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Everyone in the care industry agrees that choosing a care home is tricky and it's too easy to make a mistake.

CARE OPTIONS



In 1998 EAC and John Moore's University, Liverpool interviewed 1,000 older people living in Care Homes for the Office of Fair Trading.

The research was part of a project to establish how much of a say residents had had in choosing where they lived, and in managing their lives once they had moved 'into care'. The findings were extremely dispiriting. Few had been able to exercise choice. Whilst many had adapted to their new situation, this had often been at the expense of any hope of retaining individuality and self-respect.

In December 1999, The Lloyds TSB Foundation offered EAC funding to see what we could do to arm older people with better

Care Options aims to bring fresh insight about the different types of care available

information and tools to help them make choices, however constrained these might be by factors such as mental or physical infirmity, or ability to pay.

How was a potential resident to choose between available homes, each of which could meet their care needs professionally and well - but only some of which would feel like home to them? To choose between homes that would or wouldn't offer a choice of menus, decoration or social activities? Would or wouldn't address them as 'love' or 'dear'? Would or wouldn't accept them as 'normal' whether they looked for privacy or companionship, read books or watched television, had familiar or unfamiliar cultural traits?

Dr Anne Titman was appointed to drive the work forward, and in discussions and focus groups with residents, relatives and carers, care home owners, local government officers and voluntary groups, identified ten key areas of information people felt they would need to make effective choices between homes. Some of these were factual - for example information about the building (rooms, garden, wheelchair access), accessibility (location,

transport routes, distances to amenities) or costs (standard fees, charges for extras). The first part of the questionnaire we devised addressed these.

Other areas identified as important were harder to address.

These included staff attitude; the home's philosophy of care; its approach to personal choice, safety, social interaction and involvement of relatives; its spending priorities - all these had to be tackled to complete the kind of picture of each home that was needed. We devised and tested a supplementary questionnaire which asked home owners, in confidence, for their views on these matters. And condensing a further year's work into a sentence, we discovered it was possible to group homes into types according to the answers they gave. The seven types of home we identified are clearly distinguishable in terms of the 'flavour' of the service they offer - their management style, ethos and culture.

By late 2001 we had conceived a complete 'Care Options' package. This would include 3 elements - a tool to help people seeking care to establish their own priorities at the outset; an up to date database of factual information about each UK home; and the classification of each home into one of our lifestyle types.

In July 2002, EAC and Help the Aged entered into a partnership to develop Care Options into a definitive and comprehensive service to older people, by mid-2003.

We believe that Care Options will also help care home owners understand their consumers better, and in time lead to greater confidence in presenting what they have to offer and how they differ from other homes in terms of the kinds of life and lifestyles they aim to support and encourage.



VOLUNTEERS

When EAC began, it was staffed entirely by volunteers, and we still rely on them to complement the work of paid staff in three key areas:

IT DEVELOPMENT

The computer system we use to respond to clients' information requests was largely developed by volunteers who offered valuable expertise. The system records details about individual clients, extracts data from our accommodation and other databases that matches their requirements, assists in producing and recording correspondence enabling us to respond to over 90% of enquiries on the day they are received.

PUBLIC SERVICE

Whilst our service is nowadays delivered by very experienced professionals, the salaries they are willing to accept are frequently well below that which they could earn elsewhere.

PUBLICITY & PROMOTION

Since 1995, EAC's Art Awards for the Over 60s has been the prime vehicle for illustrating the charity's values to a wide audience, and capturing the interest of organisations and professionals who work with older people.

Short takes

EAC IS WORKING CLOSELY with EROSH, the National Consortium for Sheltered Housing, towards a strategy for joint website development.

A LISTING OF NEW LEASEHOLD retirement housing developments, provided by EAC, is a regular feature in NFU Services' new monthly magazine *Living for Retirement*.

EAC HAS SIGNED A NEW CONTRACT with Proquest Information & Learning Ltd to incorporate its databases into Know UK, an information service to public libraries. Other sites hosting its Housing and Care Homes search facility include www.BetterCaring.co.uk (The Stationery Office) and www.Anglia.org.uk (Anglia Housing Group).

HELP THE AGED AND EAC have taken responsibility for organising a conference early in 2003 on behalf of HOPDEV (see front page) to bring together staff and volunteers from older people's advisory services.



EAC AND THE HOME IMPROVEMENT TRUST are working closely to increase awareness of its equity release product *HouseProud*.

COMMUNITIES SCOTLAND has commissioned EAC to create a Supporting People information & advice service for Scotland, including a dedicated website.

DISCUSSIONS WITH LIQUIDLOGIC, a Leeds based company, are expected to lead to the incorporation of the HOOP tool into EasyCare, a software product designed to assist health and social care agencies implement the new Single Assessment Process.

ACCOR SERVICES LTD are to incorporate EAC's accommodation databases into its FamilyLife Solutions intranet service to subscribing companies.

This project brings together Counsel and Care, the Relatives and Residents Association and EAC in a collaborative effort to deliver an integrated service to older people from minority communities, helping them through their transition from independent to supported living.

It aims to strengthen our links with minority community organisations, and in partnership with them, offer a joint service focusing on three distinct areas of the transition process:

Choice

EAC will expand its information resources to include cultural and language aspects of accommodation and care/support services, and provide the first point of contact to help service users identify the



most appropriate options according to their needs and preferences.

Funding

Counsel and Care will lead on this area of the work, offering whatever information, assistance or advocacy may be needed to help individuals access the financial resources to pay for their chosen options.

COUNSEL AND CARE
Advice and help for older people



Settling in

The Relatives and Residents Association will offer any support individuals require to help them settle into a new living environment, and will develop an information pack and guidance service to housing and care providers to help them to take account of the cultural and social needs of service users from minority communities.

THE RELATIVES & RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION
For quality of Life of Older People in Care

The Transition Project