



One Year On



July 2010

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I. The Circle Concept

Circles are membership organisations representing a cultural shift in the relationship between older people and state sponsored support.

The concept and business model have been co-designed and developed, in conjunction with Participle, over three years, with over 1000 older people and their families, beginning in Southwark, but now extending to communities across Greater London and to more rural areas in East Anglia. Through their contributions, they have shaped a service solution that will help them live the lives they want to live, from their fifties to their nineties and beyond. They have helped shaped the vision behind it, and have voted with their feet by joining a network that allows people to be 'each other's solution,' in a light but structured manner, and open to all.

At the individual level, a Circle delivers flexible support with life's practical tasks (from DIY to gardening to technology), an opportunity to learn and a social network for building and maintaining relationships around shared interests and hobbies. Crucially, it does this by allowing those that seek support in some areas of life to provide help to other members, in other areas of life. The outcome is a more connected, supported person, who is part of a service that evolves with them as they age. The social impact is an increase in quality of life, an improved sense of well being and new relationships and acquaintances that lead to an increase in social capital.

At the community level, the service also rebuilds the networks that enable greater local economic development. It does this primarily through member interaction with people called Neighbourhood Helpers. These are people of all ages who share their talents and skills; each of them is CRB and reference checked and some are paid the London Living Wage for their time. Helpers may also be members, and our experience tells us that approximately 1/3 will be over 50 years of age themselves.

For local authorities, it subverts the existing culture of 'us' and 'them', the 'able' and 'needy.' It is a new culture in which members own their own needs, and get supported to find solutions. It answers the demand to deliver personalised, preventative services in ways that leverage the resources and capabilities latent in communities. Circles are collaborative organisations and partner with other organisations for the benefit of members. It improves efficiencies between existing services and creates significant long-term cost savings in the context of a challenging fiscal environment.

What follows is an in-depth review of the first year of Southwark Circle, which is the flagship Circle. There are Circles being launched in Hammersmith & Fulham and in Suffolk County in the autumn of 2010, with five more planned to launch in 2011.

II. Southwark Circle One Year On

“When the system stops rewarding complexity, it is the people who figure out how to work simply in the present, rather than the people who mastered the complexity of the past, who get to say what happens in the future. (For example) a service business does best not by trying to do things on behalf of its users, but by providing a platform for them to do things for one another.”¹

Southwark Circle’s first year is a story of relentless drive to work simply, fail cheaply and build a platform for a new type of support, including methods for people to be ‘each others solution.’ One of the biggest challenges has been forging a community of ‘we’ in an overly regulated eco-system that all too frequently creates ‘us and them.’ This will take time and the commitment of many. In the spirit of building community, and a new membership organisation, when we say ‘we’ anywhere in this document we mean everybody: members, Neighbourhood Helpers and the team in the office. So what have we done this year?

For one, we’ve grown in number. We’ve exceeded our first-year targets for new members by 15% at 346 members (as of 1st May 2010), and we’ve consistently attracted a motivated group of local Neighbourhood Helpers that now stands at 55 people (again, as of 1st May 2010). It is truly a group of 400 people that every day, week and month proves that there are alternate ways to receive support and flourish. While we are aiming to more than double the size of the community in the coming year, we also know that we must do so while continuing to learn from user insights and innovate more tailored service offerings for some, and offer more regular services for others.

We’ve built a scalable, easy-to-use back office technology platform for Circles, with intuitive and sensible operational processes that underpin a dynamic, distributed model for service delivery. All this makes it possible to spot trends in requests for practical services, social interactions, usage of tokens and overall participation by members and Helpers. The combination of this capability with a free phone number, which members use more than any other method of communication, means that as an organisation we can adapt and evolve in line with what the community wants, or needs.

This report also outlines the work we’ve been doing to measure social impact. We believe this to be truly ground breaking work, as we do not know of other organisations that measure their success, in real-time, through social impact metrics such as ‘relationships initiated’, and that have the data to back it up. We know that the literature around social capital and quality of life are thoroughly researched and proven, and we’re taking it one step further by integrating concrete measurement of social impact into the way we work.

¹ Clay Shirky, writer, thinker and author of “Here Comes Everybody”

We hear from members and Helpers all of the time. Indeed, continuous feedback is the DNA of every Circle. But for this report, we have also interviewed a cross-section of members and Helpers to provide a more detailed look at their experiences in the first year. The next section of this report is their words on the different elements of Southwark Circle.

We deliberately avoid intrusive data capture methods, so associated with the old cultures of 'service provision'. Apart from simple data capture upon signing up as a member, we will hold off on a detailed questionnaire and evaluation processes, and will do so until the end of 2011. This document is a review, and is the result of some 'soft' interviews and the data we capture in our members management system.

In closing, we would like to thank Southwark Council for their vision and support in developing and launching the flagship Circle in Southwark Circle. We are proud to work with them as a partner and look forward to the coming years, both the challenges and the opportunities. Together, we asked people if they wanted be involved in creating a different way of doing things and here, in essence, is what they've said (hint: Yes!):



III. Members and Helpers on Southwark Circle

What the people say...

On Being a Member:

“Other organisations, it’s as if you’ve been given something which is good. But Southwark Circle is more you’re doing things with other people because you choose to. It’s not like, ‘you poor little victim, you.’ I don’t think that mentality does anyone any good.”

“I’ve had an insight into lives I wouldn’t normally see in my social circle.”

“I’ve learnt that you can expect more from people than you think. One lady I used to bump into every now and then, she’s joined and I’ve bumped into her at the park since. I thought, ‘this woman is more interesting than I thought, once we got past the ‘how’s the husband conversation.’ I really hadn’t given regard to what people could actually contribute within themselves, if you get to know them.”

“It’s nice that I belong to it and I don’t mind paying, I can afford to pay for things now.”

“It’s made me more aware and more helpful in meeting and dealing with people, it’s almost becoming more integrated in your community, isn’t it.”

“I’m glad that the group of people who have formed Southwark Circle can make a little contribution themselves, everyone must feel that they value themselves more when they do make a contribution.”

The Social Side:

“My life was comparatively quiet before I joined in the social arm of Southwark Circle. I’m doing more things that I used to because I’m now retired, you see, and I am on my own.”

“I became a member because I wanted a recommendation for a plumber, I saw the Member Calendar and jumped at it. I thought, ‘I’d like to get involved with that.’”

“You meet other people, mixing with people is good, it doesn’t cost the earth. Plus, I’m a carer and I think this sort of organisation is ideal for carers if they need to get a away for a while.”

“Now that I’m a member of Southwark Circle, I’ve got the choice of staying indoors or going out a X times a month, and as you get older, the more you get out, the better for you. And just meeting new faces, new people.”

“You are truly welcomed when you go anywhere. You’re not isolated.”

“With other groups I go to, people come for the food. I shouldn’t feel that, because there are many other reasons why people do things, but to me their interest is so shallow. The people I’ve met through Southwark Circle are people who want to do things for themselves.”

“When I went to the Christmas party, I had about three people’s telephone numbers, we were all sitting at the same table together.”

“I felt very at home, if you know what I mean. I don’t mind going now. Before, I’ve never been the sort of person to go to anything like that, a bit nervous. I’m not nervous now of going. I still feel a bit shy but I’m a bit more open.”

The Practical Side:

“The focus of this is getting the best you can from life, and I’m a firm believer in that. It’s sort of getting means to deal with life, and knowing, ‘this is what you can do if such and such needs doing.’ It makes a difference to your mental state.”

“To start with I was attracted to the practical side, since everything to do with the maintenance is down to me, and being a pensioner if you call in a regular trades person you have to pay through the nose, if you can find someone who will bother with the small jobs anyway. Those small jobs make a lot of difference.”

“I’m the sort of person that, if I’ve not tried something before, I’m not confident. But with someone there saying, “this is what you do” then I think I can do it.”

“I said to [the Neighbourhood Helper] who came, “I really ought to clean up my wormery.” At a push I could do it on my own, but having someone there to sort of do it with you encourages you to get on with it.”

“I wanted an outside aerial fitted, and I asked Southwark Circle about it. They gave me a couple of names for recommended trades people. I’ve used one of them and have been very pleased with them. You see, even for the bigger jobs that you wouldn’t use a token for, you still feel more confident about. These things make a lot of difference for those who want to live independently.”

On Being a Helper:

“(I like) it’s flexibility and variability, because you didn’t have to be an expert at anything and I’m not. You could pick and choose jobs for which you were suitable and you weren’t pressured into doing more than you could.

“I thought this looks like an interesting, novel idea in that it benefits the local community, helps individuals and also gives personal satisfaction, whilst doing something useful and whilst also earning pocket money. So it appealed me in its self-help ethos.”

“I think [without payment] it would have largely felt like do-gooding, and I’ve never done any charitable work like that. I mean until recently I’ve been working full time. So I probably would have seen that as a bridge too far. Although the payment is nominal, I think it’s psychologically important and it also made the ethos of the whole thing more attractive because it wasn’t people volunteering and helping out in an ad hoc ‘grace and favour’ way. I like the notion of the circularity of it; that the people who use the service paid something for it and equally those who helped out were paid something too.”

“I really enjoy the interactions, being self-employed and a home worker, you become very friendly with the people in the local coffee shop. But you never really see people from day-to-day. So it’s having the conversations, going out and having the interactions. In the way it’s the same as what some of the other members (are doing), where they are now having some interactions with people, where as before perhaps they didn’t.”

“My mother-in-law was involved in a church in her village and they were short of a mini bus driver. I thought I could do something like that and my wife said ‘why don’t you do something locally in London’ and I saw this. At the time, work was slow and I thought if its another £30-£40 coming in a month then that helps.”

IV. Key Learning and Insights

Marketing & Membership

The trigger that motivates most members to join is only the beginning of the relationship. Whether they joined because something came up that needed doing around the house, or because they were interested in going to a specific event on the member calendar, members are ‘trained’ over time as to how to get the most out of being members. We have learned to recognise patterns and behaviors that will help make the service more relevant to members’ lives, and how to encourage this with positive outcomes and potential cost savings. We have been surprised by how fast people have tailored membership to their lives, and have been running as fast as we can to ‘package’ this raw demand into new services.

The Language and Culture of ‘the Circle System’

We have learned that language and culture are crucial to encouraging contribution, participation and unlocking people’s capability to do things for themselves, and others. It is very nuanced, very subtle, but when you get it right, it works, and if wrong, doesn’t. Every turn of the phrase in the monthly newsletter, the way in which the monthly member calendar is developed, the Helper induction, each of these must be aligned. The way that a Circle ‘looks’ and ‘sounds’ is a departure from traditional services, which means that members have a different perception of the role of the service in their lives, and in how they interact with it.

The Circle Operating Model

We now know that a demand-led, community-delivered business model can work in practice, and deliver a real alternative to the existing system. There is no need to ramp up our model on the infrastructure side; indeed we have found partnership difficult with organizations that depend on buildings, especially those whose business models are built on running day care centres.

Community Segmentation

Members have joined from across the spectrum of ages, backgrounds, financial situations, and we know that Southwark Circle’s community is representative the economic and ethnic diversity of Southwark itself. That said, it’s the behaviour that matters to us, i.e. what are key triggers to joining, how are people using tokens, when is take up rate highest? The ‘tokens’ system was introduced during the first year, and, for many members who regularly use tokens, the service has become more flexible. This has resulted in a more dynamic, natural usage of Helpers by members. It has also paved the way for a more accessible, structured social offer via the member calendar, which is where relationships are established, and this is exactly what we want to happen.

Collaborative Work – An Opportunity for Carers

We have noted that a significant percentage of early adopter members are carers for a family member, partner or friend. Clearly the proposition works for this group, and both ongoing feedback and more in-depth interviews for this review have demonstrated the benefits to their lives and to their family. There is a great opportunity here and we've focused resource and partnership efforts, with both Southwark Council and its third sector partners, on ensuring Circle membership becomes even more compelling to carers.

Social Impact & Neighbourhood Helpers

We have been overwhelmed by the 'stickiness' of the Helper proposition in today's cultural and economic context ('give back to my community and pay off my mobile bill'). Furthermore, joining the Helper network turns out to be a great 'slip road' job into work, or into semi-retirement, for men in particular.

IV. Measurement – Social Impact & Cost Savings

What do we measure?

We have dedicated considerable time and other resources in our first year to developing a measurement framework that allows us to measure our impact for individuals, the community and other stakeholders. Southwark Circle has been designed as a self-sustaining social enterprise, and as such must not only breakeven but must also demonstrate that it is achieving its social mission: to improve the lives of its members. We measure social impact in qualitative terms, i.e. what is the societal value created for individuals and the community. The framework is underpinned by Participle’s mission statement, Beveridge 4.0.²

We measure our impact in monetary terms through our cost savings model, which measures across three types of cost savings³:

- **Actual Savings (Council and Health):** savings that the council will potentially be able to directly achieve from implementation.
- **Preventative Savings:** these are savings that can be potentially 'indirectly' achieved, i.e. savings arising from actions that have the effect of preventing certain costs from occurring in the future.
- **Better Value:** these savings relate to being able to more effectively coordinate or use existing services & infrastructure to increase the number of older people who use the service and/or infrastructure.

What were the cost savings from year one?

Two big caveats need to be placed right upfront. First, we are social entrepreneurs, not consultants. We do not review council activity and make recommendations on how it should conduct its business. We build innovation-based new enterprises that offer an alternative approach to the current way of doing business.

Second, the potential cost savings below do not reflect recommendations made to Southwark Council, nor have they been submitted as evidence for the purpose of discontinuing service provision or existing funding to specific providers.

Having said that, we know that our social enterprise results in cost savings for Southwark Council, and have consistently seen strong evidence of preventative cost savings (e.g. “I know I visit my GP less since I joined Southwark Circle.”)

² http://www.participle.net/images/uploads/Bev_4_final.pdf

³ Each local authority is different, and each Circle maps its cost savings onto this landscape. Interested parties are invited to contact Hugo Manassei (hugom@participle.net) for more information on the full cost savings model.

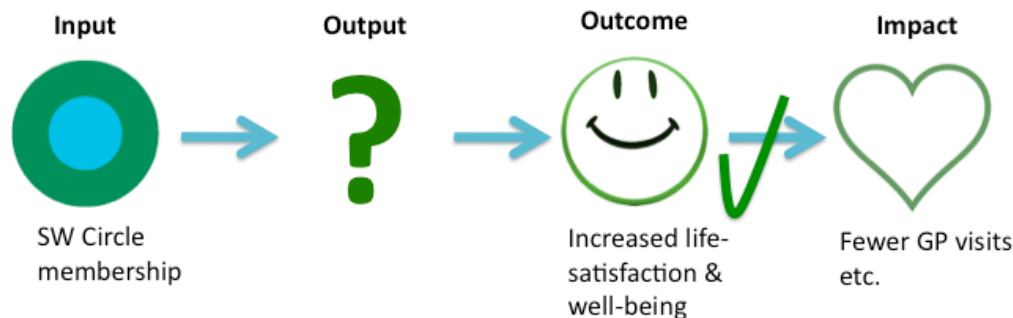
We have calculated approximately £275,000 in total cost savings that Southwark Council could act on, just in the first year, and bear in mind, according to the model, costs savings follow an exponential curve, really ratcheting up in year three onwards. Here are examples from Year One:

- As of May 2010, Southwark Circle's monthly delivery of home maintenance, gardening and other domestic odd jobs, has generated savings of £85,000 in relation to what this would have cost if delivered through traditional methods. If Southwark Council decided to seek additional 'actual' cost savings through seeking alternatives to a Council-delivered Handyperson service (annual funding ~£125,000), the Helper network is scalable and could easily cope with additional demand;
- We know that approximately 45% of members have engaged with self-arranged social activity in the community that would not have happened were they not members, around once a month on average. If this was provided through a public service provision such as day-care centres, the cost would have been approximately £58,500;
- Approximately 5% of Southwark Circle members (as of May 2010) previously received benefits under more comprehensive FACS criteria at Moderate level and now meet their needs for practical support through Southwark Circle. To our knowledge, none of these have been re-assessed as Substantial, i.e. they self-assess through Southwark Circle and do not require adult social care benefits. This generates a notional cost savings to Southwark Council of £18,000 in home care costs.
- About 45% of Neighbourhood Helpers were not engaged in paid work at the time of joining, many were either receiving unemployment benefits or working freelance, and at risk of falling into this situation. Approximately 10% of these have since moved into full-time work as a result of the structured commitment, confidence boost and inclusive nature of being Neighbourhood Helpers. Clearly there are cost savings here, but we believe further research must be done before including this figure into our cost savings model.

What was the social impact created?

In order to assess the impact of Southwark Circle, we first formulated its "theory of change", depicted in a simplified manner below. For example, we know from a vast amount of peer-reviewed scientific literature that there is a strong relation between increased life-satisfaction and fewer GP visits. Therefore, if Southwark Circle could demonstrate that membership leads to significantly increased life-satisfaction, amongst other factors, this would be highly relevant.

How do we measure social impact?



The question mark, symbolizing the link between Southwark Circle membership and increased life-satisfaction, is no mystery to us; from research in Sociology and Social Psychology⁴ we know that factors like increased Social Capital or perceived self-efficacy lead to higher life-satisfaction and ‘subjective’ well-being. Consequentially, we focus on finding out from members themselves whether membership leads to an increase in these factors. Early evidence, such as the following case study, points in this direction.

An example: Adele’s story

Adele is retired and lives alone, her friends reside on the other side of London. Because of an accident, she doesn’t go there to see them very often. She initially became a Southwark Circle member upon referral from a neighbour because she needed a plumber. After discovering the social events facilitated by Circle and suggested by members, she has attended gatherings on a monthly basis.

We used the Life Satisfaction scale to ask Adele about her experience with Southwark Circle. The question is: “All things considered, how satisfied are you with life as a whole nowadays?” (0-10, 0=not at all satisfied, 10=absolutely satisfied). Adele reported a significant increase in life satisfaction (7 to 7.5 = 7%) due to the regular outings with and contacts through Southwark Circle. She would like to see a few people more regularly and expects another increase in life satisfaction (7.5 to 8 = 6%) if she makes friends. We know that many other members have had similar experiences like Adele, and, once completed, the Southwark Circle Impact Assessment will give an exact number. Based on this, it will be possible to determine the comprehensive social impact of Southwark Circle’s work on an ongoing basis.

We are currently testing a new tool allowing us to measurement of the following capabilities (data as of May 2010):

⁴ For instance, the European Social Survey (ESS)

Category	Data Collection	In short	Example	% total members
Aspiration or Capability Unlocked	Self-reporting/ testimonials, observance, structured interviews	Could but wasn't	"Betty pushing Jean around in her wheelchair after reporting mobility problems"; Dorothy said, "getting help gave me confidence to fix things myself."	9%
Lifestyle changed		Change in ongoing behavior	Stan manages to stop smoking after being supported by Circle.	10%
Relationship initiated			Susan and Barbara meet at social event and then go shopping together.	8%
Skill acquired		Couldn't and now can	Robert learning from a helper how to operate a mobile phone, computer, etc.	12%

Appendix A: Service Request Breakdown

Service Request Monthly Breakdown				
Month	Total completed SR's	Token	Non-token	% of SR's using a token
May-09	3	3	0	100.0%
Jun-09	23	20	3	87.0%
Jul-09	22	21	1	95.5%
Aug-09	20	20	0	100.0%
Sep-09	41	41	0	100.0%
Oct-09	21	20	1	95.2%
Nov-09	23	23	0	100.0%
Dec-09	38	33	5	86.8%
Jan-10	41	34	7	82.9%
Feb-10	52	50	2	96.2%
Mar-10	71	62	9	87.3%
Apr-10	56	43	13	76.8%
May-10	57	40	17	70.2%
Jun-10	68	51	17	75.0%
Totals	536	461	75	

Non-Token Breakdown		
	Number of non token jobs	Percentage of non-token jobs
Recommendations (Of tradesperson)	22	29.33%
Signposting and Referral (To other orgs)	17	22.67%
Transport	13	17.33%
Life Admin	8	10.67%
Social (Non-Calendar)	5	6.67%
DIY	2	2.67%
Learning	2	2.67%
Miscellaneous	2	2.67%
Shopping and Errands	2	2.67%
Gardening	1	1.33%
Technology support and repair	1	1.33%
Personal Care	0	0.00%
Cleaning	0	0.00%
Decorating	0	0.00%
Sorting, moving and tidying	0	0.00%
Totals	75	

Token Breakdown		
	Number of token jobs	Percentage of token jobs
Cleaning	96	20.82%
DIY	85	18.44%
Gardening	83	18.00%
Learning	67	14.53%
Sorting, moving and tidying	38	8.24%
Technology support and repair	27	5.86%
Decorating	25	5.42%
Transport	13	2.82%
Life Admin	11	2.39%
Shopping and Errands	8	1.74%
Social (Non-Calendar)	4	0.87%
Miscellaneous	2	0.43%
Personal Care	2	0.43%
Recommendations (Of trades)	0	0.00%
Signposting and Referral (To	0	0.00%
Totals	461	

