



Person-centred and community based working

(strengths based approaches)

in association with

Foreword

Each time we breathe, we are reminded of what it is to be human. On the inbreath we encounter our deepest personal yearning for life, and both on the outbreath and inbreath we come face to face with our interdependence with the world that surrounds us.

We are all at once individuals with personal needs, and members of a wider community with irreplaceable gifts and contributions, to the wellbeing of the whole community and the natural world.

As we have personal and community natures, we can never be truly independent, unless we are also interdependent, put simply we need to be needed. We need each other and our natural surroundings to be healthy and safe and to live a fulfilling life.



Living a full life is Person-centred Community Living in motion and this handbook of the same name is a practical guide as to how social care workers can cheer on the movement towards full citizenship for everyone. It provides a compass for those searching out practical ways of ensuring people have a life of their own choosing; not just a service that has been prescribed for them.

This handbook is for troublemakers, people who are interested in breaking people out of prison, people like the Biblical character of Joshua, who wanted to see the walls of institutionalism “come tumblin’ down”. It is also for people who want to create genuine and truly loving community alternatives to institutional programmes, while making sure that services are there in reserve when needed. It’s for people like you, committed to ensuring that the will and preference of people who you support, people often at risk of not having their gifts recognised and received and not being fully heard and valued.

This is more than a practical guide or an easy to follow playbook for troublemakers and jailbreakers; it is also an acknowledgement of workers from a wide variety of disciplines who are committed to ensuring the full participation of the people they serve.

It is so refreshing to read a publication that says plainly:

- that we love and value all our citizens equally;
- that we will do what we must to ensure that everyone can participate at the centre of natural and diverse communities;
- that the practitioners who walk alongside people who have been exiled to the margins are amongst our most prized national treasures and our torchbearers for a more inclusive future.

Onwards, and remember stay in trouble!

Cormac Russell, Managing Director, Nurture Development

Acknowledgements

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- Tameside Local Authority, Greater Manchester
- The Grange, Benenden
- Wargrave House, Newton-le-Willows
- Brightlife, Cheshire
- Home Instead, Stockport
- Ansar Projects, Bury
- Making Space, Warrington
- Vale Royal Community Mental Health Team, Cheshire
- Rochdale Borough Council, Greater Manchester.

Your ideas, feedback and stories all contributed to the creation of this resource. We couldn't have done it without you.

Introduction

Person-centred and community based working (strengths based approaches)

Skills for Care worked together with North West Employers and providers to learn more about what Person-centred and community based working means and why it's important. Focusing on a person's strengths is about what people 'can do' and what's important to them, rather than purely focusing on their care and support needs.

This resource contains information, ideas and bite-size learning for adult social care employers and their employees to learn about person-centred and community based working. We've used stories and examples of what providers told us works well and is important for people to live good lives.

You'll find key information about person-centred and community based working across social care settings including that focuses on the many benefits this can bring to people supported to have valued connections, reduce social isolation and promote good physical and mental wellbeing.

The guide is relevant for:

- adult social care providers
- care and support workers in residential, supported living, domiciliary care and non-regulated services
- individual employers and personal assistants.

The resource is split into 3 sections:

What is person-centred and community based working? This section includes an explanation of the various ways to describe the approaches.

Why is it important to use person-centred and community based approaches? This sections explains how these approaches empower and value peoples' talents, skills and abilities.

How do you use person-centred and community based approaches? This section is split into bite sized information about the various ways you can use the approaches, who to involve and includes case studies, practice examples and top tips.

You can use either the whole resource or go to the various bite-size sections for top tips, stories and practice examples. Most of the sections include team and/or individual exercises to embed learning and to support a shift towards working and thinking differently about person-centred and community based approaches. You can use the resource to develop your workforce and learn new skills.

Contents

This guide is interactive so you can use the buttons below, buttons along the top and (purple) sub-menus to navigate through the document making it quicker and easier to find what you need.



What

Why

How
By getting started

How
By building relationships

How
Strengths based leadership

How
Having good conversations

How
Conversations to plan care and support

How
Working with others

How
by learning more

What is person-centred and community based working?

Person-centred and community based working (strengths based approaches) Introduction

Person-centred and community based is about ‘what’s strong, rather than what’s wrong’.

There are different ways of describing person-centred and community based working. You may hear people talking about using skills and talents, strengths and assets, place based approaches, building community capacity. All these terms have the same focus, which is to support people to live good lives, through what they are able to do for themselves, what their community can offer, as well as what they can offer the community.

It’s also about the principles of autonomy, choice, self-determination, freedom and responsibility. These principles underpin being person-centred and taking a strengths approach, as well as being embedded in legislation in the Care Act 2016 (updated) and the Human Rights Act 1998.

Remember a community can be where a person lives, a community of interest, a faith community, a virtual online community, really anything that provides connection and a sense of belonging.



We believe that being person-centred is also about being relationship-centred. We mapped our local assets to learn more about our relationships both inside and outside of the organisation. This really helped us to collaborate and connect the young people we support with local community groups.

Chris Powell, Registered Manager Wargrave House, Newton-le-Willows.

In this section:

[What are strengths and asset based approaches?](#)



[What is a strengths based approach?](#)



[What are ‘assets’?](#)



What

Why

How
By getting started

How
By building relationships

How
Strengths based leadership

How
Having good conversations

How
Conversations to plan care and support

How
Working with others

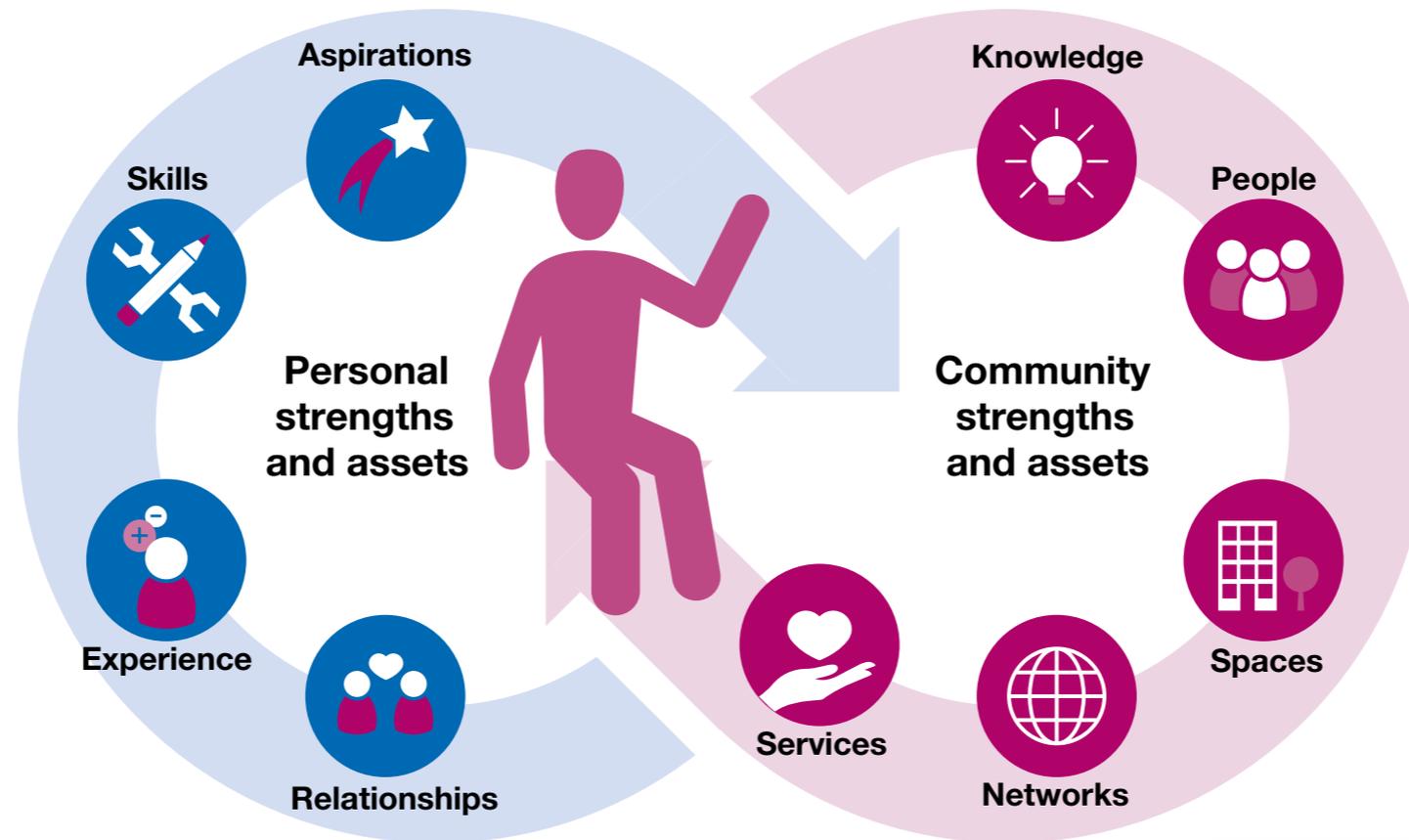
How
by learning more

What are strengths and asset based approaches?

Strengths and asset based approaches are ways of working to empower and support people to lead good quality and fulfilled lives. It's about taking a different approach to focus on what people 'can do' and what's important to them, rather than purely focussing on their care and support needs.

What is a strengths based approach?

A strengths based approach empowers and supports peoples' independence, wellbeing and their ability to make choices and control over their own lives. This can lead to more meaningful contact with others and increased confidence to take actions and responsibility, which can lead to other positives change. It's about recognising people's history, hobbies, interests, strengths and skills and connecting people with what really matters.



Taken from NICE/SCIE - [Evidence for strengths and asset based outcomes - quick guide](#)

[Exercise one - Valuing strengths](#) →

What

Why

How
By getting started

How
By building relationships

How
Strengths based leadership

How
Having good conversations

How
Conversations to plan care and support

How
Working with others

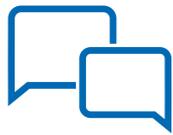
How
by learning more

Exercise one - Valuing strengths

Focus on what's strong, not what's wrong.

Try this empowerment exercise either individually or with your team:

- do you know the strengths, talents and abilities of your team?
- take time to get to know each other. How is this recorded?
- can you develop a 'skills and strengths team map'?
- how can you use the skills and strengths to deliver good care and support?



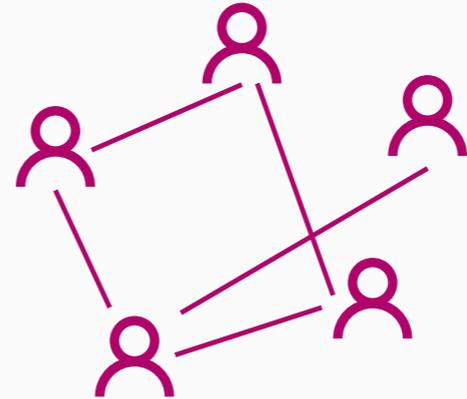
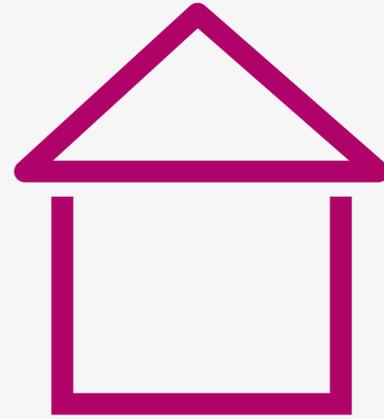
Exercise Introduction

- 1. Think of a time when you used your own strengths, talents and abilities to solve a problem, do an activity or learn something new. Write down or discuss with a colleague how you felt.**
- 2. Now think about a time where a situation in your life was seen as a problem that needed to be fixed by somebody else? Write down or discuss with a colleague how you felt.**
- 3. Discuss the difference between the two scenarios. What does it tell you about focusing on what's strong, rather than what's wrong?**
- 4. Now talk about what you already do to recognise the strengths, talents and abilities of people you support. How you can make changes to do things differently?**

- What**
- Why**
- How**
By getting started
- How**
By building relationships
- How**
Strengths based leadership
- How**
Having good conversations
- How**
Conversations to plan care and support
- How**
Working with others
- How**
by learning more

What are ‘assets’?

Assets can be a whole range of different things, a lot of people think about ‘assets’ as money or buildings. Here are some examples of the different types of assets.

<p>Personal assets e.g. the knowledge, skills, talents and aspirations of individuals</p> 	<p>Social assets e.g. relationships and connections that people have with their friends, family and peers</p> 	<p>Community assets e.g. voluntary sector organisations, associations, clubs and community groups</p> 	<p>Neighbourhood assets e.g. physical places and buildings that contribute to health and wellbeing, such as parks, libraries and leisure centres</p> 
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This information is taken from the [Social Care Institute for Excellence](#).

Exercise two – What are assets?	➔
Exercise three - Your local community	➔
Sector story - The Grange	➔

What

Why

How
By getting started

How
By building relationships

How
Strengths based leadership

How
Having good conversations

How
Conversations to plan care and support

How
Working with others

How
by learning more

Exercise two – What are assets?

Watch this short video which has a simple but powerful message about assets and using what's already available in your community.

Play video



Video Transcribe

John told the following story: he was visiting rural Ireland and wanted to go fishing at a local lake - but did not have any bait.

He found a small store, went up the path and asked, "Sir, do you sell bait?" He looked at me and said, "What do you mean, bait?" John said, "Well, like, worms." The man responded, "Son, when you walked up the path, did you see those three big whitewashed stones on each side of the path? I think if you just go and turn over one of those stones, you'll find all the worms you need".

(Laughter)

"This is the great, great lesson of Ireland which is: all around you is what you're looking for, but it's hard for you to see if you think the way you have a good life is to buy it. And so that's why I think being a consumer is the way you'll never see what's there".

John McKnight 'The Worm Story', Kirkham International ABCD Festival. June 2015

What

Why

How

By getting started

How

By building relationships

How

Strengths based leadership

How

Having good conversations

How

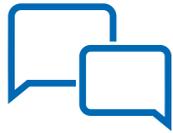
Conversations to plan care and support

How

Working with others

How

by learning more



Group discussion

1. What were your initial thoughts about the video?
2. Share any examples of how you have found what 'is all around you'.

Take a look at the next exercise and plan how to find out what's available in your area, bearing in mind that your 'community' may look and feel differently than in recent times.



What

Why

How

By getting started

How

By building relationships

How

Strengths based leadership

How

Having good conversations

How

Conversations to plan care and support

How

Working with others

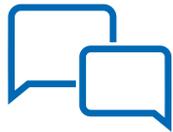
How

by learning more

Exercise three - Your local community

Skills for Care have developed [this infographic](#) to help you to think about what resources are available in the local community to improve the lives of people who need care and support.

➔ [Download a blank version](#) to map resources in your local community.



In small groups, list up to 5 different skills, strengths or assets in the area where you work.



What

Why

How
By getting started

How
By building relationships

How
Strengths based leadership

How
Having good conversations

How
Conversations to plan care and support

How
Working with others

How
by learning more

Sector story – The Grange

When their local community changed during the COVID-19 lockdown, Felicity White, Registered Manager at The Grange in Benenden told us how people they support and staff made changes to create a community at home.



A number of the people who live at The Grange volunteer in the local community run village shop and café. This is something that is incredibly important to them, so during the COVID-19 pandemic, we created our own café/shop so that they could still continue their voluntary positions and everyone else had somewhere to visit. We quickly went about clearing out an old wooden building, which was previously a craft room and support staff and supported individuals worked side by side in painting and decorating the interior.

They decided on a name for the café – Pete’s Café in memory of a dear friend they had lost the previous year, a very fitting tribute to a man who loved tea and cake! The shop was opened with a particularly delicious lemon drizzle cake, which was of course made by some of the supported people and the coffee, tea, hot chocolate (with marshmallows and cream) and cake hasn’t stopped flowing since!

To put the cherry on the cake, we added some essential goods (TV Times and Diet Coke to name but a few) to emulate their much-loved village shop, so that people were still able to continue with their usual routines and shopping habits as much as possible.

Pop-up Church

With some people unable to physically access places of faith worship during the pandemic, every Sunday Pete’s café is temporarily converted into a place of spiritual sanctuary. Music is played and people gather to practice their own individual beliefs.



Why use person-centred and community based approaches?

Person-centred and community based working (strengths based approaches) Introduction

By asking people what’s important to them, linking people with their local community and focusing on what people want as well as understanding their needs, makes a real impact on people’s lives.

Working in this way really values people accessing care and support and their families as experts about themselves and their lives, and what they can offer to the community.

Communities are full of people with diverse skills, qualities and experiences. Working together and connecting people can achieve positive health and wellbeing outcomes leading to a better quality of life.

Empowering people to use their own strengths, abilities and their local community can have wider benefits including:

- people remaining independent for longer
- reducing the impact of social isolation and loneliness
- delaying the need to larger package of care or hospital admission.

It’s important to recognise that the time you spend with people is usually only a small part of their everyday lives. Wider social connections are crucial to keep people connected and understanding how your work fits within this.

This resource is helpful when care workers are ready to deepen their person-centred knowledge on a more meaningful level. Managers and seniors can use these tools and tips to improve their own skills and share their learning with other.



Felicity White, Registered Manager The Grange, Benenden.

In this section:

What are other benefits to this approach?	➔
The Care Act wellbeing principles	➔
Exercise four - The power of communities	➔
The power of culture and faith	➔
Share your progress - TLAP Making it Real	➔



What are other benefits to this approach?

By working in a person-centred and community based way, you will deliver good quality care and achieve better outcomes for people supported.

You can drive quality improvements through making a real difference to peoples’ lives and this can help towards meeting the Care Quality Commission Key Lines of Enquiry and achieving good and outstanding ratings.

In ‘responsive’ the CQC states that people’s care plans reflect their holistic needs, including their interests and aspirations. Activities are socially relevant and people are encouraged and supported to make and main relationships within the service and the wider community.

The Care Act wellbeing principles

Improving and maintaining peoples’ wellbeing is an important area of The Care Act (2016 update) which tells us to ‘*consider the person’s own strengths and capabilities and what support might be available from their wider support network or within the community to help*’. The Care Act describes the 9 principles of wellbeing as:



What

Why

How
By getting started

How
By building relationships

How
Strengths based leadership

How
Having good conversations

How
Conversations to plan care and support

How
Working with others

How
by learning more

Exercise four - The power of communities

Watch this 6 minute video about the power of communities and connecting people.

Play video



Discussion

1. How did you feel about the impact of the ‘grown-ups playground’?
2. What do you think the wider impacts of connecting with others can have on peoples’ lives?
3. Can you think of any ideas how you can connect people using your service?

The power of culture and faith

People’s cultural needs vary. These could be based on ethnicity and religion and also on other factors such as age, sex, sexual orientation or gender identity. It could also be how people identify with where they live, their family, their history, employment or region in the UK. These are just some examples and the way that people identify with their culture and/or faith can also change through time, for example people with dementia may identify more strongly with the culture in their earlier years as they get older.

Staff don’t have to be ‘experts’ on different cultures, although it’s helpful to understand some of the aspects of care affected by culture, what’s available in your local community and where people can make connections. Connecting with what culturally matters to people can improve health and wellbeing, particularly where people are more isolated. Loneliness affects people of all ages and all communities, and many need support now more than ever. Faith and community groups up and down the country are working hard to reach out and ensure that people know that they are not alone.

Top tips

- Show a keen interest in the person’s culture and history.
- Ask the person open questions and listen without judgment.
- Talk to the person’s representatives where appropriate, especially if you are a bit unsure.
- Use the cultural knowledge and skills of your team to learn more.
- Be curious about what really matters to people and what’s important to them.
- Reach out to the relevant community to find sources of support and connections.

What

Why

How
By getting started

How
By building relationships

How
Strengths based leadership

How
Having good conversations

How
Conversations to plan care and support

How
Working with others

How
by learning more

Share your progress - TLAP Making it Real

Some organisations may be signed up to or want to sign up to the Think Local Act Personal 'Making it Real' initiative to share their commitment and progress towards community and person-centred working.

The [Making it Real](#) is a framework and a set of statements that were developed by people and families who use services to describe what good, personalised care and support looks like from their point of view with a focus on what's important to them and what really matters.

Organisations can publish their commitment to strengths and community working and share progress on the Making it Real website.

The Think Local Act Personal website also contains some useful ideas and resources about community working. Follow the link below to the directory of innovations for commissioners and providers to find out about community-centred approaches that are having a positive impact on people's lives. This directory is continually being updated with new ideas.

→ [TLAP/Innovations in community centred support](#)

The TLAP website is showcasing 'Stories of Promise' in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, with examples to show how communities are adapting with positive, responsive and creative approaches and solutions to providing care and support during the pandemic.

Go to → [TLAP Stories of Promise](#)



[Sector story – Home Instead Stockport](#)



What

Why

How

By getting started

How

By building relationships

How

Strengths based leadership

How

Having good conversations

How

Conversations to plan care and support

How

Working with others

How

by learning more

Sector story – Home Instead Stockport

Clare Cliff, Head of CAREGiver Experience told us that:

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, we facilitated a monthly lunch club for over two years as part of a voluntary intergenerational community group ‘Friendly Fridays UK’, where we made up to 50 homemade lunches and saw huge benefits of bringing the generations together to socialise and enjoy food together.

The lunch club was not just for our Homeinstead Clients and their CAREGivers but also for the wider community and has been an excellent community connection. Alongside the lunch club, we have facilitated a variety of additional sessions “intergenerational sports”, “ training sessions” , “ Dementia Parties”, “ days trips out”, all within the group. It has brought new members, as well as enabled many people to build friendships and confidence, and progress to meet up outside the safety of the community group.

During the pandemic lockdown, our lunch club was greatly missed. Many attendees were keeping in touch via phone calls and “happy post” which can be anything from a postcard, picture, letter or chocolate bar, anything that will make the recipient smile. We were also sharing as many positive stories as possible via our Facebook page. We quickly realised that our regulars were missing seeing our faces, so we completed a positive risk assessment and with consent, we obtained home addresses. We agreed a set date and two members of our team drove around to 30 people delivering ‘lunch boxes’ at social distances, opening doors to see huge smiles, people telling us “we have missed your happy faces” and “thanks so much for thinking of us”.

The staff involved, Clare and Karen both said, “it has made our day and given us lasting memories”.

What did we learn from this?

We have to ensure we carried out full risk assessments to ensure we protected peoples’ private information, that we were safe in the car and everybody could collect their own lunches from their doorstep, as we didn’t want to leave people vulnerable or unsafe.

1. There are always ways to keep relationships connected
2. Keep on finding innovative ways of working
3. “It’s not what you say, it’s not what you do, it’s how you make people feel.”



What

Why

How
By getting started

How
By building relationships

How
Strengths based leadership

How
Having good conversations

How
Conversations to plan care and support

How
Working with others

How
by learning more

How to use person-centred and community based approaches?

Introducing and embedding person-centred, community and strengths based working needs leadership buy-in and time to change culture and introduce new ways of working and thinking differently.

How to get started?

Here's a checklist with some questions to consider and suggestions how to get started.

-  Do you have strong leadership buy-in?
Leadership buy-in is important both strategically to get started, as well as everyday leadership across the organisation
-  Have you identified who will lead the process? Having a dedicated workforce group helps to focus on priorities and challenges.
What is your contingency plan if key people go on long term absence or leave the organisation?
-  How will you communicate the intended shift and commitment to person-centred and community working?
How will you monitor and share progress?
-  How will you identify and share what you are already doing well?
Share existing good practice where person-centred and community working is already happening and any lessons learnt.
-  How will you engage others and keep the momentum going?
-  How will you involve people supported and/or family members?
-  How will you work with the wider system for better outcomes e.g. social workers, commissioner, social prescribing?
-  Have you identified any barriers and how these can be addressed?



How? By building relationships

Working with people and communities in a strengths based way is all about developing human relationships and recognising the values and aspirations of others to make a positive difference and promotes individual wellbeing.

The providers who joined us at the workshops said that organisational and individual behaviour were strong influencers, described as ‘how we do things round here’ to promote working in a strengths based way.

A number of key principles included:

- going back to basics
- living social care values
- operating from a ‘rights’ perspective
- ensuring safety and wellbeing
- focusing on person-centred approaches
- using positive risk taking approaches.

They also told us that the importance of respect and the establishment of relationships were real enablers to good outcomes for people supported, as well as using person-centred approaches.

In this section:

<u>Person-centred approaches</u>	
<u>Sector story – using person-centred approaches to identify strengths and skills</u>	

What

Why

How
By getting
started

How
By building
relationships

How
Strengths
based
leadership

How
Having good
conversations

How
Conversations
to plan care
and support

How
Working with
others

How
by learning
more

Person-centred approaches

A person-centred approach means working in a personalised and preventative way to engage and support people to live healthier and fulfilled lives.

Working in a person-centred way means working in partnership with the individual to plan for their care and support. The individual is at the centre of the care planning process and is in control of all choices and decisions made about their lives.

The values of compassion, dignity and respect are essential when involving people in their own care.

Decisions should be shared decisions, with the individual seen as an equal partner in their care.

People should be involved in the design and delivery of the services they are accessing, and the public should be involved in decisions about what services are being provided for their community.

Person-centred planning is about discovering and acting upon what is important to the individual and what matters most to them in their lives.

Find out more



Providers suggested using the following person-centred tools useful for getting to know people well and finding out what's important to them to live a meaningful life:

- one page profile
- important to/for
- circles of support.

You can download person-centred tool templates from [Helen Sanderson Associates website](#)

We use person-centred tools to get to know the people we support and really understand what matters. We find out what's important to each person to live a good life and how we can support this through links with our local community.

Chris Harvey, Registered Manager Ansar Project, Bury



What

Why

How
By getting
started

How
By building
relationships

How
Strengths
based
leadership

How
Having good
conversations

How
Conversations
to plan care
and support

How
Working with
others

How
by learning
more

Sector story – using person-centred approaches to identify strengths and skills

→ [Living Well at Home](#)

Living Well at Home, Tameside assists with providing practical help, however the service is committed to changing the way this support is provided; ensuring the focus is as much about the person as it is about tasks, and wherever possible, exploring options that aren't necessarily just about paid support.

Dane Bank, Denton

Comfortcall staff have started supporting a small group of older people from the Dane Bank area to meet once a week at Denton West Community Library. They all live on their own and, due to long term health conditions, rarely leave the house. Until recently, homecare staff would have had daily calls to assist individuals with tasks, but would not have been in a position to address issues like loneliness - and the often associated issues of depression and anxiety that can result - even though they may well have recognised them.

Now, by taking a more flexible approach to support, these same staff have been able to explore more creative ways of helping people to achieve what they want in addition to the practical support; in this case, to get out of the house and see other people. Every Wednesday afternoon, with the support of their homecare workers, the group meets at the library for a brew and a chat and often some kind of activity too.





How? Through strengths based leadership

Effective person centred and community based working needs a whole system shift in thinking and culture to do things differently and work in an empowering and preventative way.

Any long term behaviour and culture change needs to be supported by the leadership and culture of the organisation and become ‘the way we do things around here’.

If leaders adopt and model this approach, there is the opportunity to provide motivation and learning how to make changes to do things differently and deliver support in a strengths, rather than a deficit based way.

At a practical level, a strength-based approach places significant importance on all involved to work in a way that enables people to reach their potential of being capable, resourceful and empowered.

In this section:

Top ten tips for strengths based leadership	➔
Video – Strengths Based Leadership Exercise about creating a movement and Exercise five	➔

What

Why

How
By getting
started

How
By building
relationships

How
Strengths
based
leadership

How
Having good
conversations

How
Conversations
to plan care
and support

How
Working with
others

How
by learning
more

Top ten tips for strengths based leadership



1. Connect, engage and communicate clearly to all staff:
 - a. why strengths based approaches are being adopted
 - b. that there is a clear leadership buy-in
 - c. the intention to deliver better outcomes
 - d. the values and principles that underpin the approaches.
2. Involve people supported, families and commissioners in doing things differently and promote working in a collaborative and co-productive way.
3. Involve the people you support, their families and staff to give feedback on what works well and doesn't work well to support making changes in line with what people want. Find out what the enablers and barriers to change are.
4. Share stories and celebrate successes to inspire and build confidence.
5. Promote a positive attitude and culture, be visible and work alongside each other to build relationships.
6. Encourage open communication and promote 'permission' to take positive risks.
7. Make practical changes based on feedback to support the changes for example, amendments to assessment, planning and review policies and paperwork to support good conversations.
8. Introduce a strengths based approach to supervision to empower and support staff in their development with a focus on what is working well, staff skills and celebrating successes.
9. New ways of working can take time to embed and you need to consider how to implement them in practice, for example by leading by example, through supervision, peer learning and team discussions.
10. Remember to review and evaluate progress and learning, what's working or not working and what else needs to change.

What

Why

How
By getting
started

How
By building
relationships

How
Strengths
based
leadership

How
Having good
conversations

How
Conversations
to plan care
and support

How
Working with
others

How
by learning
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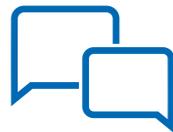
Video – Strengths Based Leadership Exercise about creating a movement

Watch this inspiring three minute video about leadership and creating a movement.

Play video



Exercise five



1. After watching the video use the top ten tips and discuss what you already do well and what might need to change?
2. How can you encourage and nurture your first followers?
3. What will you commit to doing next?



How? By having good conversations

By changing the way we have conversations, we can focus on peoples’ skills and strengths and find out what really matters to them, what they can do for themselves and in which areas they need support.

Having strengths based conversations in social care is basically ‘human to human connection’. We must never lose sight of that fact that people we provide support to are human and our conversations must be meaningful and authentic for all parties involved.

A person-centred approach respects that all conversations are two way and that the way in which the conversation happens can have an impact on those involved.

There are many things you can do to support good conversations by thinking about the way you ask questions, your body language, how comfortable the environment is. It’s really important that people leave a conversation feeling more empowered and enabled than before.

Remember we are moving away from a deficit model of what’s wrong and focusing on what’s strong. It’s really important to really listen and get to know people. These powerful words by self-advocate Christine Mayer encourage us to really listen.

“”

**To work with me
 You have to listen to me
 And you can’t just listen with your ears.
 Because it will go to your head too fast.
 You have to listen with your whole body
 If you listen slow
 Some of what I say
 Will enter your heart**

Christine Mayer

Moving away from the deficit model...

What do we mean by this?

- What is the problem?
- What are you unable to do?

- What would you like your life to be like?
- What can you manage yourself?
- What would help?

In this section:	
Top ten tips for everyday strengths based conversations	➔
Top ten things to avoid	➔
Exercise six - Active listening, open questions, strengths and skills	➔
Exercise seven - having good conversations	➔

What

Why

How
By getting
started

How
By building
relationships

How
Strengths
based
leadership

How
Having good
conversations

How
Conversations
to plan care
and support

How
Working with
others

How
by learning
more

Top ten tips for everyday strengths based conversations



1. Smile and introduce yourself; 'Hello my name is...'
2. Be aware of the environment, for example, the layout of the room, the level of privacy or other factors that can affect the other person.
3. Use active listening to really hear what the person has to say and give the conversation your full concentration. Show interest in the person their life and their community – see the SOLER model below for tips on active listening.
4. Use language and ways of working that the person prefers and understands.
5. Show empathy - this means seeing things from the individual's perspective, is 'being in their shoes' to try to understand them and how they see things.
6. Ask open questions to explore what really matters to the person and their community - see below for examples of open questions.
7. Be non-judgemental – show respect and preserve dignity - sensitively bring up topics that the person may find challenging or uncomfortable.
8. Be honest about what you can and can't do and who else to involve.
9. Feel comfortable using pauses, silences and gentle cues such as nods as appropriate - be aware of your eye-contact, gestures, facial expressions and voice tone.
10. Be observant - notice clues that might lead to other conversations - check if there is something else the person wants to talk about.

What

Why

How
By getting started

How
By building relationships

How
Strengths based leadership

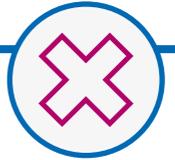
How
Having good conversations

How
Conversations to plan care and support

How
Working with others

How
by learning more

Top ten things to avoid



1. Asking open questions then not using the information to shape the conversation.
2. Being distracted, with your mind on other things.
3. Sitting or standing and using your voice in a way that shows you aren't listening or are annoyed by the conversation.
4. Assuming people have understood each other without asking and checking.
5. Using complicated language or jargon.
6. Interrupting or rushing the conversation.
7. Using your body posture, voice or positioning to gain 'power' or advantage.
8. Communicating with the person's family or carer without asking including the person as it feels 'easier'.
9. Not giving the person an indication of how long the conversation is likely to be then suddenly ending it without warning.
10. Not giving the person time and opportunity to express their feelings, thoughts and opinions.

What

Why

How
By getting started

How
By building relationships

How
Strengths based leadership

How
Having good conversations

How
Conversations to plan care and support

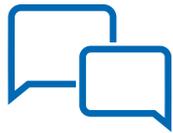
How
Working with others

How
by learning more

Exercise six - Active listening, open questions, strengths and skills

We can sometimes be paying attention to the wrong thing and miss what's right in front of us. Watch this short video about selective attention.

Play video



Discussion - What does this video tell us about how we focus our attention?

Here's some further information that can help to have good conversations. Have a look through these and then have a practice with the exercise below.

What is active listening?

Active listening is a communication technique that requires the listener to fully concentrate rather than passively hearing, and that they understand and respond to the speaker.

It is not enough to have simply 'heard' what someone has said, you need to show the person that you have heard them through your actions. Active listening is a skill to be learnt and takes practice.

The SOLER model (2002) is quite useful to try to encourage 'active listening'

Sit squarely to show you are ready to listen

Open body language indicates paying attention e.g. don't fold your arms.

Lean slightly towards the person. This confirms that you are ready to listen

Eye contact ensures 'human' connection and promotes more empathic* listening.

Relax, and try not to fidget.

What

Why

How

By getting started

How

By building relationships

How

Strengths based leadership

How

Having good conversations

How

Conversations to plan care and support

How

Working with others

How

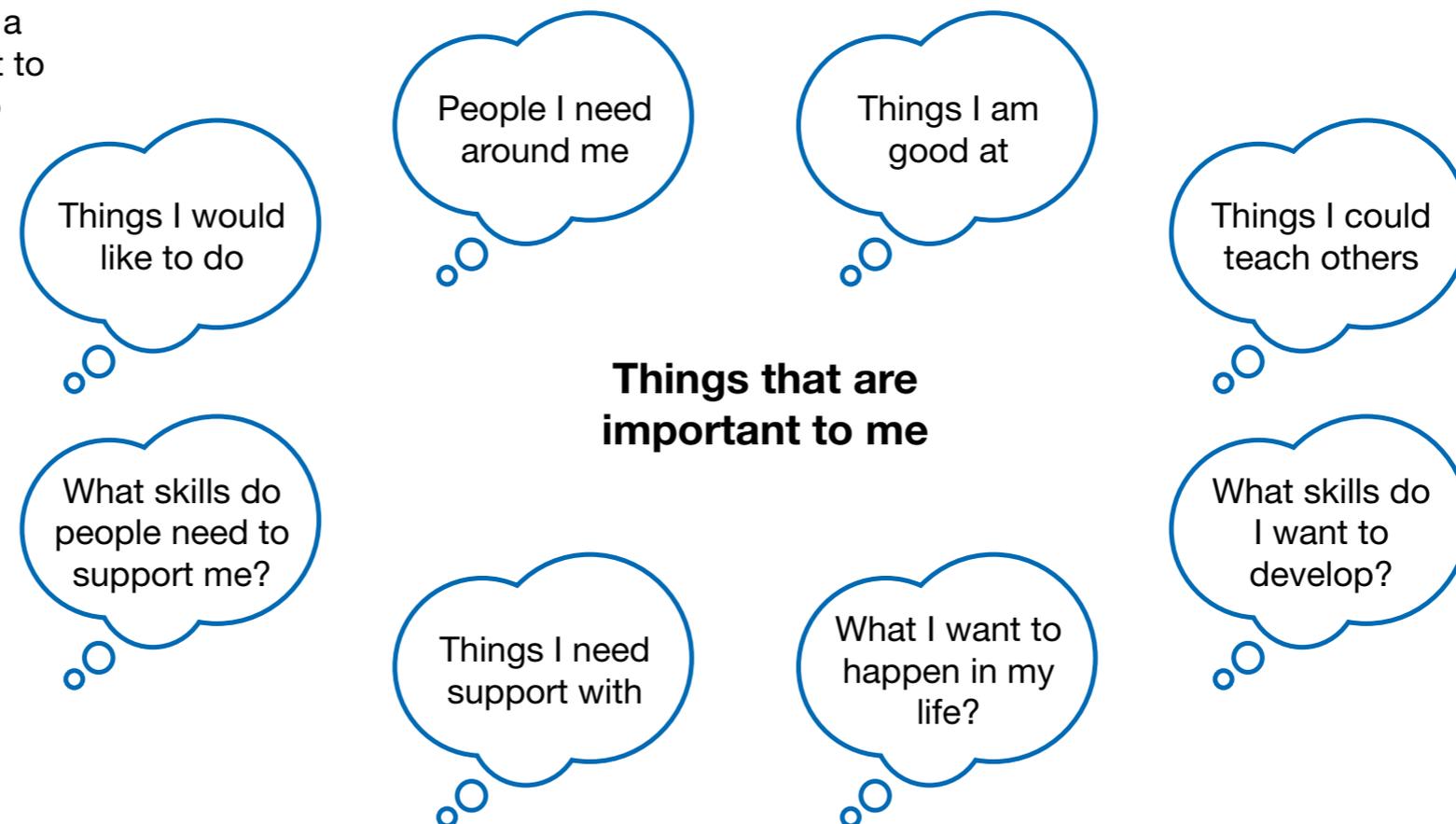
by learning more

Using Open Questions

Using open questions can be helpful to encourage good conversations, here's some examples:

- what's working well in your life?
- if you could change anything about your life, what would it be?
- what's important to you?
- what makes you happy / smile / laugh?
- what are you good at?
- who are the people in your life?
- who's the most important person to you?
- what would you like to achieve?
- what would help you to achieve this?
- what are your talents / skills / strengths?

This **Strengths and Skills Bubbles** is a useful tool to explore what's important to people and what they would like to do differently in their lives.



What

Why

How
By getting started

How
By building relationships

How
Strengths based leadership

How
Having good conversations

How
Conversations to plan care and support

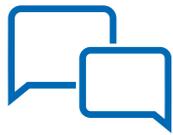
How
Working with others

How
by learning more

Exercise seven - having good conversations



- 1. In pairs or small groups, use what you've learnt from the top tips, things to avoid and the open questions above and have a 'good' conversation with your exercise partner to find out:**
 - a. What are the top two things that are important to them?
 - b. What are they good at?
 - c. What is a key strength, skill or talent they have?



- 2. Feedback how the conversation felt:**
 - a. What was it easy or difficult?
 - b. What did you learn?

- 3. How you can apply the skills you have learnt when having conversations with people you support and/or their families?**

If you want to change your practice, you have to practice to change.



Cormac Russell, Managing Director of Nurture Development and faculty member of the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) Institute

- What
- Why
- How
By getting started
- How
By building relationships
- How
Strengths based leadership
- How
Having good conversations
- How
Conversations to plan care and support
- How
Working with others
- How
by learning more

How? Conversations for assessment and care planning

In everyday life, conversation is the way we learn about people.

Having good conversations with people through the assessment, care planning and review process can help you to find out all sorts of things that could be lost if you followed a standard form and set questions.

By using a person-centred conversation approach, you can find out all sorts of things that could be lost if you just asked the questions to fill in a form. The result should be something that focuses on the person, their support networks and community, rather than about the ‘tasks’ of the care plan.

The Skills for Care [‘Using conversations to assess and plan people’s care and support’](#) guide includes the principles of conversational assessment to help you to take this approach



Conversational assessment is just the first step in supporting people according to their wishes and needs.



The principles of conversational assessment

Thinking about the principles of conversational assessment above, consider how we truly connect with people supported and their families. How do you show respect and concern, are really listening and making the experience positive, rather than just completing the task?

In this section:

[Top tips for having good conversations for assessment and care planning](#)

What

Why

How
By getting started

How
By building relationships

How
Strengths based leadership

How
Having good conversations

How
Conversations to plan care and support

How
Working with others

How
by learning more

Top tips for having good conversations for assessment and care planning



1. Using person-centred conversations, build a picture of each person's individual strengths, preferences, aspirations and needs.
2. Provide any support needed to enable the person to express their views and participate in the conversations, including independent advocacy if required.
3. Involve the person's wider social network (carers, family, friends, advocates) if that's their wish and explore the support that it may offer.
4. Consider how to support and promote positive risk-taking.
5. Promote the person's interests and independence and their preferences now and in the future.
6. Step into their world and immerse yourself in their life in order to understand them – take a holistic approach and think about the 'whole' person.
7. Take time to listen to everything - every bit of information counts not just what you think is important (or your documentation thinks is important).
8. Acknowledge what the person is already doing for themselves, their efforts and achievements.
9. Record absolutely everything but let the person guide your conversation, not your completing documents.
10. Assume nothing and constantly challenge your own assumption.



How? By working with others

What is social prescribing?

‘Social prescribing’ - sometimes referred to as community referral - is a way of enabling GPs, nurses and other health and care professionals to refer people to a range of local, non-clinical services.

Recognising that people’s health is determined primarily by a range of social, economic and environmental factors, social prescribing seeks to address people’s needs in a holistic way as well as aiming to support individuals take greater control of their own health.

Social prescribing schemes can involve a variety of activities which are typically provided by voluntary and community sector organisations. Examples include volunteering, arts activities, group learning, gardening, befriending, cookery, healthy eating advice and a range of sports.’

There are many different models for social prescribing, but most involve a link worker or navigator who works with people to access local sources of support.

➔ [Social prescribing applying all our health](#)

Learn more about what social prescribing is, what you can do and where to find more information with this All Our Health bite-sized e-learning session. No log-in required.

Source: [Public Health Matters - community approaches to health and wellbeing](#)

In this section:

What is social prescribing?	➔
Social prescribing in action – Brightlife Cheshire	➔
Introducing social work strengths based practice	➔
Commissioners, providers and communities working together	➔
Sector story – Vale Royal	➔



What

Why

How
By getting
started

How
By building
relationships

How
Strengths
based
leadership

How
Having good
conversations

How
Conversations
to plan care
and support

How
Working with
others

How
by learning
more

Social prescribing in action – Brightlife Cheshire

Providing truly person-centred care ... how do we do this?

To explain why person-centred care is so valuable to us and for the people we work with I will start at the beginning of Brightlife's story and tell you about our learning along the way.

Brightlife Cheshire was formed in April 2015 as one of 14 Ageing Better projects supported by The National Lottery Community Fund to help reduce social isolation and loneliness in people aged 50+.

Since then, our Social Prescribing team has worked closely with people to help them out of loneliness by connecting them back to their communities. We have a tagline on our flyers that reads 'the best medicine is a good laugh in friendly company' and I think that just about sums it up!

It all starts with a conversation

Our first meeting with each person takes place in a setting chosen by them, which is most often in their home. And there we have a real opportunity to build a trusting relationship. Our first learning point is that the initial meet up often lasts two hours (or more!) and time given at the beginning really does reap rewards in outcomes and relationship building. We give each person the opportunity to explore their hopes and aspirations around social connections; think about what they used to do, what they wish they had done, what can they do now, what they might want to do in the future as well as the challenges and barriers to achieving this. At that point we can begin to co-produce a personal action plan. We look at every individual's needs, wants, hopes and choices and then work with them towards achieving their goals.

What makes Brightlife different?

We look to the assets of the people we work with as well as at the assets in the community they live in to find the 'best fit' for each individual. This does throw up challenges and learning for us around the time it takes to find and match people to the right activities. As we all know there are often gaps, referral criteria, transport issues and may be some persuasion needed around paying for an activity. In addition to the person-centred work, the Social Prescribers use their expertise to build relationships with different organisations and community groups.

What

Why

How

By getting started

How

By building relationships

How

Strengths based leadership

How

Having good conversations

How

Conversations to plan care and support

How

Working with others

How

by learning more

Why are we seeing so many great results?

We make time to explore what is right and build someone's confidence up until they are able to access their chosen activities. At the outset, this includes an accompanied visit, ensuring they receive a 'warm welcome', or providing a supported referral. The effects can be staggering... frequently resulting in continued independence, a healthier lifestyle, improvement in physical activity as well as new peer support networks they discover for themselves. I could tell you hundreds of stories ... but I'd prefer you hear them first hand from some of the people we've worked with who talk about their experiences on the video.

Play video



Read one of our success stories...

We met one lady whose husband, daughter and son-in-law had died. She had worked 10 different jobs, the last of which was in school health with the NHS. As a younger woman she had enjoyed 'many adventurous pursuits' including girl guiding, marching in a band, trips to London, watching Trooping of the Colour, shopping in Harrods and seeing many shows of which her favourite was The Lion King, 'especially when the animals came down the aisles and through the audience'. At 88, partially sighted and living with arthritis she was regularly experiencing feelings of loneliness and found accessing public transport difficult on top of which paying for a Personal Assistant twice a week meant that she had to watch the pennies. And that's when we stepped in...

After a referral with consent by the Coordinator to Adult Social Care, suitable housing was identified and she has moved closer to her sister. Through connecting with the Royal National Institute of Blind People and by accompanying her to appointments (she had not turned up for 3 previous appointments) new glasses and visual aids were received. We also sourced support on choosing and using a new tablet. This lady is now enjoying weekly visits from The Reader Association where she chooses which book she and the volunteer will read together... and lively discussions are held about all manner of issues.

What

Why

How
By getting
started

How
By building
relationships

How
Strengths
based
leadership

How
Having good
conversations

How
Conversations
to plan care
and support

How
Working with
others

How
by learning
more

Sharing our learning

Our learning has centred around the relationships we build – with the referrers who have their own requirements, with the people who do not want to be made to feel ‘old’, ‘lonely’ or ‘done to’ and with the plethora of agencies, activities and communities in our area.

We have learned how important a ‘warm welcome’ is to people returning to a group and engaging with other people and this is an area that other Ageing Better projects have reported on in detail: The National Lottery Community Fund Documents: [Connecting communities and healthcare: Making social prescribing work for everyone](#).

At Brightlife we know that person-centred care and interventions can be challenging to undertake as it often involves a lot of time, phone calls and research to find appropriate activities for the person.

However, we also know that person-centred care and interventions produce the best long-term results and that a good laugh in friendly company really is the best medicine.

Read more about our work and our learning on [Brightlife Cheshire website](#).



Introducing social work strengths based practice

[The Strengths based practice framework and handbook](#) - was published in February 2019.

This framework and handbook supports social workers and social care professionals to apply a strengths-based approach to their work with adults.

A strengths or asset based approach to social work practice aims to put individuals, families and communities at the heart of care and wellbeing, and in doing so strengthen relationships between members of that community.

The framework is based around the following areas:



What

Why

How
By getting started

How
By building relationships

How
Strengths based leadership

How
Having good conversations

How
Conversations to plan care and support

How
Working with others

How
by learning more

Strengths based social work in action

Rochdale Borough Council has formed neighbourhood teams which helps to develop more local knowledge. Social work teams have adapted assessments to include strengths elements including for example the question, 'what can you do for yourself?' to open up the discussion to what is already around them, who they can connect with and include conversations about what people can do to meet their own needs.

Commissioners, providers and communities working together

Some local authorities are taking a very proactive approach to commissioning in a strengths based way.

“Tameside Council, in partnership with the borough’s six contracted Living Well at Home providers, are committed to changing the way people are supported to live at home.”

Here’s a short video which describes their approach to working together

Play video



What

Why

How
By getting started

How
By building relationships

How
Strengths based leadership

How
Having good conversations

How
Conversations to plan care and support

How
Working with others

How
by learning more

Sector story – Vale Royal

Steph Steele from Vale Royal Mental Health Team, Cheshire West and Chester told us how they worked together with care provider Making Space and others to make a difference during the COVID-19 pandemic.

After 3 weeks of government restrictions, one person supported by Making Space wasn't engaging with support and staff were concerned that his mental health could deteriorate if he was isolated for some time. A colleague suggested to Making Space to ask him if he would be interested in completing small gardening jobs at the supported living flats where he lives.

We involved Active Cheshire, the area lead organisation for physical activity and sport, who suggested contacting a local nursery that had bedding plants available. These would otherwise would have been thrown away and the nursery were interested in donating them to anyone where we felt their wellbeing and mental health could improve by receiving these plants. I suggested the Making Space scheme where the person lives and the plants were delivered by the nursery. As the person was already involved in helping a friend with gardening 2 days per week, staff at Making Space felt he would be the ideal person to assist with planting the new bedding plants. Making Space bought several small tools for him to be able to do this.

Since getting involved in gardening and being more active, the person's wellbeing and mental health has improved. He enjoys completing task focussed work, especially as this was going to benefit other tenants where he lives and they were able to observe him completing the task. He took great pride in his work tending to all the gardens, planting the flowers that were donated, whilst observing social distancing. He finds this a pleasurable activity that he has a keen interest in, which in return gave him a feeling of self-worth and pride. The regular daily routine has given him a sense of purpose and more structure. He is now able to attend the local day services and become involved with the gardening there, when able to do so.

Through Making Space willingly purchasing the gardening tools, they recognised and valued his contribution and gave him responsibility and ownership to care for the plants and maintain the garden areas.

This story highlighted the benefits of:

1. Treating people as individuals with talents, skills and strengths.
2. The positives and benefits of working and liaising with other agencies.
3. Promoting and supporting positive risk taking.



What

Why

How
By getting
started

How
By building
relationships

How
Strengths
based
leadership

How
Having good
conversations

How
Conversations
to plan care
and support

How
Working with
others

How
by learning
more

How? By learning more - further reading and resources

Things to help

- ➔ [Evidence for strengths and asset-based outcomes](#)
- ➔ [TLAP - Building Community Capacity](#)
- ➔ [SCIE - What is a strengths based approach?](#)
- ➔ [Skills for Care Building community capacity](#)
- ➔ [Sustainable community development: from what's wrong to what's strong | Cormac Russell | TEDxExeter](#)