

1. In terms of interacting with older people what are you adding to your tool belt & why?

- Learning to sit, listen and absorb what people share with us and to treasure those stories, thoughts or feelings and acknowledging the person. Understanding more and adding empathy and compassion, cultural empathy so using their language, using songs that are relevant for them. Adding knowledge about the effects of ageing – for us to understand a bit more about dementia for instance.

2. What new connections in your thinking have you made? What have been your “Aha” moments?

- Circles of care – a resource from the United States which is helping congregations build up networks of care that reach out into the wider community. An earlier presentation referred to a Finnish study which also mentioned the circles of care. So there is some empirical evidence that this works and so we can take it back to our own contexts with the assurance that this can save peoples’ lives.
- In my earlier presentation I spoke about reductionism and the idea of warring “isms” – my “isms” must live, yours must die. But if you take away the “isms” we are all exactly on the same page in terms of the themes that have come through today. It is profound and unexpected that we are all on the same page.
- When people are going through the natural grief process with perhaps the diagnosis of cancer or perhaps the death of a beloved partner or perhaps changing circumstances in terms of physicality and moving through the grief process they have a time of being depressed which with good support, and connection and a sense of belonging will pass but because their age puts them in a stage where we might say “well, you could make a choice”. I am very struck by those ethical questions and will be thinking more about it. It is important in a place like this where there will be medical practitioners who will find themselves in that position with law changes.
- Many older people and those with dementia like to express themselves through artwork. What I need to find is a young volunteer to do some art work with them. I need some young 15 – 20 year old to come and connect with the older people and give them a sense of purpose and lift them from feelings of feeling useless.
- How come there is no government strategy for the prevention of suicide in people over 80 years of age?
- People like to express themselves through artwork and some people have been amazing artists. As an activities person working with people with dementia I need to find a volunteer to come and do some art work with them. I need one of those 15 – 20 year olds to come and connect with these older people and give them a sense of purpose and lift them from feeling useless if that’s what’s leading them to be suicidal. That would cultivate a bit of true belonging between young and old.

3. What is your definition of true belonging?

- First we introduced ourselves around the circle so that we began to belong together. Then some of us had a good conversation at the intersection between the Zen Buddhist approach with belonging in the sense of impermanence and the sense of incarnational faith which says actually this is who I am and Jesus Christ makes this a belonging space for me. The absolute connection and disconnection between those two points of view – we are all on the same page. Because actually either all of it makes sense or none of it does.

I am aware of mana whenua, coming home and the power of that piece of land for those people. Land and whenua.

4. How do we facilitate true belonging when working with vulnerable older people?

- Creating groups where people feel they belong and the environment can be made warm and caring. Groups where people participate to their own level and ability and they need to lead themselves as much as they can with us facilitating. We need to have these groups that enable people to belong because there are often issues such as transport that need to be addressed as well.
- We started with the balance between I am alone and I am not afraid to die and how if a person belongs they are no longer alone. So this breaks that balance.
- The feeling of belonging. Right at the beginning of the day we were asked what is your sense of belonging right now in different areas and we thought about family, my wife, my children, this space here, land, God and each of those areas evoked a different feeling and my sense of belonging is all of those things together. So when we think about older people who we are working with it's about being aware of the different areas that contribute to that feeling of belonging for them. It is not unimportant, and part of that is the extent to which they are engaged with each other. The extent to which they are engaged with their family, the extent to which they are engaged with the community that they are part of. It is all of those things so it's about becoming sensitive to what's contributing to that feeling of belonging or unbelonging.
- Here's a challenge: While there is a Minister of Loneliness in the UK there is a great opportunity for us to turn that around and advocate for a Minister of Belonging.

5. How can we cultivate a culture of true belonging?

- Do we really need to wait for Western individualistic culture to die out before it starts to become more collective and receptive to belonging?
- Dance and movement can unlock the person within. Some people have been amazing dancers in their lives they just may not be able to physically now. Reflecting back to someone – trying to understand and work with something they are talking about. Someone may share something large but rather than moving along and pretending we might not have

heard maybe reflecting back and unpacking it a little bit more and giving them room to speak may produce a gem that will be a key to what will help that person to feel like they belong. Accepting each other, our commonality, in spite of our differences, in spite of our ages, in spite of our countries. Acceptance helps with true belonging.

- The question comes under one umbrella and the word is time. Time to know the person not the facts. Who they love, what they love doing and in that time allowing silence so that we can actually hear their stories. Often we do too much talking when we are with people when we are trying to get to know them. Trust, appreciate the time factor as the older generation may not think as fast as some of us and inclusion: when they get our trust they feel included.
- It is important for residents with dementia to take part, to contribute, to play a role, to be valued, to matter. If we change our perspective on people that they are not just bodies to be washed and fed but the person may be someone's father, someone's brother, a man who was married. He is a human being and we need to connect and then we can start doing things together. That's how we can change the culture and so people can feel they belong to even a small facility where they have to be because of dementia. But it does not define them as human beings.
- A story was told illustrating how belonging is very important in passing and departure. After the death of a man on holiday in a remote location with his son, his family in Auckland were devastated. But part of the process for them to understand their father's and grandfather's passing was talking about the historic and cultural significance of the place he died and its connection to the waka their ancestors' arrived on. The man had actually died at "home". He didn't die in a car accident in Auckland or in a hospital in Auckland. There was no better place: he was at home.

His son who was with him when he died also felt uncertainty until it was discussed with him that his father had passed with his son – he didn't die with a stranger.

The point is belonging is very important in passing and departure. The family's mourning changed because of the story of the history of the place he died and its relationship with his ancestor who landed and departed to go back to Hawaiki. This understanding was very helpful for the family for the grieving process.

6. What happens when you are not true to yourself?

- If we can't be absolutely honest with ourselves and know who we are, how can we make trustworthy connections, because our residents see through it.

7. How will you live the message of belonging?

- Listening to others, being open and inclusive, creating space for others to come into, sharing, providing a hospitable and beautiful environment, accepting others and ourselves, being compassionate to ourselves and others – if we don't love ourselves it's quite hard to love others.

- The speaker spoke about the coalition to end loneliness that has been formed with Aged Concern executive staff but there are about 8 groups – but anyone can speak into it. It is planned to rally government. Notes from the conference will be written up and sent through to them including the major themes from the conference – particularly the importance of belonging.
- The speaker referred to the two questions posed in an earlier presentation. When you answer those two questions and add the part that we have all been taught growing up: if you know who you are and where you are from, you stand steadfast and you do things correct, right and proper in all the things you do. This is from our ancestors handed down to us.
- The speaker spoke about Aged Connect which aims to add to this field of belonging. Remember those who are couples living a long time, they still have a right to be intimate. Those who are married or whatever the relationship is, couples belong to each other and should feel the right of belonging goes on to the end of life. So people in facilities like this should enable that deeper sense of belonging to go on.
- New opportunities for intimacy is something we need to be looking at and encouraging in healthy ways.