



REACHING OUT TO CARERS

A Big Lottery Fund project

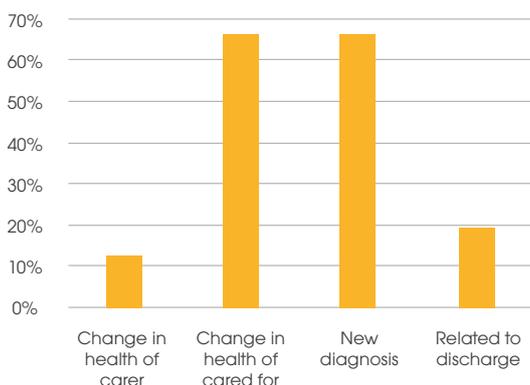
Evaluation report executive summary

Reaching Out To Carers Evaluation Executive Summary

Carers make up just over 1 in 10 of the population, but relatively few (often only 10% of them) will receive support from carers' organisations. This is despite the considerable challenges (poor health outcomes, difficulties in continuing to work, social isolation) that carers face as they provide vital support to the people they look after. Three Cumbrian organisations (Carlisle Carers, Eden Carers and West Cumbria Carers), supported by funding from the Big Lottery, came together in a project to trial new methods of engaging carers. They experimented with a variety of methods – a telephone helpline, working with employers, recruiting champions who could tell people about the carers' organisations and signpost carers to them, and running dedicated clinics in the community and in other settings such as surgeries and hospitals. These techniques aimed to increase the engagement of carers' organisations with carers.

We made an assessment of these trials, exploring why people engaged with carers' organisations, what worked well in engaging potential carers, what worked less well, what lessons have been learned and what the carers' organisations can do next to build on the learning and on the successes. We gathered the data for this report by talking to carers themselves, conducting nearly 50 telephone interviews, by site visits, by talking to the staff of the carers' organisations and by interviewing carers champions.

Reasons for engaging with carers' organisation



For the vast majority of the carers we spoke to, the trigger which prompted them to get involved with a carers' organisation was related to a change in health:

- of the person cared for
- of the carer's own health
- related to a new diagnosis
- around discharge planning from hospital.



The involvement of a health (or sometimes a social care) professional could also play a decisive role. With over half of the carers we spoke to identifying that the intervention of such a person was key in their seeking support from a carers' organisation.

These professionals are important for several reasons. Firstly, they helped carers to see themselves as 'carers' (as opposed to people who simply 'got on with' looking after a family member or loved one). Perhaps most importantly, a health or social care professional had a role in 'giving permission' to a carer to seek support, often being a more effective 'permission giver' than the carer themselves or a member of the family. They were also frequently a source of information about the type of support that carers could access. They also often followed up their initial advice to a carer to seek support – asking them at subsequent meetings if they had, and sometimes even making phone calls on a carer's behalf to introduce the carer to the relevant carers' organisation.

Once the introduction had been made, and the carers were engaged with carers' organisations, considerable benefits could result. Carers report that they were provided with valuable help and support – to apply for the benefits to which they were entitled, to find out about other useful services, to access emotional support often from people in similar situations to themselves, and even just having the reassurance that the carers' organisation would be there if they needed it.

We found that the closer project activity was to the health and social care environment, the more effective it was in helping carers seek and get support from carers' organisations. Clinics in hospitals and surgeries were more effective than those held in the community. Champions who were also nurses or other health care professionals had greater success in telling carers about the support they could get, and could provide encouragement and information.

This meant that the relationship between the carers' organisations and the health and social care providers was vital in successfully generating referrals. Where:

- relationships were strong
- carers' organisations' staff were well integrated into health services,
- health and social care professionals were committed to working with carers' organisations and knew the benefits they gave to carers, or
- where there was a 'cluster' of such knowledge and commitment (in this project, Brampton was an example of this)



Resulting in a much higher level of referral, and consequently a much greater level of support for carers. Examples of such positive relationships span general hospitals, community settings and specialist units, and included:

- In West Cumbria, a member of staff of West Cumbria Carers worked closely with the discharge team at the West Cumberland Hospital. They were able to talk to carers on the ward at visiting time, to introduce the services that were on offer, and to organise assessments for carers and support for them when the person being looked after left hospital
- At the Carleton Clinic in Carlisle, there is an aspiration to have a 'carers champion' on every ward – a member of staff of the Trust who could identify carers, and refer them to Carlisle Carers (or other carers' organisation) for help and support. In turn, Carlisle Carers were able to develop services especially for carers of people with mental health issues, and now have a support group for such carers which meets regularly, and where peer support is available
- Eden Carers has a strong relationship with the Eden Memory Services (part of the Foundation Trust). A member of staff there acts as a 'carers' champion', identifying carers who could benefit from support, and signposting them to Eden Carers. This now happens regularly, and in turn, Eden Carers will carry out an assessment of the carer and their needs, and design services to support them

The challenge now for carers' organisations is how to use the learning from this project, particularly in the context of a frequently changing and restructuring health and social care environment, and one which is under considerable pressure. We recommend that the carers' organisations continue to build on the successes of this project, and the relationships that they have developed, and also publicise these successes to others working in health and social care. In this way they can further develop their services, offer them to more people, and continue to support those huge numbers of carers who, in turn, make a vast contribution to the health and welfare of millions of people in the UK.

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