

What does it take to change a system?

Renaisi's tool for systemic change includes 3 themes, which we're learning about as part of a 12-month enquiry. In the table below, we break down what these changes really mean, and why they're important.

Note: None of them will change the system alone. They should be done in connection with others across the system and other changes.

Theme	Element	What does this mean?
Learning about the system and your role within it	Actively interrogate your role within the system	Look at your own role within the system. What do you offer, what are your relationships like, and how much power do you hold? Are there any existing practices - that you or your organisation reinforces - that might need to change?
	Learn about what's driving systemic issues	Interrogate why an issue exists in the first place. What are the deeply embedded beliefs or values that are holding it in place? How might the structures in our system be designed to ensure it stays in place?
	Explore who is in the system	Who are the people, organisations, groups or services that have a touchpoint on a person's life within the place or issue area you're working on?
	Understand and intentionally shift power structures	Who currently holds power in the system? Who might need to hold power in order for the system to work differently? What does it look like in practice to shift where power sits, and how can we make that happen?
	Understand the results and patterns the system is producing, and why	If you want to change a system, chances are that's because it is producing results or outcomes that aren't helping or are harming people. For example, unequal results such as better health or education outcomes for wealthier groups, or disparities based on gender, race, or place. understand how and why this happens, in order to design a system which doesn't re-create these outcomes or results.
Deep and active collaboration	Bring the whole system together around a shared goal	One person or organisation alone won't have all the answers. To change the system, as many people as possible within the system need to come together around a shared goal or mission.
	Empathetic, meaningful and intentional relationships	Working together deeply and meaningfully - in a way that allows you to challenge yourself and others to be part of something different - requires empathy, trust, and intention.

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	Shared processes for listening, learning, holding information and iterating	Agreeing how to listen, learn and adapt together is critical to working to a shared aim and breaking out of individual or organisational barriers. Whenever possible, ensure you all have access to the same information to help make the system clearer.
	Willingness to collectively change embedded values, structures and processes	We can't change the system alone – nor should we. We need to be willing to collectively challenge and change how we work, and how we work together.
Changing what's valued and what's accepted	Changing whose voices are heard and the stories we tell	We won't see a systemic shift if the same voices are always heard. Whose voices need to be heard in order to change the balance of power? And what are the stories we might be telling about ourselves and others that might be (unintentionally) holding problems in place?
	Invest in systemic change, not just traditional delivery	Programmes and services are an essential part of a system and what it's made up of. But alone they can't change it as that's not what they're designed to do. We need to ensure that we're investing in the work of changing the system, and not just expecting this to be done as part of existing work.
	Reimagine what we value and prioritise	Developing a new system takes creativity, and the ability to imagine something new. As part of this reimagining, we need to give ourselves the freedom to think outside of the current system, and what it might tell us is important.
	Changing incentives, perceptions of risk and flows of resources	Systems perpetuate themselves in part because of the incentive structures they have. These incentives can include data needing to be presented in a certain way, short-term and siloed funding, or hitting targets or outcomes. These mechanisms are powerful as they are what enables the system to maintain its behaviour. The same can be said for how we think about risk, and the structures that we set up around the flow of funding. You should challenge our perceptions of each of these factors.
	Change what we accept as 'normal'	'That's just how it works/what we do' is a powerful tool in maintaining the status quo. If we want to shift it, we have to imagine a new normal, and intentionally work towards it.