

## Care homes: a community resource

### Care homes in the community

Misconceptions about life in a care home are widespread and often influenced by what the public reads and sees in the media. Many care homes provide excellent person-centred care, enabling residents to live happy, active lives, but positive actions can be largely unnoticed by the local community.

Becoming more active in your local community will go a long way to improving perceptions of your care home and raising awareness of the quality of care you are providing.

### Making community connections

Many care home residents, including people with dementia, have knowledge and skills that are beneficial to a community. As long-term memory tends to be better retained, skills-based knowledge remains accessible. Giving people the chance to share these assets helps increase their feelings of self-worth which has a positive effect on their mental health and wellbeing.

We have seen great rewards from connecting older residents with the community - looking for ways that they can contribute their skills and knowledge to the local community.

As a simple example, we ran a pumpkin-carving activity to engage care home residents with local young people. This culminated in a community pumpkin carving competition at the care home. We then entered the residents' carved pumpkins into a local event which created an afternoon's outing participating in a community event and discovering gardens at a local visitor attraction.

### Using your care home garden

Many care homes have gardens and outdoor spaces that are suitable for social events. Involving residents, staff, relatives and people from the community in finding ways to make better use of them is a positive step towards increasing social interaction.

Safety issues are obviously important, but can usually be resolved whilst creating a more social atmosphere in and around the care home.



Social opportunities, awareness-raising and addressing people's wellbeing can all be achieved within a secure environment.

It can help to create a small group willing to plan and organise a few events/activities in the garden. By including staff, residents, relatives, young people and other community members in the group, the responsibility becomes shared by the community and not solely by the care home. These don't need to be large events; it's the quality of the new relationships with the community that matters, not the number of people involved.

There are lots of possibilities. For example, giving over an area of the garden as allotment space for local people on small incomes to grow healthy food; helping them to reduce cost of shopping but also giving the residents a chance to get involved or to watch the activities through their window.

## Intergenerational activities

There are many benefits from bringing children and older adults together. Children can transform a quiet, somber room into one of laughter and chatter within a few minutes, bringing new energy into a care setting. Older people can enjoy new conversations and the chance to share their stories and experiences. Children benefit from having elders listen and share in their worlds. Support flows both ways.

These experiences will also give children a better understanding of what it means to grow older, and to live with a health condition like dementia. It is a good opportunity to shift young people's perceptions of care homes.

Intergenerational activities can be as simple as making nature postcards, or planting bulbs together. We have seen strong, lasting bonds grow between young people and care home residents through activities like these. One thing that worked especially well was a film project where pupils from a local school recorded interviews with residents.



## Supporting home carers

Home carers often struggle to find help in their community. They can feel frustrated not knowing where to go for support or how best to support the person they care for.

Care homes have links to health and social care professionals and could become venues for drop in sessions. This also creates an opportunity for carers to assess a care home environment for the future care of their loved one.

### Top tips

- Learn about the skills and experiences of residents and encourage them to share.
- Form an events group to plan and run activities to include the community
- Build relationships with other service providers in the community such as the library, schools and community groups.
- Look at how you can make your outdoor spaces more welcoming and suited to social use, eg by adding chairs and tables and enhancing the overall look and feel.
- Engage young people in nature activities with residents, such as gardening and photography.
- Work in partnership with other community connections, giving access to more resources, knowledge and skills in the community.
- Explore options for supporting home carers.



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