

A Summary of the Findings from a Survey of 53 Unpaid Carers

Two years ago the people who run the health and social care services, such as social services, community matrons, and MyTherapy in Wakefield District decided that they would organise those services in a different way. They set up new teams called Connecting Care teams.

They did this to try to provide a better and quicker service to the people who use those services. These people were often elderly, frail or disabled. Sometimes their health had got worse really quickly and they needed extra support to stay in their own homes. They also wanted Connecting Care staff to provide better support to the family and friends - unpaid carers - of the patients and service users. They put workers from two local charities, Carers Wakefield and District and Age UK Wakefield District, within the Connecting Care teams to see if this would help.

Healthwatch Wakefield and an independent organisation called Niche spoke to 53 carers, face to face, in 2015 and 2016, to find out what their experiences had been like, and if these Connecting Care teams had made their lives better and helped them to carry on caring for longer. The full 45 page report, which includes lots of quotes from carers, can be found on our website at www.healthwatchwakefield.co.uk or we can send you a copy if you get in touch. You can call us on 01924 787379 to have a copy posted to you. This short paper is a summary of what we found, with some key findings detailed below. So, what did we find?

Some information about the carers we spoke to:

- Many carers were elderly themselves
- Well over half the carers were over 60 years old with **9%** in their eighties
- **80%** of carers lived with the person they cared for
- Many carers were in poor health
- All the carers lived in Wakefield District except two who lived further afield

What is it like to be a carer?

From our interviews with carers, we could see that being a carer, in every single case, had had a huge impact on their lives. The majority of carers had taken on the role because they wanted to help out, and without them, the person they were looking after would not be able to cope, but this had often come at great cost to the carers life and wellbeing. Carers physical, mental and emotional health was often affected badly by their caring role and many said they felt tired or exhausted by their caring responsibilities and by having to find and organise support. Many carers had become depressed and a surprising number had been put onto antidepressants to cope with this.

Carers often found it difficult to get out or have any time for themselves, many were unable to leave the person they cared for more than a few hours a week and so being a carer could be a lonely role and leave people socially isolated. Some carers told us that becoming a carer had caused financial pressures or hardship. Even with good help and support, being a carer could be really hard. Some carers felt guilty when they could no longer care for their loved one at home, or when they couldn't get the support that they needed and found it hard to cope.

What kind of support and help did carers have and what did they think about this?

Some carers told us that they had received really good and well coordinated support from Connecting Care staff including community matrons, social workers, physio and occupational therapists, Age UK and Carers Wakefield and District. However, there were many others who had not had all the support which they needed to help them, when they needed it. Some carers had found that services and support were well coordinated whilst others had had to do a lot of coordinating services themselves and repeating information over and over again, which could be stressful and time consuming. Many carers had found it difficult to find information about the services they, or the person they were looking after, needed, especially when they first needed it.

How did Carers Wakefield help carers?

Some carers had had really good support from Carers Wakefield and District or Age UK Wakefield District who had helped them. The one to one support from a Carers Wakefield and District worker was particularly valued by carers and several told us that they now saw them as a friend, rather than a support worker. We think that it would be helpful for all carers to know about Carers Wakefield and District, an organisation which helps and supports carers, as some carers had not heard of it or did not know how it could really help them. For more information on them you can go to their website at www.carerswakefield.org.uk

What happens with the report now?

Carers made a number of really good and practical suggestions regarding how services to support them could be improved. We have put all of these, plus our own recommendations, into the final report. Some of these recommendations include better access to information, improving access to support, and addressing poor service from care providers. The full report, feeding back what we found and what carers said to us, has been sent to the health, social care and voluntary sector managers who commission - plan and buy - and provide the Connecting Care teams. They will also be shared with the staff who work within these community teams. We hope that they will use what carers told us to help to improve services to and support for carers. Healthwatch Wakefield will continue to work on behalf of all patients, service users and carers to ensure that their voice is heard.

We would like to end by saying thank you once again to all of the carers interviewed as part of this project. Thank you for taking part in this work and taking the time to talk to us honestly, in the hope that services can continue to be improved for other people like you. Thank you for all your work as carers. Health and social care services, and society as a whole, as well as the person that you care for, benefit immeasurably from the valuable role that you do.