

Funding that also encourages innovation

A decade ago a GP faced a growing problem in primary care. Demand was growing and resources lagging. Patient time was being squeezed.

Behind some appointments there was anxiety; not from a medical condition but loneliness and disconnection.

Dr Helen Kingston was one of many who wished community engagement could be prescribed as an antidote to disconnection.

Helen felt approaches might be upended. Not only professional healthcare input but sustainable caring by the community also.

There should be connection to services and activities for patients, with time to introduce them and to follow up. There needed to be connectors!

Helen had the outline of a project in her head but needed the right context to do it. Frome

Medical Practice in Somerset became that in 2014.

Like Whitby, Frome is a town on its own and with its own care framework. Frome was Helen's opportunity to put ideas into practice, with funding that encouraged innovation.

Dr Helen Kingston engaged the right person to help her design the project infrastructure manage development and implementation.

A start had already been made on collating a directory of services and activities for patients. Online and on the doctors' desks and the Frome Health Connectors (akin to Whitby's new GP Link Workers).

The real innovation at community level was to welcome and equip volunteer Community Connectors that now number 1000+

Frome Community Connectors simply cross paths with others in everyday life. Just doing normal



activities like shopping, using the bus, attending a meeting or going to the pub (in normal times)

A Community Connector may cross the path of someone who

perhaps evidences a problem or concern. Employing common sense they may help resolve a small issue on the spot or use the online directory to signpost the

person to appropriate assistance.

Frome established pop-up cafes in commercial cafes. They are

called Talking Cafes and are at known times and places every week.

Conversations can be about anything, in side groups if necessary, or be for a personal chat for some help with a Community Connector.

It's all showing simple compassion. That is why the overall Frome project (including administrations, the voluntary sector and services) became known as the Compassion Project. In a compassionate community.

Results were striking. As intended people benefitted but over time so did the NHS and the ambulance service with 25% fewer annual A&E emergency trips compared to elsewhere.

What about Whitby?

For 18 months Frome's project

was tracked in Whitby through the good offices of Frome Men's Shed, set up 6 years ago at the same time the Compassion Project started.

Last November there was a three day visit to Frome to see for ourselves.

Whitby Community's Compassion Project, on similar lines, has been in development on paper since early this year.

It's now time to move ahead on the ground. Whitby Community's Compassion Project will begin with three initial vanguard initiatives probably in Lythe/Sandsend, Sleights and Robin Hood's Bay.

The project will then spread into Whitby and across the district.

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