

CARERS IN HERTFORDSHIRE – MENTAL HEALTH PROJECT
‘MAKING INVOLVEMENT MORE EFFECTIVE’
REPORT - DECEMBER 2016



INTRODUCTION

The primary purpose of the Carers in Hertfordshire Mental Health Involvement Project is to enable carers of people with mental illness to become more involved in the planning, delivery and development of Mental Health services in Hertfordshire. The Mental Health Carers Involvement Project team is funded by the Integrated Health and Care Commissioning Team on behalf of Hertfordshire County Council and the two Clinical Commissioning Groups, and has been in operation since 2007. The project team has two Mental Health Involvement Workers – Sarah Williams and Deryn Sparrow and is led by the Carers Involvement Manager – Roma Mills.

Over the past nine years, the project team has actively encouraged carers to join the Mental Health Carers' Network and we now have 154 registered members. Our Mental Health Forums are held every 8 weeks and are consistently well attended by an average of 20 carers. The Forums provide an opportunity to learn more from guest speakers about local statutory and voluntary mental health services, to share information and concerns, and to agree response to proposals for changes to mental health services. We also facilitate focus groups, meetings and events where carers' views are welcomed and where we have the opportunity to influence service developments.

It is important to note the positive shift in the project over the past 9 years - the involvement of carers has grown significantly and they are recognised as having a crucial role in the development of Mental Health services. The challenge is how do we make Involvement more effective? How do we co-ordinate and develop the Mental Health Involvement Project to ensure key messages, such as the staffing issues at Hertfordshire Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust (HPFT), are consistent and being heard and acted upon?

METHODOLOGY

Carers in Hertfordshire invited 32 mental health carers who were representatives or potential representatives to a workshop entitled 'Making Involvement more Effective' on 26th October, 2016, 10.30 – 12.30, at Roehill Hall, Hatfield.

Ten carers registered and attended the event and it was positive to note a cross-section - all had joined the project at different times and care for people with different mental health conditions.

The facilitator (Sarah Williams) divided the carers into three groups and they had approx. 15 minutes to answer and write notes on each of the following questions. After each question there was a large group discussion:

In what ways is Involvement effective?

In what ways is Involvement not effective?

In what ways can we improve Involvement?

KEY NOTES/MESSAGES FROM THE WORKSHOP

In what ways is Involvement effective?

- Being involved in the project provides a source of expertise i.e. attending the mental health forums.
- It is an opportunity to share experiences, personal evidence, and learn from each other.
- Meeting other carers helps alleviate feelings of isolation and we can support each other.
- More carers are involved and it provides an opportunity for a “bigger, shared” voice which can influence HPFT and others i.e. commissioners.
- It provides a better insight into how the system works, or how the system doesn’t work.

In ways is involvement not effective?

- We need a clear carer agenda to drive forward what we need.
- Does the service listen to us? If they haven’t heard – we haven’t said it. We need to keep saying it and keep pushing.
- We are not effective – we need co-ordination.
- During Mental Health Carer Forums too much personal information is shared, too many issues are raised and there is insufficient time to resolve a point of view.

In what ways can we improve involvement?

- We need to continue to recognise the value of carer input in all areas of the project including recruitment and training.
- We need to actively build on the strengths of different organisations and there needs to be better communication between organisations – we need co-ordinated input.
- When carers attend meetings we go as individuals without a plan – should we be better prepared?
- We need to continue to push for change i.e. staffing issues.
- More surveys need to be carried out which will give us insight based on evidence.

Large group discussion

The group discussed and highlighted the positive and challenging aspects of the Mental Health Forums:

- The importance of information sharing.
- The need to reinforce the Involvement Forum Ground Rules and spend less time on individual stories.
- There is not always time to feedback information from representatives who attend meetings.
- At times, the forum can feel “rushed”. There was a suggestion of extending the time by half an hour.
- Is the agenda too broad? Do we need to focus on specific mental health conditions?
- It was suggested and agreed to hold a ‘Have Your Say – Making Involvement more Effective’ forum in January 2017, which will provide an opportunity for carers to discuss the involvement project and plan the forums:

- What would carers like to achieve this year?
- What key themes would carers like to focus on in 2017?
- What guest speakers would carers like to invite to talk about and address these themes?

RECOMMENDATIONS

- To hold a Mental Health Carers Forum in January, 2017 entitled 'Have Your Say – Making Involvement more Effective'. The aim will be to take a more co-ordinated approach to planning the forums for the year, identify what the carers would like to achieve, key themes they would like to focus on, and what guest speakers could be invited to talk about and address these themes.
- It was acknowledged that over half of the carers present at the workshop are also members of HPFT Involvement and Engagement project. As such, they attend various meetings with HPFT and Carers in Herts Involvement Workers may or may not be present. It was agreed we need to take a more co-ordinated approach and, where possible, raise the same themes to ensure key messages such as staffing issues and lack of care co-ordination are consistent and fundamentally being heard and acted upon. To enable Carers in Herts to think of ways to co-ordinate and develop this, the carers wrote down the meetings they currently attend and a further discussion will take place with the group after the January mental health forum.
- To enable us to identify and capture key issues/themes from mental health carers, Carers in Herts need to develop an Involvement Report to enable us to feedback consistently to HPFT, commissioners and any other service providers.