

Whitby Opinion & Community

Column – how Whitby can emulate Frome’s successful model

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Putting heart into the community

We are an increasingly divided society. Brexit has polarised us in a political football match – winner, loser and no apparent wish for a draw either on the pitch or in the crowd.

A tribal game with consequences. This millennium we’ve faced multi-faceted change at an unprecedented rate and the danger is we are losing the collective stabilising experience of the past.

I’ve been privileged to work with organisations like Totally Socially and NYCC Stronger Communities in their aims to build cohesive communities.

The banner text Stronger Communities has served well but does not in itself say how

that is achieved.

I want to propose another word that has helped transform notable communities in UK already. Compassion.

Thus, the Compassionate Community. Does it sound just sentimental? Far from it!

Sympathy for a needy neighbour isn’t enough, but it’s a start. Empathy, standing in the shoes of a person with understanding, still isn’t enough.

It is individual compassion that takes the big stride into an action to help a person. Organisations, structures and policies offer some scaffolding to support acts of “effective kindness” but doing it always comes down to individuals.

This is the experience in the Sheds. Their strength lies in compassion member to member and particularly



Showing compassion is a big step in helping someone in need

to newcomers, not in the DIY skills exhibited or the organisation.

It’s experience in all successful people facing initiatives in Whitby.

The Compassionate Community evidenced in Frome and Fleetwood emphasises compassion at the 1:1 level.

There are things going on in Frome (equivalent to our Sheds, beach sweeps, family support and children’s work) but Frome’s simple device is so-called Community Connectors – 450 suitable volunteers with some basic initial training.

They will befriend but

their role is to compassionately do something – maybe sometimes just responsibly passing on a need for others to handle.

Community Connectors are Frome’s success and they do it willingly.

So, who took the first step? A Frome GP with others supporting.

She perceived the growing difficulty of health services coping without some radical change.

The result from bottom level, small, manageable compassionate interventions has been a 30% reduction in emergency ambulance admissions over three years, against a regional increase of a similar scale!

Think what that means to health service budgets.

Two weeks ago, BBC news featured Fleetwood with a very similar story to Frome.

You may have seen it.

I believe that Whitby, with some similarities to Frome, could and should assess the evidence.

Two or three of us plan to visit Frome very shortly to speak to movers and shakers there face to face.

It seems a heart-filled game changer.

The good news is that some of the infrastructure Frome had to put in place already exists for Whitby, such as a directory of agency and voluntary services and clubs. We’ve a strong trust network between many volunteer-led initiatives and point-of-delivery agency services.

There’s glue!

Please Google ‘Frome Compassionate Community’ to find links or you can access on www.whitbysheds.co.uk in a recent post.

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