

Carers Information Sheet 18

Information for Bereaved and Former Carers

'I cared for my mother for nearly 6 years. I'm glad I cared for her and was able to ensure she knew she had my love and support right up to the end, she was such a good mum to me. But, a little while after she died, I woke up one morning and thought, what do I do now?'

Mr F., Brockley.

'When I had to let my husband go into full time residential care, I felt such a failure. The guilt was terrible and I did not know what to do with myself. At the same time I had this feeling of a burden being lifted from my back which made me feel even more guilty.'

Mrs D., Sydenham

Caring for a loved one can be a stressful, emotional experience and often means making sacrifices. You may have given up your work, friendships, hobbies. When your day to day caring activities end, either due to bereavement or because the person you care for is now in full time residential care, along with feelings of loss and grief, it can come as a shock to realise how much of your life you have put into your caring responsibilities. This can leave you feeling even more saddened.

LIFE AFTER CARING

The end of your caring responsibilities can be a very difficult and distressing time and it is very important to look after yourself. You may feel a whole range of emotions: anger, sadness, helplessness, frustration, guilt, and sometimes relief — which can make you feel even more guilty. This is quite normal. Take your time and don't be rushed into things either by yourself or by other people's expectations of you. You deserve time to grieve and to rest. There is life after caring, but it may take some time before you want or are able to move on or make decisions.



SOMEONE TO TALK TO

As this can be such a very painful time it is often a good idea to talk to someone about your feelings. Many people are able to talk to friends and relatives, but sometimes people can be a little insensitive. They may not understand the impact caring had on you or meant to you. Sometimes people may expect you to be able to quickly pick up where your life left off when you started caring. Speaking to someone objective — even a counsellor — can help to put things in perspective about your loss. They will listen and support you without making any judgements, and help you work out what is right for you.

FINANCES

Finances can be a problem when your caring responsibilities end, particularly if you are under 60. Carers Allowance or Carers Premium can continue for up to 8 weeks after you've stopped caring. If you have little or no other income, you should be able to claim Job Seekers Allowance / Universal Credit, if you are able work: Employment and Support Allow-

ance if unable to work.

Contact your GP if you feel unable to work for health reasons and they may be able to sign a sick certificate.

Contact the Carers Lewisham helpline for information & advice on financial benefits, or the CAB at Sydenham or Catford.

If you do have or wish to seek work, be sure to recognise the skills you have learnt as a carer such as patience, communication & organising skills, assertiveness, perseverance etc. on any CV or application form. Value these skills, and never say 'I was only a carer'!

FILLING THE GAP

Once you feel ready, and this can often take a *very* long time, think about what you would like to do for *yourself*. What were your interests and activities before caring? What new skills have you learnt that you might like to develop? You may like to get involved in some voluntary work or join an adult education class. You may now find that you have the time you need for your own social contacts with other family members and friends, or more time to spend on your hobbies, sports etc.

Carers Lewisham Employment and Training project arranges various courses such as computer skills, personal development, employment rights.

OUR POLICY ON FORMER CARERS

Carers Lewisham can continue to support you for up to 18 months from the date you ceased caring. During that time you may use our services as normal, for example attend a carers support group, receive advice and information etc.

Once you have been a 'former carer' for 18 months, some of the above Carers Lewisham services are restricted (less so if your cared-for person has gone into a home).

After 3 years, you may still keep in touch by becoming a "Member" of Carers Lewisham, i.e. you can continue to have the Newsletter, and can attend the AGM.

We would also be very pleased if you were interest-

ed in being a Carers Lewisham volunteer helping us with events, our centre reception & helpline, etc.

OTHER USEFUL SERVICES

Compassionate Friends friendship and support where a child has died. Tel: **0845 123 2304**

Counselling: Your GP may be able to arrange this. Or contact **Lewisham Bereavement Counselling**, which offers one to one counselling, advice and information to bereaved people. Tel: **8692 6252** e-mail: lewishambereavement@btinternet.com

Independent Age national advice & information service for the over-60s. Tel **0800 319 6789**

Cruse Bereavement Care exists to help all those who are bereaved. It offers counselling, advice and information. **Tele: 020 8850 0505** or **Helpline 0844 477 9400**

Relatives and Residents Association for older people and their relatives in long term residential care. Provides advice, information and support. **Tele: 020 7359 8136**

Samaritans provide a listening ear to people in distress.

Tele:08457 09090 e-mail:jo@samaritans.org

'What to do after a death' DWP leaflet. Helpful guidance e.g. on registering a death, funerals (including help with costs), probate & property, emotional and practical support. Available from Registrars, Funeral directors or Jobcentres.



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