

Age Alliance Wales

Film Case Study - Lyn's Story



Lyn is 67 years old and lives in Cardiff. Her mum Eileen is 88 years old. Eileen was diagnosed with dementia at the age of 80. Lyn worked in sheltered accommodation for much of her career and is knowledgeable about older people's issues. Since retirement she has actively engaged in issues concerning older people and sits on the Cardiff 50+ forum and the National Pensioners Convention.

Lyn explains...

Before the introduction of the Social Services and Well-being Act

Approximately seven years ago during a dementia crisis Mum was hospitalised, she remained in hospital for six months. During this time there was little information given and the family were quickly aware that long term full care was required. As a family we needed to keep pushing for meetings and guidance. There was no social work contact for months and then when discharge was decided by medical staff meetings were hurriedly arranged. The assessment was then not handled in an inclusive way, leaving the family quiet upset. Fortunately during this time a Placement Officer from Age Concern was attached to the ward and they stepped in. Their support was exceptional, arranging and visiting potential homes and liaising with social workers, they spent a great deal of time with us as a family offering support. There was not a lot of contact with the social worker; I didn't even know her name.

When a place was found for mum in an appropriate home there was little contact with social services and it felt as if the family was not included in some decisions regarding mum's care. Decision were taken by social workers without consultation with the family which I felt was unacceptable.

After the Social Services and Well-being Act

Mum was admitted to hospital following a devastating stroke, it was identified that her needs were different and that full time nursing care would be required in a new environment so she could not return to her previous care home. It was during this time in hospital that the new Act came into effect. Mum was admitted to a stroke rehabilitation unit and after three months in hospital a social worker phoned to say she would visit mum to assess her. There was no awareness of her condition and that mum was unable to communicate. I arranged to be present and made it quite clear that we as a family were totally on board at every level with decision-making and I would be acting as mum's advocate.

When it was made clear that mum needed to be discharged I took charge of finding her a place in a nursing home. After numerous meetings and phone calls I was able to find a suitable place which nearly fell through as funding processes had not been put in place. This was a very traumatic time and I felt totally unsupported and surprised as I was aware that the new Act was in place. We were eventually able to secure the place I had found for mum and she was discharged from hospital. The social worker contacted me after six months of Mum living in her new home to inform me of a review meeting for her mental health which I attended. The only other contact was a phone call to tell me she was leaving the department that week and she couldn't give me a name of a new social worker. That was about 4 months ago. I have a brilliant relationship with the home and the staff at the nursing home and have no issue or concerns regarding mums care. I do however have great concern for people who are complete novices to the care system and how they would cope.

Lyn goes on to say...

I have been able to have a say in the care and well-being for my mother after making my wish to be consulted as an advocate very clear. It required a great deal of following up and determination to find an appropriate placement for my mother's needs, often feeling I was taking the lead without a great deal of support.

Information and advice was difficult to access and I think this would be even harder if you are a novice, I was lucky that I had some insight. I think changes that are needed include giving clear information on what to expect from services and service user involvement should be made paramount. There should be easily understood information about the purpose of the new Act.

At times of crisis information sharing and good communication is crucial, not just long periods of silence, even just a phone call to reassure you haven't been forgotten. There is often a lack of communication between agencies and service users and no clarity on what to expect or the role of the social worker. I feel more information sharing with clear objectives and the involvement of family and service users in every decision and planning meeting would make a huge difference to people's experiences.