

Experts by Experience

Home: Four Ways (2/2 volunteer visits)

Date: October 2014

What is Experts by Experience?

Several WCS homes have been scrutinised by Age UK Warwickshire volunteers to find out what life was like for people living there. Volunteers explored all aspects of home life, from atmosphere and cleanliness to mealtimes and culture.

As well as using discreet observations, the Age UK also volunteers mingled with people who lived there to find out how they felt about their quality of life. Each volunteer filed a report rating things like cleanliness, staff attitude and atmosphere from poor to excellent, and also commented on how each score was derived. A first round of visits gave 16 'excellents', 16 'goods', and 3 'adequates', however more visits are planned throughout 2015. **Volunteers' names have been redacted, but here are their comments published in full.**

Note: All volunteers' comments are black, while their instructions from Age UK are in Magenta.

Sections:

Home Environment

Staff Attitude

What was Happening in the Home?

Eating and Mealtimes

Quality of Life

Home Environment

Score: 4/5

Describe your own experience of the quality of the home environment. Please consider things like:

How clean the home was, how it was decorated, how homely and comfortable it was, how the home was personalised to the people who live there, how the home smelt and whether the facilities were comfortable, pleasant and easy to find.

The reception area was welcoming and neat and tidy. There was a signing in book with an alcohol hand cleanser beside it and music was playing. I was impressed that I had only been waiting a short time outside the door before the manager came out to greet me.

Homely and comfortable – there were plants and fresh flowers throughout the home with pictures on the walls. The soft furnishings and carpets were in good repair. I liked the fact that the bedroom doors into residents' rooms were made to resemble actual front doors with their names on them. I believe Four Ways to be one of the original homes transferred from Warwickshire Council and the manager was well aware of its shortcomings as regards layout i.e. that the bedrooms all opened off long corridors so this mitigated against instilling individuality into the surroundings. The majority of bedrooms were light and airy and some had been wallpapered.

Cleanliness – the bathrooms on the 2nd floor were clean and tidy. The housekeeper was Hoovering the rooms and corridors during the day. The kitchen on the 2nd floor was cleaned and the crocks tidied away following breakfast and lunch. The area under the radiator in the 2nd floor lounge was slightly dusty but overall level of cleanliness was good.

Decoration – this was a little tired in the 2nd floor kitchen/sitting room area with scuffed door frames and a stained ceiling and walls. The bedrooms I saw were clean and well decorated.

Personalised – residents were able to bring items of their own furniture into their bedrooms and were also able to bring small pets with them once any risks had been assessed by the manager. The front doors to the bedrooms were labelled with the name of the resident and each resident had a life diary. Residents were wearing their own clothes and laundry facilities were available on site. Pop music was playing in the 2nd floor kitchen/dining area with classical music in the quieter lounge area. There were notice boards evident in the reception area and in the ground floor sitting room – those for the residents were neat and tidy but the ones aimed primarily at staff were a little cluttered and untidy. There was a display of pictures of residents in the ground floor lounge.

When I sat and tried to imagine how I would feel if this were my home the only intrusive and discordant note was the medicine trolley which was trundled up the corridor outside the bedrooms and into the sitting room. Great care was taken with the administration of the medicines with residents observed whilst taking their tablets or inhalers but the process seemed more in keeping with a hospital ward than someone's home. Would there be a way of taking the medicines out from a central point rather than taking the trolley on its rounds? There were no unpleasant smells and when the rooms became a little stuffy due to the heating windows were opened to let in the fresh air.

There was a prominent display in the 2nd floor kitchen/sitting area with the day's date, the season, details of the weather and any relevant birthdays. There were clocks in the communal rooms and when I was asked the time by a resident she knew where the clock in the room we were in was situated on the wall although due to failing eyesight was unable to see it.

Although the sluice room on the 2nd floor had a key code lock I noticed it was left open and unattended in the afternoon with a container of toilet cleaner accessible on a shelf – ironically opposite a newspaper article describing how a resident in a care home had died after ingesting something similar. Realise this is not a hospital environment but some of the residents were suffering from a degree of confusion and depression and may have been at risk.

Staff Attitude

Score: 5/5

Describe your own experience of the attitude of staff. Please consider things like:

How you and residents at the home were treated, whether residents were listened to, whether people were treated with dignity and respect, whether staff were polite and courteous? Whether they had a rapport with you/residents, how you/residents were addressed (eg what name was used and whether you were asked what you'd like to be called), how you and residents at the home were treated, whether residents were listened to and whether people were treated with dignity and respect.

The residents were treated solicitously and with respect at all times – they were greeted courteously and their permission sought before procedures were carried out such as the administration of medicine.

One gentleman was feeling weepy and the staff picked up on this very quickly and comforted him.

Residents were asked whether they required drinks and these were offered on a regular basis.

Staff knew the residents well and one lady who had been a member of the Leamington and Warwick Operatic Society and known to enjoy singing was encouraged to sing at the breakfast table.

Residents were addressed by their first names and not 'duck' or 'dear'.

A letter was delivered to one resident and she had the opportunity to open this herself and to read the contents – there was not an assumption that she would want the letter opened for her.

One lady who had recently moved into the home was finding the change in her circumstances difficult to cope with as she mourned the loss of her independence and was used to going out into Leamington – one of the staff picked up on this and offered to see if there were sufficient staff for someone to take her out during the afternoon.

Many of the ladies visited the hairdressing salon on site and the staff went out of their way to compliment them on their hairstyles.

The staff I observed talked to the residents directly and did not talk over them or chat about personal issues.

At least 5 of the residents I spoke to described the staff as 'very nice' and even one lady who had had an issue with 2 members of staff in the past still described the staff overall as 'nice' – I was able to discuss the issue in question with Pearl Mackey, the Home Manager, in private and was assured that the matter had been investigated and reported to the CQC and to Safeguarding. I felt there was a relaxed atmosphere of openness throughout the home and that staff were approachable and respectful. They looked as if they genuinely enjoyed being at work and were sensitive to the needs of the residents. 2 of the members of staff I spoke to had worked at the home for a long time with one combining roles working in the kitchen and as a carer.

What was happening in the home?

Score: 4/5

Describe your own experience of what was happening in the home. Please consider things like:

What people were doing – whether it seemed to be their choice, whether people were doing what they might have been doing living independently, whether people's interests and hobbies were being supported, the organised activities you observed, how were people encouraged to join in activities and could people choose not to join in.

There were large print books available in the sitting areas and various activities were on display and easily accessible such as knitting and a giant skittles game.

The garden was wheelchair accessible and there were birds in an aviary and rabbits in a hutch adding interest. Raised wooden flowerbeds under which a wheelchair could be positioned allowed the residents the opportunity to help with gardening.

There was a hairdressing salon in full swing during the morning and a queue of residents made use of this facility. This was obviously a popular feature of the home.

The coffee morning which took place on the day we visited allowed the residents to meet fellow residents from other floors and the carers put on dance music – they gently encouraged the residents to join in either singing or dancing but did not force them to participate. Presumably there are other opportunities for the residents to mingle as conversation was somewhat hampered by the loud music although the conservatory offered a quieter environment.

There was a relaxed atmosphere in the home and I came away with the impression that residents wishes would be catered for wherever possible. Staff were flexible in their approach and residents were able to keep to their bedrooms if they so wished or were not feeling well.

The various floors were each accessed via a door with a keycode on the stairs, or by the lift. This was to provide a degree of security for residents. Staff were always on hand to transport people in wheelchairs to the various floors.

In the afternoon staff encouraged residents to participate in a game of giant skittles in the 2nd floor sitting room.

Eating and mealtimes

Score: 4/5

Describe your own experience of the meals and eating. Please consider things like:

The comfort and atmosphere at the mealtime(s) you participated in, the quality and quantity of food offered and the way it was presented, whether residents got choice about their food and could they serve themselves, how staff supported people during the mealtime, whether people could choose when and where to eat, whether people could help themselves to drinks and snacks whenever they wished? Whether there was a variety and were they visible to residents and the comfort and atmosphere at the mealtime(s) you participated in.

Residents could eat their meals either in the communal kitchen/sitting room or be served in their own rooms. The tables in the kitchen could accommodate either 5/6 people or 2 so there was a choice of seating arrangements.

The tables were attractively laid with cloth tablecloths and real flowers.

Clear menus were available on the tables and residents had a choice of cereals and a cooked breakfast and 2 main choices for their lunch with jacket potatoes and omelettes available as an alternative. Orange squash was available on the table throughout the meal and tea and coffee also available. The meal of leek and potato pie I had at lunchtime was very tasty.

Different flavours of squash were available on sidetables throughout the day in the sitting room plus packaged snacks and fresh fruit. Residents were supplied with tea/coffee on a regular basis throughout the day. Residents also had squash available in their rooms.

One member of staff sat with residents and ate with them. Notes were kept on who had had their meal. Meals were served from a trolley sent up from the ground floor kitchen and meals were plated for the residents. I just wondered whether some residents might have preferred to serve themselves from dishes on the table although people did seem to be happy to be served.

There was a relaxed atmosphere during and after the meal and no sense of being rushed or hurried.

Having the kitchens on each floor provides an opportunity for residents to perhaps join in a baking session and I'm not sure whether this is ever available. The residents' needs were all well anticipated by the staff but they were very much waited on and I wondered whether there could be more opportunity for them to become involved in the day to day activities – I realise this takes more staff time and may happen on other days but the residents seemed a little passive given this is their home.

Quality of Life

Score: 4/5

Describe your own experience of quality of life for residents. Please consider things like:

The general appearance of residents (clothes, hair, teeth, glasses), whether people's personal appearance choices and preferences were supported (eg men wearing their tie, women wearing makeup or jewellery), whether call bells were intrusive? Were they answered in good time, whether significant events and anniversaries were observed, whether the staff know the residents (their interests, preferences, life histories, family) and whether people were enjoying themselves in the home? Was there an atmosphere of calm, laughter, fun?

Residents looked well cared for with appropriate footwear and clean clothes. Several ladies took advantage of the hairdressing facility on the ground floor and 2 ladies that I noticed had had their nails painted with varnish. One resident was incontinent on one occasion and his clothes were changed immediately this was noticed with the minimum of fuss and as unobtrusively as possible.

Although the television was available in the sitting room this was switched off by a member of staff when no one was watching it – subtitles were switched on for those with hearing difficulties.

Call bells were relatively unobtrusive although were in use almost continuously throughout the morning – I only noticed that the bells went into continuous mode 5 times during the day. Where residents were happy for their bedroom doors to be left open then they could also hail staff as they passed by.

One lady who had recently come into Four Ways described it as a 'place that I live' and not as her home - for some it may be that the goal of providing a home from home is unrealistic particularly in the early stages. This is in no way a criticism of the staff or the home but merely reflects the challenge of adjusting to communal living and the loss of independence. Staff appeared to be sensitive to this and tried to arrange for residents to visit the local facilities.

Other Comments:

There was certainly an atmosphere of laughter and fun in Four Ways and a sense of people being cared for and cherished. I enjoyed my day there and was grateful for the welcome from Pearl and her staff and for the hospitality offered.

I was struck by the varying dependency levels of the residents with many requiring a high degree of physical care and attention. It must be very challenging to keep the balance between those who are more independent and those who require close monitoring and supervision.

Thank you to everyone at Four Ways for a most enjoyable visit.