

Community Circles transcript

Donna Waring: he was always a very busy man doing DIY, gardening - always finding something to do. it kept him doing them things as well as social events and it kept him meeting the group every month and he used to love them meetings.

Kath Crowther: I'm one of a large family. They are very, very supportive but the community circle were the people who live close to me, so can be called on in an emergency. One of my concerns was what happened when I became ill. To have people who were aware of Dave's needs filled me with confidence.

Cath Barton: community circles is a small national charity. We partner with a variety of organisations and local authorities. Our purpose is to support people to have better and more connected lives - more of whatever matters to them.

Historically, circles of support were popular for people with a learning disability and when we started about 10 years ago we were really keen to make them available for everybody, so we probably work with people from birth to the end of life.

The organisations that we partner with have included supported living, extra care, and working in local communities - well that's anybody who lives there.

KC: if I hadn't have had the community circle when I had Dave, I think Dave's life would have been considerably shorter, because we were actually still able to go away on holiday, we were still ambitious in what we were doing, and I don't think we would have been able to do any of those things if we hadn't have had that kind of support, because I don't think Dave would have.....I don't think he would have cooperated in going.

CB: when we think about the Care Act we think about prevention and wellbeing. Community Circles really focuses on wellbeing for people, so it flexes and adapts around an individual. So we think: 'What would you like your life to be?' 'What would you like your life to look like?' 'What would you like to be different about your life?' 'How can we support you with that?'

So it's very much a space of walking alongside people not leaping to fix people with a service solution, so really thinking about the person, the people in their life, what they can contribute, what's around them locally - a real holistic approach around wellbeing.

When Arthur moved into a care home he needed that extra support. The purpose of his circle was to keep him involved in gardening and DIY. The circle is made up of Arthur, his wife, his daughter, a friend, and then a volunteer that we support - Community Circles supports - and matched to the circle to host that conversation, to keep the conversation on track, to help people explore their ideas.

Exploring together with Arthur and his family we came up with ways to think how can Arthur keep involved in DIY and gardening? So we were able to work alongside the facilities

manager at the care home where Arthur could take that role in maintaining the home where he lived, having gardening opportunities, doing recycling, upcycling projects and donating those to the local nursery.

DW: It was very good, it showed a massive difference in his life, it showed he still had things going on. We also did other things like fun things he used to like doing as well, like going bowling, going to the local pub...

CB: so we would either meet in a local cafe or in a local pub, or join a quiz night, see whatever events were going on locally that we could spend some social time together but also thinking about having really good conversations. But yes, supporting Arthur to live well.

KB: there would be maybe 10 people and we looked at each area of our lives where help would be needed. So we looked at Dave's sporting interests. He was a very keen supporter of a rugby league club. There was a crowd of maybe six of them, but one of them agreed to be the representative in the circle and they would take turns occupying the carer's seat. I would take Dave to the pub before a match and then this person, the circle member, would bring him home afterwards.

CB: we do a variety of things, sometimes it's developing that individual circle of support around a person, sometimes that's connecting people through shared interests. We partner with a variety of organisations and local authorities and our intention is always to work alongside that organisation and transfer our skills, our knowledge, our learning.

Some of the organisations have recruited their own connector and we've provided the support and coaching, the training to develop their skills and to share our knowledge and learning. Some organisations have carved a little bit of time out of an existing post, maybe two days a week to focus on embedding circles and person-centred approaches. The model flexes and adapts, so we're having some conversations at the moment with a local authority that really wants to focus on Extra Care, and really wants to develop that for older people, really thinking about how do we support people well to connect with the people they're going to be living alongside, having a real focus on the Extra Care being a community hub.

We've worked with Suffolk [Council] and a variety of organisations - Extra Care and Hospice and Community Neighbourhood Teams, really exploring what success would look like, thinking around the challenges that that presents. It was during COVID, and getting to the detail of concerns about safeguarding, around positive risk, around exploring all the challenges so that communities and teams feel really comfortable doing more of what matters to people. So you can really weave a golden thread between the individual and what really matters to them. Who are the people, the organisation that they are connecting with, how do we bring joy into people's lives? So really giving a good practical way of developing around personalisation.

DW: he could still give some input into what he wanted to do and to show that he enjoyed doing what he did and after he did the activities he always used to say how much he'd enjoyed them, and obviously that showed us that the circles was a success.

