Are you looking after someone?
10 ways your local carers' service can help you.

Lee Sewrey, Caring for Carers manager at Improving Lives Plymouth, shares his experience of working with adult Carers, talking about who Carers are, the support that is available to them and how to access it.

I started my career in a care worker role in a residential care setting before moving to use my skills as a trainer and facilitator in the field of education where I taught adults with learning disabilities and worked as a Further Education Manager. I progressed my interest in the learning disability sector with a move to Improving Lives Plymouth to manage the Better Futures Service. Career advancement and the opportunity to work in the private sector took me to Hampshire, where I managed a high dependency CQC-registered residential home. However my heart has always been in Plymouth and I relocated in 2012 to develop the new Caring for Carers service. Now 9 years on I have an incredible team who offer exceptional support to Carers in Plymouth.

"I work with a fabulous team who all have a range of skills and experience that enables us to provide information and advice on a wide range of topics to carers."

Who is a carer?

"3 in 5 of us will care for someone in our lifetime."

A carer is anyone who looks after a friend, family member or neighbour due to old age, physical or mental illness, disability, or an addiction (this does not include paid care workers or those who are volunteering).

Carers UK estimate that there are 13.6 Million people in England who look after someone else. In Plymouth alone there are approximately 30,000 adult Carers.

'Looking after' can mean helping with things like shopping, domestic tasks, emotional assistance and personal care - all of which are much more difficult during coronavirus. If this sounds like you, you may be a carer.

When you're caring for someone, it can feel like there's no time for you.

But your health and wellbeing are just as important as anyone else's. And support is available for you. After all, you can only look after someone else if you look after yourself.

How Caring for Carers can help you:

• Statutory Carers Needs Assessments

• Access to Welfare Benefits Support

• Access to free Legal Advice Clinics

• Regular Newsletter

• Carers Card

• Signposting to other appropriate organisations

• Health and wellbeing support and activities

• Support Groups

• Training and Practical Skills Opportunities

• Counselling Support

1. Statutory Carers Needs Assessment

A carer's assessment will look at the different ways caring affects your life and work out how you can carry on doing the things that are important to you and your family. It will cover your caring role, your feelings about caring, your physical, mental and emotional health, and how caring affects your work, leisure, education, wider family and relationships.

Your physical, mental and emotional wellbeing will be at the heart of this assessment. This means that you will be able to tell the person undertaking the assessment how caring for someone is affecting your life and what could make things better for you and the person you look after.
If a carer has eligible needs, we can offer a carers personal budget payment of up to £250. A carer’s personal budget is a way that carers may be able to be supported to have a break from caring and improve their health and wellbeing; it is awarded specifically for enabling them to ‘switch off’ from their caring responsibilities by taking time for themselves away from their caring role.

2. Access to Welfare Benefits Support

Carers Support Coordinators will be able to help you to identify any benefits you may be entitled to, to support you in your caring role. This can include things like Carers Allowance, Personal Independence Payment, Carers Credit, Blue Badge and more. We have an Information and Advice team that you will be referred to for this support.

3. Access to Free Legal Advice Clinics

On the last Wednesday of every month Wolferstans Solicitors offer a free half an hour telephone or video call appointment to support people with Wills, Lasting Power of Attorney, Grants of Probate and any other legal queries carers may have

4. Regular Newsletter

We produce a newsletter 3 times a year. This is packed full of local and national news and updates for carers with some great recipes and top tips too.

5. Carers Card

We run a carers card discount scheme free to Carers, aged 18 or over, who provide care for a Plymouth resident, of any age. The Carers' Card offers discounts on a range of activities across the city to help carers to look after their own health and wellbeing because when you look after someone, it's important to look after yourself too.

6. Signposting to appropriate organisations

We understand that caring can be very complex and the support someone requires may need specialist advice or support. We have professional links with many other organisations and can refer and signpost carers to these agencies to ensure that identified needs are supported effectively and appropriately.

7. Health and wellbeing support and activities

At Caring for Carers we run a variety of face to face monthly activities for carers who are registered with us. These are low cost or free and are very popular. Due to the current Covid19 restrictions we are not able to run face to face activities but we do have some online activities that include crafting, meditation and mindfulness and singing.

8. Support groups

Caring can be very isolating and our carers support groups are intended to be a venue in which carers can meet with other carers, gain support, gather information and seek advice as well as having time away from their caring role(s).

There is a Carers Support Coordinator present at every meeting as there may be times when you want to talk to someone who understands the pressures of being a carer or you may want practical advice or support to help you cope.

Tea, coffee, biscuits and a friendly face will always be available for anyone who needs information, emotional or practical support, or simply feels the need to have a chat. Due to Covid19 restrictions we are not able to run face to face groups at present but we do have virtual groups for carers to attend.

9. Training and Practical Skills Opportunities

We provide Carers training which includes Dementia Insight, Caring and Coping and Mindfulness. Unfortunately, during the Coronavirus pandemic we are not able to provide our usual face to face training/workshop programme of practical skills for Plymouth carers. However we are still offering some opportunities via zoom. There are also some great training opportunities available via Carers UK which we can arrange a free code to enable you to access.

10. Counselling Support

Caring can be lonely and isolating. You may not want to 'burden' friends and family and consequently keep how you are feeling to yourself. Many carers feel guilty if they have negative thoughts or lose patience, but this is all natural and part of caring. Sometimes it can help to talk to people who are not emotionally involved with the situation. We have funding to provide counselling opportunities to carers who have accessed a carers needs assessment.

What does Caring for Carers mean to me?

Currently Caring for Carers supports 7,000 registered carers – but there are many more carers out there that do not identify as such.

Working with my colleagues to identify and support carers in Plymouth means the world to me. We continuously work to help raise awareness to organisations and people about who and what a carer is, and this can encourage people to realise the impact of their caring role, register with us, and seek the support they need.

Many years ago I cared for my Mother who had a terminal illness and this always reminds me of how rewarding caring can be, but, at times, it is exceptionally challenging and having support from others can truly help you through the day!

If you're reading this and have recognised that you are a carer please ask yourself two important questions:

1. Have you registered with Caring for Carers or your local Carers centre? The support they offer could be a lifeline for you...

2. Do you know someone who hasn't realised they are a carer yet? Maybe you could send them this blog.

How do you register with Caring for Carers?

There are 2 main ways that you can self-refer to receive support from Caring for Carers:

1. Telephone 01752 201890 and say you would like some support as a carer and they will take your details, register you and allocate a Carers Support Coordinator to contact you.

2. Register online https://www.plymouthonlinedirectory.com/article/294/Register-as-a-carer This referral will be processed and a member of the team will contact you to discuss your referral and the support you have requested

Once registered you can choose to have as much or as little support as you feel you require. This ranges from the regular newsletter and carers card only to accessing a statutory Carers needs Assessments. The carer will continue to be supported by Caring for Carers through their caring life.

If you are reading this blog and you are not from Plymouth you can use the link below to find your own local carers' service.

https://carers.org/help-and-info/carer-services-near-you



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