

Somerset *Community Connect*

Customer Stories

Judith

Judith visited a Community Connect drop-in. She is caring for her husband who has dementia. He used to look after the finances, but he is no longer able to do this and they are getting into financial difficulties. Judith didn't know where to turn. Caroline listened to Judith and arranged to visit her at home with Andrew from a local charity who could help with her finances. Andrew helped Judith apply for benefits like attendance allowance. He also helped her apply for a surviving winter grant to pay for some outstanding fuel bills.

Judith was very grateful for the help and felt much more in control of their finances. Caroline also identified that Judith was quite isolated and suggested that a local contact in the village should visit her and invite her to a local coffee morning.

Irene

Irene came in to a Community Connect drop-in. She is an active lady but struggling to put eye drops in. Emma discovered that Irene lived in a block of retirement flats and suggested that Irene could see if a neighbour could help her, and in return Irene could help them with shopping. Irene thought this was a great idea and she also thought it would be a good way to meet other people in the flats and help each other out.

Alan and Pat

Alan cares for his wife Pat full time and he needs a break. He popped in to a Community Connect drop-in for advice. Alan spoke to Emma. She listened to Alan and identified what is important to him - he used to be a bus driver, used to go to church and that he is worried about leaving Pat on her own.

Emma gave Alan some information on support for carers and local lunch clubs. She also put him in touch with a Community Agent, Claire. Claire was able to use her contacts to reconnect Alan with the local church. The church has now set up a rota of visitors. Alan and Pat have lots more people around them and are much happier.

Nina and Alex

Nina is blind and relies on her daughters for day-to-day support. This is all getting a bit much for Alex, as she suffers from mental health issues, and their relationship has become strained. Nina phoned Somerset County Council for support. Edward, a member of the mental health team, and Jane from the sensory loss team visited mum and daughter at home. They identified aids that could help Nina make hot drinks and meals, so that she can be a bit more independent, which will build her confidence, so she can get about a bit more.

They also suggested some domestic help to give Alex a break, so that she could focus on her own mental health.

June

June is a young mum who is disabled. She phoned Somerset County Council because she was struggling to get her children to school on time. She spoke to Sarah on the phone. Sarah identified that June needs some support and she arranged for a Community Agent called Gale to visit her at home. Gale discussed with June the possibility of other mums at the school helping to collect the children as they walked past June's house. June agreed that this would be a good idea and Gale said she would speak to the local mums. June is now much happier because her children can get to and from school safely, the children enjoy walking with their friends and June is now friends with the mums.

Jean

Jean is a bedridden 80 year old lady who was referred to Community Agent Cindy to support with her bills and post, and to help resolve an issue around her direct payments. Jean was happy for Cindy to support her to look through all the unopened post, to sort into urgent, important, and the remainder which could be discarded.

Together they set up an easy to use file, separated with dividers, into the various items, Rent, Gas and Electric, Council tax and so on. Jean now has one easy to maintain place to keep and find any important correspondence. She was very happy with this system as it had been stressful to her to become more and more out of control with her correspondence.

Once her post was organised it was obvious to see that she had some rent arrears, had not received a council tax discount, her contents insurance on her home had lapsed, and that bill paying would be much simpler through direct debit. Cindy supported Jean with all of the above, resulting in a huge relief of stress for her, and bills being paid automatically to avoid her falling into arrears in future.

Jean is now more in control of her finances and better able to manage her bills and correspondence.

Zachary

Zachary is a 20 year old man, living with his mother. He has Asperger's. He did not have a good experience of school or college. Since leaving college two years ago, Zachary has just been at home. His mother said that he is constantly either playing video games, or is on his computer. He has become isolated, and does not go out unless he has to. His mum worries that he should be starting to work and gain some independent living skills, and having something fulfilling to do in his life.

Community Agent Cindy went to see Zachary. Cindy asked him what he liked and loved and whether there was anything in life he felt he might want to do in terms of hobbies, courses and employment.....he said 'no one has ever asked me that'.

Cindy found out that Zachary loves art, particularly fine art, he loves animals, particularly horses, and he would like to combine the two. He felt he would like to do a course of some sort in fine art.

Cindy told him that she knew of a local stables where he might be able to go for a 'taster' session with a view to ride, perhaps volunteer, and potentially use art around the horses, as therapy. He said he would like to go and find out more. Cindy agreed to take him and his mother on the first visit as a support, and if he enjoyed it, could continue on his own. Cindy also investigated whether there was any funding available to fund the first sessions for him. He was delighted, as was his mother.

Cindy also talked to him about the 'Positive People' project (through the Community Council for Somerset), and mentioned the possibility of courses and employment through the community enabler, and life coaches. Zachary said he would like to meet the enabler, and to find out more, and that perhaps he could do a course in fine art - the thing he really wanted to do but had never been given the opportunity.

Cindy continues to support Zachary, and his mother. She has set up meetings to take these ideas forward. Zachary was in danger of having a large care package, had he continued to get no support. His mother's health was also in danger of deteriorating as well as their relationship. Over time, Cindy hopes to help Zachary fulfil his potential, set him off on a future of his choosing, and to give his mother the tools and support to help him become a more independent and fulfilled person.

Michael

Michael is a 60 year old man with a heart condition. He may require surgery in the future but at the moment his condition is being stabilised by medication and hospital treatment.

Michael started his butchery career at the age of 14 when he got a Sunday job sweeping up in a Taunton butchers shop. He began an apprenticeship at the age of 16 and continued to work in butchers for his entire life, leaving at the age of 58 due to his health.

Following a difficult divorce and the loss of his mother, who he lived with, and who was her carer until her death, he found himself in a difficult position financially.

His Social Worker, Karen, referred him to the Taunton Heritage Trust (THT), who provide sheltered housing, for support but it was looking unlikely that he

would be accepted, due to his age. Most heritage homes are given to the elderly. Karen referred him to Audrey, a Community Agent, for support. Audrey was aware of Michael's current address as accommodation that used to house people who are drug and alcohol dependent, and who choose a lifestyle of crime to fund these dependencies. Michael was finding it increasingly difficult living at the address.

A trustee of the THT remembered Audrey as a Village Agent from her work with the Community Council for Somerset and accepted a reference from her of Michael's good character. This was enough to help support his application and he was successful in gaining a new home.

In the meantime, Audrey supported Michael with a Surviving Winter grant and food bank vouchers as he was living on just £6.63 per week, after his bills had been paid. He was awaiting confirmation of benefits changes following an assessment to confirm he was unfit to work.

Michael moved into his new home three weeks ago. Audrey visited him and noticed a marked improvement in his wellbeing. He feels secure, safe and happy and has already made friends with the other residents and the trustees, whose office is based within the trust homes.

Audrey also applied to The Butchers' and Drovers' Charitable Institution for support for Michael to buy items to furnish his new home. They provided a grant of £536.88 to support this and he will provide a photo and story to support the charity in gaining future donations as a way of thanking them for their generosity.

Michael is astounded at the support he has had from his Social Worker and from the Community Agent, and the organisations he was referred to by them.