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. Volunteer involvement is geared towards providing companionship and encouraging the person out of the house. 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.

The process is fairly straightforward for patients to do, with each cast taking approximately 20 minutes. We use alginate powder for the mould as it is safe to use and allows for a certain amount of flexibility. Patients (and their family if desired) then place their hand into the mould for approximately two-three minutes. The mould is then ready for the plaster of Paris.

After two-three hours we can remove the mould. The cast is finely detailed showing veins, lines, even body hair can be detected. We have even had couples asking if engagement and wedding rings can remain on as they are often key to the finished result.

Patients come with their own reasons for having a hand cast. They capture that moment in time and create that special memory to cherish for years to come. This service can be important to patients and families as they prepare to say goodbye. One of our patients said “It has helped me emotionally - knowing that my hand will still be there for my husband to hold, even when I’m no longer around”.

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We began making hand casts approximately two years ago after a patient came through our doors asking if this was at all possible, as her daughter still wanted the opportunity to be able to hold her mother’s hand after she had died.

The process is not just about making an impression of their hand, it is symbolic of who they are, as the hand can be the most tactile and intimate part of the body.

Patients who come to us for a hand cast all have huge strength of spirit and character. They come at a time when their lives are being tested beyond their control.