

## Experts by Experience

Home: The Limes

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: 5/5**

**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 home was clean and tidy. I saw a couple of spills and drinks upset but they were quickly cleaned up. I have no reason to believe that this was because of my presence. One of the residents told me, spontaneously, that 'if anything is spilled they clear it up quickly'. I saw a broken curtain rail but it was explained that this had happened very recently and a repair was scheduled for later in the day.

Although it was the last day of October the weather outside was unseasonably hot (at least 20 degrees Celsius) but inside all was at a sensible temperature. Depending on how much a room was getting in terms of sun, windows were opened or closed as necessary. If a resident said they were hot or cold then a window was opened or closed as appropriate. Although the outside weather was pleasant, no-one was sitting in the garden as it wasn't that warm - but at least two people told me how much they enjoyed sitting in the garden in the summer.

Many residents had personalised their own rooms with photographs and mementoes. Outside several rooms there were additional materials relating to their hobbies, interests and achievements. In the general areas there were more generic displays about local history and sights as well as a Second World War display (two of the men I spoke to had seen active service).

I was present at breakfast (downstairs) and lunch (upstairs). At both times there was music playing from CDs and this reflected the ages of the residents.

A resident cat was present downstairs and, later on, three dogs arrived which were bought by relatives of residents. These were well-behaved and under control and their presence was appreciated by the residents.

# 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.**

I was made to feel very welcome by all members of staff. All the time I was being asked if I needed anything or if there was anything else that I wanted to see or take part in. Again I don't think that this was a special effort made for my benefit. These same courtesies were extended to other visitors to the home during the day. The staff members were quite genuine in their positive outlook and willingness to help. It was clear that they knew all of the immediate residents in their charge - not just their names but also their likes and dislikes, habits and routines and particular foibles. It was noticed if someone was acting differently to the day before or if there had been any change between the morning and afternoon. At least two residents mentioned to me - again without any prompting - about how much they liked and appreciated the staff. At the beginning of the day, Karen, the manager had shown me around and introduced members of staff as well as residents. On at least two occasions residents mentioned to her that their tea or porridge was too hot: she attended to this straight away without delegating to anyone else. She also provided immediate comfort to a couple of people who were clearly distressed. Her example was followed by all members of staff. Karen also provided me with some histories of particular residents and pointed me towards those who might be more willing (and able) to speak to me about their experiences in the home.

I sat in at a staff meeting in the middle of the afternoon where the status of each resident was discussed. I was impressed not just by their knowledge of each individual but also by the care and attention that everyone received. Everyone was made to feel comfortable and cared for.

## What was happening in the home?

Score: 5/5

**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.**

In the morning the main organised activity that I attended was upstairs, where the residents who were not in their rooms were joining in doing some simple exercises. The lady (Christine I think) who lead the session made every effort to include everyone in the activity, even though some were able to participate more fully than others. But everyone got a hug, and everyone was encouraged to do what they could. My impression was that everyone wanted to join in: if they were not fully participating then it was because they were not able to do as much as they would have liked - not because they didn't want to.

There were plenty of indications that those with hobbies were they could still participate were being fully supported. For instance those who enjoyed painting had some of their pictures on the walls.

Did it seem like this is what people would be doing if they were living independently?

This is a hard one to answer unless you have observed people in their home environment. My impression, and it is no more than that, is that they may well have been doing more than they would if they were in their home. In the care home, there were more people to talk to, not just other residents but also staff and visitors, and more distractions. In their own home they might well have just turned on the television for companionship. (Note - the only time I saw a television turned on was in the room of one resident and that was just before I left).

When I asked some of the residents about activities, they mentioned visits by musical acts as well as arts and crafts. They were complimentary about all of these and several were looking forward to carol services and Christmas.

## Eating and mealtimes

Score: 5/5

**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.**

I sat in the downstairs area during breakfast and chatted with Robert. The ladies preparing breakfast went to great trouble to make sure that everyone got what they wanted and what they liked. They checked with everybody if the porridge or the tea was too hot and if it was then they got it cooled. Where residents needed help with cutting up food or spreading toast then they would assist. The atmosphere was quite jolly with music playing.

At the mid-morning snack I was upstairs were there were hot drinks and biscuits and everyone tucked in.

At lunchtime I set with Bett and Roy and Nora (?). I had a jacket potato with cheese and salad which was delicious. There was a choice of main course and everyone had something different. Roy decided to skip his main course in order to have more ice cream. Around the room people were asked what they wanted and adjustments were made to the standard menus to take account of what people did and didn't want. Again music was playing and account was taken of what people wanted to listen to. No-one had to wait for food and the servers made sure that everyone was eating and had drinks. If there was something that they didn't like then they found an alternative.

When I asked residents about the food I heard compliments not complaints. People felt that there was always plenty of food if they wanted it and more than enough variety. Not surprisingly they liked the more traditional food and the puddings but I heard no negative comments about the choice or the quality.

# Quality of Life

Score: 5/5

**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?**

The residents that I saw who were out of bed and moving around were all dressed in clean clothes. I saw no evidence of broken glasses, unkempt hair, shabby/dirty clothing or any other signs of neglect.

There was a fire bell test that was quite loud but everyone was familiar with this and they were given fore-warning of it. One of the residents in the upstairs area had a birthday and at breakfast everyone sang 'Happy Birthday' to her: her family took her out for the day. Robert was also collected by a volunteer from another charity and went into Stratford during the morning. Roy went out with one of the staff to do some shopping. Three of the residents that I saw had visits from their relatives.

Residents were always being asked if they wanted drinks or snacks; I didn't hear anyone have to ask for anything. Staff always went to great lengths to include everybody and to make sure that everyone was ok.

Sitting with the residents my impression was that most of them understood that they were there because they could not longer cope with living in their home, on their own. Many were frail, either mentally or physically, or both. Of necessity there were times when a group of residents might be left on their own. Most understood that this was a much better alternative. They would be happily sitting chatting but they did sometimes become a bit anxious if there was no staff member in the room. However a staff member was never more than a couple of minutes away and once they saw somebody, any anxieties went away.

## Other comments

Before I began this visit (my first in this programme) I was not absolutely sure what I would find. I have visited care homes before to see relatives and also a lady that I had befriended through Age UK. Here I saw a different perspective because I was also talking to staff and hearing their views. Also out of 28 residents I was only able to have conversations with about 6 of them. The others were either in their rooms or were too frail or unable to speak about their experiences. The residents I spoke to were all positive. The only one who was not was a lady who was confined to her room who told me 'I hate it here'. After a minute she asked me to leave the room. I believe that her comments reflected frustration at her physical situation rather than at the care and treatment she was receiving.

My overall impression was very positive with staff who are committed, friendly, hard working and positive, even when having to deal with many difficult situations. My own father is 86 and has lived on his own most of the time since my mother died 30 years ago. At that moment he is coping on his own and he shows no desire or need to go into residential care. I asked myself a simple question: would I be happy for him to go into The Limes? The answer is 'yes'. I would be confident that he would be looked after well.