



Neighbourhood Networks
Evaluation of the Peer Support Network in North Ayrshire
May 2023

www.neighbourhoodnetworks.org
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Introduction

This is an independent evaluation of the North Ayrshire Neighbourhood Network assessing the impact of the peer support network. The work was carried out by Outside the Box, between February and May 2023. The aim of the evaluation is to assess the effectiveness and impact of the network for network members and how they live their lives, and for their families and carers.

About Neighbourhood Networks

Networks are generally made up of around 9 to 12 people. Everyone in the network tends to live within the same community, often within walking or easy travelling distance of each other. People who are part of the network are called members. They may have a learning or physical disability, mental health issue or other support need. Members choose to be part of a network - their involvement is voluntary.

The aim and purpose of the network is friendship and mutual support. Each member is encouraged to use their skills to help and support other members of the network.

Neighbourhood Networks Mission, Vision and Values Statement says:

“Through local networks of mutual support, we will work with people in their neighbourhoods to deliver the support they require to live independently in their own homes, and to contribute to their communities.”

Each network is supported by a Community Living Worker (CLW), who generally lives in the same area as the members. The role of the Community Living Worker is to support the network and its individual members. It is also to connect members with their community, increase activities that they are involved in, their circle of friends and connections, and reduce social isolation.

Network members tend to be people who are at the edge of services, or transitioning into adulthood, or may have previously had more intensive help but are now at a stage where they need some support but don't necessarily need a service or regular support with a set number of hours.

Each network decides amongst themselves how often they meet, where they meet, and the activities they want to participate in. Each network is a genuine partnership based upon coproduction between the individual members, the CLW and Neighbourhood Networks.

About the North Ayrshire Network

In November 2019 North Ayrshire Council, on behalf of North Ayrshire Health and Social Care Partnership, commissioned Neighbourhood Networks to develop a network covering the Garnock Valley area.

Since then, the North Ayrshire Network has developed, now consisting of 6 local networks that cover three geographical areas: Largs, Stevenston, and Garnock Valley. Each area has 2 networks, and they are supported by 5 Community Living Workers and a Network Manager.

The Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns had a significant impact on the development of the networks. Despite this, the CLW's were able to develop online activities that enabled members to build and sustain connections. Since then, they have been able to host in-person network activities that have supported members to rebuild important aspects of their lives that were impacted by the sustained lockdowns such as confidence and self-esteem.

About the evaluation

The aim of the evaluation is to evaluate the impact of the peer support network in North Ayrshire. We have used an ethnographic approach which involves observing people in their own environments, in this case this was members' local networks, to provide a holistic understanding of experiences, contexts, and impacts. In North Ayrshire this involved observing network meetings, taking part in network activities where appropriate, and facilitating interviews and conversations with people involved with the networks to evaluate the impact of the network on members and family members. The observations were collected and organised using an evaluation tool called Magic Moments. More information about Magic Moments as an evaluation and analysis tool can be found at these links; <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/developing-evidence-enriched-practice-health-and-social-care-older-people> and <https://otbds.org/storie-matter-how-they-can-be-used-in-qualitative-analysis-and-evaluation/>

We used Magic Moments to highlight small but significant changes in people's lives. They are a snapshot of individuals' experiences that collectively show the differences in people's lives because they are, for example, a member of a network or group, participate in activities, or are supported well. In this evaluation, the Magic Moments are a collection of quotes, comments, and notes from observations of activities and conversations.

We collected qualitative data from observations and participation in network sessions including a regional activity that brought together networks from all three local areas. Our visits enabled us to have informal conversations with a range of network members, their family members, and CLW's.

We followed up our informal conversations with semi-structured interviews using question sets based on the Personal Outcomes Planning Wheel. We carried these out by attending digital and in-person staff meetings and conducting telephone interviews with network members and family. These began with some general questions about strengths and weaknesses of the Networks, then more specific questions around areas of independence, skills, and confidence. To determine the degree of connection to community or levels of isolation, questions were also asked about engagement in activities. Family members were asked additional questions about degree of participation in other activities, and around any challenges encountered by the Network. They were also given the opportunity to give any other relevant information or comments.

The sources of information that the evaluation has drawn on are:

- In-person and telephone conversations with members of the peer support network
- In-person and telephone conversations with family members of network members

- Discussions with staff and managers at Neighbourhood Networks
- Evaluators observations and notes from network visits
- Neighbourhood Networks Values and Mission Statements
- Neighbourhood Networks Annual Reports and Blogs
- North Ayrshire Neighbourhood Networks Evaluation - North Ayrshire Health & Social Care Partnership August 2022
- Care Inspection Report April 2023
- Taylor Nisbet - Establishing the financial case for Neighbourhood Networks 2018/19

Within Neighbourhood Networks it also draws upon:

- Neighbourhood Networks Charter of Rights
- Member Planning Wheel and Action Plan
- Key Performance Indicators
- Support Planning policy and procedure
- Information leaflets

Magic Moments

Life Skills	
Person	Magic Moment
Member	"I do lots of cooking here – I also did cooking at my college."
Member	"I like doing cooking the best. My favourite thing to make is tomato soup."
Member	"I wasn't very sure about soup – not a soup person but we made it here together and I tried it. I'm now a soup person...I get to try new things here."
Member	"No, I've never peeled a carrot before, but I tried – it's not easy but I did it."
Member	"Now I know how to make chicken noodle soup – I didn't know that before. I might ask my carers to make this with me now that I know how – I can even peel and chop the carrots myself."
Member	"We have made soup before. We made tomato soup, and we then used the leftovers to make it into a pasta sauce to make another meal."
Member	"We do a lot of themed sessions. We did Halloween activities, same for Christmas and now Easter. At Christmas we got to do arts and crafts and I loved making Christmas stars and using glue. We also did Christmas cooking. We make turkey, Brussel sprouts, pigs in blankets and learned how to make roast potatoes."
Staff	"If there are ever any challenges – personal or things that come from a group meeting – we [community living workers] offer guidance and support to work through it, but it's important to give space and time for that to happen."
Staff	"Member B was quite isolated, almost in a wee bubble. She had a very basic phone that would only make phone calls. We helped her to get a better phone and did some digital skills training with her – she can now do facetime, social media, and is much more connected."
Staff	"The activities really vary – crafts, cooking, personal safety, money skills, cleaning – but they are all important skills that members want to have."
Member	"If people are arguing in the street, it's better to cross the road to avoid trouble." Personal Safety Session
Member	"Theoretically, a bumbag is safer to keep your stuff in because it's harder for someone to remove or cut off. I'm just sharing my knowledge and skills with everyone. I try not to carry really valuable items in my bag – just my essentials." Personal Safety Session
Member	"...or wear your bag inside your jacket – a cross body bag instead of shoulder bag. Also, in busy areas wear your backpack back to front. You need to be careful in bus areas – like shops, bus stops, train stations – where there's lots of people." Personal Safety Session
Member	"We do so many activities – today is personal safety which is good to know. But my favourite thing to do together is bowling – it's so much fun."
Member	"I've really enjoyed this; I've not done it before – it's really good to know it." Personal Safety Session
Member	"I am so glad Neighbourhood Networks got me a sewing teacher. I have loved making shirts and cushions and quilts. I can't wait to make my leggings"
Family	"His communication was going backwards, and I think this group has been really helpful for him"

Family	"To have someone like Anna May being there to explain things and help him with paperwork etc, that is really invaluable to me. It means so much to me that someone is there for him"
Member	"Catherine helped me with my computer at Christmas – she came after the new year to sort it all out and now I'm online"
Family	"They [the members] work as a team – the team decides what they want to do. They just all go with it, there's no conflict or disagreements, they all work together and help each other...They all take part in it."
Family	"This all started when he went into independent living - didn't know how he was going to fill his time... Too many [favourite activities] to pick from"

Friendships and Relationships	
Person	Magic Moment
Member	"We [the members] look out for each other"
Family	"You wouldn't know they have only known each other for four months".
Staff	"There's a lot of peer support between the members – they are each other's cheerleaders."
Staff	"We plan things to go together – all the regional networks get together for an activity. They're usually seasonal activities like Christmas or Easter and the members really enjoy those.... It gives members a chance to build different types of friendships with people who like outside their own local area."
Staff	"Quite often members will catch-up with each other in smaller pairs or groups after our network meeting had finished – 2 of my members always go somewhere together after."
Member	"My favourite thing about NN is all the different activities and hanging out with all my gang."
Member	"We're just planning our Abba tribute night out – it's in Beith so we don't need to travel up to Glasgow – it can be tricky to get home at the end of the night because the transport isn't good."
Member	"It's nice when we all get together [the different networks] – we all know each other, we're lots of friends."
Member	"Aye, I go to Johnny's Disco with my friends. Used to go on a Friday but now I go to the shops to do my shopping on a Friday."
Staff	"Member asking for other members addresses so she could send them a postcard when she went on holiday"
Member	"It was through the Networks that I met my fiancé. We are hoping to get a house together and get married in the future."
Member	"Since joining NN I have formed some good friendships whereas before I was more isolated and only really got out with family. I enjoy going along to network activities and meeting up with other members. I have particularly enjoyed the personal safety courses that I have attended with members of NN at the centre of personal safety in Ardrossan."
Member	"Made a lot of friends in the group"

Family	“With Neighbourhood Networks he is very busy, very sociable. Neighbourhood Networks has filled such a gap in his daily routine. From a parent's point of view – my god, I can’t thank you enough. It is absolutely wonderful”
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Confidence and Self-Esteem	
Person	Magic Moment
Staff	“Today is the first time that we’ve had a member lead the session. They planned out the activity, worked on the recipe, and shopped for all the ingredients and utensils that we’re using.”
Member	“I don’t come here all the time for every session, it depends on how I’m feeling on the day. It was good to lead the session today. I didn’t feel nervous because it’s a relaxed and friendly space – I would feel nervous at big formal meetings or things like that, but it’s not like that here.”
Staff	“Covid lockdowns sucked the confidence out of people. Confidence and self-esteem is one of the outcomes that unlocks the others – once that starts to build for the members you see the other outcomes begin to fall into place much easier. All the outcomes feed from that.”
Staff	“All our work is about being member-led and creating choices for people, everything is flexible and they [members] can come and go as they wish. They don’t have to come to every meeting or activity – they chose what they want to take part in, and it helps to grow their independence.”
Staff	“Taking part in community events and things like community larders – we can see the difference it makes to members, but it can take a long time to build up the confidence to take part.”
Staff	“There’s a member I’m thinking of, she had limited engagement with her community, was very shy and not very confident. She’s really found her space in the local community centre – she’s become a total rep for them – helping to organise and get everyone local going to the cinema nights. She’s really come out of her shell.”
Staff	“You have to know when and how to take a step back to create more space for members to grow – like when we went to the bowling. I could see that they felt confident, so I just merged into the background – there if they needed me but getting on great without me.... it’s the same with other activities like cinema trips.”
Staff	“Covid knocked their confidence and the groups have allowed this to be built back up. They met on zoom every week until they were able to meet in real life. This helped them to get to know each other and allowed them to meet in their safe place at home until they met in real life.”
Member	“It’s good [personal safety session] You feel like you know what to do when bad things happen.”
Staff	“[Member] going to a Women’s rally at night and introducing herself to various officials and members of the public, where previously she had been very shy.”

Staff	"When [Member] first joined NN, she spent a lot of time alone suffering with low confidence and Self –Esteem. She is now leading the way sharing her Excellent cooking skills with members & staff within the Networks."
Member	"I am so thankful that Catherine has given me the support and the push I need to talk about the things that have been bothering me for years" Member referred to specialist counselling.
Staff	"Member received self-defence training and counselling for sexual trauma. Seeing the difference in [member] after support to get back out and about and equipping her with skills that she needed to boost her confidence has been wonderful to watch"
Family	"NN has provided more independence for my daughter to get out and about/enjoy herself without me and this has meant her confidence has grown and is still growing."
Family	"Anna May is a security for him, he feels confident he can ask her anything and she will help him. It calms him. There's someone there who doesn't judge him and helps with whatever the problem"
Family	"...so many activities. The network has helped her confidence - she gets to meet other people in her own community. All very happy with it – it is very well organised."
Family	"It makes her feel important [going to NN], It's her thing – not mine."
Family	"I don't get told much about the network or the group – it's my daughter's thing...She's been a member a year. She really enjoys it, it's something for her, nothing to do with me – she always depended on me, now this is hers."

Health and Wellbeing	
Person	Magic Moment
Staff	"It's a lifeline for people who fall into the gap between support services, and for people who have problems with their mental health it catches them before they get to a serious crisis point."
Staff	"I support some members who have experienced sexual trauma and now have PTSD – we were able to find them specific support that's helped them move forward."
Member / Staff	"I used to feel tired walking up the hill, but I can do them no problem now!" There is a hill near the members house that they used to struggle with, but no longer does since they've been out walking more.
Family	"I was seriously concerned about his wellbeing, now I'm celebrating him being independent."
Family	"He got to point he wasn't getting up out of bed, pretty bad and I chatted to Anna May to explain and Anna May took him to a new GP and helped him with this and get himself sorted."
Family	"He feels he'll get through difficult time with the housing issues as he knows someone has his back"
Family	"[Member] enjoyed going out and the Zoom activities she really enjoyed."

	Now that it's better weather, it's nice to get out. However, in the zooms she got the chance to request music and it was something to look forward to when she was in the house and not getting to go out. It really gave her a diary of activities to look forward to."
Member	"My ex kicked me out – the first person I spoke to was Michelle – she is really there for me in personal issues –she's helped with council tax issues."
Member	"They [Community Living Workers] are there for you no matter what"
Member	"If anything happens to me God forbid, hospital or police, – they would be an emergency contact. My sister moved to Dubai, so I feel closer to NN staff"
Member	"They [Neighbourhood Networks and Community Living Workers] make sure I am happy and can come to them with whatever is going on."
Family	"He is really supported, he is really happy, they do lots of activities – it's just great".
Family	"It makes parents reassured; I know he is okay when he's with NN, he is enjoying himself...I can't thank NN enough for the service that is provided."
Family	"With [member] being so happy in his life and independent living, I've managed to downsize my house"

Money Management	
Person	Magic Moment
Member	"The model I wanted was £5.99 so that was too much. We do money stuff here too – money matters. We talk about our budgets and what things cost."
Family	"He wouldn't have been able to pay for anything when his UC stopped, he didn't feel in control of his own life, and he couldn't function. He spoke to Anna May and did manage to get housing association and they came to fix things and help him."
Family	"[He] is about to go on his own on holiday for first time, there's worry about money management. He can talk to Annamay about money worries. Next couple of weeks will be anxiety inducing – I knows he will contact Anna May for advice and support."
Member	"A couple of times I get emails about domestic living payment – I ask Michelle for help with this and looking at stuff with them."

Employment and Volunteering	
Person	Magic Moment
Staff	"Member successful in gaining a volunteer position in charity shop after some support to apply, he has continued to work there 2 days a week since last summer."
Staff	"...This member has also had the confidence to become involved in volunteering with horses since joining the network."
Family	"I hope she will be able to get back to volunteering in time."

Independent Travel	
Person	Magic Moment
Member	"I go all over the place – I've travelled to London and Edinburgh. When I go out myself or with my friends, I get the bus or the train."
Member	"Me and my friend are going to go up to Braehead – there's a bus that'll take us right there."
Staff	"We've done some travel training with Member A – she was having to get taxi's everywhere, and it was so expensive. We supported with some travel training around using the bus, how to use the bus pass and things like that. She's off everywhere now – away up to a Steps concert in Glasgow!"
Staff	"In Garnock Valley transport can be an issue for people – it's a rural area so transport links aren't great. As a network we adjust our meeting times to work the best way possible for members."
Staff	"[Member] telling their carer that she does not want them to travel with them to NN activities as they feel confident coming alone."
Staff	"When [Member] first joined the NN, he did not travel alone. He now can meet members and staff in public places confidently and walk back home."
Staff	"We were able to secure a bus pass for a member who struggled to afford travel to activities. He is now able to attend all things without being out of pocket."
Carer	"With the help of Neighbourhood Networks S is confident in travelling and has the freedom to go independently."
Member	"It's helped me a lot [with independent travel]."

Community Participation	
Person	Magic Moment
Member	"I'll go to the pub after this today. I'll go with my friends. I'll not have an alcoholic drink; I usually have a water. I'll have a chat to the other people in there."
Member	"I go to college to do maths. I passed my maths test, and I am getting a trophy."
Member	I love watching films and I love travelling to the cinema to see new films with my dad.
Member	"We love doing day trips like the transport museum."
Staff	"We support our members to link in with other types of support outside the network like the Wellbeing Course. We're aware of what else is in the community and can find different things like courses, classes, or groups that'll support the member to meet their own outcomes."
Staff	"The local community is so important – strong links with groups in the area makes such a difference to members – especially in rural communities."
Staff	"Members from my network are involved in the local community garden and you can see how they've grown alongside the garden."

Staff	"I went to a community garden meeting with one of my network members – everyone knew her by name saying hello. I could see that she was a really respected and valued member of that community. She had really built-up strong relationships and it was obvious she felt good there."
Staff	"After covid – you can see how the expansion of community events have helped expand the lives of members."
Staff	"The local action group meeting has dubbed one of the members 'mrs dalry' with how active she has become and is very well respected. She only moved here in 2020 and now so involved."
Member	"I go to the Bingo with my friends who don't come here [Neighbourhood Networks]"
Staff	"[Member] had never played pool before, after a few visits to Potters in Largs. He enjoys playing pool confidently and has won a few games."
Staff	"Before joining the network, this member was very isolated and did not leave the home very much. Since joining the network this member has been getting out more in the community. This includes visiting local places."
Family	"She doesn't have much on which is why the network is extremely beneficial. She joined at the end of Nov 22 and since then we've been very happy with everything – no issues at all."
Family	"She has a nice time – she went on a protest march; she did tell me about that – it was very good. She goes for coffee, goes to a meeting"
Member/ Evaluator	He wants to go to Millport; he's not been for 30 years. Catherine explained that another NN group is going to Millport soon and offered him to go along with the other group. He says this happens a lot when he gets the opportunity to join other groups on outings and activities.

Neighbourhood Networks and Community Living Worker	
Person	Magic Moment
Member	"My favourite thing to do here is arts and crafts. We will be doing easter crafts soon."
Member	"We all come up with different ideas of what we want to do. I come up with ideas of crafts and we think about how to do them."
Member	"I would like to have my own mini-bus – I would let everyone here on it and we can go for a trip. That's a good idea – I'm going to tell everyone. We do go on trips together, there's lots of good places to go."
Staff	"We're doing crafts next session, I think. Members decide what we do and when we do it. We'll often meet up with the other groups – especially for seasonal activities."
Member	"We do lots of cooking here, arts and crafts and outings. I really enjoy the sessions."
Member	"Easter is coming up and I am excited for what we get to make."
Staff	"We listen to their ideas and then shape the sessions around what they want to do."

Staff	"...it's about enabling people to move on to other opportunities...it's about advocating independence for members."
Staff	"That's the beauty of the process – when they meet their outcomes and don't need a personal plan anymore...and if they want, they can become associate members, but only if that works for them."
Staff	"When we review the personal plans, they can really see their own growth and development. We review them every 6-months and it's always a personalised approach depending on what's happening in their life at that time."
Staff	"Our members trust us to support them through difficult times – they know that if we can't help, we can signpost them to other services."
Staff	"Most members will have some support from carers – but that time is fixed, and carers are limited in what they can do. We [Community living workers] are much more flexible and can support a much wider range of activities and support."
Staff	"A lot of the extra support comes from Community Living Workers actually living in the local areas – so much is shared by word of mouth or Facebook pages. We pick up on things by being local ourselves and share that across the whole staff team so more members can benefit."
Staff	"People have their own ups and downs and day-to-day differences and setbacks. We are very flexible, and we fit in to their lives not the other way around. They have all the control."
Family	"I was so delighted he met Neighbour Networks and it is a god send – I live in Glasgow and have full on job. This group is the saving of him"
Family	"Anna May has been so good for him; I can tell [member] when to speak to Anna May. She can help when I can't be there in person and be a person to listen to [member]"
Family	"I worry myself sick about him and since Anna May has come on the scene – I don't have to worry anymore. I can rely on Anna May, and it makes me feel happier. I feel confident that he'll be okay with Anna May."
Family	"Neighbourhood Networks has made an incredible difference and given me peace of mind."
Family	"We find it exceptional - from first time the manager talked to us to then meeting more of the staff. The paperwork was very positive - since then it's been great"
Member	"You really should call the staff all 'big sisters' - that's what they're like"
Family	"Anna May is on the ball, and she will contact me if there is anything to worry about and we'll talk about it. It's such a relief for parents to have NN."

Interpretation and Analysis

The evidence gathered through this evaluation shows that the Networks in North Ayrshire have a positive impact and are effective in achieving positive outcomes in members' lives.

We have gathered and analysed a range of data that shows the impact of the Neighbourhood Network approach on different aspects of the members' and their families' lives. We have broken this down into themes which reflect the programme outcomes, as well as any additional or unexpected outcomes.

What people liked about the Networks?

Members talked to us about the positive impact the networks made in their lives. The impacts are wide reaching and touch on all aspects of members lives.

The key aspects that the members liked most were:

- Meeting other people, building friendships and wider social networks.
- Taking part in a wide range of interesting and enjoyable activities.
- The advice and support they receive from their network and CLW.

Family members also spoke about the support given through the network. This is for the members themselves – to build up confidence and skills, feeling empowered to tackle issues around housing or money, for example. They also told us about the impact to them as family members and carers – *“peace of mind”* and *“reassurance”* being common themes.

“It makes parents reassured; I know he is okay when he’s with NN, he is enjoying himself.”

The role of the Community Living Worker and the impact of having a supportive, approachable, caring person in the role was important and contributed to the success of the networks. Staff spoke highly of their jobs and noted that they felt supported by their managers and colleagues. They enjoyed their jobs and felt a sense of satisfaction when they could see members progressing through their personal plans and meeting their own outcomes.

“That’s the beauty of the process – when they meet their outcomes and don’t need a personal plan anymore...and if they want, they can become associate members, but only if that works for them.” CLW

Life Skills

The network offers a wide range of activities and opportunities for members to build on existing life skills or try out something new for the first time. CLW's take the time to understand the members and the outcomes they are working towards for themselves. This is apparent through the activities and the way they are delivered. Activities are generally suggested and chosen by the members – we observed the CLW's encouraging members to think about these could be delivered – drawing on practical life skills such as planning, time management, using transport etc. It also provided opportunities to build softer, social skills

like communication, awareness and understanding of others, decision-making, negotiation, and sharing peer support.

Some of the activities and life skills include:

- Cooking sessions – knife skills, working with gas and hot water, thinking about safety and how to limit risks and accidents.
- Food Hygiene – how to prepare and cook food safely, safe storage of food, raw/cooked contamination.
- Money Management – planning out costs, looking at budgets, prioritising important payments.
- Personal Safety – understanding the law, understanding the difference between assault and self-defence, how to protect yourself if in danger.
- Creative activities including seasonal crafts and art sessions.
- Social activities in community spaces like bowling, theatre shows, gardening.
- Digital communication – using apps like WhatsApp, Zoom throughout lockdown, using smartphones and social media pages. Using the internet to access local information, advice, and support.
- Giving and receiving peer support – building relationships that will be sustained outside of the networks, this helps to build stronger personal resilience in ways that work for each member.

“Members were peeling and chopping carrots – most of them said it was their first time trying. When offered to give it a go each member confidently said they would like to try. There was lots of positive encouragement and reassurance from staff and the other members.” Evaluator observation

“One member asked a question about a scenario he has previously experienced where someone was trying to steal his wallet on the bus. The question was treated with respect by other members and facilitators. The individual asked about their rights to defend themselves and what they could/should do if in that situation again. They appeared to feel comfortable in the space to share the experience and reassured by the information and advice offered by the personal safety facilitator. Other members in the session appeared to be familiar with this scenario and shared how they have dealt with similar situations in the past.” Evaluator Observation

“Catherine helped me with my computer at Christmas – she came after the new year to sort it all out and now I’m online” Member

“I am so glad Neighbourhood Networks got me a sewing teacher. I have loved making shirts and cushions and quilts. I can’t wait to make my leggings” Member

Friendships and Relationships

The networks have increased social friendships, connections, and interaction for members. It has increased the number of friends, and the number and range of activities that

members participate in. Everyone recognised the importance of friendship and valued being part of a group of friends that support and help each other.

“My favourite thing about NN is all the different activities and hanging out with all my gang.” Member

“Since joining NN I have formed some good friendships whereas before I was more isolated and only really got out with family. I enjoy going along to network activities and meeting up with other members. I have particularly enjoyed the personal safety courses that I have attended with members of NN at the centre of personal safety in Ardrossan.” Member

It was noted that the range of activities and organising different events gave members the opportunity to build different types of friendships with a wider range of people.

“It was through the Networks that I met my fiancé. We are hoping to get a house together and get married in the future.” Member

“We plan things to go together – all the regional networks get together for an activity. They’re usually seasonal activities like Christmas or Easter and the members really enjoy those.... It gives members a chance to build different types of friendships with people who like outside their own local area.” CLW

“It’s nice when we all get together [the different networks] – we all know each other, we’re lots of friends.” Member

There is also support offered to navigate friendships and relationships if things become difficult. CLW’s will support members to reflect on any difficulties and find ways to move forward and overcome them – this is important inter-personal communication that contributes to the members development across all their personal outcomes.

Member Case Study – Building Trust

One member explained that he had fallen out with one of the other members in his network. This falling out was putting him off going to any more group meetings. He spoke to his CLW about the situation and explained how he was taught not to trust anyone growing up. They helped him work through the issues with the other member. He really trusts the CLWs and has a good relationship with them. He feels comfortable talking with them about his problems and feels they are very approachable. When he needs help, he sends them a text and knows that they will get back to him when they can.

Confidence and Self-Esteem

Almost everyone we spoke to mentioned the impact of the covid-19 pandemic and ongoing lockdowns. The digital connection offered by the network supported people to maintain connections outside of their own household, but the pandemic had a profound impact, and it takes time to rebuild confidence.

“Covid lockdowns sucked the confidence out of people. Confidence and self-esteem is one of the outcomes that unlocks the others – once that starts to build for the members you see the other outcomes begin to fall into place much easier. All the outcomes feed from that.” CLW

“After lockdown had to readjust methods as members were afraid after lockdown and were not ready to go back out. Staff go with the flow and have gone more slowly to let members get to know each other.” CLW

“The support and activities work across all of the 8 personal outcomes, but I would say that all of the members in the network join us with low confidence and self-esteem. That seems to be a pretty common issue for everyone.” CLW

Neighbourhood Networks and their personalised approach is making a significant contribution to members building their sense of confidence and self-esteem. They work at a pace that is set by the members themselves, finding what works well for individuals and the network as a whole. Members and their families told us how the activities boost their confidence which enables them to tackle new challenges in their lives outside the network.

“All our work is about being member-led and creating choices for people, everything is flexible and they [members] can come and go as they wish. They don’t have to come to every meeting or activity – they chose what they want to take part in, and it helps to grow their independence.” CLW

“It’s good [personal safety session] You feel like you know what to do when bad things happen.” Member

“NN has provided more independence for my daughter to get out and about/enjoy herself without me and this has meant her confidence has grown and is still growing.” Family

“There’s a member I’m thinking of, she had limited engagement with her community, was very shy and not very confident. She’s really found her space in the local community centre – she’s become a total rep for them – helping to organise and get everyone local going to the cinema nights. She’s really come out of her shell.” CLW

Family Member Case Study - Confidence

One member’s family explained how much Covid had knocked their daughter’s confidence levels.

Before Covid, the member would travel alone and get the ferry over to Millport where she volunteered. She also volunteered locally and walked to the office.

After the first lockdown ended, both volunteering opportunities did not restart, and she did not have much on. She loved joining the network as she got the chance to fill up her diary and it gave her something to look forward to each week. The member joined in on the Zoom sessions during the second lockdown which gave her a chance to get to know the other members before they eventually met up in real life, and something to do when they weren’t getting out. Now that the sessions have started in real life, her confidence is building, and she is beginning to get back out walking alone.

We heard about situations where the CLW offered support to overcome a specific challenge and through this the member builds confidence and self-esteem.

“Member received self-defence training and counselling for sexual trauma. Seeing the difference in [member] after support to get back out and about and equipping her with skills that she needed to boost her confidence has been wonderful to watch” CLW

Family Member Case Study – Overcoming challenges

An example of how conflict is dealt with within a group was when a member had some issues with another member in their group. The member repeatedly called them ‘Dad’, asked for his phone number and followed him home. The member was put off going back to the group after this incident, but he reached out to the CLW to express his feelings. The CLW dealt with the situation to ensure it didn’t happen again and encouraged the member to come back to the group sessions.

The family explain that the member never wants to tell anyone how they feel but this time he spoke up to the CLW as they have helped build up his confidence.

Health and Wellbeing

Members and their families were clear that being part of this network helped them keep well and healthy. They spoke about the positive impact the network and the activities had on their mental health and wellbeing.

“He got to point he wasn’t getting up out of bed, pretty bad and I chatted to Anna May to explain and Anna May took him to a new GP and helped him with this and get himself sorted.” Family

“I was seriously concerned about his wellbeing, now I’m celebrating him being independent.” Family

“It’s a lifeline for people who fall into the gap between support services, and for people who have problems with their mental health it catches them before they get to a serious crisis point.” CLW

Some members also spoke about the impact on their physical health – support to eat a healthy and varied diet or getting out for exercise and taking part in physical activities.

“I used to feel tired walking up the hill, but I can do them no problem now!” There is a hill near the members house that they used to struggle with, but no longer does since they’ve been out walking more.” Member/CLW

For some members there was specific additional required to overcome specific issues impacting on their health and wellbeing. CLW’s were able to draw on their extensive networks and source the right type of support from specialist agencies when required.

“I support some members who have experienced sexual trauma and now have PTSD – we were able to find them specific support that’s helped them move forward.” CLW

“My ex kicked me out – the first person I spoke to was Michelle – she is really there for me in personal issues –she’s helped with council tax issues.” Member

We noted that most of the family members we talked with notes the positive impact of Neighbourhood Networks on their own mental health and wellbeing.

“It makes parents reassured; I know he is okay when he’s with NN, he is enjoying himself...I can’t thank NN enough for the service that is provided.” Family

“NN has made an incredible difference and given me peace of mind.” Family

We observed CLW facilitating conversations about how members can keep themselves well and healthy – these conversations were gently woven through sessions bringing added value to already purposeful activities. It enabled members to reflect, share with others, and think about new possibilities relating to both physical and mental health.

Money Management

The cooking sessions we observed gave an excellent example of managing money. The network members talked about ways of saving money by making the most of leftovers, substituting cheaper ingredients or looking out for special deals. Members also offered peer support by sharing knowledge about current special offers and the best places to shop with one another.

Members spoke to us about the different ways they manage their money and explained that learning about managing food and cooking budgets helps them apply these skills to other areas of their lives. This included travel – bus and train fares, shopping for household items or items for special occasions.

“The model I wanted was £5.99 so that was too much. We do money stuff here too – money matters. We talk about our budgets and what things cost.” Member

We heard from members and their families that managing money can be a challenging area for independent living – and is often a source of anxiety and worry. CLW’s provide support to work through the issues and in doing so provide peace of mind and reassurance about dealing with future challenges.

“A couple of times I get emails about domestic living payment – I ask Michelle for help with this and looking at stuff with them.” Member

“He wouldn’t have been able to pay for anything when his UC stopped, he didn’t feel in control of his own life, and he couldn’t function. He spoke to Anna May and did manage to get housing association and they came to fix things and help him.” Family

“[He] is about to go on his own on holiday for first time, there’s worry about money management. He can talk to Anna-May about money worries. Next couple of weeks will be anxiety inducing – I knows he will contact Anna-May for advice and support.” Family

Employment and Volunteering

Members had different experiences of employment and volunteering. Most members we talked to said that these were heavily impacted by the pandemic, and for some members their employment and volunteering opportunities never started up again.

“He makes glass (arts background) - thanks to Princes Trust. He has a studio, but he is on his own. Before lockdown he had a main entrance – good for him so he could chat with people - not the best communicator – he used to have stalls outside the studio which was fantastic and helped him. He got more and more confident but has lost all this after lockdown. The person who did stalls gave it up. [Member] then moved to Largs” Family

While speaking with a family member we heard about their daughter’s experience, and the impact of the pandemic. Before Covid, the member would travel alone and get the ferry over to Millport where she volunteered. She also volunteered locally and walked to the office, after the first lockdown ended, both volunteering opportunities did not restart, and she did not have much on. She loved joining the network as she got the chance to fill up her diary and it gave her something to look forward to each week.

We heard from everyone we talked with that there are fewer local volunteering and employment opportunities for members however this remains an important aspect of members’ lives and CLW’s are keen to support this where possible.

“Member successful in gaining a volunteer position in charity shop after some support to apply, he has continued to work there 2 days a week since last summer.” CLW

“...This member has also had the confidence to become involved in volunteering with horses since joining the network.” CLW

We have also heard about the importance of informal volunteering in communities through community larders, community gardens and helping at local events.

“I went to a community garden meeting with one of my network members – everyone knew her by name saying hello. I could see that she was a really respected and valued member of that community. She had really built-up strong relationships and it was obvious she felt good there.” CLW

Independent Travel

Independent travel is an outcome that weaves through so many other outcomes and activities. Members were keen to talk to us about developing their independence and travel was usually an important topic within that conversation. The network sessions themselves provide an opportunity to practice independent travel.

“[Member] telling their carer that she does not want them to travel with them to NN activities as they feel confident coming alone.” CLW

“When [Member] first joined the NN, he did not travel alone. He now can meet members and staff in public places confidently and walk back home.” CLW

“I go all over the place – I’ve travelled to London and Edinburgh. When I go out myself or with my friends, I get the bus or the train.” Member

Members often meet up with each other at a session then head off together to another activity independent of the network – café, shopping, pub, bowling, or cinema. They are encouraged to think about their transport options and with support from the CLW arrange their meetings to work well for everyone. This is particularly important for members of the Garnock Valley network;

“In Garnock Valley transport can be an issue for people – it’s a rural area so transport links aren’t great. As a network we adjust our meeting times to work the best way possible for members.” CLW

By supporting travel opportunities, especially independent travel, CLW’s can support members to access other meaningful, life-enhancing opportunities.

“We’ve done some travel training with Member A – she was having to get taxi’s everywhere, and it was so expensive. We supported with some travel training around using the bus, how to use the bus pass and things like that. She’s off everywhere now – away up to a Steps concert in Glasgow!” CLW

“Me and my friend are going to go up to Braehead – there’s a bus that’ll take us right there.” Member

“We were able to secure a bus pass for a member who struggled to afford travel to activities. He is now able to attend all things without being out of pocket.” CLW

One member explained how helpful going to group sessions across North Ayrshire can be for him personally. When the member is in Saltcoats for a session he can go and do his food shopping at the bigger supermarket which better choice and lower prices.

Community Participation

Members were excited to share all the different ways that they are involved in their communities. It is another area where it was felt that the pandemic has had a sustained negative impact, but people are seeing things progressing with more opportunities for members involvement.

“There have been challenges, especially setting things up after COVID. All of the community activity had stopped, and it took a long time for things to start-up again, some of it hasn’t, and that had a big impact for our members.” CLW

“After covid – you can see how the expansion of community events have helped expand the lives of members.” CLW

“The local community is so important – strong links with groups in the area makes such a difference to members – especially in rural communities.” CLW

“I’ll go to the pub after this today. I’ll go with my friends. I’ll not have an alcoholic drink; I usually have a water. I’ll have a chat to the other people in there.” Member

The network provides the first steps for members who are more isolated and provide additional networks for activity for members who are keen to expand their connections. There were different experiences relating to the challenges and opportunities but universally, when it worked well it was a rewarding and fulfilling experience for members.

“She doesn’t have much on which is why the network is extremely beneficial. She joined at the end of Nov 22 and since then we’ve been very happy with everything – no issues at all.”

Family

“Before joining the network, this member was very isolated and did not leave the home very much. Since joining the network this member has been getting out more in the community. This includes visiting local places.” CLW

“The local action group meeting has dubbed one of the members ‘Mrs Dalry’ with how active she has become and is very well respected. She only moved here in 2020 and now so involved.” CLW

“We support our members to link in with other types of support outside the network like the Wellbeing Course. We’re aware of what else is in the community and can find different things like courses, classes, or groups that’ll support the member to meet their own outcomes.” CLW

Neighbourhood Network and Community Living Workers

We heard from members and their families that a key part of their Neighbourhood Networks approach is the role of the Community Living Workers. They take the time to build a relationship with members, to understand them as individuals. They support members to take part in meaningful, life-enhancing opportunities than enables them to grow and develop, ultimately achieving their own personal outcomes.

“When we review the personal plans, they can really see their own growth and development. We review them every 6-months and it’s always a personalised approach depending on what’s happening in their life at that time.” CLW

“The support we offer is different for everyone – it’s very specific to that person. We fit in with their lives and what’s important to them at that time.” CLW

“You really should call the staff all ‘big sisters’ - that’s what they’re like” Member

There was a big impact for family members and unpaid carers, much of this was attributed to the CLW’s and the role they play in the lives of members and their families.

“I worry myself sick about him and since Anna May has come on the scene –I don’t have to worry anymore. I can rely on Anna May, and it makes me feel happier. I feel confident that he’ll be okay with Anna May.” Family

“Neighbourhood Networks has made an incredible difference and given me peace of mind.” Family

“We find it exceptional - from first time the manager talked to us to then meeting more of the staff. The paperwork was very positive - since then it’s been great” Family

Through the activity sessions we observed CLW’s practising a very personalised approach that enabled them to encourage and support members in ways that worked for them.

“One member joined the group slightly later and was hesitant to take part. Her CLW sat with her at the edge of the room making sure she felt comfortable. I could see the CLW checking-in with the member throughout the session. She chose to follow the group into the gym hall for the physical part of the session. Again, she sat at the side observing instead of taking part in the defensive moves. Everyone in the room offered encouragement whilst respecting her choices and maintaining contact with her throughout the session. Members would go over and chat, talking about the activity, and CLW’s would go between this member and the others keeping her linked to the wider group in ways that she appeared to be comfortable with.” Evaluator Observation

“Most members will have some support from carers – but that time is fixed, and carers are limited in what they can do. We [Community living workers] are much more flexible and can support a much wider range of activities and support.” CLW

Family Member Case Study - Impact of CLW

One member moved to the area and was without a GP for some time. His family live in Glasgow and are unable to drop in to check on him as often as they’d like. Him being without a local doctor was causing great concern for the family. After the member spoke to his CLW about the situation, she took the young man to the doctor, got him registered and made appointments for him.

The member also had numerous issues with his housing conditions. He had a leak in his roof which was causing mould and other serious damage. His family encouraged him to speak to his CLW. He reached out and talked to the CLW about the problems he was facing and asked for help.

As a result, the family no longer worry and know that if he has any further housing issues then there is someone local “who has his back”. The member now feels confident that he will get through his difficult housing issues.

“I was so delighted he met Neighbourhood Networks and it is a god send – I live in Glasgow and have full on job. This group is the saving of him.”

CLW’s explained how important it was to know when to create space – this supports personal growth and helps to ensure there isn’t an over-reliance on the network as the members and CLW’s work towards ‘independence’ – this may mean something different for each member but is universally important.

“You have to know when and how to take a step back to create more space for members to grow – like when we went to the bowling. I could see that they felt confident so I just merged into the background – there if they needed me but getting on great without me.... it’s the same with other activities like cinema trips.” CLW

“That’s the beauty of the process – when they meet their outcomes and don’t need a personal plan anymore...and if they want, they can become associate members, but only if that works for them.” CLW

“...it’s about enabling people to move on to other opportunities...it’s about advocating independence for members.” CLW

Areas of impact - Mental Health and Learning Disabilities

We explored the impacts of the networks and the approaches for the two main groups that the North Ayrshire Networks supports: people with learning disabilities and people with poor mental health. As previously noted in this evaluation, confidence and self-esteem, has a significant impact on all members achieving their own personal goals (and outcomes).

“The support and activities work across all of the 8 personal outcomes, but I would say that all of the members in the network join us with low confidence and self-esteem. That seems to be a pretty common issue for everyone.” CLW

This is a particularly important outcome for people experiencing poor mental health. We heard that the route to increased confidence and self-esteem can differ between these members.

“Within my network I would say that there’s very different benefits in being a member for the two groups: people with poor mental health and people with learning disabilities. The people who come to us with poor mental health it’s mainly about building confidence, sharing skills, taking on a peer support role and helping others in the network - That’s what makes a big difference for them. For people with learning disabilities, it’s the different activities that they benefit from – that’s where their growth in confidence comes from – from taking part and learning new things.” CLW

“I am so thankful that Catherine [CLW] has given me the support and the push I need to talk about the things that have been bothering me for years” Member referred to specialist counselling.

Member Case Study – offering peer support

“When [Member] first joined NN, she spent a lot of time alone suffering with low confidence and Self –Esteem. She is now leading the way sharing her Excellent cooking skills with members & staff within the Networks.” CLW

We spoke with this member who told us about her poor mental health and the impact this has had on her life. The day we met her she was facilitating a cooking session for members with learning disabilities. She had planned the session, shopped for resources, and prepared each step of the recipe thinking about safety and accessibility. She answered questions about food hygiene and safe storage, and encouraged other members to think about how they could adapt this recipe or try it at home. She reflected that this didn’t feel overwhelming because it is an informal, friendly environment.

“It’s nice to have a chance to share my skills – I sometimes feel really low and don’t want to leave the house but today was good and they all [other members] did a great job.”

“I don’t come here all the time for every session, it depends on how I’m feeling on the day. It was good to lead the session today. I didn’t feel nervous because it’s a relaxed and friendly space – I would feel nervous at big formal meetings or things like that, but it’s not like that here.”

She went on to share pictures of her artwork and it was suggested by a CLW that she could lead an arts session. At this suggestion she became energised and animated – it was clear that she enjoyed and valued her role in facilitating the activities. She told us that she would go home and think about what would be achievable and enjoyable within the meeting time.

Overall Assessment and Conclusions

This assessment of the North Ayrshire Network is based on how the network is achieving its own aims and objectives, and how it reflects wider social care policy and practices.

All the evidence collected through this evaluation indicates that the network excels in offering high quality, personalised support that enables people to further develop their own independence. The local networks are highly valued by the members and their families and carers, making a huge impact on the quality of the lives of everyone involved. This is echoed in their most recent Care Inspectorate report dated April 2023 when they received the highest rating for supporting people's wellbeing.

People we talked to wanted to highlight the role of the Community Living Workers in the success of the local networks and for members achieving their goals and positive outcomes. The Community Living Workers themselves noted that support from their colleagues and management contributed to the high quality that members experienced.

The networks are playing a crucial role in members rebuilding the aspects of their lives that have been hugely impacted by the pandemic. The evidence indicates that members are benefitting from new friendships, social connections, and enhanced life skills and that these contribute longer-term impacts of increased confidence and independence.

The evaluation shows that the network's aims outlined in the introduction are being met, and that this is resulting in a high-quality mutual support network with good outcomes for the individual members.

The areas of most significant impact are:

- 1) Increasing opportunities for social connections and social activity. Networks support members to develop different types of friendships and relationships with a wider range of people across communities. This enables members to make valuable, meaningful contributions that are recognised and celebrated within their local communities.
- 2) Progression towards independence as members' confidence and life skills develop. The network supports members to develop existing skills while learning new skills through engaging activities. The wide range of practical skills are enhanced by the development of soft skills through working as a team to plan and organise activities.
- 3) The flexible and adaptive approach provides a unique support network that enables members to access the right information and resources when challenges arise – often resolving matters before reaching crisis point. This not only helps individual members but also assists and reduces the impact on other health and social care partners delivering services.
- 4) The support and space provided to families and carers has a huge impact on their own personal wellbeing. The trusting relationships that the Community Living Workers nurture extends to family and carers. This helps families feel assured that members are safe and supported while developing their independence away from their family unit.