

Recognising, respecting and responding:

*promoting human rights
for residents of care
homes in Scotland*

Fairfield Care

Introduction

RIGHTS

Made Real in Care Homes

Rights Made Real in Care Homes is an exciting project, funded by the Life Changes Trust and delivered in partnership with Scottish Care and the University of the West of Scotland.

The overall aim is to improve the quality of life of those living in a care home and to help support staff to not only recognise, but embed, human rights in their everyday practice.

The funding supported the development of seven creative and innovative projects and ways of working that will benefit people living with dementia and show others how to make rights real in care homes. All partners in the project are committed to ensuring that older people, including those living with dementia, have a right to maintain strong connections with family and friends, with their communities and with the things that matter to them regardless of where they live.

The Life Changes Trust invested £135,000 to support these seven projects across Scotland to promote the inclusion and participation of care home residents with dementia in a meaningful way. Scotland's new health and social care standards state that everyone in Scotland deserves to receive the care and support that is right for them. Each of the funded projects was designed to show how these standards can work in practice.

In order to showcase good practice in the care homes, particularly in relation to observing and promoting people's human rights, we have produced a collection of stories from the projects which show that adopting a human-rights based approach is not something people working in care homes should view with anxiety, but instead recognise that it is about building on many of the attitudes they currently possess and activities they currently practise.

The overall aim of the project and the stories is to inform and encourage workers in care homes across Scotland in their efforts to meet the new health and social care standards and provide care that recognises human rights, promotes people's dignity and demands only the highest-quality level of service.

This story is from Fairfield Care

Changing habits

Fairfield Care

The quashing of someone's human rights in a care home can happen in full sight. It does not need to be the result of conspiratorial actions. It can happen simply through the act of enforcing habits – the result of habitual thinking and behaviour that may be barely noticed and go unremarked and unchallenged.

Sandra McCombie, business support manager for Fairfield Care, recounts how habitual thinking and behaviour looks in practice.

'One of our homes is in a very rural setting, with beautiful views. But the staff close the blinds, meaning the residents can't see the views. We asked, why do you do that – why deny the residents such a lovely sight? And the answer was – it's a habit. It's done "just because". And there are so many habits like this one that have formed in care homes "just because".'

Moving beyond habitual thinking and behaviour requires effort and support. And that is at the hub of a project taken forward within homes owned by Fairfield Care.

The project is using the Learning and Innovating from Everyday Excellence (LIFE) approach from the My Home Life programme for care homes.

‘There’s nothing wrong with some habits,’ says Professor Belinda Dewar of the University of the West of Scotland, who has been supporting the project. *‘But we wanted to help people to talk more about them. We wanted them to be curious about the habits they want to keep, and work out what to do with those they wanted to move on from.’*

Belinda explains that LIFE sessions really tap into what matters to people and help them to take forward the cause of human rights in care homes.

‘They use short snippets of conversations and stories about life in care homes to help explore more deeply what matters and what is valued,’ she says. *‘The stories use the experience of residents, their relatives, managers and staff of care homes and the wider community to help us talk about our ideals and practical ideas that can be taken forward to benefit everyone who lives in, works at or visits the home.’*

Belinda’s colleague Cathy Sharp (from Research for Real), adds: *‘We do not need long stories or conversations. Just a few lines about life in care homes to help us explore what people value, what matters to everybody in the home community – what we want to have more of, and what practical ideas we can take forward to everybody’s benefit.’*

The LIFE session process starts with hearing or reading a story.

‘Then we go through a process of questions,’ says Cathy. *‘We talk about what is there to celebrate in this story? People chip in with their views. Then we move on to talking about any surprises and puzzles that emerged, before turning to identifying what people would like to happen more of the time, and what can each of us do that feels real and possible?’*

Once the questions are completed, the group considers what learning has emerged from the process, noting what’s worked well so it can be used on another occasion.

'We've learned a huge amount by following this process consistently throughout,' Cathy says. 'There's always something new. We're always surprised and there's always learning every time we've had a LIFE session.'

A LIFE session story looks something like this one, from a resident.

"I didn't like it here at first. I was wary of the staff. I didn't know them. I didn't really trust them. I've managed to make friends. People can be funny at times. After being here, I notice that the staff seem to be genuinely interested in me. They ask me the funny questions and get a bit of a laugh. I feel protected here. I look forward to the lovely meals and sitting here in the lounge watching the world go by, you can just sit here in peace and quiet. I like to talk to my daughter on the phone. She has been off on holiday so I look forward to hearing from her."

'So from this story, we'd work through the questions – what is there to celebrate, what are the surprises and puzzles, and what can we do from here on in?' explains Belinda. 'It's amazing what we come up with. Yes, we might think we need to ensure more opportunities for phone calls with the daughter, but many other things can spin off as well.'

'The importance of peace and quiet, for instance,' Belinda continues. 'Where are the spaces in the home for peace and quiet? We have activities coordinators, but should we think about having a peace and quiet coordinator as well? The most obvious route from the story might not be the one we end up pursuing.'

Typical issues that come up for discussion in the sessions include supporting night staff to ask specific questions about hopes and what matters to them and residents, asking people what helps them to feel safe and protected, discussing the concept of activity with the Care Inspectorate, and being more aware of how people can be supported to make connections and form friendships.

To ensure learning from the sessions can be shared among those who are unable to attend, the team have developed a set of cards that carry some of the questions and topics discussed.

‘The cards are kept inside a brightly ornamented container called ‘Chatterbox’; Sandra explains. ‘It’s all very well having a LIFE session with five or six people in the room, but what about the rest of the staff in the care home? How can we spread our learning, curiosities and puzzles more widely? The Chatterbox is the answer.’

Questions might be things like: It’s the day of your funeral; what would you like people to be saying?, Who would you like to get to know better? and Who makes you laugh? As well as using the cards with people who haven’t been to a session, they can also be used within sessions to raise another topic of discussion if conversation dries up.

For Belinda, an important issue is that it is the Chatterbox – not professional staff – that determines the questions.

‘So it isn’t about staff asking residents questions, which is the traditional approach, perhaps. It isn’t an interview – it’s an engagement. There is something quite levelling about that process.’

'The big thing about LIFE sessions is that you don't really get it until you do it,' Cathy says. 'Lots of people haven't really understood it until they've actually tried it out and have been part of it. And then perceptions change.'

That was certainly Sandra's experience.

'I remember saying to Belinda, well, you can come and do this, but we know our residents really well – you're not going to improve much. That was a bit arrogant. It's only when you peel back at the sessions you find out how much you didn't know, not just about the residents, but also about yourself. I never realised that I wanted everybody to laugh at my funeral – how fun is that!'

And now, Sandra is seeing the tangible effects of the LIFE sessions.

'A resident used one of the sessions to tell her story about the care home that pulled the blinds down and obscured the lovely views outside,' she recounts:

'About two weeks ago, she came up to me and said, "do you know, the blinds were opened and I got to see the sunset. It was beautiful and I wished you were there, and I could have taken a picture for you."

That lady made us face up to and challenge our habits with her story. That's culture change in action for me.'

The LIFE sessions and the cards are still evolving, and Sandra is confident that they will continue to gain momentum as time passes.

'The important thing for us is that the LIFE sessions are still ongoing,' she says. 'I see them as being a bit like a lemon drizzle cake – you know that when you put the lemon on the top of the cake, it will take a wee while to filter down to the base. At the moment, I'd say the lemon's probably halfway down the cake.'

Belinda is also optimistic about the future of the project in the homes.

'One of the lovely things about the LIFE sessions is that it's not Sandra or any other staff member who's taking it forward – it's actually all the people in the session. All of them – staff, residents, relatives – are progressing different bits of the change process. So if we ask who are the innovators in our day-to-day practice – actually, it's all of us.'

Rights secured:

- ✓ **Right to respect for private and family life Article 8**

European Convention on Human Rights

- ✓ **“I benefit from a culture of continuous improvement, with the organisation having robust and transparent quality assurance processes.”**

Health and Social Care Standards, 4.19

- ✓ **“I am included in wider decisions about the way the service is provided, and my suggestions, feedback and concerns are considered.”**

Health and Social Care Standards, Principles

- ✓ **“I am supported to discuss significant changes in my life, including death or dying, and this is handled sensitively.”**

Health and Social Care Standards, 1.7

- ✓ **“I am encouraged and supported to make and keep friendships.”**

Health and Social Care Standards, 2.19

