

# Survey of the website content of care home providers



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In 2017, Green carried out a survey of the website content of 71 large care home providers in England in order to learn about their statements regarding support for residents' human rights<sup>1</sup>. The author showed how care home providers had a duty of 'publicly and expressly committing themselves to human rights' and noted that while few of these sources specifically used the term 'human rights' many homes did state their intention to foster the integration of residents within local communities.

Following this exercise and as part of the Time to Connect project<sup>2</sup>, in March 2019, the websites of 500 care home providers in England were superficially reviewed<sup>3</sup> to find out how residents were supported to go out and engage with their local community. This exercise follows a more comprehensive survey of these websites in a search for declarations about upholding human rights. Here are the findings.

## For some, there may be no way out

A third (n=160 or 32%) of care home providers make no reference to their residents going out at all. Perhaps residents do go out and the website is incomplete or inaccurate, or the website author did not consider it important enough to mention.

Some expect the community to come to them and say nothing about residents leaving the building:

*We enjoy excellent relations with the local community with interest groups, entertainers, guest speakers, schools and clubs who are all regular visitors to our home. We view our home as being very much part of the local community.<sup>4</sup>*

## Using local services

A few care home providers focus on access to local healthcare services as a way to get out of the building.

*Our team will support you to make and attend appointments which may include G.P., psychiatrists, psychologists, Community mental health teams and nutritionists.*

Other providers widened the definition of local services to include amenities which might be utilised by residents such as the hairdresser, chiropodist, optician and newsagent. One or two reported business connections maintained by the home, such as their patronage of the garage that maintained their wheelchairs and the butcher from whom they bought their meat. Using local services may make life more convenient, but they hardly make life sweet.

## Mapping the local area

Eight percent (n=41) of the websites gave some details of their local area. If the website provides information about the area surrounding the care home, then we might conclude that they anticipate residents going out sometimes. A number of homes provided rich descriptions:

*A ten-minute level walk takes you to Eastbourne's beautiful Victorian Seafront with its stunning Pier and Bandstand where one can enjoy a variety of entertainment. There are a range of local Churches, St Saviours, St Andrew's, Our Lady of Ransom, Holy Trinity and First Church of Christ Scientist. The beauty of our central position is that all of these are within a short level walk. Literally on our door step are the RAF Association Club and Eastbourne Bridge Club. Not to mention our glorious countryside with fantastic views.*

*The Hill Road shopping area is within walking distance. Layde bay is 100yds from the property with its own pebble beach and steps leading to it... There is a bus stop at the end of the road, we support our residents to apply for a bus pass and encourage them to use the buses to promote independence.*

There is no doubt that these care homes anticipate that some of their residents will leave the building from time to time. Other descriptions may have been written for the benefit of family members – to help them visit, encourage them to visit more often or possibly to reassure them that their relative is in a 'nice place':

*Within easy reach of local shops, public transport and the A1(M).*

## Outings and excursions

As mentioned above, a third of the websites reviewed contained no reference at all to residents leaving the care home. For those that did, a huge amount of the activity (50% of websites, n=252) described outings and excursions, sometimes alongside other outings. While a small number of care homes levied additional charges to pay for these trips, we note that they provide variety and stimulus for participants through:

- Visiting a tourist spot: *the seaside, Frensham Ponds, Eden Camp, zoo, steam railway, boat trip, country house and garden.*
- A cultural activity: *concert, theatre, gallery, cinema, pantomime, opera.*
- An everyday activity: *the local pub<sup>5</sup>, garden centre, shopping, library, café, market, park, restaurant, fish and chips, swimming, ice cream, sports centre, fishing<sup>6</sup>.*

Each of these activities has real value in the life of individual care home residents and, when enjoyed as a group, they deepen the relationship between participants who share the experience together. However, if the group consists solely of residents and staff, these outings will have little impact on residents' relationship with other citizens who live in the wider community. People go as a group and stay together as a group, interacting in only the most superficial ways with others at the venue. They will achieve community presence, but community relationships will be little more than nodding acquaintance.

## Welcoming guests on excursions

Six percent of websites (n=28) hinted at the possibility that friends might join with the resident in activities arranged by the care home. Some of these were making it clear that friends were welcome to join in with activities sited at the care home, but it was less clear whether they were welcome on outings. For a few homes, there was no doubt at all:

*We are keen to find out what individual residents like and will encourage and support them to continue hobbies and pastimes. We especially like to encourage the activities and friendships they had within the community prior to joining us. Relative or friend, you are very welcome to join us for our social events within the home and on external outings.*

*Regular outings covering many interests are also arranged and family members and friends are always welcome; as they are on all of our activities. The more the merrier!*

This is fine for residents who have longstanding friendships with members of the public that they wish to retain. Inviting an old friend can cement the relationship with a neighbour that is otherwise threatened with extinction by the move into a care setting, while sharing a pleasurable activity can refresh the warmth of connection even when the resident cannot remember the old jokes they used to share. But something different is needed when people lack these longstanding connections and feel lonely or detached from community life.

## Stronger community connections

It has long been known<sup>7</sup> that care home residents are at risk of losing touch with family and becoming isolated from the wider community, so steps need to be taken to re-establish a connection with people beyond the home. The best environment for forming new connections is one where people share a common interest or work together towards a common goal greater than themselves. One in five of the websites (19%, n=97) described care home providers encouraging people to teach a class, learn a new language, join a club, link up with a church, vote or find some other way to connect with the community beyond the service.

*There are many clubs in Frinton... bridge club, Frinton theatre, church groups which residents are free to join.*

From time to time, this involves volunteering in the community or fundraising for charity. This latter activity can engage people who do not want to leave the care home and visitors who call in briefly, but it also has potential for building bonds of friendship and common purpose between residents and other citizens<sup>8</sup>.

*Residents particularly enjoy visits from our linked schools as well as helping with activities at local playgroups.*

*Spending time with friends and loved ones helps keep you connected to your past and present, or you may like to meet new people, make new friends, discover shared interests and enjoy their company as well. You can enjoy one of the daily social events or outings to somewhere new, join one of the many interest groups or get involved with the local community. You may have a skill or hobby such as photography or bird watching that you'd like to share with others.*

## Conclusion

This brief survey of the websites of 500 care home providers has yielded some important messages. There are widely divergent views about what is meant by community participation, and a third of the providers give it no attention at all, at least on their website. Of those that do publicly recognise the value of community connections, the most popular way of describing what they do may be to view them as tourist outings. Only one in five providers acknowledge the significance of community relationships, and for many of these, there is little to show what they mean by the phrase. Supporting residents to build new connections beyond the care home requires a detailed and carefully worked out strategy, but the existence of such an approach is only hinted at on a handful of the websites that were examined.

*Being part of the wider community can help many people to maintain a sense of connection and well-being. Some our residents join in the weekly 'singing for the brain' group at Brixington Church, and we organise outings to the theatre, the beach, and attractions such as the World of Country Life. We also ensure that people who wish to exercise their rights to vote in local and general elections can do so. We have a great relationship with a local primary school who perform concerts at Rose Lodge around Christmas and Easter time, and we continue to work with the children of a local school to grow vegetables with the residents under a community landshare arrangement. This year we established a relationship with Exmouth In Bloom. As well as entering our gardens in the competition, the residents have also volunteered to plant out communal spaces in Exmouth.*

Perhaps more care home providers could take a positive and strategic approach.

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<sup>1</sup> Caroline Emmer De Albuquerque Green (2017) Exploring care home providers' public commitments to human rights in light of the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights *Journal of Adult Protection* VOL. 19 NO. 6, pp. 357-367, DOI:10.1108/JAP-09-2017-0033.

<sup>2</sup> Time to Connect was a project funded by the Lottery and delivered by NDTi and Time Banks UK – see <https://www.ndti.org.uk/our-work/our-projects/time-to-connect>

<sup>3</sup> CQC maintains a register of care homes in England and the author accessed this at [https://www.cqc.org.uk/search/site/spreadsheet%20of%20care%20homes?sort=default&distance=15&mode=html&f%5B0%5D=ds\\_created%3A%5B2019-01-01T00%3A00Z%20TO%202020-01-01T00%3A00Z%5D&f%5B1%5D=im\\_field\\_registration\\_status%3A6585&f%5B2%5D=bundle%3Aprovider](https://www.cqc.org.uk/search/site/spreadsheet%20of%20care%20homes?sort=default&distance=15&mode=html&f%5B0%5D=ds_created%3A%5B2019-01-01T00%3A00Z%20TO%202020-01-01T00%3A00Z%5D&f%5B1%5D=im_field_registration_status%3A6585&f%5B2%5D=bundle%3Aprovider) on 1 March 2019, selected the year '2019' and 'providers of registered care homes' and downloaded the database as an Excel file. Using the column headed 'Specialisms/Services', he deleted all services that did not include accommodation for persons who require nursing or personal care. The result was a dataset of 1405 providers. The database gave the website address of each provider, so some of these were checked. Sites were selected to meet the following criteria: (i) the weblink given by CQC worked (a surprisingly large proportion of links were broken); (ii) the site indicated that the provider ran at least one registered care home; (iii) the provider was not a local authority; (iv) an email address was readily visible on the website. While email contact was not a requirement of this survey, it was useful for another task and served as a useful filter to reduce the number of eligible websites. Online forms were not used, as this would have entailed more work and provide no record of the message having been sent. (v) Where websites gave a separate email address for each home that they managed, the first was chosen. The list was frequently re-sorted during the process, and providers were selected quite at random, sometimes by jumping to a different part of the spreadsheet to give some variety. Each email address was tested, duplicates were removed, and any undelivered emails were replaced by another provider from the list. This continued until 8 March when a total of 500 email messages had been sent (35% of the total number of eligible providers). A further 497 website addresses had been checked and excluded. The 500 remaining websites were then briefly reviewed and text (usually within a section headed 'activities', 'services', 'lifestyle' or 'life at the home' transcribed. It is possible that some relevant information was missed because it was sited in an obscure part of the website.

<sup>4</sup> Quotations from care home providers' websites appear in italics. Individual care home providers are not generally named, as the intention is to separate out the distinct themes that may be employed in describing a care home's approach to community participation rather than evaluate individual services. Quotations were selected by reviewing all the relevant websites that included similar statements and selecting the one that best illustrated the theme. A single quotation should not be used to judge the entire approach taken by an individual provider, as this would only be fair if all the statements appearing on the provider's website were taken together.

<sup>5</sup> We note in passing that some care homes have constructed their own makeshift bar and so residents can 'attend the pub' without leaving the building. This means, of course, that they will be less likely to make connections with citizens beyond the care home, but rather remain in the existing social circle comprising other residents, staff and anyone who is currently visiting the home.

<sup>6</sup> The italicised lists of items shown in these three bullet points are aggregated lists drawn from all the websites that were surveyed, rather than a direct quote taken from a single website.

<sup>7</sup> Townsend P (1962) *The last refuge: a survey of residential institutions and homes for the aged in England and Wales* London: Routledge and K. Paul.

<sup>8</sup> A care home resident saw a report about homeless people in their town. As a result, the activities manager supported residents to contact the homelessness service to find out what was needed and then they formed a collection point for donations of these specific items. Then residents took the donated items out to the homelessness project, met the people and accompanied staff on a 'soup run' to meet beneficiaries.