



# STAR: Share, Talk and Remember bereavement peer-support groups

## ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

This toolkit showcases the journey of the STAR (Share, Talk and Remember) bereavement peer-support groups, which were initiated and supported by the Bristol Ageing Better (BAB) programme.

The purpose of this toolkit is to share our learning about how Jan Perry, the STAR Network Coordinator, used an Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach to set up the first STAR group in one neighbourhood of Bristol. Since then, the STAR model has been taken up by other residents in the city as well as further afield, leading to a network of STAR groups supported by Jan.

# BACKGROUND TO THE STAR MODEL

The Bristol Ageing Better programme funded 10 community development projects, which were delivered by 8 organisations over the course of 2-3 years.

These community development projects used an asset-based approach, working with the skills and strengths available in the community and supporting residents to take the lead in setting up and running their own activities. A paid worker provided support and guidance, with the aim of gradually stepping back so that the activity could be led entirely by the local community themselves.

One of these community development projects focused on the neighbourhood of Stockwood, in the South of the city. This project was funded by BAB from September 2017 – December 2019 and was delivered by St Monica Trust. Jan Perry was employed by St Monica Trust to work on this project as a Community Development Worker, and is also a local resident.

The Stockwood STAR bereavement peer-support group is an excellent example of putting the ABCD approach into practice.

## ABCD approach

Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) is about bringing people together with a shared goal and common purpose to make something possible.

The ABCD approach is built on four foundations:

- It focuses on community assets and strengths rather than problems and needs.
- It identifies and mobilises individual and community assets, skills and passions.
- It is community driven – ‘building communities from the inside out’. It is ‘for the people, by the people’ in the community.
- It is relationship driven.

The foundational truths of the ABCD approach:

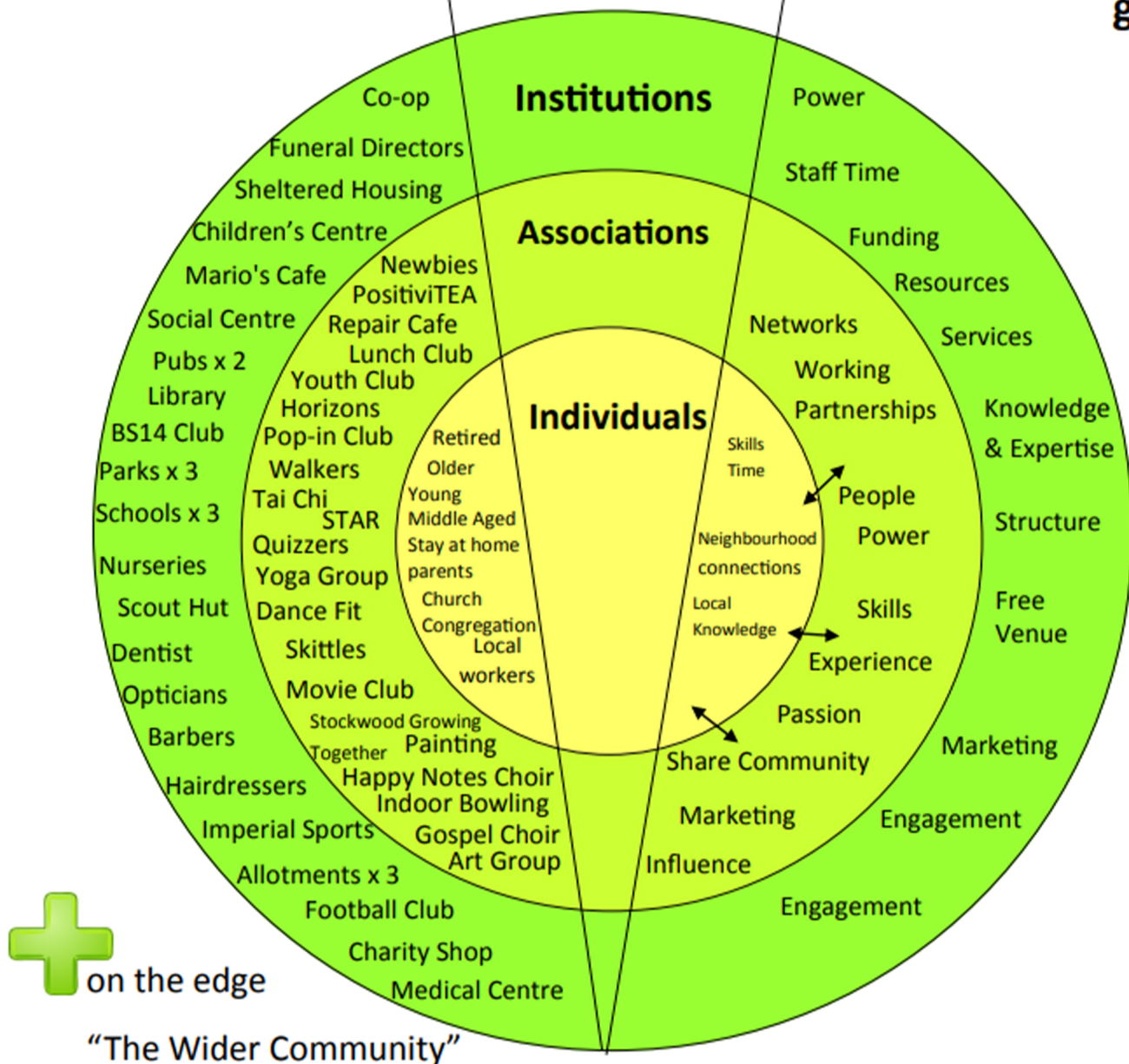
- Everyone has gifts.
- Everyone has something to contribute.
- Everyone cares about something and that passion is their motivation to act.

# Mapping Community Assets

Who are they?....



What gifts do they have to give?



*Note: This list is not selective—there are many more examples than can be added*

An example of the community assets mapped by Stockwood STAR and Greater Stockwood Alliance

# TIMELINE OF THE STOCKWOOD STAR GROUP

**April 2019:** Local residents in Stockwood expressed a wish for a local bereavement peer-support group led by the community.

**April 2019:** As the community development worker for Stockwood, and a local resident herself, Jan Perry used the NextDoor website to help find other residents who were interested in setting it up and taking the lead. She made it clear that the group would not be attached to any particular organisation and they would not be formal volunteers, but instead would have ownership of the group themselves, and produce a 'community entity'. Within 24 hours, six residents came forward to take the lead on setting it up and running the group.

**April – May 2019:** These six residents spread the word even further within the local community and a total of thirteen residents came forward to help set up the group. Over time some of these individuals did not have enough capacity to continue helping out with the group, eventually resulting in a team of eight people who were fully committed to moving forward with setting up the group.

**May 2019:** The team mapped the assets available in the local community to find out what institutions, associations and individuals could support the group. Through doing this, the team secured a free local venue.

**June – October 2019:** Jan supported the residents to lay strong foundations for the group, for example sharing out roles and responsibilities between members. These foundations ensured the group could become self-sustainable.

**October 2019:** Stockwood STAR launched! The group opened their doors to the community. Residents began to come forward to receive support from the group via fortnightly drop-in sessions.

**February 2020:** Jan developed a training course to share the model of the Stockwood STAR with others. The Stockwood STAR group recorded audio and video recordings to feature in this training and provided feedback and other input. Training workshops began in May 2020, and a network of STAR groups began to emerge.

**During Covid-19:** One-to-one support offered to members via telephone check ins. The group met up in person when permitted and safe to do so in a Covid-secure space. The group began to offer one-to-one befriending to those who did not feel comfortable attending a group environment.



# BUILDING STRONG FOUNDATIONS

In order for a STAR group to continue to be strong, consistent and not reliant on applying for funding, it is vital for the group to be built on strong foundations.

For the STAR group, these foundations included:

- Making a 'wish list' of what the peer-support sessions would look like (e.g. venue, refreshments, room layout, type of seating etc.).
- Deciding what resources would be needed in order to achieve the above 'wish list'.
- Developing a structure for the peer-support sessions which built in lots of time for people to share stories and listen to others.
- Coming up with contingency plans, planning ahead to how the group would respond to any issues that arose and thinking of ways to create discussion within the group.
- Establishing roles and responsibilities within the facilitation team (e.g. somebody to welcome people at the door, somebody to keep the resources up-to-date, somebody to facilitate group discussions etc.).
- Identifying any training or support needed, including looking at theories and models of bereavement and grief.
- Creating a welcome pack of resources for everyone who attended the group.
- Creating a Group Agreement, including terms of references, work ethic, code of conduct and standards. This Group Agreement is important to make sure everyone has the same understanding of the group and knows how to respond to different scenarios.
- Deciding on the aims and objectives of the group.
- Deciding on the name of the group and developing publicity materials.

These foundations take time, and are an important way of making sure everyone feels fully confident before the group opens to the public.

# STAR MODEL

## Aims:

The Bereavement Peer Support Group, 'STAR', provides free support for people grieving from a bereavement or difficult transition in their life. The aim of the support group is to create a safe space for people to receive support, listen to and share stories & experiences with others who have experienced loss in their life.

## Objectives:

- To provide peer-support sessions which will be facilitated by Peer Supporters; volunteers, most of whom have themselves been through a loss.
- To share information about establishments which provide a range of support to help with sustaining virtuous health & well-being.

## What the STAR model is not:

- Not a constituted business, registered company or \*public service.
- Not managed by a governing body.
- Not a counselling service.
- Not a service giving advice & guidance.
- Not an organisation that charges.
- Does not have a selection criteria.
- Does not have a waiting list.

*\* A public service is something which is organised by the government or an official body in order to benefit all the people in a particular society or community.*

## What the STAR model is:

- A voluntary community group / its own entity.
- A service which enhances and supports public health.
- A secular community service.
- Focuses on ABCD approach, organised without any hierarchy. Every STAR group is unique in terms of the dynamics of the group and the assets that each individual can bring.

- Provides sign-posting to other support.
- Inclusive environment, welcoming diversity and equality for all adults aged over 18 years.
- It doesn't cost any money to run – just time & commitment of everyone involved, & gifts in-kind.
- A safe place where people are welcomed, able to listen to others, talk, share stories, cry, laugh, receive care and support, and just be.

When someone is interested in attending a STAR group for the first time, one of the STAR facilitation team will meet with them on a one-to-one basis first to let them know how the group operates and what it can offer them.

## **SUPPORTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF OTHER STAR GROUPS**

The success of the Stockwood STAR group led Jan Perry to share the STAR model with others interested in setting up their own STAR group. She developed a training programme to guide others through this process step-by-step, and connects local STAR groups together through an emerging STAR Network in Bristol, North Somerset, South Gloucestershire and beyond.

This emerging STAR Network enables local STAR groups to learn from and support each other, further aiding their sustainability.

## **BENEFITS AND IMPACT OF THE STAR MODEL**

The STAR model makes sure that STAR groups are free for people to attend. STAR groups operate on a drop-in basis for those seeking support, meaning there is no pressure on individuals to commit to anything in advance, no registrations and no need to cancel if someone can't attend.

Moreover, STAR groups have no selection criteria; everyone over the age of 18 is welcome to attend, it does not matter whether the loss was recent or a long time ago, somebody very close to the individual or somebody more distant. There is also no waiting list; someone can get support straight away by attending the very same day they find out about it!

Furthermore, there is no time limit on how long someone stays involved with the STAR. Some people may join for one session of support only, whereas others may stay for many years. Some may stop attending for a while, but then join again at a later time when they feel they need the support.

## Impact on those attending Stockwood STAR for support:

*"I was told about the group by a guy who I met at the cemetery. He recently lost his wife. He told me that he's the only man in the group and although he was anxious about coming along, he said it was the best thing he's done; everyone in the group is lovely, friendly and caring and he feels he's able to express himself which is something he usually finds difficult to do. He encouraged me to come along, so here I am."*

*"It's just what I need. I've been for 1:1 counselling but I feel that I need to listen to others share their stories and how they cope in difficult situations. I can't say what I want to say at home as I need to protect my family."*

*"I need to know that I'm not alone in how I feel."*

*"After coming to the group last time, I slept through the whole night....the first time I've slept properly since I lost my husband! The best night's sleep I've had. I felt peaceful inside. It was so lovely to be able to speak about how I was feeling without having to hold anything back in case I upset my son."*

*"I've been telling everyone I meet, including everyone in Oncology at hospital, what a fantastic group of people you are and I cannot thank you enough for what you are doing. It's so lovely to know that there are such caring people in the world and people who have compassion, understand my difficulties and what I'm going through."*

*"After the first session I came away feeling 'lifted'."*

## Impact on facilitators of Stockwood STAR:

*"I'm here to listen and give support because I care but actually, I find that when I leave the session I feel that I've received therapy because the reward of helping others and making a positive difference to somebody's life is amazing!"*

*"We are not just there as facilitators or helpers, we are actually part of the group as a whole. – the group is 'one'"*

*"You can actually see the difference it is making to everyone involved."*

*"We laugh, we cry, we laugh and cry some more!"*

*"I am on a journey. I know there are people in front of me in their grief journey which can help me. I know there are people behind me in their grief journey and I am happy to help them along their way."*

## An interview with Debs, one of the Stockwood STAR facilitators

In this informal off-the-cuff interview a member of Stockwood STAR speaks about her role within the group, why it is so valuable for people who have experienced a bereavement and her advice for others wishing to set up a STAR group in their local community.

[LINK TO VIDEO](#)

## FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information about the model, and/or if you are interested in finding out a little more about the STAR Training Programme, please contact Jan Perry:

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