



# Broker Bites



Your quarterly update from The Community Brokerage Network

## Hello there!

It's been a strange few months for us at the Community Brokerage Network!

As a result of Covid-19 we've all had to adapt to a 'new normal', whether that's been working from home for the first time, practising social distancing or getting to grips with socialising over Zoom, Skype and a whole host of other video call apps. The lockdown has changed almost every aspect of our lives and there isn't a single person who hasn't been affected in some way.

However, we believe plenty of positives can be taken from this challenging time. Many of us have a renewed appreciation for the simple things in life, like spending more time with our families, getting out in nature and turning inward to rest and refocus on our personal goals.

The past three months have felt a bit hopeless at times but we believe there is still lots we can do to help others. In this issue we update you on what the Community Brokerage Network has been doing to help others during lockdown, including delivering PPE to carers and helping one amazing woman to secure a more fit-for-purpose home.

We hope you enjoy this issue of Broker Bites and remember that simple acts of kindness, no matter how small, can have a massive impact on the lives of other people.



# Meet Our Brokers

Say hello to some of the fantastic brokers who make up the Community Brokerage Network. Here three of them tell us a little bit about themselves and what they bring to the network and the individuals they work with.



## Kay Mills

Kay joined us in 2013 and has worked with people with learning difficulties and mental health problems for over 20 years. She is best known for her work with individuals, helping people form new relationships, find work and get involved in community life.

Having worked at a senior level in both residential and personalised support services in the West of Scotland, Kay founded LEAF (Life, Employment and Friends) in 2001 and is self-employed. Her work focuses on supporting people who have become marginalised to maximise their own potential. Kay also recently published [A Guide to Friendship](#).

Kay's role as a broker is to help people make the best use of their money, using natural networking and creative ways to maximise their individual budget. She can also connect, and support people in a number of ways to get involved in their local community while maximising their skills and talents.

## Carol Brown

Carol is a professional coach and business owner and has many years of experience in providing services to, and on behalf of, local authorities, NHS, businesses, charities and educational bodies as well as individuals. She has developed her own brand of training and coaching programmes which have been evaluated and endorsed by the Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM). She is an ILM Recognised Training Provider and consultant to City & Guilds.

Carol believes that everyone has the right to be heard, to be involved in decisions about their own lives and to choose activities which improve and enhance their wellbeing.



## Andrea Fletcher

Andrea is an ex police officer who took great pride in helping others and ensuring everyone was treated fairly. When she retired from the police she decided that she would like to continue with a career which involved assisting others and making a difference to people's lives.

She is very much a people person and committed to fairness and equality as well as genuinely wanting to help others in making their life the best it can be.

Andrea is blessed with three children, a dog and a cat and loves the outdoors. She is a keen gym goer, loves cooking, baking and eating! Andrea loves reading and previously volunteered as an athletics coach and as a health coach. She previously had her own photography business.



## Our New Recruit!

We hope you'll join us in welcoming our new broker, **Liz Callaghan**, to the Community Brokerage Network.

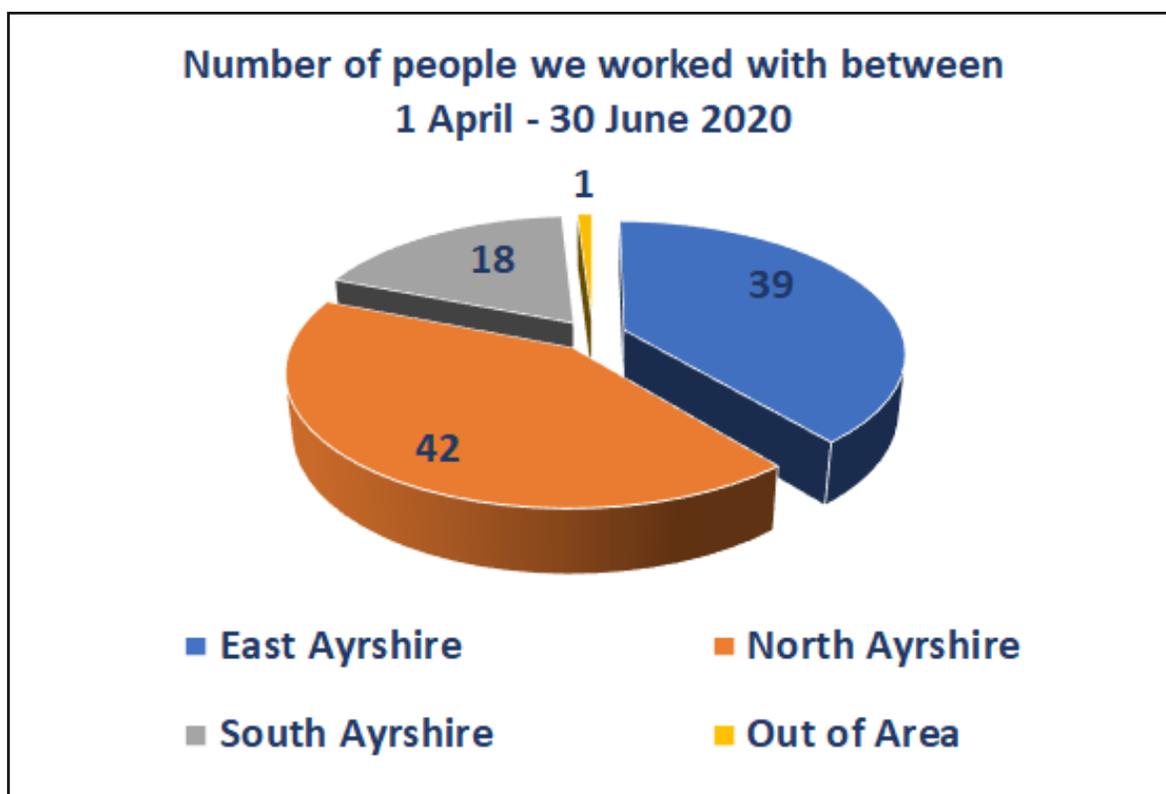
Liz has campaigned for the rights of people with learning disabilities most of her life to live a full ordinary life. Her passion has stemmed from her personal experience as a mother of a son with learning disabilities and her experience growing up with an elder sister with learning disabilities. She has first-hand experience of special schooling, transition, and planning for adult life.



More recently Liz qualified with a SCQF Community Brokerage Award as a broker and has a full understanding of self directed support, the importance of good support and the challenges faced by families and individuals in planning for a future of their own.

Liz has been running the Quality Improvements Service at Values Into Action Scotland since 2014 and has a wide and varied background in training and project management. As a trained counsellor, holistic therapist and trainer, she has worked with young people, women's groups, learning disabilities, social work and health care staff and the voluntary sector since the mid 80s. Liz is also skilled in person centred planning tools, Asset Based Community Development and Talking Mats.

## Activity this Quarter



# Reaching Every Goal:

## The Incredible Mindset of Arlene Howe

Covid-19 has forced many of us to adapt to a new way of living, placing us in circumstances we could never have anticipated or imagined. The current lockdown restrictions have impacted on almost every area of our lives, leaving a lot of us feeling hopeless, frustrated and overwhelmingly fixated on the negatives of the situation.

However, the same simply cannot be said for one incredible woman.

Arlene Howe, 39, has chronic rheumatoid arthritis and has been suffering symptoms for sixteen years. Her condition is so severe that her ankle and elbow joints have fused in place and she requires a wheelchair to get around. An operation was scheduled to relieve the fusion in her ankles but was postponed due to her low iron levels causing concern that she could bleed out during surgery. She has also recently been diagnosed with Crohn's disease.

Arlene's experience with the Community Brokerage Network began when she was put in touch with our broker, Andrea, through a community link worker. Since then Andrea has been providing Arlene with support and guidance in her efforts to secure a more fit-for-purpose house for herself and her five-year-old daughter, Sophie:

"I love that I was put in touch with Andrea and it's great to have someone to speak up for me. I've had a lot of battles and sometimes don't have the fight in me but Andrea's always in my corner. I wish I'd known about the Community Brokerage Network sooner."

Arlene currently lives in a council house with an upstairs and downstairs set-up. Despite having a ramp and wet room it is still far from ideal for her day-to-day life and means she is sometimes confined to living upstairs when her multiple conditions cause her too much pain to move.

She has requested a move to a house on one level and is keen to stay local to keep Sophie in the same school and to keep things as normal as possible for her:

"[Moving house] will make things better. We won't have to keep going up and down stairs and there will be more space to do things. My wheelchair doesn't fit around the corners or doors so I feel restricted. If I had a bungalow I'd be able to wheel out into the garden and it would make things more normal for Sophie."



Arlene with daughter Sophie

Arlene has a fantastic relationship with her neighbours who, even before lockdown, regularly helped her out and made sure she had everything she needed:

"They've been hanging washing and Hoovering when I can't manage and my neighbour Yvonne asks me every morning what I'm needing from the shops. Since lockdown a lot of my friends haven't been working so they've been on hand to help me too."

I'm enjoying lockdown and feel I'm finding out more about people because I have the chance to talk to them."

Arlene applies a sparkling 'can-do' attitude to every aspect of her life, demonstrating enthusiasm and motivation that would put most of us to shame. She and Sophie, with the help of their family, friends and neighbours, have completely transformed their garden from a tired and nondescript space to a beautiful outdoor retreat full of colour and imagination:

"Everyone came in on different days and did a little bit while Sophie and I painted all the scrap wood to make new edging. My niece and I spent two days lifting all the chipping stones and putting them into bags then we laid new weed membrane and put the old stones back down. My neighbour Yvonne let me take some of her old decking and we cut it and screwed it together. Then I painted it for the new edging and a raised bed for my pear tree. Yvonne and my friend Jackie put up a balcony screening to hide the unsightly bushes then I painted the old stepping stones and plant pots. I had a whole pile of plant pots, wood and old garden edging that was heading to the dump but we managed to use everything by cleaning and painting it. Yvonne's husband even made me a planter box and a wooden love heart from the scrap wood. I am very proud to have managed to salvage everything."

"I felt it was important to have the garden functional and entertaining for us both as I am shielding and it's the only place I can go to. I purchased a cheap patio set, a sand pit, a mud kitchen, slide and basketball ring for Sophie to make sure she has plenty to do."

They also have a patch in the garden where they plant their own vegetables and can enjoy their own organic produce and herbs:

"Since I've had problems with my health I've been more aware of chemicals and pesticides and what I'm putting into my body. Sophie and I planted lots of vegetables and we have just built a small artificial greenhouse that we purchased on Amazon.



My other neighbours have an allotment and gave us tomato plants in exchange for some of our pepper plants. Sophie enjoys watering all our vegetables and can't wait to pick them. We've planted onions, potatoes, carrots, peas in the pod, peppers and herbs and I'm getting Sophie to try two new foods every week."

As well as sticking to organic produce, Arlene and Sophie have embraced a chemical-free lifestyle. Together they make their own lip balms, shampoo bars and soaps and intend to give them as gifts to everyone who has helped them during lockdown:

"It keeps me busy and Sophie likes them as well. I know there are no harmful chemicals in anything so I don't mind her using them."



A self-taught makeup artist, Arlene’s creativity also extends to the world of cosmetics and special effects makeup:

“I was self-employed, selling makeup supplies to colleges across Scotland when I was first diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis. I decided to put myself through a home learning course to train as a makeup artist in the hope that I could take on a lighter job that wouldn’t put a strain on my body. However, I found the makeup artist world very competitive and I never got much work, especially when I turned up to jobs wearing wrist splints. After Sophie started school I decided it was time to expand my skills [to special effects] as I like to try new things and you never know where it might lead. I enjoy creative work and can spend hours painting my mannequin.”



Clockwise from top left: Preparation for Arlene and Sophie’s hand-made candles and wax melts; the finished items; Sophie looking proud as punch with her creations.

Despite the mental and physical challenges Arlene must face on a daily basis, she remains determined to show Sophie a positive image of disability and illness. She has a true ‘glass half full’ personality, consistently choosing to focus on the positives of her situation and to be grateful for what she is able to do. I felt genuinely humbled after listening to Arlene and finished our video interview feeling more upbeat and motivated than I had in a while. Her unwavering outlook of optimism, resilience and gratitude is nothing short of awe-inspiring:

“Sophie has a 50% chance of getting this illness and I don’t want her to see a negative example of it. I want to teach Sophie that illness doesn’t hold you back and that you need to focus on what you can do, not on what you can’t. I want to show her that I may be disabled but I can still reach every one of my goals. I just get there a little differently.”



# Covid-19 and the Community Brokerage Network

Our chairperson, Anne-Marie Monaghan, recently answered questions from the Personal Outcomes Network on our experiences during the Covid-19 outbreak. Read on for full details of the challenges the pandemic has presented us with, how we are overcoming them and what we have learned from the experience.

## How have you been able to keep a focus on what matters to people during COVID?

The Community Brokerage Network now works across Ayrshire having provided a successful service in East Ayrshire for a number of years. We coordinate a network of brokers who help people to plan and organise their support, and to make the most of any budget or resource and to maximise the use of community activity and support. If the person doesn't qualify for formal support the broker can still help by linking to activities in the community or with other people with similar interests. We support people who use any of the 4SDS options. The outcomes we need to achieve with our funding are to help people and carers to:

- feel more informed
- creatively and flexibly plan to achieve personal outcomes including accessing community assets
- have increased skills so are better able to manage social care packages

From the outset of the CV-19 Pandemic we made a conscious decision not to rush in but rather to see where gaps may emerge and if we could help at that point. Our rationale was that we actively supported community involvement and developments and there had been significant community response to CV-19 which we didn't want to get in the way of.

We engaged in welfare calls with people we were involved with and continue to do that. When the issues about PPE emerged and the need for people in caring roles to use PPE there were issues about how to get it to PA employers. It was also recognised that as a result of lockdown measures people employing a PA may have other concerns and needs that were impacting on their wellbeing. East Ayrshire HSCP approached the Community Brokerage Network (CBN) to deliver PPE to those PA employers that needed it and as a result the brokers were also able to provide reassurance and support health and wellbeing.

## What have you had to do differently and what made this possible?

The knowledge and skills of the brokers was key to the success of this as they had:

- local intelligence knowing where the local addresses were and used this to plan routes to minimise travelling
- the ability to engage with people and offer reassurance, information guidance about the options/flexibility of SDS during the pandemic as the details became clear
- skills in good strength-based conversations and were able to address anxieties and concerns
- connections to signpost people to other support arrangements where needed

The skills used are those used every day in the work of the broker but the context in which they were using them was different. It was possible because of the longstanding and positive relationships with the HSCP that had been built over time and was

rooted in mutual respect and trust. It afforded the appropriate use of data based on trusting relationships.

## **What have you noticed that has been better? (for people using the service/staff/the organisation)**

This arrangement meant that over 100 people who were PA employers didn't need to make arrangements to travel to pick up the PPE. It was delivered by a small group of 8 brokers meaning the risk of exposure of carers to CV-19, many of whom were caring for clinically vulnerable people, was greatly reduced. It also meant their anxiety was greatly relieved because they didn't have to leave home and because the brokers were able to provide reassurance.

## **How did this make you feel?**

It felt a very worthwhile use of the resources we had available and there was satisfaction knowing that the time invested in relationships and building a credible organisation over the years had paid off. The HSCP trusted us with information and with a task that would help make peoples' lives a bit easier. The recipients of the PPE were very grateful and were able to share their delight at not having to make arrangements, especially with limited public transport, to go and collect it from the town centre.

## **What have you learned through this?**

It reinforced that small acts can make big differences and sometimes it is right to sit back and wait for the right opportunity to reveal itself.

## **Anything else you want to tell us?**

It was a very positive experience for the brokers involved who had also offered their services through the local hubs but hadn't been called upon to support any aspects of the work. During this time there was a feeling among the brokers that they were doing little to help and they carried a bit of guilt about it but also recognised the need to allow community responses to emerge. The PPE deliveries made good use of their skills, knowledge and experience so was the perfect activity. This will continue on a monthly basis until it is no longer needed.

## **Covid-19: Guidance on Self-Directed Support**

Click on the link below to view the Scottish Government's guidance on self-directed support during Covid-19.

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-self-directed-support/>



# The Community Brokerage Award

There are still spaces left on our very own SQA certified course:  
The Community Brokerage Award!

Covering all aspects of community brokerage relating to self-directed support, the course is worth 30 credits at SCQF Level 7 and is comprised of 5 modules, delivered over 9 months.

An induction will take place on 20th August and the course will commence in the first week of September, using online delivery.

If you're interested in this terrific opportunity to learn all about the world of community brokerage then please submit your application to us without delay!



## Comments from past participants...

*"This course has enabled me to see how SDS principles and values can be applied to different areas of my own and other people's lives."*

*"You all did a great job and I'm proud to have been a part of it."*

*"My confidence has improved by doing this [course], both personally and professionally."*

*"I would definitely recommend the award—their presentations have been superb and the support is second to none."*



For more information about the course and details on how to sign up for the next intake, please contact our SQA Advisor and Co-ordinator, Jenny Reekie.

[jennyreekie@communitybrokeragenetwork.co.uk](mailto:jennyreekie@communitybrokeragenetwork.co.uk)

## And Finally...

We hope you've enjoyed this edition of Broker Bites, which has been something of a 'Coronavirus Special'!

Until next time we'd like to extend our warmest wishes to everyone receiving assistance from us and hope you and your family are keeping safe. Feeling anxiety, frustration or a general sense of hopelessness is natural right now, making it even more important to be kind to yourself and take the current situation one day at a time.

To quote Arlene Howe, "focus on what you can do, not on what you can't."

We can't think of a more fitting message to sign off with.

