

## About Frameworks 4 Change

Frameworks 4 Change designs and delivers bespoke learning and development programmes working with Local Authorities, NHS Trusts and Care Providers to build a more compassionate, safe and resilient Health and Social Care System.

One of the interventions we have designed is described as a Compassion Circle.

## Background to Compassion Circles

There is strong evidence that the Health and Social Care system makes many of the people who work in it stressed to an unhealthy degree leading to physical and mental breakdown. A recent report published by Point of Care Foundation (1) states that 38% of staff had felt unwell as a result of work-related stress in the previous year. Among nurses, the figure is higher at 55%. 69% of staff had attended work in the previous three months despite not feeling well.

Compassion Circles offer a safe, reflective space for dialogue to groups of up to 12 people who are connected through Health and Social Care. Compassion Circles aim to build up personal and organisational resilience and well-being. Compassion Circles can run as closed or open groups generally meeting once monthly.

### Benefits to participants...

- Time to re-connect with core values of nursing and patient centred compassionate care
- Time to consider self-compassion and to make plans for maintaining boundaries and personal well being
- A safe space to leave hierarchy to one side and to meet as equals
- Time to reflect on culture in the workplace and to contribute to building a compassion focused culture

Comments from nurses who have participated:

- *'I felt comfortable being in a group of people that believe compassion should run through the veins of everything we do, it was a calm and comforting set up.'*
- *'I liked the group of staff who took part in the circle and appreciated the openness and honesty of each individual. I personally found it reassuring to know that other people felt the same way and shared some of the same experiences that I had.'*
- *'Generally speaking I think we need all to be kinder and understanding to each other in the work place. With the exception of a couple of colleagues I would not normally have had the privilege to spend time with individuals in the group and I was amazed at how comfortable and relaxed I felt with those present in a very short space of time.'*

## How do compassion Circles Work?

A host and facilitator work together to create a space for reflection. The host issues the invites to join the circle. A trained facilitator runs the circle.

The circle consists of space for personal reflection, thoughts on core values, pairs thinking, taking turns to think around the circle and appreciations.

## How long do compassion circles take?

A minimum of one hour.

## Who can attend compassion circles?

Compassion circles can help to break down hierarchies and, at times, unhelpful boundaries between people. Compassion circles can be attended by anyone with an interest in being compassionate towards themselves and in building and sustaining compassionate cultures in Health and Social Care. What is it that makes compassion circles a success?

The thinking behind compassion circles is influenced by the work of Nancy Kline ('Time to Think') Paul Gilbert ('The Compassionate Mind') and Jon Kabat-Zinn (Full Catastrophe Living). The methods have been tested and refined and see consistently positive responses and impacts as they create a safe space for dialogue about values, care for self and compassion for others. Borrowing from Paul Gilbert's thinking and research the Compassion Circle is a place of nurture and safety which enables participants to be in a soothing state which makes space for them to consider what conditions help them to be in a state of compassion.

## Who hosts compassion circles?

Whoever steps forward – patients, leaders, carers, nurses, care workers, other health care professionals, positional leaders, senior managers.

## Who facilitates compassion circles?

The team at Frameworks 4 Change are trained to facilitate compassion circles.

Training for groups of 12 in hosting and facilitating compassion circles is available through Frameworks 4 Change.

## What is the best approach to introducing compassion circles into an organisation?

In our experience it works best to create an initial experience by inviting a group to take part in a compassion circle and to have space to consider how compassion circles could be of benefit to patients and staff.

The cost for a Frameworks 4 Change facilitator to facilitate this initial circle and reflection (recommend three hours in total) is:-

£450 plus VAT and expenses

## Compassion in Teams and Ourselves

Maxine Craig who is Head of Organisation Development at South Tees NHS Trust and visiting Professor (Sunderland University) attended the first compassion circle in May 2013 and has been proactive in working with Frameworks 4 Change to develop her own learning re the value of compassion circles.

From [www.knowing You Matter.com](http://www.knowing You Matter.com) blog:-

*I have been reflecting on my learning about helping teams to be kind to their members and to focus on caring for themselves. In my work as an Organisation Development practitioner I use a range of techniques and methods when working with teams in tricky situations and I have learned the following:*

- *Everyone's story is really important in creating the connection between people in a team*
- *When team members are kind to each other it acts like GLUE.*

*In my work using the Compassion Circle methodology I have learned that people shy away from thinking and talking about self-care. Caring for oneself is not a subject we, as human beings, find easy. People merrily chat away about how we can create a more compassionate environment for others but getting folks to start on:-*

*"What could you do more of to care for yourself more deeply?"*

*This question needs time, patience and persistence if you want an answer.*

*This question initially made me feel uneasy too. I have spent time reflecting on this as I see it time and time again, it's not associated with gender, class or age (well not in my experience). I think this is a really important issue for us to consider as it sits at the heart of creating compassion in our workplaces. If we are not caring for ourselves how can we possibly expect to care for others and treat our team members kindly?*

*The good news emerging from my practice is that with commitment to this question (and by that I mean asking it regularly and reflecting on it well) the question seems to create its own space. In a compassion circle this question can create a space in which we can think about our own self-care and share our thoughts with others. With regularity seems to come the acceptance that focusing upon one's self is both important and necessary if we are to create compassionate teams and organisations. I am beginning to understand some of what people experience when they begin their reflection into self-care.*

*I come from a generation of healthcare professionals who were trained to 'leave their emotions at the ward door'. Professionally socialised to believe that we 'the nurses' were unimportant, that our patient's needs were paramount and they were best served with kindness and compassion and technical expertise, which should always be on show, irrelevant of how you were actually feeling. We were taught that we should work hard, serve the patients, and that the work would be highly emotional but that we should be able to control that emotion and continue to care for others, putting our own needs to one side. Being authentic was not part of my initial training. The reward for this approach was that the honour of caring for others would sustain us. Now some of this is true and some of it we now understand better.*

# Introducing Compassion Circles to Health and Social Care Organisations

## Getting Started

### Frameworks 4 Change

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*My work in the NHS will always be my calling, it is a true vocation for me, I came to make things better and the rewards of improving things, relieving suffering, fostering independence are indeed rewards without measure. However 'leaving your emotions at the ward door' was possibly understandable as an instruction BEFORE we knew about such things as 'emotional labour', 'burn out' and the importance of authenticity. What we NOW know changes things, the research into all these areas tells us that ...*

*to give our best we must be at our best  
and that means caring for ourselves, in order that we can care for others.*

*So if you do nothing else this week in your team, begin gently to ask the question  
'What could you do more of to care for yourself more deeply?'  
Expect your colleagues to be quiet, a little uncomfortable, but please stick with it because in my experience its vital to the creation of great teams.*

## Research

Whilst Compassion Circles have been consistently well received and welcomed by those who have participated it is early days in their implementation. Frameworks 4 Change is now actively seeking partners to research the benefits of compassion circles to staff well-being, team working and patient experience.

## References and Links

1 Point of Care Foundation – How to engage staff in the NHS and Why It Matters

<http://www.pointofcarefoundation.org.uk/Downloads/Staff-Report-2014.pdf>

<http://discursiveoftunbridgewells.blogspot.co.uk/2014/02/guest-post-what-will-help-prevent.html>

<http://www.onyett.org/2014/03/02/can-compassion-counter-evil-the-potential-of-hosting-spaces-to-listen-and-speak-from-the-heart/>