

Support Carers

Reporter

Victoria Hulstrom-Allen at [Milton Park Therapeutic Campus](#), Brookdale Healthcare on 28 January 2015.

What did you do^{*}?

Our previous attempts to hold a regular meeting for carers had foundered, partly because most relatives lived many miles from our service. We decided to relaunch our Carer's Forum and this has now run successfully for six months. We have also started training staff to have a better understanding of the needs of carers. During this training, they learn about the carer's assessment and the services that may be available to carers close to their homes.

What is excellent about it?

Families that include a member with autism often spend a lifetime campaigning for adequate support for their loved one and can neglect their own support needs. As a result, we can add real value by tuning in to the needs of carers as well as recognising their strengths. This helps to equip staff with more insight into the challenges that carers face and to see the individual as a part of their family group. Equipping staff to understand how the carer's assessment works, how to get one and what it might lead to, also strengthens the relationship between our staff and relatives.

Our Carer's Forum happens every other month on a weekday from 5pm to 7pm, as decided by the group. We offer a total of 47 beds on our campus, and the Forum welcomes relatives of current residents. Around a quarter of the families have attended at least one meeting and some travel a long way, using the meeting as an opportunity to visit their relative too. The group have asked for a combination of unstructured discussion and suggestions for improvement, and a staff presentation about a topic chosen by the group. The Deputy General Manager and the Head of Therapeutic Services and Clinical Psychology help with continuity by working together to facilitate all the meetings.

As a result of feedback from the Carer's Forum we have developed a Carer's Guide that includes a description of the service, useful phone numbers and a campus map.

Even better next time?

We will be updating the training about the carers assessment in the light of forthcoming health and social care reforms.

We would like to involve carers in the recruitment and selection of staff, and hope to negotiate this with the Carer's Forum and our own organisation in due course.

We will be asking for views on the Carer's Guide once it has been in use for a while.

Carers may be offered the opportunity to contribute to conference presentations.

The group may in the future decide to create an online forum or share contact details so that they can offer one another peer support between meetings. Staff may propose some of these options.

* [NDTi](#) was commissioned to deliver a staff development programme promoting a more personalised and inclusive approach for those living and working in locked rehabilitation services in the English East Midlands. While the current inspection routine has a focus on risk prevention, our job is to focus on sharing positive practice and innovation. Peter Bates led the programme and wrote up these stories.

The Excellence Programme is for independent and voluntary sector providers of locked residential rehabilitation services for people with mental health issues or learning disabilities living in the East Midlands. It has delivered:

- *A series of seminars for key staff and people using services to promote a more personalised and inclusive approach*
- *A shared sense of what excellent services look like, captured in an [Excellence Framework](#) document.*
- *Learning exchange visits between members which lead to individual action plans for each service*
- *Excellence stories that capture and share ideas for service improvement.*

These case studies have arisen from members of the Excellence programme and NDTi has not independently verified what we have been told. Some are radical and ambitious approaches that transform the whole service, while others consist of small steps that may not seem especially exciting to other readers, but make a difference to one person. Some readers might even question whether progress is being made at all! The overall purpose is to stimulate reflection and celebration for every step forward, whether large or small.