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news

Summer 2015

Here's Hagir, converting summer fruits into summer smoothies at last month's Healthwatch stall on Chapel Market. One of a team of volunteers, she spoke to as many people in the market as she could, finding out what they thought about their GP, about local hospitals, and about any other care services they were using.

We heard requests that physiotherapy clinics be based at larger GP practices, stories of improving

customer service, and concern that at some GPs not enough time was allowed for each appointment.

We don't just listen. We do our utmost to ensure that services are improved as a result of your feedback. One example comes from our recent work in care homes. There's more on that inside.

So get in touch with Healthwatch and tell us what you think about services. We're stronger together.

Spotlight on care homes

Having the facility to go in and see what's happening and talk to the residents about their experiences directly is good isn't it? Often they're not asked these days or if they are they're just expected to tick a box and not actually talk to somebody. It's about treating people as individuals.

Geraldine Pettersson (right), Healthwatch volunteer



My mum had been in an old people's home some years ago, she had dementia. That was a good home and I just hoped that all the Islington ones were as good. That was the reason I got involved.

Sue Cartwright (left), Healthwatch volunteer



Healthwatch Islington is able to visit health and care services, observe how they are being delivered, and speak to the people using those services to find out what they think of them. It's called **enter and view**. This past year we've been visiting care homes.

Sue and Geraldine are two members of the enter and view team. We asked them to share their thoughts on the care homes they'd visited.

Care home staff

G One thing that we do is talk to staff. There are set interview questions we ask.

S Some are better than others aren't they? Sometimes you get somebody who's really enthusiastic, and you can see that it's really their vocation. They're really enjoying what they're doing trying to make things better for people and they know their residents. It's quite rewarding when you come across somebody like that. I don't know that those people ever get heard otherwise.

Poor use of outdoor space

G Most care homes have at least a garden or an outside area. I suppose for safety reasons they don't allow the residents just to wander out on their own and come back. But often the doors are locked and the outside areas aren't well used.

S There was a garden with raised beds in one of the care homes we visited. It had one shrub in maybe, nothing else. Lots of people, older people in particular, have done gardening in their lives and it would be really good to get them to do a little bit of gardening in those raised beds. But there weren't any flowers at all.

G It's a real lost opportunity. I've done research for a voluntary sector group over in south London. It was a gardening group. They would go in and help service users to plant in the same sort of raised beds. There must be gardening groups here in Islington who'd be very happy to go along to that care home to help and to participate.

What we look for on our visits

G In one care home the residents liked to sit by the windows looking out onto the street. The staff said it was because they see the children walking to and from school.

S Because they never see children normally. Watching those children gave them immense pleasure, they were really captivated. And it was good that the staff had put the chairs near the window in order to facilitate that.

I think the Care Quality Commission [the body that carries out formal inspections of care homes] probably go into it more for clinical and medical probing, whereas we go into it more to see that people are treated as well as possible, and that they're enabled to fulfil their lives as well as they're able, with whatever they've got wrong with them. I think the two sides complement each other quite well.

Gathering the views of residents with dementia

G When we started visiting care homes it wasn't so noticeable but now almost everybody you talk to has got severe dementia.

S I think the reason is because there's much more home care than there used to be.

G That must be true. I would hope so. But it is very noticeable now and it's a real challenge. I've been on dementia training and I do think it's a must. It does help you to know how to interview somebody.

S First of all you have to get them to relax. You talk to them a little bit and then you start asking them the questions when they're feeling comfortable. We've got set questions to ask, but sometimes you have to put the questions in a different way in order to get them to understand.

So what difference does it make?

We made eight enter and view visits to care homes last year, speaking to more than 60 residents and members of staff. Although our findings were mainly positive, we noticed that in some care homes, gardens were in a state of disrepair.

We reported our concerns to Islington Council, who agreed to follow up with the providers, and ask for more access to outdoor space for residents.

They also carried out Tree and Garden Surveys at each care home. Following this a number of improvements have taken place. The work was completed at the end of March.

For example, at Muriel Street the front and rear gardens have been extensively pruned and tidied, including the previously unkempt area that we had described in our report. In addition, the manager of the care home is obtaining permission to re-landscape the gardens completely, to make them more user friendly. On a recent council monitoring

visit the garden was in regular use by residents and their visitors. There were also outdoor tea and coffee groups in the mornings, and the garden had even been used to host a visit from an exotic zoo.

Healthwatch had also noted that not all residents were satisfied with the range of activities on offer in their care homes.

The council have responded by setting up a meeting with voluntary organisations and care home managers to consider ways of engaging local volunteers to support activities both within and outside the homes. Age UK Islington had been working in this way already, at Lennox House, and are interested in building on this.

In addition, Kissing it Better, a charity that works with patients and their carers in hospitals and in care homes, has been funded to set up new intergenerational activities in the homes.

Spotlight on volunteering



We're going to loads of events over the summer and we're always looking for help manning the stalls. It's a great way to dip your toe in the water.

Jennifer Kent(right), Healthwatch volunteering coordinator



Back in April we welcomed volunteer coordinator Jeni Kent to Healthwatch Islington's staff team. Now that she's had time to get her feet under the table (it's a portable one that she takes out to community fairs and street festivals) we asked her how she was getting on.

'It's pretty busy. We've got all sorts of projects starting up. Some of our volunteers are going to be investigating GP provision in care homes. They'll be talking to residents, relatives and staff. Then, later on in the year our **enter and view** team will be looking at sheltered housing and mental health settings.

'Our mystery shoppers are going to look at online booking systems on GP websites. Online booking should have been up and running from April. It will be interesting to see whether those systems are available at every practice yet. Then we'll be looking at healthcare travel costs. We also want to do some mystery shopping of pharmacies and dental surgeries later in the year.

'We're also hoping to start a project that will gather the views of people receiving care in their own homes. Volunteers will be doing telephone interviews, "Do you see the same carer every week? Is that important to you?" We'll be asking these kinds of questions to build up a picture of what people like about home care, and what they think could be done better.

'A lot of this work will be with our established cohort of volunteers, but we'd love to get new people involved. We're going to loads of events over the summer and we're always looking for help manning the stalls. It's a great way to dip your toe in the water.'

If you'd like to find out more about volunteering with Healthwatch Islington give Jeni a call on 020 7832 5821 or visit our website. You can also take part in Healthwatch by letting us know your own views about health and care services that you and your family use. The more people we hear from, the better placed we are to represent the needs of the whole community.

Our contact details

You can visit our website to give feedback on any health and social care services you use, and get information about other services that are available. If computers aren't for you, you can call us, or write a letter. You won't need a stamp.

Freepost RTGT-HCUS-LXBS
Healthwatch Islington
200a Pentonville Road, London N1 9JP
Tel: 020 7832 5814
Email: info@healthwatchislington.co.uk
www.healthwatchislington.co.uk
Twitter: [@hwislington](https://twitter.com/hwislington)
Facebook: [healthwatchislingtonpage](https://www.facebook.com/healthwatchislingtonpage)