



Annual Review
April 2007 - March 2008

CHAIR'S REPORT

What a year it has been!

I have been involved on the Board of Management of Carers Link since its beginnings in 2003 and am delighted to see the great progress that has been made both during this time and, importantly, in this last year. However, every year in Carers Link has also seen growth mixed with significant challenges and this one has been no exception.

The beginning of 2008 was an uncertain time for our Volunteers as our application to the Big Lottery to continue funding for Sharon's post, Volunteer Services Co-ordinator, was unsuccessful. Carers Link was thus faced with the loss of a full-time staff member, over 20 Volunteers and, crucially, nearly 300 Carers would immediately have lost the regular telephone support provided through Carers Call.

The potential impact of this loss to Carers was recognised by East Dunbartonshire Council and funding has been secured for the services provided by Carers Link's dedicated Volunteers, who support the organisation in a wide range of ways. Sharon Moncrieff remains with Carers Link as Peer Support Co-ordinator with a special responsibility for Volunteering.

Over 70% of our Volunteers and all staff members have experience of caring, and the job titles of staff have changed to reflect the personal understanding and empathy that have now grown to become the ethos of Carers Link.

Our first step towards Carers Link developing specialised care remits was the appointment of Fiona Campbell in November 2007 as

Peer Support Co-ordinator with special responsibility for Carers of people who experience mental health problems. You can read more about Fiona's new post on page 8.

A personal highlight was my involvement in opening the consultation event on the development of a new local Strategy for Respite. As Chair of both Carers Link and of the Carers Planning, Performance and Implementation Group of East Dunbartonshire Council, I was very happy to welcome so many Carers on the day.

Towards the end of the financial year we made an application for funding to implement the NHS Carer Information Strategies locally, and were successful. Indeed, at the time of writing we are interviewing for 2 part-time posts to carry out this work, which will add to the continuing growth of Carers Link. The need for this new service will become apparent throughout this report.



Of course none of the above would have been possible without our funders East Dunbartonshire Council and East Dunbartonshire Community Health Partnership and our dedicated, conscientious staff and Volunteers, to whom I give a hearty Thank You.

Mike Molyneux
Chairperson

JEAN'S STORY

Jean lives in Bearsden with her family, including 18-year-old son Stuart who was diagnosed with Cystic Fibrosis twelve years ago. She knows only too well the frustration and despair that can be overwhelming.

“When Stuart was small we were told that his constant coughing, vomiting and shortage of breath were due to asthma. Diagnosis came when he was six, and with it a whole new way of life for us. Caring for Stuart dominated family life as he required physiotherapy sessions, which lasted for one and a half hours each throughout the day, plus three daily intravenous injections. Both of these I was taught to do, but the stress of other health issues on top of this made getting through each day very stressful whilst trying to keep everyone happy and cope with normal everyday life. There was no way I could carry on working; living with illness is a full time job.”

It was at this point that isolation set in, with some friends falling by the wayside through lack of compassion and understanding of the condition, and also of the anxieties Jean and her husband faced daily.

“Some of Stuart's Cystic Fibrosis friends died, which depressed him greatly as he was convinced that he would be next. Encouraging him to integrate into society and hoping that society would accept him was a constant struggle. The years moved on and the routines never changed. You appear to cope but don't realise the toll it's taking. I became mentally and physically worn out - I was tired all the time and wanted to run away, but loving him so much meant I never gave in.”



“I now feel less isolated - Carers Link are always at the end of the phone and I know that someone is there to listen to and support me when I am stressed”.

HEALTH IMPACTS

Every day in Carers Link we see the reality of the impact that caring has on a Carer's health and overall wellbeing.

For many Carers the demands of a caring role make attending to their own needs seem, not only less important, but even unrealistic in the face of the challenges that they face day in and day out.

We know that avoidance of stress is key to overall good health and wellbeing, and that a balanced diet and taking regular exercise can positively affect our bodies and minds, but for Carers, finding time to look after their own needs - even to attend a simple appointment with their own GP - can sometimes seem impossible.

Carers Link aims to support local Carers towards as happy and healthy a life as possible, and raising awareness of our services is always a priority in order to reach a wide range of Carers. Over our first 4 years, we have worked with nearly 700 Carers in East Dunbartonshire.



As Lead Support Co-ordinator, Paul tries to provide a supportive presence when in contact with Carers.

Many do not feel able to talk about what they are doing and the emotions they are feeling. Saying the words out loud can be a great release and can have an immediate effect upon how they feel. The support that staff provide can be invaluable in releasing the pressure of emotions.

By offering advocacy, Paul and the staff team can make contact with local authority departments such as Education and Social Work and service providers such as Home Care to initiate services, relate information or notify changes in circumstances.

“ We can contact the most appropriate person and communicate with them on behalf of the Carer. This can take a lot of pressure from a Carer as contacting services can be stressful and time consuming. ”

- 95% of Scottish Carers say that they regularly hide the fact that their health is suffering in order to be able to continue with their caring responsibilities

- Nearly 1 in 4 say that they often feel unable to cope with their day to day caring role due to the physical and emotional stress that they are under

- More than 25 % of East Dunbartonshire's Carers have a stress-related illness

Between April 2007 - March 2008, Carers Link has provided:

Immediate Resolution - 252 Carers

Long-term Advocacy - 184 Carers

The number of NEW Carers supported this year has increased by 44% (209 Carers previously unknown to Carers Link)

CAROLYN'S STORY

Carolyn and Reg live in Lenzie. Reg contracted polio when he was ten weeks old, and five years ago his muscles began to weaken leaving him unable to sit up, doubly incontinent, unable even to write and with little dignity remaining.

“ Since last year” says Carolyn “he’s also had a series of mini strokes. He’s frustrated, depressed and speaks of having a major stroke that will bring an end to his misery. When it happened I didn’t know what had hit me, and I didn’t know how quickly my role would change from wife to nurse - with no training.”

Carolyn sees her life as *“Looking after a big small-child”* who regularly reduces her to tears. *“Yes, of course there are times when I’m full of self pity because my day revolves around getting Reg out of bed, putting him back to bed, changing his nappy and feeding him. There’s no training for a job like this, to say nothing of the devastation of seeing a man who was so handsome, independent, clever, lively and full of personality, diminish before your eyes.”*

The couple's conversations about the good times are non-existent because Reg's concentration levels are so low that he forgets what he's saying. *“There really should be more to life than this, you know, but all you can do as you grow into the role is get on with it.”*

I attended a moving and handling course, a one-day refresher for the other home care workers, but it was an experience of a different kind for me.

I learnt such a lot at this class, it was marvellous, but of course I'd developed my own methods so no wonder I had a sore back and a problem right shoulder. They kept me awake some nights.

Such was the confidence boost from the class I have since transferred my husband every day using the sling and ceiling hoist not perfectly but correctly.

I returned home that day so full of excitement. I loved being on that course, I would recommend it to any one in a similar situation. As I said to one of the care workers there *“I didn’t choose to be a Carer, you did, and I get to do it 24/7, only now I can do it better”*.



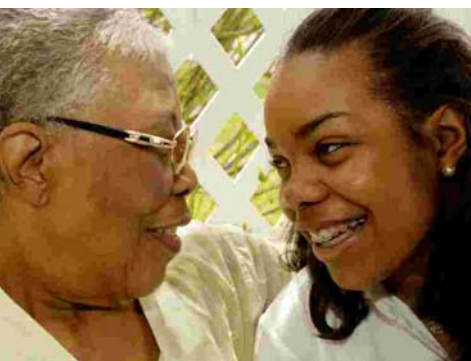
Reg and Carolyn on a cruise aboard the QE2 in 1991, to celebrate their Silver Wedding Anniversary

INFORMED CARING

More than one million of the UK's six million Carers provide more than 50 hours of care each week. These Carers are twice as likely to be permanently sick or disabled. Carers' contributions in the UK are now valued at £87billion a year.

However, not everyone who is a Carer has a full-time caring role. For many, the person that they live with needs some help day to day but is otherwise quite independent, while for others a day every weekend might be taken up with caring responsibilities for a relative or friend, or the caring role can be shared with others.

Juggling work, family and home can be stressful enough at times for anybody, but for Carers there are obviously also additional responsibilities and pressures. Whatever the time spent caring, the stress that each Carer feels is relevant, because time spent caring means time away from other things, and many people suddenly find themselves carrying out a caring role without any warning or preparation.



East Dunbartonshire Community Health Partnership has awarded Carers Link funding to implement the new NHS Carer Information Strategy for this area, and we will be starting a rolling programme of 'Informed Caring' sessions later in the year, which will be open to all Carers in East Dunbartonshire and will aim to provide information about all aspects of what it means to be a Carer. Two new part-time Peer Support Workers will deliver these sessions throughout East Dunbartonshire, and Carers will be invited to provide input about what they would like to see included in the programme.

STATISTICS

** Hearts & Minds: the health effects of caring 2004*

10 hours of care-giving per week increases the risk to your mental wellbeing by nearly 30%

Care-giving is the 5th most significant factor associated with distress rates in women - it has more influence than being a widow or not having paid employment

Carers Link

participated in delivering 'Carer Awareness' Training to nearly 300 Health and Social Work staff. Referrals have since more than doubled!

The overall objectives of an NHS Carer Information Strategy include:

- Identifying people as having a caring role
- Ensuring that Carers receive information and training and are signposted to further sources of support

A NEW DIFFERENCE

Peer Support Co-ordinator Fiona Campbell began working with us in November 2007, with the remit to support Carers who look after someone who experiences mental ill health. Since then she has been getting to know how Carers Link works and making contact with other health professionals who work in this field, with a view to establishing close working relationships and raising awareness of Carers Link's services. Fiona is very keen to chat with Carers to find out what assistance they feel might have helped them with caring in the past, and hopes that in time her role will enable Carers of those experiencing poor mental health to access the support they need more easily.



"I have already noticed that many people who are caring for someone with poor mental health struggle to think of themselves as Carers, because their role specifically entails providing much more emotional support and encouragement, rather than more practical support."

"I know from personal experience that caring for someone with poor mental health can be very isolating, and I hope that my post will enable people to share their experiences and feel that they do not have to cope with their stress alone."

Fiona knows it is sometimes difficult for Carers to get the information that they need to help the person for whom they care because, due to issues of confidentiality, the health professional cannot share knowledge and information. Perceived stigma only adds to the difficulties and, as a result, many Carers continue to deal with everything on their own and do not come forward for help. In the long term this can lead to accumulated stress, which may in turn affect the Carer's own physical and mental wellbeing.



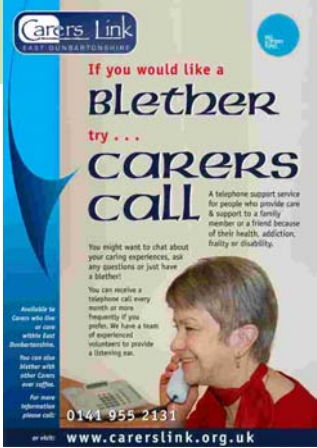
As well as working one to one with Carers and continuing to raise awareness, Fiona hopes to launch a new Information Leaflet and start up a group in Autumn 2008 for Carers of people who experience mental ill health. She plans to invite health professionals and representatives from Social Work to come along to the group so that Carers can ask some of the questions which they may otherwise have no opportunity to ask, and thus hopefully develop a better understanding of issues that they deal with daily through caring.

"Simply having the chance to talk to someone can make all the difference between coping and not coping, and I am keen to reach as many Carers as possible."

Volunteer numbers continue to swell, and our telephone support service Carers Call goes from strength to strength with 14 Volunteers now regularly providing this service.

70% of Carers receiving Carers Call have chosen to receive weekly or monthly calls

Over time, Carers Call Volunteers have recognised the need for this service to be enhanced in order to help Carers in times of particular concern, difficulty or crisis. Thanks to our first full year of Choose Life funding provided by East Dunbartonshire's Choose Life Strategy Group, we have been able to help Carers who are particularly isolated or require additional help. Carers are now able to meet with a Carers Call Volunteer for a coffee to talk through concerns and problems, and thus access short-term, intense support.



In association with Ceartas, the Choose Life funding has also been used to run a Men's Group in Milngavie Youth Cafe, specifically aimed at older men who may find themselves becoming isolated. This group has been very successful, and has included speakers from the Ramblers Association and historical groups, internet training opportunities and a chef who came along to give simple cookery lessons.

“The men came from a range of different situations. Some were recently bereaved. Others had wives with dementia or living in a nursing home - they were all isolated and finding life lonely. A questionnaire was circulated, and feedback indicated that cookery lessons, speakers and congenial company would be much appreciated!”



Mastering Golf on a Nintendo Wii !

RONNIE'S STORY

When Huntington's Chorea began to take its toll on Marion, Ronnie her husband of 42 years took early retirement to become her full-time Carer. He knew life was going to present him with *"different challenges"* but didn't bargain for his wife's refusal to accept any outside help. *"Marion refused to accept that she was ill because she was still physically and mentally able, so she would walk out and take bus trips to the coast and wouldn't return until late in the evening. Her balance was poor and I was afraid she would fall. I could not reason with her, and our relationship was suffering badly. It was awful."*

Much worse was to follow and Ronnie reached a point where he thought of nothing but Marion. He developed high blood pressure and desperately wanted some time to himself.

"I was terribly lonely as well. Marion couldn't respond to a conversation. I had lost the woman I loved and felt so sad. Life was very tough."

He knew it was imperative that they had a support package in place for Marion's return home from a long stay in hospital. *"It was Sharon at Carers Link who organised a visit from Social Services. They couldn't believe that we had been without help for so long and immediately set up 10 hours a week morning and evening visits, leading to 40 hours eventually. They even arranged for Marion to spend a week in a Nursing Home on a quarterly basis, which was very helpful."*

Through time Marion and Ronnie's marriage has returned to its former happy state, which he believes is due in large part to receiving respite care by allowing them more time together without Ronnie constantly being exhausted and worried.

"In addition to the daily help I was given a one week break every three months, but found by the end of that week that I was just starting to unwind - a second one would have been beneficial. That being said, it helped ease the pressure, and I feel we ought to be raising public awareness as to what's available because no-one should have to carry the full load of caring by themselves."



SUPPORTING CHANGE

Many Carers find it very difficult to get a regular carer break, and spend so much time concentrating on the person they are looking after that they forget about their own needs. It is also very common to feel guilty about needing such a break, or to be unsure how to find out about entitlement to Respite. Our Peer Support Co-ordinators work closely with individual Carers and Social Work, and encourage all Carers to have a **Carer Assessment** carried out as this is key to accessing Respite and other services.

The Carers Planning, Performance and Implementation Group (PPIG) has been working towards the launch of the development of a local Respite and Short Break Strategy. The Carers PPIG is unique from other planning groups in East Dunbartonshire - and we believe possibly unique in Scotland - in that a Carer, through an independent Carers' organisation, chairs this group. We are delighted that Carers are able to drive the agenda, and that their opinions and experiences will help shape the future of Respite locally.

"Carers have repeatedly identified breaks from caring as one of their highest priorities. Carers have also identified the significant benefits to their health and wellbeing from even short, regular breaks" (Pat Begley, Carers Scotland)

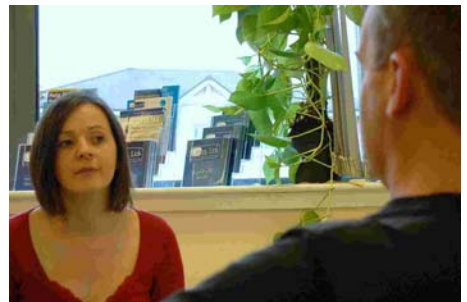
"I didn't know what Respite was until Carers Link explained to me that it could be as simple as having someone from Homecare coming to take my son out to allow me time to sleep. Before that I felt worn down, physically and emotionally"

"I used to swim several times a week before my caring role overtook me. I approached Carers Link who put me in touch with the Social Work department who gave my wife a support worker from Alzheimers Scotland twice a week, which meant I could take time to return to my swimming. Being able to exercise again has just made me feel so much better"

"Respite quite simply gave me and my wife the break from caring we needed so that we could have a holiday together and remember who we are"



"Getting time away from caring saved my marriage. I felt I couldn't go on. My doctor was so worried about me he suggested I contact Carers Link. They told me about Respite and Social Work offered my husband several weeks in Residential Care each year to give me a break. I knew I could go on caring for John knowing I would have a chance to take a break on a regular basis"



LOOKING AHEAD

The forthcoming year promises to be one of change and continuing expansion for Carers Link, as the sustained increase in the number of Carers accessing our services leads to further developments in our service.

With significant input from Carers, we have been pleased to have the opportunity to work closely with the Council and other partners in the development of the East Dunbartonshire Joint Community Care Plan, which is due to be launched in June 2008. The plan is a commitment to improve services for people who have community care needs, and their families. Identified during consultation for the JCCP was the pressing need for East Dunbartonshire to develop a Respite Strategy for Carers, and Carers Link is now part of the working group that will liaise closely with Carers on this during the coming months.

Our expansion in staff numbers means that we will outgrow our present office space and we hope to move into larger offices in Milngavie Enterprise Centre later in the year.

In addition, we have identified further goals within Carers Link that we will aim to achieve over the next year:

- Beginning a new Volunteer recruitment drive for Carer Support Volunteers
- Launching our new free-phone number
- Seeking funding for a new Peer Support Co-ordinator to work particularly with Older Carers
- Developing a new Fundraising Strategy, including production of a Fundraising leaflet
- Updating and expanding our information factsheets and information pack
- Producing leaflets for "Mental Health", "Addictions" and "Looking After Yourself"
- Launching our updated, new-look website
- Participating in the National Carers Conference in January 2009 being jointly organised by the National Coalition of Carers and Glasgow Caledonian University - and Carers Call becoming a featured digital story as part of the event

*Ann and Sandra,
who feature in
the digital story*



DAVID CAMPBELL TRUST

The first awards of the David Campbell Trust were made at Carers Link's third AGM in November 2007 to two successful recipients. Afasic East Dunbartonshire, a support group for parents of children and young people with speech, language and communication difficulties were given £150 to help with their newsletter costs.

The second beneficiary was Huntly Court, a sheltered housing complex in Bishopbriggs, which received £100 to enable the Carers and residents to have more outings.



David Campbell lived in Milngavie and was one of the founder Board Members of Carers Link, working hard for East Dunbartonshire's Carers until he died in October 2005. As a former Carer himself, David was passionate about supporting other Carers and before his involvement with Carers Link had started the Bearsden and Milngavie Carers Group through Cairns Church in Milngavie. David had also worked tirelessly for a number of other local voluntary organisations.

Using a donation received from the Campbell family, the Trust offers small awards to help any local community groups, voluntary bodies or charities in East Dunbartonshire that promote and develop self-help initiatives and/or peer support for Carers. The Trust is particularly keen to help groups that are being set up by Carers. Assistance and in-kind support at the start up stage is available to applicants whether or not they are successful in applying for financial help.

The Trustees are pleased to announce that an award of £350 will be made later this year.

If you know of a group or organisation who may be able to benefit from the Trust please contact us.

Summary of Income and Expenditure for the year

1st April 2007 to 31st March 2008

Balance at 1st April 2007	£958
Income - Donations	£208
Expenditure - Trust Awards	(£250)
Balance at 31st March 2008	£916

TRUSTEES

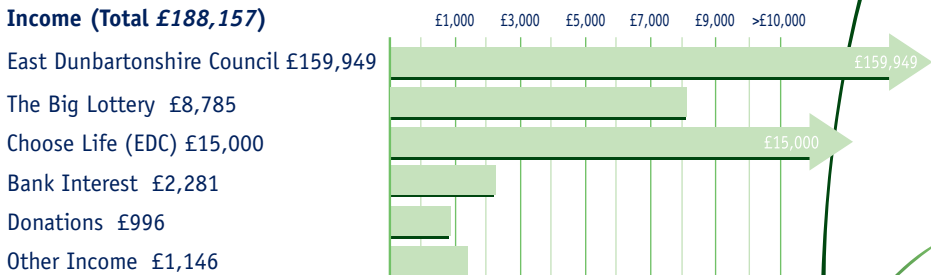
Brenna Campbell, Dorothy Crawford
Susan Henderson, George Ross



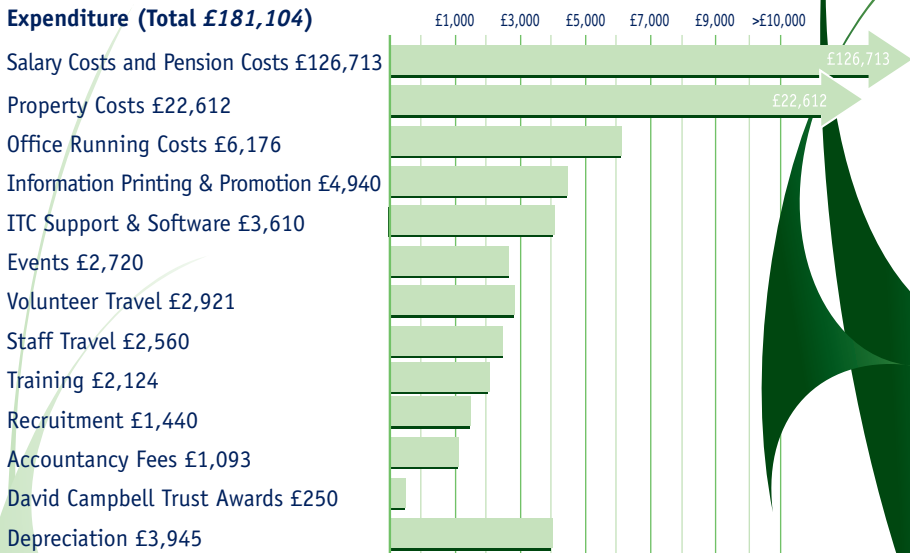
FINANCES

Summary of Income and Expenditure for the year 1st April 2007 to 31st March 2008

Income (Total £188,157)



Expenditure (Total £181,104)



Please contact us if you would like a full copy of our accounts for the year ended 31st March 2008.

The Statement of Financial Activities shows a surplus of £7,053 for the year to 31st March 2007. The Board of Management has designated some of this surplus towards developing our Information service. Total Net Assets at 31st March 2008 are £72,335, however of these, £58,240 are Restricted Funds.

The restricted funds from East Dunbartonshire Council are primarily for the purposes of providing Carer Service throughout East Dunbartonshire, and related staffing and office costs, as detailed in the Service Level Agreement. Additional restricted funds are from (1) The Big Lottery are for the purposes of employing a Volunteers Services Co-ordinator and related costs for recruiting, training and supporting Volunteers and (2) East Dunbartonshire Choose Life Strategy for the purposes of providing support to Carers and Older People at risk.

Of the above expenditure £7,616 was spent on Governance Costs such as the cost of accountancy fees, Annual General Meetings, Membership Newsletters, Board Meetings and Board Training.

Carers Link is Registered in Scotland as a Company Limited by Guarantee Number 270702
Recognised as a Scottish Charity Number SC 034447

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