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## Newsletter

### **New help for hidden carers? - Recent Law Commission proposals**

#### **The current situation**

Carers must be giving "regular and substantial care" to qualify for help from a local authority. They must also request an assessment of their needs if they are to receive one, although social workers have a duty to inform the carer of their right to request one. As a result, many carers are hidden from the system. This means they may be deprived of support that improves their lives and avoids costly interventions later.

#### **The difficulties for carers – Lisa's story**

"I feel like I'm begging to be let into the system," says Lisa Kilcairn, who cares for her mother who has anxiety disorder with psychotic features and a recent colostomy. Aged 33, Lisa has been a carer for almost her whole life, but has not had a carer's assessment. She feels excluded from the system because she doesn't live with her mother and has a job. She became aware that she might qualify for respite care and contacted her council, but found it difficult to gain an assessment. She was visited by a member of staff but it hasn't resulted in any concrete plans. "A carer's assessment would help me be clearer on what I'm entitled to and what things I can access," she says.

#### **Proposals for changes**

Concerned by situations like Lisa's the Law Commission recommended sweeping changes to carers' rights in its proposals to overhaul adult care law, published last month. It said carers would no longer need to request an assessment and instead should be offered one as standard, though they would retain the right to request one when it is not offered.

It also proposed removing the "regular and substantial" criteria to mark a shift from an hours of care-based system of assessing carers. This means that tasks that are not easily measured in this way, such as support from a distance, intermittent support, often required by those with mental health problems, and emotional support, which is often impossible to quantify in terms of time, will all now be brought within the system.

Carers would only need to appear to have needs that could be met by social care services to qualify for assessment. Campaigners say these changes could provide a real step forward for carers' rights and would put them on a near equal footing to those they care for.

### **Out of hours Service.**

Family Tree have just received this information from Wayne Connor-Scahill (Acting Clinical Service Manager - Access Line - Adult & Older People's Mental Health Division – Wirral)

"For your information, any service users or carers who require out of hours advice regarding their distress or general signposting can call Lakefield Ward on 0151 482 7639. We are providing this service as a result of a recent inquiry into an incident. If patients are under the care of the Crisis Resolution Home Treatment team then they should use GP OOH (out of hours) number (0151 678 8496) as usual when their call is outside of usual hours Mon-Fri 9-5. In the longer term we hope for the Crisis service to move up to Lakefield Ward, Clatterbridge"

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### **Will these changes happen?**

The prospects for the Law Commission's proposals being included in government legislation on care reform, due next year, seem favourable. The UK government's carers strategy, published last November, recognised the need to reform assessments, while it has also provided over £4m in funding for projects to identify carers earlier and provide low-level interventions to support them.

Perhaps the biggest barrier to change is cost. The Welsh government has already stated concern that the proposals could lead to a rush of carers requiring social workers' time. But Emily Holzhausen, director of policy at Carers UK, is not convinced: "People don't flock to social services to have assessments. And in some cases early investment prevents problems further down the line."

This broader definition of caring would benefit carers, empower social workers and possibly prove cost-neutral for local authorities. All it needs is for ministers to legislate and make it happen.

Don't forget our new web-site [www.familytreewirral.co.uk](http://www.familytreewirral.co.uk)

## Hearing Voices

### Notes from the meeting with Jacqui Dillon June 9th

#### Some Facts about Hearing Voices

- Hearing voices when nobody is around or at least when nobody seems to be saying the words you hear, is quite a common thing to happen.
- Many people hear voices that are not perceived as thinking, thinking aloud or coming from people around them.
- Up to 10% of the population in the UK hear voices that no one else can hear.
- It is estimated that 20% of these people find their voices reassuring.
- For some people, this experience is part of their life and causes no distress.
- For others, hearing voices is a very distressing experience. Their voices are perceived as threatening, powerful and disturbing.
- People who hear voices may hear one voice or voices.
- The voice or voices may be pleasant and 'good' or they may be unpleasant and 'bad' voices.
- Sometimes, 'good' voices may turn 'bad' later on, and vice versa.
- There is usually a pattern to when the voices appear, when they stop, when they get worse and when they get better.
- Voices often appear or get worse when the voice hearer feels stressed.
- To a voice hearer, the voices exist! They are real to the person who hears them.
- Hearing voices is always a very individual and personal experience although certain themes are quite common.
- What the voices say may reflect important aspects of the hearer's inner emotional state.

Research done by Dr Marius Romme and Dr Sandra Escher (who spoke at the Family Tree Conference in 2007) shows that at least 70% of people who hear voices have had some traumatic experience which they connect with hearing voices .

#### People who coped well with hearing voices

Experienced themselves as stronger  
Experienced more positive voices  
Experienced less imperative voices  
Set more limits to the voices

#### People who couldn't cope with voices

Experienced themselves as weaker  
Experienced more negative voices  
Experienced more imperative voices  
Did not dare set limits to the voices

## Living with Voices: Key Themes

### Voices are a survival strategy:

- Point at real life problems in the past and the present
- Use metaphorical language that can be translated into real life challenges
- Are split off feelings - feelings that are unbearable
- Are awful messages about terrifying past experiences
- Voices are both an attack on identity and a way to protect or preserve identity

### Recovery' is not about getting rid of voices but about

- The person understanding their voices in relation to their life experiences
- The person changing their relationship with their voices so that the voices become harmless and/or helpful

### Equating hearing voices with the diagnosis of schizophrenia

'Schizophrenia' is a lifelong label

#### What doesn't help:

- The 'no-hope' and 'lifelong illness' approach
- The passive victim of pathology approach – not encouraged to help oneself .
- The dominance of the diagnosis of schizophrenia – disregarding all other problems
- Difficulties in social acceptance arising from the diagnosis of schizophrenia
- The negative effects of psychiatric hospital admission

### Important steps in recovering from the distress associated with hearing voices:

- Meeting someone who takes an interest in the voice hearer as a person
- Giving hope by normalising the experience and showing that there is a way out
- Meeting people who accept the voices as real; being accepted as a voice hearer by others, but also by oneself.
- Becoming actively interested in the hearing voices experience
- Recognising the voices as personal and becoming the owner of your voices
- Changing the power structure between you and your voices
- Making choices
- Changing the relationship with your voices
- Recognising ones own emotions, accepting them and expressing them

**Living with Voices** is an anthology of 50 stories of voice hearers who have learned to live with their voices through accepting them. It contains contributions from voice hearers from all over the world, .

- Several key themes have emerged that illustrate how it is possible to live a fulfilling life with the experience of hearing voices.

## Sue Gladden's retirement

As you may know, Sue Gladden retired from her role as Carer's Services Manager at the end of July.

I'm sure you will all join me in thanking Sue for all the years of hard work, commitment and dedication she has put into Family Tree and wish both her and Graham a long, happy and healthy retirement. If you would like to join us at a Carer's Lunch on October 13th to say goodbye to Sue then please let me know using the enclosed booking form.

To introduce myself as Sue's successor – and it's a tough act to follow - my name is Iain Mayoll and my background is in adult education, designing and running such courses as Assertiveness, Stress Management, Building Self Esteem, Conflict Resolution and Negotiation Skills. I am also a qualified counsellor and group psychotherapist and hope to be able to use some of that experience to run a training day for you entitled "How to get the best from your Service Provider" on November 17th - lunch included and booking form enclosed.

There is also a training day organised for 27<sup>th</sup> October where you will have the opportunity to have an open discussion with Chris Taylor – the carer lead for CWP – on your issues. I have also invited Iain Stewart – the Wirral NHS Alliance lead - to give an update on current NHS service provision changes – lunch included and booking form enclosed.

And the final event of this year will be Xmas dinner at the Devon Doorway on 7th December—booking form enclosed.

If you need to contact me for any reason my usual working days are Tuesday to Thursday, my mobile number is 07552 930789 and my e-mail address is [iain.mayoll@cwps.nhs.uk](mailto:iain.mayoll@cwps.nhs.uk).

I am delighted to be the new Family Tree Carers Services Manager and look forward to meeting as many of you as possible over the coming months.

As my first request to you all – as I am keen to ensure that carers have a full say in CWP service provision wherever possible – I'd like to know what you would like to see on a possible new CWP carer's website. I'm looking forward to hearing from you....

Morecambe and around the bay



On the Monday of Carers Week we set off on our trip to Morecambe, Carnforth and Lancaster. In Morecambe we had the opportunity to take a (very windy) walk along the promenade and see Eric's statue or take tea at the Midland Hotel – a splendid Art Deco building (much more the civilised option). Lunch was taken on Carnforth Station in the refreshment room that featured in the film Brief Encounter where there was also an interesting museum and of course the famous clock where Celia Johnson met Trevor Howard.

Finally we went to Lancaster where there was a choice of museums to visit or the chance to do some shopping. Those of us who went to the tiny Cottage Museum were entertained by the wonderful "tenant" who really made it come alive.

Finally back to Wirral where the sun was shining.



We began the day with a visit to Martin Mere bird sanctuary which provided a fascinating mix of both British waterfowl in the wild, which kept the twitchers and serious birdwatchers among us happy with excellent views of the mere from several large hides - as well as more exotic species from all around the world in the smaller man-made lakes, which were also home to otters and beavers. After lunch in the excellent café we drove on through some breathtaking dales scenery to Stonyhurst College – near Clitheroe.

The college is open to visitors outside of school term times and is well worth a visit for its works of art, collections of South American antiquities and the beauty of the architecture. We were especially lucky to have a former pupil as our tour guide who had a wealth of interesting stories – a favourite of ours being one of the tricks played by the pupils on the teachers. Apparently they "borrowed" three sheep from a local farmer, painted them with the numbers one, two and four and released them in the school halls. The sheep numbered one, two and four were quickly rounded up but the college staff then spent a week trying to find number three!

The college also has a large number of famous old boys including the actor Charles Laughton and the young Arthur Conan Doyle – the author of the Sherlock Holmes books – who happened to have friends at the college named Sherlock and Watson and two brothers he wasn't too keen on called Moriarty!

J.R.R. Tolkien – author of the Lord of the Rings series – wrote some of the books at Stonyhurst and apparently some of the place names in the novels bear an uncanny resemblance to places around the college.

Following a brief stop in the college café to top up our tea and cake levels we drove back to Birkenhead to be greeted by the first rain of an excellent and varied day out in rural Lancashire.

## Proposed Changes to Benefits

In what has been described as the biggest shake up ever in welfare benefits, the government are proposing sweeping changes over the life of this parliament.

Many of the changes are contained in the current Welfare Reform Bill and are still subject to Parliamentary approval.

**The main proposed changes** (by 2013) are

- The abolition of Income Support, Tax Credits, Employment Support Allowance, and Job Seekers Allowance and their replacement by a new Universal Credit.
- The abolition of Disability Living Allowance and its replacement by a new Personal Independence Payment (PIP).
- The abolition of Council Tax Benefit and its replacement by local alternatives
- The abolition of the Discretionary Social Fund (which includes Community Care Grants, Budgeting Loans and Crisis Loans) and its replacement, probably, by locally funded alternatives through Social Services.
- New and more stringent rules about over-payments etc.

*In the meantime*

- The time limiting of contributory Employment Support Allowance - only means tested support will be available for people with long term health problems.

**Other points that may affect you or the person you care for.**

- Over 70% of claims and contacts are planned to be made on-line. There will be no facility for face-to face contact.
- Carers Allowance will remain
- Universal credit will be paid monthly - to a single claimant in the case of a couple
- Although Housing Benefit administration will be transferred from local authorities to the Department of Work and Pensions, some complex cases (e.g. for those in supported accommodation) may remain with the local authority.

## Other Causes for Concern

As well as worries about changes to entitlement and reductions in levels of benefits another big worry concerns the proposals to cut legal aid to organisations that provide support to people wanting to challenge benefits decisions. This could affect the availability of benefits advice such as that provided by Advocacy in Wirral.

Another possible consequence is on income of the Department of Adult Social Services (DASS) - currently they can charge people who receive DLA at least the amount of that benefit. If someone who needs care no longer receives that benefit or a lower amount then the income of DASS will reduce which could affect the amount of services they can provide - this reduction will be on top of any other reduction in grant from Central Government.

Despite this there are **some positive changes** which could help certain categories of people.

- The 16 hour rule is to be abolished which means that people who work less hours will be able to keep more of their earnings and it will be easier to make a gradual return to work.
- Mortgage interest repayments will be treated the same as rent (at present there is no provision for people to claim mortgage interest as part of working tax credits, although it is available through Income Support) This has been a disincentive to people with mortgages who become ill and who need to return to work gradually to go back into employment.

There are a lot more details concerning specific benefits. If you need more advice or information please contact

Advocacy in Wirral

Tel 0151 650 1530

e-mail [admin@aiw.org.uk](mailto:admin@aiw.org.uk)

or

Wirral Welfare Rights Unit

Tel 0151 666 4570 (Mon, Tues, Thurs and Fri 9.30 -12 30

e-mail [welfarerights@wirral.gov.uk](mailto:welfarerights@wirral.gov.uk)

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