

SURREY: SUPPORTING UNPAID CARERS

In Surrey a widespread partnership has been raising awareness of the needs of the many unpaid carers who informally support people looking after their relatives and friends for many years. As one of the partnership leaders commented: “Our aim is to make carers everyone’s business”.

John Bangs, the council’s carers strategy and development manager, has been slowly building the partnership since 1994. When he started few organisations were giving much thought to unpaid carers. As he observed: “The carers’ agenda has evolved. It has developed more than I ever envisaged.”

The partnership involves Surrey council council, all six local clinical commissioning groups (CCGs), all the local NHS acute and community trusts, the mental health trust, the ambulance service, pharmacies, GP practices, and many other local organisations.

It takes a “whole systems approach to supporting carers”. They are “fostering culture change within the NHS to create a carer friendly experience”, as well as “identifying and targeting vulnerable groups of carers to ensure no carer falls between the gaps”.

When new organisations join the partnership, they are not pressed to commit to do something in particular. Instead they are encouraged to develop their own action plan. “We throw ideas out: we are not prescriptive about what organisations should do”. And: “You can’t bully people into being involved. We don’t ask them to give us a ‘to do’ list. We don’t micromanage. We are a coalition of the willing.”

Fundamental to the partnership’s philosophy is involving and listening to carers, understanding their particular and varied needs. “Carers play a central part in what we do. Some organisations do elaborate glossy things which don’t really address what their service users want.”

Quarterly meetings of NHS providers are held, chaired by the voluntary organisation Action for Carers Surrey's chief executive. A number of groups develop policy in particular areas such as a black and minority ethnic steering group, a commissioners' group, a carers' action group, a dementia partnership board, a continuing health group and a hospital discharge group.

ACHIEVEMENTS

The **carers' memo of understanding** developed by the partnership sets out an agreed approach to supporting the implementation of an integrated approach to the identification, assessment and meeting of carers' health and wellbeing needs across Surrey. It has been signed by the council, Surrey's Health and Wellbeing Board, the six CCGs, the NHS trust, and the voluntary organisation Action for Carers Surrey. "We have a commitment to work together across boundaries, to make things happen. We have permission from on high."

A cross-organisational **carers' commissioning and development strategy** has been agreed, as well as a **young carers strategy**.

The partnership has spawned an **extensive programme of support** for carers including many **activities for particular groups**, such as support for end of life carers, black and minority ethnic carers, military and veteran carers, young adult carers, and carers looking after people with mental health issues.

Some examples of the partnership's activities are outlined below.

Carers' prescription

In 2014 the partnership created the 'carers' prescription', an online tool that allows GPs and other health staff to quickly refer carers to a range of services. "It takes people 2 minutes to complete. Previously some of the applications for services were 9 pages long."

Every NHS provider uses the tool, including all the local GP practices. Through the tool GPs can offer up to £300 for carers' to have a break — which can be a holiday or something more low key like an Indian head massage. Other options include referring carers for an individual assessment, or support from voluntary organisations like the Alzheimer Society or Crossroads.

Young carers' forum

The forum involves youth services and education support, as well as the other partners. It supports carers aged between 5 and 18. "The forum has given young carers a voice."

It meets quarterly, and young carers themselves often run workshops. "If a young carer asks you to do something it breaks the barriers down: it really has an impact". Examples of forum ideas that have been implemented include a 'guardian angels' scheme where influential people are asked to wear a badge to publicly display their commitment to think about young carers, and a prepaid card that enables young carers to get out and about more.

The forum is supported by three young carers officers employed by the council, who also help to raise awareness about young carers and their issues. "They go to school assemblies and do teacher briefings. They've developed a 60 minute play and taken it to 15 senior schools reaching 3,000 young people and 100 staff. It also got onto the radio and news. It's now being filmed so that it can go into the other schools."

The young carers have had an impact nationally, influencing the Care Act and the Children and Families Act. "Both draft acts omitted young carers. So they visited the Children's Minister and took it up with her. Now they are included. The young carers gave her what for."

Examples of individual organisations' approaches

All the partners have a '**carers' action plan**', and many have specialist staff or champions who lead the work in their organisations. For example the mental health trust has recruited 25 people to support carers.

The voluntary organisation **Action for Carers Surrey** sits at the heart of the partnership, as well as running several carers' support services. "Our vision is empowering carers, allowing carers to take control of their own destiny. We have action for carers, with carers. 75% of the Board are carers. It's a user led organisation. We seek input from carers. They influence our strategies."

The Royal Surrey Hospital has created a '**carers' passport**'. "It really added value. It provides carers with things like extended visiting times, cheaper car parking, discounts in the food outlets."

The council employs a **carer practice advisor in each local social work team** and one centrally. They are managed by the team managers but get together to share learning across the county. They go out to schools, meet up with pastoral workers, and provide information, such as where to access support, helping to prevent crises. They run drop in sessions, and other events, as well as promoting best practice, including being involved in awareness raising events such as Carers' Week.

Overall impact

An ever growing number of carers are being identified and helped: 25,000 have now been formally registered by GPs.

Partners are very proud of the cultural change they have achieved. As one interviewee commented: "There has been a sea change in council and the NHS. We've won a lot of respect." And another: "We have got carers into the DNA of the NHS."

KEY LEADERSHIP ACTIONS

The interviewees highlighted a number of leadership actions as particularly contributing to the partnership's many successes.

Building mutual trust by:

Demonstrating a team approach "We are an integrated team. We walk integration." "It doesn't matter what structure you have, it's how people behave that matters." "We've got a networked partnership: interconnectivity and trust." "We have a collegiate sense, and trust, it is ok to go and do stuff." "You can't do it on your own. You all need to pull together."

Persuading new organisations to get involved "You need diplomacy and negotiation skills. We work with the organisations that are ready for the journey, and bring along the others when they are ready. You can't push them. It doesn't work." "When you are trying to build links with potential partner organisations you have to look at their drivers." "When hospitals were going through mergers it wasn't the right time to get them involved. You have to choose your moment."

Avoiding being prescriptive about the actions partners should take "What works in one area may not work in another." "You can't impose a system from one place on another: organisations will have their own ideas." "We are genuinely working with partners – we are not David and Goliath. We don't stamp down on difference."

Agreeing shared strategies by:

Listening to carers "The carers are very good at ideas. You have to ask the end user what they are looking for. People make assumptions about what users want." "There are so many different types of carers. For example we recently had an event for Nepalese carers: there are many retired Gurkhas living in the area."

“Carers sit at the centre.” “Co-design is very important, having a conversation with carers.”

Welcoming fresh ideas “We keep an action log of all the suggestions that are made to us about the carers prescription. We give feedback to people if we haven’t been able to respond to their ideas.” “We are open and willing to do innovation.”

Taking a whole system approach “It’s ground up, champions at the top, and people in-between.” “There is senior permission right across the organisations. The senior leadership commitment helps.” “The bigger players – senior managers, politicians – allow and enable innovation. They don’t disregard a wacky idea.” “We have leaders at all levels – we give permission to people to lead.”

Encouraging long term political commitment “We have a county councillor on the board, she’s been involved in the issue for many years. She has been huge champion. She’s a cabinet member. She attends the young carers strategy group. She gets things moving when we get stuck.” “We have really good member engagement, we have two member champions.” “We inform and work with members.”

Evolving and developing over time “We have been working on this since the mid-90s. We have been making it up as we go along.” “It’s changing and evolving.” “We don’t sit on our laurels.” “It’s an offer people take up and add to themselves. It’s organic.” “We are willing to learn. We are building on success.”

Delivering results by:

Making things happen “Success depends on partnership working. Everything is done in collaboration. Someone says: ‘I’ve had an idea’. They use the others are sounding boards. If we like it we make it happen. We are committed to making it happen.”

Being determined “We are very passionate. It hasn’t happened overnight. It’s been a lot of perseverance. People’s personalities are important.” “Take every opportunity, keep going, keep pressing.” “If you have the passion the budget doesn’t matter.”

Learning from each other “We come together to find solutions where there is underperformance. We have peer-friendly competition.” “We have a commitment to share what works. We are growing and sharing.” “Don’t spend time reinventing the wheel.”

Monitoring and analysing activities closely The partnership monitors which provider services get taken up on the carers’ prescription. “It creates some competition in the system”. “It’s real time, flexible and comparable.” They also monitor who does the referring: which GPs, which people in a particular organisation. “We have a league table of providers. GPs get comparator feedback.” The carers’ commissioning group and Action for Carers Surrey also collect and analyse management data.

CHALLENGES

The interviewees identified very few insurmountable barriers that have prevented them from attaining their ambitions. As one said: “I don’t believe in barriers. There are challenges: it is nearly always an excuse for inactivity.” And another: “Where there is a problem I say: Let’s unpick that.”

There were some issues about confidentiality in relation to setting up the carers’ prescription. As one interviewee commented: “I used to be told off for sharing confidential information with other organisations, but it just made sense.” And another: “With mental health carers there are confidentiality issues, which is not in the best interest of the carer.”

Some also mentioned the frustrations caused by major organisational changes:
“Every structural change sweeps away everything.”

MORE DETAILS

The Surrey Carers Memorandum of Understanding:

https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/152943/Together-for-Carers-support-strategy.pdf

The Carers' Prescription:

<https://www.actionforcarers.org.uk/for-professionals/general-practitioners/the-carers-prescription/>

Surrey Carers Commissioning and Development Strategy:

https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/152942/Carers-Commissioning-and-Development-Strategy-2016_2019.pdf

Surrey Young Carers' Strategy:

<https://www.actionforcarers.org.uk/for-professionals/schools-colleges/our-strategy-for-young-carers/>

Action for Carers Surrey:

<https://www.actionforcarers.org.uk>

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This case study was produced from interviews with partners in 2020 and 2017.