



Together With Compassion

No Barriers Here with Veterans: Creative Conversations about Future and End of Life Care

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Summary

The purpose of this report is to share our findings and impact with our funders and partners and give thanks and acknowledgements to the wonderful people and organisations who helped to make this work happen.

This project highlights the benefit of taking creative and non-clinical approaches to advance care planning (ACP). Community-based ACP activities gives opportunities to explore a range of learning styles and offers excellent engagement in a safe shared space.

This pilot suggests that arts and community-based models like No Barriers Here (NBH) can improve confidence in ACP conversations, helping to foster a compassionate community of peer support and increased discussion and sharing of future wishes and care plans.

The team are excited use more of this creative-approach to ACPs with discrete cohorts of people; united by either protected characteristics, common lived experience and/or a shared community venue.

This public health-funded pilot shows strong potential for adaptation with other community groups through partnerships; where hospices and communities come together to help address issues that matter to us all. Death and dying is everyone's business.

Together in partnership

Huge thanks to main funder and supporter Lancashire County Council's Community Projects Team and valued partner and additional funder, South Ribble Borough Council's Communities team. Heartfelt thanks to Leyland Veterans' Café and Mary Stevens Hospice. You were all instrumental in making this work happen.

Special thanks from Lynn Kelly (Chief Executive Officer)

Our mission is quality of life, to end of life. By working in partnership with local and regional authorities and other hospices and community groups, we are stronger together; together in compassion to support people and their loved ones through death, dying and loss.



Aim and Background

AIM

To train two hospice staff to be NBH facilitators, identify a community group likely to face barriers in end of life discussions and pilot the NBH approach to increase confidence in having such conversations.

The Compassionate Communities team had become aware of NBH¹ from being regular attenders of the online Compassionate Communities Network Meeting².

Hearing excellent feedback from multiple hospices, our aim was to become facilitators via training from The Mary Stevens Hospice, Stourbridge. However, we needed to source funding for training, venue hire and additional resources.

The Compassionate Communities team have regular contact with our three local councils in Central Lancashire, and Lancashire County Council (LCC). LCC Community Projects team had a relevant funding opportunity that we successfully bid into.

Once trained, we sought to work with a group who may struggle to have such sensitive conversations. One of South Ribble Borough Council's (SRBC) Communities team's officer, a veteran herself, was keen to explore improving ACP conversations with veterans - a group that can face challenges and barriers to discussing end of life wishes. Having an opportunity to present this opportunity to the welcoming Veterans' Café, we recruited another four men and one woman to form a cohort of six. Taking advice from the council officer, we chose the term 'future care planning' rather than ACP.



¹ No Barriers Here, The Mary Stevens Hospice, www.nobarriershere.org

² Generously hosted by Judy Horne (Community Development Worker), St Luke's Hospice in Plymouth, www.stlukes-hospice.org.uk



Method

1. No Barriers Here facilitator training

Clinical Educator and Compassionate Communities Project Lead trained at Mary Stevens Hospice (they originally co-produced this training with adults with learning disabilities).

2. Seek partner and identify cohort

SRBC supportive to explore possibilities with veterans (local authority and proactive member of the Armed Forces Covenant).

3. Arrange dates and book venue

Choose a well known and accessible community venue. Workshops happen over three consecutive weeks. Additional funding secured from SRBC for venue hire including lunch.

4. Promotion, marketing and recruitment

Make a poster, arrange to speak at the fortnightly Leyland Veterans' Café, taking NBH examples of arts and craft.

5. Pre-workshops evaluation

Ten-minute telephone interview

6. Workshop 1: Getting to know me and what is important to me

7. Workshop 2: Choices and wishes

8. Workshop 3: My Legacy

9. Post-workshops evaluation

Ten-minute telephone interview.

10. Hospice myth-busting talk, tour and goodbyes

Tea, coffee and cake seemed a great way to finish off this lovely project, with our "little family".

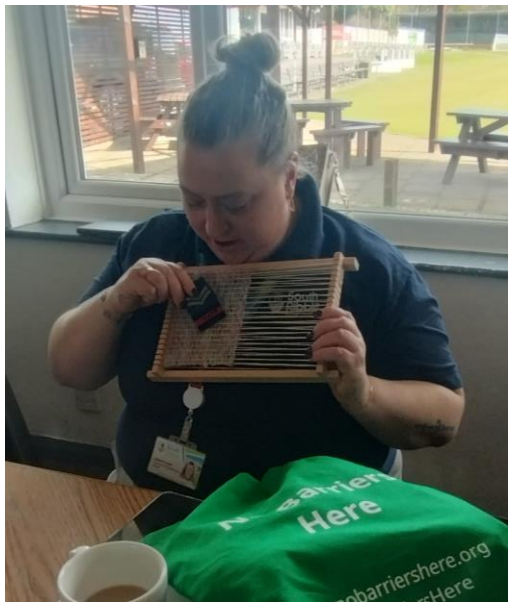


Results

Four of six veterans increased confidence in ACP.
The table below shows participants' confidence scored out of 10, in talking about ACPs.

	Start	End	Change	Comments
1	5/10	5/10	0%	Workshops "very good", meeting and slightly exceeding their expectations. Particularly valued the sense of community and connection formed among participants, likening it to a "little family." They would be willing to take part again.
2	9/10	9/10	0%	Workshops went fairly well overall but found the amount of art activities overwhelming. Felt the art sometimes got in the way of deeper conversations and suggested more discussion, writing, or storytelling would have helped. Recommended including practical information on wills, Lasting Power of Attorney and assisted dying. They are confident in talking about ACP and feels their spouse knows their wishes clearly.
3	9/10	10/10	11%	A positive experience. Arts and crafts offered a fresh, more palatable way to explore ACP. The creative approach broadened understanding, encouraged reflection on important issues and made people more open and vulnerable. The open atmosphere supported honest conversations.
4	9/10	10/10	11%	A positive and engaging experience with meaningful interactions across a diverse ex-forces community. The safe, supportive atmosphere encouraged openness. Even though not 'arty,' found the creative activities surprisingly helpful for relaxation and conversation. Would recommend especially for those who may be facing hidden mental health challenges. Already at ease with the topic due to personal experiences of loss and a natural use of dark humour (common in the forces).
5	6/10	9/10	33%	The experience was both powerful and personally meaningful. Sessions engaging and thought-provoking. The shared experience of military service fostered a strong sense of connection and understanding and sparked important conversations beyond the group, including candid and even humorous discussions with friends, demonstrating a shift in comfort and openness. They strongly endorse the program to others.
6	5/10	10/10	100%	The workshops boosted both confidence and perspective on ACP. Previously unfamiliar with end of life planning beyond funerals, they found the sessions eye-opening and thought-provoking. Being among fellow veterans created a relaxed, relatable space, making tough topics approachable—even enjoyable. What was once difficult to discuss is now something they can speak about openly and with humour.





Workshop 3

Conclusion

This pilot suggests that creative, community-based models like NBH can enhance ACP conversations and promote person-centred care. A shared, safe community space played a vital role in fostering trust and engagement.

There is a clear value in using an arts-based approach. For participants, it was the first time doing arts and crafts again since early childhood. It created a lovely, calm and relaxed atmosphere – someone described it as ‘therapeutic’.

Having their very own bag of ‘No Barriers Here’ arts equipment to use each week and keep at the end, gave a value to the experience, with someone remarking ‘It’s like Crimbo!’. We concur with NBH, that although more costly than having shared supplies, each person needs to have their own box or bag of supplies. Everyone wished to keep their work, rather than making a community display.

This arts-based approach to ACPs shows strong potential for adaptation with other community groups through hospice collaboration.



FACILITATOR'S REFLECTIONS:

Justine Cummins

(Clinical Educator – on the left)

It has opened my eyes to how differently we can have ACP conversations with people, bringing in arts and crafts can help with barriers around this topic.

I feel we wouldn't have got as much out of the group if we had just had a conversation regarding ACP. I feel the group opened up and shared lots of their life stories and it was a privilege to be part of this.

I found the programme fun to deliver and would be happy to deliver this course all the time.

FACILITATOR'S REFLECTIONS:

Jenny England (Compassionate Communities Project Lead – right)

I was surprised at how easily we recruited six veterans; people were open and curious to ACPs via an arts-based approach. Offering lunch was an additional expense, but totally worth it; helping to form strong bonds and relationships in the group, which continue today. Adding a final session at the hospice felt an appropriate thank you to this remarkable group of men and women. I am looking forward to planning more sessions with other partners and groups.

I am very grateful to Joanne Lloyd at SRBC and Laura Worden at LCC, for championing this project. Huge thanks to the amazing Leyland Veterans' Café for their hospitality and support; an incredibly supportive community of ex-forces men and women.



Our final meeting at St Catherine's Hospice, including a myth-busting tour.
Helping us to spread the word and continue to reach more people in our communities.