



## 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, older people 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, low level care needs, 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 older people as they age. The social impact is an increase in quality of life, an improved sense of wellbeing and new relationships and acquaintances that lead to an increase in social capital. The actual impact, resulting in dramatic financial cost savings, includes longer independent living, and maintained levels of good mental health.

At the community level, the service also rebuilds the networks that enable greater local economic development, particularly in the areas of low level care. 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 (often hourly). Helpers may also be members, and our experience tells us that approximately 1/3 will be over 50 years of age themselves. These Helpers provide new services in new ways. They, with a sophisticated bespoke underlying IT software managing their tasks and time, enable a Circle to be entirely demand driven, not supplying anything unless it is asked for, and thus not having to maintain infrastructure, such as buildings and vehicles. This dramatically lowers the cost of service delivery.



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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 cost savings in the context of a challenging fiscal environment.

## Evidence to Date

Southwark Circle was launched in May 2009. In its first year it:

- Exceed all its membership targets by 15%
- Achieved estimated cost savings in the region of £275,000 (bear in mind cost savings increase in subsequent years);
- Maintained a mirroring cross section of members and helpers that directly reflect the ethnic diversity, and varied income levels of the population of Southwark;

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. But we do have a new measurement framework, based on real-time social capital metrics, that prove that members are significantly more active, physically and mentally, getting out more through more varied social activity, receiving care in totally new ways, and in better mental health, lowering GP visits, and such like.

## How to get one set up

Each Circle has a business plan, and this includes a robust cost saving argument and a plan for how to get to great even point in it's third year, meaning that it will require no further support from public funds, and continue to make savings. Each Circle is set up as a local social enterprise (Community Interest Company), and has its own managing director, that reports to a board, on which the local council will have representatives.

Participle can, free of charge, develop this business case for you, upon your request. We will then meet with you, and your teams to help you understand how we could develop a Circle in your area, getting all stakeholders on side, and developing the necessary case for its investment. Typically a Circle costs around £200k per year for three years, before it breaks even, with no further revenue funding. Typically this investment will be justified through cost savings made in the first 3 years, with a 6 fold return on investment by the end of year 5, depending on local factors.

For more information visit [www.southwarkcircle.com](http://www.southwarkcircle.com)

For contact on how to set one up in your area, please contact Hugo Manassei:  
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