



People finding out about LINK

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Assessing the needs of people in care homes



Birmingham LINK strives to seek out opportunities to engage with the elderly in regards to health and social care; it does so by going into the community and speaking to people at a grass root level. Its Older Persons Action Group (OPAG) decided to undertake a project which involved speaking to elderly residents at care homes to find out their views on the type of activities on offer. OPAG believes that care homes should offer a variety of activities so that residents are stimulated in using a more holistic approach. The project involved visiting nine care

homes across Birmingham and covered the three Primary Care Trust areas, which are Birmingham East and North, South Birmingham and the Heart of Birmingham. Elderly residents were asked a series of questions in regards to what activities they took part in. The objective was to find out residents' level of satisfaction, if they had a say on the choice of activities and if the care homes offered any outdoor options.

The consultation wanted to find out what would inhibit a resident from taking part in an activity and what measures care homes could take to eradicate this. In addition, the consultation wanted to ascertain if physical, sensory, cognitive, emotional and social activities were on offer. Lastly, it wanted to find out if care homes had a dedicated events coordinator who designed activities considering this approach.

To ensure the findings were accurate and representative of the needs of the elderly population, LINK visited a variety of care

homes, including private, voluntary, local authority, health authority and housing associations. Besides, the homes they visited had different Care Quality Commission (CQC) ratings (i.e. poor, good and excellent). CQC is the independent regulator of all health and adult social care in England. Its aim is to make sure better care is provided for everyone, whether that's in hospital, in care homes, in people's own homes or elsewhere. The aim of visiting a range of care homes was to gather a true reflection of the type of activities offered across Birmingham.

For more information about this project, please contact Birmingham LINK on 0800 652 5278 or via email on info@birminghamlink.org. A completed report will be submitted to Birmingham City Council which will include the findings of this project as well as recommendations for the future.

Have you visited our exciting website? Visit: www.birminghamlink.org

Joint work to influence outcome of maternity consultation

Our Women's Health and Maternity Action Group teamed up with Solihull LINK to undergo a research project after being informed of proposals to change the way services are provided in Birmingham East and North and Solihull.

The closure of a full paediatric maternity service at Solihull Hospital and the extension of maternity services at Heartlands Hospital triggered a full consultation by the local Primary Care Trusts to review their maternity strategies. This brought about a lot of negative comments from patients, local families and Councillors and many felt that the consultation was not adequate to the changes being proposed. We brought these views together in a research project and forwarded it to lead commissioners to ensure patients' voices influence their decisions.

The research project was carried out by an independent researcher and broken into two parts: focus groups and qualitative interviews with mothers who had given birth in the last year. Overall, four focus groups and 75 interviews were carried out between Solihull and Birmingham LINKs, with mothers being invited through post-natal groups and with the help of local Children's Centres.

The interviews covered the quality of care being provided to mothers' pre birth, throughout their pregnancy, delivery and post birth; also looking at quality of support being provided to mothers who wished to breastfeed.

Elsie Gayle, the chair of the Women's Health and Maternity Action Group said "We incorporated the expressed needs and wishes of local women to make recommendations to improve access to and the quality of maternity care and education. We feel we brought together strong arguments, which can help shape maternity services in the coming years."

The report was presented to the Maternity Service Commissioners and leads at Solihull Care Trust, Birmingham East and North and Heart of England Foundation Trust. It was also forwarded to local Councillors, Solihull and Birmingham East and North Maternity Liaison Service Committee, members of the Health and Adults Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the mothers who took part in the research project.

To read the full report, visit our website or call 0800 652 5278 for a paper copy.

Pupils are encouraged to express their views

Birmingham LINK undertook a project to understand how the School Nurse service is perceived by young people aged 12 – 16. LINK benefitted from the input and expertise of the School Nurse team at Quinton Lane Care Centre in designing a questionnaire to be rolled out to six senior schools across South Birmingham. All the schools kindly agreed to prioritise the questionnaires in class tutorials to ensure enough pupils took part.

Each school offers a different type of service, with some having a weekly School Nurse drop-in service and others an offsite School Nurse who can be contacted by phone. LINK is currently collating the results and is keen to see if the perceptions of the School Nurse service differ for each school.

Pupils were asked if they knew about the School Nurse service, and if given the choice, what would be their most preferred way of accessing the service. They were also asked about how comfortable they would be speaking to the School Nurse about issues they have and to tell us about their experiences using the School Nurse service in the past.

We are positive that this engagement exercise will enable Birmingham Community Healthcare Trust to improve the way they deliver this service in the future.



Letting the community have their say

LINK Community Outreach Officers (COOs) have been active all across Birmingham to engage with different organisations and communities who are keen to tell us their views and opinions about health and social care. The Women's Health and Maternity Action Group (WHMAG) has been at the forefront of their agenda, with them attending two awareness raising days in March for International Women's Day; one at the Balsall Heath Church Centre and another at Mayfield School in Handsworth. They took this chance to ask women what they think the priorities for WHMAG should be as well as promoting the good work the group is doing.

COOs also attended an Expert Patients Day

in Sheldon on 14 February which was organised by NHS Birmingham East and North. There was special emphasis on coping with long-term conditions and helping people access the right services. They also consulted with people at a Parent Support Advisor Event in Washwood Heath so they could learn about people's experiences using health services in that area.

In February, they worked with the Birmingham Disability Resource Centre (BDRC) to consult with service users about the planned changes to the Disability Living Allowance. They worked together to formulate and submit a comprehensive response to this consultation, and they are

awaiting the response to this. LINK also met with the Multiple Sclerosis Society to learn about their problems accessing health services and the current gaps in service provision. LINK plans to meet with its Birmingham branch to focus more closely on some of these issues and potentially help them to gain better use of services.

Lives Interrupted is a major success

Birmingham LINK recently organised *Lives Interrupted*, a dementia event in partnership with the Alzheimer's Society. The event was held on 22 March at the Midlands Art Centre (mac) in Cannon Hill Park and attracted more than 100 people.

There were various speakers at the event, including Robin Felton the Team Manager of Birmingham Memory Assessment Service (BMASS). He informed the audience on how they can access the BMASS service and how people are referred. The event also had Dr Avi Dhariwal, a consultant for the Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust, who discussed the various issues surrounding dementia and the current statistics of dementia prevalence within the UK.

Norman Howell MBE, the chair of

Birmingham LINK's Older Persons Action Group (OPAG), shared his experience of caring for his wife who was diagnosed with dementia. In addition, a current service user of dementia services talked about the surrounding issues of being diagnosed. One attendee said "I found the carer's personal experience very useful and also the service user's personal account".

There were many health and social care organisations in attendance, and a number of information stalls with an interest in dementia too. One of the information stall holders said "I met lots of useful contacts and have achieved my main objective of coming away feeling like I have touched some people's lives and possibly made a difference; that alone makes all the hard work worthwhile – well done LINK for a successful day".

The event was a great success; having achieved its objective of encouraging professionals and members of the public to interact with each other and learn more about dementia services and the support available. Birmingham LINK Community Outreach Officer Linda Onerhime added "I was so pleased with the outcome of *Lives Interrupted*; it has achieved what it set out to do. The professionals and members of the public have learnt from each other, it has been very interactive and informative. More needs to be done to raise awareness of dementia and I am very proud that Birmingham LINK has taken on this issue.

I would also like to thank the Alzheimer's Society for being great partners in the organisation of this event".

Striving to support all the community



Our University Hospitals Birmingham Action Group (UHBAG) held *Working Together*, a patient support awareness day, at the main entrance of the new Queen Elizabeth Hospital on 10 March, with support from the University Hospital Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust (UHB).

The event gave support groups from across the city a chance to offer advice, information and support to patients, carers and staff and to inform them of how they can benefit from using their services. It was an excellent opportunity for them to promote their work and to build stronger dialogue, especially as some groups were supporting similar types of illnesses.

The event also marked two other important occasions: World Kidney Day and UHB Governors Day. There was a strong

representation for World Kidney Day, with the Kidney Patients Association and Kidney Research UK both attending, and there were also Dialysis Consultants on hand to give simulated demonstrations on how dialysis is used.

Working Together was a great achievement for the Birmingham LINK. Some groups took this opportunity to speak to LINK about problems they have encountered and others wanted to clarify how their group could benefit from working with it in the future. The most useful outcome of the event was its success in 'linking' support groups together so they can work more effectively and provide better and more coordinated services for patients and carers. LINK also gave some smaller groups valuable exposure that they could not have gained otherwise.

This positive response has already led to discussions to hold a similar event in the future so other support groups will have the opportunity to market their activity. Given the chance to do this type of event again, LINK is certain that it would be even more successful. Watch this space!



29 out of the 38 people who completed the survey said they knew more about Birmingham LINK as a result of attending, whilst 18% said they were now 'fully aware' of the topic, and another 42% felt they were now 'informed'.



An impressive 73% were very satisfied with the event.

Some of the comments included:

"it was the first event of its kind, very encouraged by the organisation"

"very informative with lots of literature to take away"

"very helpful and considerate people"



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Organisers of the Working Together event



Vaisakhi in Handsworth is a major success

Birmingham LINK welcomes new Core Group members

The Birmingham LINK has recently held elections for its Core Group. With a view to consulting and engaging with the wider general public on all aspects of health and social care within the city, the Core Group is made up of individuals and groups who feel that their experience, knowledge and effort can contribute to the effective running of health and adult social care issues within the city.

The Core Group is tasked with overseeing the governing strategy of the Birmingham LINK as well as detailing plans of community

engagement through meetings and events that it organises.

With over thirty nominees standing for individual places (and five group nominees) within the Core Group, the election produced a result that should allow the new Core Group to continue its work in engaging with the people of Birmingham around issues that affect their daily lives.

Those who were elected to join the Core Group this year are:

| Individuals | Groups |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Noorin Akhtar Barbara Jones (Resigned) Gerry Moynihan (Resigned) Enid Said Manjit Singh Pat Thomas Chris Vaughan | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Search Team Insulin Dependent Diabetes Trust Freshwinds Balsall Heath Mother and Midwife Project SUFI Trust |

Well done to those who were elected. We are looking forward to their support in helping Birmingham LINK move forward and continue developing its service throughout the city.

Currently, the Core Group is not meeting due to a reappraisal of the standard operating procedures and other governance documents, which will be placed on the LINK website for consultation shortly.

A transition mission

1 April marks the beginning of the official transition year from the current LINKs into the new HealthWatch organisations. HealthWatch groups will have stronger powers to shape and hold local services to account than the current LINKs.

With this in mind, a group of Birmingham LINK members met on 2 April to discuss and debate the way forward for HealthWatch in Birmingham and to ensure that the LINK will be at the forefront of the discussions during the transition period. It was acknowledged by all attendees that lessons must be learnt and best practice maintained in order to ensure a productive and effective HealthWatch for the citizens of the city.

With the additional responsibilities now placed on the forthcoming HealthWatch, members agreed to continue discussions with a view to formulating a viable proposal for HealthWatch in Birmingham.