Home Improvements
A service improvement grant-making scheme for care home projects working with people with Alzheimer’s disease and other dementias

Introduction

Home Improvements was a grant-making scheme launched in 2008 by the Mental Health Foundation to improve the quality of care and the quality of life for people with dementia living in registered care homes. It provided grants of between £5,000 and £25,000 for innovative service improvement projects lasting up to 2 years.

The scheme was launched against a backdrop of considerable evidence, as well as extensive media reports, indicating the need for service improvement in the delivery of care for people with dementia living in many care homes.

Home Improvements sought to demonstrate that effective interventions and quality services for people with dementia in care homes are possible. It aimed to support the development of innovative projects, whose benefits would be felt locally but which would also be of national interest and importance to the care home sector and those involved in the care of people with dementia – ultimately impacting on policy and the quality of services for older people with dementia living in care homes.

The requirements for funding detailed that individual projects must focus on people’s mental health needs and should aim to add value and improve the quality of their care and support. They should also promote key outcomes of person-centred care, including meeting diverse needs, increasing choice and control, making residents’ lives more fulfilling and stimulating, and demonstrating dignity and respect.

Planned Key Outcomes

- Improved quality of life and quality of care for people with dementia in each grant-funded project, including demonstrable improvements in person-centred care
- Innovative, sustainable and replicable service improvement models, that may also demonstrate good value for money, for care homes providing care to people with dementia
- Innovation in service user involvement models for older people with dementia

Projects funded

The scheme awarded 4 grants ranging from £5,000 to £25,000 to the following organisations:

- South West Yorkshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust developed a multimedia toolkit ("Portrait of a Life") for life story work in dementia care
- Norse Care (formerly part of Norfolk County Council) helped families and friends of residents to become more involved with their care homes
- Blackpool Council supported care home residents to become involved in setting standards and commissioning services
- Age UK Oxfordshire provided information and training on the needs and issues of older lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) residents with dementia

The need for our work - Dementia and the Quality of Care in Registered Care Homes

At the time of launch, it was estimated that two-thirds of care home residents had some form of dementia (244,000) and a third of all people with dementia lived in care homes. Most care homes were privately owned and didn’t provide any specialist care for people with dementia. Over 100,000 people a year were inappropriately prescribed anti-psychotic medication to control their behaviour and three-quarters of care home residents in one study complained of not having enough daytime activities.

A number of media and public reports indicated the low quality of care in general in many care homes for older people. Improving the quality of care for people with dementia was a key objective in the National Dementia Strategy for England, published by the Department of Health in 2009.
The Successful Projects

South West Yorkshire NHS Foundation Trust
“Portrait of a Life”: The development of a multimedia toolkit for the use of life stories in dementia care

The project aimed to produce a comprehensive multi-media toolkit which would facilitate training and education relating to life story work, and promote meaningful engagement for residents through life story work in care homes.

Life story work involves working closely with a person with dementia and people who know them to build up a picture of their life using words, pictures and objects. It encourages care home staff to get to know the person, rather than just treating their dementia. The work resulted from identifying an evident gap whereby care professionals wished to carry out life story work but didn’t have access to comprehensive educational and practical resources. The development of this resource has broken new ground in life story work by developing a toolkit that supports the knowledge and evidence-base of individuals, family carers and staff working with older people and in particular those living with dementia.

The team developed a resource that is accessible and user friendly for different levels and disciplines of staff in a wide range of mental health and social care settings. It helps staff and family carers to better understand the rationale, risks and benefits of life story work and guides them in how to produce life stories and other innovative products such as electronic journals, memory boxes and life story boards.

Named “Portrait of a Life”, the toolkit comprises an 80 minute training DVD, a 14 minute film “Going Home”, a DVD ROM containing numerous additional learning resources, tutorials, video clips and documentation, an e-learning guide to developing electronic journals, a 98 page detailed written guide, and a number of resources that people can copy.

The toolkit was produced in conjunction with service users, carers, staff, Alzheimer’s Ambassadors and other experts and professionals with international recognition in the field of life story work. Case studies and filmed group activities were used to demonstrate how staff can utilise life story work to plan meaningful activities, such as reminiscence, to further promote and maintain the wellbeing of the people with dementia in their care. The training DVD brings together much of the available evidence and latest thoughts from recognised experts on life story work to produce a user friendly resource which can be utilised by and meet the needs of family carers, health professionals and academics. It also has the potential for wider use in schools and supports the educational curriculum for nursing, medical and allied health professionals, as well as the wider community.

For more information visit: http://www.southwestyorkshire.nhs.uk/quality-innovation/initiatives-projects/portrait-of-a-life/ and http://www.ennovations.co.uk/portrait-of-a-life

Norse Care (formerly part of Norfolk County Council)
Friends and Family – Family and Friends: Helping families and friends of residents to become more involved with their care homes

The project, working with four care homes in Norfolk, aimed to improve the general wellbeing of residents with dementia by supporting their relatives and friends, sometimes known as ‘the lost carers’, in maintaining a positive role in the lives of residents with dementia. The project specifically looked to:

- Provide lost carers with a bespoke development and support programme
- Identify and deploy the particular skills of relatives to provide individual and group opportunities for residents
- Improve community links to reduce the feeling of isolation experienced by some residents with dementia
- Support some residents with dementia to become advocates of this new programme in order for it to then be rolled-out to other care homes in Norfolk

One of the key challenges moving care organisations and their staff away from delivering task-focused care to a more person-centred model is ensuring on going engagement with family and friends in the process. As guardians of the most detailed information about the resident, it is essential to support relatives with sharing this knowledge to better equip staff to meet the care needs, wishes and wants of the individual resident – this is particularly valuable for residents with dementia.

Following the initial launch of the project, Norfolk and Waveney Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust ran explanatory sessions for staff, with a further 31 sessions for families and friends of residents. From the outset, relatives were integral to the approach and formed a core part of the planning and steering group. These sessions included enabling family and friends, as carers of residents with dementia, to explore and share their experiences as well as learn about and appreciate the perspective of someone with dementia through developing greater awareness.

The project was able to engage relatives in developing and delivering a wide range theatrical, musical and creative sessions to promote opportunities and “fun” for “their own” and other residents. Themed fun events,
the use of an interactive theatre company, live music and the involvement of children to bring an inter-
generational community mix to the home were all ways
that relatives were able to continue to provide care
for their loved ones. Memorable moments included a
1940s street party, where residents and relatives were
singing and playing musical instruments together. The
project learned that many of the residents enjoyed the
preparation almost as much as the events themselves.
The experience added an injection of fun, variety and
surprise to the day to day life of each care home. As a
result, the care homes became more relaxed and lively,
relatives realised that they could still play a major role in
continuing to provide care for their loved ones, and the
closer links between staff and relatives enabled excellent
person-centred planning and richer, more connected
relationships with residents.

Norse Care has developed a positive model of relatives’
involvement and support for residents with dementia
who live in care homes which, together with the resource
pack produced, is planned to be rolled to other care
homes in Norfolk and beyond. The project has secured
a national and international profile with information
about the project presented at the International
Alzheimer’s Conference in Thessalonika, Greece (2010),
the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services
Conference in Manchester (2010), the Alzheimer’s
Europe Conference (2011) and the UK Dementia
Congress (2011).

For more information please email: contact@norsecare.
co.uk

Blackpool Council
Dementia Care Standards: Involving care home residents in setting standards of provision

The project, led by Blackpool Council, sought to
improve service provision within care home settings
by involving people with dementia in the development
and publication of a set of local standards for care
home provision for people with dementia focusing on
mental health needs in their residential environment.
Once finalised, the project then planned to publish and
launch the standards amongst care home providers
in Blackpool, together with support sessions for all
dementia registered care homes to consider how they
apply to their home and how they can be effectively
embedded.

The 9 month long project was split into three elements:

Months 1 – 3: Make contact with care homes
Choose residents to participate and gain
their consent
Train advocates and start consultation

Months 4 – 6: Consultation with residents, staff and
families
Start to collate data

Months 7 – 9: Develop standards
Publish and launch standards

This consultation exercise led to the development
of a set of local standards, directly from the voices of
the people with dementia. These standards covered
areas including dignity, respect, choice, maintaining
independence for residents, the provision and promotion
of activities and clean and safe environments. The
project standards also importantly reinforced the
need for the connection with families and carers to be
safeguarded.

The standards were formally published and launched in
August 2010, following a Dementia Conference led by
Blackpool Council’s Strategic Commissioning Division
with the Blackpool Care Learning Partnership – many
of whom are care home providers. The launch involved
a series of pledges including communicating the
standards to staff members and informally adopting the
standards as good practice.

The project has successfully led to better dementia
care standards, increased understanding for carers
and staff and stronger partnership working amongst
stakeholders. Work is continuing with the aim to develop
a Charter mark as a tool for accreditation for care homes
in the region. The people with dementia who were
interviewed have undoubtedly helped to shape the
future of dementia care within Blackpool and change the
way in which commissioners view quality in dementia
care.

For more information: www.blackpool.gov.uk or email
kelly.neale@blackpool.gov.uk
Age UK Oxfordshire  
**Rainbow Care Homes: How to better meet the needs of older lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) residents with dementia**

With the need to understand how care homes can better meet the needs of older LGBT residents in general, and those with a dementia in particular, the aim of the project was to embed the awareness of older LGBT residents’ needs and experiences in the organisational and care culture of the homes and, by doing so, ensure that older LGBT residents with dementia are able to participate, benefit and be appropriately supported in a care home environment.

The current cohort of older LGBT people grew at a time when homosexuality was illegal and seen as mental dysfunction. It was only in 1992 that the World Health Organization removed homosexuality from its list of mental illnesses. With estimates in the 1940s and 1950s of 5-10% of the population being either gay or bisexual, it is likely that a sizeable amount of older LGBT people would be in need of care.

However, there is doubt whether care home staff understand the needs of older LGBT residents or, even more fundamentally, whether they are even accepting of homosexuality. Fear among older LGBT people is leading them to conceal who they are, as they believe there is a real possibility of rejection and that they may receive compromised care if they are open about their sexual orientation.

The specific objectives for the project were to:

| - Improve staff awareness and understanding of the specific needs of older LGBT residents |
| - Produce a good practice tool for the Order of St John Care Trust (a care home provider) on working with and caring for older LGBT residents with dementia |

**Phase 1** of the project reviewed existing knowledge on the topic amongst stakeholder groups across the UK. A more focused piece of work was then conducted in two pilot care homes to get a better understanding of care staff’s attitudes through surveys. The survey results revealed significant levels of misunderstanding as well as uncertainty over how to deal with older LGBT residents.

**Phase 2** of the project involved raising awareness amongst staff, based on the training needs identified in Phase 1, and saw the development and delivery of awareness raising sessions in the two pilot care homes. Each session was compulsory for staff and had clear learning objectives to:

| - Raise awareness among staff of the historical environment in which this generation of older LGBT people grew up in |
| - Explore with the staff the meanings of providing LGBT-inclusive care |
| - Enable staff to feel more confident to provide care for LGBT residents |

The project had a number of major successes. The training sessions significantly improved staff awareness and understanding of the specific needs of older LGBT residents, with over 80% of participants stating that the ideas and information will help their work. The training is now planned to be rolled out across all of the 17 care homes that the Order of St John Care Trust operate in Oxfordshire, with the potential to roll it out widely across the UK. Recommendations have been made for changes to the life history assessment form that Order of St John Care Trust is currently using so it can become more inclusive and hopefully enable older LGBT people feel more willing and comfortable to tell their stories. A detailed report on the project will be produced, outlining further suggestions for best practice.

For more information: [http://www.ageuk.org.uk/oxfordshire/](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/oxfordshire/)
Summary

Home Improvements was funded by a very generous legacy that was left to the Mental Health Foundation and without this it would not have been possible to support these four projects. Never the less, the amount of money provided to each project represented little more than seed corn funding. The Mental Health Foundation provided additional ‘in kind’ support through action learning sets, advice and guidance (especially concerning project evaluation), and a national platform to promote and disseminate the projects’ achievements. It is testimony therefore to everyone involved in all four projects that so much was achieved with relatively few resources.

The evaluation of all four projects also demonstrated that very significant improvements can be made for people with dementia living in care homes where there is commitment, energy, enthusiasm and creativity, backed up by organisational support, professionalism and good partnership working. The projects benefitted people with dementia, their families and friends who were directly involved but also successfully developed interventions, approaches, services and products which can improve the quality of life and quality of care for anybody with dementia living in a care home. The Foundation recommends that individuals and organisations working in the care home sector with people with dementia gives serious consideration to incorporating the work of Home Improvements into the services they provide.

The Mental Health Foundation continues to support good practice in dementia care and, as well as care homes, has undertaken research and development projects for people with dementia living in their own homes using self-help approaches and receiving support from community services, and to encourage the participation and empowerment of people with dementia to influence services and policies that affect their lives.