

# Self-directed support

## Getting involved in your community

There are many things that can cause people to be cut off from their community such as a disability, mental health issue, change in circumstance, loss, house move, illness, having a baby or just getting older.

But for many people who already have busy lives, getting involved in their community can seem too time consuming or an unnecessary extra burden.

Taking part in community activity helps to build friendships and support networks which can bring together those who are isolated, and prevent others from becoming isolated.

This fact sheet looks at different ways people can get involved in their community.



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**“Good lives for people needing support depend on whether they are actually recognised as members of the networks and associations that constitute community. People excluded from this risk loneliness, isolation and powerlessness.”**

John and Connie O’Brien



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# The basic facts

## Getting involved

If you or someone you care about is not involved in their community, why not help them to explore the reasons why not?

For example, do they understand what the benefits of doing so are? Are they getting the support they need to do so? Do they know what 'gifts' they have to contribute? Do they know where to get information about what is going on in their community?

## Support

If you or someone you care about is not getting the support they need to fully take part in community life, **they may not be directing their own support in the best way.**

You can read In Control's fact sheets for more help on self-directed support.

Looking at all parts of your life and recognising where and when we might need extra support to live a full life can highlight the areas which may be holding us back in any way, including preventing our involvement in community.

For more information on support planning, visit:  
[www.in-control.org.uk](http://www.in-control.org.uk).

## Planning

Person centred planning can be used to help identify what is and is not working in a person's life.

These tools can be used by anyone who wants to make a positive change in their lives.

For more information see our fact sheet – Person centred planning.

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## More information

### Community connectors

People who know, or who actively seek to find out, who's who and where to go to when you need help are good community connectors.

When supporting someone to live a full life, it is important that you have the skills to build strong community connections for the individual you support. If you are looking to employ a member of staff, this is a great skill to put in their job description too.

With support, everyone should be able to get to know their neighbour, their butcher, their hairdresser, people with similar interests, their local library, school, college, church or faith group, and community centre.

### Circles of support

Our fact sheet on Friendships and relationships has more information on how to build up circles of support around an individual.

### Local information

To find out information about what is going on locally, why not visit the Directgov website? It's easy to use and will help you find all kinds of services and resources in your local area and can help inform your support plan.

For more information, visit:

[www.direct.gov.uk/en/HomeAndCommunity/index.htm](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/HomeAndCommunity/index.htm)

or [www.direct.gov.uk/en/HomeAndCommunity/](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/HomeAndCommunity/)

Gettinginvolvedinyourcommunity.

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## Get to know your neighbour and neighbourhood

This may seem obvious, but many people don't even know who lives next door to them! Here are a few ideas to help get you started:

- Introduce yourself to a neighbour.
- Get to know the community leaders in your area, such as the chair of a local committee, school leaders, church leaders etc.
- Find out if you can be involved in local fundraising or volunteering.
- If you have your own home, you could help to hold a coffee morning for the neighbourhood.
- Plan an activity around a common interest such as a book club.
- Have a stall at the local spring, summer, autumn or Christmas fair or car boot sale, selling things you have made or second hand goods.
- Invite people for coffee or offer to make them lunch or dinner.
- Grow plants, fruit or vegetables to sell or give to people in your community.

Don't forget: Community groups are always on the lookout for ideas to share with their members. If you have a skill or story, why not offer to share it with a local group?

### An example

A Cub Scout group in Lancashire asks older people from the community to speak to the cubs about what life was like in their village when they were children. This is educational and a lot of fun for both parties, and helps the cubs earn their Heritage badge.

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## Befriending services

If you want to build up your social life, why not try and find a befriending service?

Befriending services match up people living in the same community who have similar interests and who could enjoy spending time together and doing activities in the community, like going to the cinema or going to a local café or pub.

Befriending services are run by a variety of people, including through the local NHS health service, the council or a local charity.

## Floating support services

Floating support is another good service to look out for. Floating support workers come to people's homes and ask them how they would like to get involved in the community. People can choose to do all kinds of activities - from daily shopping and cooking, to line-dancing or dog-training classes. There are lots you can get involved with!

## Join a network

You can also join a network such as In Control's People Power movement which is about people working together to help change things for the better.

For more information, visit: [www.in-control.org.uk/peoplepower](http://www.in-control.org.uk/peoplepower)

## Take up an interest

You could try attending an exercise class at a nearby gym or joining a local club or interest group to help you meet other people. Exercise is also great for improving your overall health and sense of well-being.

If you'd prefer to do something a bit less physically active, you could also start an educational course or get involved in volunteering. How about working at a local charity shop or helping in community projects part-time?

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## An example

U3A stands for the University of the Third Age, which is a self-help organisation for people no longer in full time employment. It provides educational, creative and leisure opportunities in a friendly environment, and runs U3A groups all over the UK, which are charities in their own right and run entirely by volunteers. Their ethos is simply – no assessment, just learning for fun!

For more information or to find a U3A group in your area, visit: [www.u3a.org.uk](http://www.u3a.org.uk)

## Youth groups

Youth groups also offer a great opportunity for people who want to get involved in their local community.

Organisations like Scouts or The Duke of Edinburgh Award are for young people aged between 14-24 years, and provide a great platform for this.

For more information, visit: [www.scouts.org.uk](http://www.scouts.org.uk) or [www.dofe.org](http://www.dofe.org)

## Volunteering

There are many ways to volunteer in the community, depending on how much time you can spare.

Full-time, part-time, evening and night volunteering opportunities are offered by various organisations in the community. You can find out more from your local Volunteer Centre or Council for Voluntary Service. Ask your local council for their contact details.

See our fact sheet on Giving Something Back for more information.

## Getting 'out and about'

Sometimes getting out and about can stop people getting involved in their community, but it needn't do.

If you need help finding out about transport links, see our fact sheet on Transport.

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## There is a lot more information on the In Control website: [www.in-control.org.uk](http://www.in-control.org.uk)

In Control has jointly published a book with Helen Sanderson Associates, about how the most isolated people in society can not only just part of the community, but also make important contributions to it.

**'In Community: Practical lessons in supporting isolated people to be part of community'**, describes practical approaches to unlocking this vast potential for increasing social capital.

For more information, visit:

[www.hsapress.co.uk/publications/books.aspx](http://www.hsapress.co.uk/publications/books.aspx)

or contact HSA Press on 0161 442 8271.

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### About the **In Control and Me** project

A three-year project to produce accessible information for everyone who wants to direct their own support, funded by the National Lottery through the BIG Lottery Fund. You can find out more at [www.mencap.org.uk/incontrol](http://www.mencap.org.uk/incontrol) or [www.in-control.org.uk/icandme](http://www.in-control.org.uk/icandme)