

Anthony's story

Q. What have you been doing in the community?

At the beginning of Covid I joined a WhatsApp in this street. We had a Victory in Europe Day (VE) celebration although we weren't able to easily mix with people, we sat on our driveways. We realised how little we knew the other end of the road. Through the WhatsApp group I got to know almost a quarter of our neighbours' names out of 80 houses. I now know that one of the neighbours, Catherine, was actually born in that house and she has lived all her life in this street. Consequently she knows most people. Deliberately I created the personal cards addressed to each one. I was able to go around and have a conversation.



I was also able to make some links with the other neighbours. One example is, there is a neighbour, Patricia who used to help me with shopping during Covid. Her husband died five years ago. She wasn't sure if she was confident to be able to speak about her bereavement. She said when she spoke to her close relatives she burst into tears. So, I decided to invite my two neighbours along and bring the three of us together to have a chat, initially simply to get used to the kind of thing we will be doing in time.

Q. What makes you carry on being involved in your community?

As a retired minister, I still conduct funeral services. There were a few cases that really started me thinking of setting up a Bereavement Peer Support group. One of the cases was a funeral for an elderly lady whose son had cared for her at home for 35 years. He rarely went out and relied on his brother to bring in shopping, etc. When his mother died, he had no identity or purpose in life. The bereavement had turned his life "Inside Out" (hence the name I chose for the group). Not knowing at the time when I started my life was going to be 'inside out' retiring from full time Circuit ministry and then my wife died last April.

Prior to my retirement, I had a specific appointment with clear duties and responsibilities, and a defined pastoral list of persons - now I had no such structure! I didn't want to restrict the "Inside Out" group to just those who had been bereaved but for any who have had their lives turned inside out for any reason.

When I struggled to make a start with the group (Inside Out), I then heard about Share, Talk, And Remember (STAR), Bereavement Peer Support Group and thought this might be a better way to lead into something like “Inside Out”, for a wider audience. I got to hear about the STAR online Bereavement Peer Support training *and I did the course with Jan that seemed to be a good way in towards setting up something similar to ‘Inside Out’. I discovered that Sato (she was at the training) could help me produce some leaflets and I have been exploring the possibility of using Nextdoor*. I think it could be a good avenue to pursue this later on. I had intended to approach door to door to promote the group. I had a conversation with Sato and after several revisions (initially it was going to be a leaflet that was too much information), Sato and I produced a neat postcard sized publicity for STAR.

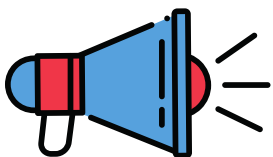
Q How do we build more welcoming communities for senior citizens?

“Neighbours inviting one another could be a gentle step forward”

When I retired, I visited the Civic Centre and asked ‘what is there for old people locally now I am retired?’ They said ‘we haven't got any details here, you would have to go online.’ I found it's quite difficult to find out online. The other thing is we are right on the edge of Bristol and South Glos. It's totally different authorities and different groups so if you are trying to find what's available locally it's rather confusing! You would have to do two searches, one in Bristol and one in South Glos.

Part of the challenge is actually getting to talk to people. That's why the VE day celebration was really good. We were out of the house talking to one another. Maybe we will have a similar event, next June at the Queen's Jubilee.

The challenge is stepping outside the door. If you are used to being on your own, in your own comfortable environment (perhaps going to the dentist and shops if you have to), unless you are going to meet someone you really know well, then it's very unlikely that you feel brave and desire to step out and make yourself vulnerable. I just think that neighbours inviting one another could be a gentle step forward.



*STAR Bereavement Peer Support group has been set up by a group of local residents in Stockwood in Bristol originally and now the models of the group and idea have been spread across Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire. Find out more details on STAR Network Co-ordinator & Freelance Trainer

starsconnecting@outlook.com M. 07595165082

*Nextdoor is an online community app where you can exchange information and help with those nearby neighbours, businesses, and public services.