

MATTERING

Foundations for Flourishing Lives



Lucien Paul Stanfield

Photos by Claire Lawrie

FLOURISHING LIVES

Some years ago, we were funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation to examine what made some services for older people particularly successful. There were many conclusions and indicators of best practice and a discussion of these can be found in the full Flourishing Lives Report, published at www.flourishinglives.org. There was however one stand-out quality, one clear difference in services that people felt to be among the best, and it was all to do with friendship.

The Flourishing Lives Coalition will soon number over 200 charities from London and beyond, from small day centres to national arts, culture and sports organisations. At the heart of this coalition is a focus on a relationship-based approach, where people feel heard and feel that they matter to one another. It is from this basis that genuine friendships, and the most positive outcomes, seem to emerge.

This booklet has been produced to help articulate what this approach is, why it works, and how services might be improved across a wide range of sectors, not only in services for older people.

I am very grateful for the original support of the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and The Mercers' Company, as well as the current support of The City Bridge Trust, The Cripplegate Foundation, The Islington Development Partners, and the teams and members of both The Flourishing Lives Coalition and Claremont Project, without whose help and input this work would not have progressed.

Lucien Paul Stanfield

Chair, Flourishing Lives Coalition & CEO, Claremont Project
September, 2017

Author: Lucien Paul Stanfield - lucien@claremont-project.org

Photos: Claire Lawrie © 2017

All the featured photos are of Islington residents and Chapel Market traders.

For more about Claire's award-winning work, please visit www.clairelawrie.com.

Printer: Absolute Print www.absoluteprint.com

Printed on FSC Certified paper

Booklet printed from unrestricted free reserves by Claremont Project (Islington),
Charity Reg 1070611

“Feeling that we matter is fundamental not only to our self-esteem and sense of being part of society but also to our health, happiness, and longevity. Let's build and redesign services to reflect the principle of mattering to one another, rather than feeling bound to ways of working which devalue us.



WE NEED TO MATTER

“The deepest principle in human nature is the craving to be appreciated.” William James

We live in a world which seems increasingly coloured by disillusionment, loneliness, alienation, factionalism, and failing political, economic, and ecological systems. There is a sense for some, if not for many, that their lives - who they are - does not matter. Dysfunctional attempts to feel seen, heard, and to really count range from unsustainable consumption (fashion, food, cars, goods, etc.), to the bitter rage of terrorism.

On the other hand, we also live in a world filled with loving and enriching relationships, as well as systems which try to help the complex politics of need, and people, organisations, and companies working ethically and sustainably.

This booklet is about why we need to matter to one another, not just because that is the right thing to do, but because we have evolved to be that way. We are ignoring or defying it to our own and the whole planet's detriment.

The booklet explores what mattering is - what it looks like, sounds like, and feels like. It looks at the science behind our need to matter, especially how our brains and bodies as a whole are geared up to be essentially social and inter-dependent.

At the heart of mutual mattering is learning to listen to each other, becoming aware of our own biases, and working in ways where meaningful relationships, and all people, count.

WAYS IN WHICH WE MATTER

gender, age, attractiveness, ethnicity,
employment, education, physical ability,
knowledge, skills, sexuality, wealth, class,
ideology, health, religion, values...

In what ways do you feel you matter, to yourself and to others? And how would you feel if you felt you didn't matter at all?

Mattering is part of our lives. From baby to high schooler and beyond, we need to matter to others. We make decisions every day about the clothes we will wear and how we look because we will be seen and judged. We check each other out all the time for moods, intentions, and social and sexual cues. We choose values and ways of behaving which place us in social groups of shared "mattering".

But there are times and circumstances in our lives when many of the things which help us matter to others is challenged.

Not having a work life can rob us not only of money but of colleagues and a sense of purpose. Not having a family or friends, not being physically able, or being sick or depressed can be isolating. Society's own judgements about us - its sexism, ageism, racism, and other "ism's" - can also make us feel we are "less than", that we do not matter as much.



“ HOW DO YOU FEEL YOU MATTER? HOW DOES IT FEEL WHEN SOMEONE REALLY LISTENS TO YOU? ”



Perhaps the ultimate in not mattering is the removal even of our name. Primo Levi, a survivor of the Nazi extermination camps and widely-acclaimed author, noted of the camps, “For the first time we became aware that our language lacks words to express this offense, the demolition

of man... They will even take away our name.”

Consider the following extract from the diary of Lieutenant Colonel Mervin Willett Gonin DSO, who was among the first British soldiers to liberate Bergen-Belsen in 1945. The source is The Imperial War Museum,

“It was shortly after the British Red Cross arrived, though it may have no connection, that a very large quantity of lipstick arrived. This was not at all what we men wanted, we were screaming for hundreds and thousands of other things and I don’t

know who asked for lipstick. I wish so much that I could discover who did it, it was the action of genius, sheer unadulterated brilliance. I believe nothing did more for these internees than the lipstick. Women lay in bed with no sheets and no nightie but with scarlet red lips, you saw them wandering about with nothing but a blanket over their shoulders, but

with scarlet red lips. I saw a woman dead on the post mortem table and clutched in her hand was a piece of lipstick. At last someone had done something to make them individuals again, they were someone, no longer merely the number tattooed on the arm. At last they could take an interest in their appearance. That lipstick started to give them back their humanity.”

- How do you feel you matter?
- What aspects of your character are you proud of?
- What’s your favourite item of clothing?
- What does it feel like when you don’t matter to someone?



THE SCIENCE OF MATTERING

Biological co-regulation is at the heart of our social being. We need each other to flourish and a barometer of this is a sense that we matter...



We are not by nature solitary individuals. Even basic bodily functions, like breathing, heart rate, immune system, body temperature, and digestion are socially intertwined, not just occasionally but most of the time. It is called biological co-regulation and works at many levels - how we smell to each other, our facial expressions and micro-movements, our voices, and all the other ways in

“ WE ARE NOT BY NATURE SOLITARY INDIVIDUALS

which we consciously and unconsciously communicate. Whether we know it or not, we play a part in keeping others and ourselves in an appropriate range of physical function and health.

Emotional co-regulation is a form of this and can be seen in many relationships - between parents and their children and between close adults. For example,

a baby will cry and in healthy circumstances, a parent will provide care and soothing. Consistent positive care over time will result in the baby understanding that their distress is manageable and that all will be well.

Levels of cortisol (the stress hormone) will reduce, breathing will settle, and the baby will enter into rest or play. This is the basis of a secure attachment.



“

FEELING THAT WE MATTER CAN DETERMINE NOT JUST OUR HAPPINESS BUT OUR HEALTH AND LIFESPAN.



Adults provide similar co-regulation - a partner soothing the other during a stressful event (Google Coan's "Lending Hand" experiments for a graphic example of this) or the heady mix of dopamine, norepinephrine and oxytocin released in the experience of love and lust, which can contribute to deeper attachments.

There is now a large body of science behind co-regulation, not least the work of Bowlby and Ainsworth, who established attachment theory, and Porges, who made the link between three autonomic systems and our physical and psychological states, processes and health. Advances in brain scanning have led to an explosion of research

in the field of social biological psychology. There is another, more shocking body of science and it relates to how our health and even how long we live is connected to the extent to which we feel we matter. This is the work founded by Sir Michael Marmot in his Whitehall One and Two studies. Marmot was interested in what determined health

and longevity. Many things determine these, including wealth, education, diet, lifestyle, and genetics. But Marmot's shocking conclusion was that *the most important* determinant of health was social - how important you felt in your peer group. Over and over again he found that on average those at the high end

of any social group (from gate porters to Nobel Prize winners) outlived those at the bottom end of the same group. He further concluded that societies where the social gradient was flattest, where everyone mattered more equally, were those where there were no huge differences in health

and mortality. We are relational to our core, our health depends on others, and feeling that we matter can determine not just our happiness but our lifespan.



“

THE MOST IMPORTANT GENERAL DETERMINATE OF HEALTH IS SOCIAL - THE DEGREE TO WHICH YOU FEEL YOU MATTER TO OTHERS



WE THRIVE WHEN WE FEEL LOVED...

FREDERIK'S TERRIBLE EXPERIMENT

In about 1282, a monk by the name of Salimbene di Adam, started writing his *Chronicles*, covering the years 1167-1287, as well as *The Twelve Calamities of Emperor Frederick II*. It is from these writings that we come to know of several stories relating to Frederick II (1194-1250). Frederick was King of Sicily and a Holy Roman Emperor, governing large areas of Italy and Germany in the Middle Ages.

Of relevance here is a terrible experiment said to have been carried out on newborn babies. Wanting to learn what language would have been given to Adam and Eve by God, Frederick took infants and restricted human interaction with them to the bare minimum. Foster mothers were allowed only to feed and bathe the children "but in no ways to prattle or speak with them; for he would

have learnt whether they would speak the Hebrew language (which had been the first), or Greek, or Latin, or Arabic, or perchance the tongue of their parents of whom they had been born."

Tragically, Salimbene continues, "he laboured in vain, for the children could not live without clappings of the hands, and gestures, and gladness of countenance, and blandishments."

Similar stories of the effects of physical and emotional deprivation emerged from Romania after the fall of Nicolae Ceausescu. In 1989, it became clear that there were over 170,000 children in Romania's impoverished orphanages. Without stimulation, care, touch, and attention, many children had either died or been affected by life-long physical and psychological effects, including poor brain growth.

EMPATHY & MIRROR NEURONS

In the 1980s and 90's, Rizzolatti and colleagues were looking to see which areas of macaque monkeys' brains fired when the monkeys did things like reach for, or bite, a peanut. While they were doing these experiments, they noticed something unexpected. The same neurons which fired when monkeys did these things also fired when the monkeys watched other monkeys doing the same tasks. The monkeys were in some sense experiencing the same thing as each other. These neurons were dubbed "mirror neurons" and a great deal of research has since been conducted, including on humans, which seems to corroborate their existence. Although research is on-going, it points to a neurological basis for empathy which could be a foundation stone in our being able to empathise, learn from others, anticipate others' actions, and make effective bonds with them. The first journal paper was in *Experimental Brain Research* (Vol. 91, No. 1,

pages 176-180, 1992) and in 1996, in a paper in *Brain* (Vol. 119, No. 2, pages 593-609), they dubbed their discovery "mirror neurons." In 2007, V. S. Ramachandran, a well-known mirror neuron researcher, wrote, "I call these 'empathy neurons' or 'Dalai Lama neurons' for they are dissolving the barrier between self and others." ("The Neurology of Self-Awareness", *Edge.org*, 10th Anniversary Essay.)

- What function might empathy have for us?
- Just because we feel empathy, is our feeling always the same or similar to the other person's? How do we know?
- What would life be like to show no empathy? To not smile when smiled at, for example?



DOING THINGS BETTER

“ Mattering isn’t just about being seen and heard. It is about being experienced and cared about empathetically.



If we are social to our core and if mattering is the most important factor affecting our health and happiness, we need companies and organisations, and the people working within them, to work in ways that meet those needs. But how often is that the case at the moment?

So often we can feel like we are just objects of a business process or organisational procedures, whether it is buying something from a shop, visiting a busy doctor, or trying to sort out a tricky issue with the local council. If we don’t quite understand the process or have needs outside the normal boundaries of that process, we are made to feel even worse - not just an object but an irritating or difficult one. We are de-humanised by these processes, even when we manage them without practical

difficulty. We do not want to be just another patient, shopper, resident, service user, or beneficiary - it robs us of our dignity and full identity - our “mattering”. These services can be said to be simply “transactional”.

For a long time, many organisations, especially in the public sector, have used the term “person-centred”. It was an attempt to recognise the other person as a person. However, it is quite possible and perhaps quite common for someone to be on the receiving end of a “person-centred” approach and feel that they matter less than the person delivering it - a far cry from Carl Rogers’ intention for the term and its approach. Mattering is more than focussing on an individual.

If it’s more than focussing on an

individual, what is it? What is the difference between a Doctor listening intently but still seeming distant and aloof and one who you feel really cares about you? A large part of the answer is *empathy*. Empathy is at play when we flinch when a toddler falls over, feel joy when we see people reunite, or revulsion when we see a gameshow contestant eating something horrible. It’s experiencing another person’s experience as our own. It’s different from sympathy, which is experiencing their life as just theirs and pitying it. Mattering isn’t just about being seen and heard. It is about being experienced and cared about empathetically. In contrast to transactional approaches, this is a Relational Approach.

But can one do this in a work setting? How?

THE RELATIONAL APPROACH

“ People want to feel they matter... even before they care about getting something done

If empathy is essential to interactions where people feel that they matter, and feeling that we matter is essential to our health, happiness, and longevity, how do we design and operate our services accordingly? The key thing is that many people want to feel they matter, that you care about them, even before they care about getting something done. Furthermore, if they don't experience accurate empathy, they can feel "less than" and become disengaged

or antagonistic. Assuming how another person feels and thinks without first trying to understand them can be disastrous. Each of us interprets the world in our own ways and these interpretations and experiences shape our values, opinions, and decisions. There are two broad aspects to this. The first is understanding ourselves, including our values, our ways of seeing and being in the world, how we come across to different people, and how we want to feel we matter ourselves. The second is how

we go about trying to understand others so that we can connect with them accurately and empathetically, and they with us. The ABCDE's of the Relational Approach are some fundamental building blocks for this.

A is for Awareness: This is awareness of ourselves and others - what we are feeling, what our body language is doing, and how we are being with other people. Sometimes we don't know that the way we are being

has unintended consequences for others (who might see you as dominant or submissive, for example) and sometimes our identity raises issues for others that may surprise or anger us (assumptions some men might have about women or some people's beliefs about age, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, for example).

B is for Bias, Baggage and Bracketing! Bracketing is the ability and skill of knowing one's own biases, baggage, beliefs, judgements, and ways of thinking about things and being able to suspend them for a while to listen to the other person. It is avoiding saying, "I know exactly how you feel." It is also the ability to suspend biases that the other person may have about you. Sometimes we are unaware of our own biases and these are called "blind spots".

C is for Care: Care is about you feeling that the other person matters and wanting in some way to matter to them too. Care is about listening without judgement and without assuming that something is important to them. For example, if they tell you that their cat died, the tap is always dripping, they have bone aches, and they like ice cream, which is the most important? Do you make that judgement or do they? This is the skill of horizontalisation or equalisation - not deciding for the person which thing is most and least important and maintaining an openness to what they are bringing to you.

D is for Description: An excellent way to hear more about what someone is saying is to ask for more description from them, "Can you describe that

a bit more, please", "What was that like for you?", "What colour was it?", etc. It opens up the subject being raised, gives you a better sense of how they are experiencing something, and gives the speaker more of an understanding of their own experience. There are a range of active listening skills which can help in this process.

E is for Empathy: As you begin to understand the other person through the above processes, you will begin to be able to feel accurate and useful empathy. Empathy is helped by eye contact and other body language and can't easily be faked - hundreds of micro-expressions in the face tell us a great deal about how the other person is being, including if they are insincere. Empathy is primarily about feelings and less about thoughts or facts.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

TRANSACTIONAL	RELATIONAL
You feel like an object (to be processed by a system) - you may be given a reference number	You feel like a unique and valued human, with your own feelings and name
You feel talked down to, usually by someone being "professional"; or you talk down to them	You feel like there's equality and mutual respect
You feel listened to but not cared about or understood	You feel cared about (there's real empathy), listened to, and understood in the way you want to be understood
You feel invisible and ignored	You are noticed and someone positively engages with you
There are announcements of delays on your train line but no information about why, how long the delay might be, or what you should expect; staff are very defensive	There is a heart-felt apology and explanation and if they don't know what's happened, they say so - they sound like your friend is making the announcement to you rather than a "professional"
Check-out person serves you without looking at you, disengaged.	Check out person says hello, makes eye contact, and shows interest in you - chatting
School teacher thinks they know what's good for you but has no idea who you really are or your circumstances	Teacher takes time and effort to know you and your situation and discusses things with you as more of an equal
Your carer comes in for 10 minutes a day to clean, etc., and is always in a rush, barely notices you	Your carer comes in and explains that they have a set amount of time and asks how you would like to spend it
At work you feel like a cog in a machine; there is no soul	At work you feel you can be "you" - you are not just an employee role and that you have a meaningful, in some ways irreplaceable part to play

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Q: This is all very well but isn't it exhausting? How can you be relational all the time?

A: Yes, listening attentively and with empathy can quickly lead to either burn-out or switching off. Services need to be designed so that people get enough time away from the demands of the "front of house" to work on other tasks - two hours on "front", one hour on "other", for example. Hiring people who only want to work short shifts (to fit in with their other commitments) might be helpful and people working as "tag-teams" might relieve unrelenting contexts. This kind of redesign might mean radical change for a service or only minor realignments.

Q: Clients/customers can raise some really difficult issues and if I am really connecting with them I am worried I will feel overwhelmed. What can I do?

A: Being able to set and maintain boundaries about our own issues and time are critical in looking after ourselves. Team meetings are also important, as are self-reflective practice meetings with peers, external supporters or supervisors. Such practices are common in professions such as psychology/psychotherapy, social work, and nursing. The Flourishing Lives Coalition is in the process of facilitating the setting up of independent peer-to-peer supervision groups. These will be especially helpful to freelancers, people working for organisations unable to afford their own reflective practice groups, and those who might find it difficult sharing personal issues with their work colleagues.

Q: Isn't this just saying that the customer is always right?

A: Not at all. It is about listening to, trying to understand, and genuinely care about customers. You may have to tell them that they have misunderstood something, give them bad news, or tell them that they are treating you disrespectfully. If they want to feel that they matter, it is a two-way street.

Q: How do I learn more about the ABCDE's of the relational approach?

A: Flourishing Lives offers training programmes where these skills are taught. For details, see the web site and the section later in this booklet.



RELATIONAL APPROACH TRAINING

We offer a one day CPD Accredited training course called “Mattering: An Introduction to the Relational Approach”.

The course is designed for people at any level working in charity and public sector services and provides a framework and skill set to develop effective and genuine interpersonal connections.

The training expands and develops all the material touched on in this booklet and includes numerous short workshops on the ABCDE’s of the Relational Approach. These are aimed at illustrating and embedding the theoretical material, as well as developing participants’ self-awareness and awareness of others. Exercises include skills building in active listening and understanding body language, as well as exploring how relationship dynamics are formed and developed.

The course is very down-to-earth and looks at the realities and challenges of work settings. There is time for discussion of the many benefits and challenges of working relationally and of how to work safely and responsibly. The trainings are also excellent opportunities for people to share their work situations with others and find support, inspiration, and knowledge from peers.

Courses are run in groups of up to ten people and with fees on a sliding scale, based on the size of organisation represented.

To find out more and to book your place, please contact Lucien Paul Stanfield and the Flourishing Lives team via our web site, www.flourishinglives.org, or call us on 020 7689 8091. We very much look forward to you joining the movement, learning from you about your situation and experiences, and sharing our own with you.

WHAT PEOPLE SAY ABOUT THE TRAINING

"Excellent, professional, interesting, inclusive and patient... well-paced and achievable... I felt it was very well organised"

"I learned to listen more effectively, and set boundaries to ensure I don't experience burnout"

"I learned that I need to make an effort to realise if I am projecting my own self onto someone else when listening. Trying to notice and control bias..."

"Listening, practicing, and feedback opportunities felt well spaced"

"I will definitely use some of the techniques to actively listen more effectively... I liked that I was included - a mutual process"

"The trainer was down to earth, he allowed time to help the team all understand... His understanding in the group sessions was so helpful. 5 out of 5. More please!"

"The most interesting talk I have had in a long period of time. I found it very helpful for the new journey I am starting on and I am practising the approach in my everyday life. Thank you."





www.flourishinglives.org
www.claremont-project.org

