

The *Boundaries Clock* and the Community Circle

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Overview

The *Boundaries Clock* was introduced in a previous paper³ to bring together the triple imperative to safeguard vulnerable people, maintain 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 papers⁴ 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.

Community⁵

“Community...is about the experience of belonging. We are in community each time we find a place where we belong...to belong is to be related to and a part of something. It is the opposite of thinking that wherever I am, I would be better off somewhere else...to belong to a community is to act as a creator and co-owner of that community. The work then, is to seek in our communities

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³ Bates P. ‘Thinking about professional boundaries in an inclusive society’, chapter 2 in Gilbert P (ed) (forthcoming, 2010) *The Value of Everything* Lyme Regis: Russell House Publishing.

⁴ Further ‘The *Boundaries Clock* and....’ papers will include Peer Mentors, Peer Support Workers, Timebanks, Befriending Schemes and a Community Choir.

⁵ Newton, C. and Wilson, D. (forthcoming 2010) *Keys to Inclusion* Inclusive Solutions for more on inclusion, education and community.

a wider and deeper sense of emotional ownership; it means fostering among all of a community's citizens a sense of ownership and accountability.”⁶

Community is not simply about place; it is about relationship. It challenges us to build a community where everyone is welcome. Bringing up challenging children and supporting vulnerable adults is more than the work of any one person, more than one parent, more than one teacher or carer. We need to harness the capacities that exist beyond the school, home or care centre to enhance life opportunities, provide role models and a richer range of life experiences than any home or institution could ever provide. Crucially, we need to support people to belong to the wider community.

For example, in North East England local fishermen were successfully engaged to mentor criminalised young men who shared their interest in fishing but who would otherwise be extremely troublesome without this mentoring. Simply involving the elders in a community in the lives of our most troubled citizens can be a very powerful way of changing behaviour and meeting unmet emotional needs.

Historically it is clear that significant community development only takes place when local people are committed to investing themselves and their people in the effort. Top-down community building or outside-in approaches tend not to work. School leaders are uniquely placed inside communities and have powerful opportunities to lead and facilitate change. Local people will unite very powerfully around shared concerns or agreed aims and this can be a very powerful force if it is given effective leadership. Ultimately the committed worker or practitioner will be changed by the work if it is done authentically. Relationships are dynamic, complex, nuanced and ongoing. The work is never done.

In our explorations we have found many ways of helping people to become more connected to the communities they live in, including:

- via our own network of relationships⁷
- via community mapping and connecting to persons and groups who share interests⁸
- by building an intentional circle of support⁹.
- by using ‘third places’

⁶ Block, P. (2008) *Community – The Structure of Belonging* San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

⁷ This is perhaps the most obvious place to start for all of us as citizens. In contrast, where people relate to one another as *staff* and *clients*, it is fraught with complexity, and that is what this suite of papers seeks to explore. See Firth, H. and Rapley, M. (1987 revised 1989) *Making Acquaintance* Northumberland Health Authority District Psychology Service for an example where staff supported community participation via their own personal connections, and for a discussion of the wider themes, see Pugh R (2007) Dual relationships: personal and professional boundaries in rural social work *British Journal of Social Work* Vol 37, pp 1405–1423.

⁸ For more strategies on helping people connect to the community beyond services, see Bates P (2010) *Social Inclusion Training Pack* Bath: National Development Team for Inclusion.

⁹ For more on circles of support, see Newton, Colin & Wilson, Derek (2003) *Creating Circles of Friends* Inclusive Solutions UK Ltd.

- by locating and mobilising ‘community guides’
- by building ‘community circles’

We have addressed the first three of these approaches elsewhere, and this paper briefly describes the final three before focusing in more depth on the Community Circle.

In all these approaches we begin by *listening for the story* rather than by expecting people to be able to tell us what they want in a direct way. Some call this listening for the story *tuning in*. It involves noticing the people and places that seem to work for the excluded person, where they seem happy, relaxed and comfortable. It might mean talking to the people who know and love the excluded person if there are any such people in their lives. The aim is to build up a picture of what matters to the person, what they care about; what makes them unique.

Third Places

Ray Oldenberg¹⁰ came up with the concept of third places in 1989. The first place is your home, the second place is your place of work, if you have one, and third places are a specific type of community setting such as a church, pub, coffee bar and so on.

Third Places support associations or connections between people that are based on locations, but not on the shared activities, structured relationships or intensive responsibilities that occur in the workplace, in school or at a sports club. A third place becomes important in relationship building because you can become a regular at a café or bar, a place where you can get known without doing much. It is important to go at regular times, which suits people who rely on routine.

A Third Place might also be a good place to spot a community guide, someone who is very connected in his or her own community. Reciprocity is likely to be important here; you need to think about what the guide will get out of getting involved with someone you are supporting or care about. Guides don’t always need to relate directly to the person you are supporting; sometimes you are just asking for their advice and knowledge, not involvement. At other times such people can create circles of support or fill a room for a community circle.

Community Guides

Community Guides are simply well connected non-professional community members who can be involved by leaders to reach out to isolated people. Every locality has safe, non-paid individuals who know people who know people. Their role can be to draw together a team or circle of support from other local non-professional people. They can also be active in eliciting invitations from others who would share interests with

¹⁰ Ray Oldenburg (second edition 1999) *The Great Good Place*, New York: Marlowe & Co.

them, for example: 'I am a friend of your sister. She said I should approach you. I have this friend who loves to sing. She has a great voice. I think you might like her in your choir'. Community Guides know the community territory of hospitality and rejection and so they work with the former and work around the latter. Community building in the interests of people with challenging issues must start with attempts to build and rebuild relationships among local residents, neighbours and local associations.

Community Circles

"I really enjoyed the gathering and it just highlighted what inclusion is all about. I have never seen it so brilliantly demonstrated; it was as if a veil had been lifted from my eyes." (Pat, Circle NG3).

The purpose of a Community Circle is to intentionally bring people from a local neighbourhood together to share their skills, talents, gifts and resources. Inspired by the activities of Lois Smidt and *Beyond Welfare in Iowa*¹¹, this idea is based upon the premise that we all need three things in our lives to make us happy and fulfilled: *money, friends and meaning*.

Beyond Welfare is a gathering of citizens that began with a simple but ambitious aim: "to eliminate poverty in Story County by 2010". They define poverty much more widely than simply a lack of money and recognise that poverty of relationship and/or meaning is equally common in our communities.

Community Circles are based upon reciprocity and the assumption that everyone has both gifts and needs, whether these are labelled or not. The Circle makes this reciprocity tangible. Members adopt the fundamental value of inclusion that all means all, and so no one is excluded from the community circle, but instead the circle members work out how to include everyone equally and safely.

A Community Circle is made up of participants from the local community. The meeting starts with everyone sharing food and conversations. Next the group comes together in a circle so that everyone can see each other and shares what is good and new in their lives. Everyone gets a turn to be listened to. "Good" and "new" breaks the habit of thinking about and reacting to what's wrong; it is an exercise of giving and receiving attention with one another and it also provides a solid foundation of strengths from which we can think about and tackle difficulties. The group is then asked the question what do they *want, need* or *have to offer*.

Community Circles provide a great starting point from which to explore connections, build relationships, locate resources and share skills. These circles will be a particularly important resource for *Independent Support Brokers* and the disabled people with whom they work. They provide a safe forum in which people can meet and friendships can start, a natural reservoir of people and relationships where people can be invited to offer their time and capacity. A member of the Community Circle states:

¹¹ Asset Based Community Development Institute (2005) *Hidden Treasures: Community Building Workbook*.

“To be successful we have to start from a belief in inclusion. A belief that we are all born ‘in’, that all means all. Everyone needs to belong; everyone is ready; everyone needs support; everyone can communicate; everyone can contribute. Together we’re better.”

‘Offers, wants and needs’ includes a discussion about meeting patterns and practical arrangements. Inclusive Solutions has been involved in five Community Circles in various parts of the country and in Circle NG3, their ‘offer’ was to pay for a regular meeting space and some refreshments. They hire a room in a local pub for the Circle to meet on a monthly basis, welcome the thirty or so people who turn up, and facilitate, although individual meetings may well be led by other members of the group.

So what has Inclusive Solutions think has been learnt after almost two years of creating Community Circles?

It is still easier to say what this sort of group isn’t rather than define precisely what it is. However we do spend time each gathering simply exploring and building a picture of what participants value about meeting together. Here’s what Circle members have said so far:

Poster 1: What we value about Circle NG3.



The central components include the following.

1. People show up (or don't) *by choice*, not because they have been referred to the community circle or had their attendance mandated by someone else. People will come and go, show up once and not again, or attend irregularly.
2. As Lois Smidt told us in 2009, people need to “leave their labels at the door” and *come as themselves* rather than in their work role, as a representative of a local service or organisation, on behalf of someone else, or as a labelled person.
3. People will only show up if invited personally and some need a person with them to be present at all. We ensure that people are properly welcomed on arrival by assigning this role to at least three people, including younger members, in order to set the tone. Both hospitality and food is offered at the start of the gathering and is available throughout to suggest welcome and connection.
4. It is about creating a context, which allows or restores what is already and always there between people, namely the impulse to be generous and offer support. Again, no one is obligated to do anything in response to a particular need, want or offer.

5. People who know a lot of people are important in the task of growing the Circle and so we need to find the people who are best at making connections happen.

6. The Circle is strongest when it is most diverse. Young people of all ages are a unifying presence within Community Circles. As Peter Block says; *"It is hard to argue against the next generation."* We try to nurture their leadership and support their impulse to be generous. The Circle is a gathering where they can participate on equal terms around real and lively issues. It is not school – no one is forcing them to be there – and in our experience they keep coming back. The young people seem to appreciate the respectful space where they can offer help as well as name their own needs. They are great at welcoming and hospitality and love eating and drinking! As Angus, aged 15, said,

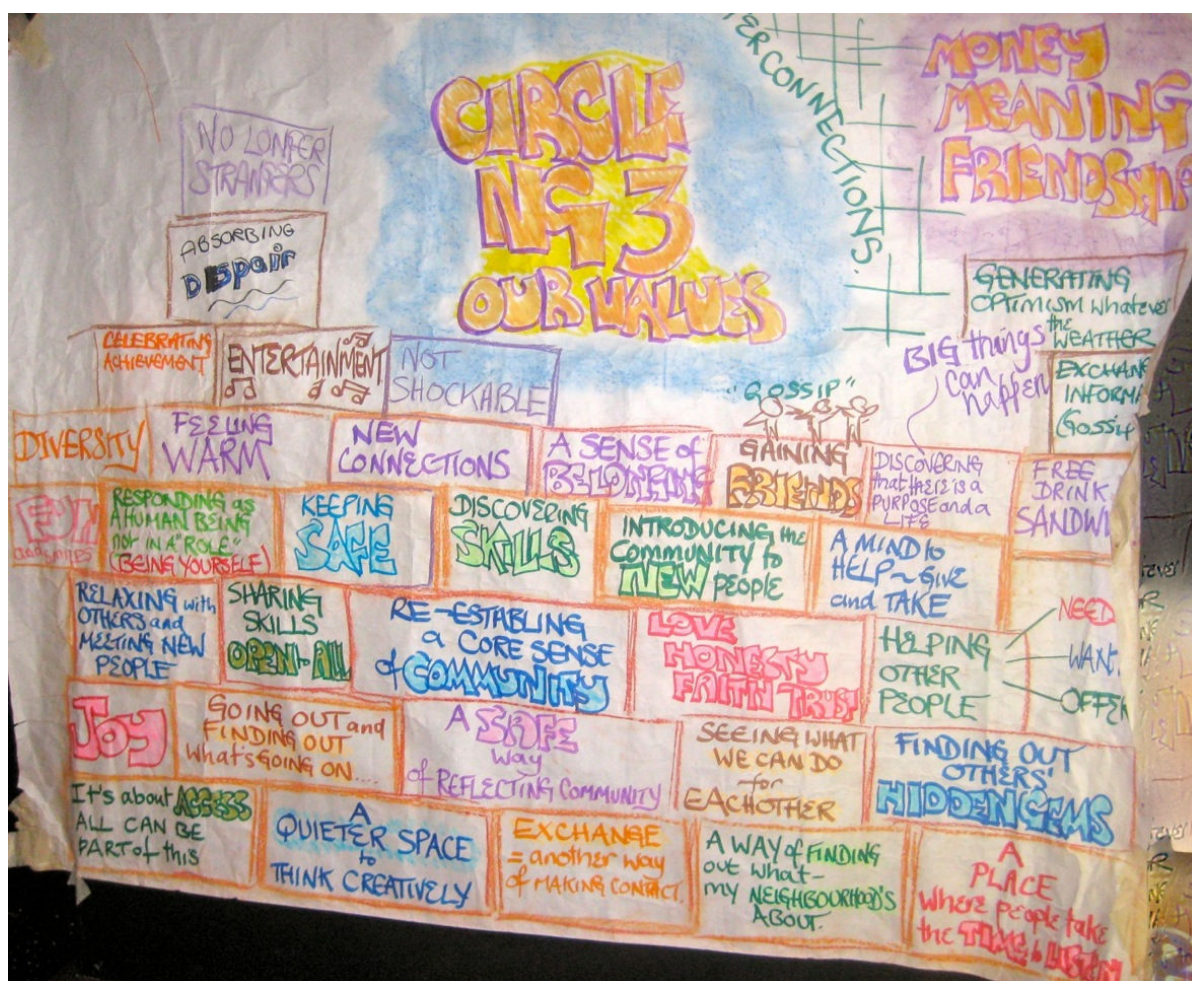
"It's meant a lot to see people all helping each other."

7. Gatherings need to be intentionally facilitated and hold a structure. Community Circles are not an open-ended get together – someone (or more than one person) leads and moves the gathering on to the next step ensuring that the Circle meeting finishes on time. The meeting leaders convene the gathering, hold the space and introduces the conversations that will happen.

8. It's about the *little words* that we all understand - needs, wants, offers, hope, trust, feeling safe. We try to keep the gathering jargon and acronym-free. Words like 'assessment', 'safeguarding', 'collaboration' have no place here.

9. What happens at the end in the flurry of conversations and connections before people leave may be as important as the main meeting itself.

Poster 2: Our values at Circle NG3



April, a woman with autism, sums up this kind of gathering really well:

'It is a meeting which is free with food and drink and where able and disabled people come together completely equally and help each other in all sorts of little and big ways. ... this meets one of the greatest needs of the disabled person to be able to help and to give. Also in the meeting is a chance to share in two's good things and needs in a respectful way.'

Keeping everyone safe

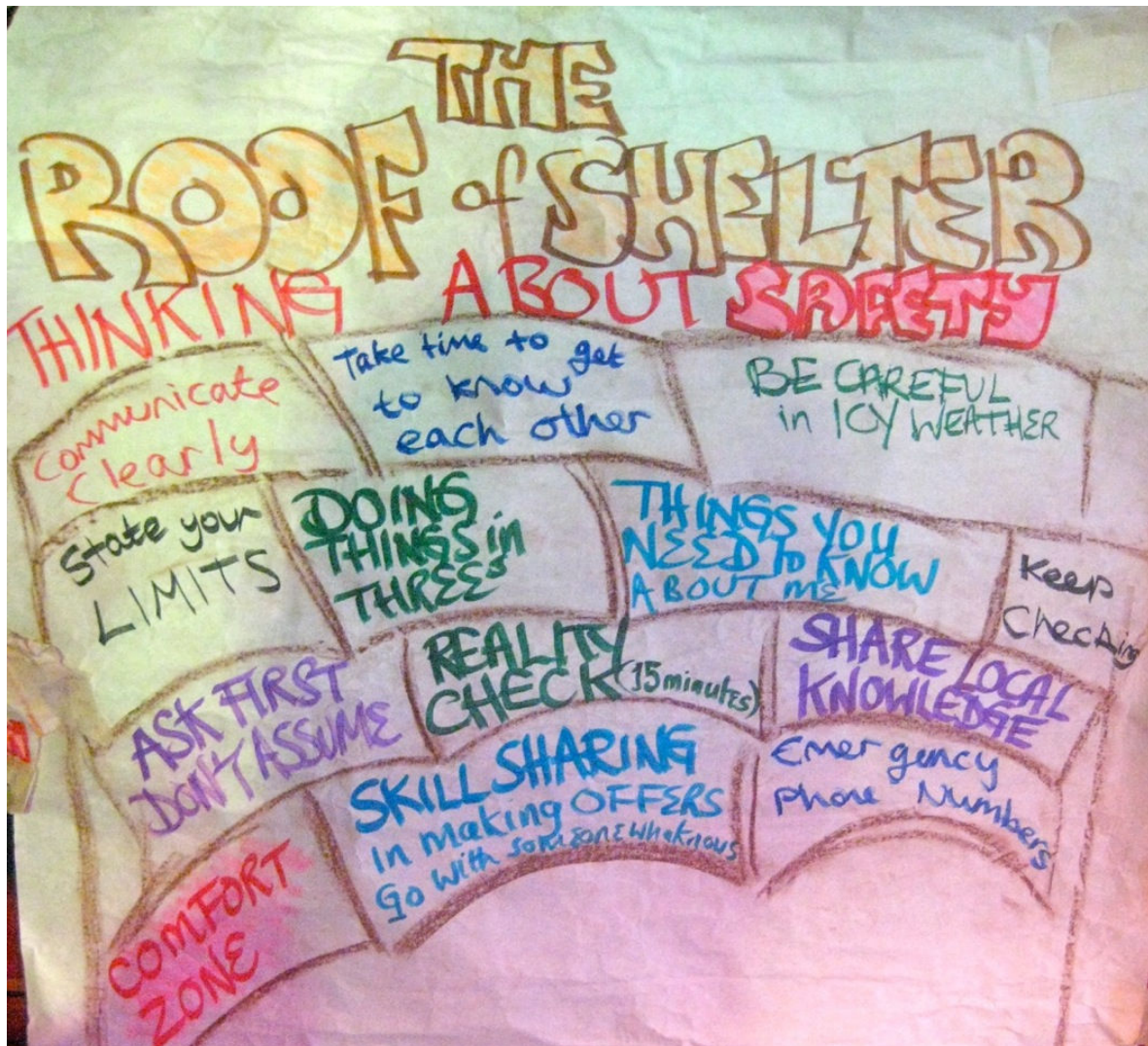
We asked the people at Beyond Welfare for their thoughts on staying safe whilst building community relatedness; this was their reply:

"...we have had many community conversations about this. We used our Thursday night gatherings to engage the community in setting the 'policy'. We have a policy that, with the little kids, at least two adults/care providers are present so that there is an accountability/protective structure. With the youth, yes, pairs or threes to assure the same. The reality is that people get hurt in

spite of protective measures, in all kinds of situations. We opt not to do 'background checks' because they are not a community structure of protection, they are an institutional 'solution'. And – if they truly worked we would not be seeing so much abuse in foster and institutionalised care where background checks are required. So we opt for a community/relational approach. It is also our experience that even people with a history of challenging behaviours behave better in a circle of community. Good news also is the knowledge that we have not had an abuse incident in our 12 years of building community”

Meetings of the Circle NG3 have included open discussions about safety over the past year. The safety of all is considered but the focus is on *natural* rather than *special* safety measures, such as doing things in threes rather than twos. It is not being vulnerable that puts you in jeopardy; it is being vulnerable *and isolated*. These discussions were captured on the 'Roof of Shelter' poster.

Poster 3: The Roof of Shelter



In the UK, recent changes in legislation have reduced the amount of discretion open to formal organisations: they can no longer 'opt not to do background checks'. But is

the Community Circle an organisation in this sense? As *Inclusive Solutions* pays for the room and arranges who will lead meetings, they cannot entirely 'leave their label at the door' and so have stimulated discussions about safety and sought advice from the local authority. It is noteworthy that the *Independent Safeguarding Authority* acknowledges that vulnerability can be context-specific¹² and that groups can be hosted by a formal organisation whilst being self-run and free of the need to make formal background checks¹³.

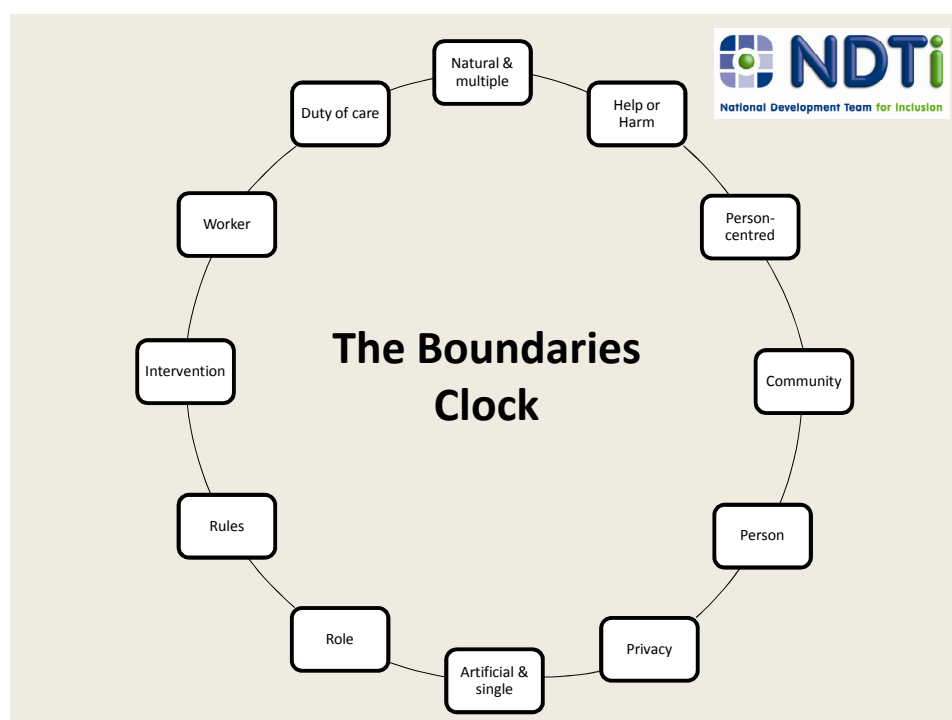
The Community Circle is an appropriate area for the ***Boundaries Clock*** to be employed, as it deliberately seeks to create a diverse community that includes people who need support to stay safe whilst maintaining informality. It deliberately seeks inclusive community solutions to the issues that formal organisations manage through rigid membership, regulation and exclusion. Although the topic of professional boundaries may not be strictly applicable here, since nobody is explicitly on-duty as a professional whilst they are in the Circle, it was helpful to use the Boundaries Clock structure to explore our solutions to safeguarding and inclusion issues.

¹² For example, a patient is regarded as a vulnerable adult whilst in the doctor's surgery but not elsewhere, so we conclude that their concept of vulnerability includes an acknowledgement of the context.

¹³ For example, the ISA agree that people who might be barred from a job in the health or social care service can lead meetings of local Alcoholics Anonymous peer support groups, which may well take place in a building managed by a health or social care agency.

The *Boundaries Clock*

Six pairs of competing priorities are set in opposition to one another to form the twelve-point *Boundary Clock*¹⁴. Individual case studies or service arrangements can then be placed on the clock-face 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 clock-face area, the issues that arise inevitably overlap here and there, but the twelve points frame a systematic discussion.








The table on the following pages presents the issues in three columns. First is a one-sentence summary¹⁵ of the general viewpoint for each of the twelve viewpoints on the clockface. The second column applies this general viewpoint to the context of the Community Circle. The third column shows how Circle NG3, where the second author is a founding member, has responded to these issues.




¹⁴ All metaphors have limited value and can carry unwanted freight. This clock is inanimate, has no hands, no power source, 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.





¹⁵ 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.

Applying the *Boundaries Clock* to the Community Circle

	General Viewpoint	Questions for the Community Circle	Solutions the Circle have found
	Help or Harm. Consider the actual or potential benefit to, or abuse of, the person in the here and now	What is the potential benefit of the Circle that people would lose if they could not participate? Have people been hurt or upset by the Circle? How can you keep everyone safe?	Meaning, friendship and money are all available at the circle. This is the messy world of relationships and so people can upset each other. That is the real world. The heart of the gathering is carefully facilitated to minimise clashes of personality and ideas. Safety is continually talked about and we have created an evolving 'roof of shelter' poster. Each meeting we revisit this. Key principles have included doing things in threes and a 'reality/safety check' at the end of each meeting regarding offers made.
	Person-centred. Adapt your conduct to the people involved and their context	How do things change if people turn up with different gifts and support needs? How flexible can you be?	We watch and listen very carefully as people arrive. We have a welcoming team that thinks about needs and provides a comfortable greeting as people arrive. Food and drink are always there at the start. We talk about needs as part of what we do each meeting. We try to be very flexible. We watch for gifts and look for possible opportunities for these to be used. For example when Sue raised a need for her mum's Care home to have some kind of musical activity, Robert, a man with learning disability who is a gifted guitarist was immediately asked to be at the heart of a musical jam session there.

	General Viewpoint	Questions for the Community Circle	Solutions the Circle have found
	Community. Make the most of the person's informal community relationships	Can people bring friends along to Circle meetings? How welcoming is the Circle to newcomers? How does belonging to the Circle help people to make and keep roles and friendships with other people who are not part of the Circle? Do people see each other outside of the Circle meetings? How do you help that to happen?	<p>People are all invited to bring friends/anyone they think will benefit or could offer something to the circle. Every effort is made to welcome newcomers. There is always a cross age welcome team at the front door and everyone always introduces themselves to the rest of the group.</p> <p>An informal eating/drinking/chatting half hour at the start sets a good tone.</p> <p>People are encouraged during the meeting to make offers that will lead to activities outside the circle. Activities in threes or groups are encouraged. 'Leave your label at the door' has been a helpful mantra encouraging people to come as themselves not in role or as a labelled person.</p>
	Person. Focus on the person and their unique resources, relationships and needs	Are there still hidden depths in people that you have not drawn out? How can you mine the gold?	<p>We constantly try to mine for hidden gems and they do emerge. The 'new and good' question brings out many surprise gems. When people make offers in response to expressed needs we often notice gifts emerging. Of course there is always more in people and modesty will always get in the way – but generosity of spirit reveals much!</p>
	Privacy. Support the person's right to run their own life, participate in the community and build a home free from surveillance or interference	Do people share things about other members in the Circle meetings that should be kept confidential? Do members feel dominated or controlled by other Circle members?	<p>This has not been an issue so far and the meeting facilitator would not give allow much time to someone doing this. There is always a right to not speak/to pass.</p> <p>There is no obvious controlling happening apart from the circle facilitators who are trying to be firm, listening, but democratic leaders.</p>

	General Viewpoint	Questions for the Community Circle	Solutions the Circle have found
	<p>Artificial and Single.</p> <p>Keep the relationship between the worker and the person distinctive by following special rules and inhibiting other contact.</p>	<p>Are there ways in which relationships within the Circle are intentionally distinctive – different from other relationships that members have?</p>	<p>Leaving labels at the door makes an enormous difference to the informality and openness of the gathering. We are trying to create something natural whilst deliberately and intentionally relationship building. We are doing something which for many present would not naturally occur in their lives, but also trying to be genuine and authentic and so avoid artificiality.</p>
	<p>Role.</p> <p>Watch out for setting a precedent and keep a consistent sense of what counts as an appropriate working relationship</p>	<p>Do people get jealous of the closeness of some of the friendships they see in the Circle? Should some people 'hold back' while they are in Circle meetings so that they keep everything fair and appropriate?</p>	<p>We are not trying to restrain people from developing friendships– just the opposite. Private jealous feelings may be present but these have never been articulated publicly or privately to us so far. The natural modelling of strong friendships feels healthy in this context as long as no one is left out. We watch for this often, encouraging pairs and groups to talk to newcomers or anyone where relationship or communication is challenging. Occasionally we ask everyone to spend part of the meeting with someone they do not know.</p>
	<p>Rules.</p> <p>Apply law and regulation to all people and all relationships at all times to keep things fair</p>	<p>Are there any rules, laws or regulations that shape what you do? This might include duties to the venue provider. What does the Independent Safeguarding Authority say you ought to do?</p>	<p>The most important rules here are about safety for the most vulnerable including the children and vulnerable adults involved. Hence work in threes, reality checks on skills needed for offers made, exchange of emergency phone numbers and information that might be needed about each other before we do anything outside the circle.</p> <p>Safeguarding Officers have visited and met separately with a group of us. They were comfortable with what we were trying to do and were not insisting everyone had a Criminal Records Bureau check.</p>

	General Viewpoint	Questions for the Community Circle	Solutions the Circle have found
	Intervention. Make the most of the relationship between the worker and the person	The Circle convenors have a particular relationship with Circle members. How do you keep that safe and positive?	We welcome, convene, facilitate and model our own needs and willingness to make offers. We display our own humanity and bring our own children and personal friends into the circle as participants, which conveys its own message about how safe and important we feel the circle is.
	Worker. Value the worker and their unique resources, relationships and needs	Are convenors allowed to relax, take time off, be useless or idiosyncratic sometimes? Do the next generation leaders have to be clones or can they do things in a new way?	We do relax and simply enjoy the circle for what it is for ourselves. We have particularly found it useful to involve young people in the facilitation. Elliot, a 17 year old young man has twice facilitated the circle and this created a different atmosphere and was greatly appreciated.
	Duty of Care. Take action, and sometimes even over-ride the person's preferences in order to keep everyone safe	What contingency planning have you done? When would you call the police or contact a relative, social worker or doctor?	A core of the group are all actively watching out for difficulties/issues and the 'reality check' session is helping us to name issues. We have talked to other people when safety concerns have arisen. For example, when Elliot offered to climb a stepladder and use a hedge trimmer, his dad spoke to a friend about it at the end of the meeting, as he had no prior experience of using such equipment – even on the ground!
	Natural and Multiple. Use the worker's ordinary humanity, citizenship and experience of life to engage with the person.	Do people's lives overlap in other settings as well as the Circle? Is that OK? Can healthcare staff (for example) invite people they support to a place where they take off the 'professional mask'?	People's lives do overlap in other settings such as church, allotments, work and wider community. Making sure that the circle is focused geographically locally for the facilitators and most of the participants is very important.

Conclusion

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. We fear regulators will try to stop bad things happening by stopping good things happening, while we are convinced that making good things happen in communities will reduce the chances

that bad things will happen. Circle NG3 is building a community where everyone is welcome. The *Boundaries Clock* stimulated a rigorous and serious examination of what Circle NG3 has done to keep everyone safe and included.