



COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS TRAINING MANUAL



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Welcome

You are here because you are interested in other people and in working with them so that they can live their Good Life. You bring your unique self and life experience to this work which is a key asset in doing this role well: We recognise that we are people first and professionals second.

What is your aim as a one to one worker?

To support the person you are working with to identify and draw on their strengths and those of the people around them, enabling them to live a good life of their choosing.

Working in a relational way

Relational ways of working are a way of achieving this aim, here we talk about what this is and give practical guidance on how to do it. You will also get lots of opportunities to shadow community connectors, this is really useful as you get to see what it looks like in practice.

Care and equality

Care is something each of us gives and receives, and this principle underpins relational working. In our society, self-sufficiency is often promoted, yet we all need care at different times, and a caring community is one in which when care is needed, care is given. Caring for and being cared for are part of life.

'We all just need a bit of care sometimes.' – a community connector

"He has become such a good friend to me, I feel like he needs me as much as I need him, as someone to talk to in these lonely times" This quote comes from a person who became a phone buddy with someone who was shielding, like her.

Think about your life from birth to now. When were the times you were fully cared for/ completely without care? How do you access care and support in your own lives, and who from?

"What makes care equal is not the perfection of an individual caring act but that we can trust that over time, we will be able to reciprocate the care that we receive from fellow citizens, and that they will reciprocate the care we've given to them".

Joan Tronto¹

¹ Tronto, J., 2015. *Who cares?*. New York: Cornell University Press.

Section 1. Our approach

1.1 Listening and finding out about people

Relational working starts with listening and being curious about the person. A relational worker tunes into and reflects on the nature of the person we are supporting and their circumstances. This skill enables empathy and can come naturally to people or can be learned. It involves reflecting on:

- who someone is - what is important to them (current and life-long) – this might be places, people, practical activities, or physical feelings
- the way they think about themselves and life,
- how they see themselves within their current circumstances – what is working and not working?

This is a mental impression that you build over time, rather than a list of questions or a formal 'case history'. Gaining this understanding involves 'being' yourself in a genuine relationship. These relationships can form quickly but may also take time. They cannot be forced, and sometimes may not be possible.

All our work starts with the 'Good Life' conversation.

This semi-structured conversation can occur anywhere the person chooses to meet: over a coffee, on a walk, on the bus. It isn't formal, and you don't take notes.

Aim:

- To start supporting the person to plan their future positively by:
 - o Drawing out an individual's assets and strengths
 - o Enabling the person to open up about their lives and explore what they have available to them and what they might need to support them to live their life to the full.
 - o Giving people a sense of self agency and confidence so that they can take ownership of their lives and play a positive role within it
 - o Giving people hope for their future and a belief in their own ability to shape it

Questions:

- What does a good life look like for you?
- What do you have already that helps you lead this life?
 - o Explore:
 - Individual strengths
 - Family and friends
 - Community
 - Formal support

- What would you like to work towards? These can be big, life changing things or small things that will make your life better.
- What else would it take to achieve this life? Think Big. Can we explore that and see if we can break it down into bite-sized chunks?

1.2 Roles and role boundaries

Health and care services typically manage role boundaries through the structure of the service and the roles that are created. These structures are the rules and processes – like the practitioner’s title, qualifications, the letterhead, the appointment process, and the discharge criteria. Formal roles and processes can provide confidence and security in care relationships. Each person knows where they stand and what to expect and not expect.

However, these rules, roles and processes can separate the ‘real person’ of the practitioner from the ‘real person’ using the service. In doing so, they can get in the way of the benefits that human relationships offer. John O’Brien² calls this a ‘veil of indifference’, which needs to be lifted if a relationship is to be formed. Carl Rogers³ talks about ‘congruence’ as necessary in person-centred practice. Congruence is being yourself and dropping any professional façade.

In our service the relationship does the work, and so we need to bring the relationship to the fore. We have clear rules and processes and they are put in place to support our relational way of working.

We work differently:

Without the formal structures that create role boundaries, managing boundaries needs to happen ***within the relationship***. Therefore, reflective practice is essential to ensure that the relational boundaries remain well articulated and understood.

In our service, we need to (sensitively) revisit and restate boundaries, particularly where there is a risk of the relationship being viewed differently, e.g., as a friendship.

Working relationally is intuitive and skilful. It can be challenging because each person is different, and there is no roadmap*. It is different for every pair in our care relationships.

(*apart from necessary statutory guidance e.g. safeguarding)

² Further reading: O'Brien, J. (2014). The trouble with person centred planning. [online] Sheffield: The Centre for Welfare Reform. Available at: <https://www.centreforwelfarereform.org/library/by-date/the-trouble-with-personcentred-planning.html> and

³ Rogers, C. R. (2004) *On Becoming a Person: a therapist's view of psychotherapy*. London: Constable.

Who you are and who the other person is, is an integral part of the relationship. This is why each relationship is different, and it may sound scary and uncharted – but we have navigational tools and processes to support you.

1.3 Managing expectations

The **expectations document** (which we give on first meeting) can help people understand what your role is and isn't:

What you can expect from me

- To help you look positively to the future
- To support you to think differently about life and be alongside you as you try new things
- To support you to identify things you want to do; you are the expert in your life, and you will know what you need to live well
 - To champion you and be positive about all that you can do
 - To be there if things don't go so well and support you to try a different approach.

What I need from you

- To think about what will help you to live well
 - To be willing to give things a go
- To be in charge! We are happy to support and be alongside you as you make the decisions and take things forward

What I can't do for you

- Offer you any sort of therapy – I am not a mental health specialist
- Do things for you; this is all about you setting your goals and finding ways to achieve them. I will, however, do my best to find right resources to support you

You are working towards the shared goal of the person developing:

- a stronger sense of themselves,
- where they are heading and
- the relationships that will be important for them along the way.

You are just one of these relationships and in the grand scheme of their lives, a very short term one. But the relationship between you and the person can generate positive effects and contribute to their ability to move forward.

Section 2: How relationships 'do the work'

2.1 We aim for our relationships to generate 'positive effects'

Our work is based on the theory that the relationship ‘held’ between people is a connection that cannot be seen – but that has an effect⁴. This is not magic. It is a connection between the ‘self’ of the practitioner and the ‘self’ of the person being supported. It is generated from a genuine sense of joint purpose – a feeling of solidarity or ‘**in it together**’.

Positive effects can lead to a shift in the way people begin to think about and act upon their gifts and capabilities, their future and aspirations and their relationships and connections.

2.2 In what together?

In an everyday relationship – there is a mutual understanding, a sense of trust, a positivity that forms a connection between people and even though we can’t see it and it is hard to describe. ‘In it together’ simply refers to a joint interest or purpose.

When the relationship is working well between people it can have positive effects. These positive effects happen *through the person* themselves and how they are thinking and feeling. There is a sense of ‘we’ instead of ‘I’. These effects will involve both people: you and the person being supported. Where this is working, the relationship has effects, in some way, for *both people*.

Think about what is important to you in being part of any relationship – a personal or a care relationship. How does it make you feel and how does it help you in living your life well?

2.3 Why do we work in this way?

We have found that this way of working suits people who have had something break in their life and finding it hard to find a way to move forward. They may have become *disconnected*, or are finding their current circumstances *challenging or overwhelming*. Examples include; losing a job, leaving where you live, losing someone you love and recovering from an illness.

It is important to note that this is not the only way of working – if people are already able to navigate life, with well-established and effective social connections, relationship-focused support may not be needed or right for them. Be aware of this and keep up your reflections on how the relationship is working, and discuss this with colleagues.

2.4 One of many relationships

Throughout life, we all have many different relationships – short and long term – some (even short term ones) are memorable perhaps because something changed

⁴ Donati, P., 2015. When relational subjects generate relational goods, in: *The Relational Subject*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 198–228.

or shifted for you. The relationships you have with the people you work with will be relatively short-term and may be only one relationship among many.

Generating 'positive effects' is not a given – it is difficult to achieve, can take time, may never happen – but it is what we work towards.

2.5 How do we achieve relationships that can generate 'positive effects'⁵

The following are general principles for valuable and productive life relationships, such as those with our friends and colleagues. We apply them to our care relationships because relationships that meet these requirements can generate positive effects.

- a. **A relationship that develops over time.** It is not an 'interaction' or fleeting contact.
- b. **A personal and social identity of each person.** This means that the relationship cannot happen between anonymous people. The people in the relationship are known to each other. This means the practitioner also sharing something of themselves (eg their personality, likes and dislikes), but it's important to do this within the agreed relational boundaries (see roles section). Be yourself as you get to know the person.
- c. You are open to **tuning into and reflecting on the person and their strengths and lived experience**, and this is actively prioritised
- d. **Caring comes first in the relationship**, keeping the outcomes and experience of the person at the centre of our work. The principle is to *foreground* the relationship and retain the processes in the background. These processes help us to organise our work effectively and safely. We understand and apply these rules but they are not routinely visible to the people we work with.
- e. **The relationship is reciprocal**; that each person in the relationship contributes and gains within a purpose that is shared. This is 'in it together'. In the care relationships you have, this shared purpose *is primarily centred on the person receiving support*, however, in scaffolding this purpose, you have an intrinsic interest in their success.
- f. **The benefits emerging from the relationship are shared.** The purpose/outcome is shared, is meaningful and matters (in different ways) to both people.

Look at the wording in bold in the statements a-f and think about personal relationships that are important to you. These statements are likely to reflect genuine and positive relationships in your own life. Our approach, as much as possible, applies these everyday relational principles to care relationships.

⁵ adapted from Donati, 2015 (above).

In the context of our service, however, **the relationship is temporary**. The nature of the offer intends to create a **bridging relationship** that leads to people being/ becoming more connected and feeling comfortable and confident in their community relationships.

Section 3: Practicalities

3.1 Practical tips to working in a relational way and using soft skills

Being human:

- Empathetic not sympathetic: Kindness isn't about feeling sorry for someone it is about connecting with someone and showing you care
- Be relatable, use humour and stories wisely
- Be non-judgemental
- Approachable: you are not the 'expert' in people's lives.

Providing motivation:

- Enthusiasm and excitement for what the person wants to achieve
- Natural interest and curiosity in the person
- Encouraging the person to look to the future rather than dwell on past and present
- Being a cheerleader – celebrating achievement, however small
- Flexibility and can-do attitude: If a person wants to do something, you do it now! Don't ask someone else to do it or wait for an 'optimum' time. Strike whilst the iron is hot! E.g. catching a bus/ going shopping/ tidying the kitchen

Encouraging focus:

- Concentrate on one thing at a time
- Set up encounters so that the person is present in the conversation. If they aren't then time will be wasted, so if you are trying to talk to someone and the television is on, and they are distracted then ask to turn it off. Respectfully support people to focus
- Active listening – encouraging people to explore issues and find solutions by using 'probing' questions like 'what do you mean by that?' 'can you help me understand how this would work?'

Working on mindset:

- Re-framing situations e.g. 'I only got to the door of the group, I didn't go in' response: 'that is brilliant you made it as far as the door, next time you can take a step further – but look what you have achieved'
- Providing positive challenge and moving people away from long held assumptions such as 'it always goes wrong for me' 'nobody ever likes me'

- Encouraging people to think about others in a situation e.g. 'he didn't say hello so he doesn't want to know me' response: 'have you thought he has had a bad day, and maybe you could have reached out to him'
- Nudging not telling or directing
- Reflecting on what an individual already has and ways that they are already supporting themselves, sometimes the everyday things need to be remembered and celebrated.
- Challenge and promote trying new experiences that can present challenge to the person

Changing the power dynamic:

- Putting the person in the driving seat
- Empowering people by asking them to teach: 'you have some beautiful house plants, mine always die can you give me some tips'
- Encouraging person to take responsibility; 'it doesn't matter to me if you go to the group, it's for you, you are doing it'
- Enable the person to do things for themselves, rather than doing it for them

Fostering an honest and respectful relationship

- Know your limits: you can say no to people and that this isn't working for me.
- Managing expectations
- Don't be afraid to say 'I don't know'

There are also several pitfalls that the worker can fall into and must be mindful of.

3.2 What relational working ISNT

- Forgetting you and the person you are working with are **equals**, both with your own value, you are not there to teach but to be alongside.
- Becoming a superhero: people may well feel that the worker is a 'saviour' and without them they cannot move forwards. Succumbing to this 'ego boost', can be flattering, everyone wants to feel that they are making an important contribution to someone's life BUT this is not the intention of this work, your role is to ensure that the people you work with become their own superheroes!
- Encouraging dependency on you, by doing things for the person. It may be as small as being asked to go to the shops to get a pint of milk, or always paying for the coffee when out and about
- Providing 'counselling' as opposed to 'coaching' and becoming a pseudo mental health professional
- Trying to 'save' or 'fix' the person by dictating solutions to what you perceive are their issues. In the past professionals have often started their work with a pre-defined list of things they will offer – without even listening to the person!

- Overstepping boundaries; turning the relationship into a friendship, and oversharing your story and personal information

These unhelpful relationship dynamics can start sub consciously as the worker naturally empathises and supports the person. In order to avoid these pitfalls you have to be mindful and intentional about your practice and interactions and be prepared to critically reflect on the relationship you have with the people you support. Workers also need to consciously deploy their 'soft skills' and make sure that they are appropriate.

The balance a worker needs to strike is a relationship that enables people to feel secure and supported but which also encourages growth and independence. You are a short-term catalyst for big change!

A good quote to remember is this:

'to be truly kind one needs to be able to distinguish a situation in which one ought to step in and help someone who is struggling from a superficially similar situation in which someone should step back and allow the struggling person to develop the requisite skills and sense of autonomy. A kind person will be sensitive to that difference – and in noticing that difference will thereby be motivated to act in the appropriate ways. On this character-based approach, there is no way to specify in a particular set of circumstances what is the kind thing to do independently of the judgement of the kind person'

Johnathan Lear, quoted in Radical Help, Hilary Cottam, Virago 2018

3.3 What do we support people with? Some examples:

Due to the person-centred nature of this work it may feel that the range is limitless! However, there are overarching themes to this work and part of the reflective practice is to consider whether the things you are supporting people with match these themes.

Themes for one to one work:

Growing people's strength and capabilities: start by assuming people have their own agency and are capable of doing great things! People need support to increase their confidence and restore their faith in our own abilities. Building the courage to try again is a momentous step. You are there to support a person to create a sense of possibility, belief in positive change and be hopeful. Ultimately you are supporting people to find meaning in their life. A sense of purpose is fundamental to our lives and is what drives us forward

You will be supporting people to develop new ways of being, new habits and new vision. You do this through supporting action and not through providing information.

By doing and achieving people start to see the change that is possible, they can then accept the rationale for change and continue forward.

Changing mindset from one of scarcity to abundance: showing people and the communities they live in that they have a wealth of skills and strengths to share.

Supporting the development of relationships: 'you can't tickle yourself'. If people feel supported by strong human relationships change happens. This can be a slow process for the people we work with, but we have found that everyone has some form of connection that can be grown or enhanced. The ultimate goal is to grow natural friendships that work outside of any service delivery model. Social connections need to be authentic and made through shared interests not just some charitable wish to help another.

Bringing community and people together by encouraging reciprocity and participation: those who traditionally have received help, become the helpers, changing power dynamics and relationships and empowering people and the communities they live in to take back control

3.4 Level and type of support

- Understanding a person's starting point: The people you work with will be at different levels of motivation and have varying ideas on what their direction is. The starting point is to meet people where they are, find the spark, and work from there.
- Goal Setting: People can become 'stuck' when challenges seem insurmountable. This is why we end our first contact with setting goals. These don't have to be big goals and can be broken into small sticky steps. Celebrating and acknowledging the achievement of these goals is a great motivator, so if a person has gone to the shop on their own for the first time in 3 years pop a card in the post, make a big deal of it, congratulate them!
- The journey: When working with a person it can feel that you take two steps forward and three steps back. This is to be expected. Remember: change is a gradual, non-linear process with moments of triumph and failure. Most people move backwards at the very moment that they are really going forwards: the moment when we really see the challenge and start to take action is frequently an unstable one

Section 4: How Wiltshire CIL supports you

4.1 Interaction between our culture, structures and people

Wiltshire CIL is a User Led organisation; we are led by and work with disabled people to ensure everyone is able to live the life of their choosing as valued members of their community. Wiltshire CIL's values and culture support you to work

in relational ways. Our work is carefully constructed around three elements that continually interact with and influence each other:

- **Our culture:** the ideas and values that shape the way we work.
- **Our structures:** these emerge from the culture. We create roles, rules and processes that support the principles of our work. We continually evaluate whether these structures work for the people who work for, and with us. For example each of our areas of work is overseen by a co-production group, made up of people with lived experience and employees. They work together on strategy as well as providing feedback on what works best.
- **Our people:** influence the culture and structure by sustaining or changing them – through their ideas and actions. ‘People’ includes employees and the people they work with, both on a one to one basis and through our co-production activities.

In practical terms this looks like this:

- Learning culture: Permission to make calculated risks, mistakes, judgements and decisions
- Reflective practice: supporting your learning and development by reflecting on your work. This will be done through maintaining a reflective log. All reflective practice centres on the question **how is the work I am doing supporting people to live their version of a good life?** (discussed below)
- Team support and regular supervision. Supervision will include discussion of your reflective practice
- Making your work process and paperwork light so that you can spending 80% with person or in the community and 20% on admin
- Referral process: meeting the person not the label we don't ask for any prior information on the person including any diagnosis. We only ask whether there is a lone working risk. This is because diagnostic labels can mean that you have preconceptions of the person which will make it difficult to hear who the person thinks they are and develop a relationship.
- Setting no limits in terms of length of intervention and people aren't discharged so can re-connect when needed. This makes service responsive and means you can frame the exit as positive 'you don't need us anymore' vs 'the service has run out'
- Scaffolding independence and personal agency - supporting the person's ability or readiness to act by reducing level of support
- Working with the wider team at Wiltshire CIL this includes people with lived experience who provide support, knowledge and guidance. As part of your induction you will also receive the Make Someone Welcome and disability equality awareness sessions delivered by our user engagement team
- Training We offer training in Mental Health First Aid and Motivational Interviewing BUT training comes with a health warning: there are lots of training options out there and lots of tools you can use to support people to think about change. This

can end up feeling overwhelming and get in the way of the intuitive nature of this work. Put simply, you can end up being so busy thinking of what tool to use that you stop properly listening and engaging with the person. We believe you have the skills to do this work already! The training helps you to understand these skills and learn to use them mindfully.

4.2 Safeguarding

We want you to be safe in your work. Here are some key guidelines:

- Trust your instinct: if a situation doesn't feel right, then leave
- Always follow the lone working policy, always call in after a visit
- Remember: We aren't a crisis service, in fact, this way of working won't work for people in crisis as they won't be able to look forward but will need to focus on their immediate recovery. This means:
 - o Mobile phones are turned off at 5pm
 - o Out of hours message states that if it is an emergency then the person will need to call 111 or 999
 - o No out of hours visits unless prearranged e.g. person is attending a club for the first time
- Take any threatening situation seriously and report. Examples of situations:
 - o threats from client to harm themselves or others
 - o disclosure of information that may impact negatively on others
 - o home visits where you have felt unsafe
 - o incidents that you have had to report to another organisation
 - o threats to workers
- If person discloses information which you believe is a safeguarding issue discuss with them that you will have to report to either adult social care on 03004560111 or their GP surgery
- Provide information on relevant mental health emergency contacts e.g. Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership, Samaritans

4.3 Self-care and reflective practice

There is lots of evidence that supporting people using this relational approach can have an impact on the worker. The impact can be quite subtle, even down to 'mirroring' behaviours that are witnessed.

In order to grow skills and manage the impact of the one to one work you will:

- Keep a reflective log, this is to be done after each visit, it can be kept short but will provide a basis for personal and team development
- Use the question: how has my work supported the person to live their version of a good life? Keep notes on the soft skills you have used, the relationship dynamic and progress towards goals
- Use team meetings and supervisions to discuss issues

- Stay in contact with team via text and our WhatsApp group
- Adhere to WCIL workplace mental wellbeing policy
- Don't do visits last thing on a Friday and take it home with you. Always debrief either formally or informally

Section 5: Resources for this work

In developing our work we have been really inspired by many different people. Special mention and thanks go to Gail Mann, who worked with us when researching her PhD and who has co-written this training manual, converting her research into practical guidance.

We have also been inspired by Hilary Cottam's book 'Radical Help' by Hilary Cottam, London, Virago, 2019, 320 pp., ISBN-13: 978-0349009094, ISBN-10: 0349009090 (paperback)

Finally, our work is informed by all of our co-production activities, you can find the reports for these here: <https://www.wiltshirecil.org.uk/my-life-my-experience/> and here: <https://www.wiltshirecil.org.uk/the-imaydit-project/>

Links below are not exhaustive but are things we have found useful! We have divided into categories for ease of use.

| | |
|--|---|
| Motivational interviewing | There are lots of resources on this and a google search will help you find information. This video is a good one to watch before you read up about techniques, as talks about the spirit in which you should do MI: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=APPoKvTPhog |
| Strengths based approach: One to One working | https://www.scie.org.uk/strengths-based-approaches/videos/what-is-sba?utm_campaign=10105067_SCIELine%2011%20December%202018&utm_medium=email&utm_source=SCIE&utm_sfid=003G000002joteblAA&utm_role=Manager&dm_i=4O5,60L4B,P54SGG,NL0XD,1 |
| Managing violent and aggressive behaviours | https://www.nice.org.uk/about/nice-communities/social-care/quick-guides/reducing-the-risk-violent-and-aggressive-behaviours |
| Recovery Model | https://www.slideshare.net/revanslacey/the-recovery-model |
| Importance of relationships | https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2021/mar/24/the-social-biome-how-to-build-nourishing-friendships-and-banish-loneliness |

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|---|--|
| Coaching and acknowledging trauma | https://www.coachesrising.com/podcast/becoming-a-trauma-sensitive-coach-with-david-treleaven/ |
| The perils of over diagnosis in mental health | "BBC Radio 4 - Start the Week, Defining mental illness" https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000tv12 |
| Asset based community development | Sustainable community development: from what's wrong to what's strong Cormac Russell TEDxExeter https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a5xR4QB1ADw |