

## Person Centred Thinking Tool 6

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### Wishing

What do you wish for? Is this any different to what older people wish for? A project in South Oxfordshire asked a number of older people about their wishes and dreams as part of the Circles work described in the Introduction. The Oxford circles and wishes project, run by the Older People's Programme with Age Concern Oxfordshire, asked people in group settings (day care centres, lunch clubs and social clubs) what they wished for and what they thought it would take to make it happen. We did this because we wanted to find different ways in which interested organisations and individuals could adapt the Circles of Support approach to suit their own situations. Many people had told us that they didn't want or need to explore other aspects of person centred planning, but they were keen to share and explore their own personal goals and dreams - their wishes.

### A session on wishes

Facilitators from the Older Peoples Programme ran a session with each of the groups on wishes, and then kept in touch with the club organisers afterwards to give them some support and ideas to carry this forward. There were between 15 to 20 people at each of these sessions. Many of those attending these clubs had disabilities and illnesses (including severe arthritis, Parkinson's Disease, depression, a dementia or sensory impairment) which both they and others involved in their support, had assumed had stopped them from dreaming or pursuing their wishes. Others felt it was 'just their age'.

Our conversations about wishes revealed a different picture.

### The wishes we were told

Overall, we asked around 80 older people about their wishes, from five different 'clubs' and groups. Only a few people had no wish that they wanted to share with us. Of these, two could not think of anything because:

*"My time is full doing different things - I'm fully occupied"*

*"My days are full with committee meetings, line dancing, bowls and Friday Club - weekends my family visit."*

But most people had two or three wishes they could think of straight away. Some people needed a bit more of a chat before thinking of something - whether with us, or with another club member, or the club organiser or volunteers.

The wishes we were told are grouped under 11 general headings. This list of wishes includes those shared by the OPP team as well as any shared by the clubs' staff and volunteers. We've included these wishes because, whilst we know

which is which, we think that only some of these stand out as being obviously the wishes of younger or older people.

Interestingly, although some wishes might well cost some money to achieve, only two people talked specifically about goods they wished they owned, or could buy:

*"I'd like a pair of amber earrings"*

*"Find Cadbury's Old Jamaican chocolate bar, as I can't buy this in the shops any more".*

### Our reactions

Our reactions to what we are told are critical. We wondered whether many of us are in fact too quick to write off an older person's wish, because either:

- We are worried about the risks involved (sometimes without understanding what's involved at all!) or
- It's not what we'd do, or
- We'd love it to happen as well - but life isn't fair so why expect to have this, or
- We dismiss it because we've heard it all before, or
- We don't think that's what that older person should be doing.

## 1. Trips, visits and holidays

- Visit a local factory to see how something (anything) is made
- A day out or trip to: (these included) Lourdes, York, London, Bath, Weymouth,
- Have a family day together
- Go on an occasional boat trip
- Go to the theatre in London on a Saturday night with someone
- Have a helicopter trip
- Go on a hot air balloon ride
- Revisit Arizona
- Go down a particular local walk, through a nature reserve
- Visit the chocolate factory at Cadbury World
- Visit a local garden centre
- Go to Cyprus
- Go on a world cruise
- Visit the Eden project
- It would be lovely to visit the Holy Land again
- I would like to take the train from America to Canada and go through the Rockies
- Go in a glider
- Watch stock car racing
- To be taken to one of the best and biggest hotels and watch all the top chefs at work
- To go out in my electric scooter more, to get the courage to cross the roads. At the moment it gets used about once a year
- Go to a horse racing event or a gymkhana



## 2. Do it again

- Ride on the back of a big motorbike
- Try cycling again, and have a cycling holiday
- Work on a pantomime
- Go to art classes

## 3. New skills

- Master a PC and also text messaging
- I would love to be able to mend punctures and generally maintain my bikes (that's the downside of always having brothers, boyfriends and finally a long suffering husband doing it for 50 years - how I wish I had taken notice)
- Look into my family tree and find out about all my family

## 4. Creative arts

- Make a kite, then fly it
- Take some photographs of the wooden flowers I collect
- Read more poetry, and write some too
- Read Charlotte Bronte again, and share this with someone
- I wish I had time to learn to paint well (paint pictures, not the walls)
- To visit the Globe Theatre and see a play there
- Attend a concert for older people where the players do not assume that we want to listen to music from the First World War
- Do more bead weaving
- To write a book - it's all in my head
- I would like to go to a Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra concert
- I should put my life story into print, having led a most interesting one - as a police

woman during the war and then travelling all over the world with my service man husband, it is difficult to start, especially as I now have Parkinson's disease and find it difficult to write

### 5. Things to do at the club:

- Hear a guest speaker

### 6. Living arrangements

- Live with Sally (daughter)
- I should make up my mind to join my two daughters and their families in the USA. Should I leave my friends and my British way of life to be with my American families? I wish I knew!
- Bungalow in the Lake District - country retreat
- Have a kitten again

### 7. Church

- Go back to C of E church
- Go to church

### 8. Luxury

- Have a massage on my neck and shoulders
- Please myself, be a lady of leisure and indulge myself
- Personal get fit trainer, chef and chauffeur

### 9. Fitness and health

- Learn to jive and Tango
- Walk the mountains in Wales again
- To have good health again
- Be able to walk about without fearing I'll fall
- Go to classes and get really good at Foxtrot, Rumba, Cha Cha Cha, Rumba
- To find out if the disabled

swimming club is still operating

- I would really love to be able to learn to swim, without being scared of the water
- It would be lovely to have a ramble on the Cumbrian Fells
- For someone to walk round Farlington Marsh with me on a [bright, sunny] day like today
- Learn to swim

### 10. People

- Meet up with a group of people I knew 20 years ago
- To have good neighbours and friends
- To see more of my friends
- Talk to Patrick Moore - he's so interesting, I miss going out to the local Observatory to see the sky at night

### 11. Life dreams

- Buy my own place
- Have enough money to give some to charity
- Have a lot of money to treat my family as they have been very good to me
- To be more positive instead of not being able to make a decision
- My dream would be to run a baby wear shop
- Go to South Africa to work with the children who are orphaned and who have Aids and are homeless
- Win the lottery and take it abroad to work with deprived people.



It's exceptionally easy for us all to believe that we all behave impeccably all the time, and never get any of this wrong. If only it were that simple. Most of us probably get this wrong at least some of the time - including those of us who know (or ought to know) better.

### Here are some examples

In April 2005, we held a 'sounding board' seminar to which we invited a small number of key people nationally, who are interested in improving services for older people and in person centred approaches. When we mentioned that lots of people had the wish to go in a hot air balloon, one person said; "Not that old chestnut again."

At the same seminar, although we'd talked about a wide range of wishes (including the people who were looking into Voluntary Services Overseas, as they wanted to do voluntary work abroad), another person lamented over how limited older people's ambitions and goals are. At one of our Advisory Group meetings, we also heard this same view.

There is no doubt that we did not hear every single wish held by all the older people we met. But the ones we heard were genuinely held. If these are 'old

chestnuts', or they fall short of the sorts of dreams and ambitions we believe we have for ourselves, we shouldn't let our disappointments cloud our responses to their dreams. In other words, it might well be an old chestnut - but it's their old chestnut, and that's what matters.

### Setting up false expectations

One issue that we heard a lot from people across the sites was in essence an objection to asking the question at all. It can be paraphrased as:

*"You shouldn't ask because if you know you can't deliver, you've given someone false hope by setting up their expectations"*

This seemed to be based on an assumption that we think we must fulfil everything if we are asking about it. So, if we ask, that's because we're going to deliver the wish. But when we won't be delivering the wish, therefore, we shouldn't ask the question.

This belief seems to us to be fundamentally tied up with the last 12 years of social care practice, since the community care reforms of 1993. We are used now to the idea that there

are limited funds and therefore limited opportunities. We are well versed in applying eligibility criteria, and in telling people they don't qualify for support.

What is it about us that we come to assume that we have to fulfil everything for an older person - and so leads us to avoid asking about any aspect of life where we think we can't do this? If your friend says they want to go on a world cruise next year it's highly unlikely you'll rush out to raise the money to pay for it, organise their health jabs, pack their swimsuit, present them with the tickets and physically escort them on board.

But there's every chance you'll show a great interest in their plans, ask them how arrangements are going, keep an eye out for articles and bits of information that might be of help or interest to them, ask them to send you a postcard, and then look at their photographs and home video/ DVD on their return.

This approach is about doing a little bit of both - a bit of practical help, and a bit of encouragement and interest. How much of each will vary from person to person, and from situation to situation. But this is not the equivalent of your paying for and sorting out every aspect of your friend's cruise.

There is another important aspect to this. As you're not expected to deliver the whole wish, try not to take over. This approach isn't about helping you feel better because you 'did' something (i.e. you sorted it all out), it's about supporting someone else to play as big a part as they can in achieving their wish, in part because:

- That's what treating an adult like an adult means.
- If the person can be encouraged by their own efforts, they may begin to tackle more for themselves.

Wherever possible, you should avoid creating the dependency on you to sort everything out. This means saying 'well done', just as you would to anyone you know who's doing something that might be difficult for them.

This is also why this is an approach and not a service.

### Achieving the wishes

Some people, when asked, already had the contacts they needed to make their wish come true - but they weren't doing anything about it. What seemed to help them was talking to someone who was taking an interest and encouraging them.

In each case, the only question we had asked to start this part of the conversation going was:

- What would you need to do to make this happen?

### **Molly James - a visit to the Philippines**

A good example was a woman whose wish was to go to the Philippines with her family. She had enough savings for a flight; her Philippine daughter-in-law went every year to stay with her own family and took her children. They were always inviting me to go over as well, so there would be no accommodation costs. She said:

*"I've been saying for ages I'll do it, but that's definite. I'm going to ring my daughter-in-law tonight and tell her 'Book the tickets straight away and count me in!'"*

### **Vera Barnham - a horse event**

A woman who used to go to horse racing with her husband, said she would like to go again. Her son has a share in a race horse so she would ask her family if they would take her to see it race, or take her to see her granddaughter at a gymkhana.

### **Janet Barnes - a hot air balloon ride**

One of the (several) people who wanted to go on a hot air balloon ride had already been on one before, organised by her son. She decided to ask him if she could go again, as:

*"They're always asking me what I'd like for my birthday and Christmas, and I can never think of anything to ask for. If it's a lot of money maybe they could all chip in, or it could be my present for both. I don't need any more talc, that's for sure!"*

She said it wouldn't have occurred to her to ask for something like that if we hadn't been asking the question about wishes that day.

### **Tom Mills - going on a cruise**

One person who wanted to take a cruise to about 3 different countries, wrote:

*"I am selling my house this year so feel this may well come true"*

Of course, not everyone has money, or family, to help achieve his or her wishes. Nor does everyone feel well enough to do precisely what he or she might like:

### **Tony Roberts - in touch with nature again**

A retired gamekeeper and a keen walker in the past, a man now aged 90, said he would like to follow a particular local walk through a nature reserve. The club's deputy manager already knew the current gamekeeper of the estate through which most of the walk passes. She asked the gamekeeper about the possibility of using his Land Rover to take this man along the route. He said he would be delighted to help. She gave the gamekeeper's telephone number to the man, who is happy to make the call as this means he can arrange it to suit him. Separately, she heard that his daughter also knows he is to phone; so two of the people in this man's circle (or network) have been taking an interest and encouraging him to make the call, and are awaiting news that he has completed the "walk".

### **Ron Armstrong - discovering the Masai Mara**

A man with a mild form of dementia said his wish was to go to see the Masai Mara - but he didn't think he was well enough to travel that far. Later that day, he came up with his own solution: he would like a day out at Longleat Safari Park, because his wish is to see African animals in the open.

### **When wishes aren't achieved**

Some people may not be willing or able to achieve their wishes. One woman we met said she would love to have a massage and learn to swim, but she "didn't have the guts". She found ordinary life hard enough without adding something extra that she felt sure would make her more anxious. But she liked the idea of the wishes.

Another woman said she would love to get all her family together but, as this would mean 17 people, she didn't feel she would cope. She was adamant that no one was to mention this to her family, as she knew they would then sort it out but that although she loved the idea, she would hate the reality. She said she wanted it to stay as her daydream

A third woman told an interesting variation: the minute she mentions to her daughter that she'd like to do something, it's organised for her - a trip to Dublin and an afternoon tea at a posh hotel were two recent examples. As a result, she is careful not to mention (even in passing) that there's something she'd like to do: she loves these events, but thinks her daughter does too much for her and doesn't want to add to this if she can avoid it.

We shouldn't let the fact that something might not work out stop us trying things. Life really is like that sometimes. If it helps you, think of examples in your own life where something didn't work out - what did you do? Did you really stop trying anything ever again? Be clear whether you were the stumbling block and, if you were, either find someone else who will be able to support the person better than you did or change your approach and ask the person if you might try again. If it doesn't work but there's nothing that could have been done to make it possible, try not to write off the whole approach.

### Older people's top tips

At two of the clubs, we asked those present for their 'top tips'

to other older people on how to achieve their wishes. This is what they said you need:

- Enough money.
- Enough confidence.
- To tell someone who might be able to help.
- Ask someone else - would they like to do it too? Work on it together - or do they know someone else?
- To find out different or new ways of doing something or other ways of going about things.

On the money front, these were some additional tips:

- Ask your family (or whoever else buys you presents) if something could be for Christmas or birthday or both.
- Think of an alternative that would cost less.
- Team up with others so you can share and spread the costs.
- Save up, and look for discounts.

Check your own assumptions: does your age really get in the way of you doing something? Make sure you find out before reaching your decision.

Many people had told us that they didn't want or need to explore other aspects of person centred planning, but they were keen to share and explore their own personal goals and dreams - their wishes.

### Summary of how wishes and wishing can be used

Asking someone about their wishes, and/or listening carefully to what is said in general conversation (which might reveal these wishes) can:

- Help to personalize the support that someone receives in small but vitally important ways for that person. Often what people share are not big things, but important ways of doing things, past interests and friendships that they want to renew, or skills they want to develop. If costs are involved, they may well be personal expenses, and this can help to identify the priorities that person wants to focus on in order to have a good quality of life (e.g. paying for a taxi to go and visit a friend, or arrange a lift with someone else).
- Help to enrich someone's life and increase their control over what happens on a daily or weekly basis – moving their experience from one of surviving to thriving in

a relatively short space of time. This can be especially important if someone is living in a communal setting such as a care home or other supported accommodation, where everything is organised for you and you therefore have little control over day to day decisions.

- Identify shared interests between two or more people – and therefore forge new friendships and networks. This can be particularly important if someone's network has diminished over time, or suddenly.
- Be part of a strategy for coping or living with depression or increasing low mood, through finding the things that brighten someone's day, or motivates them to get out and about and do the things they used to do, or always wanted to do.
- Help with decision making and building confidence in problem solving: for example in making wishes happen and working with others, or on your own, to make this work.

In all of this, it's important to remember that if we don't ask, we may never hear about someone else's wishes. We might not ask if we are worried that the person will think we are

going to sort it all out for them -and we don't want to have to do this or don't have time or other resources at hand. We often forget to think who else might be able to help - including the person themselves. It may not occur to us to ask, especially if that's not 'the reason' we're talking to the person. The way we ask is also important, as is the way we respond to what we're told.

We also need to pay attention to what is being said in general conversation, and how we're being told something. You may be being told a wish. If you are the one person who will ever hear this wish - and you may only be told once - then if you miss it, the wish may never surface again.