

Living in Residential Care, in St Helens.

The views and experiences of people who
live in residential care, their
friends and family.

Report, September 2021

Report produced by the
Healthwatch St Helens Support Team



Background

Part of the local Healthwatch duty is to carry out Enter & View visits. Local Healthwatch representatives carry out these visits to health & social care services to find out how they are being run and make recommendations where there are areas for improvement.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Healthwatch St Helens were unable to carry out their usual Enter & View visits. We still wanted to know what people think of the residential home they or their friends or relatives live in, so we designed two surveys - one for residents and one for visitors. Some residents requested help in completing surveys. All surveys from residents were returned in one envelope from the care home. Visitors were given freepost envelopes to return their completed questionnaires.

We didn't want to put additional pressure on staff who work in residential care so we tried to keep the surveys as short as possible, and we were aware that the surveys wouldn't be appropriate for some of the residential settings across St Helens.

What did we ask?

We didn't want to just focus on the pandemic although we did include some questions relating to the situation with COVID-19. We wanted to concentrate on trying to gather the kind of information that we would usually gather by observation and conversation during an Enter & View visit. For example, whether a resident feels well cared for or appears to be well cared for.

What was the response?

There were a total of 22 completed 'residents' surveys returned from 6 care homes as follows:

- Adamstan House - 1
- Eccleston court - 6
- Parkside - 5
- Parr Care Home- 1
- Stocks Hall - 5
- Thomas House- 4

Some residents requested the help of a staff member or visitor in completing the survey.

There were a total of 24 completed ‘friends and relatives’ surveys returned from 11 care homes as set out below. Two questionnaires were returned blank and incomplete. Some of the 24 surveys did not have answers to all questions suggesting that either the people filling the surveys in felt they couldn’t really answer the question, or it was not applicable.

- Abbey Rose Court - 1
- Adamstan House - 5
- Amberley Court - 1
- Brown Edge House - 1
- Elizabeth Court - 4
- Elmtree House - 1
- Madison Court - 1
- Parkside -3
- Parr Care Home -2
- Prospect House - 3
- Thomas House - 1

What did they tell us?

In all the care homes family and friends could not visit freely, but some did have window visits. A few were admitted into the care homes at the beginning of and during lockdown, but did not have the opportunity to look around the home. Family and friends had no idea what their bedrooms looked like, nor how they were treated except for what their loved ones told them and observation of their moods, appearance, and demeanour during window visits or conversations by phone.

Communication difficulties and practicalities

For those residents with dementia where there were communication difficulties, friends and family relied on staff to tell them how they were. It was evident that it was not always easy to contact staff by telephone, and if they did answer the phone they were very busy. Some staff didn’t always call back, as indicated in some of the comments below:

“My wife has communication problems and sometimes when I phone the care home they are too busy to give me an update but said they would phone later but never did.”

“They pass on information when I ring to enquire about his health or if they are allowing window visits, I feel they should give relatives frequent updates about the Covid status and visiting, perhaps by email or post. I have had 1 email in 12 months.”

Where residents could use a mobile phone and answer calls with the press of a button, it was a lifeline for some relatives. However, some simple practical things help could be overlooked, such as staff ensuring residents' mobile phones were charged to enable them to take calls, where residents either don't know how to, or forget to charge their phones. One relative's comment about her father was: *“Explanations from staff helps to allay upsets about visits about loved ones.”*

“The Manager explained to me that I don't have to phone if I wanted to visit, and to turn up any time I wanted.” (Elizabeth Court.)

Other comments mentioned trusting staff to give the best possible care:

“Before Covid, as A's wife, I visited nearly every day, but for 12 months I have had less contact with him or with staff looking after him. I believe staff at Adamstan House look after A's needs well, and keep him safe from Covid to the best of their ability.”

Another positive comment:-

“My mum wasn't in a care home before the pandemic, but the care she has received from Parr Care Home has been astounding, giving my family a peace of mind”.

Residents, on the other hand, viewed communication differently in that the majority (19 residents) were able to keep in touch with loved ones during the pandemic, but missed the usual communication with other residents in the home.

“I saw my wife on Christmas Day - since then only garden visits or not at all.”

“I've had window visits”

“I keep in contact by telephone and I pad”

“I am in touch with my daughter, just down the road”

One lady did not have any contact with her family and says “...*nobody comes to see me, but I have the girls here who I love and keep me safe.*”

Dignity and Respect

All residents felt that staff treated them with dignity and respect. The quality of care did not change during the pandemic, with the exception of one comment where testing was done up the nose. In terms of what they would like to change about the home, one resident out of 22 said, “*staff don’t always listen.*”

The rest of the residents felt that staff work very hard before Covid and did their very best during such difficult circumstances during Covid. Examples of comments are:-

“The staff there are the best (Parkside)..., ...work really hard....press a bell, someone comes.”

There were no concerns mentioned about their care home itself only that one worried that the home may not stay open due to COVID-19, another person worries if the alarm goes off.

To sum it up one resident told us:-

“My transition from my own home to the care home has been great, the staff cannot do enough for me and made a difficult time easier.”

Observations from friends and relatives.

“One care home has demonstrated that the ethos of dignity and respect runs through every member of staff.”

“ All staff from cleaners to management have gone above and beyond their professional requirements to ensure my Mum’s health and well-being is at its utmost each and every day..... They have seriously brought my Mum’s dignity and self-confidence back after being let down by other organisations.” (Parr Nursing Home.)

All friends and family felt their loved ones were treated with dignity and respect with the exception of one man who didn’t know because his wife has dementia and is unable to communicate. He commented that sometimes on his visits, his wife appeared dirty and felt that it ‘*smacked of neglect*’. (This has been reported to the Council’s Quality Monitoring Team and they are looking into it).

Care

Family and friends have praised the high quality and commitment to care of their loved ones.

“I was called by the Manager of the care home on Tuesday at 10.45ish. My wife had a blockage in her throat which caused her to stop breathing. When staff realised there was a problem, they moved into action to remove the blockage and then used CPR to bring her back. Absolutely amazing what they did to save her life. It took 25 minutes to revive her, for which I’ll be eternally grateful.”(Elizabeth Court)

“The team at Prospect House are doing everything possible to keep Dad as safe and well as they can under the circumstances. I feel they have got to know him, and care about him and his welfare.”

“Mum wasn’t in a care home before the pandemic, but the care she has received from Parr Nursing Home been astounding, giving myself and my family a peace of mind that my Mum is in the best place for her recovery from Covid. Amazing to see they are 100% committed and supportive towards her.”

“I had great hope for my relative’s care in this home. I feel they have lived up to my expectations.” (Madison Court)

“They (staff) generally pick up any early signs of her being ‘off colour’ very quickly as they did last week and acted on this.” (Thomas House)

“Mum was ill with Covid before Christmas, during this time and after she was quite low. Once back from hospital the staff nursed her back to health.” (Parkside)

Life in the home

All residents reported that they felt safe in their homes and that the homes were clean, smelt fresh and were described as ‘spotless’. They all felt that their rooms were their own with personal touches such as photographs, bedding. One lady helped her Mum to choose the wallpaper and colour of the carpet for her room. Relatives were able to continue to bring in personal items, which got passed on to staff to give to residents.

Laundry was a difficult area for friends and relatives to comment on, around whether residents received the right clothes back. 8 said they did, 4 didn’t know, 3 said *sometimes* and 1 lady takes her Dad’s washing home.

Another lady said it was difficult to keep her dad clean due to tremors from Parkinson's disease.

The menu for each home was given verbally with 3 saying it was a written menu. 20 out of 22 said there was a good, varied choice of food and drinks, and all said they were able to ask for more drinks if they wanted them. Two people said they didn't think the menu was varied enough, with one describing the *fish as 'not fresh.'*

The views on the food varied with some being described as 'lovely' (Thomas House and Parkside) whereas another was described as 'satisfactory'. (Eccleston Court). The majority of residents were able to choose where they eat.

77% of residents felt their spiritual needs were met with other residents saying '*sometimes*', through a visiting vicar or priest. Access to outside spaces such as the garden helped their sense of well-being as commented on by a relative.

Residents missed visits from friends and relatives but they understood that restrictions imposed through Covid were outside the staff's control, therefore they were realistic. A couple of residents expressed feeling low as they were not mixing with other residents in the usual way and unable to take part in activities within the home.

"I would like there to be more people to talk to, more mixing."

Friends and relatives reported on the change in mood - 15 said the their loved ones were low, 5 said there was no change in mood, 1 family member said her Mum was brighter as she had recovered from COVID-19, and another said it was difficult to say as her Dad has Parkinson's.

Most people took part in activities within the home, when restrictions were relaxed and bingo and singalongs were re-introduced. Television was very much appreciated and one relative commented that her father enjoyed watching rugby on a large TV screen.

"Mum got distressed as there has been a couple of times where the majority of people (residents) had been isolated. Very weepy and confused but much happier now." (Elmtree House.)

Outside visits and trips were also suspended and a couple of residents commented on looking forward to them when they return.

Friends and families also missed their loved ones but were glad that they were in a safe place due to physical security measures, for example, the alarm system, locks, and reassurance that they were being cared for.

“I haven’t been in reception, lounge, Mum’s room for 14 months! That said there is nowhere I would rather she was during this time as staff have taken such good care of her.” (Parkside)

Recommendations

Communication

- Better or more frequent communication between staff and families when visits are restricted or not permitted during times of a health crisis. This could be by phone or email to reassure relatives of their loved-one’s well-being.
- Ensure that residents’ phones are charged and assist in helping residents to use their phones, iPads etc.

Care

- To continue the current good practice of picking up sign of low moods and being unwell, and acting on this, based on how well staff have got to know residents.

Menu

- Ensure that menus are available in arrange of formats.

It was noted that nearly all residents were given the menu verbally. This may be because of COVID-19 restrictions where residents had to stay in their rooms, or be spaced out across rooms.

Picture menus and worded menus written or typed in a large format could assist those that may have dementia or sight issues.

The overwhelming message from residents, relatives and friends is that staff did their best in a very difficult situation which was outside their control. The safety and care of the residents was a priority at all times even though residents missed the social aspect of interacting with others in the home and sometimes felt low.

As some residents came in during the COVID-19 pandemic the care was focussed on nursing them back to health with TLC. This reflects caring staff in nearly all cases.

Appendix 1

The Survey for Residents

We asked residents to complete 15 questions regarding their experience of living in a care home. We asked:-

1) *Do you feel safe and secure in your home?*

All 22 people reported yes.

2) *Is your room clean and does it smell fresh?*

All 22 people reported yes.

3) *Were you able to bring your own belongings into your room to make it feel like home, such as photographs, small items of furniture?*

All 22 reported yes.

4) *Do you have a good, varied choice of food and drinks?*

20 people reported yes.

1 person reported no.

1 person reported sometimes (yes for drinks, no for food, and added the fish is not fresh. Sometimes the food can be yuck.)

5) *Can you ask for more drinks if you want them?*

All 22 people reported yes.

6) *How is the menu displayed?*

18 people replied that someone told them

3 people replied in words

1 person didn't know

7) *Can you choose where you eat your meals?*

21 people replied yes

1 person replied no, the dining room only

8) *Do you take part in activities in the Home?*

16 people said they did

5 people said they did not (2 due to mobility problems and 3 because they didn't want to)

1 person didn't answer

9) *Do you feel you are treated with dignity and respect by staff and other residents?*

22 people replied yes

10) *Do you have any worries or concerns about the Home?*

20 people replied no

2 people replied yes (1 became worried if the alarm went off and 1 was concerned that the home may not stay open after COVID)

11) *Are your spiritual needs met?*

17 people replied yes

5 people replied sometimes

12) *Since the COVID19 pandemic, have you been able to keep in contact with loved ones?*

19 people replied yes

2 people replied no

1 person replied sometimes

13) *Have you noticed any changes in your care due to the COVID 19 pandemic?*

1 person replied yes (doing tests up the nose)

20 people replied no

1 person replied don't know (completed for her husband)

14) *Have you been able to go outside spaces during the COVID19 pandemic?*

15 people replied yes

6 people replied no

1 person did not answer

15) *Is there anything you would change about your home or the care you receive?*

2 people answered yes (staff don't always listen, more people to mix)

20 people answered no

Appendix 2

The Survey for Friends and Relatives

What is the name of the care home?

Does the Reception area feel welcoming?

Yes	16
No	

When you walk in, does the home smell fresh and clean?

Yes	16
No	
Sometimes	1

Is the home clean?

Yes	16
No	
Sometimes	1

Does your friend or relative look clean and tidy?

Yes	16
No	
Sometimes	

Is there somewhere private you can chat when you visit?

Yes	17
No	

Do you feel your friend or relative is safe and secure in the Home?

Yes	22
No	

Do you feel your friend or relative is treated with dignity and respect by staff and other residents?

Yes	23
No	

If you answered 'No', please tell us about it.

Does your friend or relative get the right clothes back after they have been to the laundry?

Yes	8
No	
Sometimes	3

Do you feel that, as a friend or relative, you get the information you need about changes in the home due to COVID-19?

Yes	18
No	1
Sometimes	2

Have you been able to deliver personal items for your loved one?

Yes	21
No	

Do you feel staff listen to your concerns about your loved one regarding covid-19?

Yes	18
No	
Sometimes	1

Has your friend or relative's mood changed during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Yes	15
No	5

Please use this space to make any other comments

See main body of report.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

Acknowledgements

Healthwatch St Helens would like to thank everyone who completed our survey or supported someone else to be able to do so.

Once finalised, this report will be published on our website, shared with the local authority Quality Monitoring Team, Healthwatch England and the Care Quality Commission.

Disclaimer

Please note that the information contained in this report does not reflect the opinions of staff or volunteers from Healthwatch St Helens. It relates entirely to the views and experiences of the local people who completed the survey.

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Please note that the Healthwatch St Helens Support Team are currently working from home but we can still be contacted by telephone, email or through our website.
