

# Compassion is contagious



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## If this were Just a Minute I'd be challenged on repetition.

In April 2018, two and a half years ago, I wrote an Opinion piece on the very same topic.

It described an initiative in Frome, Somerset I'd learnt about from national media. It was the 2013 brainchild of a GP.

The purpose was to reinforce community compassion and engage ordinary people in doing so manageably.

Compassion has been a critical success factor in the NHS and the care sector for many years.

*"It's not what you do but the way that you do it".*

It appealed to me and some others because much of what the Men's Sheds I'm involved with (for women too) is concerned with relationships, banter and, indeed, compassion - not woodwork!

I highlighted two key elements in the Frome Compassion project.

First, knowledge of what was available to people to potentially benefit their wellbeing. Actions to help people feel better and more connected. Frome created a database.

Second, a significant pool (then 500 but now 1500) of volunteer Community Connectors. They were not rostered. Few ties therefore!

Community Connectors just carried on with everyday life ready to respond if they cross paths with someone with a concern, need or problem.

A Connector might resolve something simple on the spot. It might only need some reassurance. Commonly they will signpost to a service or group positioned to help with their particular need. It all depends!

It is not taking over, but taking time to talk through an issue.

*All part of compassion.*

The third element was not then apparent; regular "pop up" places to meet at different times in the week.

They are places (not clubs

to join) bringing people together for various reasons ad hoc to simply talk. Friendly host cafés (in non Covid-19 times).

Outcomes were amazing for people and services.

**30 months later, why return to the topic?**

*Whitby Community's own Compassion project is now being launched.*

Information was shared formally and informally suggesting the relevance of Frome's venture to Whitby. It was also posted on "My Town" in February as a suggestion.

Evaluation was assisted by Patrick Abrahams of Frome Men's Shed. He was involved near the beginning with Frome Medical Centre and other voluntary groups.

Last November a visit was made to see the project ourselves and report back.

Whitby GP Link Workers came on the scene publicly in January. Bridge builders to the community for patient referrals. Frome had the equivalent.

Quite unexpectedly a very welcome turn in events



happened. Whitby Community Alliance was formed just before lockdown, to provide mutual support in Whitby's voluntary sector.

Stronger Together in Whitby during Covid-19 became a welcome Facebook agent in food compassion engaging with businesses too.

A range of organisations

within and without the Community Alliance support the journey of Whitby Community's Compassion Project.

Among early supporters are two schools (Sleights and Eskdale), NYCC Stronger Communities Team and Mulgrave Benefice. Variety therefore. The door to helping is only just opening, *including for individuals.*

The initial focus will be preparation to establish community based vanguard pilots centred in Sleights, Sandsend/Lythe and Robin Hoods Bay.

Compassion is contagious. Catch it!

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