



Talking about cancer is not the easiest conversation to have. The word 'cancer' itself can evoke a sense of dread (the unknown and uncertain elements). It can also create some discomfort around discussions, as all too often, we focus on saying the right thing and can adopt the attitude of 'saying nothing is better than saying the wrong thing.'

How then do you start a conversation that leads to having frank and open discussions about cancer, that delves into its intricacies and navigate the awkwardness, to arrive at the help and support that is out there? What is the first thing to say? Is there a way to start?

My role as a Project Officer (Talking About Cancer Together) is to bring members of our communities at the receiving end of support offered by charities and community organisations, together. I use the metaphor of the zipwire to describe my role as going down a zipwire to touch base with communities, bringing along charities and community organisations along with me. The focus being the directness and efficiency rather than the speed of arrival, avoiding all the windy roads along the way.



Starting the conversation has been my challenge; and as I talk to people about my role, there is almost a unison in response, of how important this role is and how much it is needed to bring together services and communities. The first thing I did when I started this new role, was to find out about the organisations in Suffolk -both cancer and non-cancer organisations- which offer support to people who have been diagnosed with a form of cancer and make contact with them. This is still ongoing, and the list I have, is by no means, an exhaustive list- so please get in touch if you are doing work with cancer or health and wellbeing in Suffolk and I haven't already made contact.

Within Suffolk, the help ranges from organisations that will translate literature to different languages, to groups that offer peer to peer support- going for a walk or coffee and offering a listening ear, to groups that meet monthly to socialise and even go on holidays together.

Whilst my title is 'Talking About Cancer Together', it has become increasingly obvious through networking, that, good mental health helps to navigate the journey of treatments, test and waiting for 'the all clear', or not, as the case may be, just as well as having a good support system. I had the opportunity to see first hand an exercise class for men with cancer in Abbeycroft Leisure, Bury St Edmunds. Two of the service users talked about the exercises helping with their mental wellbeing.

As I gather more and more information about the different VCFSE (Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise) organisations as well Cancer Support groups, my aim is to draw on the support systems that are already in place and strengthen the services available through networking events of exhibitions/fairs and workshops to celebrate and highlight what exists in Suffolk, thus creating more visibility and awareness, in a joint effort to bridge the health inequality gap.

If I may be permitted to borrow words from the SNEE ICB the aim is to achieve '..... a 'can do' health and care system that people can genuinely trust.' The ICB states 6 core principles that are needed to achieve this: Collaborative, Compassionate, Courageous, Community focused, Creative, Cost-effective. Between the many VCFSEs and charitable organisations in Suffolk these principles exist and more. If we can coordinate our efforts the 'Live Well' campaign, seeking a population in Suffolk that has equal access to health services, will be achieved.

We may all call our various 'campaigns' different names, but what we are trying to achieve is a more healthy, happy and contented Suffolk. Talking About Cancer Together is another one of those campaigns but I cannot do it alone, we need to work together. The more we talk about cancer, the more we will be able to change the statistics that says 1 in 2 of the population will be diagnosed with cancer in their life time.

My message is, there is a richness and a wealth of support within our communities and we reach more communities by working together. If I have not been in touch already, please get in touch, it is an exciting project and I look forward to working with all to create a healthy Suffolk.

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