

Caring for older people - has the Carers Strategy made a difference?



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Carer research programme

- Three core aims:
 - Improve our understanding of the experiences & support needs of carers.
 - Inform the development & implementation of the Carers Strategies in England & Wales.
 - Strengthen the links between research & practice.
- Collaborations with statutory and independent sector organizations, as well as carers.

Carers Strategy in Wales - Aims



- Empower carers by giving them greater control over the range, nature & timing of services.
- Mobilise community support to carers & give them a break.
- Respond to the diversity of caring contexts.



A Study of the Carers Strategy in Wales: aims & objectives

- Explore carer experiences of the process & outcomes of carer assessment.
- Highlight good practice in carer assessment & service delivery.
- Infer whether the Carers Strategy has been successful in promoting a wider range of services to carers in Wales.

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Method

- Multi-method approach:
 - Three postal surveys of carers [n=387; n=310; n=160]
 - Two sets of in-depth interviews with carers, set 20 months apart [n=107; n=76]
 - Two sets of in-depth telephone interviews with staff, set 15 months apart [n=58; n=62]
 - Survey of carer services [n=136]
 - Carer focus groups [n=6]



Older carers in our study

- **Postal Survey 1:**
 - 156 carers aged 60 years & over
- **Postal Survey 2:**
 - 136 carers aged 60 years & over
- **Postal Survey 3:**
 - 75 carers aged 60 years & over



Findings

- Explore older carers' experience of carer assessment.
- Explore older carers' experience of new services that have been developed under the auspices of the Carers Strategy.



Findings – assessment process

- Less than half of carers aged over 60 received a carer assessment.
- Practitioners are reluctant to complete separate carer assessments:

“Many social workers are involved with carers but they often shy off from doing assessments because assessments throw up a need that they can’t fulfil.” Voluntary Sector Representative

- This is confirmed by older carers:

“Carer assessments are legally required but go nowhere; they’re a waste of time.” Carer



Findings – assessment - eligibility criteria

- To qualify for an assessment, carers must provide a *substantial* amount of care on a *regular* basis.
- But - practitioners describe a reactive approach to assessment to the detriment of early intervention & ongoing support to older carers:

“Things would have to be pretty drastic. The carer would have to be providing a high level of care, night & day, & I’m afraid to say they’d have to be on their hands & knees.” Care Manager



Findings – assessment - carer experiences

- Carer experiences of assessment are variable.
- For some, the carer assessment offers the opportunity to:
 - have their caring role formally recognised
 - access services

“Professional & supportive. I now have the help I need.” Carer

“The social worker found excellent carers for us and was very kind and helpful.” Carer



Findings – assessment - carer experiences

- For others an assessment is seen as a test of their ability to care:

"I didn't really understand why I was having one. I wasn't sure whether they felt I was incapable. I wasn't sure whether they were assessing my abilities or what it was all about." Carer

- Practitioners report that some older carers view the assessment process with suspicion:

*...they see it as policing their ability to care.
LA Representative*



Findings – new services

- Staff report that the Carers Strategy has provided the impetus for change:

“That Strategy was the impetus to get people together to actually talk about carers’ issues and I think there’s a lot of progress been made since then.”
Local Authority Partnership Manager

- A key change is the development of new services for carers.



Findings – new services

- Staff suggest:
 - The range of support to older carers is expanding & becoming more innovative.
 - New services extend the parameters of support & seek to accommodate carers' personal preferences.
- However, this is not supported by evidence from older carers completing the postal surveys. The number receiving new services is low.



Findings – new services

- **Practical support:**
 - Helping older carers with domestic activities, as well as one-off payments to cover the costs of purchasing equipment.
 - Whilst staff report on the expansion of practical support, this is not reflected in the experiences of older carers who completed our postal surveys.
 - Older carers emphasise that simple types of practical support can make a substantial difference to their everyday lives.
 - Older carers identified outstanding requests for practical support – e.g. large digit telephones.



Findings – new services

- **Support to enable carers to remain socially active:**
 - Legislation notes the importance of supporting carers **in & beyond** their caring role.
 - This is reflected in the development of new services:
 - arts clubs for carers
 - book clubs for carers
- **Carer breaks:**
 - Bargain Break packages & one-off payments that contribute to the cost of a holiday.
 - Contingent upon the carer having completed a carer assessment.
 - The need for *further* expansion of break schemes is highlighted by carers. Many older carers in receipt of a break still identify a break as an unmet need.



Findings – new services

- **Preventive health measures:**
 - New initiatives that aim to prevent ill-health amongst older carers:
 - Look After Me Courses
 - Carer Healthy Living Schemes
 - Flu immunization programmes
 - Gym membership



Findings – experiencing new services

- New services were highly valued by carers in receipt of them:
“The garden is wonderful now and we get a lot of joy from the garden.” Carer
- But - there are problems relating to their organisation & delivery.
- For example, carers are sometimes required to pay in advance for driving lessons. Other carers are offered one-off garden makeovers rather than a regular gardening service.
- One older carer received a contribution towards the cost of a holiday - the nearest departure point was 1 hour away & the taxi fare prohibitively expensive.
- Concerns were raised over the sustainability of new services & financial constraints were identified as a barrier to future service development.



Findings – unmet needs

- Almost half of older carers responding to the 1st postal survey identified unmet needs; there was little change in reporting of unmet need by older carers responding to a 2nd survey.
- Carers' unmet needs include:
 - practical needs for more flexible breaks
 - emotional needs for counselling support



Summary - key findings

- Growing commitment from staff to develop more creative approaches to supporting older carers.
- Increasing recognition of carers as individuals & as service users in their own right requiring services that are designed to meet *their* needs.
- But - considerable scope to improve the range of services, their organisation & delivery.



Bridging the gap between policy & practice

- The ambivalence of practitioners towards carer assessment must be addressed.
- The tenuous security of voluntary organisations who deliver many new services must be addressed.
- Embrace the potential of direct payments, personal budgets & wider community resources in supporting older carers.



Bridging the gap between policy & practice

- Organizations are thinking more broadly about outcomes for older carers – they must:
 - Capture carer perspectives on the *quality* as well as the *quantity* of new services - do these services make life easier?
 - Build upon the modest successes accomplished by listening to carers & drawing on carer expertise.