



## **Carers Assessments:**

### **Workforce Development Opportunities based on Carers' Experiences.**

#### **A Summary of Key Findings**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Skills for Care, in partnership with Carers Trust undertook a piece of fieldwork in November and December 2012 as the start of a project aimed at identifying and defining the skills and knowledge needed by social care staff undertaking carers assessments. This fieldwork involved consultation with small groups of carers and with local organisations involved with supporting carers to help understand the current practices, experiences and potential barriers to good experiences of Carers Assessments.

#### **CONTEXT**

This project is particularly timely in light of the proposals in the draft Care and Support Bill, published on 11<sup>th</sup> July 2012. This comprehensive reform of social care legislation proposes that, for the first time, carers will be entitled to support to help them with their caring role and to help them balance caring with the rest of their life. All carers will have a right to an assessment to decide if they need support, rather than just those who provide a substantial amount of care. The assessment must be available to all carers and should concentrate on their needs and outcomes and on both their willingness and ability to provide and to continue to provide care. It should also consider whether the carer works, or wants to work, and/or spend time in education, training or leisure time.

These key legislative changes are likely to have significant local impact. Therefore this is an important time to consider workforce development to ensure that those carrying out assessments are well equipped to effectively do so.

## **KEY FINDINGS**

Although this initial research has been based on a relatively small sample of carers, and therefore cannot be seen as a statistically representative group of all carers, there are some clear themes that emerge from this initial fieldwork. Perhaps one might have expected that this research would highlight a need for some further improvement in listening skills, empathy and understanding of carers' needs, and indeed these things have been highlighted. However there are also some less obvious findings about workforce development opportunities, which are as follows-

### **Outcome-focused application of knowledge**

Perhaps the largest barrier to a successful outcome for carers is the fact that many carers see the process as having no outcome. Areas which are performing well have prioritised having a clear menu of service options available for carers quickly after assessment – which include a mix of social care, health, voluntary sector and community services. Staff therefore need not only to gain the knowledge of what services are available, but be able to apply that knowledge creatively. Developing an outcomes-focused approach will help staff to consider a broad range of ways in which solutions may be reached that meet the needs of the carer, rather than a focus only on more traditional statutory solutions.

### **Courage to tease out and address difficult issues**

Recognition of the challenges and emotions that many carers will face culturally, socially or within their own world view, in considering their own needs or asking for help, is essential for anybody carrying out Carers Assessments. A patient and painstaking approach to teasing out a situation and seeing behind the everyday coping mechanisms is important. This may be best achieved by starting from the point of recognising and respecting the skills and coping mechanisms that the carer employs and working with the carer to maximise and encourage those while also building on this to identify and address their concerns and struggles. Most carers said that they have no trouble talking about what they can do but real difficulty expressing where they are struggling or need help.

There is also considerable courage and sensitivity needed on the part of the professional to talk through issues such as whether someone is willing or able to continue caring and putting together emergency and future plans.

### **Clear route map and involvement**

Carers feel that they need much clearer communication before, during and after the Carers Assessment to ensure that they are clear about the purpose of the assessment, the choices available to them and the whole process itself. They also want staff to treat them as experts in the situation of the person with care needs and as adults who are able to make their own decisions and take part in the process in an active way. In particular carers want written follow up that shows the outcome of the Carers Assessment and a plan in place about what happens next and how they can feed into the process if they disagree with what is written down or if their circumstances change.

**The full report is available to download at**

[http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/developing\\_skills/carers/carers\\_introduction.aspx](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/developing_skills/carers/carers_introduction.aspx)