



Carers Voices

Who we are and what we do

- Commissioned by Essex County Council (ECC) to deliver the Carers Voices Project.
- Identify and link with unpaid carers in Essex, empower them to have their voices heard.
- Engage with unpaid carers across the county.
- To raise awareness of carers rights. Many 'carers' simply don't identify themselves as carers.

Our Impact – What we have done

- Throughout the year we have targeted areas across the county identifying and engaging with **carers across all communities**, all ages, gender and ethnic minorities including Chinese, Nepalese, Bangladeshi, Indian, Ghanaian, African, and refugees.
- We focussed our efforts on talking but mainly **listening and hearing carers** tell us about their lived experiences, both positive and negative and building up a picture of services, what they offer and where and the difficulties and barriers carers have accessing timely and appropriate support.
- We have facilitated very useful **focus groups** across the county. Collating feedback and being the conduit to ECC. We have gained a good understanding of issues carers face.
- We **surveyed** carers over a broad range of subjects that directly impact on carers. Topics including communication; loss of identity; young carers; isolation and loneliness (on behalf of ECC).



Winter Warmers



“At times it was really hard (being a carer) and other times were moments of pure joy.”

“I’m aware there isn’t a manual for caring because everyone’s situation is so different.”





HEALTHWATCH
ESSEX

Are you an unpaid carer?
We want to hear from you

Carers Voices is where carers share their experiences so that services can be improved for carers across Essex. We want to hear what works well, or not so well, and what the person you are helping/have helped is like.

There will be a range of ways to share your views, from joining group discussions to responding to surveys and polls.

DO YOU...

- Help someone in their home?
- Keep someone company?
- Help someone with their shopping?
- Care for someone who is frail or has a mental health problem?

Scan the QR code to find out more

We would love to hear from you

t: 0300 500 1895
e: carersvoices@healthwatch Essex

Outreach with young people



Carers identified themes

- **Inconsistent GP services** – Standards vary across the county.
- **Mental Health** – the negative impact for both the carer and cared for.
- **Carers Rights** – General lack of awareness.
- **Isolation & Loneliness** – Carers fall off the radar of family, friends and services.
- **Young Carers** – Balance of caring and academic studies.





“Sometimes the carer requires more support than the cared for person. Thank you for asking how I am.”

“Had Healthwatch not spoke to me, I’d never have known what was available to me in my local area.”

“Thank you for supporting me.”





Carers Rights in Parliament

Our Visit to Parliament

We were invited by Chris Vince, MP for Harlow and chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Young Carers and Young Adult Carers, to visit Parliament to discuss our work and the challenges carers face.

Along with two of our Experts by Experience, Charlotte and Arnaud, we discussed these key issues for unpaid carers:

- **Lack of Recognition**
- **Accessing Support**
- **Young Carers**
- **Medication Issues**

The ambassadors felt that Chris was genuinely interested in their conversation. They left Parliament feeling heard and confident that they had effectively represented carers.



Mental Health and Wellbeing Survey

We had 520 people fill in at least some of the survey, with 170 people completing it in full.

83% of carers said their caring role had a **negative impact** on their mental health and wellbeing.

Carers told us that **financial and practical difficulties, lack of support, exhaustion, lack of time to themselves, isolation, balancing caring with other responsibilities** and **the effects of caring on their physical health** contributed to the negative impact on their mental health and wellbeing.





Carers & Employment Survey

Carers frequently face conflict between caring and employment. They **sacrifice employment to meet demanding caring needs**, balancing these commitments with work is an ongoing challenge.

Many carers **lack understanding of their employment rights** and this can hinder pursuing work or promotion.

Carers feel there is a **lack of structured support** and where there is support, it's not made known, so therefore not easily accessed. In some cases, lack of flexibility has led carers to resign.

Larger employers tend to have **robust carer friendly policies** while the smaller organisations often lack formal support structures.

A **general lack of training for managers** and limited awareness among colleagues contributes to feelings of isolation and helplessness among working carers.



Connecting with the LGBTQ+ community

Susan's Law

'Susan's Law' is about creating a more comfortable and safe space for carers to talk about their experiences.

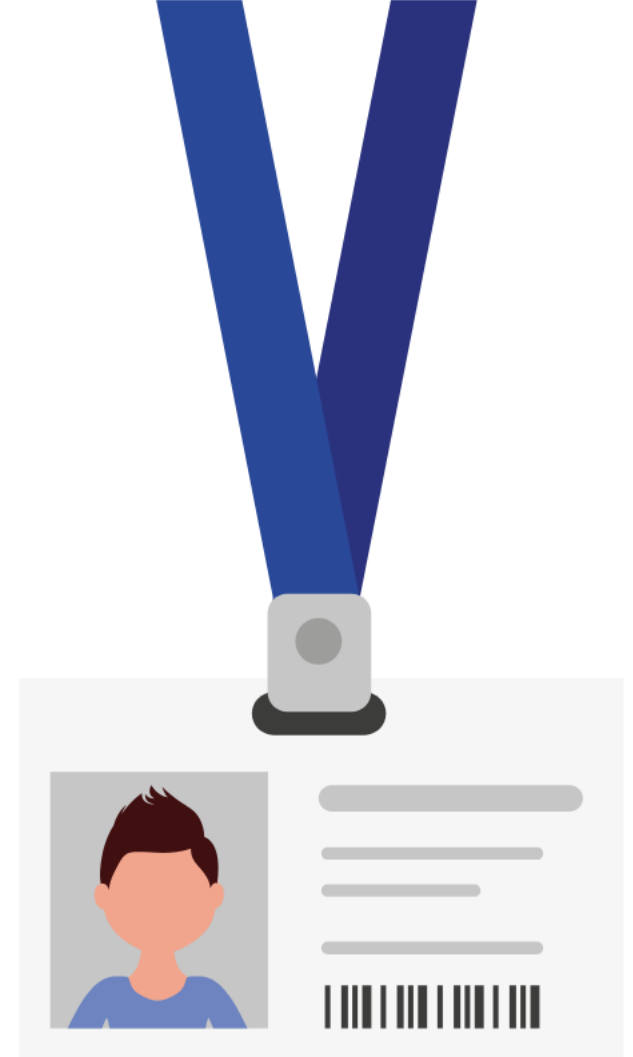
Background

During a focus group, one carer shared she felt out of place among professionals in the room.

Changes

- Name labels or cards instead of work lanyards or badges
- Sharing this learning with others through 'Susan's Law'
- More emphasis on guiding the conversation and reading the room

We want carers to feel confident to speak freely about their experiences without judgement. Thank you to Susan for bravely sharing her experience!





“Thanks to the Carers Voices team for making a difference in my life. It’s so hard to navigate the services out there, but Healthwatch Essex were there to help.”



Summary

Engaged with nearly **6000** carers.

- Carers have told us that if they are given the resources, advice and guidance and access to local and appropriate services early in their caring journey the less likely they are to need more support in the longer term.
- Many carers say they are keen to learn from the outset about caring but are faced with a lack of anticipation, knowledge of the cohort and an understanding of the unique circumstances carers face by untrained and unaware services.
- Our survey respondents were from across the length and breadth of Essex and indicated that isolation and loneliness are not confined to the elderly, less mobile and geographically or digitally isolated. Isolation and loneliness can impact on everyone.
- The issues, barriers and concerns for carers were common themes, and something easily anticipated at the point of contact. Services need to be joined up and communicate with each other.

For more information

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