

"Involving People"

The newsletter for carers of
adults with a learning disability



Carers
in Hertfordshire

charity registration number 1085491

Summer 2020

For more information about anything in this newsletter or to find out more about our support for carers of people with a learning disability, please get in touch with us.

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Making Carers Count

Support when you need it

Anyone experiencing mental health distress can call the Hertfordshire Crisis Helpline for emotional support and signposting to the services that can best help you. You can also call if you are worried about someone else.

The helpline hours are below, but are often reviewed, so please check the opening times at

www.hertsmindnetwork.org/crisis-helpline

Hertfordshire
Crisis Helpline
01923 256391

Mon 6pm – Tue 8am

Tue 6pm – 1am

Wed 6pm – 1am

Thu 6pm – 1am

Fri 6pm – Sat 8am

Sat 3pm – Sun 8am

Sun 3pm – Mon 8am

Calls charged at your standard local rate

Welcome

A long time has passed since our last newsletter. The Spring 2020 edition was about to go to print and then COVID-19 happened, so we had to pause its production. It's been a difficult time and we hope this newsletter finds you and your family well. We wanted to remind you that Carers in Hertfordshire is still here to support you in your caring role (more details about our services are below).



The Involvement Team has been hosting its Carers' Forums online, using Zoom (more details on page 2) and we've been providing some online learning opportunities (more about this on page 4). In this issue you can also find out about schemes to help adults with a learning disability into work and get ideas for outdoor activities that can benefit your wellbeing.

How we can support you during the COVID-19 situation

Our offices are open Monday to Friday, 9am-5.30pm (4.30pm on a Friday) with Carer Support Advisors on hand to talk to you about your caring role by phone 9.30am-5pm Monday to Thursday and 9am-4pm on Fridays. Other services include:

Carers' Passport Discount Card - this gives you access to discounts or offers in many businesses and can be used to identify you as a carer for some supermarkets' priority shopping times.

Keep in Touch calls (or emails) - offered to any carers who would like regular support and a chat.

Bereavement Support – trained volunteers support you in finding a way forward after your loss. Currently, via phone.

Make a Difference funding - that can help you access something away from your caring role that can improve your health and wellbeing. For example, it could be used for equipment for a hobby or to keep in touch with family or friends.

Our website - www.carersinherts.org.uk is regularly updated with information to support you in your caring role. You will also find some activities to do whilst staying at home and online learning opportunities.

We also provide **mentoring**, a **Young Carers Service**, and dementia specialist **Admiral Nurses**, with support mainly over the phone at present.

If you would like more information call 01992 58 69 69.

Review of Learning Disability Week 2020 and our Carers' Forums

This year's Learning Disability Week took place in mid-June and was a little bit different due to COVID-19 as it was celebrated online. We marked the week by holding our first virtual Learning Disability Carers' Forum on the evening of Thursday 18th June using Zoom, a video communications tool (*meeting pictured*).

The theme of the week was the importance of friendships during lockdown as people with a learning disability experience high levels of loneliness and social isolation, which was made worse during the coronavirus restrictions.

Mencap, the national charity that supports people with learning disabilities and their relatives and carers and co-ordinates the week, has created a friendship flag activity that you can still access at www.mencap.org.uk/get-involved/learning-disability-week-2020#involved The activity encourages the person with the learning disability to create a flag with a message about why they miss a friend or someone special to them and share what they've produced over a video call or picture message.

During the week and lockdown period, local Mencap groups and Electric Umbrella, have held online activities. Electric Umbrella, is a Hertfordshire charity that provides music activities to adults with a learning disability to help tackle social isolation and boost their confidence. You can find out more about the charity at www.electricumbrella.co.uk or call 07452 806517.

For details of your local Mencap group visit www.mencap.org.uk/search/groups or call Mencap's Learning Disability Helpline on 0808 808 1111 (Monday to Friday).

Our Carers' Forums and Groups

We have various groups to bring together people in a similar caring situation, including a Forum for people providing unpaid care to someone with a learning disability and a C4A Carers' Group for those supporting an adult with an autism spectrum disorder but no learning disability.

The Forum and Group also provide opportunities for unpaid carers to hear from guest speakers about services and issues relevant to their caring role. They can also give feedback to the organisations planning or providing health and community services in Hertfordshire, including suggestions for improvements or comments on changes to what is on offer.

Due to the COVID-19 restrictions around social gathering and social distancing our face to face meetings were paused in March, so we moved to holding online meetings, and as a result we had some new faces



at the sessions. Topics covered have included Direct Payments and contingency planning.

Carer Brenda said: "I have welcomed the online forums because, as someone who has been shielding, I have loved seeing peoples' faces and having conversations with a group of people rather than just one to one."

Although community venues can re-open and restrictions are easing, we are still planning how and when to safely restart our face to face activities and so will continue with the online sessions. The 2020 dates for our online meetings are below.

Virtual Learning Disability Carers' Forums

Tuesday 25th August 7pm-8.30pm.

Tuesday 8th September 10.30am-12.30pm.

Monday 23rd November 7pm-8.30pm.

Virtual C4A Carers' Group

Thursday 20th August 7pm-8.30pm.

Monday 5th October 10.30am-12pm noon.

Wednesday 2nd December 7pm-8.30pm.

If you wish to join in any of the meetings, please contact Karen Malone, by calling 01992 58 69 69 or emailing karen.malone@carersinherts.org.uk. If you need help about accessing or using Zoom, please get in touch or visit www.carersinherts.org.uk/downloads/have-your-say/1141-using-zoom-video-conferencing/file

Connecting with nature during COVID-19 lockdown and recovery

Gardens, balconies and outdoor spaces have been a great comfort to many people during the coronavirus lockdown period, particularly as the weather has been good. A lot of people have enjoyed gardening activities such as planting seeds, tending plants and growing vegetables.

The mental and physical health benefits of gardening or just walking in nature are well documented, for example they can improve mood, reduce stress, and increase physical activity. The Mental Health Foundation in partnership with WWF have produced a free booklet called *Thriving with Nature* available at www.mentalhealth.org.uk/campaigns/thriving-with-nature/guide and you can request a hard copy from them.

The booklet outlines how we can make the most of the UK natural spaces for our mental health and wellbeing. The guide is filled with imaginative and simple suggestions for seasonal activities to help you engage with nature throughout the year. Each activity will have different components that research suggests can be helpful for supporting your wellbeing such as staying active, connecting with others, or spending time in green spaces.

Karen Malone, one of our Carers Involvement and Development Workers said: "There are a range of activities that involve using different senses, there is something in there for everyone. Maybe something to do with your loved ones. I would love to see pictures of your activities in nature and you can email them to karen.malone@carersinherts.org.uk."

Karen added that on Sunday 28th June 2020 the BBC programme *Gardeners' World* featured a story of two adult sisters with learning disabilities (Kirsty and Rebecca), who had taken to growing their own food in lockdown. They started out growing lettuce to feed their pet tortoises and moved on to other vegetables and plants.

The programme (episode 15) is available on the BBC iPlayer and the link to it is <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000kcjs>



Our Carers' Involvement Network explained

We often refer to our Carers' Involvement Network, Learning Disability Network, or C4A Network, but you may be wondering what these are so here is an explanation.

All unpaid carers known to Carers in Hertfordshire are invited to take part in any activities or events that we are involved with. To make sure that we reach as many people as we can, we have set up involvement networks that carers are welcome to join. The networks are based around a condition or caring situation, so the learning disability one is for people caring for an adult with a learning disability and the C4A one is for those supporting someone with an autism spectrum disorder.

Those who have joined our networks are kept informed about any relevant consultations or discussions which are taking place. They may also have the chance to respond to online surveys or be invited to join one-off workshops or events.

People who join the network also receive notes and minutes from our forums – we have one for people caring for an adult with a learning disability and the C4A one for carers supporting someone with an autism spectrum disorder.

If you would like to check whether you are a member of our Learning Disability or C4A Networks, or if you have any questions, please email Karen Malone, one of our Carers Involvement and Development Workers, at karen.malone@carersinherts.org.uk or call 01992 58 69 69. Please also get in touch if you are not currently receiving emails about our events but would like to.

Helping adults with a learning disability into work

Figures from a Mencap survey show that although 62% of UK adults that are of working age and have a learning disability want a job, less than 6% are in paid employment. Barriers to getting work include inaccessible application forms and being able to use transport or pay for it.

Organisations such as Mencap and Remploy work with employers to find reasonable, cost effective adjustments they can make to enable more people with a learning disability to apply for work. They also support people with a learning disability to boost their skills and with finding work.

Here are details of services in Hertfordshire that may be of help, although COVID-19 may have affected the support they are providing at this time, so please contact them to learn more about their offer.

YC Hertfordshire's Supported Employment Team - Advisers support young people aged 16 - 24 with a disability, such as a learning disability, and not in education or work, to find sustainable paid employment. They assist with CVs, applications and interview skills, provide training and more. For details call 01438 844999, email yc.idd@hertfordshire.gov.uk or visit www.ychertfordshire.org

Hertfordshire County Council's Work Solutions Team - offers help to people with disabilities, autism and mental ill health, in receipt of support from Adult Care Services, find and stay in a job. To learn more call 01442 454464 for the Hemel Hempstead team or 01438 844911 for the Stevenage team.

Building Better Opportunities (BBO) - Helps Hertfordshire residents aged 15+ into work or volunteer roles (conditions apply). For more information call 01992 556183 or email BBO@hertfordshire.gov.uk

Mencap - to find out more call 0808 808 1111 or visit www.mencap.org.uk

You can also visit www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/connected2work

Learning skills during lockdown and beyond

For some people online courses and workshops have helped keep them occupied during the COVID-19 situation or whilst self-isolating at home. As we ease out of lockdown, there should still be opportunities for online learning. Below are details of organisations that may have sessions of interest.

Hertfordshire's New Leaf Recovery and Wellbeing College - The college offers a range of free educational short courses to give adults in Hertfordshire the practical skills and knowledge to better manage their emotional and physical wellbeing.

Previous students have reported that they benefitted by:

- ◇ Feeling more in control of their situation or empowered to change it.
- ◇ Overcoming fears and anxieties.
- ◇ Feeling less isolated and gaining new friends.
- ◇ Achieving improved self-awareness and mindfulness.
- ◇ Starting new or rediscovering favourite hobbies.

Due to the coronavirus, the college converted their courses into online versions, delivering them via Zoom. This has enabled them to reach more adults in Hertfordshire. It also produced online resources, such as breathing exercises and tips for keeping well at home.

The New Leaf College is run by Hertfordshire Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust and funded by Hertfordshire County Council and the NHS. The next courses are due to start in September 2020. You will be able to find out more and book a place online at www.newleafcollege.co.uk or call 01442 864966.

Carers in Hertfordshire - We have produced some workshop videos, including one with tips for getting better sleep and another about managing stress, as well as resources with suggestions to keep well or occupied at home. They are available on our website at www.carersinherts.org.uk

We also have some online learning opportunities for carers, delivered via Zoom, you can find an updated list at www.carersinherts.org.uk/events or call us on 01992 58 69 69.

Open University has a range of free online courses via OpenLearn and you can find out more at www.open.edu/openlearn/education/free-courses. Although, the organisation doesn't take calls about courses it has a web chat function or you can email openlearn@open.ac.uk

