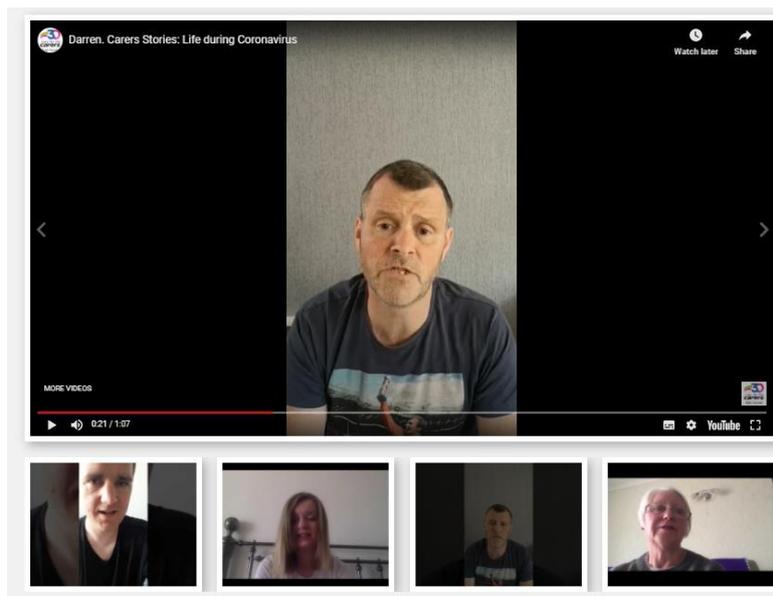


Annual Carers Voices Conference

July 2020



Executive Summary

“At last I feel someone is listening, understanding and speaks the same language. I don't feel quite so scared about the future now.”



Introduction

The Annual Carers Voices Conference of 2020, focused on the theme, **Healthy Caring, Healthy You**, comprised of a series of virtual engagement events and offline engagement during July.

The aims of the month-long conference were to:

- Keep carers informed and share information
- Bring carers together
- Listen to and amplify carers voices

Building on the success of our previous Carers Voices events, we sought to incorporate the popular elements of keynote speeches, a live Q&A session with carer organisations, opportunities for carers to 'visit' a virtual marketplace, and consultation workshops on the hot topics for carers – albeit delivered online, and through telephone discussions, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions.

Key themes

1. Experiences of caring during Coronavirus were mixed, with many carers experiencing increased pressures and significant crisis, and some carers reporting some positive benefits.
2. Concern about how COVID-19 is affecting Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities and feedback that organisations must actively ensure that carers from BAME communities are supported.
3. Carers experience loneliness and isolation as a result of caring, which can be overwhelming and debilitating.
4. Carers do not consistently receive relevant information and support when they need it, and Health & Social Care systems do not consistently work effectively for carers.
5. Carers have a range of digital needs, including digital training, targeted, concise and accessible digital information, as well as the option to access services non-digitally.
6. Carers are concerned about national measures which impact on their lives, including the level of Carers Allowance being the lowest welfare benefit and not available to many groups of carers, and the absence of a statutory right to Carer's Leave.
7. Concern that the 'clap for carers' during the pandemic, which was aimed at paid care staff, represents how the country ignores and undervalues unpaid carers, and highlights how greater carer awareness is much needed.
8. Concern about what impact COVID-19 and the resultant economic crisis will have on home care and care home provision in East Sussex.

Recommendations

The carer feedback gathered through the Annual Carers Voices Conference 2020 informs the following recommendations:

1. **Statutory and voluntary sector COVID-19 response planning should take carers' needs into account, including: recognition, clear information and communication, flexibility, and timely support.**

2. Organisations should consider the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on BAME communities and the associated increased prevalence in carers from BAME communities, and work collaboratively to reach these carers.
3. Carers should be given regular access to timely, relevant information and support, enabled through the following measures:
 - a. Health and Social Care and voluntary sector practitioners should undertake Carer Awareness training as part of induction;
 - b. Carers should be routinely identified by Health and Social Care and voluntary sector practitioners and offered referral to the Carers Centre, at an early stage and recurrently throughout their caring journey;
 - c. Health appointment letters should include standard text regarding carer identification and support;
 - d. Health and Social Care and voluntary sector organisations should implement effective referral pathways to reduce the need for carers to repeat their story to multiple services.
4. Services should be delivered through both online and offline formats, in order to meet the range of carers' digital engagement levels, using digital methods to include those carers unable to access face-to-face services and using offline methods to include those carers who are digitally excluded.
5. Carers' digital inclusion support should continue to be made available and promoted more widely, in order to increase carers' capacity to engage with the digital information and support available.
6. Carers should be given opportunities to talk about the impact of their caring role, including through emotional support, counselling, and peer support, and should have timely access to support, advice and guidance.
7. Care for the Carers should continue to work in partnership with national carers' organisations, and support Carers UK's 'Fairer for Carers' campaign, to lobby for an increase in Carers Allowance levels and an overhaul of carers' benefits that recognise the enormous contribution carers make.
8. Employers should implement a range of carer-friendly employment benefits, including Carer's Leave, flexible working, and referral for support.
9. East Sussex County Council should consult with carers when planning the recommissioning of home care services in East Sussex.

Next steps

The key findings and recommendations from the Annual Carers Voices Conference 2020 will be presented at a range of strategic meetings, shared with key decision-makers, partners and all who participated in the conference, and used to inform Care for the Carers' strategic and operational planning. Care for the Carers will seek to influence partners to commit to action which will achieve positive change for carers in relation to the recommendations, and progress updates will be shared via our various communications channels.

The full Conference Report is available at www.cftc.org.uk/carers-voices-conference-2020-carers-views For further information please contact Jo Egan, Director of Services, by email: joe@cftc.org.uk or by telephone: 01323 738390 ext. 218.

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