

Making a Difference for Everyone ¹

Dr. Mark Reeson

United Response is a national charity that supports people with learning disabilities, autism, and mental health needs, at home and in the community. As a part of their 50th anniversary in 2023, it has initiated a change programme on an unprecedented scale. Its goal is to give the people it supports the opportunity to lead a life of hope and purpose, integral to the community, where they can experience friendship and loving relationships. This is the aim of the charity's long-term plan.

The focal element of the plan is to ensure the organisation remains person-centred, collaborating with the people it supports and empowering them to lead full, meaningful lives. United Response's vision is to ensure that no person it supports is excluded from the community at large. Its plan offers hope and inspiration, and the expectation that everyone has the right to enjoy an ordinary life.

The long-term plan has been designed around the five I's for everyone, to ensure a clear vision.

1. I am connected
2. I have relationships
3. I have strengths
4. I have choice
5. I am respected

Camaraderie to overcome challenges

The plan needs to be delivered in a challenging and complex environment, which means it's vital to ensure the support is there not simply to deliver, but to sustain engagement long-term. The plan is designed across the six directorates, each playing its valuable part in the strategy. The deliverable range spans five new IT systems to support the services, improvements within social care practice, the renovation and compliance of housing provision, and the management of funding and fundraising.

The recognition that no one part is greater than another, and that all parts need to develop simultaneously, has led to a great camaraderie across the business and in the strategic

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programme team. There is a singular positive belief this can and will happen for the right reasons.

To initiate the programme, a project governance structure was introduced and agreed, before starting the embryonic steps of the scoping and the justification of the projects, ensuring the right prioritisation to create a delivery which perpetually builds upon the last step.

Two critical success factors

This programme can only be successful if two key factors are delivered early within the process: the right communication both internally and externally, and the will of the people to engage once the programme delivers. To ensure the strongest, earliest impact, United Response has focused on benefits and outcomes rather than products and deliverables. By selling the solution instead of a product, we focus on what people can achieve through new ways of working, not simply on the completion of a distinct programme of work.

Although the programme's focus is on the people they support, it cannot be forgotten that those doing the supporting are also important to the success of the delivery. Without them, there would be no service. Therefore, adding a further strand to the complexity web, the programme must recognise that everyone the project is going to impact internally, no matter their role, needs to feel safe, assured, and valued. By doing this, everyone who works at United Response will feel part of making this plan a success.

Why it pays to say thank you

The wellbeing of United Response's staff is built into the heart of their plan, ensuring everyone is heard and knows the organisation is listening. By ensuring the wellbeing of those delivering the services, United Response can undertake this ambitious programme. This is being achieved through an internal programme of professional development, pay reviews and by learning to say 'thank you' consistently, all for the benefit of the staff.

United Response recognises this scale of change cannot be achieved alone, so to further extend the strand of complexity, it is engaging beyond its own borders, collaborating with other health and social care professionals, local community groups, like-minded organisations with the sector and regulators such as the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and Ofsted.

However, within the current social and economic crisis, there is one further challenge: ensuring the programme is financially sustainable. This is as much about saving money as it is raising it, and so United Response will grow their role as a supported housing landlord, accessing charitable funding sources, raising revenue from wide-ranging expertise, and expanding fundraising.

So, in the future, when you see a charity reaching out to you and looking for support, don't see the programme as the aim of the charity, but simply one small step in a long journey to making a difference in the lives of everyone.

About the Author



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Dr Mark Reeson, MBA ChPP RPP FAPM is a project management specialist with over thirty-five years' experience. A Fellow of the Association for Project Management, he has been involved in many project and programme consultative roles. Most recently Mark has become the Strategy Programme Manager for United Response, a charity within the UK that supports children and young adults with learning difficulties and autism, to develop their long-term plan to raise the awareness of the treatment and care of the people they support.

Still working as both an APM ChPP and IPMA Level A/B assessor, Mark is committed to the ongoing develop of the future generations of project managers.

Mark started his career in the Royal Air Force, serving twenty-four years, before continuing his professional development by training, consulting, and delivering projects in multiple fields of industry including nuclear, pharmaceuticals, finance and the international sporting events.

As a regular public speaker Mark now shares his experience, knowledge and commitment with those associations wanting to progress project management in a more sustainable and successful manner. Mark's next aim is to develop this further and to spread project management knowledge and competency into areas not typically recognised for the discipline to deliver more projects successfully, globally.

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