

SERVICE USERS OF CARERS SUPPORT SERVICE – FOCUS GROUP REPORT 25TH JULY 2018

A focus group was held on the evening of 25th July at the Stockport Meeting House and was attended by five carers. The purpose of the group was to discuss the services provided by Stockport Mind to support carers.

One participant had not accessed any of the support offered to carers and had only accessed support for their family member; they did not realise they provided support for carers. Three participants had only accessed one to one support and one participant had accessed one to one support as well as the Carers support group and an emotional resilience course.

HOW DID YOU GET REFERRED OR HOW DID YOU FIND ABOUT THE SERVICE?

There was a discussion about how different members of the group had accessed the services through Mind.

One participant had been referred by the Psychiatric Unit at Stepping Hill hospital when they had been visiting their loved one. They had contacted Mind on their behalf and then they received a call from Mind. This all happened quite quickly.

Another participant had been referred by their loved one's Community Psychiatric Nurse.

“I had an appointment within 2 weeks. I had probably about 12 months one-to-one together with the carers support group that I attend. And I've attended an emotional resilience 'how do I' course with them, it's really, helped me on a personal level so much so that I'm now volunteering to work with them to give something back.”

Following on from this, another participant described how they had been made aware of Mind by their GP. Their daughter had then gone on to contact them and make an appointment on behalf of the carer.

CAN I ASK YOU ALL TO DESCRIBE ANY DIFFICULTIES YOU HAD IN ACCESSING THE SERVICE?

In terms of satisfaction with the availability of the services, one participant raised the issue of times available for support to be inconvenient. Some carers have other family commitments, work commitments and their own health issues to fit around attending support sessions. This respondent was accessing evening appointments but would have preferred if these were in the afternoon.

The other participants said that they had been satisfied with the waiting time for an initial appointment. One respondent said that although they had accessed appointments for one to one support, the level of service has been inconsistent. Their previous support worker had been proactive in making appointments and offering support with things, however their new support worker does not do this and the carer does not feel confident enough to ask for the help with making appointments.

Other members of the group stated that they did not have any issues with accessing the service and could do so easily when they needed to. They also felt that the waiting times for support after they had an initial appointment were reasonable.

The group discussed the importance of consistency in the support they received. One participant had described how they had built a relationship and a level of trust with a staff member from Mind but they had now gone on maternity leave. They then felt they did not have the confidence to start all over again to build a relationship with someone new. Other participants agreed that it can be difficult having to explain your story repeatedly to different professionals. Those that had always had the same person said they felt very lucky.

The group did not describe any other difficulties in accessing the services despite prompting around physical accessibility, language barriers or anything else.

There was some discussion about the timeliness of when people are accessing the carers support through Mind. Some members of the group felt that this should be as soon as you are at crisis point.

“I think it needs to start right at the Stepping Hill hospital doors, in the A&E department or with the GPs. It may be an idea to have a pack with the services for your person that’s suffering and a pack for the carers combined.....something that says ‘you’re now in a scary position, here’s your help’”

The rest of the group agreed that this would be a good idea.

The group discussed the fact that it is difficult to ask for help as pride can get in the way of this and the fact that there are still stigmas around mental health which make it difficult to approach the subject of asking for help. It was felt that a more proactive approach would be appreciated by healthcare professionals and Mind in raising awareness of the service. Some of the ideas the group suggested were a mailshot asking if carers need support and signposting them to it, an email or even a text.

One member of the group described their troubles with getting help for both themselves and their loved one. As they had experienced difficulties in accessing services in the past they have thought ‘what is the point in trying’.

WHAT IS YOUR AWARENESS OF THE SERVICES AVAILABLE?

A sheet was handed around the group with a full list of all services offered. A discussion then followed around awareness of these services.

There was little awareness of the services on the list, outside of what they were already accessing. There was a comment that once you were accessing one service from Stockport Mind the 'doors open up to you' for accessing other services.

Some members of the group said that they had seen these things being advertised but had assumed that they were for their loved ones and were not services that were available to carers.

“You know for counselling and CBT, unless it says for carers, I would presume that is for the person that is accessing the services, you know, that we’re caring for.”

HAVE YOU BENEFITED FROM THE SERVICES YOU HAVE RECEIVED?

Some members of the group described how the support they have received has enabled them to cope with day-to-day life. There was agreement around the group that it is important to look after yourself as a carer. If you are not coping then you are not going to be able to offer the support that is needed for your loved one. The support received through Mind had given some members of the group the strength and emotional resilience to know that they needed to take time out for themselves and they have been encouraged and empowered to do so. There had also been practical support received in terms of helping a member of the group to attend English classes.

The peer support was also valued amongst the group participants. They were supported by attending Carers meetings as everyone there is supporting someone with a mental health condition and they know what each other are going through. The carers felt it was important that you feel you are not alone as they can feel very isolated as carers. The service they received helped them to feel supported in this way and have gained the strength to cope when they go back home.

“You know, nobody would laugh, nobody would not believe you because everyone was having issues. We all supported each other through that.”

One member of the group had been given some coping strategies at a one-to-one session at Mind to help them through difficult times. They have continued to use these strategies and have not felt they have needed to go back to Mind to access further help. The group acknowledged that Mind may not have a solution to their problems but that it is helpful to know there is someone to discuss your problems with.

ARE ANY PARTS OF THE SERVICE NOT BENEFICIAL?

As the group were speaking of their own personal experience there were no parts of the service that had not been beneficial to them.

WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS AND ARE THERE ANY IMPROVEMENTS THAT COULD BE MADE?

There was a lengthy discussion about the fact that the help for carers needs to come earlier than when they are receiving it. The group felt that the support was only being accessed further down the line but that it was needed right at the beginning when their loved ones were first visiting A&E.

It was suggested that there should be a pack available for carers which includes all the support that is available for them along with a phone number. The pack should include a simple explanation of what each of the services are, as some people would not know what 'Advocacy' is for instance.

“When they are admitted to a ward we have no idea what is going to happen, where our support network is, who do we turn to? It’s down the line that we get it.”

Some of the group described their experience of feeling desperate and needing help in those early days when their loved ones were suffering. The help needs to be more readily available and advertised more widely. It was also felt that the Monday – Friday availability isn't always good enough and that there should be a 24 hour helpline.

Other improvements that the participants would like to see is more funding for Mind so that more of the services could be available.