

Introduction

Over two years ago one care home was approached to be part of the Time to Connect (TTC) project. The care home had one particular member of staff, J, who has over time, with the support of colleagues, managers and members of the community, created more opportunities for residents to participate in and enjoy life in their community and in their home. Community inclusion wasn't new to this individual, but the opportunity presented through TTC gave a platform from which they could and were determined to do more. Below is the story of what's possible.

What has happened?

“If you understand what the inclusion wheel [web] ¹ is about it's really easy.”

Conversations that explore life histories are the starting point for every resident when they arrive at the home. This is a chance for care staff really to understand who the person is. They use the principles of the Inclusion Web (see below) to explore what opportunities (either in the home or community) connect with their interests or experiences, that would re-engage them back into those things. Through J's own practice and support, other members of the care home staff are using the same Inclusion Web principles. J explains:

“It's quite exciting seeing the other staff sort of getting it now. It's hard work because the job itself is hard. Sometimes it's hard for them to see beyond what they need do. So not that they make it task orientated it's just, once they've done that, I think sometimes they feel that there's not enough time for anything else but now they are getting involved despite that.”

J talks about the mindset needed for making this possible:

“You either go to work, do your work and go home, or you're part of your job”.

The approach taken by J is to ask staff to contribute or volunteer an extra 15 mins of their day to do something to support this activity. The theory, or change in culture, is that it doesn't feel that difficult to give up 15 minutes of time but built up over 4 days this would equate to an hour. So if they have a project happening and 10 people gave up an hour that's 10 hours towards a project. Staff then aren't asked to give up anything more for a few months. For people who haven't given up that time for a while J might ask them to come on a trip and help out. It's not formalised by the home, rather an informal arrangement which J suggests is similar to time banking; where staff get something out of the experience as well. It's a practice that J reciprocates; helping out her colleagues when they need it. J is noticing that colleagues are showing more interest, are more receptive to find out how to provide opportunities for residents to be engaged in their community as well as why it's important.

1 The inclusion web is one of the tried and tested tools that TTC has introduced to care staff: www.ndti.org.uk/resources/publications/the-inclusion-web

What has happened? (continued)

Community engagement is something that has evolved over the three years. J explains, she uses Facebook, “a lot”. There are always lots of requests where the community are asking for things or asking for people’s help, so the home has engaged with that as much as possible. As a result, J doesn’t need to approach the community anymore, the community know who they are and approach them. The time invested in building relationships across the community was realised this year through the National Care Home Open day. It was all about community arts. J engaged lots of community groups to be involved, including a group attended by one of the residents, E. E encouraged the people there to complete some artwork to bring into the care home. Members of the community including schools and nurseries were also invited to come and see what they’d been doing. J says it:

“was probably the best thing we’ve ever done.”

They had eight different community groups join in and local supermarkets, Tesco & Sainsburys. Following the connections made at this event with one of the supermarkets, the home now gets free flowers donated twice a week, every week. J acknowledged this by writing a letter saying how amazing the engagement had been in the art project, the difference it made to the residents and how great it was that every time the residents go to the local supermarket the staff now know them.

In addition, as part of the Britain in Bloom campaign the care home was approached to be part of the route this year, so they have a flower bed in town. Residents are responsible for the whole process from designing the bed, choosing the plants, growing the seeds, planting, maintaining and feeding/watering. It was this during this project that residents said they couldn’t reach the existing beds and so the home made the new accessible planters.

What difference has it made?

Managers are recognising the impact that taking part in the local community has on the health and well-being of their residents, seeing that older people now have a sense of purpose. They can see the resident’s disappointment if they are unwell and are then unable to get out or volunteer. Care staff also see the difference it makes and how happy people are after they have been out and engaged with the community.

Having a purpose has really changed the life of one particular resident. E had moved into the home after a period of ill health, and used to attend a community centre before she got ill. J recalls that the people in the centre never thought that they would see her again. But through the conversations with the staff at the home and to the delight of the centre, she returned and now goes twice a week. She helps lay tables there and at the home. In the home, E’s help had always been recognized through J writing thank you cards but staff were chatting one day and said ‘Oh, E deserves a badge’, so she now has her own badge that says assistant on it, to recognise her contribution. In addition to attending the community centre E goes to a nursery to listen to children read, and she’s about to start with Riding for the Disabled (RDA); something that she used to do a long time ago and, J suggests, perhaps something that she never thought she’d get to do again. Her physical health has improved and if life wasn’t full enough, E has recently won an award her volunteering activities. J thinks that all the interaction and being part of something, feeling purposeful has made her want to have a go at being ‘herself’ again, something she may have lost through her period of ill health. E along with other residents who volunteer in the community and at the home, being visibly busy and out and about, is showing other residents what’s possible. Seeing this, they want to join in more, do more and go out more.

What difference has it made? (continued)

Another resident, H, listens to children read in the local school, something she's continued to do every week since the project began two years ago. She also supports the In Bloom gardening activities and gives ideas to the florist for what she can do with the flower arrangements in the home. As well as contributing to the life of their local community, being involved in TTC has also helped to change the way things work within the care home, with residents now making a much greater contribution, which is one of the important principles that underpin TTC.

Like E and H, residents are engaged in care home life in a number of ways. There is a resident's meeting where they can talk about everything. There is also a resident's fund which the home won't use without the residents saying what they want it to be spent on. The staff tell residents what grants are available, and the residents say whether they want the home to apply for them or not. For example, they've applied to Tesco Bags for Help, because the residents wanted a summer house. This is where funds for the community activities come from.

Residents design their own menus. All the food in the home is what they want and has to be seasonal, they even grow their own vegetables. In fact, this year the home has altered the garden so they now have low bedded planters that are accessible. Residents look up the recipes, go to the local supermarket, buy the additional ingredients, come back, cook it and eat it. Residents look online for recipes and can add them to a portal for the care provider's catering department, then the rest of the organisation can see what they are doing. The residents also make jams and marmalades which they sell to the community with any fruit or vegetables when there is a bumper crop.

Staff are also being creative digitally, to enable people who might not be well enough to go out, to still be able to participate in activities. For example, they've applied for a grant to get another laptop so that they can use their projector to screen Google Maps Live and take people down the street they used to live on. This is creating opportunities for residents to tell the stories of their lives. They can even create the resident as a virtual person in the programme. On another occasion, when some residents weren't able to join in an open day, staff filmed the event through Facebook live. Residents were then able to watch what was going on, on a laptop upstairs. One lady wanted to have a go on the tombola, but she wanted to see what she could win before she did. So staff used this live videoing to show her the prizes.

Two years ago the care provider introduced a Facebook page for the whole organisation, which is made up of around 100 care homes. J posted pictures of what they were doing and would see more and more people doing different things in their homes. Three years on, just as with residents seeing E going out and getting involved in the community J is seeing more diverse activities in other homes across the organisation. Whilst she knows it can't all be because of her efforts she does feel that some of this change is down to the work in her care home, showing what's possible.

What has made it work?

Just as residents are recognised for their contribution Senior Managers recognize the contribution of staff. J gives thank you cards to staff to make sure they know that giving up their time is not expected and is really appreciated. She references the residents who they have supported, saying that they have appreciated what the staff have done.

This focus on valuing the contribution that people make, whether they are staff or residents, has been an important part of J's approach. Her emphasis on building positive relationships, including with the community, has also been key, and looking for mutual, reciprocal benefits from the connections with local groups and businesses has meant that the home and its residents are now a valued part of the life of the local community.

Contact NDTi:

Madeline Cooper-Ueki
call 01225 789135
email: Madeline.cooper-ueki@ndti.org.uk
or visit www.ndti.org.uk/our-work/our-projects/time-to-connect/

National Development Team for Inclusion
First Floor
30-32 Westgate Buildings
Bath BA1 1EF
www.ndti.org.uk



Contact Timebanking UK:

Nicki Baker
call 01453 750952
email: Nicki@timebanking.org
or visit www.timebanking.org

Time Banking UK
The Exchange
Brick Row
Stroud
GL5 1DF
www.timebanking.org

