POSTER ABSTRACT

Compassionate, helpful, neighbourly – a connected community that cares

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Introduction: Compassionate Inverclyde (CI), a citizen led collaboration, is transforming societal attitudes and behaviours around loneliness, isolation, death, dying and bereavement.

Short description: A growing, dynamic, and self organising social movement of compassionate citizens who care for each other: fundraisers, volunteers, befrienders, ‘no one dies alone’ companions, community cafes, schools, businesses and neighbourhoods.

Aim and theory of change: CI enables ordinary people to do practical things for ordinary people, tapping into their desire to be kind, helpful and neighbourly, compassionate and caring skills. Local engagement events identified what people most valued about Inverclyde (Neighbourliness; Helpful; and Compassionate) and generated ideas for actions across the life stages led by volunteers with mentoring from the programme lead. Actions build social capital and affirm that caring for one another at times of crisis and loss is is everyone’s responsibility.

Targeted population and stakeholders: CI is implemented in a population of 80,000 with high levels of poverty, unemployment and single occupancy households. Volunteers work with integrated health and social care services, voluntary sector organisations, private care providers, hospice, schools, college, police, prison service and local businesses.

Timeline: 150 people pledged to make Inverclyde a more Compassionate Community in the initial public event. The programme was officially launched January 2016.

Highlights: 70 trained companions support people in their last hours of life, with another 25 recruited; 45 helpers sourced food and wellwishes from the community, filled and delivered Back Home Box to 1115 patients returning home from hospital alone; 281 people completed a wellbeing programme; 14 companions are trained as urgent responders for frail older people; a volunteer led Community support hub welcomes the socially isolated; Public events promoting compassion, celebrating life and commemorating deceased loved ones are an integral part of the civic calendar; workplaces have adopted compassionate illness and bereavement policies.

Comments on sustainability: Apart from a programme lead post, all resources are community donations or resources in kind. Empowering volunteers builds social capital and a sustainable model that is not dependent on statutory services.
Comments on transferability: The community development and citizen empowerment approach offer lessons for community wellbeing initiatives and patient and public involvement in services.

Conclusions: CI has built community resilience through neighbourhood networks and relationships with people who care and can help, enabling and equipping compassionate citizens to offer support at times of crisis. People facing bereavement, loneliness, and survivorship access compassionate support that improves wellbeing, irrespective of age, condition or socio-economic background.

Discussions and Lessons learned:
Development support from a trusted, compassionate, authentic leader is critical.
Develop a strong cross sector guiding coalition that provides permission
Collective impact from collaborative leadership at all levels around a shared purpose
Start with conversations about what matters most to people
Find creative ways to make it easy for ordinary people to provide support
Empower citizen volunteers to have an equal voice
Nurture citizen leaders by peer support and reflective practice supervision.
Use social media as a practical communication, coordinating and self organising tool

Keywords: compassion; care; volunteers; community