

Together with friends, family and neighbours

Autumn 2023 | Carer newsletter



Welcome to our newsletter for carers.

We make this newsletter, with carers and staff, to share information from our Trust and local communities.

We work alongside people who care for their partners, family, or friends. We know that many unpaid carers may not identify as one, or know they are one. In this newsletter, when we say carers, we mean anyone who provides unpaid support that someone in our care relies on.



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Involvement opportunities



Our northern undergraduate medical education team working with student doctors.

Opportunity for carers to share their experiences with future doctors

Written by Anthony Heslop. Anthony is a lived experience educator within our medical education team. Before starting this role in January, he was an inpatient peer worker for the trust.

Each year, medical students in their third and fifth years come into our Trust for several weeks to learn about mental health. While they are with us, the medical education team arrange for their classroom tuition and front-line placements on wards and in the community. At the end of their five-year degree course, they become doctors, and some will be our future psychiatrists.

As a lived experience educator, it's my job to bring a lived experience perspective to the student's learning. Something that's important to me is not to become isolated from the community I represent. I don't rely solely on my own experience to bring that lived experience point of view. And of course, lived experience is not just about the person who experiences the mental health difficulty. It's also about the people who care for and support the person.

So, the way I approach my work is not to be an educator, but rather a facilitator. I look for opportunities to bring lived experience voices into student tuition.

One such opportunity is an informal chat event we are planning for spring 2024. We hope to bring as broad a range as possible of people with lived experience together. This will include carers, of course. The group will talk with students about how mental health difficulties have affected their lives: what has been difficult, what has helped and what they would want from their future doctors.

We have some carers supporting these events already but would love to have more. If you're interested and would like to know more, please do contact me at anthony.heslop@nhs.net. The usual support with travel or travel expenses is available, as well as a thank you payment should you wish to accept it.

Spotlight on getting involved...



Our Carers Working Group

Our Carers Working Group meets once a month over Microsoft teams.

They aim to improve people's experience at every level of our Trust. The group is all about highlighting the voice and specific needs of carers.

If you choose to join, you'll be in good company. Many of the carers in the group are driven to make improvements and support others. Together they give valuable feedback from a carer perspective.

The group has been influential across many projects, as well leading on some important work. For example, the group has organised conferences and open events, as well working on providing detailed website information for carers.

Meetings are on Microsoft Teams. They currently take place from 9-10.30am on the fourth Wednesday of every month.

New members are always welcome. To get involved you'll need to be an involvement and engagement member (see right).



Register for involvement opportunities

Would you like to share your views, as someone who has experience of being a carer? We'd love to hear from you. Getting involved means you'll be able to work with us on important work and improvements.

Opportunities include:

- Taking part in focus and involvement groups
- Working with us to improve services
- Working with us on a range of projects
- Helping us to recruit staff
- Taking part in hospital inspections

If you register for involvement opportunities, we'll keep you in the loop about involvement opportunities you may be interested in. You can choose which, if any, you'd like to take part in.

When you register, we'll make sure you have key information, such as how to claim expenses and an involvement fee.

Please get in touch to ask about involvement opportunities and activities. Email:

tewv.involvementandengagement@nhs.net

Phone: 01642 516468

Working together to improve mental health services for older people

Written by Laura Blake. Laura facilitates the Mental Health Services for Older People (MHSOP) Patient and Carer Co-creation Group (PCCG) which is chaired by modern matron, Tyra Sutton.

Our Trust is committed to working together with patients, carers and partners. We call this co-creation. With that in mind, in our Mental Health Services for Older People (MHSOP) around a year ago we developed a Patient and Carer Co-creation Group (PCCG).

Our PCCG currently includes 17 members. Most group members have lived experience of accessing our services. They are passionate about using their personal experiences and perspectives to improve services for others.

Each group member is given the opportunity to share their thoughts, experiences and ideas. Some group members report that being involved with our group has given them back a purpose and confidence. They say it has increased in their self-esteem, knowing they are giving something back and making a positive difference.

Our group is one of the sounding boards within MHSOP. Teams can come to us to gain ideas for development opportunities. Our group currently reports into the Quality Business (QBI) and Quality Assurance & Governance (QAIG) Groups and going forward will also report into the North Yorkshire, York and Selby (NYYS) Co-creation Board.

Our group are here to help with any specific areas that clinical teams wish to improve on. We can offer feedback and suggestions that may be required to facilitate positive change.

We're also happy to be involved with any audits, pilots, clinical pathways, and operational policies.



Above: Laura Blake won our People's Star award last year. This award recognises the real difference Laura makes to the experience of the people in our care, their family members and carers.

The group's lived experience means we offer an invaluable insight and can identify what improvements are needed.

If you're a patient or carer who would like to join our group, please get in touch. We're always happy to hear from people who are passionate about using their personal experiences to improve services.

Email: laura.blake3@nhs.net

Therapy dogs are just paw-fect at helping patients

It's a dog's life for County Durham animal lovers Pam and David Coombs – and they couldn't be happier about it.

The couple, from Stanley, spend hours each week bringing happiness and healing smiles to hospital patients with their three therapy pups.

"It is something we started years ago, when my mam was ill, and have just kept on with it," said Pam, a governor for Tees, Esk and Wear NHS Foundation Trust.

"It's lovely to see the dogs bring a smile to staff and patients – and we both really enjoy making visits to the wards. It's amazing how much joy pets bring to people."



Love of dogs runs in the family

Pam, 65, a retired tutor for our Trust's expert patient programme, grew up around dogs – with a love of animals instilled at an early age by her grandfather Henry Hindmarch.

Henry, who worked as a police officer, bred Jack Russells in his spare time and often walked the beat around Sunderland and later Ferryhill with a canine companion.

Unsurprisingly, Pam's mother Edna was given a Jack Russell as her first pet – as was Pam. Although she had a sheepdog and Airedale terrier while growing up too.



Above: Pam's grandfather, Henry Hindmarch.

Left: Meg - the couple's first therapy dog

Paw-fect volunteers continued....

"Dogs have always been important in my life. They are all so special," she said. "But I never really thought about their use as therapy animals until my mam got ill.

"She ended up in a nursing home after having a stroke and we asked for special permission to bring our Jack Russell Meg in to see her.

"It really brightened her up and got her smiling."

Special bond with animals

A special bond developed between Edna and Meg during these visits – with the little dog lying on Edna's bed and bringing her comfort through difficult times. (Right)

Such was the happiness Meg brought to Edna that one of the nursing home staff suggested she might make an excellent therapy dog.

Pam and David applied – and the rest is history.

"We put Meg through a temperament assessment to qualify as a therapy dog, and then started visiting other nursing homes and hospitals as well with her," said Pam.

"At the same time, we had adopted a rescue dog, Jess, who had been badly burned. She was such a gentle soul and, once she recovered, we took her to see mam too.

"We got Meg and Jess as pets, never thinking they'd be therapy dogs. But they both ended up doing wonderful work and bringing happiness to a great many people."



Looking to the future

Pam and David spent several happy years spreading cheer with their pets, until Jess sadly passed away at 18 at the start of lockdown, followed by Meg two years ago.

The couple were determined not to get any more dogs, as they had so many fond memories of the pair, but eventually gave in to their need for canine companions.

Three new dogs – border terrier Bella, Jack Russell/ border terrier mix Sasha and cocker spaniel Ben – have now joined the family.

They have also taken on the therapy dog tradition.

"We weren't going to have any more dogs after Jess and Meg – but the house felt very empty and we ended up with three from friends and relatives," said Pam.



Left: Therapy dog, Sasha

Paw-fect volunteers continued....

"We get so much pleasure and happiness from our dogs, and it is just so nice to share it. Animals are so calming – patients just relax and start chatting to them."

Helping to spread cheer and happiness

David, 67, a retired PC engineer, often works with Ben the cocker spaniel on the Bowes Lyon Unit at Lanchester Road Hospital in Durham.

Just recently he was presented with a coloured picture of Ben by one of the patients, who had found great peace of mind and happiness through the little dog's visits.

Pam, a team leader, assessor and volunteer for Therapy Dogs Nationwide, also visits Lanchester Road with Sasha and Bella – as well as homes, hospitals and schools.

"I suppose it is a bit like 'coming home' when you get to see a dog while you're in hospital. It's a little bit of comfort, especially if you are a dog lover," she said.

"The other day I was talking to a patient who really opened up when she saw Bella. She sat and chatted to her – which then helped her open up to the staff after that.

"I would really encourage people to come forward and do pet therapy. You, and your dogs, can do so much good for other people – and it's really enjoyable too."



A picture of Ben the therapy dog - coloured in by a patient who chats to Ben during hospital visits.

If you'd like to get involved with volunteering with your dog across our Trust sites, please contact us: tewv.volunteer@nhs.net



Right: Pam and David Coombs with Ben and Bella

Trust staff are top of the class after uniform appeal

Dozens of children from Middlesbrough started school in style this September – thanks to kind-hearted Trust workers.

Staff from our secure inpatient services (SIS) dug deep into their own pockets to spend hundreds of pounds on school uniforms for youngsters at Ayresome Primary.

Administration manager Sophie Antill initially came up with the idea while sorting out her son's school wear for the new term – and the initiative snowballed from there.

“Lots of my colleagues have happy memories of shopping for uniforms when their children were younger and, after a discussion around this, I suggested buying uniforms for a local school,” she said.

“I never expected it to get this big – and it's been emotional at times. I kept thinking of people struggling to buy items and reflecting on how fortunate I was to not have to worry about it so intently. We wanted to help as many families as possible.”

Right: Administration manager, Sophie Antill

Helping hand on offer from staff

Ayresome Primary was chosen as the link school for the project, as its postcode falls within one of the most deprived communities in Middlesbrough.

Staff from across SIS – including admin, ward staff, housekeepers and leaders – took responsibility for buying individual uniforms and a total of 31 youngsters received support.

“The response was amazing,” said Sophie. “I linked staff up

with the extended services manager at the school, and families who would benefit were identified.

“As a child I used to love getting my new uniform, then going to school feeling all nice and new – and I wanted the children we were supporting to feel like that too.”



Uniform appeal story continued...

"I then aligned each child to a donator – meaning they were given what they specifically needed – and often more as well. It was heart-warming.

"Not only did people buy the usual sweatshirts and polos, but often a lot of extra items too – like hair bobbles, bags and school materials. One family also required shoes – and got them.

"When you consider we only launched this a few weeks before the school summer holidays, it's amazing what we have achieved. It's lovely to think we've helped so many."

Plans for the future

Sophie spent six weeks hot-desking at work, after turning her own desk space in the admin office into a school uniform drop-off point.

But, although glad to finally get her seat back, she's already looking ahead to Christmas – when she is planning to hold a festive gift appeal for pupils studying at local schools.

"I want to thank everyone who donated to our uniform appeal. The compassion value of the Trust really, really shone through. People were so happy to help out," she said.

"As a child I used to love getting my new uniform, then going to school feeling all nice and new – and I wanted the children we were supporting to feel like that too.

"It's such a nice thing. I just love the idea of all the children going to school in their new uniforms and feeling a million dollars. It makes me smile to think of that."

Right: Free uniforms for students, collected by Trust staff.

Help with cost of living

Charlotte Haylock, headteacher of Ayresome Primary School, welcomed the donation of uniforms and thanked everyone at our Trust who had taken part in the initiative.

She said: "We are delighted with the support that we have received from NHS staff. It really does make a valuable difference.

"With the cost of living impacting on so many, we aim to help our families in a variety of ways to ensure all children can have the same sense of belonging and pride at attending school in uniform. The support means such a lot."



Debbie's story



Award-winning care assistant retires after decades without a day off sick

Dedicated Teesside health care assistant Debbie Robinson has devoted her whole working life to helping others – clocking up over 34 years without taking time off for sickness.

The award-winning NHS stalwart was inspired to work with people with learning disabilities after helping to support her older brother, Gary, who was born with Down's Syndrome.

Now, following years of caring for hundreds of children, she has retired from our Trust – after spending most of her career on the same ward.

"I've been lucky as I've loved my job. I've worked alongside wonderful staff and loved working with the children. You don't realise how many lives you can touch," said Debbie, from Eston.

Found her vocation at early age

Debbie developed a keen interest in working in mental health care at an early age after attending events at her brother's adult training centre – including trips, activities and parties.

She went on to complete a two-week work experience at Grangetown Adult Training Centre while at school, then studied for a Preliminary Certificate in Social Care at college.

"I loved my work experience at Grangetown and, during my college course, one of my placements was at another adult training centre in Skelton – which I also loved," she said.

"Once I finished college, I volunteered at an adult training centre in Middlesbrough for several months, before moving down south to Kent to work in a nursing home."

Homesickness led to move back north

Although Debbie enjoyed her new role in Kent, she eventually became homesick – so her mother forwarded her CV to Bankfields, an adult respite ward, in 1989 and the rest is history.

"I had the interview on the Friday, started on the Monday and have never looked back. Working with people with learning disabilities is a wonderful and rewarding job," she said.

"I've been with the Trust ever since, and never had a sick day in over 34 years. I'm not sure if it's some kind of record – but I kept working all the way through Covid and the lockdowns.

"Even at senior school I didn't have any time off in five years. I guess that I was just lucky with that. I do get sick, but usually it seemed to happen when I was on holiday!"



Above: Debbie's retirement celebrations

Debbie's story continued...

Finding her perfect role by helping others

Debbie spent three months at Bankfields before moving to Normanby Road – a respite ward for children. Although she'd initially wanted to work with adults, the new job was a perfect fit.

Her role involved supporting youngsters of all ages, from babies to late teens, including cooking meals, organising activities, personal care and health support alongside nurses.

It was a physically demanding job, as the youngsters all had learning difficulties as well as complex health and sometimes autism needs, but Debbie found herself in her element.

"Someone once called me the Pied Piper, as the children just seemed to follow me. Our base was an old house and we tried to make it into a real home for the children," she said.

"179 Normanby Road was a huge part of my life. I married, had my kids and brought them up while working there. It was somewhere I've both grown and grown up in. I loved it there."

Part of an award-winning team

Debbie, 55, went on the play a key role in helping to move the facility from Normanby Road to the new Baysdale ward at Roseberry Park Hospital, Middlesbrough, in 2011.



And she then continued to work on the same ward until her retirement this month – with just a one-month stint at another service her only time away.

"I had wondered what life was like outside of Normanby Road and was offered a secondment in adult day services. I enjoyed it, but really missed the children," she said.

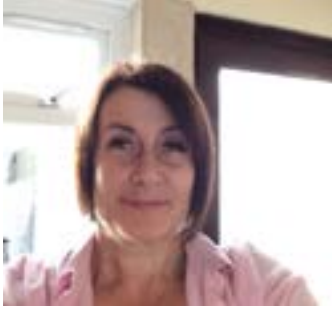
"Any job has its ups and downs, but even during the challenging times I still enjoyed working and caring for the children. Knowing that we were helping them made the job really special."

Debbie's hard work and commitment won her a Living our Values Award last year from the Trust, and she was also part of the Tees Children and Young People's Service team which won a Quality Improvement Award in 2014.

She is now planning to spend the first few months of her retirement devoting "lots of time to her two beautiful granddaughters" – before considering any future plans.

Debbie will, however, always retain fond memories of her long career with the NHS and said: "If anyone is considering working with people with learning disabilities, then go for it – it is so rewarding."





New support group in Whitby for our Trust's carers

Susan Dodsworth runs a support group for carers of people in our services in Whitby. Susan is a Carer Champion in the Community Mental Health Team at the Anchorage in Whitby. Here she explains how it came about.

I am extremely passionate about supporting carers/ family members of our patients. I believe this is crucial for carers' emotional wellbeing.

Our group meets on the first Tuesday of every month. It's facilitated by myself and a member of the local Carer Support Organisation, Carers Plus.

Carers say they appreciate the relaxed chatty atmosphere of the group. They say it's nice to talk to others in similar situations which makes them feel like they aren't alone. One carer told me: "I enjoy speaking with other people and getting ideas on things to do that can help in certain situations."



Carers are often dealing with their own mixed emotions. This may be their first experience of supporting someone with mental health difficulties, possibly evoking feelings of sadness, guilt and frustration. One of the reoccurring themes identified among carers was the feeling of isolation.

That's why I developed the carer support group, where any carer of a person using our service can attend. The group is very informal with no set agenda. We have tea and biscuits, get to know one another, and talk freely about experiences, feelings and discuss their difficulties, thus increasing the level of emotional support carers receive.

My manager, Patrick Appleby-Reid, supports me to work creatively, enabling me to assist carers and families. So, I started to contact carers informing them of the carers support available. Building on this, over the last few months, means I now have carers who I contact on a weekly/monthly basis depending on their needs.

I aim to give carers a safe space to talk about their thoughts and feelings, provide updates on the patient's progress, address any concerns or questions, or provide emotional support. Having one dedicated member of staff as the carer lead means I can build therapeutic relationships with carers. This contributes to forming a positive, collaborative relationship between patients, professionals and carers.

Members of the group told us it provides:

- Respite from caring responsibilities
- Opportunities to relate to other people
- Perspective and a safe space
- Safe place or a vent
- Time to speak to those with shared experiences
- Help to understand things a bit more and learn from others



My visit to No. 10 for Carers Week

This article was written by Ros, a volunteer, carer and involvement member.

At short notice, the mental health charity Rethink (that I do some work with) was asked to produce two carers and a member of staff for a reception in No. 10 to mark Carers Week. It was to be hosted by the Minister for social Care Helen Whately. I and Philippa Lowe were asked - and accepted.

I travelled down on an early train and went to the plush new Rethink offices on the Embankment. Philippa and I were joined by the Chief Exec Mark Winstanley and went by taxi pulling up at the security gates. Along with about 30 other carers and staff from a variety of UK charities including the Carers' Trust, Young Carers, MND charity, Age UK, we walked up Downing St and went in the famous door - depositing all devices in the entrance. A slightly aged looking Larry the cat watched for a bit, flicked his tail, and then left by the front door.

The famous staircase with all the portraits took us up to a very plush and somewhat over the top red and gold state room (decorated to Margaret Thatcher's specification - apparently). The Minister and others schmoozed the room and chatted with us all briefly, as we consumed - as politely as possible - very nice canapés, fruit punch and tea. She spoke about the new requirement for the CQC to inspect councils etc on their compliance with Care Act 2014, which requires services to value the wellbeing of carers equally with that of service users. She said how important we were! The Chair of the Carers' Trust responded well.

We took photos as we left and I headed home. A good day but, as expected, more a nod towards positive parliamentary publicity for Carers Week than a real effort to find out what life as a carer is really like. That would have taken a good deal longer than the 1 hour 15 minutes allocated.

We have a lot to be proud of, yet we don't always provide a good enough experience.

**In 2020
you told us...**

1 Our purpose...

For people to lead their best possible lives.

3 We want to be...

We will co-create safe and personalised care that improves the lives of people by involving them as equal partners. We will listen and always be respectful, compassionate and responsible.

4 We can achieve this by always living our values:



Respect



Compassion



Responsibility

5 Our three big goals

Goal 1

To co-create a great experience for our patients, carers and families:

- Outstanding compassionate care, all of the time.
- Access to the right care for you.
- Support to achieve your goals.
- Choice and control.

Goal 2

To co-create a great experience for our colleagues:

- Pride because your work is meaningful.
- Involved in decisions that affect you.
- Well led and managed.
- Workplaces that are fit for purpose.

Goal 3

To be a great partner:

- Share an understanding of our communities
- Work innovatively across organisational boundaries.
- Be recognised for what we have achieved together.

Your opinions are important. Get involved