

PeoplePlus Stoke and Staffordshire Carers Hub Response to the Healthwatch Staffordshire Support for Carers Report

PeoplePlus welcome the Healthwatch report and recognise that some of the recommendations required our attention. There are plans in place to ensure these are implemented.

As a company we are committed to delivering the very best service for carers and as such take every opportunity to hear directly from our service users and respond to what they are telling us. As part of this commitment we are already discussing a further Healthwatch review of the Carers Hub in early 2017. Whilst some of the stories featured in the report express understandable frustration, there are also clear examples of how we have successfully supported adults, parents and young people to overcome the barriers and challenges they can often face as carers.

The report is largely concerned with the transition of the service from the previous providers, the initial setting up of the Carers Hub and our first six months of delivery up to March 2016. We've come a long way since our launch, of 8,000 carers reported to be on the database of the two previous providers, less than a quarter consented to have their information handed over and many of these came with incomplete records and details which made initial contact difficult.

We closely monitor the performance of the Hub and the quality of the service we provide and as a consequence had already identified a number of the recommendations made by Healthwatch. The Report therefore confirms our own findings and further emphasises the need for us to focus on the things that mean the most to carers and those that make the biggest difference.

During the time that the Healthwatch report was being compiled, we made a number of changes to our delivery model. Whilst there is still more to do, significant progress has been made at a fairly rapid pace. A new set of customer service standards has been implemented, including a timeline for responses to support the need to improve the service and meet not only our KPI's but Carers' expectations. There has been a significant increase in the number and type of activities we provide, giving carers the opportunity to try new experiences such as horse-riding, rock-climbing and bowling, and meeting other carers at information sessions and coffee mornings. We have developed a Young Carers Passport to encourage Young Carers to attend activities and focus groups. They will receive a stamp in their passport each time they attend. We recognised improvements needed to be made in our telephone response times and changed the system in May to remove the need for Carers to select the Stoke or Stafford office.

Response to recommendations

Raising Awareness

We have reviewed and amended our marketing materials and developed specific promotional activity for young carers with the support and feedback from focus groups. We have also created tailored material which is distributed through community facilities, GP surgeries and pharmacies.

We are continually reviewing our communications marketing plan and the location of our outreach activities. Further development of the website will make it more user friendly and a reliable place to access information on what services we offer and what a carer should do if they are in crisis.

Communication

Clear timelines for responses, next steps and follow up actions are already in place. We have started to investigate why delays have occurred in providing the outcome of Carer Assessments and will put measures in place to ensure that expectations are met.

Carer's Assessments

We are focussed on reducing waiting times for assessments and we know from our own monitoring that some improvements are needed. In July 2016, 181 carers were seen within our target of seven days. This has resulted in 31 adult and young carers receiving advice and guidance and 101 receiving a full assessment.

Accessibility

All our premises are DDA compliant with sufficient private interview space.

We have acted on feedback to identify new premises in Stoke at The Bridge, Birches Head Road, to provide free parking and increased space for activities. We move on September 30, and look forward to welcoming new customers.

We have 150 outreach venues across the county - nearly three times the number we had initially planned. This has allowed us to engage with a larger number of people, in communities that had not been easily able to access to carers services before.

Ensuring that the responsibilities of young carers are properly recognised by schools and colleges is a crucial part of our work. Our teams have now engaged with 31 local primary and secondary school and launched a pilot called Cool Carers at Burnwood Primary School. This has proved so successful; the school has agreed to continue the programme.

Training and Development

PeoplePlus are extremely proud of the dedication and expertise of our front line staff and managers. Several of the team are carers themselves and all have wealth of knowledge about local provision and services.

All our front line staff are undertaking an NVQ Level 3 qualification in Information, Advice and Guidance which has customer service training threaded throughout.

Specialist needs

We recognise the need for us to draw on a wider range of specialist support organisations and have appointed staff champions for Mental Health and Learning Disabilities.

Relationships with other providers

The hub and spoke model of delivery is constantly evolving as the strength of our partnership arrangements and network of delivery partners continue to grow and mature. We are continually reviewing our engagement strategy and links to local providers and have an open door policy for any organisation that delivers quality services for carers.

Activities

We have improved the range of activities and groups on offer and are working to ensure this support can be accessed across the geography. We continuously review our activity plan and welcome feedback from carers, carer's forums and other local providers.

Kevin Rodger
Communities Director, PeoplePlus