

Carer Engagement Policy

Our Commitment

Carers Network is committed to putting carers at the very heart of the development, refinement and delivery of our services. We seek views both from carers who currently use our services, and those hidden carers who do not. We aim to embed carers' views and feedback in all the services we deliver. We also aim to help other relevant organisations to seek carers' input in to how they design and run their services.

Why carer engagement?

Carers' views are an important and relevant perspective for any carers service. Their views and experiences bring enormous benefits for staff, services and individuals across the boroughs we operate in. Carers have a unique perspective and vital insights into the type of services they need and how these should be delivered. This policy sets out how carer engagement is supported both internally within Carers Network and externally through support provided to organisations working with carers.

What is carer engagement?

Involvement covers a range of activities, from consulting carers about their views, through to working in partnership with them to develop projects or services, right up to carers leading projects, services or organisations.

How we involve carers

Carers Network actively seeks the views of carers through:

- Representation on our board of trustees (we will ensure that a minimum of 50% of our board are carers or former carers)
- Feedback on activities – such as trips and events – through paper forms, online and telephone surveys
- Annual survey by phone and online
- Feedback on one to one support – through a short anonymous feedback sheet
- Outcomes monitoring to evaluate the impact of our support, where appropriate – using the Carers Star or wellbeing evaluation tools.
- Focus groups – to coproduce new services
- Recruiting new staff – including a trained carer on the interview panel
- Curating a section of our regular newsletters with content requested by carers
- Through our local carer fora
- Providing equitable access to engagement by ensuring a range of methods are available, and taking a flexible approach to involving carers with specific barriers to engagement, such as being unable to physically leave the person they care for or speaking English as a second language.
- Demonstrating the value of carers contribution through a range of means, including reimbursing expenses where appropriate and possible, awarding time credits where available and sending thank you cards.

How carer involvement informs services

- Communications – our Communications Officer uses carer input in each newsletter and into content for the website

- Social media – our Communications Officer encourages carers to co-produce content for our Facebook page and to connect with us on Twitter
- Our carer trustees have a standing agenda item in each board meeting in which they feed back on services formally, in addition to feeding back informally to service leads
- Feedback from events and trips is used by our Communications Officer to continually improve our activities, and our response to feedback is included in a column in our regular newsletter
- The trustees and senior management team analyse the results of the annual survey to identify trends or issues and feed these into changes to our services
- We run targeted focus groups of in-depth interviews with carers ahead of any new project or service design and we shape our proposed services with carers' needs and views in mind
- Compliments and complaints are regularly reviewed as part of reflective practice, and any learning used to improve the service
- We work with the carers fora to empower carers, and ensure their views are heard by providers of other services they use locally.

Supporting other organisations to involve Carers

Carers Network works with carers to help them to raise the profile of carers amongst local services. We provide opportunities for carers to contribute to the work of the local Clinical Commissioning Groups, Adult Social Care, the Mental Health Trust and hospital trusts.

Carers can participate in a variety of ways including:

- Becoming a carer representative
- Joining the board of trustees
- Helping to research carers' views on specific issues
- Advising on the development of services with carers' needs in mind
- Advising on the design of literature and information for carers
- Reviewing the performance of existing services
- Attending groups and meetings to raise carers' views
- Co-delivering information and training sessions about caring for professionals.