

Video transcript: Debbie John describes how Community Catalysts work with councils to develop and support local micro-enterprises delivering care services

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In many communities, people struggle to find the care and support they need.

If people are operating locally as a self-employed carers [or] sole traders, they can respond to that need.

Community Catalysts work across the UK with local authorities to support local people to set up small enterprises. That could be one person operating as a sole trader delivering home care to people in their local area, or it could be a partnership or a small community interest company for example who want to provide day opportunities and activities for people with learning disabilities. Some people want to specialise in working with people with dementia, or end of life care.

We have people who might have come from a nursing background. Then we also have home care providers who, let's say, do lighter touch [work]. They come in and do some befriending, some shopping, it might be some transport, it might be some cleaning, for example. There is quite a breadth of provision that falls within our community enterprise remit.

In terms of who's coming forward to set up and deliver community enterprises, we have people who come from a health and social care background, they might have been nurses, social workers. But we also have people where it's quite new to them, or people who've diversified.

They might have had a cleaning business and then decided there is much more of a need for home care, or there might be somebody who has cared for a family member, or been a volunteer. If you think about the response to Covid, some people go: 'actually maybe I could do this as a job, as an enterprise.'

There are people who worked for agencies where it hasn't quite suited them. It may be the hours, or the travel, and again, if it's really localised it might be someone who doesn't drive and they think 'actually if I did this really super-locally, I could walk between my appointments.'

Community Catalysts operate all across the UK and we've got a number of contracts in the East of England. In Central Bedfordshire we've got over 70 enterprises operating, there's a strong focus on homecare for older people. In Hertfordshire it's home care and supporting people with learning disabilities. Cambridgeshire's a more recent contract with lots of community co-production going on there.

When we first start working with a council, a thing we do very early on is a diagnostic. If there are any micro-enterprises operating currently, and where those are, it'll be about

identifying what the biggest needs are and where are the gaps in the care and support market.

We would also talk to lots of different people from the local authority to find out what their view is of the current market and what they think the need is. We'd be looking at what partner organisations operate there, it might be CVS organisations that we could partner with. And obviously recruiting a catalyst: we want to find someone local, who knows their area, who's got that passion for their local area.

Once they are in post it's a case of getting them ready to go and starting to recruit the enterprises, and obviously we'd look at where we need to do that, where we need to advertise, working with the council comms team to make sure we've got their comms support and that that's aligned with ours to make sure people are seeing the adverts and we are getting the enquiries through.

So if somebody did want to come to us to set up, there's lots of different aspects to take them through. Initially just making sure they're HMRC registered, that everything is above board. We work with people to ensure they have all the right insurances in place and that they are aware of that local authority's safeguarding procedures, and that they've got their own safeguarding policy in place, and that they are looking at the CQC regulations.

Some people who we work with might be exempt from those but we would still make sure that they were clear about what that exemption was and whether they need to be regulated. We do a lot of hand holding really through that process, and making sure they've got a contract in place with the person they are providing support for and that the person who's receiving this support is really clear about everything the provider has in place so both are really confident that everything is all operating safely and as it should be.

Obviously we make sure that the social work teams that we work with who will refer to providers in our network, that they are really clear about our 'Doing it Right' standards as well and confident. If there are certain specifications that a local authority has, for example specific training that they would like people to undertake we can then ensure that happens as well.

The processes can take a different time for different people and it might be that some people could do that as quickly as within say a month, if they are really keen to get started. For some people it does take longer, it might be that they have the initial chat with the catalyst or they expressed their interest and that could be a much slower process. It is something that we have the resource with the catalysts to support people to do relatively quickly.

They might come to the catalysts already with a very fully formed idea or they might come with just a thought, you know, 'I wonder if I could go self-employed?' Because we have that catalyst dedicated resource if someone is serious about that idea, we can support them all the way through from the thought or idea, to setting up, and to sustaining their enterprise on an ongoing basis.

In terms of finding opportunities, we would encourage the enterprises to think about where they market themselves. Is it that they produce business cards, make sure they have actually got a Facebook page, or putting ads up in their local area, in the village halls, the Citizens Advice Bureau, for example.

A big thing we do is link some of the enterprises to the local authorities, so we think about how could we make sure that they can access some of the people for example who have a direct payment. So we work closely with the local authorities, with their direct payment teams, to make sure that they are aware as well, of our enterprises that are operating, and getting the message across to people that they can use their direct payment to get care and support from a local enterprise.

So we're commissioned by local authorities to do what we do, and its key that we continue to work with them. So as a project manager I work closely with our commissioners and that's to make sure that we are really enabling community micro-enterprises to flourish and succeed in an area.

We make sure they are on council directories, for example, that we get support from their comms, social media, could be their websites, to really make people aware that this is an option in their area and then it's for people themselves who are thinking of setting up an enterprise that it's free to them, support from catalysts is free.

A prime motivation obviously is to offer more choices in the market, so more provision, more care and support options, so obviously it is really important that there is capacity and more hours of care and support, but also if you think about the Care Act and people having choices and control.

And also, the opportunity for employment in the area. Obviously we have to report to local authorities on our targets and work with them to ensure that we're doing as much as we can with the local authority as well to enable that.

People often ask us if they can make sustainable living through doing this and of course they can. We know from the number of our enterprises that sustain and keep going, even grow, some of them grow and take on staff, that it absolutely is a good option for self employment and good earning potential.

We get really good feedback in terms of satisfaction. A lot of people, the majority are operating in their very local communities so there's the rewards of seeing the impact on older people or people with care and support needs in their community. People do show us feedback from their clients, letters, thank you letters and people are really grateful for the care and support they receive. It is widely reported to us and the catalysts that people get a lot of satisfaction from it.

And also, we encourage the providers within our network to network with each other, so we enable that through WhatsApp groups, through meet-ups, for example. That's a really really positive thing because we know it can quite isolating being self employed and operating out

there on your own, so that's why we try and bring people together to share ideas and best practice, for example, just have someone else to talk to.