

Christchurch Angels and the Five Ways to Wellbeing

The Christchurch Angels project is led by Christchurch Community Partnership, a local charity with aims to improve the quality of life of people in Christchurch.

Christchurch Angels reaches out to those in the community who live alone and don't have a network of family or friends to give help and support in times of crisis or illness. They provide practical, short term support and information and advice about other services available in the area. Customers are referred to the Angels through local medical practices. Support varies widely according to need - for example, it could be regular weekly contact during a time of bereavement or helping with small household tasks, such as posting a letter or changing a light bulb following an operation.

Each individual Christchurch Angel is a volunteer and the project is funded by Dorset Community Foundation, Christchurch Borough Council, the Dorset Clinical Commissioning Group and Sovereign Housing. Christchurch is a community with England's highest concentration of pensioners living alone and one in six residents are over 75, almost twice the national average. Of the 197 clients helped to date by the Christchurch Angels, 92% are 60 or over, of which 42% are over 90.

The service was recognised in 2013 as the winner of the prestigious NHS Alliance Acorn Award for "Making a Difference".

Connecting people

The project connects clients to trained volunteers who provide help and practical support. After referral, the coordinator will carefully match each client to a volunteer who can give them the help they need. For example, a recently widowed lady of 82 who had moved down to be near her daughter a few years ago, lost her to cancer and is now living in an area where she knows no-one. An Angel is now taking her to the Widows Club and the Women's Institute to support her to have a better social life.

An 85-year-old lady without a bus service was referred. An Angel took her to the bank to sort out a lost ISA, helped her join the Widows Club and accompanied her for the first few times until she felt comfortable using a taxi service.



The organisation also produces a directory of information and support services available locally, so that users can connect to other support available in the community.

"The volunteer got on with Mum very well. She was excellent, a lovely lady and a perfect match for Mum. I am so grateful."

Keep Learning

An important focus for the Angels is supporting clients with the use of IT. A 91-year-old gentleman who was very lonely and isolated, and missed social interaction loved chess, singing and music. All his family were working or living abroad. Not only did the Angels help him find a local chess club and a community singing group, but they also helped him to use Skype in order to keep in contact with his friends and family. He is also being collected by car to attend a local PROBUS Club (for retired business and professional people). He says all this has changed his life.

The Angels were able to put one client who became housebound suddenly after an illness into contact with organisations who run courses online. This has given her a real uplift and she is continuing to learn as her condition worsens, but her mind remains stimulated.

“In particular, my volunteers are providing really good company and stimulation and are a tremendous source of information about my technology problems – computer, radio and phones. I very much look forward to their visits.”

Being Active

A widowed lady of 79 with vision impairment, lost confidence after her husband had died and wanted to use the bus again on her own. A Christchurch Angel helped her on several bus trips and helped her to become confident enough to use the bus service on her own again and regain her independence.



Christchurch Angels has helped by taking clients on short walks, enabled a customer to go out on a mobility scooter, helped with the purchase of an electric wheelchair, helped with simple exercises and restarting physiotherapy and even helped a customer buy comfortable shoes to enable them to walk.

“I cannot tell you how much my day to day life has improved since [an] Angel came into it 3 months ago.”

Taking notice

Befrienders do this informally. As they start to chat and get to know someone, conversation develops and for example, if they are out for a walk, they may talk about the weather, the seasons and the views. Talking also helps people notice and express their own feelings- are they feeling sad or happy or lonely. Are they aware of whether they are comfortable or hot or cold? Often building confidence provides the impetus for clients to get out and to start taking notice of the world again.

An elderly Yorkshire man in his 80s who had lost his wife was very lonely. He could not go out due to breathlessness and poor eyesight. A male Angel, who happened also to be from Yorkshire, has befriended him. He now has a new lease of life, is more confident and has started to play the piano.



“Christchurch Angels has changed my life! I don’t know what I would do without them.”

Giving

The project sees itself as the community helping the community, with both recipient and donor benefitting from the experience. There is evidence to support the view that good health and well-being of the individual is inseparable from the good health and wellbeing of the communities to which they are engaged.

The project provides many opportunities for volunteers to give. The public also has a chance to give, for example community lunches and birthday celebrations have been funded through Waitrose Good Causes and 4.com.

Two part-time staff run the project but all of the one to one support of vulnerable and isolated patients is done by volunteers. To date volunteers have supported over 197 clients, since the organisation's inception in September 2013.

As the service offered is short term befriending, with an average support time of 3 months, the number of volunteers at any time fluctuates between 25 and 30. Volunteers attracted to the service are often retired and like the flexibility of the short term as it allows for holidays and time off to support family.

"I like being of help, providing friendship.....to help/put something back into the community."



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Bournemouth CVS and Poole CVS are working with Public Health Dorset to support local voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations to deliver better public health outcomes. This project is to help the sector measure and demonstrate the impact their work has on health and wellbeing in their communities. These case studies are designed to highlight the varied and substantial impact VCSE organisations have on the Five Ways to Wellbeing. The Five Ways to Wellbeing is a tool comprising of a set of five, evidence based public health indicators about the kinds of activities that individuals can do that are known to improve their health and wellbeing: Connect, Be Active, Take Notice, Keep Learning and Give.

To learn more about the work of the Bournemouth and Poole VCSE sector please contact Liz Cooper 01202 682046, liz.cooper@poolecvs.org.uk

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