

Experts by Experience

Home: The Sycamores

Date: November 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.

I found the home to be very clean and well decorated in all the areas I visited. The soft furnishings including curtains and blinds were very attractive, of modern design and I would guess were fairly new.

The way the home is laid out, ie in small households, give it a very homely and comfortable feeling. Each household has recently had a new kitchen area which is both attractive and practical.

I visited three bedrooms all of which were personalised to the residents. There were several pictures, photos etc on the walls and other personal items. Residents are obviously encouraged to have their own belongings in their rooms including furniture where practical. One of the residents has his own long cased clock which he is very fond of. He also had various certificates from his place of employment which, together with personal pictures etc, help to instigate a conversation with staff and visitors

Each bedroom door is made to look like a flat/house front door with a smart number, letter box and the name of the resident which I thought was a nice touch. There were no unpleasant smells in the home which I was impressed with particularly considering each bedroom has its own en suite.

Each household has its own lounge, dining area, kitchen and also a small quiet room where residents can sit and read, have a snack, entertain visitors or just be on their own if they wish. All these areas were well furnished with comfortable chairs, tables etc. The kitchen was well equipped and accessible to residents and visitors. The dining area again was comfortable and well furnished.

I noticed several large signs around various areas to help the residents find their way to the facilities.

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 started my visit at 8 am and attended the handover meeting which I found interesting. The night staff gave a detailed account of the activities of each resident during the night and what the current situation was eg whether they were up and dressed. It was obvious from this meeting that all the staff knew the residents well.

My view was that the residents at the home were treated exceptionally well. The staff I had contact with were very patient with them and treated them with respect. All the residents were addressed by their first name and I feel that there was an atmosphere of respectful friendship between residents and staff.

The staff I talked to obviously enjoyed their work and were working well as a team. There was quite a bit of playful banter between them and the residents - the atmosphere was very pleasant.

I was treated with respect and the staff showed interest in the project. It was nice to chat with them and hear how happy they were at the home. In fact I was told that if someone leaves they usually return before too long because they missed the home!

In addition to the care workers, the lady who looks after the laundry was doing an excellent job. Clothes were carefully washed, dried and folded neatly before being put into the individualised baskets for each resident before being returned to their rooms. The domestic staff also seemed happy in their work, felt valued and also appeared to have a good relationship with the residents.

What was happening in the home?

Score: 3/5

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 area where I spent most of my time, ie the middle floor, the residents were not really doing very much but did seem content. The television in the lounge was on but no-one was taking much interest in it. There were one or two visitors around which provided some distraction.

The lack of activities in the home is something which I understand is being addressed very shortly and appointments have been made.

It is obvious that the staff, both at WCS and The Sycamores are very keen to improve the amount of time spent on positive activities for the residents. It was good to hear that the new appointees were going to receive thorough training from a specialist organisation which sounds very exciting.

Regarding the support of residents' particular interests and hobbies, I was told by one resident that he was taken to the Sydni Centre and was able to do some model making which he enjoyed.

Residents are also supported if they want to visit the local shops or Asda and they also have the opportunity to go further afield, eg to the service of remembrance.

There is also a nice garden which the residents are encouraged to use in the summer. Clive has recently been raising money to provide further equipment.

Eating and mealtimes

Score: 3/5

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.

The dining area is well furnished and comfortable.

I participated in lunch and was offered a choice of beef casserole or smoked haddock bake. I chose the fish. I was told that the residents made their choices on the previous day. I also had soup as a starter and rhubarb crumble for pudding.

I was slightly concerned about the way the lunch was presented to the residents. The portions seemed rather large which can sometimes seem rather daunting particularly for the older residents who probably don't have very large appetites. My view of the food itself was that it was tasty but both main meal and pudding were a bit stodgy.

Also the food was presented to the residents complete with gravy on the main meal and custard on the pudding. I was given a large portion of crumble with custard and as I don't eat custard I had to ask for it to be removed. I was presented with both the soup and the pudding without being asked if I wanted them or told if there was a choice. I did notice though that one of the residents was eating a yogurt instead of the crumble.

My view is that the residents should have more say in what size their portions are and as to whether they would like gravy, sauce, custard etc. Perhaps they could have jugs on the table so they could help themselves if that is practical.

I didn't see any of the residents helping themselves to snacks, drinks etc but this could have been a mobility issue. I did, however, see visitors in the kitchen area who obviously felt comfortable making themselves a drink etc. One of the more mobile residents was laying the table for lunch which she was encouraged to do – this was nice to see.

The staff fed a couple of the residents who were unable to feed themselves. These residents had been dressed with aprons in order to protect their clothing.

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?

I feel that the quality of life of the residents I came into contact with was very good. They all looked very well dressed and I would imagine that their appearance was the same as when they were living in their own homes. Patients are offered a hairdressing facility together with manicures.

The call bells were not intrusive. I only witnessed one occasion when the bell was ringing and it was answered straight away.

The residents I spoke to were happy and content in the home. One resident told me that she had been very reluctant to move into the home and was initially unhappy. At the age of 98 however, she realised that her family could no longer allow her to live on her own and she eventually accepted that situation. Another lady told me she was very happy at the home and was pleased that she was no longer a worry to her family. She enjoyed going to the local shops from time to time and a walk in the locality.

There was a very pleasant and happy atmosphere in the home and a lot of friendly banter.

As well as having an air of fun and freedom, the home is also secure with keypad locked doors at the entrance to each floor and stairway.

There were several relatives visiting and I had the opportunity to speak with them. In all cases they were extremely happy with the home and one gentleman told me that he had noticed a marked improvement since Clive had taken charge.

The day of my visit was the day Clive returned from his holiday and he had very obviously been missed by the residents. There was a lot of friendly banter between the residents and him when he took us on a tour of the home.

Other Comments

I really enjoyed my visit to The Sycamores. From the moment I stepped through the door I was impressed with the friendly atmosphere, decor, cleanliness and general ambience.

As discussed, I feel that the length of the day we were initially asked to do was too long and my colleague and I left during the early afternoon. However, I came away feeling that there was a lot more I wanted to see and find out about. I suggest that it might be a good idea to spread a visit over two or three days, visiting at different times on each day. I would certainly like to visit The Sycamores again, perhaps after the activities programme has started.

Clive and Natalie run the home in a very professional and caring way which was obvious from the chats I had with residents and staff.

The residents seem to be treated as family and I liked the way that all their files etc were personalised with their photograph on the front. I noticed that this system is also used in the laundry on their individual clothes baskets.

I also like the idea of the life diaries which are a valuable means of communication between residents, families and staff. They are also a good way of keeping a record of the residents day to day life. My mother was in a nursing home nearly 15 years ago and as she had short term memory loss, it would have been so valuable to have such a diary.

I think the best way to sum up my visit and views about the home would be to say that if I had a relative who needed to be in a care home, I would have no hesitation in recommending The Sycamores.