The *Boundaries Clock* and L'Arche

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Overview

The *Boundaries Clock* was introduced in a previous paper[3] to bring together the triple imperative to safeguard vulnerable people, maintain personal and professional boundaries and advance social inclusion. It does not provide easy answers, but rather provides a systematic way to consider the issues and arrive at a defensible position. That initial paper is now followed up with a series of papers[4] that apply the *Boundaries Clock* in given situations, thus demonstrating its utility, and assisting readers to develop sufficient fluency to apply the approach to new settings. Neither the *Boundaries Clock,* nor this paper that uses it, lead to neat answers, but instead have provided a framework for ongoing questioning and self-reflection within and beyond L'Arche.

L'Arche

L'Arche runs 137 communities in 40 countries, with nine in the UK. People with learning disabilities share their lives with employed Assistants in networks of community support that include other friends and volunteers who live nearby. Many of those disabled[5] adults share their home with Assistants who live-in.

L'Arche began in 1964 in northern France, when Jean Vanier, with the personal affirmation of the chaplain to a nearby longstay hospital, and the practical support of friends and neighbours, opened his home to welcome some people from that institution. The ethos was one of shared lives. Today he would have been directed to

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[3] Bates P. 'Thinking about professional boundaries in an inclusive society', chapter 2 **in** Gilbert P (ed) (2010) *The Value of Everything* Lyme Regis: Russell House Publishing.
[4] We hope to co-produce further 'The *Boundaries Clock* and....' papers on Peer Mentors, Peer Support Workers, Timebanks, Befriending Schemes, a Community Choir, and mini teams.
[5] People First thinking supports the term 'people with disabilities' while advocates of the social model of disability say 'disabled people.'

the commissioner for Adult placement services, but back then, alternatives to kinship care or hospital services were rare. The offer was intentionally open to people with long-term support needs, and suited two of the three people who said yes and moved in – the third moving on after a short time.

A year later, Vanier was invited to take on the running of an existing local service for men with learning disabilities, a locked ward in the village. This commitment obliged the small group of pioneers to constitute as a structured organisation, *L'Arche*, to embrace this new initiative, no longer under one roof. The door was unlocked, live-in Assistants were introduced alongside those who lived elsewhere, work opportunities developed with the disabled people and links grew with the locality. Further shared houses were opened; and within a few years this open vision of 'creating community through relationships of mutuality' found new expressions in other places and in countries with very different cultural and spiritual contexts. The first in the UK was opened in 1974.

Typically L'Arche communities include several shared houses and individual flats in which the support is now commissioned from Social Work rather than the hospital. All communities offer either work and vocational opportunities, or individualised activities. All include local people as volunteers in their networks, as well as promoting links with neighbours and with other expressions of community in the locality, unconnected with L'Arche.

Mutual relationships lie at the core of L'Arche. The shared household is one expression of this, and the presence of a proportion of Assistants who live-in makes this a distinctive circle of belonging.

L'Arche explicitly includes people who offer their time voluntarily, and so these relationships form a wider circle of support beyond the first. This category includes both people whose time is offered on a purely voluntary basis, and also some employed Assistants who, in addition to their paid hours, spend time voluntarily with individuals, beyond their working responsibilities.

A further domain that overlaps with volunteers includes all the relationships that individuals have with their personal networks of neighbours, friends and family; some of whom may know little or nothing of the commissioned role which L'Arche has in the life of the person they know in another way.

L'Arche is an appropriate area for the **Boundaries Clock** to be employed, as it deliberately seeks to create a 'shared life community' in which common humanity and spirituality eclipses, or at least puts in new context, the differences between people with and without obvious disabilities. The fact that there have been no reports of serious abuse anywhere in the international L'Arche community suggests that they may be getting something right, but the organisation is not complacent, understands the risk of abuse in any context, the possibility of undisclosed abuse, and seeks both to learn from experiences of lapses in support, and to maintain a vigilant approach to

safeguarding. The rigour of the *Boundaries Clock* allows L'Arche to review its activities and practices to check that arrangements are effectively balancing the needs for professionalism, safeguarding and inclusion: specifically

- Live-in paid staff continuing to share their home life with people with disabilities they live with, despite being off-duty. This is a direct parallel to contemporary adult placement services.
- Live-in or live-out paid staff sharing off-site social activities with the people they support, despite being off duty.
- Paid staff assisting the people they support to meet and get to know other citizens in the locality they share.
- Volunteers doing any of the above.

In fact, either the reliance on a proportion of live-in Assistants, or the negotiation of commitments with people in time they offer voluntarily, could be critiqued, and has been on occasion. Some commissioners have put it to L'Arche that this conception of support work is not professional in regard to personal and professional boundaries, safeguarding responsibilities, or L'Arche's strategy for community building and local inclusion in networks beyond itself.

L'Arche believes the way it discerns these commitments meets the concerns expressed, but remains open to continuing dialogue and the potential for change. The 'live-in' dimension makes the role of support workers more demanding so L'Arche responds with more rigorous selection processes and support arrangements. The involvement of Assistants and volunteers beyond their formal role needs, and receives, scrutiny. People make themselves accountable for their choices in both their personal and professional role. Proposals and initiatives are appraised according to their intentions, behaviour and consequences.

Some employed people choose to offer time in settings that go beyond contractual expectations, socialising or sharing community activities outside work time. Some used to, and don't now, as lives change; some don't, and that is affirmed too. Equally, some people with learning disabilities see L'Arche as no more than their chosen support provider. They revisit that decision at least annually in review. Others receive the support, and also relate in ways that go beyond L'Arche's contracted outcomes. They spend time with people who have become friends, and in other relationships built on a mutual desire to be met as a person.

In L'Arche's thinking, valuing mutuality is a spiritual outlook. For some at L'Arche, it is an understanding of God that grounds this; a spirit of communion inviting all people into relationships of mutuality and faithfulness. Jewish scripture sums this relationship up as 'covenant love'. Others find their own expression of commitment and belonging using different words, images, signs or music. This diversity of motivation is a key element of community, alongside a common conception of support that's agreed among those who are part of it, families and professional colleagues.

The *Boundaries Clock*

Six pairs of competing priorities are set in opposition to one another to form the twelve-point *Boundary Clock*[6]. Individual case studies or service arrangements can then be placed on the clockface and the twelve vantage points used in turn to generate ideas for shaping practice in an individual situation. As each of the twelve viewpoints is merely an entry point to the clockface area, the issues that arise inevitably overlap here and there, but the twelve items frame a systematic discussion.
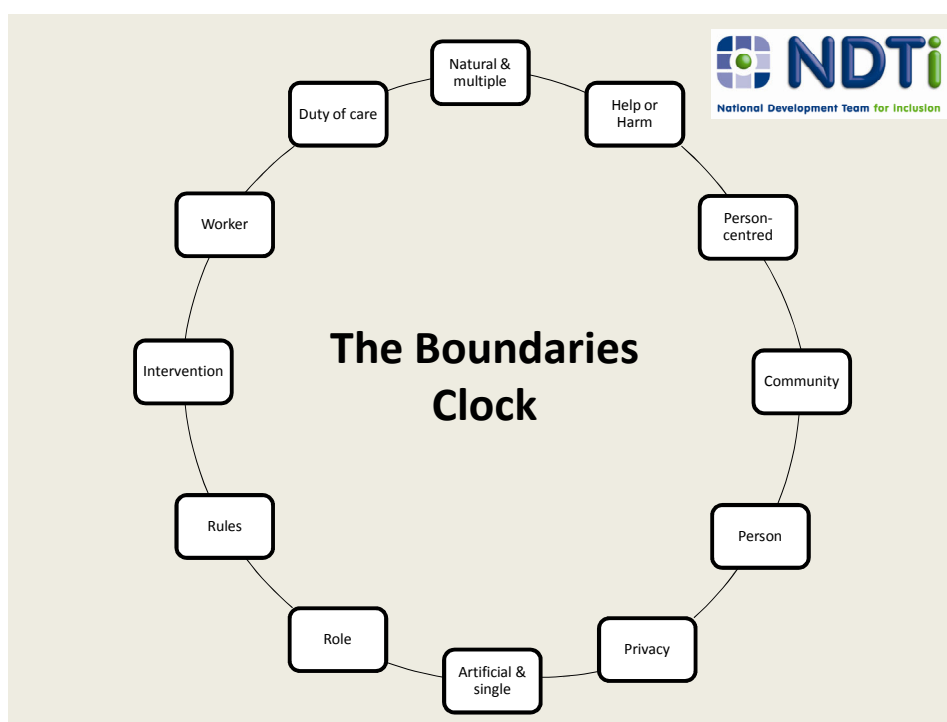
The following paragraphs present the issues in a repeated cycle. First is a one-sentence summary[7] of the viewpoint. The indented paragraph generates questions for L'Arche from this heading and the third section shows how L'Arche has responded to these issues.

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[6] All metaphors have limited value and carry unwanted freight. This clock is inanimate, has no hands, no power source, and no machinery – it is simply a face with 12 observation points. The image of a 12-person jury might work just as well, although it suggests crime and punishment.

[7] The one sentence summary can also be opened out into a wide range of issues that are broadly associated with each viewpoint. These are available through workshops facilitated by the first author – contact peter.bates@ndti.org.uk for further information.

Help or Harm. Consider the actual or potential benefit to, or abuse of, people L'Arche supports in the here and now.

What distinctive hazards arise from your arrangements? Do your risk assessment processes pay sufficient attention to benefits, so that a decision includes the good things that will be gained as well as the bad things that should be avoided? Have you considered the ways in which long-term harm sometimes accrues from short term kindness?

L'Arche recognises that unthinking support can increase dependency rather than self-reliance. Open discussions examine the actions and gestures of team members and volunteers in the course of support, as well as the meaning ascribed to those actions by the person being supported.

The approach to risk-taking highlights the positives which the person hopes to gain from the thing proposed, before weighing with them and their network the risks which may need mitigating.

L'Arche attempts to acknowledge and actively manage the hazards that may arise from mutually-chosen social contacts outside of paid support, and the use of live-in Assistants. Team leaders have a responsibility for appraising the risks of contacts that are proposed, before they take place; and for maintaining the culture of the open review and recording of those that do; with particular obligations towards those whose mental capacity to gauge their degree of personal risk in social contexts may be developing rather than established. The issues this gives rise to can be subtle for leaders. This tests their insight, and capacity for joint working with other professionals.

The L'Arche policy on personal and professional boundaries recognises a hierarchy of risks and includes a risk assessment template for those that are higher risk, with criteria to indicate the latter, and their ensuing recording.

Person centred. Adapt your conduct to the people involved and their context.

How does your behaviour change if people in the house have different gifts and support needs? How flexible can you be? Are rules different when you are off duty or after the people have moved out of a shared house to another setting with support from L'Arche? Do rules change for people who occupy different roles in L'Arche?

L'Arche seeks to value the unique gifts and support needs of each person and, expects these to be expressed differently. With much of the support L'Arche offers being chosen and commissioned with an openness to the long-term, the time is there

to come to know the person and reflect their unique hopes and requirements in an agreed and detailed plan of support. Various person-centred planning processes and tools are used to assist this such as PATH, MAPS and ELP[8]. Specific attention is given to the way a person likes to engage with a newcomer, at home or elsewhere, and to the kind of support that is needed to sustain existing networks of friends and family. For some, their informal friendship network includes some people who are or were part of the team of paid Assistants. Any proposed initiatives are appraised by a leader, while the ideas of one leader are checked by another.

Team leaders have a key role in maintaining the culture of flexible support, especially by maximising opportunities for community engagement at the times people are available: often evenings and weekends. People choosing a shared household can expect to become aware over time of some of the choices others make in regard to social contacts, as in other areas of life. This can be a source of creative tension – among Assistants as much as among the people L'Arche supports.

Constraints on what is possible include the commissioner's assessment of funded support hours, travel and activity costs, required outcomes, and the attitude of others in the household towards an individual's proposed guests in the shared spaces, given this week's calendar.

Community. Make the most of the person's informal community relationships.

How do you help the people you support build and sustain membership of the 'community beyond L'Arche'? Do members of the public coming into contact with the person have to be risk assessed?

We use the word 'community' to refer both to bonds created across L'Arche and to the locality and the neighbours, networks, services and community groups of all sorts that it contains. The locality offers scope both for enabling individual relationships that reflect a shared interest of some kind, and for initiatives which foster relationships between L'Arche as a group and other groups that share a common interest or values.

Some opportunities to make community connections occur naturally in the course of being out and about. Others need a degree of planning to enable them to happen, or to happen in ways suited to that individual, especially in their early stages. Becoming a regular participant in a local pub, for example may well raise issues to explore together, and the solution will reflect personal interests, capacity, need for an

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[8] For more on person-centred planning tools, see Sanderson H & Smull M (2005) *Essential lifestyle planning for everyone* Stockport: HSA Press.

Assistant and other factors. Appraisal of the risks and benefits is part of this, and this can include appraising with the person the motivation for a newcomer's interest in offering contact, if the latter's interest appeared one-sided; but formal risk assessment is unlikely unless triggered by shared concerns in a best-of-interests situation. New people introduced by L'Arche are of course subject to risk processes including criminal records checking.

Person. Focus on the person and their unique resources, relationships and needs.

How much of the individual's life is genuinely designed around that person's preferences, rather than suiting the convenience of the organisation? Do care records capture plenty of information about the person's strengths, gifts and sources of delight?

It is widely accepted across support organisations that marks of how good things are include the content and layout of the planning tools used with individuals, the oral culture of the team, the processes that translate these goals into practice and ways of reviewing outcomes. Additional important factors include the ways in which planning is facilitated, the contribution of a true cross-section of a person's network, and the chairing of the process by someone with sufficient objectivity and separation from all the details of day to day implementation. These person-centred processes need to be underpinned by guidelines for support and managing risks. The person supervising the leader of the team that offers day-to-day support has a particular role in evaluating whether choices, customs and routines are evolving to meet the plan, or to suit private convenience – they carry the longer-term view that may elude those providing day to day support or making snapshot inspection visits.

Privacy. Support the person's right to run their own life, participate in the community and build a home free from surveillance or interference.

Are there parts of the person's life that are none of your business? Can people spend time alone? Can people live with more risk if they wish? Can people go out without being chaperoned? Do the person's friends have to be risk assessed?

Privacy is valued, and so it helps to mark the border where support becomes interference, surveillance, or chaperoning. To choose to live in community is not to choose to live with constant company. Everyone – and this includes people in a shared household where a continuity of support is available across the week - does spend time alone; and the degree of risk a person wants in their life is a topic discussed at the times when support is agreed. Some do choose a higher level of risk than others, even with steps taken to mitigate specific parts of a desired action.

People are supported to make social arrangements in public spaces, in private ones, and at home, with the degree of support adjusted to reflect the risk of unwelcome and unnecessary chaperoning. Their existing friends are not put forward for criminal records checks, though Assistants are aware of their safeguarding responsibilities in relation to any specific information that may be seen, inferred or disclosed. L'Arche volunteers are subject to the same renewable criminal records checks as paid staff, but those who move on from this role into informal friendship with the person are not re-checked.

The Social Worker's assessment of the number of hours of support, and whether it needs to be continuously available across the week or not, is a starting point with someone newly choosing their support from L'Arche; as is their degree of assent to that judgment. Over time, this becomes a threeway discussion with L'Arche's experience added - one that includes the perspectives of others who know the person.

Artificial and Single. Keep the relationship between the worker and the person distinctive by following special rules and inhibiting other contact.

How is the relationship between a person with a learning disability and an Assistant different from an ordinary friendship? How do you construct 'appropriate professional distance' at L'Arche and then obtain the benefits of it while avoiding its dangers? What supervision mechanisms do you have in place for keeping it on the right path?

The evolution of an informal friendship lies primarily between the two people concerned, though it is shaped by the views of others. In contrast, the relationship with a prospective staff member starts in a different way, as the Assistant begins with specific responsibilities that are defined as 'support and care', under the supervision of L'Arche, the agency that introduced them. The way we see each other is partly governed by how we met. These responsibilities and this accountability endures if the Assistant remains a part of L'Arche's network but leaves the team responsible for day to day support of the person.

The person who is the Assistant is not someone with a learning disability; the other is, and the different degrees of capacity in certain areas of life cannot be ignored; even with a vision of what it is to be human that says of any given pair of people in a relationship that either may be the one who is more mature as a person, in their outlook on life and their response to others.

A proportion of the support offered at L'Arche is from Assistants who have been invited to come and live alongside the person, forgoing at least for now their option to have a second space of their own, and so L'Arche has a particular obligation to prompt reflection on personal boundaries. This living arrangement results in more

time alongside the person and a greater effect on the lives of others as well as themselves.

In part this means clarifying the professional boundaries of support; and in part it means creating a culture in which feedback is openly shared, and the gift is given[9] to 'see ourselves as others see us'. It takes a certain maturity to be able to integrate that kind of personal feedback. 'Wounds from a friend can be trusted' as the biblical saying puts it (Proverbs 27:6). Supervision is one aid; as is the norm that people have available someone outside of their daily life who understands the context they have chosen to be in, and who meets regularly to 'accompany' them in their human and spiritual journey in community, with a particular focus on relational issues, boundaries and transitions. Those asked to accompany are expected to have access to their own supervision for this form of listening. It is a real challenge to maintain these twin aids that underpin the culture.

Role. Watch out for setting a precedent and keep a consistent sense of what counts as an appropriate working relationship.

Do flexible arrangements today create problems for the way that people are supported tomorrow? Do different Assistants do their work in such individual ways that it creates difficulties for their colleagues? Does the way that things work at L'Arche store up problems for the future when a person moves on?

Different people set different values on consistency in the sense of a uniform approach to the specific aspects of their support; or in the wider sense of enjoying or finding difficulty when new Assistants are introduced. Planning processes and specific support guidelines capture this over time; the more detailed the guideline, the more likely it reflects a concern in the person to keep things predictable; which for some will be one of the particular features of an underlying condition.

If a specific setting at L'Arche is not working out, it may be that the change needed is environmental, and an agreed move to a different context will resolve it, such as a move from a shared house to an individual flat, to a setting with no live-in Assistants, or to a setting where support comes from another organisation - but the person may often keep in touch with the network they created at L'Arche in such a way that this informal circle becomes a key resource for their future life.

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[9] The right metaphor to describe the space in which the personal and professional meet is a moot point. *'Boundary'* is the most commonly used, in social care and therapeutic contexts. Others favour *'territory'*, following a Canadian Aboriginal concept: 'the domain between, in which members of both tribes could travel…a special space, a space of vigilance and heightened scrutiny where one was mindful of one's actions and sensitive to the realisation that this was not a homeland'. See Austin, W., Bergum, V., Nuttgens, S., and Peternelj-Taylor, C. (2006) A Re-Visioning of Boundaries in Professional Helping Relationships: Exploring Other Metaphors. *Ethics and Behaviour*, 16(2), 77-94

Rules. Apply law and regulation to all people and all relationships at all times to keep things fair.

What does your job description say you should do? Are there any rules, laws or regulations that shape what you do? What instructions or performance targets have been set by your commissioner, funder or employer? What does the Independent Safeguarding Authority and other regulatory bodies say you ought to do?

The job description makes clear that in terms of support, what L'Arche does is governed by its contractual relationship with the person and the Local Authority who was involved in the person's initial assessment and who remain a reference point. Contracts refer to the regulatory framework[10]; as well as often having specific outcomes and processes on which L'Arche is inspected via contract monitoring arrangements[11] in addition to individual reviews.

Local Quality Assurance Frameworks that originate in the field of support work – especially if that is understood narrowly as a one-way, asymmetric relation from the worker to the client – are those most likely to have specific comments on the nature of the relationships between people, on social contacts outside of role, and on performance indicators of successful inclusion in the wider local community.

L'Arche has had lengthy dialogue with Commissioners and other Social Work colleagues and, so far, has been able to reach agreement on suitable rules for safeguarding. The L'Arche schema for risk assessment that addresses social contacts beyond role has 14 criteria and this gives robust guidance to those involved in appraising risks. There is a policy on 'personal and professional boundaries' that gives detailed guidance for those occasions where people 'socialise beyond role', among other things. All documents however depend on the capacity of the people who implement them.

The Independent Safeguarding Authority and other incipient national safeguarding schemes such as the Protecting Vulnerable Groups scheme in Scotland have set out obligations for recruitment and selection of staff and volunteers, and on the reporting of concerns and the outcomes of formal disciplinary action. L'Arche is compliant with these obligations.

The UK government has instituted a review of the reach of these safeguarding schemes that will consider the interface between private life and public accountability. Along with others, L'Arche is attentive to this national debate as its outcome may affect the practices described in this paper.

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[10] Regulation is carried out in England by the Care Quality Commission, in Wales by the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales and in Scotland by the Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care.

[11] These usually sit within a local Quality Assurance Framework.

It also acknowledges that an organisation with a different starting point could achieve the same outcomes of compliance with safeguarding through a different policy and practice.

Intervention. Make the most of the relationship between the worker and the person.

What disciplines govern your work – planning care in collaboration with the person, your colleagues and manager, consistently delivering agreed interventions, monitoring impact and recording? How will your relationship building and actions on safeguarding and inclusion meet these objectives?

L'Arche uses the same tools as other organisations in terms of informal feedback from the person and their network, reviews, observation, team meetings, supervision, appraisal, keyworking, and written records review to make the most of the relationship between the worker and the person, and evaluate how well current practice fits with agreed plans and goals. Certain aspects of support plans may be arrived at with input from another professional, a psychologist or psychiatrist, often with the impact of strategies set out. Sometimes such interventions concern situations of potential risk of harm to self or to others. Sometimes the strategy is specifically about widening access to a social setting in the name of inclusion and new opportunities.

Worker. Value the worker and their unique resources, relationships and needs.

How do Assistants model participation in the community of L'Arche and the community beyond L'Arche so that this forms a helpful role model to disabled people? Do L'Arche policies acknowledge that Assistants have a right to be off duty and keep parts of their personal life private from the people they support? Under what conditions would the Assistant be criticised in connection with activities in their private life?

Evidencing local knowledge and having the confidence to act on it is the mark of a good Assistant, and is gauged both at interview and appraisal. In welcoming a range of Assistants from other localities and cultures, L'Arche has to mitigate against depleting the level of knowledge and confidence in a particular team, as this risks closing down options – the part played by others in the team, and the wider circle of people involved in a person's life both help with this. This risk is acknowledged, particularly with live-in assistants, given current patterns of recruitment.

Assistants are acknowledged to need free time and holidays, and this is set out in writing; particular oversight is needed of what is asked of live-in Assistants, who are in a context where the boundary between what is work and what is free time is

different to many working roles. Some choices made during a person's free time will be more visible to others they live with than if they lived alone and this can cause tensions.

Parts of a person's life are private from the people they support such as choices over how free time is spent, and contacts with friends beyond the house.

Duty of Care. Take action, and sometimes even over-ride the person's preferences in order to keep everyone safe.

Who is obliged to undergo a criminal records check? As people move into the community beyond L'Arche, when is it right to stop asking for such a check? When would you ask informal community members to share surveillance and alert responsibilities so that you are notified if things go wrong or anyone is at risk?

L'Arche's policy on Safeguarding, which is introduced as a prelude to the Policy of the relevant Local Authority for that area, says that potential Assistants will be subject to criminal records checks. Volunteers introduced by L'Arche are similarly checked and informed of the approach to safeguarding, and of the need to name any concern they may have.

Contacts made in other ways would not required by L'Arche to have criminal records checks, though safeguarding alert responsibilities still apply to Assistants and volunteers introduced by L'Arche; and concern about the possibility of 'mate crime', or abuse by someone purporting to be an informal 'friend', is not unfounded.

Natural and Multiple. Use the worker's ordinary humanity, citizenship and experience of life to engage with the person.

Do the lives of people L'Arche supports and Assistants overlap in other settings as well as at work? Is that OK? Are there any banned places, times or interactions?

The L'Arche vision of community says that life is lived in settings where relationships are natural and multiple; and that this need not be a problem provided we are open about the different perspectives different settings will have. It's a case of both/and, rather than the either/or of being one side of a fixed boundary: 'either you are a worker with the task of enabling someone else to experience inclusion and friendships elsewhere in the local community; or you are a friend'. Different contexts can and do overlap, without that necessarily entailing a boundary violation[12].

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[12] This is one reason why the metaphor of 'territory' is promising. As Austin and colleagues note, 'Although the metaphor of boundaries conveys limits, it does not, however, help us

Even so, the risk of boundary violation is acknowledged, including the gross violation of initiating or consenting to a sexual relationship with someone the individual has the responsibility of supporting, and so the organisation is constantly vigilant to prevent abuse and promote safe lives that are full of positive opportunity.

Conclusion

In working round the clock we have noticed that, while L'Arche can identify with all twelve points of the clockface, the values that inspire and motivate the organisation tend to belong to the afternoon hours, from 12 noon to 5 o'clock, while some funders have favoured the evening - from 6 to 11 o'clock. This may help to explain some of the challenges L'Arche has faced in communicating its ethos.

There are risks in any attempt to describe the gossamer threads of community. We are weaving thousands of tiny threads together to make something as strong and yet intangible as love and belonging, respect and compassion. There is a risk that regulators will try to stop bad things happening by stopping good things happening, while L'Arche seeks a twin approach of making good things happen in communities whilst being alert to the possibility that bad things may happen too. Indeed, making good things happen may reduce the chance that bad things will happen. L'Arche has been building communities for forty years that search for safety and competent support, within the context of shared humanity where our weakness and need for one another can be recognised, and everyone can contribute their unique gifts and strengths.

The *Boundaries Clock* stimulated a rigorous and serious examination of what L'Arche has done so far, and needs to do in future, to keep everyone safe and included – and confirmed the two-fold understanding that L'Arche is both a shared-life community committed to its locality, and a provider of commissioned and self-directed support.

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explore the ethics of engagement, not does it reveal that not attempting to connect with a patient can be unethical' (Austin et al (2006)