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## **Wirral Carer Connectors: Insight into needs of Carers**

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**Collated through  
contact with WIRED  
Care Connectors**

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## Wirral Carer Connectors: Insight into needs of Carers

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## **Wirral Carer Connectors: Insight into needs of Carers**

### **Local work with Carers and Families**

In 2015 Wired were commissioned to deliver the Carers Health and Wellbeing Service. This service introduced the new role of carer connectors. Carer connectors are based at the WIRED Resource Centre in Birkenhead. They are working in partnership with local organisations to help carer's access services and community support that maybe available to them. Carer Connectors help to identify new Carers and offer them information and advice referring them to relevant services for their needs.

### **Project Objectives**

The aim of the carer connector service is to:-

- Reduce social isolation and encourage carers to share knowledge and experiences.
- Improve the quality of life and wellbeing for carers helping them to keep physically, psychologically and emotionally well.
- Signpost carers to other local organisations and services, helping to prevent and reduce the need for care and support.
- Help to develop a life outside a caring role, and promote integration within society.
- Advise carers about their rights as a carer, increasing awareness around carer pathways to other services improving confidence and maintaining independence.

### **Project Approach**

There are 4 part-time carer connectors who support carers in a number of community settings, such as WUTH, GP surgeries, Wirral job centers and community groups.

The carer connectors do an initial assessment with the carer to determine what areas of support are needed. If areas of need are identified the carer connectors will refer within WIRED or on to other agencies. The carer connectors can also support carers to do an online Carers assessment into adult social services.

After the initial WIRED assessment, the carer is contacted within a 3 month period to complete a review of their needs to determine if the information and advice given was of help. The carer connectors, over a number of months, have met a large number of carers with a diverse range of needs and difficulties. With this in mind the carer connectors are able to identify areas that are a continued concern for carers and the people they care for.

### **JSNA – Key issues for Carers**

Following meetings with Wirral JSNA Programme Lead there were a number of issues and aspects the Care Connectors were encountering on a regular basis through their work supporting Carers and their families.

This information is seen as important to share with local service commissioners and public sector organisations so they can be aware of the situations and circumstances carers are experiencing and instigate changes or interventions that might mitigate or alleviate the outcomes being seen.

The following aspects continue to be reported by Carers through their engagement and involvement with the 4 Carer Connectors

## **1. Emotional support**

Carers felt that there was a lack of available support for Carers in Wirral who find it difficult to cope emotionally with their caring role. It is important to recognise the complex and diverse needs of carers and to become aware of the pressures they have on a day to day basis.

## **2. Befriending/sitting services for Carers**

Carers often need time away from their caring role to relieve stress and wellbeing issues and often need someone to just sit with the person they care for and there would appear to be a reducing number, possibly lack of, services within the community to help in these situations. Given the vital role Carers play in supporting the care needs of their family member then it is important to prevent the deterioration of the Carers health so enabling them to continue with their caring role. With an aging population and a larger proportion of elderly people with then a caring role too, then we will find family members and others with their own health needs having to care more and more for each other with not a lot family or friends around them.

## **3. Information when becoming a carer**

Becoming a carer can be a big decision and ultimately a change to financial and personal circumstances. A wide range of local services, providers and agencies need to collectively ensure wherever possible that new carers can be identified and in turn are then equipped with information and contacts to help them in their carer role. This should include front line staff being as aware as possible and involved in the identification of carers such as GPs, Practice Nurses and other allied health professionals as one example.

## **4. Isolation**

A study from Carers UK identified that 8 in 10 carers felt lonely or socially isolated as a result of their caring responsibilities with 57% of carers losing touch with friends and family. This is not an unfamiliar situation we see across Wirral. If we can identify neighbourhoods where there is evidence of high proportion of people undertaking considerable caring duties and where there is evidence of a greater concentration of health problems then these areas could be targeted with more support and information for those residents. This could include finding additional ways to maximise the availability and opportunities for local carers' breaks.

## **5. Hospital Discharge**

Inappropriate discharges are still happening with inadequate support and devices in place. Carers are not being involved in this crucial decision making stage and assumptions are made that the carer will take on the caring role when the person is discharged. Carers can sometimes be left with little support, for example, when they are asked to decide which care home their loved one should be placed in.

## **6. Hospital admissions**

Carers do not feel listened to when their cared for person goes into hospital. There could be more emphasis on the carers experience and knowledge of the cared for when going into hospital (Partners in care) especially when there is an extended stay and procedures and tests are needed. These issues are particularly pertinent with carers of patients with mental health illnesses, especially with fluctuating conditions and where confidentiality and information sharing is an issue. Lack of information sharing can sometimes put the carer and patient at risk.

## 7. Employment Services

The importance of a carer's role can be overlooked that can lead to a possible lack of recognition for their level of care involvement, how it impacts on their time and in turn how it can prohibit them from gaining employment. A carer's own mental health can be adversely harmed through their employment when having to juggle both their caring role and their job.

## 8. Carers Rights – Employment

Employers need to be more aware of carer's rights and current legislation i.e. time off for caring and flexible working. This can be an issue for carers when their caring responsibilities escalate unexpectedly.

## 9. Parent Carers/ Sandwich Carers

There appears to be a lack of support for children with mental health issues, those with ADHD and other emotional problems with waiting lists in excess of 4 months. Parent carers who when identified for a carers respite break this can fail when a lack of respite facilities and funding can often stop the break from happening. Sandwich carers are carers who look after more than one person/child and can impact quite heavily on the carers' health and wellbeing and more often than not result in the carers' health deteriorating. More preventative intervention within a sandwich carer situation could help greatly. For example, emergency planning could help greatly especially when an unexpected situation happens such as when a carer goes into hospital.

## 10. Transition

Transition from childhood to adult services can have a mixed level of support for the individual where they can encounter difficulties gaining recognition for their role, correct support, inadequate respite and at times contradictory advice. Ideally, with transition from child to adult services starting from an early age so services are put in place and confirmed before the age of 18; best practice suggest 13 years old.

Transition can also impact quite heavily on family finances and advice regarding this should be given as early as possible.

These issues and aspects are considered to be important and local service commissioners and providers should be aware of the impacts when creating new provision or new opportunities that would adversely affect carers in the situations noted above.

If you require any further advice or background on the work and contact via Care Connectors then please get in touch with the **Carers Helpline** on **0151 670 0777** or [cws@wired.me.uk](mailto:cws@wired.me.uk)

## Current activity and services

The carer connectors currently engage with a number of other agencies both statutory and voluntary in identifying new and hidden carers. Once identified carers are supported either within the remit of WIRED services or referred onto other agencies; which include:-

Age UK, Alzheimer's Society, Family Tree, Mencap, Wirral Change, Headway, MAP, St Vincent de Pauls, Stroke association, Fire Safety, Barnardos, Admiral Nurses, Wirral Connect, Beechwood Community Trust and others.

### **What is coming on the horizon?**

As with most contracts within the third (Charity) sector, the carers support contracts are reviewed on an annual basis. We will know more about the Carers Support contract at the end of June 2017.

### **What does the research suggest as further actions?**

The emphasis is moving towards empowering vulnerable groups within local communities, such as carers, to take control of their own issues by tapping into services available to them other than statutory services.

### **Links**

- [Useful links for Carers](#)
- [Wirral Carers Enews](#)

### **Relevant and related National and local strategies**

The new Carers National Strategy went out for consultation in 2015 ready to be launched in the summer of 2017 with a new emphasis on working Carers.