

Stewardship Circle Introduction

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What is the Stewardship Circle?

The Stewardship Circle is an invitation to reflect on the role of leadership in enabling a culture where communities can connect the strengths of local people to build neighbourhoods from the inside out.

We believe that sustainable communities thrive when people who live together come together to share their skills and passions, and everyone has the opportunity to make a contribution to the place where they live. To achieve this vision, as leaders, we recognise that we need to reflect and challenge ourselves on what leadership means. We need to consider alternative ways of leading that aren't about directing change from the top, but rather creating the conditions that enable people in communities to take action on the things that are important to them.



The Stewardship Circle seeks to support this vision by inviting a group of peers - all active in community, health, policing and housing and who share an interest in nurturing citizen-led action in the neighbourhoods they serve – to spend time together reflecting on the leadership challenge.

Stewardship Circle sessions are safe and creative spaces to explore specific topics as a group, allowing individuals to share their understanding, experience and challenges with each other. The sessions build over time as a programme that links members into a network of peers and supports them to navigate the complexity of leading in a changing context.

Facilitated by Richard Holmes, Rob Fountain and Sally Byng, together with key practitioners who bring relevant perspectives, sessions will pose questions for the group to explore and share insights from their own experience.

Programme Structure

Stewardship Circle members are invited to commit to participate in 6 facilitated discussion days spread over a year, starting on Thursday 23rd April. Each of these gatherings is themed around a particular topic, and members are invited to read key articles, watch relevant videos or listen to podcasts in advance of the session so that they can shape the discussion on the day. Whilst these topics offer a structure to the conversations, the sessions are flexible, enabling members to take responsibility for sharing the issues that are important to them.



These are not taught training days - the sessions create a space to explore stewardship behaviours and practice and consider what rituals and routines the group wants to develop, to model how a strengths-based culture can evolve.

Stewardship Circle: Facilitated Discussion Days

Session 1 – Shifting Paradigms – Moving from what’s wrong to what’s strong

In this initial workshop we will be exploring the idea of working from strengths, rather than a deficit approach which remains dominant in our culture. We’ll consider what might be the implications of shifting perspectives from problems to possibilities. We’ll also introduce the concept of stewardship and its relevance to citizen-led movements including Asset Based Community Development. The group will be invited to reflect on some core principles and consider what they might mean to ourselves and our organisations.

Facilitators: Richard Holmes and Rob Fountain

Date: Thursday 23rd April 10am – 4pm

Session 2 – Discovering Core Gifts

Taking a strength-based perspective requires us to understand more about gifts and how to connect and utilise individual gifts for the benefit of our communities and organisations. One thing we know for certain: understanding and using our gifts is both an old and a new idea. Cultures and faith traditions, many centuries old, used specific methods to identify and use gifts in their members. Now, modern neuroscience and positive psychology have backed up older wisdom traditions by proving that individuals thrive when they are able to find meaning in their lives by knowing and giving their gifts.

Facilitators: Richard Holmes and Rob Fountain.

Date: Tuesday 2nd June 10am - 4pm





Session 3 – Creating interdependence

This workshop will be a safe space to explore the differences between independence and interdependence and what this means for agencies and service providers. Whilst communities have the capacity and skills to take action on the things they care about, people will still require access to quality services. This workshop invites us to deepen our understanding of the role agencies, and individuals within them, play in addressing social justice, and how together we can nurture innovation to ensure those we serve have the opportunity to lead a life of their choosing.

Facilitators: Richard Holmes, Rob Fountain and Katie Peacock

Date: Wednesday 8th July 10am – 4pm

Session 4 – Building Hopeful Cultures

In committing to long term social change, and as leaders and stewards of that change, we need to be hopeful about what we are doing now to reap rewards in the years ahead, especially if the change we want to see is likely to go beyond our tenure in an organisation or even our lifetime. In this session we'll take a deeper look at how to build hope and consider how people in communities and organisations can come together to create cultures that build deeper relationships and shared purpose.

Facilitators: Bruce Anderson, Richard Holmes and Rob Fountain

Date: Wednesday 2nd September 10am – 4pm

Session 5 – Creating systemic change in a complex world

In this session we will be exploring systems change and consider how we can all work together to create transformation, to use resources in interesting ways and look for synergies and spot and take advantage of assets or opportunities. We will be invited to reflect on Gloucestershire as an ecosystem that organically changes and grows with the connections that are made within it and how we can maximise those connections for the purposes of social change.

Facilitators: Jean Boulton, Richard Holmes and Rob Fountain

Date: Tuesday 20th October 10am – 4pm

Session 6 – Seeds for transformation

In this workshop we will consider what we understand about transformation, and what that means to our organisations, the wider system and ourselves. We'll take a deeper look at what the implications might be for those seeking to steward social change across the system and consider what leadership qualities we are seeking to nurture in ourselves and others. We'll also learn from others about different forms of organisational structures that facilitate social change in new and innovative ways, inviting reflection on the opportunities and tensions that can emerge as leaders find ways of letting go of their power in order to unleash the potential of social change from within communities and individuals.

Facilitators: Will Mansell, Pippa Jones, Richard Holmes and Rob Fountain

Date: Thursday 12th November 10am – 4pm

Level of commitment

In addition to the 6 discussion days offered by the Stewardship Circle, members are invited to keep a reflective learning journal through the programme. Members should allow approximately 2 days over the year for background reading and reflection, although some may wish to spend longer on this.



Members are also invited to form their own Learning Circle or practice group with peers from their community or field of interest. From our experience we have learned that these groups can be effective when they meet up to 3 times over the year, although they may choose to meet more frequently.

The total commitment is expected to be approximately 10 days over the year.

Assessment Process

There is no formal assessment process, although members are expected to evaluate and learn from each other through offering reflective questions.

It is anticipated that by the end of the Stewardship Circle, its members would have:

- Attended 6 facilitated sessions
- Kept a reflective learning journal
- Facilitated a local Learning Circle or practice group

Resources and support available

A number of resources will be available to support Stewardship Circle members with the completion of the programme. These include:

- 1) A Workshop Guide for each of the 6 workshops with the following information:
 - Workshop overview
 - Core papers, videos and podcasts
 - Reflective questions
 - Additional resources and further reading
- 2) A Reflective Learning Journal – to support members with the process of reflecting on and recording their observations and learning
- 3) ABCD Glossary which explains some of the terms used in community-led action and systems change.



Support during the Stewardship Circle

The group will be encouraged to think about how members can support each other through concerns or challenging situations. The group should always be the first resource members turn to.

Profile and qualities of a Stewardship Circle member



Stewardship Circle members are leaders who believe in social justice and ensuring every voice is included. They value relationships over prestige, power and position. They understand how to move beyond a single issue and recognise the importance of mobilising people to develop a whole community vision that includes the interests of everyone.

Members of the Stewardship Circle do not need to have any formal leadership experience, but they will have the ability to inspire whole scale community-led action. They may be a leader in civil society or hold a senior role in a social sector organisation. Others might have formal leadership experience as a commissioner or manager in a local council or as a political, faith or business leader in the community.

Responsibilities and expectations of participants

Throughout the programme Stewardship Circle members are invited to think about their collective values and behaviours that can contribute to shaping a unique strengths-based culture, which in turn they can take back to the communities they serve. Throughout the programme members are encouraged to think about the gifts that they want to share with others in their own communities and members of the Stewardship Circle.

Contributors



Richard Holmes is an experienced thought-leader, strategist and practitioner in Asset Based Community Development. Over the last 5 years he has developed and facilitated the Stewardship Circle as a means of supporting leaders to work together to build a social movement. Richard is an educationalist with extensive experience of working with both young people and adults, bringing thoughtfulness, humour and gentle challenge to encourage transformational change.



Rob Fountain brings extensive leadership experience drawn from social work and social care; public sector consultancy, business development in charity and third sector organisations; higher education; social care service-user consultations and evaluations; advocacy. Rob is a highly effective communicator, using creativity to spark new ideas and stimulate deep insights. He is currently Chief Executive at Age UK Gloucestershire.



Sally Byng is CEO at Barnwood Trust, leading its vision to create the best possible environment in Gloucestershire for disabled people and people with mental health challenges to make the most of their lives. Barnwood acts as a catalyst in the county to help build a movement for lasting social change. Sally has been involved in the Stewardship Circle at various stages since its inception in 2016 and brings her stamina, persistence and appetite for the challenging.



Bruce Anderson is an internationally recognized speaker, community activist, and leadership coach. Co-founding Community Activators in 1990, he collaborated with other groups and developed extensive training and action-based materials about how to identify and use gifts. Bruce is known for bringing intriguing ideas from other cultures and times, personal stories, and practical ideas into the workshops and sessions he leads.

Contributors continued



Jean Boulton researches, writes and teaches about complexity. She investigates how to deal with a complex, interconnected, often fast-changing and uncertain world. Through her consultancy role, Jean works internationally offering organisations support in strategy, coaching, organisational development, community, and international development. In 2015 she co-authored 'Embracing Complexity' for Oxford University Press.



Katie Peacock is an experienced trainer with Barnwood Trust and a social activist. Katie's interests include encouraging interdependence in communities, enabling people to lead connected lives, where everyone is valued for their contribution. She is also interested in nurturing more conversations around the power of vulnerability, and how that might be a virtue that can strengthen relationships in society.



Will Mansell is Chief Executive of The Grace Network, a social enterprise incubator. Will believes that unlocking human potential through coaching and gift development is the missing link in generating change through social businesses. Linking together social capital, skill sharing and financial capital, The Grace Network has launched 7 businesses in the past 5 years. These are led by those with lived experience of poverty. Prior to The Grace Network, Will founded a number of anti-poverty charities, worked for a UK Member of Parliament and briefly within social finance.



Pippa Jones leads Create Gloucestershire, a membership organisation that seeks to make art accessible to everyone, every day in Gloucestershire. Pippa asks, 'What would our communities be like if art and culture were centre stage?' This is the question that Pippa and Create Gloucestershire are on a mission to understand. Pippa is also a Trustee at Barnwood Trust.