

## Nine ways to connect your care home with the community

Care home residents benefit from getting out, building relationships with other citizens beyond the care system and contributing to wider community life and this is the focus of the [Time to Connect](#) project. For some, this begins when care homes invite members of the community in, but the initiative is only complete when the relationship becomes reciprocal and people go out too. The following real-life examples have come from 76 care homes<sup>1</sup> and they illustrate a range of ways for a care home to connect with its community. You might like to:

- Print this document and highlight the items that residents you know engage in.
- Write down a brief summary of any activities that you offer but I have missed. Send it to me at [peter.bates@ndti.org.uk](mailto:peter.bates@ndti.org.uk), so I can update the online version of this document.
- Check your activities programme to see if you have at least one activity under each of the headings.
- Check whether your focus is entirely on inhouse activities or whether you provide real opportunities for residents to build relationships with citizens beyond the care system and to make a contribution to the wider community rather than just receiving help from others.
- If you want to start a new activity, you might try contacting a care home that has already given it a go to see what you can learn<sup>2</sup>.

The paragraphs below combine what everyone is doing into one big list, so it is obvious that no individual home can do everything that appears here. Moreover, just because an opportunity is provided, it does not mean that it is necessarily what an individual resident wants to do, so it remains vital to strive for a person-centred approach. Finally, just as any of these activities can be done in a way that adds enjoyment, confidence and skills (or not), so each activity can be done in a way that reinforces the residents' isolation from the wider community or that builds bridges and connections with people beyond the perimeter wall.

---

### 1. Make the most of your site and...

Your home may have a feature that is in demand in your local neighbourhood which can be used to draw people in, such as a meeting room, a kitchen, a garden or a woodland. You may have space to keep Shetland ponies, breed chickens or build an aviary.

### Make the most of your community

There may be venues close to your home that would be willing to link up with you or a local community project that you could support. There may be ways in which you can connect with the people using the street or bus stop nearest the home.

---

<sup>1</sup> An email was sent to 500 homes in February 2020, and some care home websites were briefly reviewed to collect these examples. Most examples illustrate the start of the journey as they show how the public are invited into the home and await the fulfilment that will occur when the residents go out and connect with community life. Notice that only a few activities from each care home appear on this list. Each home has a much fuller programme which cannot be represented here, so the quality of an individual home should not be inferred from either the frequency with which it is mentioned, or the activity itself, whether mundane or remarkable.

<sup>2</sup> You can find which home provided each example by looking at the endnotes. If there are no endnotes on this version of the 'Nine Ways' document, click [here](#) to get to it. To go to the shorter, uncluttered version, click [here](#). The text in the body of the document is the same in both versions.

---

## 2. Trade with local businesses and...

The home trades with many local businesses, from sales of individual toiletries to mass catering supplies, replacement of white goods, repairs and transport providers. Each of these businesses can be encouraged to show their human face and link with residents rather than rely on remote deliveries to the kitchen entrance.

## Work with local businesses

Some residents may enjoy a tour of the workplace, especially if they worked there in the past, while others may want a job there. Local businesses may offer raffle prizes to go alongside those donated by friends of the home or community partners.

---

## 3. Bring in visiting services and...

A host of occasional visitors to the home provide services, such as:

- Health and personal care offered by the doctor, nurse, counsellor, hairdresser, chiropodist, masseur, optician, audiologist, dentist, aromatherapist
- People bring in animals such as an alpaca, dog, donkey, falcon and other birds of prey, goat, guinea pig, lamb, parrot, pony and snake.
- Performances such as flower displays, lectures, theatre, dance and musicians.
- People bringing leisure activities - library, the local Knit & Natter group, pottery painting
- Fitness trainers such as Tai Chi and Let's Get Active

## Use community services

Wherever possible, use universal services made available to all citizens in the mainstream community rather than relying on services brought into the home. After all, the library has a bigger selection than the van or book trolley.

- Visit the City Farm or a petting zoo and meet up with other citizens who share the same interests.
- Attend places of worship as well as receive pastoral visits from Anglican, Catholic and Salvation Army groups.
- Shopping in the usual way can offer a richer experience alongside the range offered by pop-up shops in the home selling clothing and shoes.

---

## 4. Cherish the skill and motivation of residents and...

At the heart of community lies the idea of contribution. Staff and others can look out for the resident's skill, interest or hobby which is the starting point for linking with others. Does the resident like to keep a pet? Birthdays provide an opportunity to focus on individuals. It may simply be a common interest that connects one citizen to one resident for one conversation.

## Cherish the skill and motivation of local citizens

An external charity or neighbourhood development project may capture the imagination of one or more residents and so could be supported, alongside supporting the comforts fund at the home. A village festival may be run by local people or the founder of an interest group may live nearby.

---

## 5. Support residents to host their own guests and...

Individual residents or small groups can invite friends in for a particular activity such as playing a game. The care home can make space available for a resident to welcome their own relatives and friends to their party, shared meal or wake.

## Support citizens to host residents

Part of the fabric of civil society is hospitality, whereby a citizen invites a care home resident, who may be an old friend or a new acquaintance, into their home.

---

## 6. Create a brilliant events programme and...

A good events programme based on what residents enjoy will be attractive and draw in relatives, friends and community members - if they are invited and welcomed. Events can include:

- Social events and activities, such as coffee morning, reminiscence, quiz night, bingo, darts, open day, garden party or a tea dance.
- Craft activities such as making pottery, candles and greeting cards, glass painting, flower arranging, baking
- Pamper sessions and nail care.
- Exercise such as keep-fit, ball games, walking, quoits, hoopla, table tennis, indoor bowling, golf, skittles, Wii video gaming, yoga, as well as watching sports together.

## Utilise the brilliance of community-led activities

Reach out to other stakeholders, such as hosting a carer's support group or offering day care to citizens who may later need to move into your care home. Sometimes a broker helps to bring activity providers together with care homes. Don't forget to allow for the 'no thanks' option for people who don't wish to participate.

Link with community groups and organisations that arrange performances such as concerts, choir, artists, karaoke, storytelling, poetry reading. Attend their events as well as inviting them to perform in your care home.

---

## 7. Strengthen existing contacts and...

Relatives and friends can be included in all kinds of social events. People celebrate Chinese New Year, Valentine's Day, Pancake Day, Mother's Day, Eid-al-Fitr, Seder, Hallowe'en, Bonfire Night, Diwali and Christmas. Guests can be deliberately invited to join in with activities and their skills may be harnessed. Relatives and friends can eat alongside residents, stay overnight, and be invited along on trips, either sharing the transport or meeting at the destination. Payments and other 'rules of engagement' can be clarified, so everyone knows how the relationship between care staff and visitors should work. When relatives and friends can't visit in person, care staff can help with communication with relatives or ensure that Postcards of Kindness get through.

Beyond the care home, beyond the circle of extended family and old friends lie the rather more nebulous 'communities' of strangers and acquaintances, people who are not yet friends of the resident but could become so in the future.

## Reach out to make new friends in the community

Care staff can find out where friendships start in their area by doing some Community Mapping. On the way, a link might form with a specific organisation, such as the Parish Council, Brownies, school or conservation group. You may also establish a connection with a key individual in the community who will lend their ongoing support, such as the mayor. Surviving relatives of those residents who have died can be invited to continue their link with the home. Do not neglect the value of informal communities and connections in favour of people whose conduct is regulated by policies and written agreements, such as staff, Volunteers or a League of Friends. As a back-up, volunteers can be recruited by the home or looked after by a volunteer centre and join in with activities, share a cup of tea and chat, go out in the garden or go for walks. Buddies may develop 'befriending' relationships with isolated residents.

---

## 8. Set up a project and...

Your organisation may be a registered charity that engages local people as Trustees or you may have a Friends group or involve residents in managing the programme through a regular residents meeting. Garden space can be shared with members of the community so that schoolchildren or gardeners create and maintain an allotment together. Training provided for staff, such as how to create a dementia-friendly service, can be offered to community members so everyone learns together.

## Join a project

Pre-school children from a nursery can visit and sing nursery rhymes, while residents may enjoy a return visit. Schoolchildren can visit to read with the residents, while residents may be able to visit the school to talk about the old days or judge a painting competition. Older schoolchildren, students, interns or jobseekers can come to the home on a work experience placement.

---

## 9. Connect with other care providers and...

The home can arrange joint activities with other care homes in the group or similar health and social care services, thus widening the circle of connection between residents and others who receive health or social care. The home could host meetings for the Activity Coordinators working in the area, develop theory, collect evidence and showcase the talent of freelance performers, while residents can compete in sector-wide competitions.

## Connect with neighbourhood forums

Keep in mind that many people want intergenerational and diverse networks of friends and acquaintances and do not wish to be confined to a segregated world, however caring. Links can be established with individual community groups and organisations as well as neighbourhood forums where many coordinators of these groups meet together.

---