

Notes of a meeting with Hard of Hearing Group Service User Group for Somerset County Council Adult Social Care. Wednesday 2nd April 2008. SAIN Offices in Taunton.



PURPOSE OF THIS MEETING

Respond to a number of topics Adult Social Care (also known as Social Services)

- TOPIC 1: Discussing the response from Social Services to issues raised in the last consultation in 2007
- Topic 2: User expectation of Social workers/social services
- Topic 3: Social Service Standard Equipment List for Hard Of Hearing service user.
- Topic 4: Perceptions of Day Services
- Topic 5: Other issues



INTRODUCTION

8 people in the group have contacted a social worker in the last 12 months. The group talked about their current contact with Social Service. Extracts of what people said is outlined below:

- “You have to be in a pretty serious state before they even want to get involved with you. When I first needed help they were very good but now if they cannot help you they just fob you off, I don’t know whether it’s a lack of funding but lately I have not received the same level of service”
- “I have not been in touch recently but when setting up a hard of hearing group they were enthusiastic but could not give us any help whatsoever, they didn’t even suggest where we might get help.....however they have come along to talk about what social services can offer”
- “I am in contact with a social worker now with help with sight and hearing and I find that the social worker cannot come as often as I need but she is so helpful in every aspect”
- “There is no social services in my area now. I used to go their office for help but now I have to use the local hospital”
- “I have had a lot of contact in last 9 months, my hearing is a lot worse and have been getting help with a digital hearing aid. I can’t run them down”
- It must be a couple of years ago since I had help from social services, I don’t believe in buying equipment if they are available. I wanted a fire alarm I could use and my local office arranged a vibrating fire alarm.
- “I have had a drop off in ‘real social workers’. The people I am in contact with don’t appear to be trained at all. For example I used to telephone a social worker and there would be a reaction, they would be able to communicate appropriately and be informed. Now you will

find them answering the telephone not knowing anything about basic equipment, such as loops and basic equipment. There seems to be a lack of pure professionalism in social work”

- “When we arrived in Somerset, Social Services didn’t think we had any particular needs, even though our son had a hearing impairment. We were told this was because there were other people in the house without a hearing impairment. We have found social workers are continually unavailable due to sickness although most have been very pleasant I don’t think people often recognise how much stress social workers are under. Someone somewhere is responsible for their welfare”
- “We have had adaptations in the home but you do have to press them for it – but the modifications are not always suitable. For example we have had steps installed where a ramp was requested. It’s very difficult to know who is who from the initial assessment to implementing modifications. When things go wrong its not clear who sorts things out”
- “ We constantly badgered them to find out who our social worker was and were finally told we didn’t have one”
- “When we had railings installed to gain access to the garden we had no fault to find [with Social Services] and I think social services were involved. However this came about via the GP support worker then our care support workers and then occupational therapist”
- “We were advised by our care support worker about the need for support as we were ongoing users. I asked for an assessment and they came out. They were not prepared to help with bathing equipment but could help with rails etc in the house. They also assessed social needs and got a place in a day centre social club. It’s a lovely club.”
- “They have been very good to me, I had an intercom put into my flat and that was sorted very quickly, within a week I think. Also I bought a hearing aid which was no good and was helped by a lovely girl from social services who put me in touch with my GP and now I am getting a new device sorted.”



TOPIC 1: Discussing the response from Social Services to issues raised in the last consultation in 2007

Participants updated their views on this item:

- Websites: Most participants wanted less reliance on signposting to websites for information and advice.
- The increased use of websites makes people feel “threatened”, “marginalised”, “left out in the computer age”.
- One participant said “I could not find the relevant website about available equipment for deafness and visually impaired to access information about equipment”
- The use of volunteers was supported as a means to support people using computers and websites.



TOPIC 2: USER EXPECTATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS/SOCIAL SERVICES

Participants identified key issues for this topic, in particular:

- Concern about the turnover of staff in some localities.
- Concern amongst participants whether or not they are live clients.
- “[they are] a professional friend. They need to know what they are talking about”
- “You need to trust them”
- “They are available. If they don’t know something they should signpost you”
- “Provide regular assessments once per year. A knock at the door to ask if you are ok would be enough”
- “I am not happy when they you receive a letter saying you have been assessed without them actually visiting you face to face”

People talked about their awareness of the changing role of social workers and recognised:

- Regulations change nationally and locally
- Changing rules mean that staff can no longer lift people
- Participants are keen for Adult Social Care to inform people about the individual implications of national and local policy changes.
- Participants feel social workers could do more to explain their role and their caseloads so people understand their pressures.
- SAINs’ Networker magazine was seen as good template for newsletters and to promote Adult Social Care’s service .



TOPIC 3 SOCIAL SERVICE STANDARD EQUIPMENT LIST FOR HARD OF HEARING SERVICE USER.

Suggested items missing off the standard list include:

- Telephone & Amplified telephone
- Cordless telephone
- Pager linked to doorbell
- Reading lamp
- TV Loop
- Credit Card Sized badge for people to use to

indicate a hearing impairment.

Availability and affordability issues about equipment:

- Smoke alarms suitable for hearing impaired need to be arranged much quicker.
- Personal communicator are about £400 but help may come from local charities
- RNID catalogue was universally the most popular source of products for hearing impaired.
- RNID and to a lesser degree Hearing Concern are the main source of information about to – up-to-date equipment and technology.

- “People living on a pension could probably not afford any of these items”
- “Buying it does not ensure you get the support and advice to use it that you should get from a social worker”
- “Many of these prices are beyond our reach and as a minority its not fair”

Other equipment issues included:

- One participant would think to contact Adult Social Care or Social Services for equipment.
- All participants are not familiar with this Standard List
- Widespread concern of the high cost for so called ‘specialist equipment’
- One participant has a friend that who damaged their pager and therefore was without one for two months, they were surprised social services said they could not help”
- Some vibrating items are not always useful e.g. smoke alarms are linked to vibrating device in bed but you need that warning throughout the day.
- It might be helpful if the standard equipment list explains whether the device flashes or vibrates.
- Many participants were not clear what some devices are for or how they function.
- CAB was promoted by one participant as an organisation that has helped them in the past for help with grants for equipment.
- Smoke alarms - It is not clear what the most effective route is to secure a smoke alarm, particularly for hearing impaired. Another participant had to wait over 12 months for an alarm from Social Services but was grateful they were keeping her informed although it was too long a wait. “Surely we should have know the length of time for the waiting list?”
- “You are afraid to ask about the standard items because of the costs involved”
- Earmark publication was familiar to very few participants in the group and some that are familiar have older copies than the current one available for 2004. The group were notified that there is an update being prepared.

Other general issues

There were very few, if any, organisations around for the hard of hearing in Somerset.



TOPIC 4: PERCEPTIONS OF DAY SERVICES

The group discussed their perceptions of day services and who they are for. In particular:

- “Run by church volunteers for social meeting and for those who live alone and as respite for carers. There are auctions, physical activities, games, music. There is a lunch club which costs £6 including transport. Its set up by social services but ran day-to-day by volunteers”
- “Some day facilities are somewhat dependent on volunteers who are themselves becoming older and disabled”
- “My perception is based on my experience as a worker some

years ago and remember most people that used them were elderly people, now if you are a younger person I didn't think they were meant for you”

- “Now they are trying to do all ages but the same activity“
- ”My only contact is organised through the church and we have little get togethers. I don't know nothing about day services but I would like to get involved”
- “I thought they were mostly for people with learning disabilities. They used to provide them for physical disabilities but they no longer do that”
- “I go to a day service and its mostly about companionship but we have been told the Government is making changes and we are expecting it to change”
- “I don't have anything to do with day services but I do worry about when I get older and frail whether I will be on my own”
- “I used to go to Halcon Day service and everyone was upset when they closed it and we were told it was because of less government funding, but also were we assessed as no longer having a need for day service.”
- “We set up our own group for disabled people by disabled people”
- “Not everyone with a hearing loss see themselves as a disability and day services are perceived as something for the disabled or the frail”

The group outlined barriers to using Day services:

- affordability
- Transport to day centres
- staff suitability trained to support hard of hearing
- Harder to participate
- Social workers assume to signpost you to day service
- Social stigma
- You need a referral from a social worker before you can have discounted travel
- “I don't seem to get in contact but I don't mix with that sort of thing”
- Fear that the facility is not accessible and disabled friendly...loop, interpreters, physical access, geographically accessible
- “ I don't suppose two day services are the same. I didn't think I was going to like it and it took me a while to make up my mind but now I look forward to it everytime. We have a good time and there are lots of helpers”



TOPIC 5: OTHER GENERAL ISSUES

Other matters raised included:

- Deaf awareness training – Recently a member of staff from a County Council Department made a presentation to a group of people that were hard of hearing and deaf but admitted they had no training in deaf awareness and lacked an understanding of how to prepare for such an audience. No further details were available to identify who it was.
- Fire alarms – there was confusion amongst participants about the 'best route' to secure fire alarms. Some arranged it through the Fire Service whilst others through Social Services. It was not clear whether the advice and equipment from both these sources was consistent. For example would both Fire Service and Social Services have suggested the possible use of a pager system or simply a vibrating alarm?
- A number of participants in the room were not of aware of care support network even though they either were themselves or have someone at home that is a carer. Specific mention was made of the St Johns Ambulance Carer Support Courses throughout Somerset.
- No participant was aware they were on the Deaf/Hearing Impaired database or register held by Somerset Adult Social Care or social service. Do Adult Social Care use the register proactively to contact service users?
- Earmark publication was familiar to very few participants in the group and some that are familiar have older copies than the current one available for 2004. The group were notified that there is an update being prepared.

End of meeting

Information obtained from SAIN following the meeting;

The St John Ambulance Carer Support Course offer people help in a caring role and is free of charge. It is open to all carers over the age of 18 who provide voluntary care. The courses are run as four three hour sessions over four-five weeks. For more information contact Jude Glide on 01823 345922

Hearing Concern – are a membership charity dedicated to improving the quality of life of deaf and hard of hearing adults in the UK. Membership entitles you to access information about clubs and groups and receive discounts on their publications and merchandise. Membership is £18.00 per year. Contact details are;

Hearing Concern
95 Gray's Inn Road
London

Tel: +44 020 7440 9871
Fax: +44 020 7440 9872

WC1X 8TX

Text: +44 020 7440 9871

SMS: 076 2480 9978

Email: info@hearingconcern.org.uk

HelpDesk: 0845 0744 600 (voice and text/local rate)

RNID – A copy of the current catalogue is enclosed.

Membership costs £22 per year and entitles you to receive a copy of their 1 in 7 magazine. Tel:0207 296 8000 or Text: 0207 2698001 or e mail: membership@rnid.org.uk.