Sue Ryder Doncaster Carers Dementia Support Service

Overview

The Sue Ryder Doncaster Carers Dementia Support Service is a befriending scheme for carers and people with dementia. Befrienders visit people in their homes for two hours per fortnight to help involve people in activities and provide low-level support and respite for carers. This is a non-regulated service, whose primary role is to support people to engage with the community and avoid social isolation. The service is funded by Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council (DMBC) and currently supports 30 people, but has a waiting list and is working to increase capacity within current funding.

Sue Ryder Doncaster Carers Dementia Support Service was established in March 2011 after the charity won a tender from Doncaster Council Adult Services. Commissioners were looking for something different in the new tender; a service that would offer a more flexible and personalised care offering. The Sue Ryder bid demonstrated a innovative and personalised package gained from the charity's experience of working with volunteers, in community settings and experience of delivering Dementia services in residential settings and in people's own homes. The Alzheimer's Society previously ran the befriending service.

The tender process took a few months to complete and there was some negotiation in the confines of the normal process. Staff were transferred to Sue Ryder from the Alzheimer's Society (under TUPE regulations). The transfer ran smoothly and there continues to be a good working relationship between the two
organisations.

A new manager was recruited to oversee the administration and delivery of the service. The service has a volunteer (from the Sue Ryder Prisoner Volunteering Scheme), who provides support with administration.

There has been excellent, consistent support from the council. This has been facilitated by good relationships between the manager of the service, the Commissioner, and the council office. The confidence that the council has in the model and the manager to deliver a high quality service has meant that it has been afforded a flexibility to test innovative ideas and approaches.

Although the service is not Care Quality Commission regulated, they manage the service as though it were. The service specification (set by DMBC) and the service’s own operational policies and procedures set the service standard. Their accommodation is Disability Discrimination Act compliant; and staff (and volunteers) receive all pre-employment checks, supervision and appraisal, as though they were operating under a regulated service.
Outcomes

People who have come into contact with the service have been very satisfied.

Outcomes for people who receive the service:

- They appreciate having time to themselves in the confidence that their loved one is doing something that they enjoy.
- They benefit from time spent apart, this has proved to be a good release of pressure enabling the continuation of a more stable environment.
- They benefit from having someone to talk to about how they are feeling and appreciate the listening ear of befrienders.
- They thoroughly enjoy visiting places of interest and doing things without their regular carer, like shopping and being social, going for a coffee and chatting with someone who is focused on them.
- Clients are able to re-engage with their community in a way that best suits their individual needs.
- They like the service so much that they would like it to be more frequent, once a week, and for some even more often if it were possible.

It is a very personalised response; activities are based around the needs and wishes of the carer and who they support, and change accordingly. This could mean sitting and having a cup of tea so the carer can go out on their own time; or supporting the client with dementia to engage in the community through visits to local shops, leisure and garden centres encouraging hobbies and interests. There are no care plans in place, but risk assessments detailing each individual's needs are made on every referral.

The befriender and client record their time together in a diary that remains with the client to remind them of what they have done and to look
back and reminisce on their past activities.

Outcomes have been measured through observations, talks with clients and carers and through verbal feedback given to befrienders. Each befriender only has a small number of clients (between 4 to 8 clients each) and develops a strong relationship with the client and their family. Befrienders are well trained, supported and will raise any concerns. The service manager also provides a spot-check to help ensure clients remain satisfied. There is regular contact between befrienders and the service manager (one-to-one and team meetings).

The service have used a postal questionnaire (based on their existing quality assurance tool), however, although the questionnaire was designed to be completed by the people using the service, or family member, the return rate was low. The service provided the council with factual information (number of visits, nature of support, location within Doncaster of clients and family carers who may live out of area). The council is able to conduct its own quality assurance checks.
What Next?

The service originally took on 20 clients but now supports 30 (with a further 16 on a waiting list). An additional part-time befriender is being appointed. In 2012 the service expects to be able to increase capacity to 40-45 people, delivering more hours of care but remaining within the original funding envelope.
Key Learning Points

- **Contract implementation** and delivery ran smoothly because the service inherited an experienced workforce and recruited a competent and experienced manager. The service has been well supported by Sue Ryder and DMBC.

- **Flexibility and personalised response**, and the strong relationship between the service manager and the council. The freedom and flexibility provided by the confidence of the council in the service has underpinned its success.

- **Close working relationship** with a designated commissioner has assisted the smooth running of this service.

- **Increased efficiency** was made possible by adopting a new approach. The new manager has made efficient use of resources; using part time posts, and making sure staff are well supported. The effect of which has been noticeable, with only one member of staff leaving since the service was established.

- **Staff** previously spent a significant amount of time fulfilling administrative tasks. With the new manager now taking on admin responsibilities with the support of a volunteer, the befrienders' time has been freed up so they can deliver more hours of frontline care.