

AUG 2021

Care Home Report



INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the delivery of health and social care services across the UK. We realise that life for those in and involved with, care homes are very different and that people are facing and dealing with many challenges.

Method:

The project aimed to gather the experiences of fifteen relatives of care home residents residing in Aspen Care Home in Tower Hamlets.

Our main aims were:

- to explore and understand the experiences of family members of care home residents;
- to identify key issues faced by the care home;
- To highlight the good practice of Aspen Court care during the pandemic.

The project involved community insight researchers and Healthwatch Tower Hamlets staff conducting an in-depth interview over the phone with twelve relatives. Four out of twelve participants were between the ages of 30-50, the remaining eight were 50+, two out of twelve identified as male, and the remaining eight as female. Participants were informed that their responses would be confidential and anonymous. The interview questions covered a range of topics including PPE and Covid-19 testing, personal care, and access to the care home during the lockdown. Community insights researchers asked participants for permission to record the interviews which were later transcribed for those that refused respondents answers were noted down during the interview and immediately after to ensure they were recorded accurately. The data collected were sorted and grouped into themes.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 01** Introduction
- 02** Visiting /Communicating with Relatives
- 03** Relationship with the Care Home
- 04** Perception of quality of care
- 05** Service quality during COVID
- 06** Conclusion

VISITING RELATIVES

Family members often play a crucial role in the care of residents in care homes.

Maintaining that relationship during the pandemic proved difficult and good communication between staff and family members was important to ensuring that a good relationship was maintained.

"Yes, I have managed to keep in touch. At the beginning it was very hard, I could only see mum through the glass door. Which you know was very very difficult because her hearings not great at times and I shouldn't be saying this on the tape but at times some of the girls let me have the door open just slightly enough so she can hear me better... Yes I can actually go in now, I can either have a garden visit but um what I've been doing is taking her out in the park just around the corner. We walk around the canal I take her in a wheel chair and I take her down and we sit on the front and they might be paddle boarding in the canal or you see the boats go by yeah it's a big park then we got a great big social distance. We just sit there and it's just nice to be with her." Female 30-50 White British

"Initially when my husband went to hospital my communication was through telephone and later on when he was more settled, East Ham care arranged some video link calls so I can see him in the hospital so that was very good. In relation to Aspen Court, initially he was in isolation so it was difficult to have anything to do with it. After isolation they had visiting slots on Tuesday and Friday afternoon and I've been pretty lucky to get slots to see my husband at least once a week.[cont]"

" It was difficult. Reason being phone calls because my husband doesn't like talking on the phone, sometimes a phone call would last 30 seconds. The video links lasted longer because the staff were there prompting him to stay on the link with me. He was supervised so he wasn't wondering off. Regarding aspen court there's a 30 minutes slot when weather is good, I see my husband out in the garden initially it was difficult because he would refuse to sit down and was walking around the garden and wanted to go back indoors and due to covid I was not allowed to follow him. Indoor visits at aspen court are facilitated by a care worker who would offer my husband food to stay in the allotted room with me" Female 50+ White British

For some relatives the rules that the care home put in place regarding visiting time and length made it harder for them to communicate with their family members effectively.

"The visiting time is Tuesday and Friday. Between 2 and 3:30pm. Each time I've booked when I arrived, they say I'm not down for a booking. And they say who have you spoken to and I say i've spoken to [someone]. They go quiet. But then they still let me go in." Female 30-50, White British

VISITING RELATIVES

*"I guess that's the thing, it's been a little bit frustrating to be honest because there are 3 shifts and Mum has three sons, and it's been a little bit kind of annoying and I understand there's been various protocols and various things, but it's been very frustrating in that we haven't really been able to go and see on... when I say regular time, it's basically, we can't go during the week as we're all working, so it's really at weekends that we can. But it just seems to be at the weekend, different floors get allocated a weekend. So, you know, for instance this weekend we wanted to go, but couldn't, so I had to try and book it the next week. So it's a two week slot that we're missing. I don't fully understand why, you know, why that I can't, I can kind of appreciate that the answer is the volume of people that, you know, actual residents that they have, but I don't quite understand why it's so limited. Regarding visiting time there only seems to be visiting time between kind of two and four o'clock and I kind of understand they've got dinners and they've got various bits to do but you know maybe in the evening there could be a two hour slot. And we're not I you know I'm not asking for, like, you know, to spend half an hour with her "but just to kind of, it's just to have some, you know, time with her. So that's a little bit of an annoyance, from my point of view."
Male White British 30-50"*

*"We haven't been connected, and that's one of the things that I'm kind of hoping that by allowing her to come out, you know, to basically come out for a day with us and just do things because that's the thing as well. You know a lot of the residents have basically been within the care home for a year, they haven't been outside other than maybe to go to hospital. Yeah, I guess from their point of view it's a kind of a frustration. I hope that with the ease in the COVID, that we should be able to have more access to her and that way we'll be able to get a better understanding of how you know how things are there. It's very difficult to gauge how she is by seeing her for 15 or 20 minutes, but not being able to go back in the home with her."
Male White British 30-50*

"I've only been able to start visiting her in the last two or three months....Well, I don't see how anything else could have been done to be honest but it was very hard on her, hard on all of us. Because I've taken the responsibility because my sister in law, looks after her 90 year old parents and my two brothers work. So I took on that, I would be the the main visitor for now. It's not what you want, obviously it was nice where we could just walk in and sit in a room and chat to her. But we have to, you know, book a slot, take a test and then she's brought to me in a room or out in the garden. But I have noticed, very much, a degeneration in her mental state, definitely. [cont]"



VISITING RELATIVES

"I put that down to the fact that when we couldn't visit, they said that they were kept in their rooms because of the COVID. So I think with no stimulation, she's just got more and more confused." Female 30-50 White British

Stricter and changed visiting times affected family members negatively as they felt disconnected from their relatives and upset their loved ones were isolated and possibly alone.

RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CARE HOME

Relatives felt it was important that the care home kept them up to date regarding changes at the home. Many felt that they were not provided with important information in a timely manner.

"Well, no I received a letter recently about what you can and can't do but that came through from HC1, not from HC1 Limehouse. It actually come through the head office you know about various different things that you can and can't do. I haven't had a one-to-one meeting with anyone about a care plan, not for a while anyway, and I assume that's because of the situation. As I said if I was that concerned about something, an individual thing, then I'd obviously have to say could I speak to the manager? The only person I actually see is the girl at the reception and [name] worked there for quite some time ago and she's come back she moved to another HC1 near where she lives." Female 30-50, White British

"So when you get a letter that comes through. It's basically a blank letter that's relevant for all of their homes all over the UK, which is fine, but then you find that you try and go to the people in the city we visited, you know when COVID was going on. And, you know, we've got this letter saying yeah yeah as per the government kind of guidelines, you're now going to see, you know, the residents when you want to, but then when I rang up to do that they said oh hang on a minute, no, because we have council residents in there that Tower Hamlets pay for, we can't do that. So I was kind of thinking, well hang on a minute that's not, you know that letter doesn't reflect what's happening in Aspen Court so I think that, I think it'd be nice if there were some things that were specific to Aspen Court does that make sense." Male White British 30-50

"In terms of communication so I'll just get a general letter, which the home sends out to everybody says on what's happening within the care home for safety reasons and everything
"The only time, I get a call is if he's hurt himself, like if he's fallen to the floor, if he's trying to get out of bed and other stuff. They let me know what's going on that way. I hardly hear from them, every now and then I'll ring them to make sure he's all right. This morning they've tried ringing me because he wanted to talk to me but when I ring back it says the line's busy..... Yeah, and then again, not being racist or anything like this, when some people ring I really cannot understand what they are telling me. A couple of times I've asked to ring back and asked to talk to someone else and ask what it is he's trying to tell me. Because it's rude isn't it to say you don't understand them... Well, it would be nice to be able to get through and talk to somebody that when you get through you say what floor you want and they don't say that they are busy. [cont]"

RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CARE HOME

I understand that you are busy. But when you're not allowed in to see him and then you can't even talk to find out how they are, that's when you got worried. It's hard to even find out how he is like even once a week because I don't have time to keep ringing." Female 30-50, White British

Well yeah, I mean obviously you can go and speak to a manager which again there's been disruptions with the manager inside. I don't even know who's actually in charge at the moment. I speak to the receptionist when I am let through the first door before I go into the home. I speak to the receptionist there. I've got to know her and she's got to know me. Then recently [name] the receptionist she was there for absolutely ages, she moved to another agency. The other girl that's there she can only work sometimes she does another job as well. So, she's only there when she can if you know what I mean so. "As I said sometimes you go in and if you want to speak to someone about something you don't really know who to go to. As I said I don't even know who's managing it at the moment." Female 30-50, White British

"Well as I said at the moment it seems pretty limited because you see the receptionist and even if I'm not even allowed into the home mum has been moved. She was on the ground floor which they classed as residential. She is now being moved upstairs and I was very concerned again about that because I thought oh my god is she going to be kept in bed all the time, you know she's not been walking. I was concerned about that and I didn't feel that I was informed enough about this arrangement that was going to happen. I was just told she was going to be moved, and I said well what does that mean? I got quite upset on the phone, said is Mum going to be left in bed all day, is she? You know the sort of thing and they said no no no and as I said I would have liked it the other way around. For me to be told first and then Mum to be moved, but she was there, there was a space and apparently, they said it would be better for Mum's needs. So that's fine but because I'm not allowed into the home I can only take Mum out now. Other than that I walk around through the sort of side road and go in through the gate and see her in the garden but I prefer to take her out because I feel like she feels like how we used to." Female 30-50, White British

Many felt frustrated due to the lack of information on who to contact with questions they had regarding their relative. In some cases the lack of communication led to a lack of trust in the quality of care the home provided their loved one.



PERCEPTION OF QUALITY OF CARE

Some relatives were happy with the quality of care their loved one received, and felt that staff were friendly and kept them updated.

"He has had to go to hospital on two occasions. The last time I went with him, I was an escort and that was okay. He's been sorted out when he needed to be. He's been sufficiently looked after. As I say, it's all one hopes, and what I've seen in the past the staff do take care of him until you have more hands on visiting... The only thing that concerns me is at times my husband got a catheter and the bag is not sufficiently tied when I've seen him and that gives me a little bit of concern apart from that things are okay... Um all I can say is when they bring him down to me the staff are always pleasant and they greet you. They are friendly 10/10 for the staff that bring him down. The staff are friendly. Friendly atmosphere in Aspen Court - always greeted with a hello. It is a friendly atmosphere to walk into." Female 50+, White British

"Yeah I mean no, no not really, as I said if there was anything that was concerning me then I'd have to be in touch and you know. If it wasn't addressed then obviously I'd have to try and speak to somebody else but at the moment mum's health is okay and she always seems nicely dressed you know in the clothes I've bought for her or so, that side of things seem to be fine and as I said she might have a moan about it but but on the whole she seems quite calm." Female 30-50, White British

"I used to see the previous manager there now and again - [name] and I know there's a new one there now who I haven't met. I haven't felt the need to ask for a manager or supervisor, I'm sure if I needed to, they would provide it.[cont]"

" Yeah, you know, whatever I've asked for, for her to have done, like I recently asked for the outside clinic to go in and give her an eye test for a fee, they did what I asked them to do. So I've not felt the need to ask for a manager or anything like that. I always feel that if I need to speak to anyone about anything I can just ring up, you know, so no I've not felt the need to do anything either." Female 30-50, White British

"If it is anything at all like, even if the doctor gives us a different tablet, they contact us straight away. All right, she has had ulcers on her legs and they're taken a long long time to clear up. Every time as I say, if they need to change tablets or anything like that they always seem to ring us and let us know what the doctor has done to change everything. Yeah." Female 50+, White British

However, many relatives did not share the same sentiment and did not feel confident in the quality of care their relative was receiving. Some lack of confidence was due to residents belongings being swapped with other residents or going missing and relatives not being kept informed.

"It'd be nice to be updated by them, feels like everything just seems to be a rush and I ask is there any chance to get his clothes back and they said it's gone down to laundry, yeah but it don't have his name on? I mean he aint four, he isn't going to school and I told them it doesn't give you the right to give other people my dads clothes and I kept on at them. I mean someone else had it, and I had to go and get him new ones. And he always wears his golf shirts and it's got name on it and stuff but he knows what's his you know."

PERCEPTION OF QUALITY OF CARE

"[cont] But no one can find anything. I got other stuff like undergarments and I ask who's vest is this and they say it's my Dad's and I tell them no it isn't because I know what's his. I'm trying and saying can we do this and can we do this." Female 50+, White British

"She used to have a friend who was partly sighted, because mums been moved up, and I keep saying to them "do you bring mum down to see [name]" because they just used to sit together and again, I'm not sure if Mum is brought down into the lounge, I never seem to get any answers. They've got a TV obviously in the lounge and mum and [name] used to sit together. So, I don't know if that's happening or not." Female 30-50, White British

"It has been difficult through the pandemic as I said, I try to speak to my mum on the phone but she can't really hear very well and I'm getting more frustrated than she is. I say "Mum it's [name] your daughter". I feel like I'm constantly repeating myself. But that's not anything to do with the home, it's just that Mum's hearing isn't great. When I'm with her and she can hear you know it's okay and I can speak to her face and clearly. She did have a hearing aid when she had a test done but again that just went missing. It was a tiny device and I did say this will last 5 minutes because mums going to lose it. Probably the next time or the time after I went up there, and this was quite a time ago when I used to be allowed into her room before the pandemic, and I said where's mums hearing aid gone to. Nobody seemed to know so it could have been anywhere. It's just another thing that was quite frustrating." Female 30-50, White British

"My uncle lived on his own, when he lost his wife and then he's got a bit of dementia. I was getting phone calls at all hours of the night and day from him and asking me what the time was and everything and he was a lovely person but whenever carers kept coming they said he would be rather rude to them because that's how he used to come across to people. But people really loved him in the [previous] care home and it's made him happy. So he's never been happier in his life.....The place they put him in before, God it's miles away it's in [place] but he was looked after, I know it's a respite place and he was there a long time. They were on it, they'd do anything, like issues with hearing and stuff, and here I'm telling them could you get the doctor to check him out and they'll be like oh he's got dementia. No he hasn't, and they say there's an issue with his water and they'll be like he's been like this for a couple of days. Well I haven't seen it and I'm telling them they need to do this for me please. I know there's so many people and worse people in there. But it gets a bit much. The other place they'd go in and see him and chat with him. But this place all they do is just walk past the door." Female 30-50, White British

"So obviously my Dad wasn't in Tower Hamlets he was in [place] before when everything happened and he had to stay in where he was. But he's only been here for that last two months so it's pretty recent. The other place he was in was superb, they were so nice and so good, it was a bit of a shock when he moved here. We couldn't see him for 10 days even though he had his injection and all that malarkey. I hadn't seen him for 10 days and when I did manage to get into the home, his clothes were missing, his glasses were missing, he had someone else's hearing aid in for some reason I have no idea. I wasn't happy about it. So at the moment I'm not impressed. It's annoying... As far as I know they've been okay, I mean I know I go in there and I don't mean to but I lose my head and raise my voice. And I wanna know why, why hasn't he got this why hasn't he got that? Like he has a wheelchair but he can't exactly sit up on his wheelchair. [cont]"

PERCEPTION OF QUALITY OF CARE

"Like they're not getting him in, the wheelchair from the other place helped him. But now he's laying in the bed and says I wanna go home now. They accommodated him before but now this place - like he has to eat pureed food but he says I'm not eating that and he says it's mash potatoes with different coloured gravy. But that aint helping because he like's texture. So I asked if they can ask someone to come check if he still needs it. I asked them when I got there because I want someone to check his hearing too because my dad has two pairs of glasses and a hearing aid. So I ask where his hearing aid is and they said he aint got one and I'm telling him I bought it. I checked his bag and there it was. For me that's my dad suffering because he couldn't hear anything. I think it's just guesswork or does anyone read the notes or anything!...I think what I would find useful is if there was an official care plan review. I would like to know the time scale of review. My husband has a care plan I am familiar with. Is it 6 months or 3 months I would just like to know."

Female 50+ White British

A relative mentioned other aspects of care, such as a resident's spiritual care, that were not being taken into consideration.

"No one's actually ever mentioned religion, because she was kind of a church going person before she went into the home. But no, there's been a lack of that I guess from the home, to say, You know what religion is she? Does she practice etc etc. I'm not aware that they actually had masses or services."

Male White British 30-50

SERVICE QUALITY DURING COVID

The majority of relatives felt that the care home had done a good job at looking after residents and keeping them safe during the COVID pandemic. They believe that the care home followed guidelines and made sure staff and visitors adhered to safety instructions to create a safe environment for residents.

"I think the testing of carers when they visit has been done in a sympathetic way and the PPE provided for the carers is always available."

Female 50+ White British

"Yeah, someone in there was supposed to be on their way to the hospital [because of COVID], so we couldn't get in. So that was concerning like how did he get that? It was the nurse on my dad's floor that said don't come in today. I said why not and you know I thought Oh my God not again. So I phone up again and they said no you can come in. Like someone make up your mind, do I or don't I. Not really kept up to date on what's going on really."

Female 50+, White British



SERVICE QUALITY DURING COVID

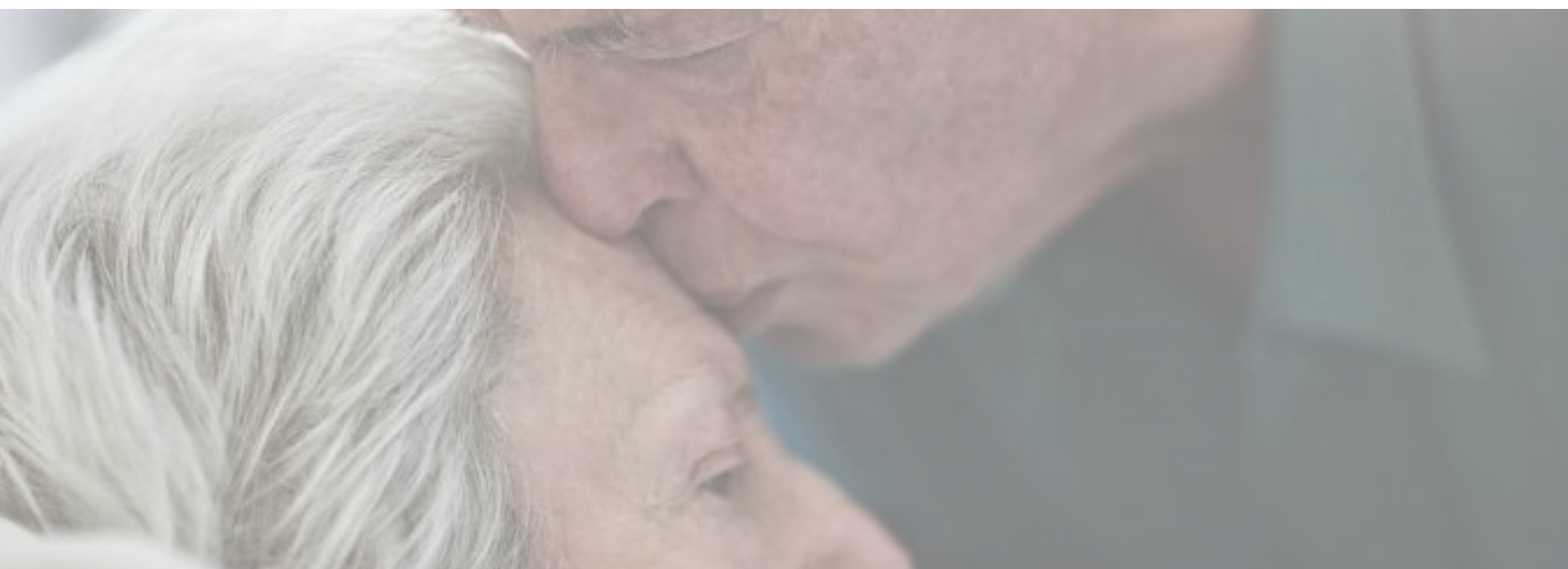
"It seems a very well run place in as much as, you know, sticking to the rules and the restrictions. I think they're in a very difficult situation. As I say I've never had any worry or concern about my auntie there. I mean if I think she needs to see a doctor or ask her, to you know put her up on the list, she is seen by a doctor. If I'm worried about her at all, I always talk to the people that are around her, because I feel that they see her most of the time so no genuinely I'm very pleased with the care she receives." Female 30-50, White British

"Overall, I feel as though the service is quite good, they've protected them as much as they possible could. I haven't been in, but the staffing and stuff is okay considering. I get it that it's been tough and stuff so I can understand, but like I say, getting through to them is just the difficult part sometimes. ... The only thing that I think they should do is change the schedule to visit, so that people that work can go visit and see their relative. He doesn't really have anyone else so I feel like maybe they should have found a way to make sure I could see him. I know they try to get him involved in stuff and I think he's happy in general there though." Female 30-50, White British

"Yeah, I think they're pretty good you know, again, you know every time I've gone there I've had to wear a mask and sanitise, and, you know, and I've been able then to go and see my mum. I've had the actual test done the COVID test after that, they're fine with that. From my perspective they have followed all the guidelines as far as I can see.....Other than, I think we mentioned at Christmas, would it be okay, if we bought my mum home, you know, for a day off. And I think the thing was well she'd have to isolate for 10 days when she came, you know then two weeks when she came back in and so that that's as far as it went. They were following kind of government guidelines" Male White British 30-50

"I think I'm fortunate with Aspen Court. Certainly the first lockdown, you know, residents were moved into Aspen Court from hospital without being checked so I know there were, some cases of COVID deaths within Aspen Court. And so I guess there's that. Once that's happened you're ultra cautious, and therefore, you obviously don't want to repeat of what happened. As frustrating as it is from my perspective, they're looking at the whole of their residents. Yeah, yeah, I think they've done a good job." Male White British 30-50

"During the time my husband has been there they coped extremely well. I haven't really had a lot of experience to comment on that but from what I've seen and heard its fine." Female 50+ White British




CONCLUSION

The data collected from relatives has highlighted areas the care home has worked well and areas for improvement. As we slowly go back to a new way of living with COVID, it is important to work with relatives to maintain good relationships between families and care homes.


Where do you go from here?

Looking at what the relatives has said we come up with the following recommendation to care services and local authorities:


Increase time resident spend outdoors

-  **01** Relatives have placed an importance on the need for residents to spend their time outdoors rather than indoors. It has been widely reported that going outdoors has been associated with improved mood and increase quality of life.


Using other modes of communication

-  **02** It is worth considering the contribution of technology to improve the care and support of residents living in the care or nursing home. As the telephone slots can be quite restrictive, using video tablets can offer a timely, efficient and useful way to capture and record care notes and communicate with their relatives.

Creative ways to stimulate residents during isolation

-  **03** When a person is left to sit for most of the day with little movement or stimulation a number of detrimental physical and psychological changes can occur. Include activities that they can take part in reduce the impacts of isolation.

Monthly Updates with the Care Home

-  **04** Some relatives would benefit from having a monthly review with the care home on how their relative is doing. This will allow them to become more familiar with the supervisors/manager and key workers at Aspen Court and have a time to communicate any issues.

CONCLUSION

Improve onboarding/introduction of new relatives and residents

05

Some relatives would appreciate a clearer introduction to Aspen Court and the services available to their residents. This would help the relative and residents to build a good relationship with the care home.

Platform for relatives to communicate

06

Some residents mentioned issues regarding communication and finding out information from other relatives they meet. Having a friends and family forum or WhatsApp group might allow relatives to exchange information and knowledge between themselves and perhaps free up staff time.

The findings from this report have been shared with Tower Hamlets Integrated Commissioning: Ageing Well Health, Adults and Community Services Team. It will be used to influence and improve current services. It will also be shared with Healthwatch England who will use it to look into the impact of COVID on social care. We'd like to say a big thank you to all the relatives that took the time to openly discuss their experiences.