

The Care Act and homeless/vulnerably housed clients

Tuesday 25th April 2017

We hear from Alex Smith, System Broker at Fulfilling Lives Newcastle Gateshead, about the latest frontline event discussing the Care Act and homeless or vulnerably housed clients.

As frontline staff, we work with vulnerable adults in need of care on a daily basis. So it's surprising that so little of us have an extended knowledge of, or experience of, the Care Act.

The Care Act was brought into legislation in 2014 and completely repealed all previous social care legislation and importantly, placed the rights of carers on the same level as the rights of people who are disabled. However there is still a lot of confusion over how the Care Act can be utilised to help our clients get the support they are entitled to, and how the criteria is used.

At our latest Frontline Network meeting, hosted in partnership with Homeless Link's Be The Change North East Network, we welcomed the CEO of Gateshead Carers – Steve Cowen – to help us understand more about the Care Act and how we, as frontline staff in predominantly homelessness services, can utilise this piece of legislation to help our clients.

As well as sharing opportunities to help our clients through the Care Act, Steve also stressed the support available for families and friends who were caring for our clients. Many of the people who are homeless who access our services get a lot of support – both practically and emotionally – from family and friends. The Care Act ensures that these carers can also have access to practical and emotional support, through organisations like Gateshead Carers.

Attending on the day were frontline staff from local charities operating accommodation and outreach services, as well as representatives from local housing associations and from two of the local councils. This provided a perfect opportunity to share knowledge and experiences of the Care Act in a safe environment and in a non-blaming way. For example, one of the delegates from a local council was able to inform a charity worker about the impact of Care Act payment support on PIP payments and benefit claims.

We also heard a case study from the Fulfilling Lives programme which showed how the Care Act differed in theory to reality, and what the experience had been in the North East so far.

Jason* started working with Fulfilling Lives in April 2016. He meets all four needs required to access the Fulfilling Lives programme – experiences of homelessness, substance misuse, mental ill-health and experiences of the criminal justice system – and in addition to these

support needs, Jason has complex physical health problems. He uses a zimmer-frame for mobility and is a frequent attendee at A&E.

When Fulfilling Lives met Jason, he was living in a privately-rented property that was not accessible to his complex needs: Jason was often unable to get upstairs to access the bedroom and bathroom in his home. All applications for supported accommodation and social housing were rejected owing to his offending history and high level of support need. The Fulfilling Lives team have made multiple attempts to get Jason Adult Social Care support, all unsuccessfully. The outcome of Jason's assessment stated that his main support need was housing, and he 'was making a choice not to attend to his personal care needs as a result of alcohol misuse'; therefore, he did not meet the criteria as defined by the Care Act.

Many of the people we work with in homeless services have multiple complex needs like Jason, and it was agreed that there should be more support and clarity about the criteria of the Care Act for people like Jason.

After working together to look at these case studies in detail, we plan to hold specific training on the Care Act for frontline staff in the North East to better equip ourselves to support our clients. We have also posted a comment on the new forum on [frontlinenetwork.org.uk](https://www.frontlinenetwork.org.uk) to find out more about the Care Act and how organisations are using it regionally and nationally (<https://www.frontlinenetwork.org.uk/forum/2017/03/the-care-act/>).

We heard how Voices of Stoke, the Experts by Experience network for Stoke's Fulfilling Lives programme, have devised a community of practice and toolkit for utilising the Care Act after realising that a big barrier to support was the way a person's needs were articulated, whether by themselves or their support workers. The toolkit that they devised is based on the legislation to increase confidence of frontline staff, inform social workers on working with people with multiple complex needs, and enable better relationships and communication between frontline staff and social workers. This has since been used across Bristol, Exeter and some areas of London, as well as being used to teach student social workers. Stoke's Fulfilling Lives toolkit is available here (https://issuu.com/voicesofstoke/docs/careacttoolkit_typeset) and we will be looking at in detail with the hope of utilising it here in the North East.

If you have experience of using the Care Act with homeless client, join the discussion here: <https://www.frontlinenetwork.org.uk/forum/2017/03/the-care-act/>