

Seeing the whole picture:
a story about knowledge sharing in a
community health & social care team



by Vicky Ward

with illustrations by
James McKay

This story is based on data collected by observing the work of a community health and social care team during an independent research project funded by the National Institute for Health Research. The characters named in the story are fictional and not based on any one individual.

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This story is about the Riverford community health and social care team. The team is made up of lots of different health and social care professionals like nurses, social workers and physiotherapists. Their job is to work together to look after people living in the local community. This is a story about what their knowledge sharing looks like.

The story is designed to illustrate a number of lessons about how groups of people share knowledge. At these points you will find a box containing a short commentary and some questions which could be used to encourage knowledge sharing. At the end of the story you will find a short summary of these lessons and some further details about the questions.



This is Bill. Bill has lots of health and other problems and the Riverford team are trying to help him by offering different kinds of help and support.

But Bill is like a lot of the people that the Riverford team look after and often turns down the things he is offered.



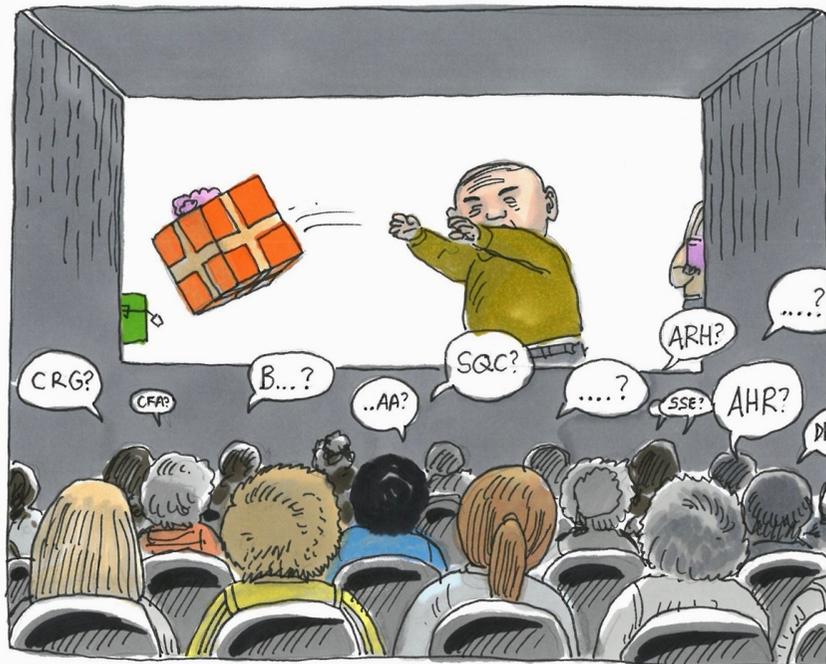
Groups of people are able to share knowledge when they identify that the situation they are trying to deal with (Bill's refusal of help) is similar to previous situations, but it can be difficult to identify these similarities. Questions to help include "have we dealt with a situation like this before?" and "what do we know about how to address this situation?"



The Riverford team talk about Bill and why he is turning things down a lot. But everyone seems to see things slightly differently.

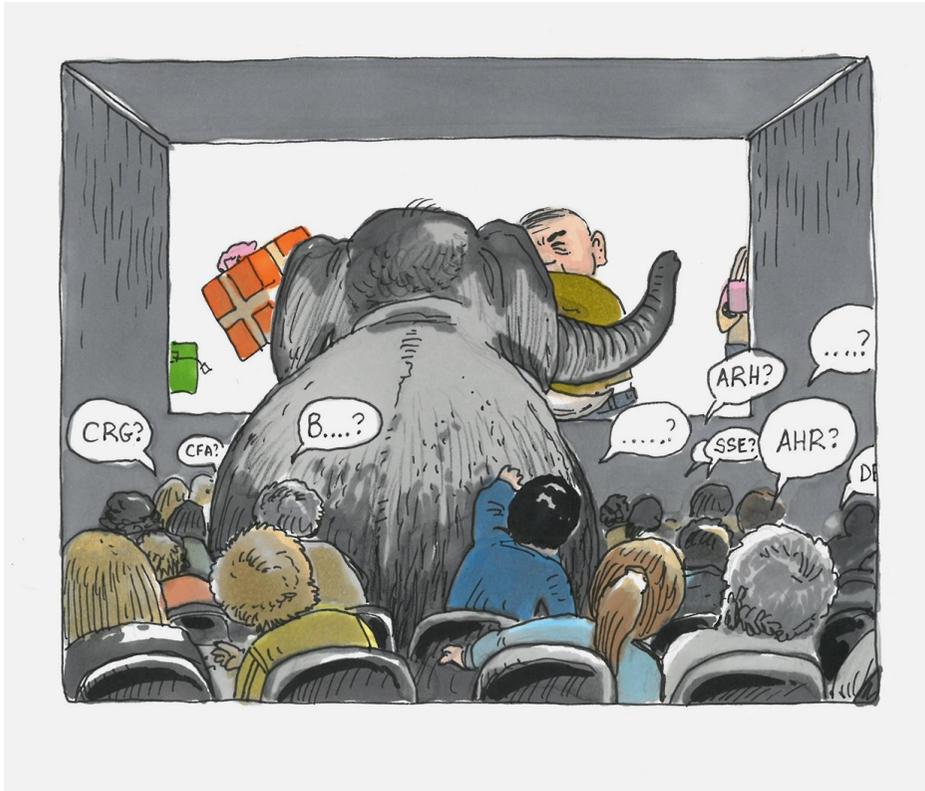
It's almost as if they are looking through different cameras. Each camera is focused on a different part of the picture so everyone ends up with a slightly different idea about why Bill is turning things down and what to do about it.

Different viewpoints and perspectives are a valuable source of knowledge when groups of people are trying to work out what to do in a challenging situation (like how to help Bill). It can be difficult for groups of people to bring these perspectives together. Questions to help include “what is the issue we need to address?”, “what do we know about this issue?” and “do we all think the same?”



People in the team often struggle when it comes to putting the whole picture together. Sometimes they can't describe what they can see to each other very well, either because it's difficult to find the right words or because they are talking in jargon or code, or simply because no one is really hearing what they are saying.

Knowledge comes in lots of different forms, but some of these (like thoughts and emotions) are more difficult to articulate and share. People also often use labels or categories as a way of sharing knowledge about a complex situation (like Bill's), but it can be difficult for others to work out what these labels mean. Questions to help include "how do we capture what we know?" and "how do we share what we know?"



Sometimes a whole part of the picture is completely missing because someone is standing in the way. It's a bit like having a silent elephant in the room. They can see why Bill is turning things down and what to do about it, but they don't say anything.

They probably don't mean to get in the way, but they're not really listening to what other people are saying and so don't realise that they are the only one who can see that part of the picture.

Curiosity and interest are important parts of how and why people get involved in sharing knowledge. Listening to one another and asking questions demonstrates curiosity and can encourage people to contribute their knowledge to a group discussion.

This story has illustrated a number of important lessons about knowledge sharing. In summary, the Riverford team are able to share knowledge with one another when they identify the similarities between situations.

The team face a number of challenges when trying to share knowledge. They find it difficult to articulate and bring their different perspectives together and sometimes struggle to understand the labels that others are using. They also find it difficult to listen to and elicit knowledge from one another.

One way of dealing with these and other challenges is to ask questions like those shown in the boxes on the previous pages. These questions have been designed to help groups of people to share knowledge when they are dealing with difficult situations where there are no clear answers (such as how to help someone like Bill). The questions focus on helping groups of people to think and talk about their main area of concern, what they do and don't know and how they will access and use knowledge to address the situation they are dealing with.

For details of where you can find out more about these knowledge sharing questions please turn the page.

About the author

Vicky Ward is an academic from the University of St Andrews. Her work focuses on how people share knowledge with each other and how they can be supported to do so.

Between October 2014 and November 2016 she looked at how knowledge was shared during case management meetings in community health and social care teams. She also developed and tested a set of questions designed to help these teams to share knowledge.

To find out more about the project and download resources please visit

<https://mobilisinghealthandsocialcareknowledge.wp.st-andrews.ac.uk/>

Email

vlw4@st-andrews.ac.uk

Twitter

@VLWard