



Moving Mindsets: how can we counter the mindset of individualism?

‘You reap what you sow.’

‘Eat less, move more.’

‘What doesn’t kill you makes you stronger.’

These familiar phrases all embody powerful, tacit, and enduring ways of thinking about how the world works. We call these patterns of thinking: [mindsets](#). Understanding mindsets means understanding how we think.

And these phrases all embody one particularly powerful mindset here in the UK: **individualism**. When this mindset is active, we think of success and wellbeing as the product of our effort and good choices. In this way of thinking, those who don’t have success don’t deserve it and those who do have it, deserve it.

Individualism justifies inequality. For example, individualism says if those with most grit and determination do best, that’s as it should be. And it casts attempts to address inequality through policy as inappropriate and even counterproductive. For example, individualism says why would we level the playing field when some people aren’t prepared to work hard? Individualism focuses our attention on choices and distracts us from the way that systems make good outcomes more likely for some – and stack the deck against others.

Individualism lies at the heart of our inability to create systems that support and include all members of society. Of course, individual’s actions do matter and individualism will always have a place. But **rebalancing individualism with a systemic perspective** is central to efforts to increase equity and build a more inclusive society.

In our research, we have found that a mindset of individualism frequently shapes our thinking across a whole range of issues from [homelessness](#), to [child abuse](#) and [childhood obesity](#). The individualism mindset is fed by – and feeds – omnipresent behaviour change campaigns run by public services and the voluntary and community sector. This relentless focus on ‘fixing people’ over fixing the way things work in our communities is way out of kilter.

This creates a clear task whenever we talk about social issues: we need to avoid triggering individualism and instead draw attention to context. **We need to show that what surrounds us, shapes us.** We need to explain the challenges we face in that context and show how they can be fixed.

In January, at FrameWorks UK we're launching a new Programme called [Moving Mindsets](#). It's designed to track dominant mindsets such as individualism – picking out moments and opportunities to push them back and raise up other mindsets that are likely to boost support for social progress.

We already have a set of methods for tracking mindsets that was developed by our sister organisation, [FrameWorks Institute](#) in the US for their [Culture Change Project](#) (no surprise that individualism is dominant in the US too). And during the first year of the UK Moving Mindsets Programme we will create a UK-specific tracking tool.

The initial one year pilot of the Moving Mindsets Programme is supported by [The Health Foundation](#) and the [Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#) and we are going to look at how individualism – and other dominant mindsets – can be countered in relation to understandings of the [building blocks of health](#) and [poverty](#).

To find out more about the Moving Mindsets Programme and how to get involved, contact lravies@frameworksuk.org or sign up [here](#) to receive regular updates about what we're finding or to receive invitations to Programme events.



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