

## Carers Trust North Wales Crossroads Care Services

### Annual Satisfaction Survey – July 2017

Carers Trust North Wales Crossroads Care Services (CTNWCCS) is a network partner of the national organisation Carers Trust. CTNWCCS operates across North Wales and its vision is for “...every unpaid carer in North Wales to be recognised, supported and offered services to help them maintain their own health and wellbeing”.

CTNWCCS is subject to the membership requirements of the Carers Trust, regulatory inspections by CSSIW and service reviews of its local commissioners. Importantly, CTNWCCS – since its inception many years ago as a Crossroads service – has also been committed to its own critical evaluation as a means of measuring effectiveness as well as encouraging comments regarding service delivery and possible areas for development of the service. This is achieved through making direct contact with those who use the service. This year a total of **183** questionnaires were sent out with a total of **115** being returned, a percentage return of **63%** - no mean feat – and is in itself an indication of how carers feel about the service.

The overwhelming score given across the board to the question of “*How do you rate our services?*” was mainly 10 with 9 a very close second. Lower scores were given – five responses scored 8 and one each with 6 and 7. One return scored 6 but went on to offer praise with comments such as “...*excellent and caring service*” and “...*cannot improve on such a friendly service*”. The return scoring 7 offered no reason for the score given but did offer 10/10 for Café Cofio. I consider it safe to conclude that the service offered by CTNWCCS is widely held in very high regard.

Given the high scores reported above, and as in a previous evaluation, I intend to focus less on the remaining scoring within the exercise and more on the individual experiences reflected in the comments of carers. It is from such personal and often vivid and moving testimony that one can obtain a better sense of what the service means, what it has achieved and some clues that may suggest areas for consideration by the Board and Managers. By way of reassurance the scores recorded against the remaining areas are similarly high.

Words. Several key words appear time and time again in the comments but can be distilled in to the following. The service instils “...*confidence*” and helps carers “...*survive*”. Further, the support offered “...*helps us both (carer and cared for) in many ways*”. One carer reflected many of the sentiments expressed by stating “...*the service is a lifeline*”.

Themes. Certain consistent themes emerge. There are no surprises as these themes have been evident for many years; the sadness is they remain stubbornly present. The issues include social isolation along with health impacts on carers. Most carers had a single, simple request - “...*more time!*”. Exhaustion, both physical and emotional, is a very real and recurring theme and despite the value of the support offered, the sense of there being no real respite. One carer described how “...*caring can be relentless*”.

Impacts. One carer offered persuasive evidence showing how receiving a service from CTNWCCS meant that the cared for had been able to remain at home for an additional 3 years before residential care had been necessary. Irrespective of the human costs in such a scenario, the resource and financial implications of such evidence should be shared with - and not be lost on - commissioners; equally other returns showed how even modest levels of support enable people to simply carry on. The question thus prompted is “...*what happens if this service disappears?*” One or two responses suggest some individuals are on the edge and may be on the verge of giving up. Another carer reported that in coping with his own serious illness he had only been able to attend clinics at Christie’s in Manchester and even further afield whilst safe in the knowledge his wife was being well cared for.

One carer was delighted that the support offered meant she was able to have “...*more grandma time with grandchildren*”. This served as a vivid reminder that in many instances the ripples of consequence visited upon families by the task of caring may extend far beyond the carer and cared for. The extent of emotional strain was powerfully illustrated by the comment of a parent caring for a child with disabilities by stating “...*having some respite gives me some of my identity back*”.

Staff. Any human based service is only as good as its staff. In this regard CTNWCCS can consider itself fortunate as comments reflect well on its investment in the staff. There are countless references to individuals who have positive impacts on carers and families, who are valued and these relationships are clearly cherished by carers and cared for alike. There is also evidence that recognises the importance of consistency in the same staff member attending over time. Words used to describe staff include “...*reliable*”, “...*capable, friendly and supporting*”, “...*trustworthy*” and “...*nothing too much trouble for them*”. Yet other comments suggest “...*meeting our carer has been life changing*” or “...*reassured by their presence*” and “...*they are the salt of the earth*”.

Young Carers. This has been the first year I have seen references to young carers which is a very positive and welcome area of development. Clearly those receiving a service hold issues in common with adult carers. However, there is an additional dimension for young carers in the shape of educational impacts and thus their life opportunities.

Also in the education world, one young mother and carer of a child with serious illness and who was herself struggling and facing surgery reported the school had “...*warned against absences for my illness rather than my son’s*”. Whilst not privy to the details of this situation, I was aware the Cabinet Secretary for Education in the Welsh Assembly Government (who herself has direct experience of caring) had recently commended the Carers Trust initiative entitled “Supporting Young Carers in School – Wales”.

This is a resource that aims to assist in identifying and supporting young carers in schools. There may already be involvement but it is for the Board to determine the extent they engage in this exercise. However as a minimum information about and awareness of the initiative should be shared with young carers and their families along with potential sources of support. Equally there are parallel considerations for schools to consider when faced with scenarios such as the one of a parent carer described above. In my experience, threats of enforcement alone are rarely effective in such instances.

Rural issues. Although there are only a few comments made regarding service delivery in rural areas they are nonetheless compelling. One carer refers to the tight timescale of leaving her rural home and, due to distance to any centre of population, cannot travel with ease for shopping etc. Had she not owned a car this could have been further compounded due to the constant erosion in public transport. This serves as a reminder that carers can appear in all areas and not just in the centres of population, also that service design and provision may need tailoring according to location. There is an inevitable impact on planning as costs of delivery will be greater in rural areas, a fact recognised many years ago by the then National Council on Voluntary Action which coined the phrase “*rural premium*” to ease the introduction of the notion of increased unit costs to commissioners. Given the geography of North Wales, the Board may wish to consider the potential impacts of rurality within its operating area.

Postcodes. Although not an obvious issue, the notion of postcode lottery is one that arose from a comment made by a Flintshire carer who sought support with gardening and home maintenance. Had she lived in Denbighshire or Conwy, affordable support could be available from agencies such as Care and Repair. This is not available as yet across all of North Wales. It was established in the early days of community care that the state of the garden was a compelling consideration for many individuals in determining whether to enter residential or nursing care. Hence the combination of a demanding role as a carer alongside deterioration in one’s surroundings could prove well overwhelming for some.

I accept this matter sits beyond the responsibility of the Board but is a useful and valid illustration of the many pressures – including some less obvious than others – impacting on the lives of carers. The issues of rurality and postcodes outlined above may assist the Board to consider whether it is satisfied in terms of equity of access and service provision across its operating area as well as offering potential opportunities to explore collaboration with others in local service initiatives.

Conclusions. There is no doubt that CTNWCCS continues to offer a highly respected, dependable and much valued service to many carers and families across North Wales.

Equally, there should be no doubt that this support is critical.

Care staff are held in high regard and quietly get on with making a significant and positive contribution to the lives of carers on a daily basis. That said challenges are never far away and continued funding is a key consideration. The commissioning and delivery of modern day social care presents many challenges but maybe it is now time for support to carers to be viewed more as an investment and less as a cost.