# Connecting PEOPLE

# Practice guidance

# FOREWORD

Connecting People helps to increase mental health service users' 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 practice guidance is part of a series of guides to help practitioners, service users and mental health organisations adopt Connecting People, and give it the best chance of success.

All guides were produced in consultation with a group of mental health service users, practitioners, and researchers.

# CONTENTS

# INTRODUCTION

**Connecting People aims to help practitioners support service users to connect with people beyond health or social care agencies. They may be people interested in the same hobby, sport or leisure pursuit. They may be family or friends with whom the person has lost contact… there are many possibilities. Based on ideas from social capital theory, Connecting People aims to enhance the diversity of people's social networks. It is not prescriptive about the size or quality of networks. It is up to individuals to decide how many people they want or need to be in contact with. However, it aims to ensure that people engage with others outside of health and social care services in addition to those within them.**

Connecting People is the result of a two-year study of practice in six health and social care agencies in the UK. It found that new connections were primarily made with others within the same agency, but there were some examples of good practice in connecting people beyond the agency they were involved in.

## The model explained:

The Connecting People model (see pages 14 and 15) does not follow a traditional linear process in which a practitioner does something for or with the service user and an outcome occurs as a result. The model was developed from a study of existing good practice. Many of its elements will therefore be familiar to many people. Its distinctive approach comes in drawing together different components of practice into one place to create a unique and dynamic model that is grounded in lived experience.

The aim of Connecting People is to rotate the green and blue wheels seen in the model. These represent cycles of discovery for both the practitioner and service user, which result in the

development of new, renewed or extended social connections and social networks. At the heart of the intervention process is the equal, positive partnership between the service user and the practitioner. The symmetry of the model demonstrates this important aspect, and every effort should be made to maintain as much equality and balance as possible.

The service user needs to be encouraged to think beyond what the service could provide and to consider new opportunities which they had previously not thought possible. Together, the practitioner and service user select a goal, or a series of goals, to work towards. The processes of mapping social networks, exploring assets, and talking about goals aid the development of the relationship and the task of bringing the service user to the point where they are ready to try new and different things.

Before the wheels can start to spin, the practitioner and service user both need to be prepared to work together, to engage in new situations, and to meet new people. The shared development of objectives and activities is

depicted at the centre of the model because it represents co-produced activities. The way that the green and blue wheels overlap illustrates this partnership. They are interlocked to represent the fluidity of the process and the uncertainty about whether new social connections will be made, and the interdependence the practitioner and service user share.

The service user's journey is represented by the blue circle on the right. In working to achieve their goals, the individual is exposed to new ideas; introduced to new people and activities; and supported to develop skills, interests and social confidence. The green circle on the left represents the practitioner's journey, and is of equal importance to that of the service user. The practitioner may develop self-awareness and self-confidence, and an improvement in their knowledge of the social networks available to the people they work with.

The practitioner needs to look out for barriers which may prevent the service user's blue wheel from rotating. These work

in the opposite direction to the programme's cycle and can present the practitioner with a number of challenges; helping the service user to overcome them is likely to be the most time-consuming element of the work. Practitioners may also face barriers which may need to be overcome in order to develop their own networks, and form an effective partnership.

The practitioner-service user partnership described here takes place in the context of a supportive agency, which is shown at the bottom of the model to illustrate its crucial, underpinning nature. An agency needs to encourage practitioners to form new ways of doing things, and share the principles of Connecting People. A positive physical environment is also important, as well as good methods of sharing knowledge that prevent reliance on a particular staff member for information.

If all of these processes occur to some extent, the model shows the outcomes of 'social network development' for the service user, and 'social network knowledge development' for the practitioner.

# How to use this manual

This manual provides a step-by-step guide on how to connect the people you work with to others in their local community. Social connections are important for wellbeing and leading a full and active life. One of the barriers practitioners face is demand on their time. However, many practitioners will already be doing some of the things suggested here, and this step-by-step approach is designed so that it can be read quickly and used to complement current activities. It may help practitioners develop partnerships with service users, think creatively, plan effectively, and evaluate what they have done. It may also introduce new ways of working that have not been encountered before.

This practice guide is not prescriptive. Practitioners and service users bring their own expertise and can adapt the model to suit their needs. The steps may be worked through as an ordered sequence, but steps may also be combined, rearranged, or revisited as required. The guidance is designed for you to share and discuss with service users, encouraging a partnership approach.

Pages 6-7 contain an at-a-glance overview of all 8 steps underpinning Connecting People. With just one or two short paragraphs, it is quick and easy to get a brief outline of what is in each step. It can be used as a reminder of where you are in the process, recap on what has been done, and think about what is left to do.

Pages 8-25 contain more detailed information on each step, which you can dip into to help generate creative ideas, and gain a greater understanding of the rationale and aims of each activity. Each step is marked in yellow highlight in the model.

Throughout the manual there are references to various measurement tools. These are the measures that the researchers will complete as part of the study (up to January 2019). However, practitioners are welcome to look at and use the measures if they would find them useful. Page 26 contains a list of the measures and resources, the Connecting People website, and also includes a space for practitioners to note down the web addresses of local activities and services that may be useful during discussions with service users.

### Practitioner and Service User Terminology

For practical purposes it was necessary to describe the partners in the Connecting People approach. The terms chosen were 'service user' and 'practitioner.' However, it is acknowledged that these terms may be seen as divisive: some people are, have been, or will be both service users and practitioners, and all are people and citizens first. Other terms considered for this guidance included 'individual' and 'worker' but were felt to be less desirable than 'practitioner' and 'service user.' Practitioners and service users are free to use their own terms if they wish, and these terms may change over time.

# STEPS TOWARDS CO

## 1 Getting Started

Discuss Connecting People with the service user and find out how they feel about trying new things. Offer reassurance that support will be provided along the way. Start to think about relationships you both have with other individuals, members of your team, and in the wider community. The Social Isolation Scale may be considered at this step. More information is on pages 8 & 9.

## 2 Existing Connections

Map the existing connections that the service user has with other people and services. This could include family, friends, acquaintances, and staff in organisations. Make a note of who connections are, how close they are to the person, how often they see them, whether they do anything together. Make a note of the service user's strengths and assets – interests, qualities, and what they are good at doing. Complete the Resource Generator questionnaire. Various tools for mapping connections are widely available. More information can be found on pages 10 & 11.

## 3 Making Plans

Based on the map of existing connections, identify aspirations, make plans for the future. These are the things that the service user would like to do. They might include specific activities, or more general goals such as making new friends. Use the Goal Attainment Scale to record goals. This will be used again at the end to review progress. More information on this step can be found on pages 12 & 13.

## 4 Stepping Out

This is about putting plans into practice. To access activities and opportunities, service users may need support. Support could come from the practitioner, someone the individual knows (identified in their asset map), introducing the individual to a named person in an organisation or activity, or by gaining new skills and knowledge, such as building confidence. Discuss with colleagues to see what they can add. More information on this step can be found on pages 16 & 17.

# ONNECTING PEOPLE

## 5 Taking Stock

Review progress so far. Identify what is working, and build on it. Identify what barriers are holding service users back, whether these are about personal confidence or motivation, lack of support, or practical issues. Think about what is working and not working for the practitioner too, for example, identifying opportunities, time constraints, organisational buy-in, resources, or lack of inspiration. You may do this step in conjunction with step 6. More information on this step can be found on pages 18 & 19.

## 6 Working Around Barriers

Based on 'Taking Stock' conversations, make plans for working around barriers. What can be done to remove barriers that hold the service user back? What can be done about the barriers that the practitioner faces? Who else might be able to contribute? Has the asset map changed at all? Could actions be completed in different ways? Do some original goals need to be changed or abandoned, and new goals added? A template for an action plan is included in the folder and available online. This step could follow straight on from step 5, in the same discussion or session, if time allows. More information on this step can be found on pages 20 & 21.

## 8 Reviewing the Process

This step involves looking at the whole process from both the service user's and practitioner's viewpoints. Practitioners may reflect on the costs and benefits for both themselves, their organisation, and on the service user. Service users may also reflect on themselves and on their perceptions of the practitioner and organisation. They may reflect on this manual, and the Connecting People approach. Consider what comes next: are service users moving on from the service, or will they re-enter the Connecting People process at one of the steps? At this stage, revisiting the Goal Attainment Scale, Resource Generator, fidelity measures and the Social Isolation Scale can be useful to review progress. See pages 24 & 25 for more information on this step.

## 7 Organisational Culture

Practitioners are encouraged to talk to their colleagues and managers about Connecting People, to encourage collaboration, sharing of ideas, and changes to working practices. Service users should also be encouraged to say how they think the organisation could better deliver services and support, including the Connecting People approach. More information on this step can be found on pages 22 & 23.

# STEP 1. **GETTING STARTED**

**Connecting People is a dynamic process. It involves getting things moving and generating activity. To get the green (practitioner) and blue (service user) circles spinning, you are encouraged to work on the following areas:**

"

### Exposure to new ideas:

*"…I'm constantly being exposed to new ideas from my clients… So it's not introducing clients to new ideas. They're introducing us to new ideas. And so that's a fifty-fifty kind of split up."*

**EXTRACT FROM INTERVIEW, PRACTITIONER**

"

### Be open minded:

*"…well, straight away, they said, 'are you interested in the activities?'… I was like, 'nah, I'll just use the team for the doctors, just to go and talk.' But then later on… I used the services, the activities… I've been playing football for two years with them now."*

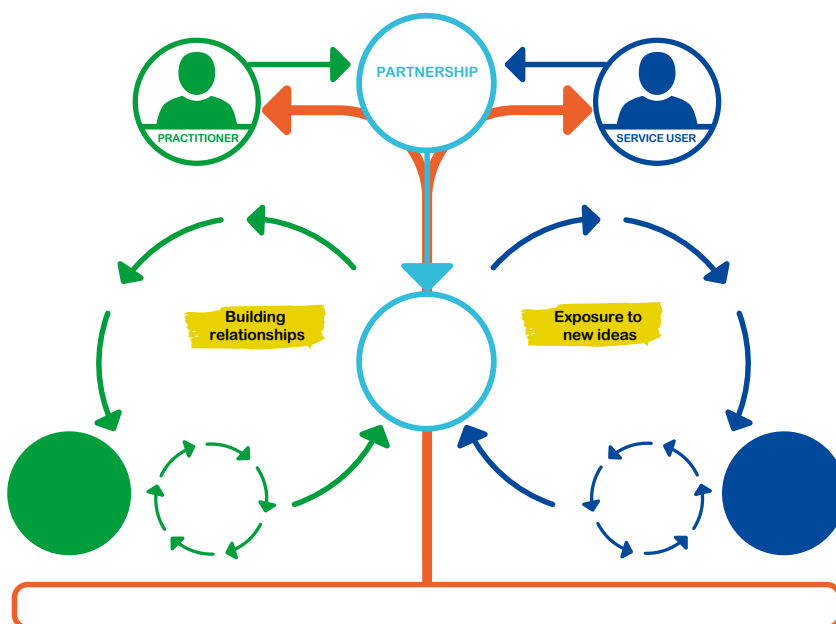**EXTRACT FROM INTERVIEW, SERVICE USER**

- Before you discuss how Connecting People works, it may be useful to talk about how the service user feels about trying out new things. They may not feel sufficiently confident, skilled, or motivated to take part. Service users may feel reassured to know that issues around support and confidence will be addressed throughout the Connecting People process, and in particular during steps 4, 5 and 6.

- Introduce Connecting People. Emphasise how you will work in a positive and equal **partnership** to identify current connections, create plans for the future, and provide or identify support to put these into practice. Practitioners and service users will develop plans together, and both will take responsibility for agreed actions. Some ideas will come from practitioners, and some will come from service users. Both parties should try to think creatively and take an active part in the process.

- It is important for both the practitioner and the service users to be open to new ideas and ways of working. Individuals may be enthusiastic about trying out new things, but they may also feel worried, lack confidence, or feel it is not for them. If they do not wish to try out this approach now, it could be discussed again later, when they may feel differently.

- If service users are happy to try new things, then it would be useful to talk more about Connecting People, and any hopes and fears they may have. Is it possible for the service user and the practitioner to agree at this stage to work together through the steps in this practice guidance?

- The next step could be looked at in the next session or, if there is time and enthusiasm, you could progress immediately to Step 2, where you will begin to map out existing connections and identify any new ones the service user would like to have.

- You could complete the Social Isolation Scale. This can help generate conversations about how individuals feel about their level of access to social and emotional connections, for example, whether they have a close friend, or whether they have someone to talk to about everyday problems. It may also help to identify the kinds of relationships that service users would like to develop with others. The fidelity measures could also be used in this step. Copies of the Social Isolation Scale and fidelity measures are included in the folder and available on the website.

# Building Relationships:

- Demonstrating empathy can help service users to feel understood, and show that the practitioner understands their fears and barriers.

- Taking time to build positive, warm relationships at this stage may help the Connecting People approach to be more effective and reassure service users that they will be well supported.

- Connecting People may feel difficult for practitioners who face competing demands on their time. However, Connecting People can also be a source of inspiration and offer new ways to meet existing goals

- **Feedback:** You may find it helpful to build feedback into the process from the beginning. Feedback should be a two-way street with the practitioner helping the service user to reflect on how they are progressing throughout the process. Practitioners may want to ask themselves, and service users "am I asking the right questions?", "how will we know this is helpful?", and "is this a helpful conversation?". This allows constant monitoring of how effective the practice is proving to be.

**Building relationships** and **Exposure to new ideas.** The purpose of this step is to begin discussion, and to gauge and encourage enthusiasm for making social connections. Developing a supportive, trusting, and equal relationship between the service user and the practitioner is crucial to Connecting People, and begins at this first step.



**The empathic practitioner:**
*"…you're understanding people… in terms of social interaction, what it's like for other people when they might lack the confidence to go out and meet other people."*
**EXTRACT FROM INTERVIEW, PRACTITIONER**

**Adapting to new ideas:**
*"The agency is always changing and workers' job titles alter every few months. Workers seem to take this as a positive thing though, and feel it ensures that their roles remain fresh and vibrant. It doesn't let them sit still and they seem to thrive from this atmosphere, and in acting like this help the individuals they work with to thrive too."*
**REFLECTIONS, RESEARCHER**

**Building relationships:**
*"I will, kind of, smile, encourage them… I have at the back of my mind, my conversation is giving them that assurance."*
**EXTRACT FROM INTERVIEW, PRACTITIONER**

# STEP 2: MAPPING EXISTING CONNECTIONS

**Key elements:**

Step 1 asked service users to start thinking about the connections they have with other people. Step 2 takes this further and asks them to map out their current networks, contacts, and connections. Practitioner contacts may be useful for a service user right now, or to someone else in the future. Compile existing connections. Pool resources. Investigate what else is available locally.

"

**Building resources:**

*"To work effectively I have to have really strong knowledge of all the available services out there – and constantly be looking for new ideas of where someone could go, where they could try out. Here at our base we have a big table full of leaflets, fliers, and all sorts of information about different schemes in the area, which helps with inspiration if you are a bit stuck."*

**VISH (NHS COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH ASSESSMENT TEAM)**

- Compile a list of your own existing connections to other people, including service users, community organisations, services, and activities available locally. Include what skills, specialisms and expertise they are able to offer. List what skills and assets you have, such as interests, strengths, and personal qualities.

- Discuss with colleagues, in team meetings, or by email. Invite others to contribute to an accessible resource that everyone can use. This could be a spreadsheet or a written list, or a filing cabinet drawer containing contacts, leaflets and information.

- Begin looking proactively for connections to add to the connections repository. This may involve contacting other organisations locally. There may be a local directory of services, a council for voluntary services, or another organisation that has information about what activities and services are out there. This can be done as a strategic exercise, or, in Step 3, it can be conducted in a targeted way based on a service user's needs.

- Engage with the local community. Creating bonds with the community allows the service user who the practitioner is helping to easily pass from mental health specific services into the mainstream. If the practitioner has contacts in the local area, this transition is aided, for example a college admissions tutor will be more sympathetic towards a new admission.

- Think about opportunities further afield. This may help service users to branch out more to follow a special interest.

- Work with the service user to map out their existing social network. This can be done by ranking the people in the service user's life in concentric circles extending outwards from the service user with those closest to them in the 'inner circle' (see image opposite).

- Discuss and write down the service user's strengths and assets. These may be their interests; things which they/ other people think they are good at; or their unique qualities. They will draw on these assets throughout the Connecting People process.

- Be prepared to share some of your own network information with service users, whether this is social or work related, to provide examples and to stimulate discussion and conversation.

- Both practitioners and service users can identify gaps and actions to fill those gaps in Step 3, next. Various tools for mapping connections are widely available. The Resource Generator-UK questionnaire is also a useful tool in this Step.
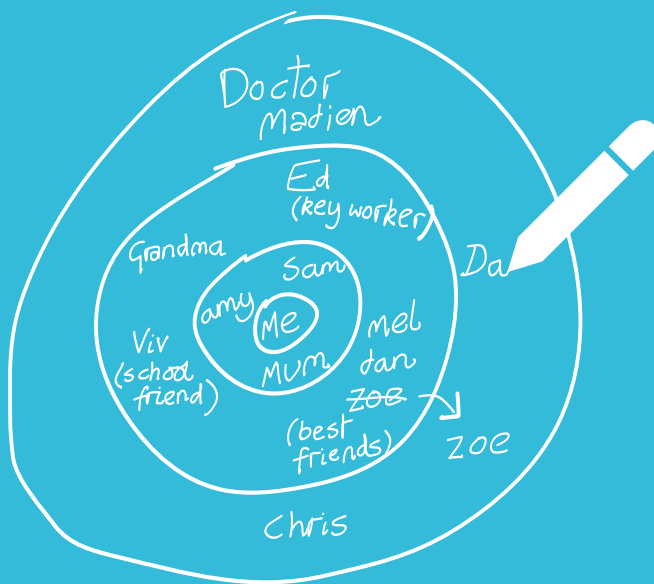
Social Network Mapping

**"**

**Developing networks and resources:**

*"So it is knowing what's out there, building relationships with perhaps other people who run that scheme or whatever it is, knowing what they offer… And that sort of knowledge takes quite a while to build up. The first year I knew nothing… now I've got quite a detailed map in my head."*

**EXTRACT FROM INTERVIEW, PRACTITIONER**

**Network assessment.** The purpose of this step is to assess what connections each person already has access to.
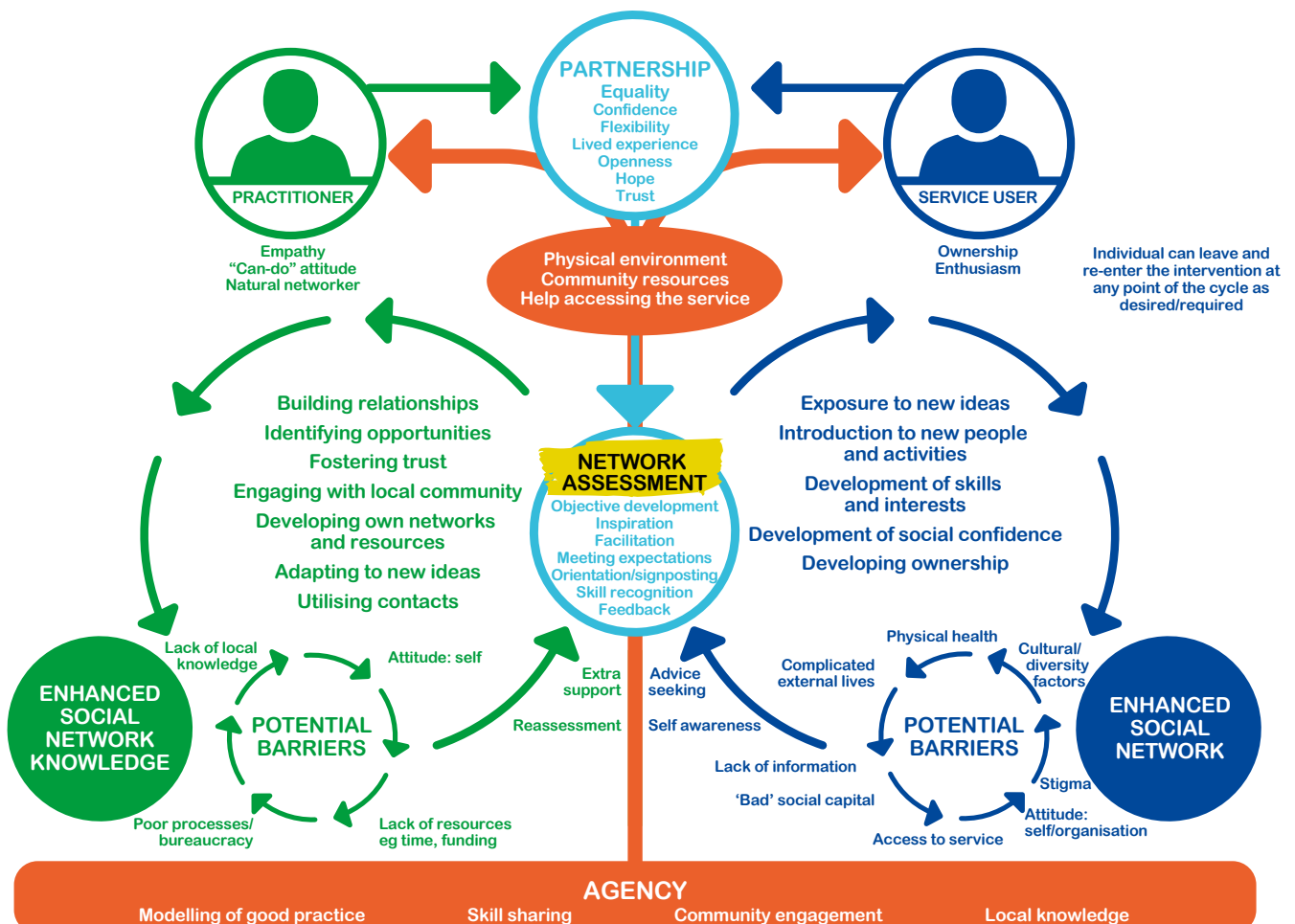
# STEP 3: **MAKING PLANS FOR FUTURE CONNECTIONS**

**Key elements:**

Discuss the service user's goals, interests and aspirations. Talk about some of the things the practitioner likes doing to stimulate conversation. Look at existing connections to see if they can be used to meet goals. Identify gaps in connections. Research potential new connections. Think creatively. Some of this step might be completed in the same session as the mapping exercise in Step 2, or can be completed at a later date.

"

**Identifying Opportunities:**

*"I guess if someone wants to work in a gallery, what about an arts suppliers… WH Smith? Or what about a library… What about theatre?… It could be music shops and it could be the cinema. And then through talking about these things: 'oh actually I would quite like to work there'."*

**EXTRACT FROM INTERVIEW, PRACTITIONER**

- Think creatively to help a service user to think of new ideas. Ask about activities they have enjoyed in the past. What are their aspirations? With individuals who have higher support needs, these processes may need to be led quite actively by the practitioner – for example through trial and reaction, or respectful guessing.

- If a service user cannot find inspiration, a practitioner can help them to be inspired. Share some of your hobbies, interests and activities to see whether these spark interest, or generate new conversations. Let your personality shine through.

- Continue to develop your own social network knowledge in order to support the service user on their journey. The practitioner is on a journey, just as the service user is. Both journeys are important to the Connecting People process. Identify opportunities; engage with the local community of the service user; develop your own networks and resources; adapt to new ideas; and use your contacts to support the individual's plans.

- Help service users to avoid getting caught up in thinking about what they cannot do, or worrying about barriers and obstacles. Working around barriers and providing support are considered later.

- Don't worry if you only manage to identify a few things service users would like to do. Start small. Thinking of just one or two things could be enough to begin the process.

- The Goal Attainment Scale can be useful for recording goals.

"

**Developing skills and interests:**

*"I don't think it matters if you're only doing one thing a week but the one thing you're doing is so fantastic."*

**EXTRACT FROM INTERVIEW, SERVICE USER**

**Adding aspirations to the asset map:**

The service user needs to be encouraged to think beyond what the service could provide and to consider new opportunities which they had previously not thought possible. Together, the practitioner and service user select a goal, or a series of goals, to work towards.

The processes of mapping social networks, exploring assets, and talking about goals aid the development of the relationship and the task of bringing the service user to the point where they are ready to try new and different things.

"

### Engaging with the local community:

*"…We went along to a really wicked café… Really cool… it's like a mini-gallery in there so local artists display their stuff there. But they also have a club… where local artists can meet up together… So I just said, 'well you could go along to that if you wanted. If you felt anxious or whatever, I could always come along for the first time and help facilitate some conversations or introductions or whatever'."*
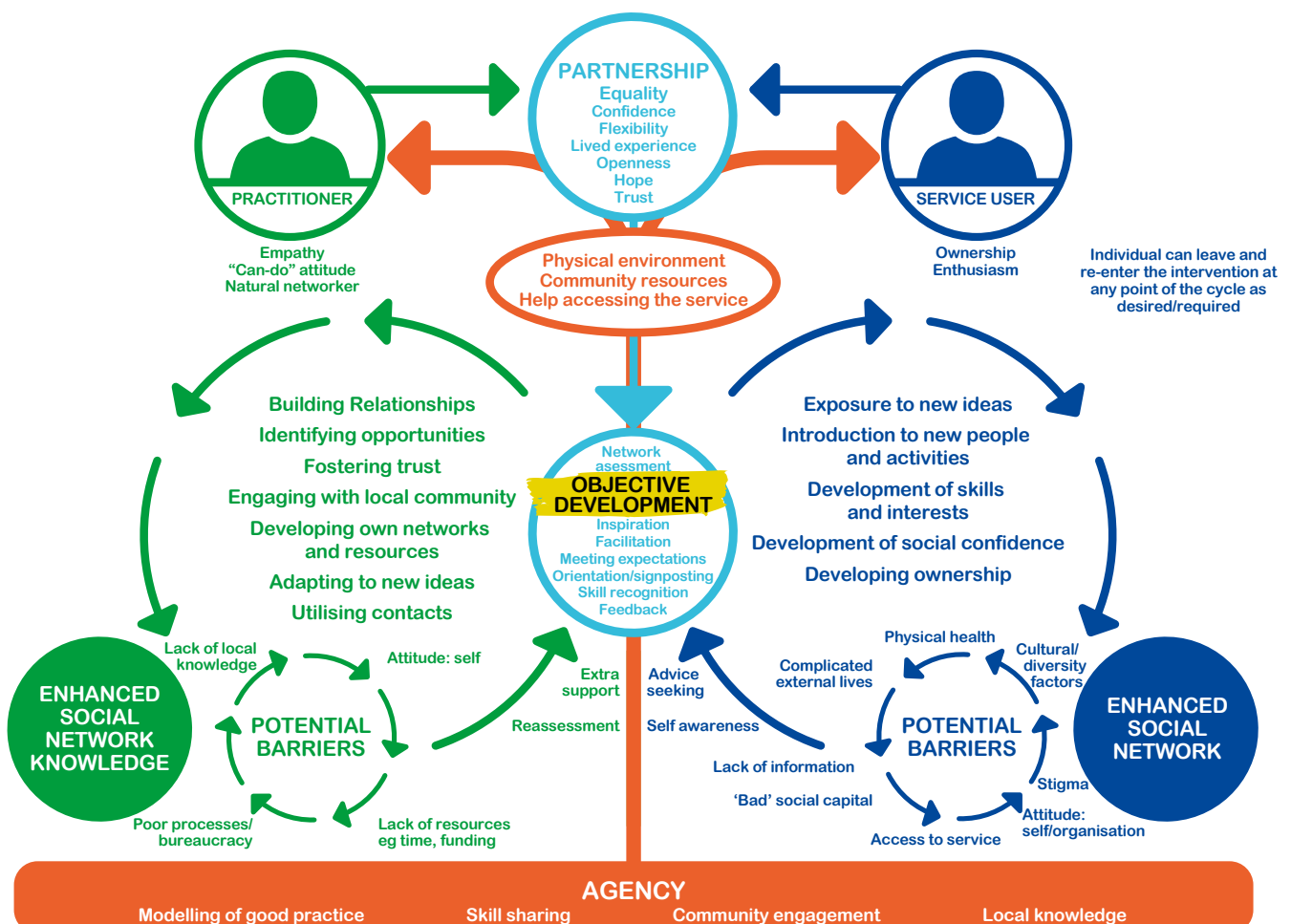
**EXTRACT FROM INTERVIEW, PRACTITIONER**

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*"We started talking about my hobbies and interests and sometimes I don't feel like I have many at all. But she helped me to think back about what Hugh and I used to do together… I've met one woman who lost her husband too and we're now able to go to the meetings together… I'm still seeing Kay regularly but with meeting new people I feel less anxious about leaving the house."*

**DELORIS, SERVICE USER**

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**Objective development, inspiration.** The purpose of this step is to decide what the service user would like to do in the future.

PARTNE...
Equa...
Confid...
Flexib...
Lived exp...
Openn...
Hop...
Trus...

Physical env...
Community...
Help accessing...

**PRACTITIONER**

Empathy
"Can-do" attitude
Natural networker

Building Relationships
Identifying opportunities
Fostering trust
Engaging with local community
Developing own networks
and resources
Adapting to new ideas
Utilising contacts

Netwo...
asessm...
Objective dev...
Inspira...
Facilita...
Meeting exp...
Orientation/s...
Skill reco...
Feedb...

**ENHANCED
SOCIAL
NETWORK
KNOWLEDGE**

Lack of local
knowledge

Attitude: self

**POTENTIAL
BARRIERS**

Extra
support

Reassessment

Poor processes/
bureaucracy

Lack of resources
eg time, funding

**AGEN...**

Modelling of good practice        Skill sharing

...ERSHIP
...lity
...ence
...ility
...erience
...ness
...e
...st

...vironment
...resources
...g the service

SERVICE USER

Ownership
Enthusiasm

Individual can leave and
re-enter the intervention at
any point of the cycle as
desired/required

...ork
...ent
...velopment
...ation
...ation
...ectations
...ignposting
...gnition
...ack

Exposure to new ideas

Introduction to new people
and activities

Development of skills
and interests

Development of social confidence

Developing ownership

Advice
seeking

Self awareness

Lack of information

'Bad' social capital

Physical health

Complicated
external lives

Cultural/
diversity
factors

POTENTIAL
BARRIERS

ENHANCED
SOCIAL
NETWORK

Stigma

Access to service

Attitude:
self/organisation

...NCY

Community engagement          Local knowledge

# STEP 4. **STEPPING OUT**

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*"Someone I knew was already part of the local football team, so I utilised this contact and this person became a buddy for Jack and took him along to a football session."*

**ERIC (THIRD SECTOR RESOURCE CENTRE FOR ADULTS WITH A LEARNING DISABILITY)**

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*"I was able to take her to some activities but wanted to be sure these were opportunities to meet new people so that she could continue getting involved without me."*

**KAY (NHS COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH TEAM FOR OLDER PEOPLE)**

"

*"like going out… (the worker has) been getting me to think about what it is that I don't like about it. And she taught me to understand that even though I don't feel like doing some of it. If I do, then I'll benefit from it."*

**SERVICE USER**

- Some service users may not engage because of a lack of confidence. Discuss their fears and anxieties and what you can both do to reduce them.

- Try to make sure they don't feel pressured, and are not afraid to say no to an activity. The Connecting People process can be challenging, but should not be stressful, even where service users are asked to step outside their comfort zone.

- Identify sources of support that could make individuals feel more comfortable meeting new people and going to new places. Sources of support might include looking at existing networks of contacts to see if there is someone who could go with the individual to activities. Over time, new contacts may feel supportive too.

- Practitioners could attend an activity or group with the service user on the first few occasions, until their confidence increases or they make connections with others.

- Consider introducing the service user to someone already involved in the activity, or someone who works in the organisation being accessed.

- It may be helpful to visit the venue with a service user so that they feel more familiar with the physical environment and less daunted by it.

- Be prepared for setbacks. Monitor the individual in a sensitive fashion to allow for extra support where necessary. The path to recovery is not a smooth one and service users may progress substantially before encountering an issue, or relapsing.

- Service users may not enjoy an activity and may be reluctant to try again. It is important to encourage them to think positively and optimistically. Start the process again, identify activities, and look again at sources of support. Practitioners could re-attend an activity with the service user if their confidence slips.

- Over time as the service user becomes more integrated with their new social networks, the role of the practitioner should become less important. Accurate assessment of when and how to drop back and allow the service user to 'go it alone' is crucial.

> "I applied to college and was accepted onto an access course. On the first morning (my worker) met me at the college to reassure me that I was able to take this route. I went on to complete the course, and was accepted on to a History BA (hons) course, which I completed earlier this year and gained a 2:1. If it was not for (the organisation) I doubt very much I would have gone into higher education."
>
> **SERVICE USER**

> "After we spoke about the running club, we decided 'no time like the present' so spent the remainder of the time visiting the local gym and getting the induction form filled in. I know that Vish only has a bit of time with me so it felt good that he could come and do that."
>
> **GREG, SERVICE USER**

**Introduction to new people and activities, development of social confidence.**
The purpose of this step is to put aspirations and goals into action, provide support based on the asset mapping, and identify what new types of support may be needed.
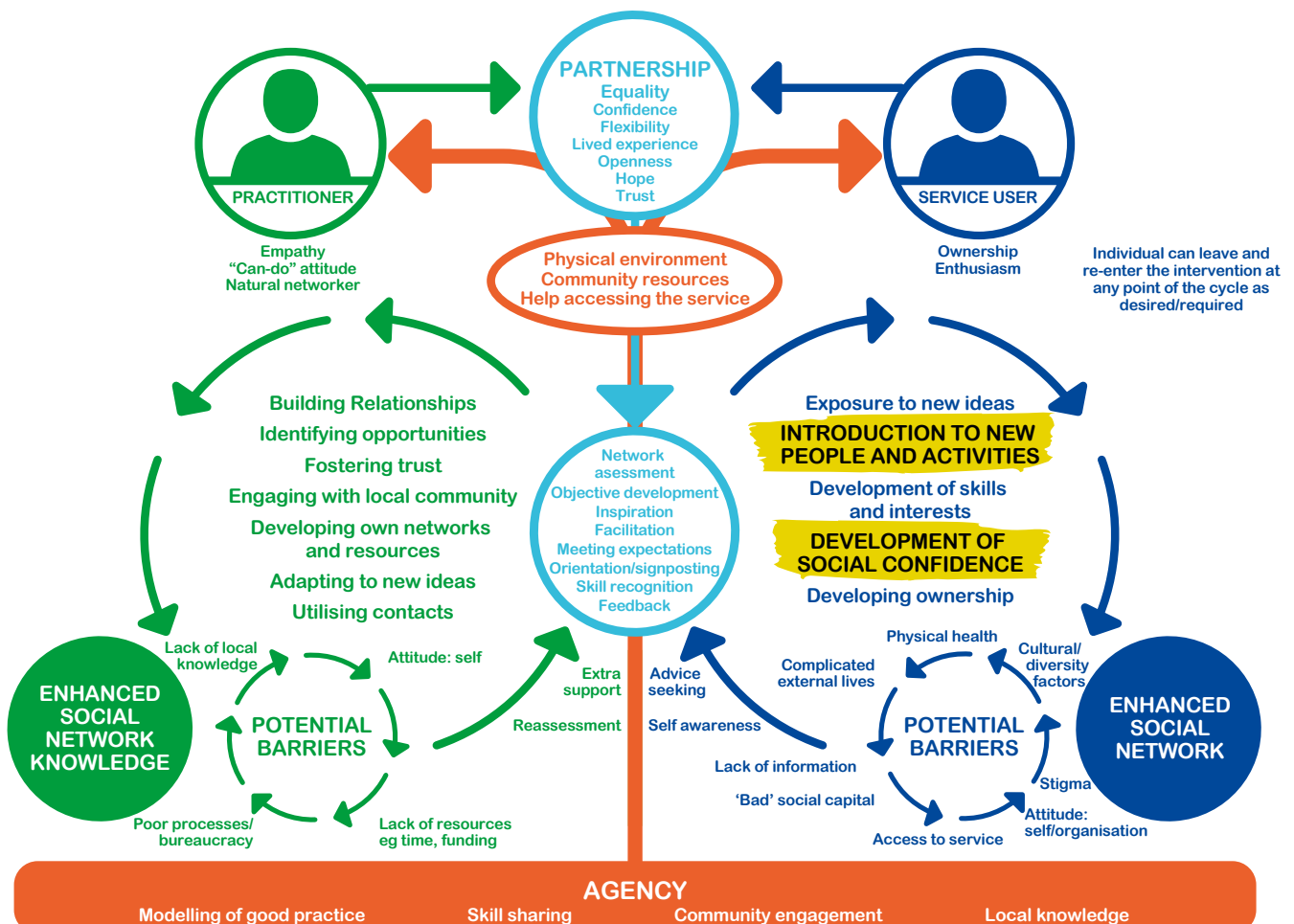
# STEP 5: **TAKING STOCK**

## Key elements:

Service users may have tried some activities that they enjoyed and wish to continue. Some may experience barriers to participation that were not identified before activities took place. This step is about looking at what is working and what isn't, and crucially, why. Connecting People is a continual process. Change and adapt as you go along. Make the most out of what works. Identify barriers.

**"**

### Extra support:

*"(I) try and work out with them exactly what it was that was stopping getting them from whatever they needed and was it a very particular thing… Because often it's very specific things that hold people back and you can make them aware of them. And also, I've prepared to do it with them…"*

**EXTRACT FROM INTERVIEW, PRACTITIONER**

**"**

*"They are not coming to be pressured… and so what we try and do with the service is make it very much user led…"*

**EXTRACT FROM INTERVIEW, PRACTITIONER**

● Discuss progress with the service user. Identify what is working, what isn't, and whether there are any barriers impeding engagement. Barriers might include not being able to find suitable activities, lack of confidence or motivation, not having the right support, or activities not being as interesting as they first appeared. Maybe service users are attending something but don't feel comfortable and confident yet.

● Think about an activity that went well and identify what helped it to go well. This might be something from the past, or a recent activity. This may help you look at what is missing or what is wrong with a current activity or goal.

● Look at current plans and aspirations. Are they realistic? Do they need to change?

● Consider re-mapping the service user's social network, and the practitioner's network of contacts (as in Steps 1 and 2). Check if the individual has any new aspirations that were not identified in Step 3. There

may be new opportunities that were previously unavailable. Alter plans and strategies where necessary, including goals, and the support that is available to achieve them.

● Where engagement has not progressed positively, service users may feel deflated, disappointed, and demotivated. It is important to discuss these feelings, and encourage service users to try again. Practitioners should encourage individuals to take very small steps forwards, for example attending just one session or making just one phone-call.

● Practitioners should identify what has and has not gone well for them too. Time constraints, access to resources, locating suitable activities, enthusing service users, changing established practices, trying out new approaches, building service users' confidence, and challenging negativity may all present problems for practitioners. Identifying barriers, whether they are structural or related to personal skills and knowledge, is the first step to overcoming them.

● Step 6 encourages practitioners to build on the identification of barriers and put together an action plan to overcome or work around their barriers.

**Progress:**

Practitioners need to gauge what stage the service user is at in the process and judge when and how to move forward. Signs that a service user is comfortable at a stage and that it may be time to move forward include increased personal confidence, increased attitude of ownership towards a task, and a more forward looking attitude. Body language and a change in the support that they ask for are other indicators.

**Extra support, reassessment.** The purpose of this step is to see how things are going, and change plans and support as needed.
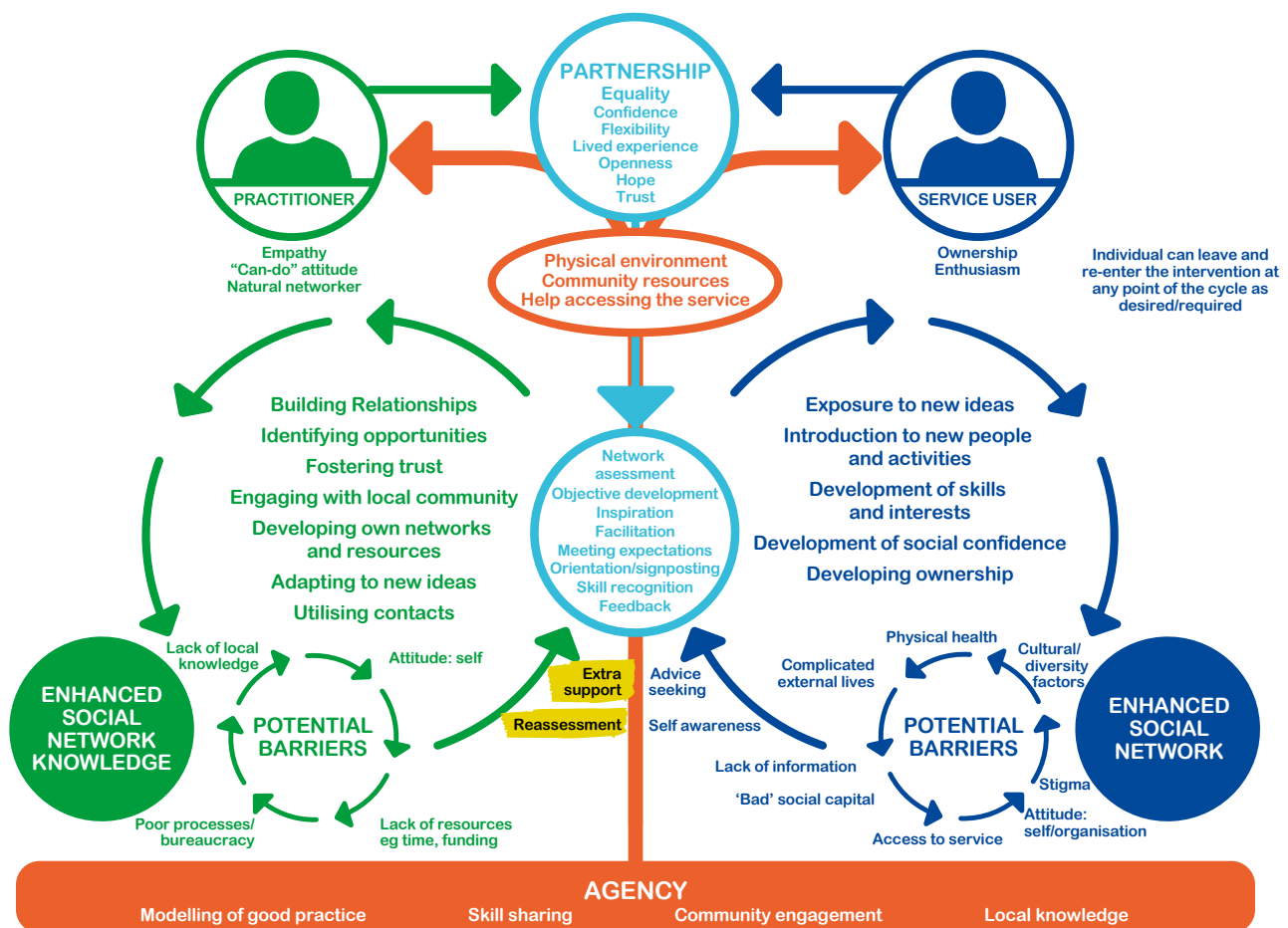
# STEP 6. **WORKING AROUND BARRIERS**

**Key elements:**

In the previous step, activities so far were discussed to build on success and to identify barriers to engagement. This step follows on from that, and asks practitioners to work with service users to make plans to work around barriers. Make an action plan. Who will do what, when?

This step looks at barriers in more detail, so that a plan can be formed to work around or tackle them and move forward again. Practitioners and service users should think about potential barriers in the widest sense, including their own barriers, those of the organisation (see also the implementation manual), and those of the service user. Some sources of barriers are given as examples below:

"

**One step at a time:**

*"I've come through the hospital and hostel, I've been through prison. And I'm nearly getting my own place, on my feet. And once I do get that, I want to be looking at education, you know, part time education, preferably evenings. Something, I'm going to enjoy doing something that I have a future in."*

**SERVICE USER**

"

**Bad social capital:**

*"…even though I've got friends to hang around with, some of them are not very good friends. Some of them drink, (do) drugs… And I want to hang around with decent people who want to get their life in track and not destroy their life…"*

**SERVICE USER**

- **Physical health:** Practitioners need to be sensitive to physical health issues when suggesting activities, and ensure that they are inclusive to allow the service user to take part fully.

- **Support to access services:** Practitioners should accompany service users where necessary. If a service is geographically governed, knowledge of similar services nearby is important.

- **Cultural factors:** Service users from tightly knit cultures may be less likely to access mainstream services and allowances must be made for these groups.

- **Lack of confidence:** Service users who are demotivated should be encouraged to take very small steps forwards, for example attending just one appointment. Are there any courses or activities nearby that the service user could access to build up their self-esteem and confidence?

- **Complicated external lives:** Although family etc. should be included where appropriate in the process, the service user should keep ownership of the process and prioritise their journey as something that they will do 'for themselves'.

- **Stigma:** By grounding the service within the wider community, and linking service users by a common activity rather than illness, the stigma of a 'separate mental health service' reduces. Self-stigma can also be reduced by encouraging the service user to attend large-scale organisational events, as they are likely to meet people that they can relate to.

- **Lack of information:** The service must be promoted clearly in a variety of different locations. The inclusion/exclusion criteria must be evident (e.g. an age restriction or a referral from CMHT needed).

- **'Bad' social capital:** If a service user's network is impacting negatively on them they should be encouraged to seek out alternatives.

- **Cost of activities:** Are there alternative activities which are free? Or is there any funding that can be accessed to support activities?

● **Organisational difficulties:**
The attitude of staff, agencies and other organisations has been cited as the hardest barrier to overcome. Good working relationships within and outside of the organisation are important. Breaking larger barriers into smaller, more manageable problems with single solutions can also aid practitioners with overcoming or working around barriers.

● **Action plan:** Write an action plan containing 'barriers' and 'who will do what and when'. This may help refocus efforts.

"

*"I had a young man who was thinking about going to college. I have, contacts, people I know, who work at the college, either in the careers advice or they've got a mental health worker there. And I was able to take him down… so we went in one of the holidays and just had a look around the college. And went for coffee in the cafeteria the following week, and we met with one of the careers advice workers… then meeting the form teacher. He (my client) gave permission (to) the teacher of the course, to disclose information about himself to them so that they could be aware of what support he might need. So working out a care package with them. And the tutor had somebody else on the course he knew, who would be quite a good contact. So they buddied up… the tutor helped the student find somebody he could go to the courses with. To me, the problem wasn't to do with this underlying psychotic problem or whatever. It's the lack of confidence that people have in returning to their life."*

**PRACTITIONER**

**Potential barriers.** The purpose of this step is to make action plans about how to work around barriers that both the practitioner and the service user identify.
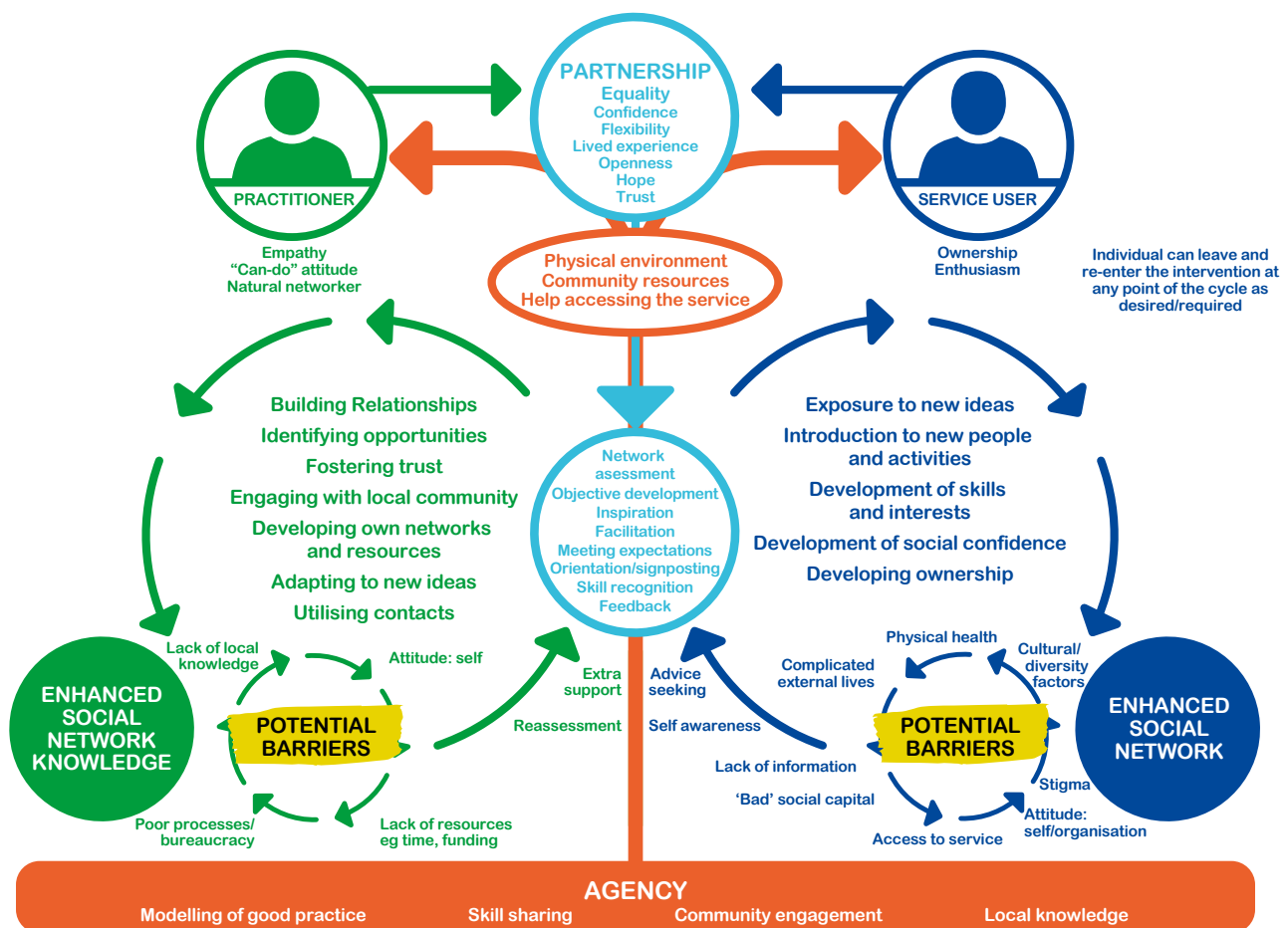
# STEP 7. ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

**Key elements:**

Encourage the agency to model good practice, share skills, engage with communities, and build local knowledge. Create welcoming environments. Change working practices. Get colleagues and managers on board. Ask service users what the agency could do to improve services and help them to make the most of Connecting People.

"

**Network Assessment:**

*"…we're asking each manager to build a resource… with all of the different resources in the community that people can access."*

**EXTRACT FROM INTERVIEW, PRACTITIONER**

"

**Equality:**

*"Office staff and admin staff would come and get involved, so you've got this real mix of people. And you had no idea who was a patient, who was staff, who was a visitor, who was a volunteer. It was completely about the activity and engagement."*

**EXTRACT FROM INTERVIEW, DIRECTOR OF SERVICE**

**Practitioners can influence their organisation's policies and procedures by discussing Connecting People with their colleagues and managers, and encouraging positive change where it is needed. Some examples of issues that may need to be tackled are given below (see also the Implementation Manual):**

- **Modelling of Good Practice:** It is helpful for an agency to set an example from the top down for all of its staff. Barriers and boundaries need to be clearly set out within policy to allow staff to feel confident in sharing and being a real 'person' to the service users that they work with.

- **Local knowledge:** There should be a database of local knowledge within the agency. Although staff will build up their own connections the agency should collaborate with staff to produce a record of useful links that can be passed on to other practitioners.

- **Community resources:** An agency should aim to link-in with other local resources in order to help a service user feel less segregated and more grounded when accessing their activity or service – this will increase the likelihood of attendance.

- **Community engagement:** Agencies should invite community members and groups in wherever possible. This reduces the stigma of mental health services. It is great if they can utilise mainstream community resources wherever appropriate.

- **Skill sharing:** An agency should not keep its skills and resources private. Sharing knowledge is really key – whether this be a skilled staff member going and helping other community organisations, or being happy to share policies and procedures.

- **Physical Environment:** This needs to be as inclusive as possible. Creating a non-statutory ethos is key to engaging service users who do not identify well with typical NHS settings. For example, no sharps cupboards, don't lock equipment away, encourage service users to assume front line positions e.g. working on a reception.

- **Help accessing the service:** The agency can play a key role in encouraging a service user to attend a service or activity: For example, creating a welcoming environment; and not forcing paperwork on a service user as soon as they start attending.

- Involve service users: throughout the process practitioners are encouraged to ask service users about how services could be made better, how Connecting People could be improved, and how the agency could be more supportive or welcoming.

- An implementation manual has been produced to help organisations adapt their work to better support the Connecting People approach. You can download a copy of this from the Connecting People website.

> **"**
>
> **Flexibility:**
>
> *"We met initially each week at a coffee shop or somewhere where it just felt like we were having a chat – it never felt like we were going through questions or filling out forms. After a while we used to meet less and less often – the decrease in intervals was always something I felt comfortable with though."*
>
> **EXTRACT FROM INTERVIEW, SERVICE USER**

This step relates to the influence of the **agency**. The purpose of this step is to make organisational change happen to better support the Connecting People process.
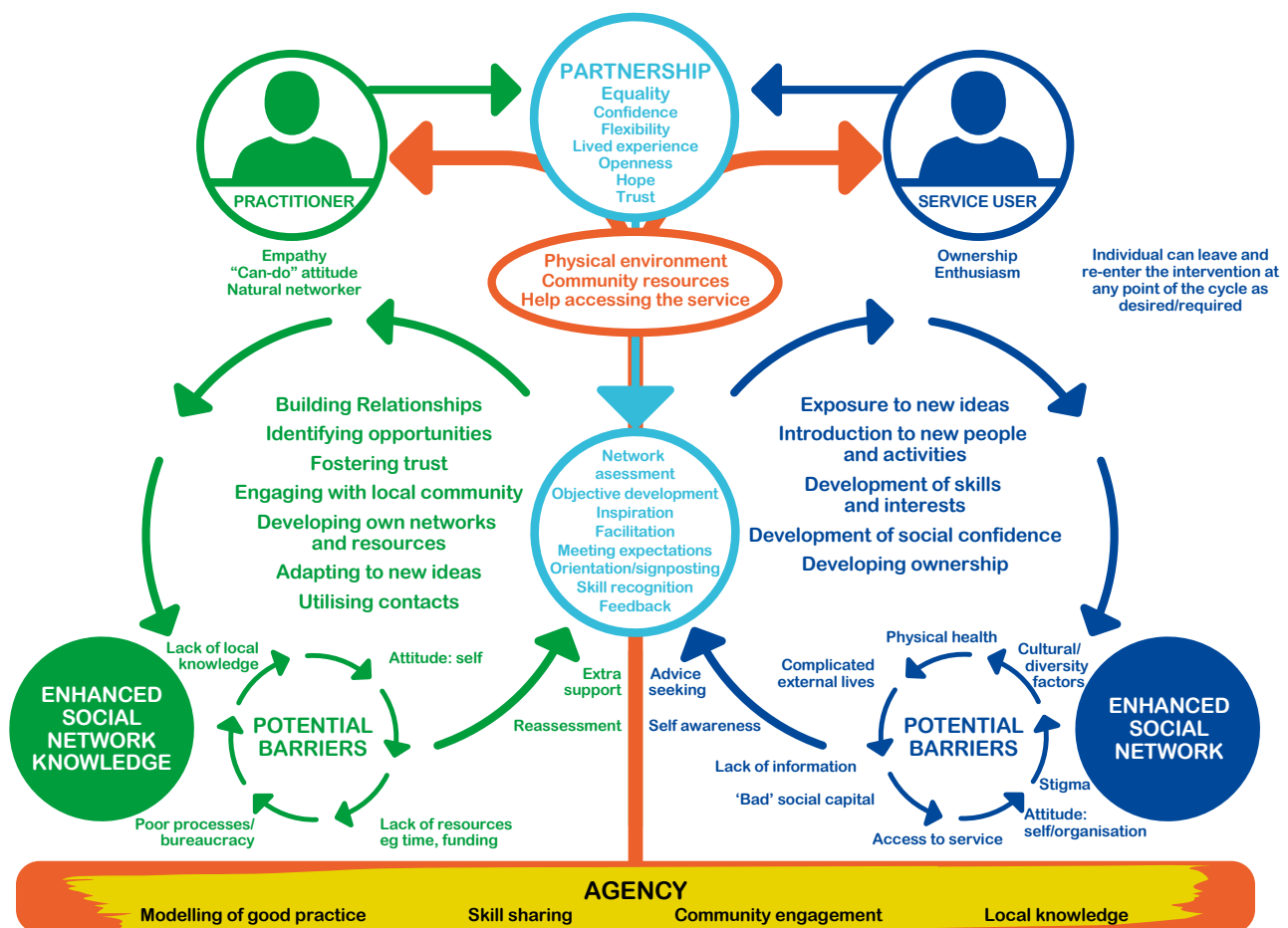
# STEP 8. **REVIEWING THE PROCESS**

**Key elements:**

Review the whole process from the perspective of the service user, practitioner, and organisation. This review is different to that carried out at Step 5 which looked at how things were going whilst they were still ongoing. This review looks back on the whole process. It is a review of how interventions went overall, how Connecting People has worked, and whether goals have been achieved. Repeat the Social Isolation Scale from Step 1, to see if the individual is less socially isolated. Fidelity to the Connecting People model needs to be assessed via completion of both the service user fidelity measure and the practitioner fidelity measure.

"

**Feedback:**

*"It (support session feedback) was brilliant because it was a summary of your conversation… it kind of contextualised what you'd done and what you'd achieved over the last month: 'we discussed that you were going to go and see this, you were going to do that, and you were going to give up smoking', and things like that you know… there's a lot of things going on in there which you didn't realise but you were going forward all the time."*

**EXTRACT FROM INTERVIEW, SERVICE USER**

The process can be reviewed on a number of levels:

- **Organisational change:** Practitioners could make an assessment of whether any changes have been made at an organisational level (Step 7) and what their effect has been.

- **Change in practice:** Practitioners can also assess how the process has worked for them, taking into account time, effort, resources, and confidence in delivering Connecting People.

- **Review:** The most significant review will be what has happened for the service user. Assessing this can be done with a mixture of informal discussion, as well as more formal measurement of distance travelled using the social isolation scale (used earlier in Step 1), and by checking whether goals have been attained, using the goal attainment scale, and by considering if their networks have changed through repeating the resource generator questionnaire.

- **Ask service users:** How well do they feel Connecting People has worked for them, and in what ways? Has the organisation changed in any way, e.g. how the practitioner or team works with them? Have they felt well supported? Would they recommend Connecting People to others? What do they think could be improved about Connecting People, the organisation, and the support received?

Practitioners may also want to assess how far elements of the Connecting People practice have been achieved, from their own and service users' perspectives:

- **Flexibility:** The partnership can be very flexible, and not bound by paperwork. If paperwork is needed to document meetings and the process, it is better to keep it minimal and interactive – both practitioner and service user should play a part in filling it in.

- **Facilitation:** Some service users may just need help determining how they want to move forward, and they can achieve the rest. However many will need help taking the first step. The willingness to work flexibly and accompany the client to new activities until they feel comfortable is important.

- **Trust:** This is really important to the service user – a practitioner should build the trust and respect of the individual by ensuring that they are not late to meetings, and keeping in good contact with them about arrangements.

● **Equality:** The practitioner should be on the same level as the service user. This can be achieved through mutual respect – just as important from the practitioner as from the service user. There is no reason that the practitioner cannot take on board comments or suggestions from the service user to aid their own work, or their wider lives. Similarly, practitioners can use examples from their own lives to help the individual, where appropriate. Sessions should be conducted at a location and time chosen by the pair.

● **Lived experience:** Some service users say that the best practitioners are those who have been through a similar experience to themselves. Consider introducing a peer support instead or other member of the team, if appropriate where this is not feasible/appropriate, practitioners can make an effort to understand aspects of their clients' lives – from listening to them talk, to going away and researching a client's interest to fuel conversation the next time.

● **Leaving or repeating the cycle:** For some service users, this stage might mark the end of receiving this or other services: some people may be ready to move on and get the support they need from other people, activities and organisations, or may be in less need of support. Others may continue to use the community mental health team services, and may repeat stages of the Connecting People process if they wish to gain more, or different, connections with other people, activities and services.

The purpose of this step is to review the whole process at multiple levels and from different points of view.
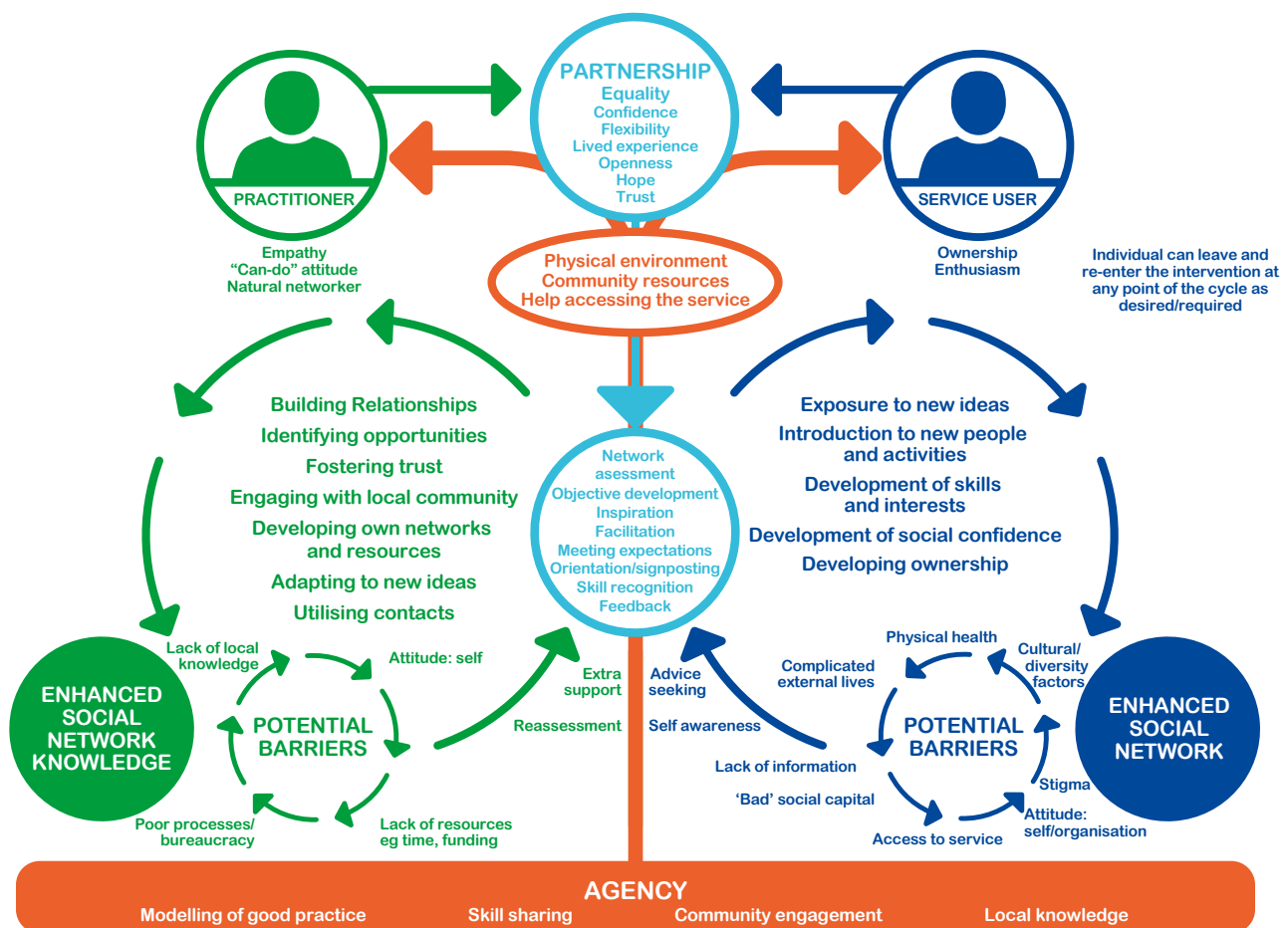
## Suggested tools to support Connecting People

| | |
|---|---|
| **Step 1** | Social Isolation Scale. |
| **Step 2** | Tool for Mapping Connections. Resource Generator questionnaire. |
| **Step 3** | Goal Attainment Scale. |
| **Step 6** | Barriers and Actions template. |
| **Step 7** | Barriers and Actions template. |
| **Step 8** | Social Isolation Scale. Goal Attainment Scale. Resource Generator questionnaire. Service user and practitioner fidelity measures. |

## Useful Links:

**Connecting People Website**

- On line tools and resources to support Connecting People are available at: **www.connectingpeople.net**

**Connecting People Implementation Manual.**

**Connecting People Training Manual.**

**The development of Connecting People is a collaboration between**

UNIVERSITY *of York*

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health research

LSE

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