

MAKING A START

Dementia – Skilling The General Needs Housing Workforce

Executive Summary

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

This report and Resource Pack was written on behalf of the Dementia and Housing Working Group, and funded by five housing associations. Its aim is to highlight the importance of ensuring that the general needs housing workforce has the necessary knowledge, skills and understanding to work effectively with the growing number of their customers¹ who live with dementia.

The report and Resource Pack outline:

- why the general needs housing workforce should have an awareness and understanding of dementia
- suggested levels and topics of awareness-raising and training sessions, aligned to different categories of staff
- some good practice examples
- external sources of learning for the workforce

Targeted primarily at housing providers, the work focuses on the workforce as a practical first step to becoming dementia-friendly organisations.

WHY WILL HOUSING PROVIDERS NEED TO THINK ABOUT DEMENTIA?

A growing number of people in the United Kingdom have dementia, two-thirds of whom live in their own homes in the community, mostly in mainstream housing. The number is predicted to continue to grow as the UK population ages, reaching one million by 2021. The financial cost to the country is currently estimated to be £23 billion, yet people with dementia and their carers report feeling inadequately supported, and many people end up in hospitals and care homes because of it.

The 2009 national dementia strategy, the Prime Minister's Challenge in 2012, and the establishment of the Dementia Action Alliance have all served to raise the profile of dementia: the importance of all organisation's playing their part in enabling people with dementia with whom they work to exercise as much choice and control as possible over their lives, and live well with dementia. This requires organisations and communities to have an improved understanding of dementia and the outcomes people with dementia say they want.

¹ The term "customers" is used to cover tenants and leaseholders in providers' properties and non-residents who receive services from the Provider

Through the Dementia Action Alliance (DAA)² people with dementia and their family carers have described seven outcomes³ they would like to see in their lives:

1. I have personal choice and control or influence over decisions about me
2. I know that services are designed around me and my needs
3. I have support that helps me live my life
4. I have the knowledge and know-how to get what I need
5. I live in an enabling and supportive environment where I feel valued and understood
6. I have a sense of belonging and of being a valued part of family, community and civic life
7. I know there is research going on which delivers a better life for me now and hope for the future

Evidence strongly suggests that most people with dementia and their carers would prefer to be supported in their own homes, with 83% of the 1,436 respondents to an Alzheimer's Society questionnaire (family carers and people with dementia) saying that being able to live in their own home was very important to the person with dementia.⁴ This means that the general needs housing workforce has a key role to play in making this possible for their customers. Timely diagnosis and early intervention are key to planning for the future and obtaining support which may prevent the need for more expensive formal care options. Thus, it is vital that housing staff are alert to signs that may indicate someone is developing dementia – for example, uncharacteristic disruption or ringing head office repeatedly with the same query – and knowing what steps to take within the remit of their role.

An organisation which is dementia-friendly, responding appropriately to a customer with dementia, will not only improve outcomes for the individual and family carers concerned. It also makes good business sense by improving its reputation and competitive edge amongst potential partners, reducing the risk of litigation and safeguarding issues, and also potentially reducing costs in key areas.

CATEGORIES OF STAFF

Staff members will require different levels of knowledge and skills depending on their role within the organisation. The general needs workforce may be divided into three categories:

1. Those who have no or minimal contact with customers (category 1)
2. Those who have some contact (category 2)
 - a) Some direct contact (face-to-face, by telephone or e-mail) with a wide range of customers, some of whom may have dementia
 - b) Staff responsible for line-managing staff who have some direct contact with customers
 - c) Staff responsible for developing / implementing strategies, policies and procedures for this staff group, or services for customers
3. Those who have significant contact (category 3)
 - a) Significant direct contact especially with older people and those with learning difficulties
 - b) Staff responsible for line-managing staff who have significant direct contact with these customers
 - c) Staff responsible for developing / implementing strategies, policies and procedures for this staff group, or services for these customers.

2 www.dementiaaction.org.uk

3 DAA National Dementia Declaration: Desired Outcomes for people with dementia and their carers

4 Alzheimer's Society (2011) Support Stay Save

SUGGESTED TRAINING LEVELS AND APPROACH

For these three categories, levels of awareness-raising and training are suggested as follows:

1. *Level 1: Awareness raising* – a one-to-two hour session for all staff and board members, preferably tailored to the housing sector in order to: provide an understanding of why dementia-awareness is an important part of the organisation's ethos and culture; give staff permission to raise with managers any issues with dementia they may be personally experiencing which may impact on their work, e.g. caring responsibilities; and enable staff to be a bit more dementia-savvy as citizens. Ideally this should be part of every staff member's induction.

The Alzheimer's Society leads short sessions of awareness-raising under the Dementia Friends programme.⁵ Taking part in Dementia Friends' session would be a good start but is essentially voluntary. Customers would benefit too from being invited to these sessions.

2. *Level 2: Foundation Level* – Ideally at least a day's session for staff in category 2 to enable them to understand and play their own part confidently and effectively in enabling customers with dementia and their carers to live as well as possible by: recognising and supporting timely diagnosis and intervention; improved understanding leading to better practice; and improved inter-agency working.
3. *Level 3: Extra topic-based sessions* – Extra targeted sessions for staff in category 3, depending on their particular role. For example: The Mental Capacity Act and Equalities legislation for those developing policies and procedures relevant to older people and those with learning difficulties; dementia design and decor for architects, surveyors, maintenance and development staff; providing leadership and staff support for managers; and communication skills for sheltered and extra care managers.

A detailed training framework based on the above staff categories and training levels has been developed as a starting point for providers. It is included in a Resource Pack which forms part of this work.

Equipping the general needs workforce in dementia requires more than the imparting of a few facts. Key misconceptions need to be dispelled, stigma reduced, the complexities of working with people with dementia genuinely understood, and skills developed in areas such as communication and person-centred approaches. For this reason, face-to-face sessions which allow for discussion and interaction are best, especially for those who have direct or indirect contact with customers. People with dementia and their carers can make a valuable contribution to the design and delivery of awareness-raising and training sessions. In addition, sessions tailored to a housing setting, and preferably also to the particular organisation, are better than generic sessions.

Depending on service offers, customer profile and preferences, providers can adopt a number of approaches to skilling their workforce ranging from sending staff to off-the-shelf sessions at one end of the spectrum to employing a trainer at the other, and a range of options in-between. External sources of awareness-raising and training vary in what they offer and charge. The detailed list in the Resource Pack, while not comprehensive, contains free offers, on-line courses, local offers, a range of dementia-specific trainers, many of whom have experience of the housing sector, and others.

⁵ For more information on these sessions see page28 of the Resource Pack or the Dementia Friends website: www.dementiafriends.org.uk

BEYOND FORMAL TRAINING

Apart from formal training, staff would benefit from reminders and reinforcement of key messages, as well as support in their work with people with dementia. In addition to managers providing support and/or peer support, newsletters, the intranet, a dementia resources file, and dementia champions within the organisation are all useful mechanisms for keeping motivation and commitment alive. A number of general needs housing providers concentrate their dementia expertise in their supported housing team which is made available as a resource to staff in the whole organisation.

BECOMING A DEMENTIA-FRIENDLY ORGANISATION

In addition to a skilled workforce, it is best if organisations can provide the right backup and environment for staff to be effective: the organisation's ethos, policies, procedures, practices and services would all benefit from being dementia-aware, and promoting inclusion. Leadership within the organisation is fundamental, however it is provided. Signing up to the DAA Dementia Declaration aimed at delivering the seven outcomes, and joining the Dementia Action Alliance, can help organisations on the road to becoming dementia-friendly.

A number of good practice examples demonstrate what some providers are already doing, and also the individuality of approaches. These may be found in the Resource Pack, as well as in summary form in the body of the main report.

Other bodies have an important part to play in facilitating the development of knowledge and skills amongst the general needs housing workforce. These will be followed up separately by the Dementia and Housing Working Group.

RECOMMENDATIONS

General needs housing providers are unlikely to be in a position to introduce all the steps to skilling their workforce and becoming dementia-friendly organisations straight away. An incremental approach is perfectly reasonable.

Housing providers could build the effectiveness of staff and board members in working with people with dementia by:

1. Encouraging staff and customers to take advantage of free Alzheimer's Society Dementia Friends sessions and supporting those willing to go on to become Dementia Friends Champions
2. Making dementia awareness a core element of induction for all staff
3. Developing a dementia-awareness and training offer that suits their organisation's approach and customer base, and in line with the different staff categories outlined in this report, using external resources as necessary
4. Involving people with dementia and their carers where possible
5. Supplementing training with other sources of information to reinforce key messages
6. Supplementing training with support and guidance appropriate to the staff member's role
7. Gearing up the Human Resources department to respond to those who come forward with personal experience of dementia

Starting with knowledge of their customer profile and the needs of the workforce for dementia awareness-raising and training, organisations could also develop dementia strategies which are proportionate, incremental and tailored.