

# **Growing a Compassionate Community A Model for Action**



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## **Foreword - Dame Annette Brooke**

I have been extremely pleased to work with Peter over the last few years to 'grow' a local project in the Broadstone Community. Peter has a passion for working with the community and not having as his starting point 'the community needs this, so let's bring in outside people and provide it.' This is an important approach and ultimately results in a sustainable project albeit that the journey may be longer and involve hard work.

We all live within complex communities with numerous different and overlapping needs. Tackling just one aspect of isolation or alienation is helpful and rewarding but we could achieve even more within the wider concept of working towards a 'compassionate' community.

The 'whole' can be greater than the sum of the individual parts and in this case many individual projects being considered together can produce even greater benefits.

By working through the 'grass roots' Peter shows us how we can develop within the community a vision and ethos for caring and compassion.

Dame Annette Brooke

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## **Introduction by Peter Jones**

This publication seeks to outline key principles and practice in growing a compassionate community—one that is inclusive and responsive to the needs of the community.

This model also provides a needs led framework that seeks to empower and equip communities and individuals to grow a compassionate community.

So, be hopeful, be courageous as you step out of your comfort zone and journey with your community with vision and passion.

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## **What is a Compassionate Community?**

A compassionate community may be described as a community that identifies and seeks to be inclusive through engaging and reintegrating vulnerable and marginalised groups that reside in the local community.

Growing compassionate communities is primarily about a community working towards inclusiveness of all diverse groups and peoples. This concept seeks to grow communities that are compassionate and that seek to include groups on the margins of the community by becoming sensitive to their needs and journey. A community may include rural and urban settings as well as prison communities.

It has a threefold process in terms of principles and practice:

- Share and pool best practice from within and without the community
- Provide peer support to empower communities to grow as a compassionate communities
- Promoting sustainability

The following framework illustrates this.

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## **A Framework for Growing Compassionate Communities.**

In order to grow a Compassionate Community there needs to be:

A pooling of best practice

Support for individuals and groups in their journey

A method to promote sustainability.

Within each of these there are key questions to ask yourself in your community's journey:

### **Pool Best Practice:**

- What works?
- Why it works?
- How it is delivered?

### **Peer Support:**

- What support is required?
- How is this delivered?
- Who does it?

### **Promoting Sustainability:**

- Who owns the process?
  - Is there consensus?
  - Is there multi agency support?
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The framework below illustrates how the various principles and practice work together and demonstrate a form of interdependence within the process of growing a Compassionate Community.



The model above is underpinned by key principles. These are outlined in the next section.

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## **Principles of Practice.**

Everything needs to be seen and understood within its own local context. The context within every community will be individual and unique. Understanding your local context will inform both the process and the journey of the community.

In order to engage with this model in a pragmatic way, there are three key components to the process. These are:

**The Listening Phase.** This involves listening to the people and to the community within the local culture in terms of its needs, aspirations and priorities. Listening is central to effectively understand the community. This can be done through focus groups, questionnaires and through informal and formal conversations. This will help to inform the community agenda.

**The Connecting Phase.** This process of listening naturally leads in to connecting with the people and the culture. This is through meeting with people, groups and connecting with their understanding and agendas. The process of meeting people where they are is central to effective listening and connecting with the culture. It is informal and leads naturally into increased engagement.

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Within this process the planning and next steps can take place. Moreover a growing consensus can begin to emerge of ownership of not only the process but also of the vision. The Connecting Phase naturally leads into

**The Engaging or Conversational Phase.** During this phase you will be engaging with the community, building collaborations and networks. Conversations will be ongoing and organic in nature. This part of the process help to shape the agenda as well as providing the energy to deliver the project

In practical terms this is a grass roots approach to growing a compassionate community, sometimes referred to a bottom-up approach. ie, it starts where the community is and develops from here, as opposed to imposing agendas and structures onto the community or individual.

*You need to journey **with** the community;  
it is **their** journey.*

*You need to immerse yourself in their culture and  
context.*

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What is pivotal throughout this process is to build a consensus through conversation and dialogue with the people and culture in which you seek to serve, or are present in. This process of emerging consensus can be achieved in a number of ways through the key principles.

This process aims to build in sustainability and ownership of the project / process as well as an emerging structure and accountability.

### **Practicalities.**

Questionnaires can be developed and used to assess the relevant needs, priorities and elicit the view of community and / or businesses. For example what are the views, agendas or priorities of the community? Who are the marginalised groups in the community?

Follow up with a community meeting. The listening process is ongoing and can be followed up with community meetings in order to get an overview of the community needs and agendas. These can then be further refined and given focus and direction.

Meet people where they are. Follow up the questionnaires with ongoing conversations and

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dialogues, both formally and informally (ie in the local shops, businesses and community groups)

It is key to understand the culture you are engaging with and residing in, in order to effectively grow a compassionate community.

In journeying with a community there are a number of pitfalls to be avoided. These include the temptation to believe you know what is best for the community. This may be referred to as mindreading and is often the case with large organisations external to the community. Interventions can often be imposed on a community, assuming that is what is needed. Consequently there is no ownership from within the community and the intervention is often shallow ie it has no roots and can be alienating to the people it seeks to serve.

By growing a Compassionate Community from within it allows the community to both own and drive the process in meeting local needs. This is a central tenet of growing something new and unfamiliar. This ownership seems to provide a framework for sustainability and future growth. It creates sustainability whilst allowing the vision to evolve organically and naturally.

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## **Action planning**

In order to effectively deliver your project there needs to be an agreed framework to work within. Firstly aims need to be identified. What do you want to achieve within the time frame? From this, an Action Plan then identifies how you will achieve the aims. The Action Plan can usefully be delivered using the themes identified below:

- Identified Work Stream. ie which aim does this piece of work address? This is the key theme identified by the community.
- What needs to be done in order to achieve the aim?
- How is this work to be carried out and delivered?
- Who is going to do it?
- What will it look like when it is finished? ie Criteria for Success.
- When will it be completed?

Appendix 1 gives an example of how an Action Plan may be set out.

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The change needs to be managed and continually reviewed by the local community and the working group. The action plan process provides a framework to monitor and measure, not only progress, but also to identify emerging needs and agendas.

## **Summary of the Key Principles and Practice of Growing a Compassionate Community**

The key principles associated with growing a compassionate community:

- Take a grass roots approach.
  - Move forward by consensus
  - Create collaborations and partnerships
  - Keep listening to the community
  - Develop tools to facilitate this such as questionnaires and focus groups
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## **Case study.**

The context to this case study was a rural, village setting on the edge of a large conurbation that appears to lack any form of community cohesiveness and connectedness.

This particular project began with the creation of a small working group of interested people. These people were originally gathered as they had common interests and goals. In time this group provided both accountability and collective support to check out the direction of travel of the project.

The next stage was to agree the process of listening (the Listening Phase) and how this should be undertaken. It was agreed to develop and deliver a questionnaire to local businesses and shops in the community. The purpose of this was to inform the listening process and acquire some feedback and direction from the community as to its needs. From this it was hoped to identify a possible way forward with the concept of developing a compassionate community.

After this stage members of the community were invited to a larger meeting in order to elicit feedback as

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well as deepening the listening process (the Engaging Phase).

The next step then was to begin to introduce initiatives emerging from the consensus that were relevant to the identified needs of the marginalised group or groups within the community.

This process is not necessarily a linear one. But finding and discovering ways to listen to the community is always the starting point .


A good example to Listening is through focus groups. By inviting the local MP and District or Parish councilor this will add value to the process as well valuing the individuals you are connecting with .

## **Appendix.**

### **Action Planning Template.**

<b>Identified Work Stream (Aims addressed)</b>	<b>What needs to be done?</b>	<b>How?</b>	<b>Who?</b>	<b>Criteria for Success.</b>	<b>Targeted and Completion Date.</b>

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A GOOD TRAVELLER  
HAS NO FIXED PLANS  
AND IS NOT INTENT  
ON ARRIVING

— LAO TZU