

SAFE WAITING

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Safe waiting, I think what it is a stance, like a professional position, that we can take when supporting someone. It's kind **of a commitment that you make with that person** to stick with them while life unfolds, whatever pace it wants to go at. And I guess **that's waiting**. The **safe** element of it is that we, as professionals, safeguard people.

Although you're allowing life to unfold for this person, you are taking into consideration their safety and dignity and assessing that risk as well. The emphasis on the word safe is to show that it's not recklessness. We're not recklessly allowing people to tumble into peril. It's taking that stance to allow people their own experience of suffering and hardship, and not intervening because if we reflect on our own lives, often the best opportunities to grow and build resilience have come through periods of suffering and challenge. I think everybody's entitled to that without somebody coming in and intervening and rescuing them from that. In some cases you will be denying them an opportunity to grow and build the exact kind of skills and strategies that we're here to help them with.

When it comes to fixing, it's not clear cut, it's not black and white. It depends quite a lot when you're working out whether you are you're actually intervening and fixing in someone's life or whether what you're doing is necessary for that person to build independence and resilience. I think it's something that as a Local Area Coordinator you should be constantly questioning. If you think that you've nailed it, then you're probably wrong. I guess that's the safest way to consider it.

I can't remember who it was that said it, but it was from the world of psychotherapy, a phrase along the lines of 'don't speak for people because you will steal their best lines'. I really think that that's relevant to fixing. It ties into to what I was describing earlier about not intervening and allowing people opportunities to grow. People make the biggest changes in their lives when they get to truly do it for themselves and people can do for themselves and be supported at the same time. I think that's the balance that local area coordinators need to find.

Fixing, I would define as stealing someone's best lines doing for them. This often, I think, creates dependency and inadvertently you are supporting someone's perception of themselves as helpless. Often people present to us with a story about themselves as someone who is a victim or unable in some way, or stuck. What people often do when you first meet them is they invite you to fix them because that's the quickest solution that they think they have, which is ask for help. Potentially they have used services for a long time, and they're used to explaining an issue and then having someone professional intervene and apparently take that issue away. If we accept that invite that people give to us, then we kind of go along with that, we kind of agree with them. "Yes, you are helpless, and I'm here to fix that". Whereas there is real power if we apply the spirit of Local Area Coordination. We can be alongside people as they take risks or come out of their comfort zone and truly be heard, instead of just taking all that away from them and fixing it ourselves.

Often, I think we fix because we are kind and we want to do something good for someone in the kindest, quickest way possible. How could we deny this person in their moment of need? They're often pleading with you to help them out and saying "no" is very difficult. It feels cruel, all of our compassion and empathy gets triggered in that moment and it feels uncomfortable. And in a sense, accepting their invite to fix them gets us off the hook too. It's one of those moments like the scene in the Matrix where the two pills are offered, this pill does this, this pill does the next. It really is our moment when this invitation comes to us to either take their invite and agree, you sort of sign a contract that "yes, I will fix you" and that's how this is going to go. But if you take the other direction, you can give them an invite back. **The invite we give back to people is inviting them to actually take a different journey** here to find your capabilities again and connect you to resources again, take you out of your comfort zone.

So it's completely understandable the reason we fix. We're not doing it because we're lazy and we want this person off our caseload as quick as possible, it is because we care. Certainly, when I think back to when I first started supporting people in supportive roles before becoming a Local Area Coordinator, I often felt like I didn't have the skills to help people through 'stuckness'. Because I felt stuck too, I felt low on resources, low on ideas. It was only when I grew in confidence and skills I realised that these are the opportunities and there are different ways that we can move towards this kind of situation when somebody invites you to fix them.

The challenge is to stay alongside rather than becoming someone that pushes or pulls. And you do this with a curiosity as a purposeful stance, a professional position that you take to be curious to whatever the person in front of you communicates. So instead of accepting an invitation, you create a question about what's just happened almost like a mirror, reflecting back what you're noticing about that person. So you could ask, "have you asked that question to anyone else recently? How did it go? What's it like for you to ask for help?", and sometimes you can point out that it seems really urgent to them.

You can be curious about the urgency; "how long have they been waiting for this to be solved?", "how long has this been an issue for them?". 99% of the time, this then sets them off on that new direction and they start exploring. The history to the problem that they're telling you about, the emotions, the chronology of it. Then eventually that starts to take the conversation onto possibilities and what they haven't considered or what they might try again. And eventually they say all their best lines. They say all of these things that lead to resilience and new ideas. You've not said it at all. You've just returned an invitation to them in a question, or several questions. Curiosity as a professional position and being a mirror, Roy Walker, from Catchphrase, always used to say, "say what you see", and it's very, very useful to help somebody self-reflect by just saying what you notice about them in a certain moment that can move you out of the temptations.

There are ways to do it. I think the fear is if you say no, or you don't say yes to this invitation to fix, then you will somehow be pitched against that person and there will be a conflict. But there are ways to still make it about them and still make it appealing to them so that they know that you're there and you're supporting them and you're not going anywhere. You're not saying it's a "no", you're saying it's a "what else?". You have to constantly question your

own position with people and your own intentions. The idea is to prioritise other people's wishes and hopes without diluting it with your own cause. That's very difficult sometimes, but often in order to really get alongside someone you have to remember you're not an expert in their life, they are.

I've always really liked ideas from narrative therapy. I use a lot of techniques from that school of thought. People are storytelling beings, our own lives and experiences as almost like chapters in a book. We live according to those stories and beliefs about ourselves and we use metaphors to bring meaning into our lives. So somebody might describe themselves as a victim. The lived experience of being a victim will differ from the perceived experience of being a victim. But oftentimes when, when you first meet someone and as a Local Area Coordinator, along with a person's description of themselves, there's often a confusion in them, as to how to get out of the situation they're in. People will often describe things as being a blur, or all happening at once and not knowing where to go or how to change things. Narrative ideas can really help that in that you can help somebody give a name to the chapter of life that they're in.

Once they move towards that name people have to kind of accept that name as true to them and the chat tends to be something that resonates with them. Something as simple as asking whether someone has entered into a period of information gathering or planning ahead. Just to have someone to go, "oh yeah, I'm planning ahead aren't I?", it adds a simplicity to that situation again, and an objective as well, rather than being in the taking action stage solving all my problems stage. All they've got to do is relax into the intention of gathering information.

This can be transformative because then people channel their energies into gathering information and looking for resources and doing all the things that they would otherwise be able to do if they weren't feeling so overwhelmed with things. Then you can help them keep track of that information gathering, how will they know if they can move to the next taking action stage? They're doing it themselves; you're just helping them kind of put chapter titles on their life. So it's really, really powerful.

Despite all of this, be prepared as a professional for whatever the issue or the problem, to be around for a while. You're inviting them to go on a journey here. So the destination, sometimes isn't as essential as the journey. So sometimes you draw alongside the problem as well and allow it to be and you remain with them. the power of being alongside someone as a problem persists can still be transformative and what you often find as well with that process is that other priorities emerge, which perhaps have to come before the priority that they've voiced to you. Often, it's "I want to move house to be near my family" or something, and that's their focus. But when it's broken down, when you go slow and you wait, safe waiting with them, you realise that there's so many other little mini priorities that need to be addressed first. Often, they're the real things that really hold someone back in all areas of their life.

Be brave. That's what I always tell myself. We are equipped as Local Area Coordinators with this incredible privilege to actually work from principles rather than towards a target. I've always detected in Local Area Coordination it's more of a work from these principles rather than trying to move people towards achieving some kind of criteria and then disappearing

from the system. We have to, otherwise they, Local Area Coordination will lose or lose its identity. If we drop that and become fixers, who claim that they don't fix, then we just get swallowed up by the system around us and will disappear.