

Taking a break from caring

Over the last year Richmond Carers Centre has been asking carers whether they feel that we have supported them with finding time for themselves and getting a break from their caring role.

A significant number of carers have responded that they are 'not sure' if they have been supported by us, or that taking a break was 'not relevant' to them.

We know how important it is for carers to have time to themselves and we want to make sure that we are doing everything we can to support carers to take a break. We therefore held a focus group to explore further the subject of taking a break, and find out what we might do differently to support carers better.

The group looked at:

- what the term 'break' means to carers
- the barriers carers face in getting the break they need
- how we can support carers better to get a break.

Attendees at the group helped us identify that carers may:

- not feel they need our support with getting a break
- not recognise their own needs
- be unsure what was meant by the statement 'I feel supported in having a break from caring and time for myself'
- feel guilty about leaving the person for whom they care
- find the practical difficulties of arranging respite care and identifying options for having a break too great
- not see a break as an option.

Carers' suggestions for service development included:

- better support with the emotional and practical difficulties carers face when planning a break
- more easily accessible information about special deals for carers
- stressing the benefits of carers sharing their knowledge, experience and tips with other carers.

As a result we are looking at how we can do better at:

- promoting information about carer discounts and options for breaks
- communicating with carers about 'breaks'
- enabling carers to share their knowledge and experience and tips with each other.

How do we *currently* support carers to overcome emotional and practical barriers to getting the break they need?

Our Adult Carer Support Workers can:

- offer individual support sessions over the phone or face-to-face to help identify the barriers you are facing and to find realistic options for taking a break
- refer you to counselling support to help you cope with the emotional challenges you face as a carer
- offer their knowledge and support with navigating the Health and Social care system and signposting you to other voluntary agencies to ensure you have all available resources
- help you to access charitable funding for breaks
- access support for you from our Young Carers Team
- ensure that you receive our quarterly newsletter
- access wellbeing activities to promote self-care
- encourage carers to share their knowledge and experiences with other carers through our Information and Support Sessions
- refer you to the Local Authority for a Carers Assessment or Parent Carer Needs Assessment, to check your eligibility for statutory support with getting a break
- identify groups and activities available to carers.

Some carers tell us that a 'break' for them is enjoying an outing with other carers, and so every month we offer a range of activities and sociable get-togethers. See pages 3-7 of this issue.

What carers have said about taking a break:

'I am now thinking more about my own needs and finding a way to have time for myself even though this can be hard to manage.'

'I feel so much better able to cope after a break, I was not good at getting time for myself. I am trying to learn that now!'

'I increasingly appreciate the value of engaging in activities outside my caring role and I am grateful to the providers of these activities.'

Richmond Carers Centre's approach is personalised, it involves supporting carers to identify their *own* need for a break and helping them tackle the emotional and practical challenges that many carers face. Please contact our Support Line, **020 8867 2380**.

We will help you explore how to get the break you need.