

The Power of Community Engagement

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Introduction

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Purpose

- Community engagement has multiple and significant benefits for all people
- Examples from Karen's lived experience show the importance of community engagement and spark ideas that other people can use to engage in their communities.
- Community engagement does not have to be a big production
 - Even small connections to people, groups, or organizations have big impact

Impact of Community Engagement

- Gather resources, develop social networks, offer or ask for assistance, and share information
- Empowerment
- Supports independent and inter-dependent living
- Socialization: someone to talk to, something to do, people to hang out with
- Reduce anxiety and fight against depression

“I Get By With A Little Help From My Friends”

Rides to doctor's appointment for cancer treatments when my car was broken down

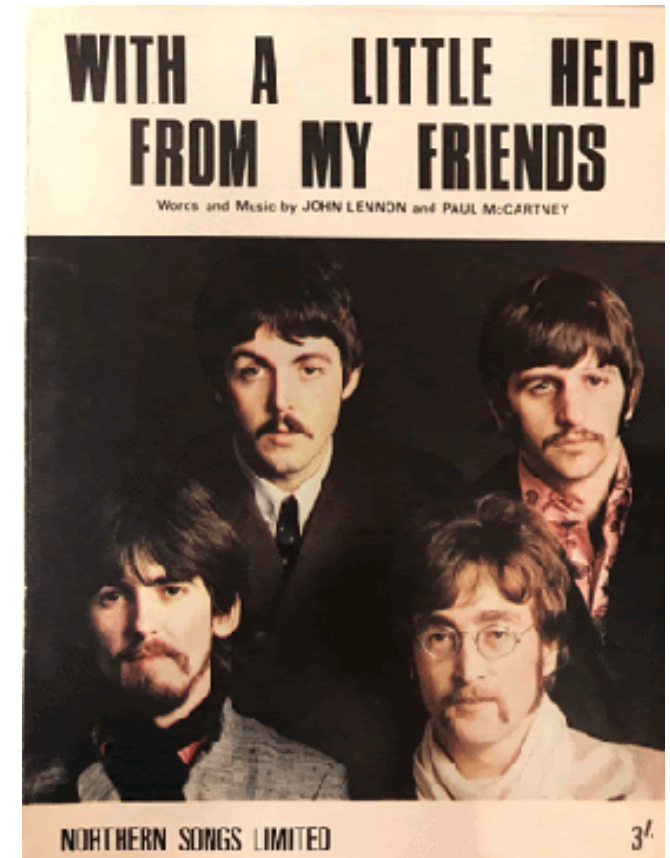
- *Not doing much driving or maintenance on the car when you are drained from cancer treatment*

Help to do chores

- *House cleaning, put together my new office chair*

Who do I call when I need assistance?

- *Come from home from hospital and stitches came out, who do I call at 5:00 AM? I had a friend to come over, helped me get dressed, and took me to the Emergency Room*



Empowerment

I found my voice

- *Easier to talk about my story and background-- I could open up more*

I learned who I was

- *I discovered my strengths and weakness*
- *I felt like had something to contribute*

I learned how to ask for and accept help

- *Communication is crucial—ask for help and plan*
- *Let people know what problems you have and they can help you or recommend a solution*
- *They won't realize you could use some help unless you let them know*
- *Sometimes helping is better than just giving money*

Independent and Interdependent living

After my mom's passing, I had lots of self-doubt

- *I didn't think I could do things*

- *I couldn't do some things because I never had to, didn't learn, or Tim did it*

I realized living independently is easier with the help of my friends and neighbors

Socialization

Friends in my community were there to help “fill the void”, ease anxiety and loneliness when my Mom passed away

- *People to go for answers: questions about funeral services, etc.*
- *I don't need a whole lot of friends, just strong ones*
- *People who understand you and can help solve problems*

My community gave me a reason to get out of the house

Anxiety and Depression

Depression meant going to convenience store and eating junk food

- *I felt miserable and I gained a bunch of weight*
 - *If I cooked, I felt better*

For me, the solution was to get up and move: do something

- *Hard to do when you have no social networks, when you feel alone, or don't have someone to talk to or interact with*

Just knowing that there is someone who will listen, be present, someone to help do things.

- *Hard to motivate when you feel all alone*

Solutions and Encouragement

Church was an important way to make social connections

- *Started attending a local church where I made new friends*
- *Help me keep the yard clean (mowing, bushes, etc.)*
- *Church friends helped me clean my house, big time*
- *Later on, they helped clean my basement*
- *Would not have been done otherwise*

Job at Dollar General let me work on my social skills with customers

- *I made friends with my co-workers, too*

Solutions and Encouragement

Do *SOMETHING!*

- *Start somewhere, even if don't know what to do*
- *Even small connections can have a big impact*
- *One connection leads to another, then another, and so on*
- For just 5 minutes and doesn't need to be a big task
 - I felt productive and gained momentum to do other chores
 - For example picking up boxes and paper leads to “let's do another small area!”

Celebrate small accomplishments, too

- *They lead to bigger victories*

Don't give up

- *Some activities or groups might not work for you, but keep looking*
- *Be a fully engaged participant*

Solutions and Encouragement

***If you want to help others,
sometimes you must help
yourself first***

***Take baby steps and soon you are
walking a mile***

