



You can access more  
**Connecting People**  
resources online at  
[www.connectingpeople.net](http://www.connectingpeople.net)

### Practice guidance

Contains more detail on how service users and practitioners can follow together the eight steps of **Connecting People**.

### Implementation manual

Helps organisations to think about how they might implement and support **Connecting People**.

### Training manual

Helps skill up others to use **Connecting People** through a train the trainer model.

### Website

Information about **Connecting People** and resources to support this way of working are available free of charge to download from the website.

# Guide

Partners in Connecting People are:



This user guide was developed from independent research funded by the NIHR School for Social Care Research. The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the NIHR School for Social Care Research or the Department of Health, NIHR or NHS.



School for Social Care Research

[www.connectingpeople.net](http://www.connectingpeople.net)

37762 – york.ac.uk/design-print-solutions

# Foreword

A group of mental health service users, practitioners, and researchers put this guide together to explain the **Connecting People** programme.

**Connecting People** helps people to develop their social networks and connections to improve their quality of life. It was developed over several years by combining the best parts of existing activities in organisations in the UK and internationally, trying them out, and evaluating whether they worked. Research showed that **Connecting People** worked better in some organisations than others. This guide is part of a series of manuals to help mental health organisations adopt **Connecting People**, and give it the best chance of success for the benefit of service users.



# Overview

**Connecting People** helps practitioners to support people to try out new activities, and make new connections, and/or reconnect with old ones, outside of mental health services. The NHS and other organisations recognise that social networks can help to increase well-being, but there is little guidance for practitioners to help service users feel less isolated and connect more with others. This is what **Connecting People** aims to achieve.

It is acknowledged that people may face barriers when working to improve their social networks. These may include:

- Stigma or discrimination from other people;
- Personal barriers like physical health problems, lack of motivation, the side effects of medication, having unhelpful friends and connections, or poor experiences of groups, activities or services;
- Structural barriers such as poverty, poor transport links, and lack of opportunities locally (especially in more rural or coastal areas).

**Connecting People** encourages service users and practitioners to think more about how they can work around some of these barriers thus enabling service users to take part in activities and make new connections or reconnect with others.



## How Connecting People works

**Connecting People** helps service users and practitioners to work together to develop social networks and connections. It encourages service users and practitioners to work as equal partners, look at existing connections, identify aspirations, make plans, and help people to achieve them. Together they will identify and provide the support needed for individuals to try new things, review their plans, and decide on their next steps.

## Evidence

Research shows that social connections help people to find work, live longer and improve their mental health and quality of life.

**Connecting People** has been developed following a systematic search of social participation interventions in 14 countries, and a two-year pilot study of practice in six health and social care agencies. The pilot study found that in agencies where **Connecting People** was implemented more fully, people experienced better social outcomes. Specifically, they had access to more social resources from within their networks, such as advice, information, or practical support from the people they knew. Also, they felt more included in society than those in agencies where **Connecting People** was only partially implemented. **Connecting People** also helps practitioners to develop their community knowledge and improve the ways that they network and interact with others.



# STEPS

**1** Getting started, talking about trying new things or reconnecting

**2** Mapping existing connections

**3** Identifying aspirations, making plans

**4** Stepping out, putting plans into practice

**5** Taking stock

**6** Working around barriers

**7** Embedding Connecting People in organisations

**8** Reviewing the process

Service users and practitioners share their knowledge of activities, interests, and hobbies. Service users are encouraged to decide what they would like to do, and how they would like to be supported.

Service users try out new activities and get involved in new groups or reconnect with old ones. Practitioners provide or identify support to help service users to do this.

**Think about... Confidentiality**  
When service users try out a new activity or are introduced to new people, how much or how little of their personal information would they like to be shared? Service users and practitioners should agree how introductions are made.

**Think about... No pressure!**  
Service users are free to take part in activities, or not take part at any time. Connecting People should be fun, and may be challenging, but not stressful. Service users should feel reassured and supported throughout.

Service users have achieved their goals and are able to continue activities without support. They may be able to stop using mental health services.

Service users and practitioners look at what has worked and what needs to be improved, make new plans, and decide how to put these into action.

## PLANNING

## DOING

## REVIEWING

