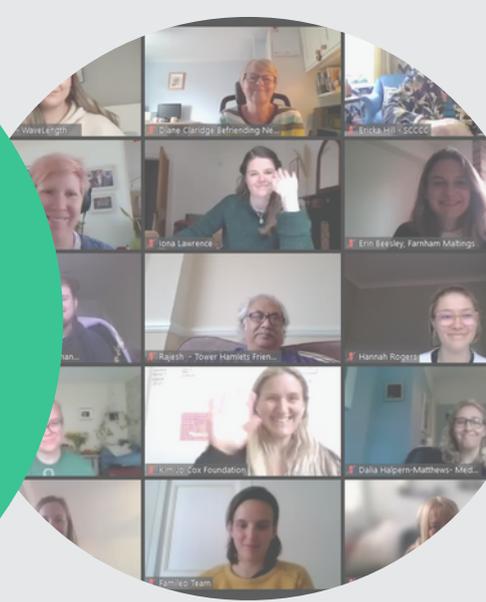


# Community of practice: how can we continue to put relationships and connections at the heart of our work

July 2021



## Summary

**Who is this for:** This is for you if you are working toward reducing social isolation, building more resilient communities and increasing connections and meaningful relationships between people. You will have experience to share and might have some questions or challenges around relationships and connections in your work that you want some support with.

**What to expect:** We will provide you with a space to share experiences and increase knowledge, skills and confidence. Attention will be focused on developing meaningful relationships and connections between group members. We will start by establishing where everyone is at, help you develop your own questions and challenges, and then see how we can address them as a group.

**Time commitment:** The overall time commitment is estimated to be 2-3 days over 6 weeks. This includes 6 x 2 hours weekly sessions, short one to one coffee catch ups with another group member in between sessions, and a couple of hours of self-directed learning.

**Key dates:** Sessions will run from 9th August - 17th September. On application we offer a few possible times for the 6 weekly sessions and will try to pick a time that suits the majority.

**Location:** The sessions will run online so you can join us from wherever you are.

**Interested? Great!** Zoë Cumberland (Connection Coalition Manager) will be running a drop in session on Wednesday 14th July, 3-4pm for members to find out more and ask questions. Complete [this quick expression of interest form](#) to be sent the link to join this drop in and a reminder of how to apply closer to the deadline. To apply please complete [this form](#) by 9am on Wednesday 21st July. Any questions please email [zoe@jocoxfoundation.org](mailto:zoe@jocoxfoundation.org).



## Introduction

We are creating a community of practice for Connection Coalition members focused on how we can continue to put relationships and connections at the heart of our work. During the pandemic, we have seen communities work together and support each other like never before. It has had a major impact on social connection and integration. For some it has been a period of deep and meaningful connection with friends, family and neighbours. Yet for others the Covid crisis so far has been a time of deep and painful disconnection and loneliness.

We know that so many Connection Coalition members have adapted in numerous ways in order to continue delivering essential support in your communities. You have formed new partnerships, recruited more volunteers, expanded or changed your work to meet needs. The work you have been doing in this crisis has helped to reduce loneliness and social isolation, built more resilient communities, increased trust and meaningful relationships between people and contributed to increased wellbeing.

We also know that it has been hard. We still don't have stability and it can be difficult to plan ahead. The full impact of the lack of connection experienced by many over the past year is still unknown. However, we do know that you want to connect with others working in similar fields with similar values, share learning and experiences, and that there is an underlying hope that we can keep some of the positives that have emerged and build back in a better, more connected way.

So much of the incredible response from individuals and organisations reminds us of the remarkable strength of well-connected, compassionate and kind communities built on meaningful relationships. One of the Connection Coalition's aims is to encourage people to carry forward relationships and connectedness with them into the post-crisis period, so that as we emerge from the pandemic, we can move as a society towards a world where we make people and their social relationships the focus of our time and attention. This is the focus of our new community of practice for Connection Coalition members.

## What is a community of practice?

"Communities of practice facilitate peer-based, collaborative learning between people with shared interests... By sharing experiences, stories, breakthroughs and challenges, community of practice members can shorten their collective learning curve, and ultimately develop their practice in meaningful and experience-based ways." National Voices 2017

We know that community and connection is where the magic happens - where people come together to share problems, solutions and stories. Communities of practice recognise this and are driven by the interests and needs of the group, with attention focussed on building relationships between members. There are some key elements which help to define a community of practice from other peer networks:

- Shared focus: a defined area with potential to develop knowledge and understanding, and that members have a shared commitment to exploring.
- Community and relationships: members may come from multi-disciplinary backgrounds, but through regular interaction and facilitated spaces they develop meaningful relationships based on trust and reciprocal learning.
- Practice: communities of practice rely on members sharing tacit knowledge from their personal experience around the shared focus.

Find out more:

- National Voices, 'Enabling Change Through Communities of Practice': [https://www.nationalvoices.org.uk/sites/default/files/public/publications/enabling\\_change\\_through\\_communities\\_of\\_practice\\_0.pdf](https://www.nationalvoices.org.uk/sites/default/files/public/publications/enabling_change_through_communities_of_practice_0.pdf)
- The Social Change Agency, 'How To Create And Manage a Community of Practice': <https://thesocialchangeagency.org/create-a-community-of-practice/>

## Aims of our community

- We will bring together practitioners within the Connection Coalition to form a community of practice on how we can continue to put relationships and connections at the heart of our work. We will provide members with a space to share experiences and increase knowledge, skills, confidence and motivation, with the ultimate aim of improving practice.
- We will create a community by facilitating peer-based, collaborative learning. Attention will be focused on developing meaningful relationships and connections between group members.
- We will work with the group to capture learning which can inform practice in a meaningful way and contribute to the sector by sharing this knowledge with the wider Connection Coalition network and beyond.

## What will you gain?

- As an individual you will gain:
- connections and relationships with other practitioners with shared values who are similarly passionate about reducing social isolation, building more resilient communities, increasing trust, connections and meaningful relationships between people.
- a space to ask questions and receive support from your peers.
- a space to reflect and share your own expertise so others might learn from it.
- ideas, tips and support to improve your own practice and that of your organisation.

## About you

The community is open to anyone within the Connection Coalition who is working toward reducing social isolation, building more resilient communities and increasing trust, connections and meaningful relationships between people. We welcome and encourage diversity in all its forms and we don't have a vision of the perfect group members or who we want to see. The group will be unique to the individuals who come forward and we will adapt to fit you. However, there are some characteristics and values that we'd like all group members to align with:

- you are an active practitioner working in an organisation that has been supporting individuals and communities throughout the pandemic, focusing on reducing social isolation, building more resilient communities and increasing trust, connections and meaningful relationships between people. You can contribute current, lived experiences that are relevant and valuable to others. You are either working directly in a 'front line' role or have responsibility for designing and developing front line interventions.

## What will your organisation gain?

- Your organisation will gain:
- meaningful connections with other organisations working towards similar aims, who are open to collaboration and sharing learning.
- an insight into wider trends and solutions in the sector with practical examples.
- the opportunity to share your work and ideas across the wider Connection Coalition network of 800+ organisations.



- you have some ideas of learning you/your organisation has gained during the pandemic and perhaps a specific challenge or question around putting relationships and connections at the heart of your work that you would like to bring to the group. These don't have to be perfectly formed, but coming with some ideas, questions and curiosity is great. The topics for sessions will be set in discussion with group members and based around key issues, challenges and questions that are shared by members. The more ideas we have from group members, the easier this process will be and the more you will get from it.
- you are committed to showing up with openness, honesty, a lack of judgement and a sense of playfulness and positivity.
- you have support from your organisation to attend and an openness from your wider team to new ideas. The group will have the most impact if you're able to create some space outside sessions for thinking how learning might apply within your role, where it might benefit your organisation to do something differently, talk with your team about your learning and be able to try things out.
- you are committed to sharing feedback and learning as we go, giving feedback to shape the internal group dynamics and sessions, and contributing to what we share externally. This might include writing a blog, completing a survey or running an online session for wider Connection Coalition members.

## Practical details

- Zoë Cumberland (Connection Coalition Manager) will be running a drop in session on Wednesday 14th July, 3-4pm for members to find out more and ask questions. Complete [this quick expression of interest form](#) to be sent the link to join this drop in and a reminder of how to apply closer to the deadline.
- To apply please complete [this form](#) by 9am on Wednesday 21st July. Any questions please email [zoe@jocoxfoundation.org](mailto:zoe@jocoxfoundation.org).
- Individuals from within Connection Coalition member organisations are being invited to apply through a simple process designed to ensure it's a good fit for everyone taking part. At this stage we will capture information about why you want to take part and what you hope to achieve which will help us to shape the community based on members' needs from the start.
- We will meet online, with an intention to meet face to face if/when restrictions allow.
- It will be free to join with expenses available where relevant.
- There will be a limited group size of 20 group members. This is to ensure we can develop meaningful relationships. If there is demand we will consider running multiple groups consecutively.

- Where appropriate we may invite external contributors to help set the scene on a particular topic, start and facilitate a conversation or set a challenge. Any need for this type of input will be determined by identifying any gaps in knowledge and skills within the group and relating this to the issues they want to discuss.
- The Connection Coalition Manager will be responsible for coordinating the group, sending out meeting invites and links, taking notes, facilitating sessions, liaising with any external contributors and working with group members to agree what learning will be shared with the wider network.
- The group will run with the following timeline:

#### Advertising and recruitment

- w/c 28 June: Applications open
- Wednesday 14th July, 3-4pm: drop in for members to find out more and ask questions
- Wednesday 21st July 9am: Applications close
- w/c 26 July: confirm group members and finalise dates

#### Sessions

- w/c 9th August, session #1, orientation session
- w/c 16th August, session #2
- w/c 23rd August, session #3
- w/c 30th August, session #4
- w/c 6th September, session #5
- w/c 13th September, session #6, review



- Each session will run for 2 hours. We will run the sessions at a regular time with all dates and times set before the start of the first session. On application members will be asked their preferences for days of the week and time of day, and we will try to find a time that suits the majority. We will help group members coordinate informal short group or one-to-one catch ups between the longer sessions. In September we will review the group and agree on next steps based on group feedback and resources available. We would like for it to run for as long as there is a need and it is helpful.
- The overall time commitment is estimated to be 2-3 days over 6 weeks. This includes 6 x 2 hours weekly sessions, short one to one coffee catch ups with another group member in between sessions, and a couple of hours of self-directed learning.
- There is an expectation that learning from the group will be captured and shared with the wider Connection Coalition network. This might take the form of blogs with questions for the wider network, a written resource, or running sharing events with the wider network. There is no set format or method for this, it will be decided between the group members and the Connection Coalition Manager as we progress.
- We will capture feedback throughout the process and carry out a more in depth evaluation and learning activity in September.