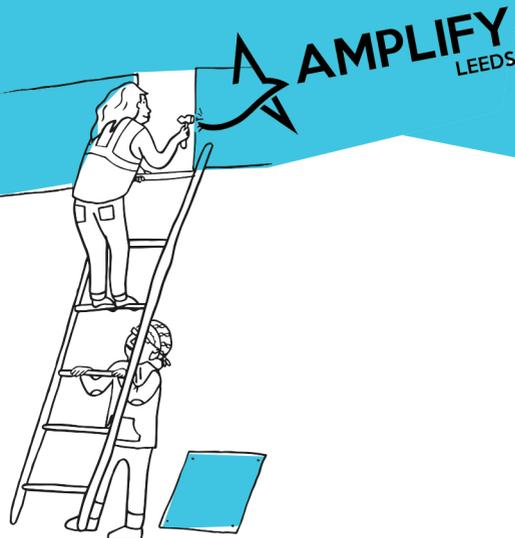




# A Story of Leeds

Changing the world every day





## Acknowledgements

The Young Foundation would like to thank the people of Leeds for sharing their stories with us – whether they gave two minutes or two weeks of their time, their insight, thoughts and openness to dialogue have given Amplify Leeds its momentum and been the beginning of a network of committed citizens who want to make change happen.

Thank you in particular to those who told the stories which are included in the book. We have tried to make sure that people could not be identified in the work but if they are we would like to say what insightful and inspiring examples of people making change their stories have been.

We especially would like to thank the communities of Cottingley, Harehills and Kirkstall, who have helped shape this work.



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# THIS IS THE STORY OF AMPLIFY LEEDS

Amplify Leeds is a group of ordinary people, organisations and institutions working together to combine our mutual strengths to make a better and more equal city.

We've joined together from every walk of life to share our thoughts about Leeds and create a dialogue on our common values, aspirations and ideas for change.

In this storybook we want to share the thoughts and stories of people in Leeds about the city's challenges and its strengths. We have heard these ideas and thoughts as part of a listening process which has also allowed us to identify real innovations and change-making ideas that respond directly to the demands and aspirations of local citizens. We think their experiences and thoughts about Leeds – its challenges as well as its strengths – help us all better understand the ways in which local communities perceive the city's most urgent needs, priorities and opportunities and how they want to act on them.

These ideas are best told as stories of inequality, action and aspiration. We have chosen specific issues and values to share stories about as these became very compelling and resonant accounts of the impact of inequality and of the way people act on shared values to challenge that inequality every day.

What people have told us help us all think about changes that we can all make in our lives every day and tell us why we should make those changes.

We hope these stories make a powerful case for understanding Leeds and its potential to grow as a strong, resilient and compassionate city.

# OUR STORY OF FIGHTING INEQUALITY BY SHARING

We're a compassionate city having some hard times.

Across the city there are communities where resources and time are very tight.

"When I first moved in there was a man knocking on my neighbour's door. When I said "She's not in" he handed me a leaflet and said if I'd just moved in I might need it. It was one of those loan shark companies."

And where decisions made in other places seem to be a barrier to us taking care of ourselves, our families and friends.

"I got my benefits stopped for taking my granddaughter to school, because I get Carer's Allowance and they said if I need a carer then I can't be caring for anybody else. As a grandma I have a right to spend time with my granddaughter, to take her to school sometimes when I am up to it. When I got reported, I felt like I'd done something wrong. I won the appeal but it was having to go to the appointment, knowing that somebody had reported me. It makes me reluctant to get involved in volunteering. I love looking after kids but I'm worried I will get reported again."

Some of us have little money,  
lack affordable transport,  
have challenges with our housing,  
or have the feeling we're not getting a job or  
opportunities because of who we are



"If you tell people you're from Cottingley, you see shock and horror. They don't think you're capable of holding down a job, they think you're on benefits. Yeah, it's council, but a lot of us work. But we can't work without childcare!"

despite what we have to offer...

This all seems to make it hard to thrive: to work, to put food on the table and to live the life we'd like to live.

**But we look out for each other in Leeds, that's who we are.**

Many people share with each other every day to make things happen:

by offering each other small favours,

compensating a gift of food with the gift of time,

by accepting that sometimes we all need a little help, and one day we'll all repay the favour.

We have a different way of thinking about value

"We need to bring the community back together, because it's got capabilities, everybody's got something. Like this lady here hates ironing, I love ironing, she can bring her ironing round!"

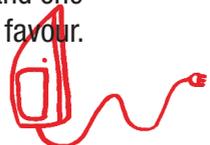
"I love gardening!"

"You see what I mean? You don't know what people can do."

What's most important to us is that nobody gets left behind in these challenging times.

"It's a city of people helping other people if they need help with anything, like getting around."

**Across the city lots of little things are happening to make the city a fairer place, and experiment with different kinds of value and worth.**



**We're a compassionate city and we want to promote a strong economy that can be compassionate too.**



*"Solving problems, and being innovative, usually starts with a negative experience in life, being aware of something you would like to improve."*

As a city we know the most valuable resource is not money but people working together to create alternatives to our unequal world,



*"The cafe space creates an incredible intersection of society which gives you an intimate introduction to those whom you would never usually get the chance to the same table with. It's full of stories, there's the woman who paid 20 pounds for a cheese toasty, because the cafe gave her so much, and she valued the not only the food, but also the eye-opening experience so greatly."*

to see our social values as being part of economic progress rather than in opposition to it. We will make Leeds a powerhouse if we follow our social values to transform the city

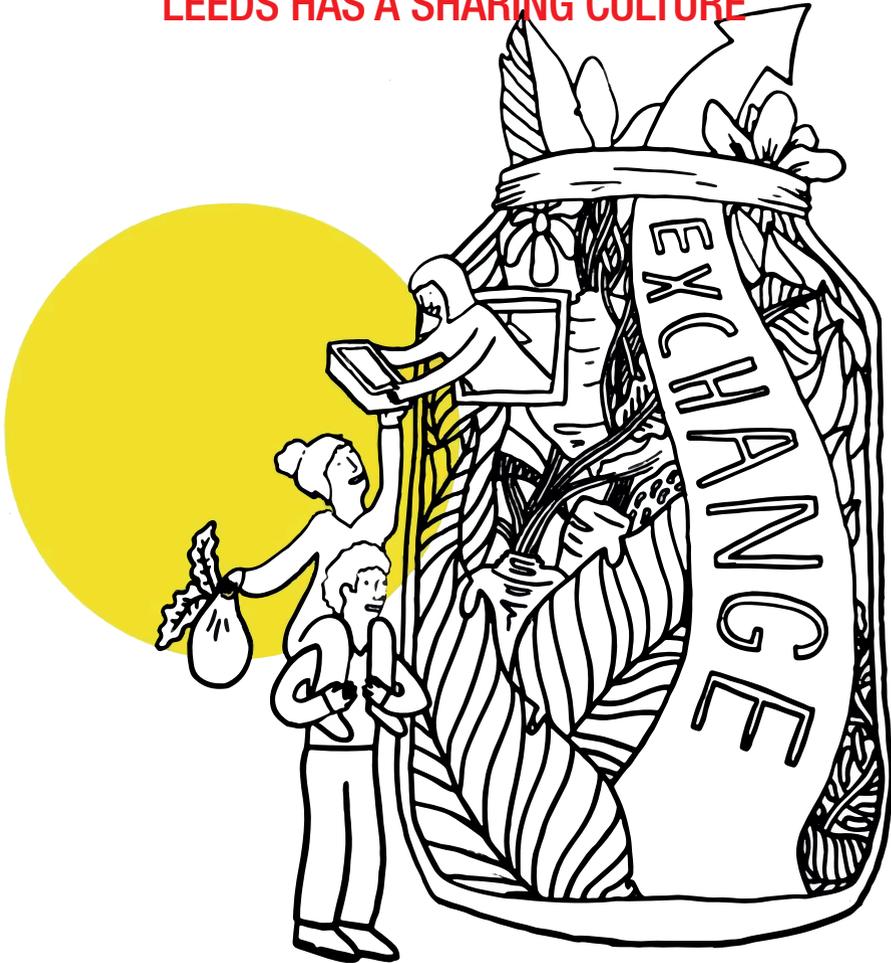
*"I've got to live but I'm not in it for the money! I don't want to charge people for sharing my skills with them and I don't want to profit from helping people."*

*"we give back to the community. By giving back, you enrich your community. By offering the community affordable but high-spec quality products you help them grow too, and it creates a snowball effect. By saving them money and time, their companies get bigger and employ more people, and reduce poverty - all from a small idea."*

**by scaling our actions across communities to be compassionate towards others.**



## LEEDS HAS A SHARING CULTURE



What could you share with others?

How do we recognise the value in what everybody has to offer?

How can the resources and assets of the city be better distributed shared in and known about across communities?



# OUR STORY OF REJECTING INEQUALITY BY NURTURING

**In Leeds, like other places, we've got challenges.**

There are many issues in our communities that seem to divide us and make life difficult. Some of our young people have poor mental health or behave in difficult ways. We can't go to public places or use the city in the way we want to because we are afraid for our safety.

We worry about how to encourage our next generation to succeed, rather than take difficult and challenging paths which seem to threaten our wellbeing too.

Too many of us experience racism, prejudice and distrust,

"If you go to jobs you experience racism. Ever since 9/11 it has become difficult. The way people treat you is awful. You have no opportunity, a lack of opportunities because of who you are. It doesn't matter if these Pakistani kids fail. Nobody had aspirations for them.

I found my experience of racism really difficult. Throughout my life I always took a stand for what is right. When I was experiencing racism from somebody else that had power, I let it go by, I tried to tell management, but I wasn't listened to.

I got to the point where I thought I need to go forward with it. When it came to management, they closed through. They refused to give me my hours, and it has been so hard. I am in overdraft.

It is hard to accept it every single day.

They have asked me to leave, but I have four kids. They are not getting me a new job. They refused to do that. I am stuck in an awful way"

and we have some shared fears about our communities and how people behave in them. **We can't always do the things we want because of the way people perceive us and the way we perceive others.**



## **We don't want to live this life and we won't.**

We recognise that these divisions don't suit our lives, that they don't make us healthier or happier or help us reach our full potential. We have to believe that rather than being scared of each other we are safest together.

We reach out a hand to young people to help them transition into adults, we reach out to those who are newcomers to help them learn about the city and feel safe in it and we appreciate and respect each other's differences and vulnerabilities.

We know we have to look after each other ourselves, by recognising our true value to each other and by nurturing the potential around us in people and places to make change happen.

*This is seriously affecting mental health. The more one stews in one's problems, the more these issues are never dealt with. We set up the team because being active you have fun and get on with life, and forget about your problems."*

We find worth, value and potential in ourselves and our community even if others don't seem to.

*"I was pushing my pushchair behind the school, I saw drug dealing going on. I was seeing people getting their fixes by the school. There was no doubt that they were shooting up there, and that ginnel land was for four year olds to play on. I said "you can't let children play there because there will be needles there." The next day my child was playing there!*

*So I started a petition. Everyone got together, thousands of us. It was a three year battle. The ginnel land went to the community. We cleared out thousands of needles from that land."*

**We know the best way of proving this to them is to have a strong belief in ourselves and each other.**



**Everyday we're re-writing the rulebook about what this inequality tells us we mean to each other, that we're divided or have nothing in common with each other**

"My hometown has a really embedded culture of just getting on with it, not grumbling, and being down to earth. We have always been good at coming up with radical and simple solutions to social struggles."



By looking out for each other, valuing each other on our own local merits, and making sure we recognise each other's potential.

"When I was at school I experienced elements of bullying, which might be why I am now very empathetic and can quickly connect with people. I see the good in everyone and I have no barriers."

Let's reclaim our city and our sense of worth.

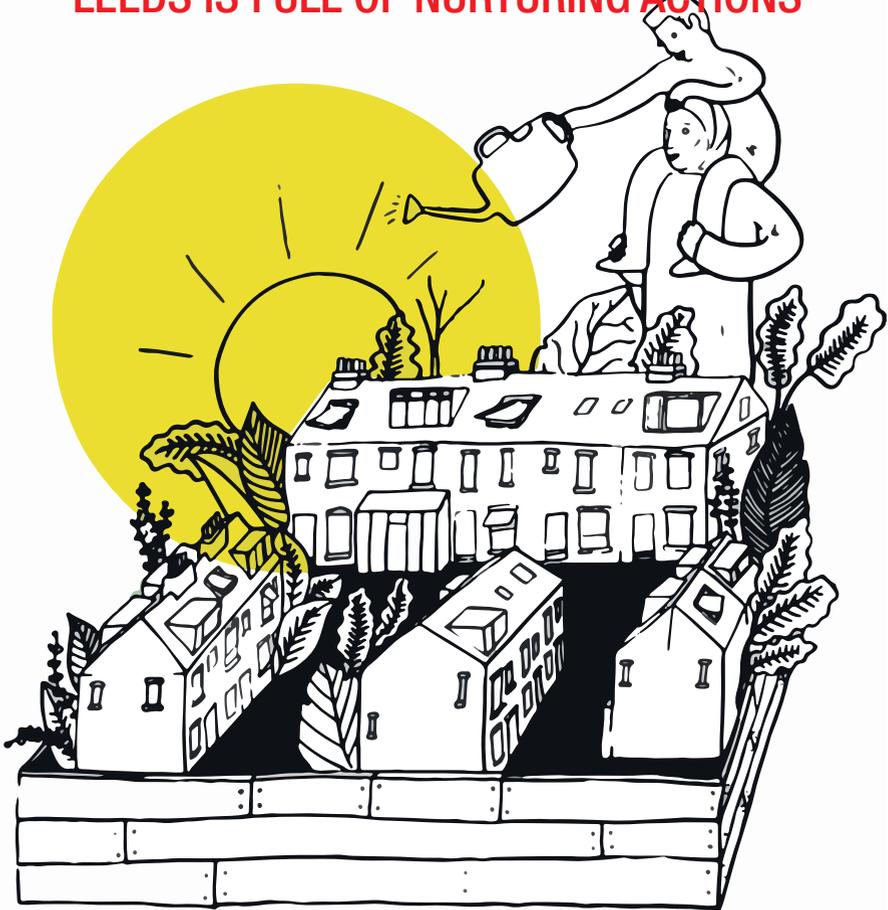
"What's been really nice is this is the first summer that the garden's actually been a usable space, before it was a space in development. I live very close to the garden and it's been nice to walk past and see people sat in there with a drink, or sat reading books, and doing things that they would do if they had a garden of their own even sunbathing a few weeks ago when the weather was really hot. I can see people using it and enjoying it and it's really, really nice."

In everything we do to help others feel better about themselves, we're going to do it a little bit more.

"Someone showed me so much hate and then I decided to create a project that would show them love and show them my culture. I wanted to tackle their lack of awareness. I used to be like others, I went with the tide, and I tried to not be seen. But at that point I realised you're as big as you want to be, and it could start from me."

**Whether it's big or small, it all makes a difference to someone else's life as well as our own.**

## LEEDS IS FULL OF NURTURING ACTIONS



How can you support others in the city?

How can we make everyone feel respected and part of society?

What can we do to recognise and harness all the potential in our communities for our common good?

## OUR STORY OF DISRUPTING INEQUALITY BY BRIDGING

In this city, some of us feel like we're invisible to others and our voices don't get heard.

Decisions seem to get made somewhere else, we sometimes feel like we can't go along and have our say because it won't be listened to. We feel disconnected from people living in communities that are probably just like ours.

It's always changing. They come from all over the place. It is really multicultural

How does that affect community cohesion?

I think it gets lonely.

The older lot say we shouldn't have younger ones here.

A lot of the foreign people feel alienated because some people just won't interact with them. These are high rise blocks and there are people with mental health issues here, and it has caused a lot of accidents.

How does that work out when different communities come in?

In this block they just do not interact at all. That's why we do events so they come down.

It is like a little village, but it takes years to get noticed

It's not that you don't want to say hello, it's more you don't know how.

If you are new it is the responsibility of those who have been here for years to make the first move. Sometimes people who are poorer are more willing to give money, because they understand the situation more than those with money

So is there a divide?

I don't think they don't want anything to do with us, because these are run down council houses. It is stigma

Sometimes this feels worse because funding cuts seem to create gaps between people and services rather than close them up. Some of us don't have good social or digital networks to find out about services or what others are doing; we can't look for what we don't know is there. Some of us don't have great language skills so we just can't connect. We feel like we are on our own little islands being left behind.

**These gaps are real and social, things that potentially stop us from working together or seeing how much we have in common.**

Many of us are already bridging those gaps, connecting places and people with each other. There are all sorts of ways this is happening now.

"It was a matter of introducing yourself. This is what I wish I did earlier. I realised that's the kind of thing you need to do. You have to build bridges, and you can't keep running them down.

"Now they see us as friends. If I need sugar I can go across the streets. They look out for you more. They knock on the door to say it is recycling day tomorrow. When they kick their ball into the yard, I just say go get it. It is not formal anymore. It is informal now. It makes me feel a little bit more safe. If anything happen [before] I would be a lunatic person on their doorstep, now I feel like if I want pasta, or ketchup, or a number or a taxi, I can knock on the neighbours' door. I can make them look out for my sisters. If I had to run to the grocery store they will give me a ride."

We know that more is possible.

Whether it's what feels like the bigger stuff –

overcoming funding silos to work with someone who needs it, setting up a place for older people to come together to have a cup of tea –

or the smaller everyday things –

talking to someone we don't know who feels lonely and invisible –

"I liked to learn. I was in Jehovah's Witness bible study. I met with some of them here. I got friends. I started hanging out with a particular boy. We used to skateboard. It became a hobby. You meet different people. You realise you're part of Leeds. You become part of the community. You identify with people and build your bridge."

"I'm not a social butterfly. But if I want to get involved I can call people up. I feel like I have a network."

or finding a way to connect with others... bridging is a powerful way to grow a network for change.



**Leeds is a place where people connect with others.  
We're friendly and grounded.**

We're a place where local pride and values are more important to us than what people outside Leeds think of us. This makes us close-knit and gives us a strong sense of mutual connectedness and belonging.

"We want to be loyal and true to our community. We will always start by listening to and working with the people who are around us. We think it's always better to work together. We believe in a good old cuppa tea and a natter. When people feel welcome and part of a community things begin to change for the better"

"I'm very keen on trying to democratise access to skills that aren't always available to a lot of people. I love the idea of collaborating with people from various different backgrounds, sharing skills and trying to do something for the common good. I try to apply the skills I have learnt to try and improve things. It sounds a bit naff but I try to do things that have a civic purpose. That's what drives me forward."

Being close-knit doesn't always have to mean knowing other people in order to make something happen, it just has to mean that there is value in being close together as a city in this fight to challenge inequality and the impact it has on us.

To create a healthy, equal and well-connected city

"I don't mind going in another person's patch if the work gets done. It's a case of all working together to provide a service, we don't discriminate or separate them from the rest of the group, because I think it works better if they integrate with everybody"

"It's about society being more cohesive you go down the road further if you go together."

"It's been really inspiring - there are so many people in the room doing amazing work. We are all learning from each other, and I've established a lot of contacts for collaboration. And it helps being surrounded by people who are experienced and passionate about what they are doing."

**we need to bridge to everyone, to make sure everybody is part of this close-knit journey towards change.**

## PEOPLE IN LEEDS ASPIRE TO BRIDGE



How can you reach out to other people and places?

How can we collaborate to move forward together?

How can we create stronger networks of cooperation across the city?



We've recognised many ways in which problems threaten to take over how we think about each other, how we recognise each other's value and how things are organised in our city.

**Inequality works on the idea of unequal division:**

there is too much poverty sitting alongside wealth, there are people having a very hard time who don't seem to get the help they deserve and there are too many silos which seem to break down our ability to get things done together.

**This inequality is found all over the UK. But we know we're stronger than that in Leeds and we challenge this inequality every day.** Our close-knit community networks give us strength, but there are people who can't access them. It's up to us to make this change, to represent who we are to others, scale up our actions and raise our voices in support of each other.

**Every day each of us acts in small ways to make a change in our city, to try and make things equal between us.**

**Our groundedness and shared values give us the guidance we need to know what really matters to us.** We share with each other when some of us don't have enough, we nurture each other's strengths and care for each other's weaknesses and vulnerabilities. We're brave enough to reach out to others we don't know or understand just yet and see them as equal.

We know we have a lot of potential to make meaningful change happen: we have powerful networks of mutual support grounded in our sense of belonging with each other in Leeds. **Every day you'll find someone in Leeds acting on our shared values to support others.** If we all scale up those actions to extend them to others and tell others that change is possible and how we can do it, **we'll make it happen.**



# WHAT THE STORY OF LEEDS TELLS US ABOUT HOW PEOPLE ACT ON THEIR VALUES TO CHALLENGE INEQUALITY

## LEEDS FIGHTS INEQUALITY BY SHARING

We've heard that Leeds has a sharing and compassionate culture. Sharing most often occurs between people who know each other and is also a focus of social innovations in the city which offer sharing services or open the ability to share to a broader network of people.

These actions and innovations share resources between people or redistribute overlooked resources. They vary widely but distinctively they play with the idea of social and economic value, as well as different types of exchange or gifting which often don't have any implication beyond resources or time being re-usable for others. Sometimes people will take, and at others people will give, or both. What they offer will differ broadly in terms of its traditional economic value, but be an alternative way of thinking about what 'real' value is in social terms.

These transactions are about assets: but assets represented in the form of people - skills, time, ideas, mutual values and ways of cooperating or being together - as much as they are tangible things.

Most importantly a sharing culture has obvious social benefits: making and sustaining social links as a fundamental part of making transactions. As people share they create and sustain a socioeconomic network: of economic resilience based on social values.

It offers us a guide to the way to scale and distribute actions which could fundamentally challenge structural inequality as much as mediate its worst impacts.

As a city on the verge of greater changes this sharing culture represents a force for distributed growth using skills, services, people and resources. **Leeds can be a powerhouse:** with powerful social values it is possible to jointly build and sustain a competitive economy based on compassionate principles, to explore the distribution of skills, services, resources, and people more widely.

## LEEDS REJECTS INEQUALITY BY NURTURING

In Leeds we've been told that stigma has a pervasive and damaging impact on community potential. Stigma affects people's wellbeing, health and ability to contribute to society, and in terms of the way some places and people living in them are perceived and the way they are then helped by services.

Yet we've found ways in which people reject labels or the low expectations that result from stigma. There is a strong community-led nurturing culture in Leeds that is beginning to overcome or challenge it. Across Leeds people in communities are seeing value in each other when others might not and they take action to reach out to others to nurture their potential. People look out for others they perceive themselves to share interests with – values, places, identity, skills, age - but find it harder to overcome stigma with others.

We have also found that people are actively subverting stigma in Leeds: they are taking action to 'reclaim' people and places. These actions range from local initiatives towards greening and using unclaimed land and buildings to schemes which facilitate the inclusion of young people, or teach refugees more about health services, to the people who care for those with vulnerabilities in Leeds on the basis of their potential rather than their problems.

Much of this action and innovation is informal and, cultural. It happens every day. It is rooted in communities and embedded in shared social norms.

This offers a strong basis for social innovation in the city and at scale. These actions could form the driver of interconnected health-based innovations closely tied to this nurturing culture. Social wellbeing building on **social networks** should be a fundamental aspect of taking care of people in Leeds.



## LEEDS DISRUPTS INEQUALITY BY BRIDGING

We have found a strong aspiration to connect with others: what people in Leeds have called bridging. In some communities people feel disconnected from decisions affecting their lives, a sense of invisibility from others and an inability to participate fully in the social and economic fabric of the city.

Many people want to bridge these apparent gaps, recognising that these divisions don't suit their lives or help them reach their potential. They do this in varied ways, by being courageous enough to reach out to others they feel judge them, by teaching newcomers English or skills they'll need to better connect with others or at scale by creating opportunities for people to come together and create new social links. However many feel Leeds has a lot to do in this area.

The desire to cooperate demonstrates a firm basis for action if existing networks are extended to other places and people, and beyond Leeds itself. These could be coordinated in **living laboratories**: exploring schemes which improve people's ability to participate in governance and make meaningful decisions rooted in their communities' priorities, and create an equitable approach to social innovation opportunities.

## BECAUSE LEEDS IS GROUNDED

Leeds has a close-knit, down-to-earth feel and mentality closely grounded in ideas about locality and belonging. This tells us why and how people do things for each other – they cooperate locally because they believe supporting their locality is more important than external status or perceptions. These values are strongly normative: it is right to share, to nurture and to connect.

Close-knit networks of people cooperating with each other to create change give a unique core strength to the Leeds community. To create change everybody should find their place in a well-distributed close-knit network: different stakeholders bringing diverse skills, backgrounds and interests working together. This will be essential to fostering a competitive growth model based on real equality.

**Sharing, Bridging, Nurturing. Our values make Leeds different.**

... and what this means for the potential to create change.

## FIVE STEPS TO A MORE EQUAL CITY

Our shared challenges are:

Recognise the challenges we face together

I believe we can change Leeds because:

Believe in the possibility of change

I share, nurture and bridge because:

Build on our shared values

We could change Leeds by:

Share your ideas

A large rectangular box for writing ideas. On the left, a speech bubble contains the text "Share your ideas". On the right, a drawing of a pencil is connected to the top-right corner of the box by a curved line.

I need others to help me by:

Take action together

A large rectangular box for writing needs. On the right, a speech bubble contains the text "Take action together".

I can help others by:

A large rectangular box for writing ways to help others.

What is your role in change?

Tell us:

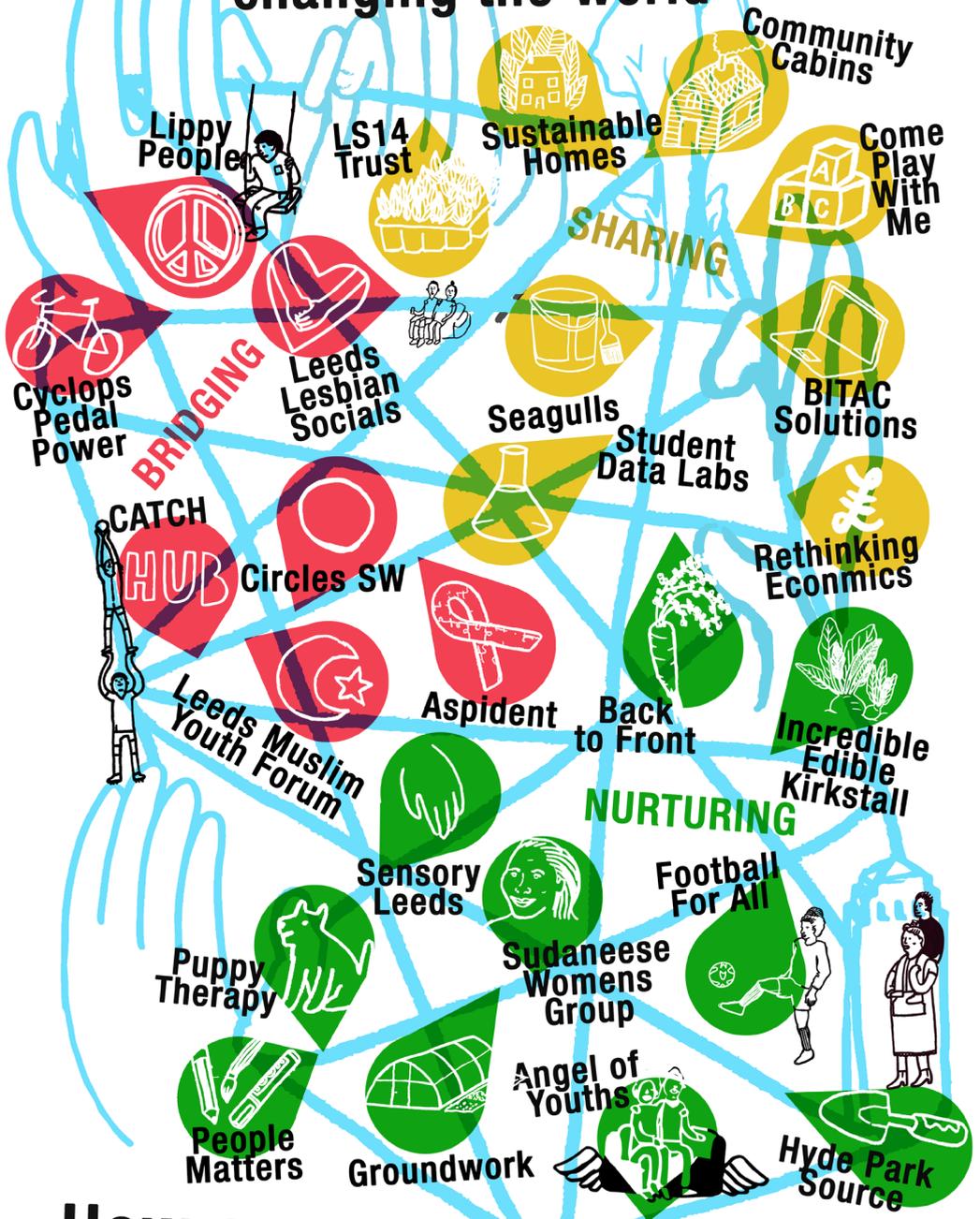
Share your thoughts

Nurture your potential

Connect with others

[www.amplifyleeds.org](http://www.amplifyleeds.org)

# Our network map of innovations changing the world



## How are you connected?