



Report on Day Services for people with learning or physical disabilities

Healthwatch Staffordshire is the independent consumer voice for local people, championing quality health and social care and ensuring that the patient voice is heard by commissioners and providers of services across Staffordshire. We gather the views of the public and raise awareness of key concerns and issues that affect health and social care services as experienced by the patient / consumer. We focus on finding out what Staffordshire residents think is working well or not working well in health and social care and we work with other organisations to influence change. We recommend improvements and highlight examples of good practice.

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Almost without exception, we found that the services we visited were of high quality, providing life enhancing activities for people using the services. People's experience of these services was vital to their wellbeing, providing community, friendship, occupational activity, learning, life and sometimes work experience.

Without exception we found that the management and staff of the services to be passionate and caring. They knew their clients well and consideration was made of clients individual needs and abilities and the support provided to clients was professional, but with a very human touch.

We found services that had sensory rooms and provided therapies to enhance the wellbeing of their clients.

We visited farm based projects with emphasis being on growing food and ornamental plants and animal husbandry.

We visited sessional services based in Leisure Centres which provided very low cost inclusive sports and also offered rebound therapy. It was really heartwarming to see clients of complex needs services attending these sessions, showing that it is not always about the money - these people were able to assess a rewarding experience, available to all, whatever their level of need, for just a few pounds cost, although they did have their one to one support with them to enable participation.



Artwork by Catherine Care (household sponge technique)

With regard to people making use of the services, they were very welcoming to our representatives and were keen, where possible, to tell us of their experience. It was abundantly clear that these services were a lifeline to people, providing company, opportunity, learning and life skills.

Healthwatch Staffordshire would like to thank all the staff and people using these services for making us welcome and sharing their experiences with us. It allowed us an insight into what is available, what is important to people and the high quality of these services.





Services we visited

Able Too , Everyone Active Meadowside Leisure Centre, Burton on Trent
Allendales, Newcastle under Lyme
Aspire, Stafford
Briars Barn. Polesworth, Tamworth
Cannock Complex Needs Service, Cannock
Care First, Tamworth
Catherine Care, Norton Canes
Chase Aqua Rural Enterprise (CARE), Penkridge
DE Healthcare – The Hub, Uttoxeter
Elite CIC, Chesterton, Newcastle under Lyme
Elite Supported Living, Leek (now called Aspect), Leek
EJN Care Solutions ‘The Farm’, Penkridge
The Independent Learning Centre (The ILC), Burton on Trent
Kingsgrove Care Solutions, Talke Pits
Lichfield Complex Needs Service, Lichfield
Moorlands Complex Needs Service, Leek
New Directions Support, Stafford
Oak Tree Farm, Hilderstone, Near Stone
Options for Life, Burton on Trent
Shaw trust, Eccleshall
Trinity Skills for Life, Stone
Upper Moreton Rural Activities, Wolseley Bridge

There are numerous other services operating within Staffordshire – unfortunately we could not visit them all. Prior to this series of visits we had visited Sherratts Wood, which we had found to provide a high quality service across their three locations in Leigh, Burton and Lichfield.





Areas for improvement

We found very few causes for concern and did not feel it necessary to make a lot of recommendations - where we found a concern, we discussed it with the provider and found them to be very responsive and pro-active in addressing that concern.

The only major issue we found was one provider who although ensured that an initial DBS check was made when employing staff, they had not been renewing these checks on a regular basis which had resulted in some long serving members of staff not having gone through a DBS check for over a decade. After we brought this to the attention of the provider, and following an internal management meeting, they reported that they would be taking immediate action to bring all staff members DBS up to date as necessary and that going forward these would be renewed at the recommended regular intervals.

Extracts from the visit reports

We were told about how the service has sourced various work-related programs for their participants including a couple of hours a week for one participant who loves dogs volunteering at a Kennels and we learned how the service has taken small group to carry out a 6-week programme at a local stable. Courses covered have included stable management and horse care. The service provider and the Manager have a lot of experience in providing Day Care for Adults with Learning Disabilities. As all the services provided by Options for Life across Staffordshire are a similar provision with common management we would expect that, like the location we visited for this report, that they all meet the quality standards set out in this report providing a good service to their clients. (Options for Life)

The staff and the clients have very close relationships; it is like one big happy family. There is a genuine warm atmosphere where people can be who they are and everyone is valued. Many of the clients and staff have known each other a very long time, which further enhances the family atmosphere. We saw that this helps them pick up on any changes, even subtle ones, because they know each other so well. (Elite CIC)

On site we saw evidence of creative and intensive sensory interactions which included developing or adapting equipment to new uses to benefit service users in spite of the challenge of very limited funds for specialist sensory equipment and aids. The service has managed to raise some 'comfort' funds which appear to be used in targeted ways. It is apparent that the Moorlands Complex Needs service provides high quality, individualised, personalised, responsive and proactive support to the people who attend. The service works to reduce social isolation and inequality by involving users of the service in visiting and using local attractions and amenities. (Moorlands Complex Needs Service)

The management and staff are highly motivated and enthusiastic. They obviously care about the clients and the quality of service provided. We were impressed with the detailed care and concern for the service users. We were struck by the level of skill the service users were applying in their art work. Having such talented staff in residence is a huge asset and the quality of the work the service users are producing is outstanding. We found that the service met all of the Quality Indicators that are considered within this report and provided a well-managed, effective, caring and responsive service. (New Directions Support)





Aspire, Stafford – A trip to Llandudno

Staff are primarily trained as sports coaches although they have been through a structured induction programme including training on First Aid, Level 1 Safeguarding and Health and Safety. All are DBS checked. The two staff who run the Rebound Therapy have had specialist training and link in with local NHS physiotherapists for advice and support with individual participants. (Able Too)

Our observation and discussions led us to conclude that Briar's Barn is well-led, with experienced and committed staff, who provide a very wide range of person-centred, user-influenced, meaningful and purposeful day opportunities for the users of its services, tailored to individual abilities, needs and preferences. (Briars Barn)

We considered the individual activity review to be an excellent example of gaining feedback from service users with the staff observations and notes making this a complete reference document as the service user many not express their preferences fully in a verbal way. (Allendales)

The students we spoke to love the service and find it enhances their quality of life. They don't like it when the centre is shut over Christmas and New Year, as they enjoy being there so much. Some of the people we spoke to especially enjoyed working in the gardens and being able to enjoy the produce they'd grown. One student in particular commented that he wouldn't want to go anywhere else. Trips and outings are organised for special occasions and the students commented on these as being especially enjoyable. This was outstanding. The needs of the students are paramount. All members of staff knew the students names and were familiar with their background. They were in close contact with their families and we felt that the establishment was a 'family'. One young man got stranded in the morning on his way to the centre due to a road closure. When he failed to arrive at the centre the Hub Manager followed this up and a member of staff went to collect him. (Care First)





We also saw other rooms: one with a trampoline for 'rebound' therapy; another with a postural relief area for wheelchair users; several quiet rooms with sensory lighting, sound and artwork; a room used by a speech and language therapist working with service users with dysphasia (2 days per week); another used for sensory-based storytelling; an art room where a volunteer had been working with service users on clay modelling and string pictures. We observed unfailingly cheerful and respectful interaction between staff and service users, from which it was evident to us that each knew the other well. We observed (and joined in) a singing session with hand gestures in the IT room. All of the participants were clearly enjoying this activity (as did we). (Catherine Care)

Service users are encouraged to take part in work which they have previously enjoyed or in which they have some experience. In this way they are able to develop their confidence, deepen their skills and enhance their self-esteem and wellbeing. Some of the displayed art and craft work was of a very high level. It was well displayed. (Chase Aqua Rural Enterprise CARE)

We were extremely impressed at how Kidsgrove Care Solutions managed to provide such a wide variety of activities and experiences to their clients by working with other services such as Cheshire Learning & Development Centre and Brighter Nights. The use of community venues, leisure facilities and clubs means that a lot of the activities taking place are within the community, not separated from the community. (Kidsgrove Care Solutions)

It was good to learn of the active support given to assist people in gaining independence skills. This, together with the variety of individual and group activities available, meant that people's needs were being met in a variety of ways. This service provides support to people with particular individual needs and this is carried out with consideration, care and dignity resulting in a high quality service. (Lichfield Complex Needs Service)

The atmosphere in the centre appears happy and relaxed, and conversations with individual clients reflect that this is how they are feeling. They enjoy the variety of activities on offer, interaction with the other clients and members of staff, and any special roles they are given. Our guided tour was provided by one of the clients, who was very informative about all the facilities on offer. They receive great encouragement from the staff and are very proud of their achievements, eg. winning the quiz, or creating something in woodwork. (DE Healthcare - The Hub)

We were shown an example of a very detailed folder for one of the clients, who had given permission to share. This contained a comprehensive dossier of information about the client's background problems, special needs and interests. We were told that each client had a similar folder which was updated as required. (EJN Care Solutions 'The Farm')

Due to the nature of the work they carry out with the clients, even though they may not be able to communicate in a conventional way, they learn what sounds and actions mean for each individual. They use seven rules of engagement which are to be found on the wall in the Day room. These seven rules include responsiveness, anticipation, curiosity, investigation, discovery, persistence and initiation. (Cannock Complex Needs Service)

Some clients are being assisted towards work placements and in chatting to them it was evident that this was an exciting time of their lives. They felt Aspire had provided them with both the confidence and skills to go to work. One of them said he had never imagined that he would have the skills suitable to take up a placement and that he may be able to have a job. (Aspire, Stafford)





What we didn't expect!

We had not really expected to be welcomed so warmly on these Enter & View visits. Experience had taught us that most services we visit such as Care and Nursing homes are initially wary of the visit, although this mostly becomes positive as they see how our representatives conduct the visit. These visits were a pleasure and people were so enthusiastic to show us what they experienced and what was on offer. Having concluded the scheduled visits, we even had other services who had heard that we were making visits telephoning us to request a Healthwatch Staffordshire "Enter & View" visit! If only we had the time and resources to visit each and every service, we would if we could as it was a very positive and rewarding experience for Healthwatch Staffordshire and its Authorised Representatives.

The extremely positive reception of these visits by the vast majority of services confirmed that the services place great importance on providing a quality service, actively aiming to give their clients meaningful opportunities and experiences.



New Directions Support, Stafford

From the outset of the visit we were made welcome by everyone and were encouraged to speak to team members about their experiences of attending the farm. This feedback was without exception positive and confirmed by our observations of Team Members going about their day. It was evident from the manager and staff we spoke to that each team member was highly valued. The service is well established having been in existence for many years and has evolved over that time to offer a varied programme of activities aimed at enhancing the skills and interests of team members. (Oak Tee Farm)

It was evident that the staff and care manager have positive relationships with service users and have a good knowledge of their needs and preferences. It was also observed that in the main, service users are highly valued and are encouraged to be involved in all aspects of the activities that take place. (Elite Supported Living, now Aspect)





Catherine Care Tea Room

During our visit one group was enthusiastically enjoying a music session. After introducing themselves, they proudly performed a song for us using Makaton signing as well as singing. Another group had gone to the supermarket shopping in preparation for a cookery session in the afternoon. One client was enjoying doing some art in the quiet room which she was pleased to show us. This is a dynamic day service built around a sessional programme of imaginative activities held both in the community and in the building. The Independent Learning Centre it has its own unique identity where learning meets fun. (The ILC)

Each service user has a valued role and is provided a uniform to make it more inclusive and to create a deeper sense of belonging. It was evident through our visit that the ethos of providing opportunity, support and encouragement for people to learn new skills and improve their existing ones runs through every activity at the nursery. Staff, service users and a relative that we contacted all spoke very highly of the manager and the service in general. The atmosphere was very calm and relaxed and service users were encouraged to be involved in the visit. (Shaw Trust)

The Centre provides a large range of opportunities and activities, for a range of adults with differing degrees of need, which are tailored to the individual. There was evidence of a wide variety of activities available ranging from skills for independent living for students needing most support to work placements for those students able to benefit. We found that the centre met all of the Quality Indicators that are considered within this report and provided a well managed, effective, caring and responsive service. (Trinity Skills for Life)

We felt that this type of day service is incredibly important to the service users, allowing them time outdoors and getting exercise in an environment where they won't necessarily feel they've been exercising, as they would in a gym. The clients were observed to be very happy and there is a very positive and calm atmosphere. The staff told us about one service user who came to them a couple of months earlier and was very withdrawn in his behavior. He was 'addicted to screens' and would get very agitated and sullen when asked to come off the equipment. He was always the last out of the door and trying to get him to change into wellies would take a long time. Within four weeks of attending the service, he is a changed person. He's outgoing, enthusiastic, and now always the first out of the door. When talking about this service user the staff were observed to be somewhat surprised, but very pleased and incredibly positive about the changes in this individual over the space of a few weeks. (Upper Moreton Rural Activities)

What someone attending Shaw Trust told us about their experience of the service

- I have a lot more confidence.
- Staff are very attentive.
- The manager is hands on.
- They encourage me to get involved.
- They treat me like a king.
- I have good relationships with the staff and manager.
- They treat me with dignity.
- I feel valued.
- They have given me the skills to get into the workplace.
- My needs are met.
- They are really nice to me.
- My dad is involved.
- It's a big relief for my family.
- It's a fantastic service.

What a parent of someone attending Shaw Trust told us about their experience of the service

- It's a lifeline for me, I am a single parent and I was struggling, this has provided my son with some passion for life and working.
- It has given my son responsibility, it's character building.
- He is motivated to be more self-sufficient.
- It's not just growing plants, he's growing as a person.
- We both get a lot of benefit from the service.
- We value the service very much.
- It's set him on the right path.
- He feels included, they have provided him with a work uniform and he values it so much, he feels like an equal part of a team.
- Provides a sense of belonging for my son, and some respite for me.
- It has helped my son to improve all aspects of his life including personal hygiene and routines at home.

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http://healthwatchstaffordshire.co.uk/downloads/?cp_enter-view-reports=1

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The two authorised representatives were very knowledgeable and were respectful to all participants and staff. Both representatives allowed our participants to carry out their daily activities without causing any interruption to the normal working day. The representatives took time to engage with everyone and their approach to questioning participants and staff was relaxed, yet thorough. Participants and staff were given adequate time to answer - which helped to put everyone at ease.

When we asked our participants for feedback about the day most said that they enjoyed talking to the representatives and found them to be very friendly. We believe that it is beneficial to all services to receive Enter and View monitoring visits, as areas for improvement can be identified and improved. Likewise, best practice can also be shared. As a team, we constantly strive to develop our service and aim to continue with our commitment to giving our participants the best quality service possible.

Upper Moreton Rural Activities

It gave us a good opportunity to reflect on our own service. The gentlemen that came explained the purpose of their visit well and were very reassuring in that it was not an audit for example. They explained to us the variety of other services that they were planning to visit and why, which helped us to understand the exercise.

It was a very open and transparent process on both sides as far as we were concerned, no hidden agenda.

Their approach was respectful and at no point did we feel uncomfortable with their presence or with the questions and information gathering.

It was good to have someone come with fresh eyes to acknowledge what we do and share what we are very proud of and that is the service that we deliver. It was good to have some positive and constructive feedback on a few observations.

Lichfield Complex Needs Service

I must compliment the Staffordshire Healthwatch team on the very professional way that they undertook the Enter and View visit here at New Directions Support as part of their work with independent day opportunities providers. The visit was very thorough and the team took time to speak to a number of staff and service users, as well as assessing a range of evidence that we were able to provide around the Healthwatch quality framework.

The visit has resulted in New Directions Support gaining an extremely positive Healthwatch report, which has celebrated our high-quality services and good practice, and ensured they are shared with others. Thank you to all the Healthwatch team for the diligent and constructive way that they carried out the visit, and for the comprehensive report that has been compiled on our service.

Warren Low, Chief Officer, New Directions Support





Wellbeing garden at Chase Aqua Rural Enterprise (CARE)

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