

DEVELOPING CIRCLES OF SUPPORT

Report of a workshop
held at King's Fund Centre

Wednesday, 14th June 1993

"It's unpredictable - you don't know what
will develop. So much happens though, it's
quite incredible."

INTRODUCTION

This workshop focused on progress being made in developing circles of support, but provided an opportunity for people working in other ways as well, to get together and share their experiences of building personal support networks.

This report is very brief - more an aide memoire for the people who attended -but is being distributed to everyone on our community building network in the hope that it will be of interest to them too.

A number of important and challenging issues came up - see page 6, which could form the basis for future workshops. We are planning at least one here at the King's Fund Centre next year. If any readers would be interested in hosting an event in their own area - working in partnership with us - we would be very pleased to hear from you.

We would also be interested to have any comments or suggestions on issues which you consider are most important to the development of the work.

Andrea Whittaker
October 1993

SUSAN PYNE'S CIRCLE

My circle of support has been going for four years. Mandy set it up. Originally I lived in a big hospital and didn't know many people.

It was quite hard starting the circle up. I moved out of hospital into a big hostel 'Longhills' where I wasn't treated very well. They wouldn't let me see my boyfriend Colin. He walked out of Longhills. That hurt me quite a lot. They wouldn't let Colin and me go on the bus. I was very unhappy.

I then moved to a house which I thought would be all right but it wasn't. I rang Mandy and told her I wasn't going to go there any more.

I didn't like the day centre. There was nothing to do. I tried another one but I didn't like that either. I liked it when it was an industrial workshop and I was earning money.

I started work with Mary in a charity shop - I liked that. One of my jobs at the moment is sewing - I do that on Mondays.

I have got engaged to Colin.

I wanted to study cooking at Henleaze but I wasn't allowed to go into the kitchen.

Irene helped me to get into college. I am doing a 2 year bakery course which is a vocational training course and I will get a certificate.

I have learnt how to use the phone, use a taxi, about money and banking and I have my own bank account and can use the cash dispenser machines. I also have my own cheque book.

Our circle meetings get together once every month or 6 weeks. We talk about everything. Sometimes we use our meetings to have fun i.e. go out for a meal, have some wine.

I live in a house in Hanham now. It's a lovely house and I am very happy there. I share it with Ray, Colin, Sarah, Malcolm, and Zoe. I do my own cooking and have dinner parties.

The most wonderful thing that's happened this year is that I've found my long lost family. I met my sister Anne after 33 years. A lot of them live in London.

Susan lost touch with her family when she was eight. She has always wanted to search for them so when the circle was set up, including her friends and her tutor, they started the search. They discovered that Susan had 13 brothers and sisters who all had families of their own - so she now can feel part of her very large extended family.

In January, on her birthday they had a family get-together with her circle supporters and had a great party. Also, in January, Susan saw her mother, just before she died. 'My legs were shaking, I couldn't walk down the stairs'. She kissed her mother and said hello. Shortly afterwards her mother died and Susan went to her funeral.

She is currently in the process of getting to know her 'new' family.

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PETER STEVEN'S CIRCLE

Peter's circle of support began 2 years and 2 months ago. It started with just his mother and Sister Josephine.

It now consists of Mandy, Ken, Chris (Bristol University), Bill (sometimes) (Bill explained that he works for Peter - sometimes!), Barry and Lynne.

When I lived in Sheppey, I was looked on as a 'nobody'. They told me when I could go out. Where I live now I am treated as an equal. They let me come and go as I please.

I am working as a part-time tutor in Redfield and I am at college in Kingswood on a 20-week course.

My circle has enabled me to go to the international People First conference in Canada this year.

With the support from circles, I now have two management roles - as Trustee on the Board of a Housing Association and as a founder member of People First in Bristol which has been going for 6 years.

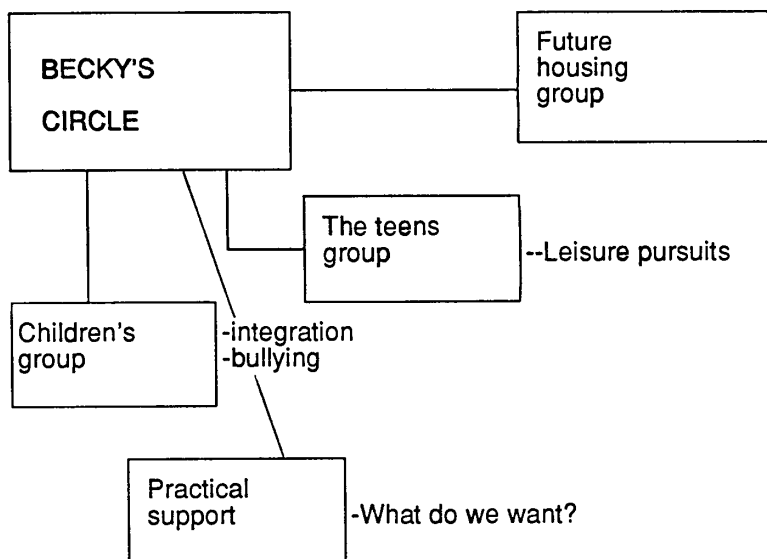
At circle meetings, we talk mainly about housing issues and getting employment.

Peter usually hosts the meetings and has pizza, cheesecake and wine. It's a forum for sharing ideas and good food and company!

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BECKY MCGUINNESS' CIRCLE

4.



Comments

Becky sometimes gets bored so doesn't go to all meetings.

How to invite some family members - but not necessarily everyone?
People don't always get on.

It's hard work, and painful for immediate family. It can be painful for other family members as well.

Can be problems when staff are there.

Admitting problems is hard.

Stick to close friends.

Individual discussions about how it's going

Some people don't like 'stupid' games and celebrating.

Emotional support is important.

Essential ingredients of a circle - FOOD!! FUN!!

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SALLY MORRIS' CIRCLE

Set up two and a half years ago - Initiated by Sheila after hearing about Circles and thinking about it.

Difficulties: Making sure Sally is involved, but also achieving aims.

Getting people to join the circle - feeling happy approaching people.

Sorting out what needs to be done (short and long term) eg: moving from family home, getting into mainstream school.

Contact with other circles. It's good to be part of a local circles network but involvement in several circles can be very demanding.

Circle has eight
members

Friends of family.

Service providers but not to Sally.

Teachers have been invited from both schools but have not so far attended.

Neighbours -children similar age and school.

Need to involve more people Sally's age.

Purpose:

Make better links in community.

Have more contact with people her own age.

Get other people to do the asking/fighting.

Getting access to mainstream education services.

Support - practical and emotional.

Comments

People have to do a lot of relationship building - a circle helps everybody in it. May be 'artificial' initially in order for it to develop at all.

People not understanding the concepts.

Need to be independent from service or there is a conflict between person and service.

Circle not necessarily right for everyone - some people would hate it.

Circles are not a SERVICE to be provided by people (eg: SS).

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ISSUES FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

The following is a summary of various issues which came up during the day, any or all of which deserve more detailed discussion on a future occasion.

- * **Who are the people in a circle?**
 - Can be mainly the care-giver's friends.
 - Family. How can we best involve family members?
 - Neighbours.
 - People in the person's peer group.
- * **How to find new people?**
 - The circle can share tasks - inviting people and offering hospitality.
 - People need help to do the asking - it can be hard to ask.
- * **How do you know whether the circle has had effect?**
 - Others may benefit later.
 - People have given practical and moral support.
 - You can still feel a failure, but you are sharing the burden.
- * **What do we want to get done?**
 - Planning - instead of reacting to crisis.
 - Getting into mainstream everything.
 - Find resources for support.
 - Balancing long-term and short-term aims.
- * **What's different about having a group of friends and having a circle?**
 - A circle develops its own culture.
 - You are often aiming for the person to be developing friendships.
 - It's unpredictable - you don't know what will develop - so much happens though, it's quite incredible.
- * **Developing the skill of sharing gifts and dreams.**
- * **Using the 'power' of a circle.**

* How do circles relate to services?

Service workers as members of circles.

How can the circle help staff and managers to change their views?

How best to involve staff.

* The role of facilitators/co-ordinators.

Facilitators get over-loaded.

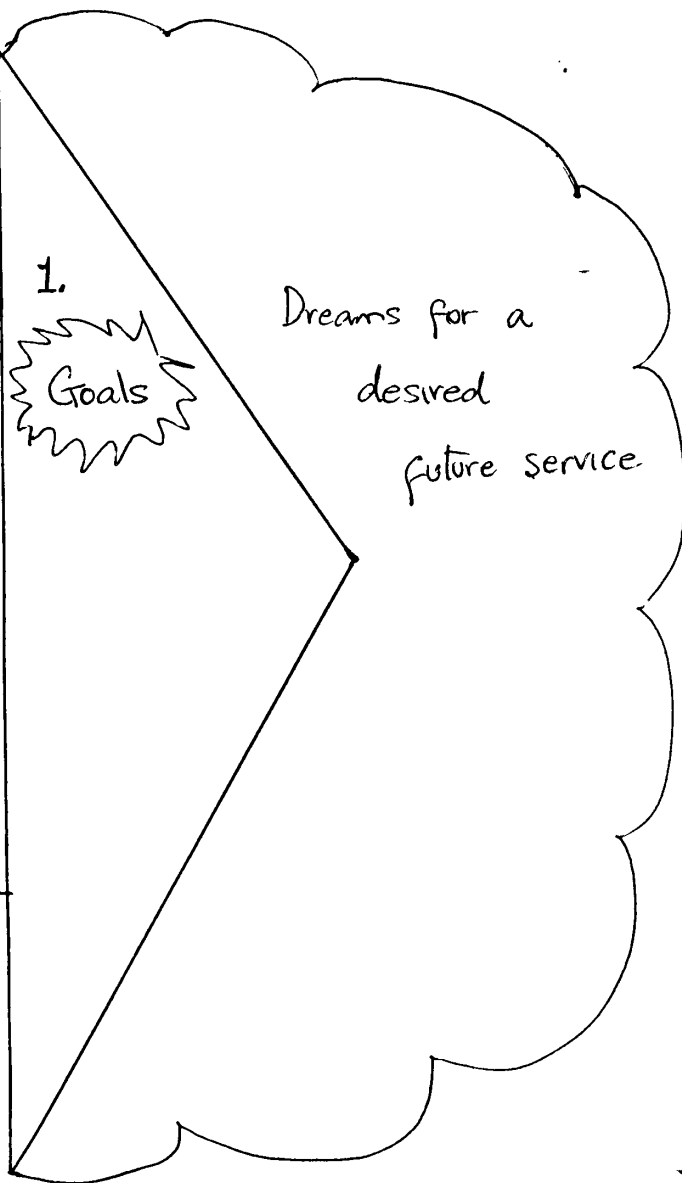
Issues around paid co-ordinators.

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LOOKING TO THE FUTURE - MAKING A PLAN FOR ACTION

Mandy Neville led us along this planning pathway.
The results are on the following pages.

2. Who is involved now? What resources are available now?	3. Who else do we need to enrol?	4. What do we need to get personally & organisationally stronger?	7. Who will support the first steps? How?	6. What are the first steps forward?	5. What are our priority goals? i.e. three months from now.
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- More contacts
- Start a circle for James
- Talking & sharing; keeping in touch
- Nicola's younger circle
- Publication from today
- Getting video finished & on TV
- More focus people in control
- Influencing people in power
- Serious fundraising
- Alex's circle thriving
- Supporting Springboarders to have strong links
- More people with learning difficulties in circles
- Find a house Kennedy likes
- Day/weekend like this (with Communitas!?) in Northwest & elsewhere
- Keeping circles safe
- Keeping in touch with Canadian People First



2. WHO IS INVOLVED NOW?

Mandy.
 Network.
 King's Fund Centre.
 Existing Circles
 John Cypher.
 Oliver Russell.
 Community "Bobby"/Youth
 Club.
 Communitas.

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE HAVE?

Enthusiasm/commitment.
 Cadbury Trust.
 Experience.
 Little bits of funding.
 Springboard - joint
 funding/Mencap.
 Power.
 Voting power.
 Surprise.
 Humour/fun.

3. WHO ELSE DO WE NEED?

Politicians.
 Community.
 Councillors.
 Media.
 People with money.
 Employers.

4. HOW WILL WE GET STRONGER?

Allowing people to help.
 Recognising strengths and
 weaknesses.
 Sharing ideas.
 Using gifts.
 Travelling and learning more.
 Winning some battles.
 Telling stories.
 Fundraising.
 Getting more paid workers.
 Being gentle with ourselves.

5. PRIORITIES - 3 months

Publication.
 Finish video.
 Springboard - publicity,
 newsletter, have produced
 leaflet.
 Produce first issue
 community newsletter.
 Lobby local MPs.

Have another circles network day,
 Nicola - follow up first contacts.
 Young man - get his own budget.

6. WHAT ARE THE FIRST STEPS -WHO WILL TAKE THEM?

Susie: Start facilitated communication.
Fundraising for network.

Andrea: Get community newsletter design brief to Minuche.

Andy: Make contact with Kingston-upon-Thames re. Mencap bid for Springboard type project.

Adrienne: Get on with Alex's circle.

Mandy: Support organisation of circles gathering on 24th July. Plan network meetings well in advance for travelling visitors.
Back Reuben's school change -inform others.
Serious fundraising. Keep working at network development.

Nikki: Approach local government for individual funding rather than statutory services or no service.
Build links with people involved in Springboard and those they would like to know.

7. WHO WILL SUPPORT THE FIRST STEPS?

Anne & Paula.
Colin, Rae, Zoe, Malcolm, Sara.

Louise - typing it.

Local government officers.

People in the circle, Mandy, Bill.

Loads of network members.

S.W. Mencap.

Mencap, Jane, King's Fund.

6. WHAT ARE THE FIRST
STEPS. WHO WILL TAKE THEM?

Nikki: Raise awareness
around learning difficulties in
Barnet as a community.

Peter: Get more people with
learning difficulties into the
network.

Approach People First.
Tell network how important
this is.

Janice: Understand links
between circles and better
services.

Sara: Help Ken find a place
to live he likes and make
sure he is the focus of the
services.

7. WHO WILL SUPPORT THE FIRST
STEPS?

Bill.

Andrea, KFC colleagues.

PARTICIPANTS

Nikki ASHBY
Tel: 081-203 6688

Springboard Project, c/o Barnet Mencap, 28
Church End Road, London NW4.

Roger BLUNDEN
Tel: 0222-576813

4 Baynton Close, Llandaff, Cardiff CF5 2NZ.

Lynne ELWELL
Tel: 0706-222922

Development Worker, Citizens First - North
West, Suite 23, Hardmans Business Centre, New
Hall Hey Road, Rowtenstall, Rossendale,
Lancashire BB4 6HR.

Bill LOVE
Tel: 0272-238137

Service Brokerage Project, Norah Fry Research
Centre, 32 Tyndall's Park Road, Bristol BS8
1PY.

Marianne MCGUINNESS
Tel: 0272-495844

8 Warren Road, Filton, Bristol.

Sara MASAGADY

c/o Louise Meynall, 99 Alpha Road, Cambridge
CB4 3DQ.

Louise MEYNALL

99 Alpha Road, Cambridge CB4 3DQ.

Sheila MORRIS
Tel: 0706-222922

Development Worker, Citizens First - North
West, Suite 23, Hardmans Business Centre, New
Hall Hey Road, Rowtenstall, Rossendale,
Lancashire BB4 6HR.

Mandy NEVILLE
Tel: 0272 568583

6 Stanbury Avenue, Fishponds, Bristol BS16
6AN.

Andy OXLEY
Tel: 071-454 0454

Mencap London Division, 115 Golden Lane,
London EC1Y OTJ.

Susan PYNE

51 Grange Avenue, Hanham, Bristol.

Janice ROBINSON
Tel: 071-267 6111

King's Fund Centre, 126 Albert Street,
London NW1 7NF

Maureen RUTTER
Tel: 071-700 5574

Development Manager, One-to-One, 404 Camden
Road, London N7 OSJ.

Jane SMOL
Tel: 081-203 6688

Springboard Project, c/o Barnet Mencap,
28 Church End Road, London NW4.

Michelle SAVAGE
Tel: 0223-317182

Cambridgeshire Social Services, Central
Office, Shire Hall, Cambridge CB3 OAP.

Peter STEVENS
Tel: 0272 628080

40 Holmes Grove, Henleaze, Bristol BS9 4EE.

Adrienne WOLF

15 Ladysmith Road, Penylan, Cardiff, South
Wales CF2 5DT.

King's Fund



54001000956360

