

What happened at the very first Carers' Hub Lambeth Forum?



Firstly, a big thank you to everyone who made it through the rain to get to the meeting on 24th February. It was a fantastic turn out with over 60 people attending on the day. It was pleasing to see not only carers who have previously been helped by Lambeth Carers but lots of new carers who found out about the Hub from their GP surgeries and friends.

We met at the Accord Centre, 336 Brixton Road and the Forum took place between 11am and 12.30pm. Debate during the Forum was certainly lively and it was important for carers to be able to spend time talking about their experiences as we know that carers can become isolated and excluded from society because of the pressures of caring. Lunch followed when people had a chance to socialise and share information and ideas.

Speakers on the day were Barbara Price from South Thames Crossroads, Julia Shelley from Age Concern Lambeth and David Strong from Disability Advice Service Lambeth. These are the three charities that form the consortium that provides the Carers' Hub Lambeth services. In addition, we were pleased to welcome Elizabeth Clowes, the Assistant Director Commissioning for Social Inclusion, Lambeth Council Adults and Community Services from Commissioning Services at Lambeth Council.

Barbara Price introduced the meeting by explaining the aims of the Hub :

- We want the Carers Hub Lambeth to provide better services for carers.
- The Hub is new as it is a partnership of local charities to provide a new range of services to all carers.

- We want the Hub to be a partnership with carers, to involve you and respond to your needs. The Hub's vision is to empower carers and give opportunities and skills; to give you ownership of the Hub, what can we do for you – not just passing you on to somewhere else; to provide services that make a real difference to you.
- We hope that the Hub can address issues of feeling isolated and excluded; not being able to access or find out about services; having to reduce work hours or caring full-time so having to give up paid work; loss of social opportunities; financial pressures; the impact on your physical and mental health; extra barriers for specific groups of carers and the impact caring has on families.

Julia Shelley and David Strong explained how the Hub's main services would help it meet its aims :

To tackle isolation :

- Carers' Enquiry Line
- Telephone out service
- Information and advice on accessing services
- Social support / opportunities to develop interests
- Mentoring, peer support, befriending
- Events, meetings and forums

To improve wellbeing :

- Advice and information on rights and key services
- Giving access to health checks and service
- Advocacy
- Befriending and peer support
- Links with counselling and other services
- Making involvement in volunteering rewarding and fulfilling

To involve carers :

- Outreach to target excluded carers and communities
- Wide promotion of the Hub's services
- Access to information via the website and newsletter
- Carers' register
- Involvement and participation
- Supporting carers' voices / seeing carers' views make a difference – for example by having discussion groups at the Forums and develop a website discussion group, if that's what carers want.

We want to work with carers by :

- Being open to what you think of the Hub's services
- Having your help to design and set up new services and projects

- Hearing about your problems and issues
- Carers telling other carers about the Hub
- Carers joining the Carers' Register
- Carers getting involved as volunteers – mentors, befrienders, advocates or other roles such as contributing to the newsletter [Jacqui or Louise on the Carers' Enquiry Line 020 7642 0038 would love to hear from any carer that would like to tell their story or share information through newsletter]

Elizabeth Clowes then talked about progress in implementing the Lambeth Carers' Strategy.

The strategy has been in place since 2008 and runs until 2013. It is the plan for improving services for carers. The Carers' Hub Lambeth is one of the main new developments included in the strategy. Elizabeth explained that she had been in post for about a year and is responsible for strategic commissioning for carers and other client groups. She will shortly have in her team a Carers Coordinator. This is a new post which will coordinate taking the strategy forward. Elizabeth reports to the Lambeth Social Inclusion Board, which has carers as a standing item on the agenda, which means that, at every meeting, carers' needs and issues are considered in whatever is being discussed.

Elizabeth then took questions from carers :

- No carer at the forum said they had been involved in developing the strategy and it seems that it has not yet had a big impact on lots of carers. Copies of the strategy are available from the council by ringing 020 7926 5555 or visiting www.lambeth.gov.uk/Services/HealthSocialCare/Carers/CarersStrategyOverview.htm
- Some carers asked questions about benefits and Elizabeth mentioned the Every Pound Counts benefits take-up campaign. To contact the service ring 020 7926 5555.
- Many carers wanted to discuss the Fix Yourself a Break scheme through which the Council can give £200 grants to carers who meet the eligibility criteria. There had been problems with the applications and processing systems this year so few carers had yet managed to get a grant paid to them. Elizabeth acknowledged that the system needs improving but said that this was now being sorted out and the Council wanted to see the 600 grants available this financial year taken up by the end of March. She agreed to look into any individual problems if these were brought to her attention.

Discussion groups



After the presentations, we broke up into four groups to discuss what carers wanted from the Carers' Hub and from carers' services in general, and also how they thought the Forum should be used. There were lots of ideas and the key points were reported back to the meeting and are listed below.

Thank you again to all the carers who were able to make it to the Forum.

We are aware that many of you were not able to attend the meeting due to your caring or work responsibilities and so would like to know your views on providing an audio recording of the Forums on the Carers' Hub website. Please get in touch with your view on this. If enough people respond, we can look into recording the next Forum so more carers can feel involved!

Here are the main issues that carers raised:

MAIN POINTS FROM FOCUS GROUPS

- Training for Carers in Caring Role and two way training for professionals
- For newsletter to cover national news / campaigns
- Could we have a social network like on SLAM's website?
- Recognise the different stages carers are at – new to caring / long-term carer
- Help with changing circumstances, for example when the health of cared for person improves as this has impact on eligibility for benefits etc.
- Impact of caring on carer's health
- To hold Carers' Hub forums four times a year
- To have information about other services / groups / events and have advice workers available at meetings / forums and to have health checks available too
- Volunteering
- Coffee mornings at different venues for carers to swap information and support each other
- Keep Hub's forms short, have enough long forms everywhere else
- Help to fund good carers agencies
- Inform hospital staff and GPs about carers services and how to refer
- Drop-in service for information and advice
- Duty system doesn't work for carers—need an allocated social worker
- Who is responsible for carers assessments / community care assessments. It's the same old story, needs a review of situation—may have this as subject for a forum?
- Fix-Yourself-A-Break scheme—cash needs to be in advance not as a reimbursement, make sure all the money available is allocated, for professionals to check criteria before sending forms and to have a reasonable time for processing, for one organisation to process applications
- More specialist carer advisors for benefits and housing issues
- Need more family activities in the area
- Emergency carer ID cards
- Grants / Finance to be available to carers to help with the extra costs incurred in the caring role
- Central place for meetings, 336 Brixton Road is a good venue as easy to get to
- Social club / days out for carers
- More advocacy work needed