

About Advocacy

The Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance Magazine

Summer 2013



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Editorial

Welcome to the summer issue of *About Advocacy* which has the theme of 'connecting'. The initial article should, hopefully, explain all. We don't often do themed issues and so it would be useful to know what you think or if you have any ideas for future themes, so do, as always, feel free to get in touch and let us know. Also, we are updating our mailing list so would appreciate an e-mail to enquiry@siaa.org.uk if your contact details have changed. We normally have spare copies so if you'd like more to leave in a reception area for people to take, or simply more for your colleagues, do let us know. Finally and as always... enjoy...

Vincent Finney
Editor

Next issue:

Please contact enquiry@siaa.org.uk if you have content for a future edition.

Thank you:

The SIAA would like to thank all the individuals who have contributed to this magazine.

Printed in Scotland using FSC certified paper and vegetable-based inks. Cover image by Vladgrin / istockphoto.

Disclaimer:

The views expressed in this newsletter are those of the individual authors and should not be taken to represent those of the Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance.

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The Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance
Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation
Scottish Charity No. SC033576

An electronic copy of this magazine can be downloaded from our website: www.siaa.org.uk.



'Only Connect...'

Vincent Finney, SIAA

"Only connect! That was the whole of her sermon. Only connect the prose and the passion, and both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its height. Live in fragments no longer. Only connect, and the beast and the monk, robbed of the isolation that is life to either, will die."

— E.M.Forster, *Howards End*

A few months ago I found myself realising that what linked an apparently random selection of books I'd just read was the theme of connecting (or a lack of connectedness). Around that time were a number of news stories of people being left to die alone, or being forgotten about on trolleys in hospital corridors. Also, numerous reports and articles disproving the lies about people in poverty told by the media and certain politicians, only for them to continue promulgating those very lies without even a hint of shame. Blame or scapegoating happens when there is an 'other' in society and there is an 'other' in society when we are a disconnected society.

Feeling disconnected can lead to loneliness and social isolation which in turn can result in physical as well as psychological ill-health. The initial articles in this magazine explore the research which backs up this theory and the importance

of 'connecting' for recovery from mental ill-health. Also, articles on the contribution both independent advocacy and befriending have to people feeling more connected. It seems obvious to me that where we live plays a part in how connected we feel and so an article exploring co-housing and community living is also included. Finally, to finish on an inspirational note, an article exploring how we might be more connected and change the world!

More could have been included. A spiritual connection (in its broadest sense) is important for many and the charity 'Faith in Older People', who recently produced an IRISS Insight on spirituality and older people, is featured, in brief, on the back cover. Another gap is, perhaps, connecting with nature, which can have positive psychological benefits, as demonstrated by the popularity of projects like SAMH's Redhall Garden in Edinburgh. Stories too can help people feel connected and in the previous issue of this very magazine we featured an article on the Living Voices project, taking poetry, stories and song into care homes. The many stories of people's journey to recovery on the website of the Scottish Recovery Network demonstrate the power stories can have for people.

But what does all this have to do with advocacy? As I hope the articles on independent advocacy will demonstrate, advocacy is surely, in essence, about connecting people—with one another and with society; that, as part of the broader picture covered in this issue of *About Advocacy*, independent advocacy has a role to play in a more connected society.

Social Isolation, Health and Society

Sandra Brown, Befriending Networks

“The assets-based approach to health currently being promoted by the NHS is built upon the idea that health is a matter both of individual resilience and of community cohesion. In such an approach, social isolation is a significant barrier to achieving both of these”

—Gerald McLaughlin, Chief Executive, Health Scotland (speaking at Befriending Networks Annual Conference 2011)

Increasingly, there is an awareness that social connectedness—the set of personal relationships or networks which a person has by virtue of their contacts with family, friends, neighbours, colleagues or other acquaintances—is a vital element of health and wellbeing. Evidence of the negative consequences of social isolation for physical and mental health fuels the growing conviction that interventions aimed at improving the connectedness of isolated people of all ages and backgrounds can ultimately have a positive impact on a wide range of key social issues, including promoting community cohesion, enhancing employability and reducing inequality, deprivation, and drug and alcohol misuse. Promoting connectedness is also seen as fundamental to the current imperative of relieving pressure on public services.

A meta-analytical review published in 2010 concluded that the influence of social relationships on risk for mortality was comparable with well-established risk factors for mortality such as obesity or lifelong smoking. More recently these findings were echoed in the results of a longitudinal study led by University College London, involving 6,500 people, which found “Socially isolated individuals are at increased risk for the development of cardiovascular disease, infectious illness, cognitive deterioration, and mortality.”

Social connectedness is thought to act as a protective factor for physical health both in terms of inhibiting the development of habitual health-risk behaviours (such as excessive drinking, over-eating, smoking or drug abuse) and by exercising a monitoring function in cases of rapid development of acute symptoms. In both cases it is clear that social connectedness could have a significant impact on the use of both routine and emergency health services, although empirical data on this key area is not yet available.

Health, however, is not just physical. The widely-used World Health Organisation definition refers to mental and social wellbeing as well as to physical wellbeing, and the causative link between social isolation and mental health problems and suicide is well described. Recent studies have found that improving social connectedness through befriending can have a significant effect on depressive symptoms. Indeed, evidence of the role of social disconnectedness as a risk for suicide and the potential of enhancing social connectedness as a suicide prevention measure



Befriending Networks

underlines the case for treating social isolation and loneliness as major public health issues.

Interestingly on this point, the University College London study notes the difference between social isolation (“...the objective and quantifiable reflection of reduced social network size and paucity of social contact”) and loneliness (“the psychological embodiment of social isolation, reflecting the individual’s experienced dissatisfaction with the frequency and closeness of their social contacts or the discrepancy between the relationships they have and the relationships they would like to have.”) Despite this, however, the study concludes that both social isolation and loneliness are correlated with reduced life expectancy.

The Campaign to End Loneliness also distinguishes between loneliness as a subjective, negative and unwelcome feeling, directly related to psychiatric and emotional problems and social isolation as an objective state, measurable in terms of contacts, interactions and social networks (which does not necessarily carry any information about how people feel about this situation). This research also highlights the important distinction between ‘transient’ loneliness — experienced by most people at some point following a change in life circumstances — and ‘chronic’ loneliness, an on-going, enduring and potentially problematic experience in terms of impact on overall health.

As with the link between social isolation and physical health, however, empirical evidence is largely still in the process of being generated, so there are as yet few tangible records of the link

between social connectedness and mental health and wellbeing. One piece of evidence which we do have access to is a pilot study conducted by Befriending Networks and the University of Edinburgh in 2009. The study used the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing (WEMWBS) scale to measure the impact on isolated individuals of having a volunteer befriender over a three-month period. Those people who were matched with a befriender in the period saw an average increase in their WEMWBS score of 5.8 while those who were not saw their scores fall by an average of 0.6.

“Social connectedness is thought to act as a protective factor for physical health.”

Positive results, then, but many more such studies will be required if we are to build the current theoretical awareness of the impact of social connectedness on health and on society into a robust body of irrefutable evidence which could ultimately be turned into investment in a sustainable network of services to ensure the continued improvement of social connectedness across all vulnerable groups in our communities.

For more information see
www.befriending.co.uk and
www.campaigntoendloneliness.org.uk
All references cited are available on request to the editor.



Connectedness and Recovery

Simon Bradstreet, Scottish Recovery Network

With our growing understanding of the nature and characteristics of mental health recovery it's increasingly clear that connectedness and recovery are inextricably linked. When we spoke with people across Scotland about their experiences as part of our Narrative Research Project, there was a strong message that the people around you and the relationships in our lives can be pivotal.

Many of the people involved described the importance of having people around you who got you—people who offered a degree of constancy, understanding and, perhaps above all, a sense of belief and hope when it was most lacking. People described the importance of constancy and trust that can be fostered through social connectedness. More widely there were many examples of how people found connectedness through a vast array of activities, pastimes and vocations that offered a sense of meaning and purpose which in turn supported recovery. A more recent large scale review of literature about the experience of recovery has powerfully backed up our own findings. In

reviewing 105 publications from seven countries the authors identified that connectedness was one of five essential ingredients for recovery (Leamy et al, 2011).

So far so obvious! On a purely instinctual level it would have been strange if the evidence had said anything different. Of course connectedness and relationships matter for recovery in much the same way as they matter for anyone to have a good quality of life but this does not necessarily mean that support for the development and maintenance of connectedness is a central aim of our mental health support system. Our NHS provided services are still largely dominated by an approach which is focused on treatments and, whether those treatments come in the form of medications or talking therapies, they are overwhelmingly focused on individuals and can fail to take account of our social circumstances or support networks. There are of course many exceptions to this generalised view but our recent experience with the Scottish Recovery Indicator tool, where services are encouraged to

seek views from informal carers, suggests that this is an area where there is considerable room for improvement.

So how might we move the importance of connectedness up the agenda? Well perhaps one driver for improvement may come from what seems like an unlikely developing alliance where two traditionally opposing viewpoints have found that they both agree that good relationships are key to mental health. In the past there has been little connectedness (to borrow a phrase) between the worlds of neuroscience and supporters of a social model of mental health. However, increasingly sophisticated brain scanning methods are consistently demonstrating the negative impact on brain development of a lack of connectedness, particularly in early years. This new learning offers a scientific rigour to the arguments of those who have proposed a social model of understanding and responding to mental distress for many years.

So if the evidence for the importance of connectedness is so clear then who is best placed to support people with experience of mental health problems to maintain and develop social networks? Speaking at our recent National Gathering, Rachel Perkins suggested that rather than trying to ensure that mental health services take account of our whole life needs, including our relationships, that services should in fact become more specialised, less generalised and really step back from assuming a role of all round fixer.

Perhaps though given the importance of connectedness to us all, the approach should be one where all services have an awareness of

connectedness and respond appropriately. This might mean helping people take up existing opportunities out with the potentially confining world of mental health services. It seems obvious that social networks and connectedness might best be re-established in community focused services and environments and for this to happen more we need to reframe our responses and ensure we invest more in community based approaches which work with people in the wider context of their lives. This requires new relationships between services and people seeking support, and new ways of working which nurture and empower people to develop their connections with family, friends and community.

I'm passionately committed to the value of peer support in all its forms for recovery and can think of great examples where peer support workers, in part through sharing experiences, have been able to really effectively support people to take up community activities and make connections. There is something very powerful in peer worker's ability to share possibilities for a new and different future that I think means they could and should play a powerful role in a more connected future mental health support system.

References Leamy, M., Bird, V.J., Le Boutillier, C., Williams, J. & Slade, M. (2011) *A conceptual framework for personal recovery in mental health: systematic review and narrative synthesis*. British Journal of Psychiatry, 199:445–452
www.researchintorecovery.com

For more information visit
www.scottishrecovery.net



Independent Advocacy — Connecting People

Independent advocacy connects people in different ways. For some their independent advocate is the only person they are able to engage with. For others an advocacy group is a means of connection through shared experience.

Here we give three advocacy organisations the chance to share how their type of advocacy can help people stay connected.

Citizen advocacy

Citizen Advocacy is a freely given, one-to-one, long term relationship between a person who has often been excluded from typical community life and a person who is living an ordinary life in the community. The two people work together to promote a good life where the person who is excluded is able to make choices, contribute to society, have an identity, share ordinary places with others and belong in the community.

Robert, has a learning disability and hearing impairment, he was homeless and alcohol dependent and was arrested and charged a number of times whilst in the company of certain individuals. Being subject to Guardianship, Robert was moved into a residential unit with a curfew and 24-hour support staff (most of whom he did not like). He couldn't associate with the group of

people who had come to be his only friends, have access to certain areas in Edinburgh, or control of his money. On rebelling he was threatened with being moved to the State Hospital.

Sandra became Robert's Citizen Advocate and helped him to understand and question decisions being made on his behalf. Getting to know Robert, Sandra began to understand that he was lonely and desperate to be included and belong. His parents were dead, his remaining family had cut off all contact and he no longer had any friends. Robert began to trust and respect Sandra and their growing friendship played a very important part in his situation improving.

Robert still remains subject to Welfare Guardianship, but with Sandra's on-going support, he has been able to move into his own flat in the community where he no longer needs 24-hour support and monitoring. He has gone 5 years without consuming alcohol; manages his finances; volunteers at a local supermarket; has purchased a plot of land at the cemetery where his parents are buried; entertains friends at his flat and is arranging his first holiday abroad ...life for Robert is only beginning!

Sonya Bewsher, Powerful Partnerships — Citizen Advocacy for people with a learning disability in Edinburgh www.powerfulpartnerships.org.uk

One-to-one advocacy

We see advocacy helping children and young people to make and break connections with family, and with public services. Most of our work is with children who have been, or who may be, removed from their families.

At the stage where child protection processes are on-going, we often find that children feel unable to connect to any adult in their life. The confidence that children can find in independent advocacy often gives them the ability to connect first with the advocacy worker, and through that worker to the family members, carers and professionals who are part of their lives.

For those who have been removed from their families, connection with family members (contact) is often a major issue. Children and young people can use advocacy to get the legal decisions or the social support which they need to enable them to make, or break off, connections with family members.

Much of our work is with children with disabilities or mental illness. Most have the advantage of school as a place to make and maintain connections with friends. For these children, the barriers to connecting with others can include isolation within or outwith school, including bullying, and the loss of connections on leaving school. Independent advocacy can help to challenge this exclusion, including situations where support and opportunities are limited or do not exist.

Simon Webster from Your Voice Advocacy which works with children & young people in North Lanarkshire www.urvz.org/whatwedo.htm

Collective advocacy

Collective advocacy enables people to get together to put forward their views about issues which affect them—in our case, issues around mental health treatment and care. We gather the views of people who use or have used the services of the Royal Edinburgh Hospital and ensure that hospital staff and management listen to and respond to them. To achieve this, we work in partnership with our colleagues in the NHS and over the years have become an accepted and respected part of the hospital community.

Most of our work is done by our volunteers—people with lived experience of using mental health services. This is particularly invaluable for making a meaningful connection with patients on the wards who feel able to tell our volunteers what they really think.

Our volunteers participate in meetings, working groups, seminars, conferences within the hospital, the NHS and the wider community—connecting with people at all levels and from all walks of life. Currently we are involved in celebrating the hospital's bicentenary, and in planning for the long-overdue new hospital.

But perhaps most important of all, our volunteers connect with each other, forming lasting friendships and support networks and sharing experiences which helps us all so much during good times and bad times.

Maggie McIvor from the Royal Edinburgh Hospital Patients' Council www.rehpatientscouncil.org.uk



Befriending

Liz Watson and Alison Chapman, Befriending Networks

"I have benefited from [the befriending service] in so many ways and it has made a huge difference to my life. Both of my befrienders have helped me to develop into a person that I once didn't think possible. I am now far happier and much more confident. I am comfortable with the person that I am and unbelievably, I actually like myself! I feel as though I can be true to myself and now realise that I don't have to pretend to be someone I am not in order to be liked. I don't think I can explain what a huge difference [the befriending service] has made to my life. I am now well on the road to recovery and I am not looking back!"

—Befriending service user, 2012

Befriending Networks is the umbrella body for befriending services in Scotland and beyond, supporting over two hundred organisations that in turn provide befriending support to people who are lonely or socially isolated.

Last year we launched the first Befriending Week, the theme of which is *Let's Tackle Loneliness*.

Befriending Week will be an annual event, every November, and its aim is to promote befriending services, celebrate the activities of thousands of volunteer befrienders, and raise awareness of the part befriending has to play in reducing social isolation and improving social connectedness. In 2012 we created a virtual 'wall' of befriending experiences on our web site, asking for contributions from across the country, and were overwhelmed by deeply moving submissions from people keen to share their befriending stories.

"I can do this, I can live. That is how I feel now".

Befriending offers a one-to-one relationship between a volunteer befriender and someone who would otherwise be socially isolated. Around the UK there are befriending projects that organise such support for children and young people, families, people with mental ill-health, people with learning disabilities, and older people, amongst many others. Generally the befriender and befriended will meet about once a



Befriending Networks

week for an hour or more, the match having been organised by the project co-ordinator, who then continues to provide support.

"It is the need of every single one of us, child or grownup, to feel wanted, to feel we belong and that we matter to someone else in the world."

— Michael Morpurgo

The results of befriending can be very significant. Sometimes, a befriender is the only person in their befriender's life who is not paid to be there, and this makes a vital difference to the relationship between them. A volunteer befriender, adequately supported and trained, can provide a lifeline to those who are socially isolated because of old age, learning or physical disability, long term health condition, sensory impairment, mental health issue, or who are experiencing isolation due to some other factor. Beneficiaries of befriending services span a huge cross section of society: what they have in common is a sense of being excluded from their community, and a need to be supported to connect in some way with the outside world. Befriending can provide them with a new direction in life, open up a range of activities and lead to increased self-esteem and self-confidence.

"Lonely and isolated, I needed a helping hand. I needed a guide to get more social contact, social interaction and get more satisfaction out of life. A Befriender was the only one to help and encourage me to reach out to the world again."

With befriending the focus is on the quality of the relationship between the befriender and the

person they support. The befriender is there first and foremost just for the befriender, to listen and to spend time doing what their befriender wishes. That could be a walk to the shops or round the block, a trip to the library or park, or a cup of tea and a chat indoors. Their role is not to move them from where they are to a place where somebody thinks they ought to be — rather, it is to help them be in a place where they want to be, spending time with them and valuing them as a human being.

"My befriender has been wonderful — she is an inspiration and has inspired me like no-one ever has..."

Those who are involved in befriending — as a volunteer, befriender, family member, friend, referral agency, GP, social worker, etc. — know how powerful a befriending relationship can be, but outside of this, there is a general lack of understanding of what befriending really is and what impact it can have. Befriending Networks provides a unified voice for its members and works with them to raise awareness of what befriending is and does, and will keep on doing so until it is universally recognised that befriending works!

"Without a befriender I wouldn't have been able to do the courses that have enabled me to get a job. I just couldn't have done it without her. It has given me my life back!"

For more information visit
www.befriending.co.uk

Live Connected — Community Living and Co-housing

Vincent Finney, SIAA

In part, independent advocacy grew out of the closure of many of the large institutions for people with learning disabilities to aid their transition to “the community”. Yet, the reality for many people with a learning disability is that they are placed where it is convenient to place them. All too often we see people with a learning disability placed in a house, with people they’ve not met before, in one part of town, only to be put on a bus every day to a day centre in another part of town.

I recently listened with unease to a social worker explain with pride how she had involved residents with a learning disability in every stage of the re-commissioning of the residential service. On reflection I understood that my unease was caused by the fact this should be the bottom line rather than an example of best practice.

We see projects working with rough sleepers to help them obtain and sustain a tenancy only for them to return to the community of rough sleepers where they feel a connection. Recently reading Dennis O’Donnell’s *The Locked Ward* I reflected on the barbarity of the old style asylums whilst lamenting the loss of the beautiful grounds in which some of them were set. Surely those grounds could have been used as a means of connection with nature and thus aid to recovery?

With an ageing population and the apparent rise in single person households there is likely to be a rise in social isolation and loneliness. I would argue that this dis-connectedness is a symptom, and we’d be better to look to the cause. In a society obsessed with having our own home we assume everyone shares that desire. If instead we

start with the premise that everyone simply wants a roof over their heads and to feel connected, a wealth of other options open up.

Living in community is one alternative approach. Scotland has a number of communities including Camphill and L’Arche communities where people with learning disabilities and other support needs live together with co-workers or volunteers. The Lothlorien Therapeutic Community in Dumfries and Galloway where the shared experience of community living is a means to recovery from mental ill-health. Of course, Scotland is also home to the Findhorn Foundation Community, which celebrated its fiftieth birthday last year, and describes itself as an experiment in conscious living, a learning centre and ecovillage.

Whilst in north London, we find the Simon Community, a sort of shared house where ex-homeless people and volunteers live and work together and provide support to others experiencing homelessness. As their director recently said at an event in the Westminster Parliament “We reject government funding so that we can remain independent. We have our own approach which is not always in line with government thinking. Our motivation is love and we offer kindness to people. These are words rarely found in government policy.”

Community living can offer people a much deeper connection. Some communities do have a spiritual foundation but often will be open to people of all faiths and none. Community living is about nourishing human relationships, allowing people to find out who they are, learning from and

giving to others. What these communities share is a belief that in a supportive community a person can grow and reach their potential. Common to many is the awareness that they are often a work in progress, an experiment, constantly learning and evolving.

Co-housing is another approach and is said to have originated in Denmark—indeed, about 1% of the Danish population now live in cohousing communities—but is slow to have taken off in the UK. According to the UK Cohousing Network, “Cohousing communities... are created and run by their residents. Each household has a self-contained, personal and private home but residents come together to manage their community, share activities, eat together.”

Cohousing provides a viable solution to social isolation and loneliness for any age group and a way of combating the alienation some feel in society. For many, it provides an opportunity to feel more connected to the place where they live and part of a supportive community. Increasingly, cohousing is seen as a viable option for older people. In *Cohousing in Britain* from *Diggers and Dreamers*, Maria Brenton argues:

“Studies of cohousing communities have found that, where older individuals are concerned, the outcomes of living in community can be an enhanced sense of wellbeing,

reduction of loneliness and isolation, continued activity and engagement, the possibility of staying healthier for longer and, finally, continued personal autonomy.

The Vivarium Trust in Fife began a decade ago when a group of friends aged 50+ decided cohousing a more attractive option than that currently on offer. They intend to create a pilot cohousing development, comprising 20–25 homes for individuals and for couples, together with shared facilities, to demonstrate that cohousing is achievable in Scotland. As quoted in Alf and Ewan Young’s *The New Road*, one of Vivarium’s members explains cohousing as “...about a group of like-minded people with shared values deciding to live beside one another, preferably in as eco-friendly a manner as possible.”

In a conversation towards the end of Lauren Groff’s novel *Arcadia*, a member of the Amish community which neighbours the recently disintegrated commune, where much of the novel is set, argues the choice is between freedom or community. Taken out of context this is contentious and many living in community would argue, to the contrary, doing so liberates them to be their true self. I think though there are certain freedoms that do need to be sacrificed for a community to succeed but, perhaps, they are the ‘freedoms’ that contribute to a dis-connected society.

Be Connected and Change the World

Carol Craig, Centre for Confidence and Well-being

A distinguishing feature of our age is that we've been turned into individual consumers. A focus on the group, the community or the public has been replaced by a focus on individual self-interest. In such a world it's hardly surprising that 'materialistic' values dominate. By materialism I mean the pursuit of money and what it can buy, a focus on appearance and image and an emphasis on fame and power.

Research has shown that the more materialistic people are the worse their well-being. There's a very simple explanation: materialistic values divert our attention from the things that really do matter for well-being—relationships and connection with others; a sense of meaning and purpose; and involvement in activities which stretch and develop us as individuals.

Of course, these materialistic values have always been with us, and always will: money and resources matter for survival; what you look like is linked to mating and social roles; and we shall always care about our position in groups. However, for a variety of political and economic reasons, from the 1980s on, materialism has completely usurped the values which once nourished individual and community well-being.

Materialistic values are transmitted largely via the mass media. This isn't simply about exposure to advertising and the creation of consumer wants it's also about people's lives being swamped by the values of celebrity culture. Researchers have shown that as television came into people's lives their participation in the community collapsed. Robert Putnam, author of that international best-seller *Bowling Alone*, argues that the easiest

way for people to build community is to 'turn off the TV'. He explains: "...the more entertainment television you watch, the less civically engaged you are. People watch *Friends* rather than having friends."

Depression is the most common mental disorder and it's often accompanied by a crisis of meaning; a feeling that life is pointless. As one of the most common critiques of materialism is that it empties life of all meaning it's hardly surprising that as it has become more important in people's lives rates of depression have risen. In my latest book *The Great Takeover: how materialism, the media and markets now dominate our lives* I look at the various ways these values are undermining our individual and collective well-being. However, I'm not despondent—far from it.

Most institutions these days reinforce these values yet ordinary people have a sense that there's something wrong and many are looking for something better. Research suggests that, even before the economic recession, at least a quarter of British adults had 'downshifted'—giving up money for more free time, a shift in career or a chance to study. There are now some great examples in Scotland of people turning their back on these values and trying to do things differently.

Some of these examples are being recounted in a new book series called *Postcards from Scotland*. (Indeed my book is number two in the series and I'm commissioning editor.) My husband and son—Alf and Ewan Young—undertook a week long road journey and visited fifteen community



based projects. They then wrote up their findings in the third book in the series — *The New Road: charting Scotland's inspirational communities*. As the book testifies people can achieve remarkable things if they turn the telly off, and connect and cooperate with others in their community.

The common conception of human beings as primarily interested in themselves and disconnected from others is wrong. There's irrefutable evidence that human beings are primarily social beings who cannot exist in isolation. In fact, loneliness kills people and having a strong network of friends protects human health. One of the major developments in our understanding of the brain is the discovery of 'mirror neurons'. These are special brain cells which are activated when we do something or when we observe others' activities. This has led neuroscientists to argue that these cells literally link us with other human beings and allow us to empathise. The existence of mirror neurons also means that humans are literally designed to 'mirror' others' behaviour.

All this means that in any group or network of people when some members change their behaviour or attitudes this can become contagious and spread to others. Indeed one surprising finding from academics studying social networks is that our behaviour and attitudes are influenced not just by those in our immediate social circle. Two experts in the field write: 'Beyond our own social horizons, friends of friends of friends can start chain reactions that eventually reach us, like waves from distant lands that wash up on our shores.'

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has"

— Margaret Mead

The great lesson to be learned from all this is simple: if a single individual changes his or her life and starts talking about it to others within a very limited time this can grow from a small ripple to a significant wave of change. This is how fashions happen, new ideas suddenly start appearing in different places and we get seismic shifts in the national mood. As the anthropologist Margaret Mead famously said: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

For more information visit
www.postcardsfromscotland.co.uk
and www.centreforconfidence.co.uk

Faith in Older People

Faith in Older People is a small Scottish voluntary organisation which works with care home staff, volunteers, faith communities and the NHS Chaplaincy Service. We organise training, events and undertake research.

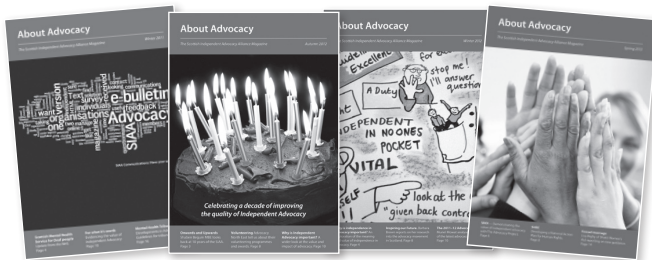
There is considerable emphasis on person centred care and understanding a person's history so that we provide care that is empathetic and ensures well-being. What we often ignore is the importance of the spiritual dimension in such care. Faith in Older People defines spiritual as 'that which gives meaning and purpose to our lives' be it nature, music, friends and family or religion. Knowing what lifts a person's spirit and gives them the strength to accept change and adapt is essential.

It is unfortunately easy to ignore how difficult it can be to make transitions from home to residential care; lose friends or be incapacitated so we need to focus on the ways in which we find resilience and enable individuals to continue to benefit from the things they find most important. We must not impose our routines or assumptions which might diminish someone's well-being but rather focus on understanding the important elements in someone's life story that can contribute to continued spiritual well-being.

5th International Conference on Ageing and Spirituality

Edinburgh: 7–10th July

www.faithinolderpeople.org.uk



About Advocacy magazine mailing list

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LGBT Helpline Scotland

Information and support for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, those questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity and their families, friends and supporters.

Tuesdays and Wednesdays
12pm - 9pm
0300 123 2523

New LGBT Helpline

The LGBT Centre for Health & Wellbeing has launched Scotland's first national LGBT Helpline. www.lgbthealth.org.uk