

Mapping the spread and the quality of social relationships among older people with dementia in an eight bedded supported living unit

Paul Webb*, Research Officer, Praxis Care Belfast.

St Paul's Court (Lisburn, County Down)

St Paul's Court is a supported living unit for people with dementia. The unit enables older people who require housing support and care to live in the community.

Aims of the Study

The evaluation aims to map the spread and quality of social relationships of eight clients who moved into the unit in February 2009.

The evaluation forms part of a more comprehensive evaluation of the unit. Details of the wider study are available from the British Society of Gerontology web site¹

Consent

The aims of the study were explained to each client so that an informed decision about participation in the project could be made.

Clients who wished to participate were asked to sign a consent form. Three of the eight clients agreed to participate.

Methods

In depth qualitative interviews were conducted with each client in order to gauge the extent and quality of their social networks.

Clients were interviewed two weeks after admission (T1) and three months later (T2). Clients were asked to talk about the people who they interact with and the places where they meet so that each person and place could be categorized by using one of eight domains.

Figures One and Two map the social network for one client. The inner circle and segments represent T1 and the outer circle and segments represent T2.

Results

- Cohesive sub-groups have been preserved following admission to the unit with contacts being retained within the family.

- Contacts within the Culture domain have been extended as new relationships have been made.

“Oh we are keeping in contact with them. I phone them up all the time. They are the best craic.”

- An emergent social group may be appearing as there is evidence of group cohesiveness between clients within the unit.

“It's just like home from home. Just one big family.”

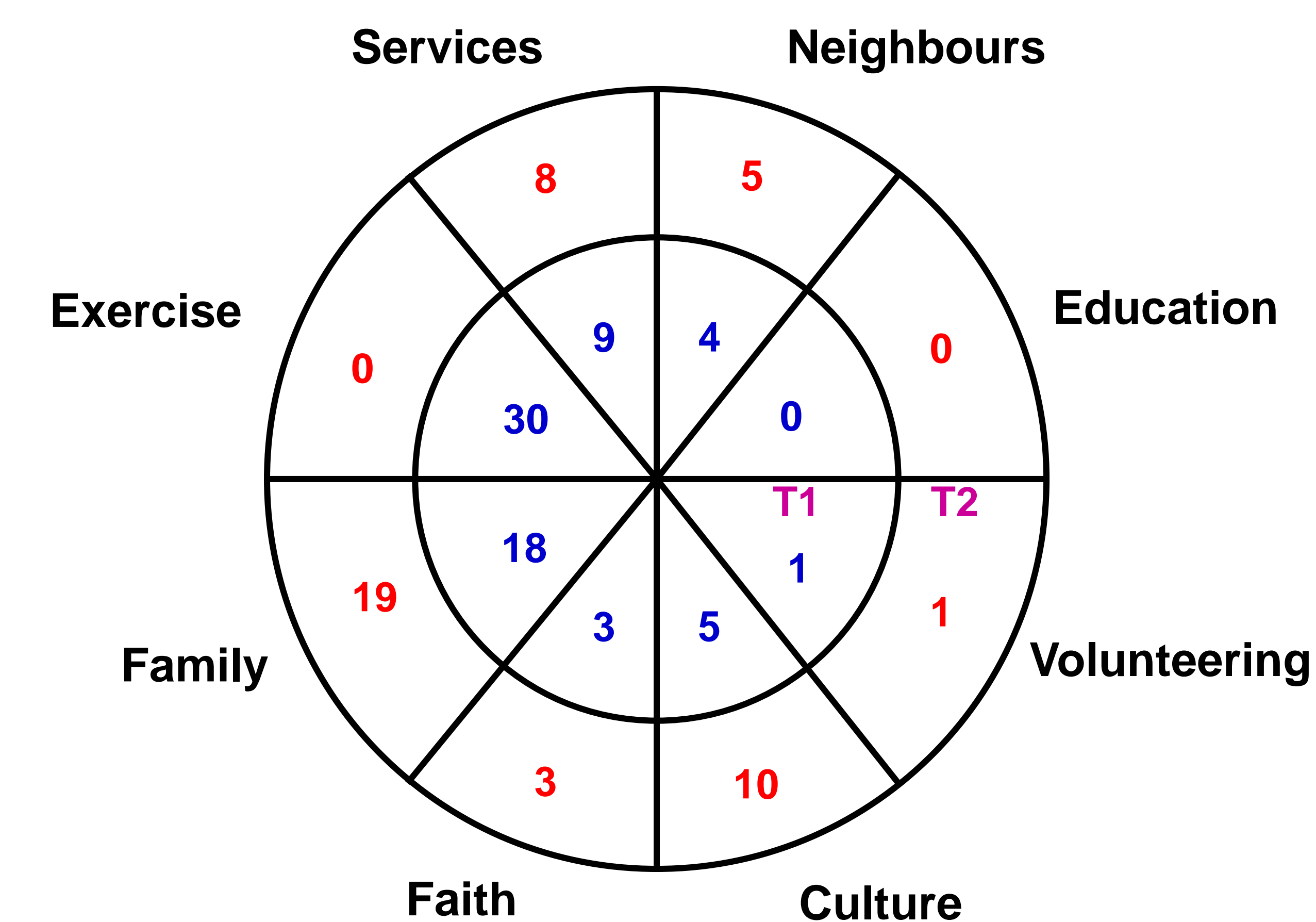


Fig 1: People who client meets split by domain

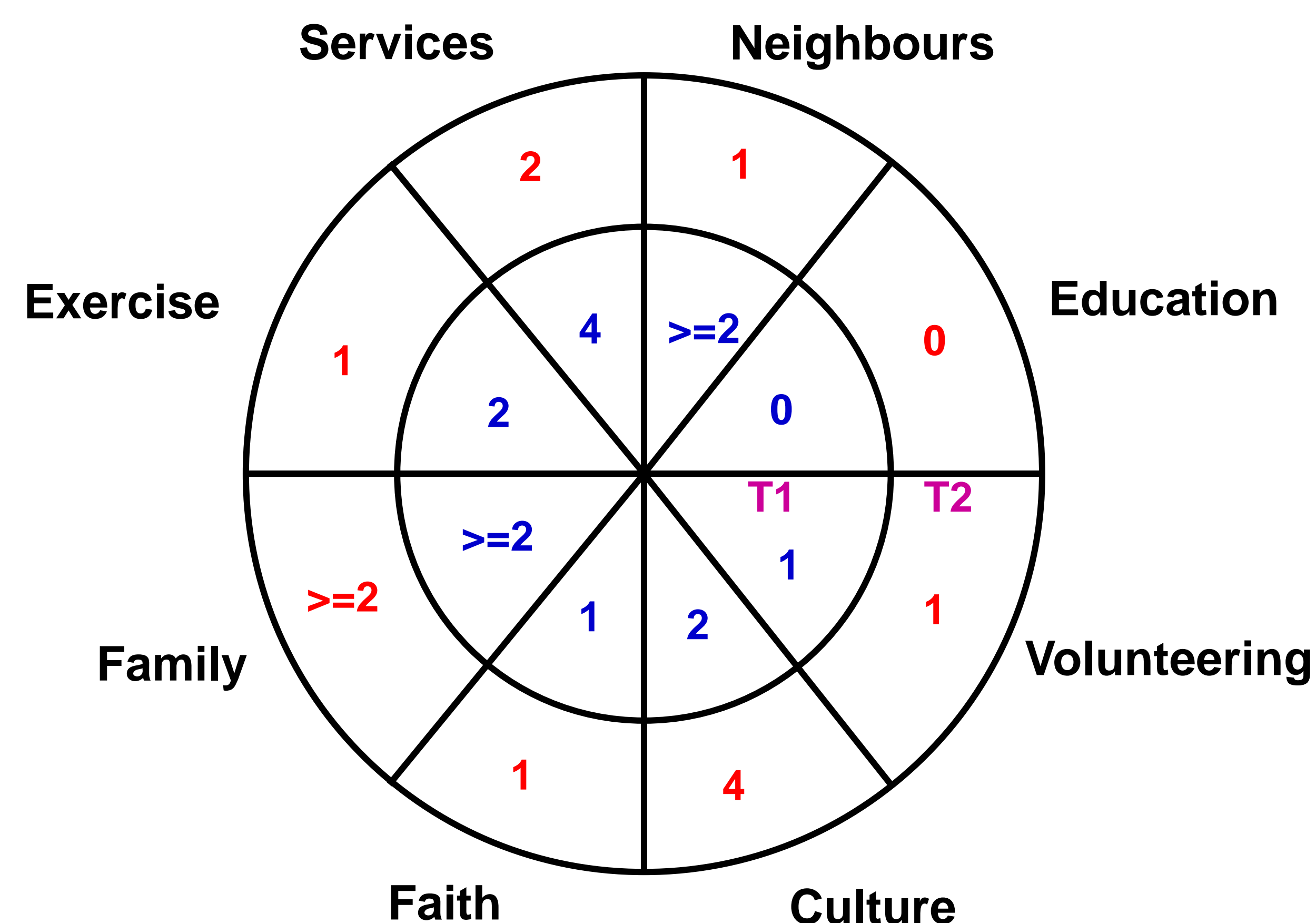


Fig 2: Places where client meets people split by domain

Discussion

- An improved spread of people across the domains may be the objective of researchers (Hacking & Bates 2008²) but the client may be content with a network which is cohesive but restricted to a few domains.

- Although spread may grow, the number of connections which the client can maintain may be limited.

- There may therefore be an inverse relationship between the size of the network and the number of connections between a client and others within it (de Nooy et al 2005³).

- Service Providers therefore need to provide opportunities for their clients to expand their social networks in order to allow clients to make informed choices.

¹ http://www.britishgerontology.org/09newsletter3/policy_practice4.asp

² Hacking, S., Bates, P. (2008) The Inclusion Web. MHRJ. Volume 13, Issue 2 pp 4 – 15.

³ Nooy, W. D., Mrvar, A., Batagelj, V. (2007) Exploratory Social Network Analysis with Pajek. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.

*Contact: paulwebb@praxiscare.org.uk.

*Web: <http://www.praxiscare.org.uk>