Compassionate Communities, Reach Out is a pilot project in Northern Ireland funded by the local commissioning group. Using a public health approach it recognises that communities have the skills, knowledge, expertise and a role to play in end of life care.

Modern palliative care has been criticised with some arguing that it has led to the development of a model of care which relies heavily on medical expertise and sits within a framework more aligned with curative outcomes that are not achievable in palliative or end of life patients.

The project aims to build capacity within communities to support those living with advanced illness and frailty to reduce social isolation and to enable people to remain living at home and connected to their communities.

At its heart is a network of trained Compassionate Neighbours who provide weekly contact to people who have become isolated as a result of illness. It might be as simple as going for a cup of tea, enjoying a shared interest, doing a bit of shopping or a trip to the local community centre.

The project will be independently evaluated in terms of its impact on the health and well-being of volunteers, clients and carers and the need for primary health care services.

Compassionate Communities, Reach Out recognises that end of life care is a social as well as a medical issue and seeks to expand our model of health care to include communities as genuine partners – not simply as targets of service provision.

Key achievements in the first year are listed below:

- 27 volunteers recruited & trained
- 47 referrals
- 20 established relationships
- Referral pathways established leading to integrated working with Community Respiratory teams, Social Prescribing and hospital based social workers who are including Reach Out as part of the discharge arrangements for patients
- Awareness raising activities including a conference, art exhibition, website designed, constructed and live, a motion passed by Derry City and Strabane District Council in support of adopting the Compassionate City charter
- Effective links established with community groups and other partners including Derry Healthy Cities, Age Friendly Forum, U3A, Alzheimer’s Society, Health and Social Care professionals.

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