

2024

# You Spoke We Listened

CARERS WORKSHOP 2024  
SUMMARY AND ACTION PLAN



**Focus**

Empowering individuals  
to live independent lives

# The Workshop

Earlier this year, Focus held a Carer Workshop at Heritage House, Grimsby, with the objective of gathering insights and perspectives from local residents with lived experience of being an unpaid caregiver and local services that support carers in North East Lincolnshire.

The workshop aimed to foster an open dialogue, allowing representatives from the community to voice their opinions, share their concerns, and propose solutions to improve the quality of the service that Focus provides.

Since the workshop, I have also been fortunate to have the opportunity to gather the viewpoints of unpaid caregivers who attend the Friendship at Home, Cognitive Stimulation Therapy Group and others who could not attend the workshop in person via email submissions and telephone contact.

The following summary captures the key discussions, themes, and recommendations that emerged during the workshop, providing a comprehensive overview of the collective viewpoints and suggestions for action that Focus can take as a result.



## Discussion Point 1: Do you feel that the term 'carer' describes you?

We raised this as a discussion point at the workshop because when engaging with the community it was clear that people with lived experience of being an unpaid caregiver had very different views on the terms 'carer' and 'unpaid carer'.

Some people felt that the term 'carer' was fitting, and they identified clearly with the term and the support that they could access as a result of identifying that way. For others, it did not resonate with them or their experience at all.

The workshop went on to identify similar themes. A lot of the participants explained that they did not see themselves as 'carers'. First and foremost, they were a partner, a spouse, a child, a parent, a family member or a friend. The person they care for is 'family' and many felt that "it's just what you do for your family".

Another common theme amongst the participants was that they felt that the term 'carer' didn't differentiate enough between them as individuals caring for loved ones and 'paid carers' from home care agencies. It was suggested that it would be helpful if we could explore identifying 'paid carers' as 'Professional Carers' instead.

There was an understanding from the groups that the law (Care Act 2014) uses the terminology of 'carer' and that it is important that people providing an unpaid caregiving role identify as 'unpaid carers' in order to access assessments and support that can help them. It was felt that more knowledge and understanding around the term 'unpaid carer' would help more people recognise themselves as being in that role.

Something that all participants appeared to agree on was that during that initial contact with Focus they would like to be given an explanation of what the term 'carer' means and then asked if this is how they are happy to be identified. They would then like their preference to be recorded at that point and their wishes followed throughout their journey with Focus.

Some of the participants also noted that they felt that General Practitioners and staff at the local GP surgeries and hospitals would be very well placed to identify people as having a caring role and signpost them to the relevant statutory and voluntary services.

The participants attending the workshop did not feel that this was something that was happening regularly and described it as a 'missed opportunity' to support caregivers.

## **Discussion Point 2: Are there words or phrases (jargon) relating to adult social care, that you have found difficult to understand when accessing information or support?**

This was an area of discussion which struck a chord with a lot of the people participating. Something that especially stood out as a topic of discussion was the use abbreviations.

The groups identified abbreviations such as DOLS, LPA, ICB and CHC. It was explained that when a professional uses an abbreviation it can make the person hearing it feel that they should know what it means and not everyone has the confidence to ask for clarification.

It was suggested that Focus should start to ensure that the full terminology is used verbally and in writing. This will help to ensure that the people we are supporting can actively engage and understand the conversations they are having. If it is necessary to use an abbreviation, the groups felt that we should ensure it is always explained in the first instance.

The participants also identified specific terms that people found were not widely understood or terms that when left unexplained could be a potential barrier to service.

The terms identified were as follows:

- Assessment
- Funds below assessment
- Lasting Power of Attorney
- Respite
- Carer Break
- Direct Payment
- Transition referral
- Hospital Discharge Team

During the discussions the term ‘assessment’ was mentioned as being a term that had caused a lot of concern.

Many participants said that when the term ‘assessment’ was mentioned they worried that it was something that they could “pass or fail”, which caused anxiety about what the consequences would be for them and their cared for if they ‘failed’.

It was suggested that when people are calling Focus for the first time words and phrases, such as those listed should be clearly explained and the Single Point of Access shouldn't take for granted that adult social care terminology will be understood.

### **Discussion Point 3: When contacting Focus for the first time, what do you think that conversation should sound like? What information do you think we need to know?**

A common response to this talking point was that the participants want the information they are asked to provide in their first phone call to Focus to be more about them and their needs rather than the person they care for.

Some participants said that their first phone call to Focus left them with a feeling of “being grilled” or “completing a checklist”.

Respondents explained that in the initial phone call they would like it to be more of a conversation with the advice officers. They would like them to approach the conversation with “kindness”, “curiosity” and “understanding”.

Some carers mentioned that they had experienced conversations that involved phrases such as “what do you hope to gain from having a carers assessment” or “what would you like to be the outcome of an assessment”. They found this unhelpful because at that point, they didn’t know what support was available to them. Some advised that it also made them feel as though they were asking for something that they shouldn’t be asking for. One person said that during their phone call they felt that they “needed to qualify for an assessment, rather than being entitled to one”.

Another major talking point in this discussion was how it made carers feel when Focus asks to speak with the cared for person to gain their consent for a referral in that first phone call.

Participants didn’t really understand the reason the Single Point of Access needed to ask for it. It was felt that it had taken them a lot of courage to make the initial phone call and needing to speak to the person they are caring for at that stage made some participants anxious and at times regretful of calling.

The suggestion was made that consent from the cared for person could be considered further in the process and not and at the first phone call.

The participants also felt that in that first phone call they don’t want to be overwhelmed by receiving too much information. They would just like to understand what the next step will be and what timescales they can expect.

It was identified that not being given information on timescale was something that did cause stress.

## Discussion Point 4: Is there anything you think Focus can do to improve our service to carers?

Participants suggested the following areas for improvement:

- That anyone having direct dealings with carers would benefit from 'active listening' training so that Focus staff learn more methods of listening to understand and not just listening to 'tick boxes'.
- Being offered a follow up email with a summary of a conversation they have had with The Single Point of Access or a Social Worker. It was explained that some of the information can be overwhelming to carers and it would be nice to have an accurate summary of the conversation they have had for their future reference. Especially, if they have been signposted to other services or given specific advice.
- More opportunities for face-to-face conversations. Many mentioned that they thought it was good when Focus used to stop in supermarket car parks on the information bus.
- Having helpful leaflets or information in public places such as doctors surgeries or libraries. Having more awareness of how Focus can support carers.
- Having information on our website to explain to carers what information Focus will need to know in that first phone call to help them prepare for talking with us.
- More information leaflets/presentations about Direct Payments so that carers can understand how it could be of benefit to them. Including information on what makes someone eligible to be considered for a Direct Payment.
- A more seamless process for when someone's key worker is on leave or away from the office. Some participants expressed that when their key worker has been on leave they couldn't get the help and support they needed. This disrupted their continuity of care and left them feeling unsupported.
- Help carers manage the transition between services. The example given was when going from Focus to Continuing Health Care.
- More events like the Carer Workshop to listen to different views.

## **Discussion Point 5: Can you tell us what works well? What positive experiences have you had with Focus?**

In the main, the people participating felt that the Single Point of Access was a very positive offering in North East Lincolnshire and have had good and helpful experiences with the Focus Single Point of Access.

Participant also emphasised that they have had good experiences with Social Workers and reported that the best Carer Assessments are the ones that feel like a conversation and rely on the social worker observing and understanding the situation. Some reported having social workers who always get back to them with the answers they need to their questions and have demonstrated knowledge, kindness and reliability.

Carers who had more than one family member receiving support from Focus also advised that having the same social worker allocated to several family members is really helpful to the carer and has helped them to have better insight in to the support the carer needs.

Some also specifically reported having a good experience with the finance team and had good financial assessments.

The Carers' Support Service advised that being able to send referrals for a Carers Assessment direct to the Single Point of Access is working well and has helped break down some barriers to service.

Some participants also specifically mentioned that they felt it was very positive that Focus CEO, Lee Mair attended the Carers' Support Service to listen to their views.

All the groups I spoke with expressed appreciation for the Carer Workshop and the opportunity to give their views on being a caregiver and feedback on the service they have received from Focus.

# What **action** has Focus **taken** so far?

Before the workshop took place, Focus had been working closely with local services who provide support to carers. As a result of this work, we had already begun to take action to improve the way that Focus supports and communicates with carers and some of the things mentioned below are a continuation of that process.



Mandatory carer awareness training for all Focus staff.



Bi-monthly drop-in sessions at the Carers' Support Service which gives carers the opportunity to have a referral for a carers assessment taken in person.



Focus now accepts referrals directly from the Carers' Support Centre that they send on a Carer's behalf.



Change to the information we ask of carers when they contact SPA to discuss their caring role. We have taken on board the information given at the workshop and amended the prompts that the Advice Officers use on the Single Point of Access.

We now ask less specific questions and allow the carer to tell us in their own words the reason for their call. We also seek to find out what their current experience of caring is, what is working well and where they feel that they need support.



Attending a variety of events in the local community to provide carers and the general public with information about the services available for carers. This included Armed Forces Weekend where we attended as part of the 'Carers Roadshow'.



Practice sessions for social work practitioners and single point of access staff reiterating the need to identify carers and support them with gaining an assessment.



Focus has created a new internal staff policy recognising carers within our own organisation and offering them support.



This is just  
the **start** ...

Here's the  
**work** we are  
going to do.



## **Focus will continue to explore different ways of supporting carers when they contact Focus for the first time and during assessments.**

When contacting Focus for the first time, the Single Point of Access will ensure that it is clearly explained to carers that they are entitled to a carers assessment. They will be offered the opportunity to discuss a referral for an lone carers assessment or an assessment that will discuss their needs as a carer and also the needs of the person they care for. It will be made clear that a carers assessment can be conducted even if they do not wish to involve the cared for person.

If the carer feels that the cared for person would also benefit from an assessment the social work practitioner conducting the assessments will ensure that the carer is given the opportunity to speak privately and away from the cared for person to allow them to speak freely about the support they feel they need as a carer.



## **Focus will create a more robust process for when a key worker is not available.**

Focus is currently restructuring the practice teams to ensure that teams have a better understanding of each other's cases when a key worker goes on planned leave.

The teams are also having practice sessions that highlight the need for good communication and case handovers when preparing for planned leave.



## **Focus will commit to a culture change of referring to paid carers as 'care workers' both in conversation and paperwork.**

This will help to clearly differentiate between unpaid carers and professionals who are paid to provide care. It will take time to feel the full effects of this change, but all staff will be encouraged to embrace this change and all new social workers and apprentices will be taught to use the term 'care worker' for paid professionals.



## **Focus to commit to using less abbreviated terms and shorthand phrases when speaking with carers.**

The group explained that when abbreviations or shorthand is used it can make them feel that it is information that they 'should know' and can make them feel alienated.

If it is appropriate to use an abbreviation, either verbally or in writing the long phrase will be spoken or written first to clearly explain the meaning.



## **Update the Focus website with more information for carers.**

Focus will create a section on our website that will give information and advice for carers. This is part of ongoing website work that will be completed by the team in 2025.

This will include a helpful section about what carers can expect when they first contact Focus, a glossary of commonly used adult social care terms and links to local support services.



## **A 'myth busting' social media campaign.**

This will be designed to help raise awareness about commonly used terms in social care that could create a barrier to some carers accessing support.

This will include terms such as:

- Assessment / Funds Below Assessment
- Continuing Health Care
- Mental Capacity
- Direct Payment
- Lasting Power of Attorney
- Respite
- Carer Break/Sits



## **Placing more information leaflets in more useful places and continuing to raising awareness of the services available for carers.**

This year, Focus has put resources into becoming a more visible presence in the local community. This will continue into next year and we will also produce more information leaflets and ensure they are in useful places like local libraries. We are also working with our colleagues in the ICB to get more information into GP surgeries.



**Focus to work with GP surgeries to help them identify carers more consistently so that they can support carers to access carers assessments.**

It was felt by the participants at the workshop that GPs and nurses are well placed professionals to identify carers and signpost them to appropriate services. However, the consensus of the group was that they did not have experience of this happening. They felt it was a lost opportunity.

Focus CEO Lee Mair, is making a commitment to work with local GP surgeries to give them the tools and information they need to address this.



**Quarterly Drop-in Sessions at Heritage House.**

The Communication and Engagement Manager will hold a quarterly drop-in session at Heritage House and take referrals, give advice and information face-to-face.

The owners of Heritage House are currently working on replacing the front door so it is accessible and more inviting to visitors. When this work has been completed we will commence with the drop-in sessions.

# Workshop Feedback

**At the end of the Workshop we asked for feedback on the workshop so that we could understand if the participants felt it was beneficial. Here's what they had to say.**



Any place where you can listen to carers is a positive event, and knowing what it's going to help towards, is also nice.



Really good and informative. Very interesting.



The advice officer on our table was lovely. They shared their carer experiences that helped build our trust.



Great to get so many current & former carers together for the benefit of the service.



Great idea - do more. Don't just sit on the info - I hope this leads to positive improvement. GOOD LUCK!



Great session, dual working is always great.



It was nice to meet with other people and their experiences.



The session was well structured + seemed very focused on the clear areas for improvement.



Very well organised.