Enter and View Report

Abbey Respite Centre

Care Home Contact Details:

Abbey Respite Centre
8 Abbey Square,
Chester, CH1 2HU

Date of Visit: 9 April 2019

Time of Visit: 10.00am

Healthwatch Cheshire Authorised Representatives:
Pat Clare, Hilary Hardman, Andrew Pleass

Abbey Respite Centre Staff Present:
Tom Grant – Registered Manager
Brian Newman – Senior Team Lead

What is Enter and View?

Healthwatch Cheshire (HWC) is part of a network of over 150 local Healthwatch across England established under the Health and Social Care Act 2012. HWC represents the consumer voice of those using local health and social services and trades as both Healthwatch Cheshire East and Healthwatch Cheshire West.

The statutory requirements of all local Healthwatch include an 'Enter and View' responsibility to visit any publicly funded adult health and social care services. Enter and View visits may be conducted if providers invite this, if HWC receive information of concern about a service and/or equally when consistently positive feedback about services is presented. In this way we can learn about and share examples of the limitations and strengths of services visited from the perspective of people who experience the services first hand.

Visits conducted are followed by the publication of formal reports where findings of good practice and recommendations to improve the service are made.

Contact Details: Healthwatch Cheshire, Sension House, Denton Drive, Northwich, Cheshire, CW9 7LU. Tel: 0300 323 0006.

1. Description & Nature of Service

Details of home:

Owner: Special Needs Care Ltd

Person in charge: Thomas Grant (Manager)

Local Authority / Social Services: Cheshire West and Chester Council (click for contact details)

Type of Service: Care Home only (Residential Care) – Privately Owned , Registered for a maximum of 6 Service Users

Registered Care Categories*: Learning Disability • Younger Adults

Single Rooms: 6

Latest Care Quality Commission* Report on Abbey Respite Centre: click here

Latest CQC Report – Abbey Respite Centre opened in March 2018 and was registered with CQC on 5 May 2018. It was awaiting its first full CQC inspection at the time of the Healthwatch visit. Some internet search engines reference a CQC report dated August 2016 but this relates to an inspection of the parent company, Special Needs Care Ltd.

Website information: www.specialneedscare.co.uk features a banner headed page for Abbey Respite Centre 'The ARC' which gives a brief description of the objectives and services offered. The facility offers both day care and residential respite services.

Google reviews: At time of writing one Google review (5 star) is available

2. Acknowledgements

Healthwatch Cheshire would like to thank the service provider, care home manager, residents, visitors and staff for their contributions to this Enter and View visit.

3. Disclaimer

This report relates to findings gathered on a specific date of visiting the service as set out above. Consequently, the report is not suggested to be a fully representative portrayal of the experiences of all the residents and/or staff and/or family members/friends but does provide an account of what was observed and presented to Healthwatch Cheshire Representatives at the time of the visit.

4. Purpose of the Visit

- To enable Healthwatch Cheshire Representatives to see for themselves how the service is being provided in terms of quality of life and quality of care principles
- To capture the views and experiences of residents, family members/friends and staff
- To consider the practical experience of family/friends when visiting the service in terms of access, parking and other visitor facilities
- To identify areas of resident satisfaction, good practice within the service and any areas felt to be in need of improvement
- To enable Healthwatch Cheshire Representatives to observe how the service delivers on the statements it advertises on its website.

5. Introduction/Orientation to Service

Abbey Respite Centre (The ARC) is a recently opened facility in the centre of Chester offering residential and day care services to younger adults with special educational and challenging behavioural needs, including autism and learning difficulties. It is run by Special Care Needs Ltd a not-for-profit company which also provides supported living facilities and legal services to vulnerable clients. Special Care Needs Ltd occupies a further two buildings near to The ARC on Abbey Square providing office and support services and, as was explained to us, have acquired two additional buildings which will be refurbished to provide a 75 place special school for autistic and special needs children, scheduled to open in late 2020.

6. Methodology

Representatives were equipped with various tools to aid the gathering of information. The following techniques were used by the Representatives:

- Direct observation of interactions between staff and residents
- Participant observation within therapeutic/social activities where appropriate
- Assessing the suitability of the environment in which the service operates in supporting the needs of the residents
- Observing the delivery and quality of care provided

- Talking to residents, visitors and staff (where appropriate and available) about their thoughts and feelings regarding the service provided
- Observing the quality and adequacy of access, parking and other facilities for visitors.

7. Summary of Key Findings

- Observations made suggested strong working relationships with local Social Services departments
- Newly established respite and day care facility for young adults exhibiting autism and other special educational needs
- Quiet, peaceful location in the heart of Chester
- Some evidence of staff's dedication and commitment through observation of their interactions with residents
- Offers a range of motivational and stimulating activities for residents with opportunities for obtaining educational qualifications.

8. Detailed Findings

8.1 Location, external appearance, ease of access, signage, parking

The ARC occupies a refurbished 3-storey Georgian townhouse in a quiet, largely pedestrianised square adjacent to Chester Cathedral. The external façade is well maintained as befits a Grade II listed period building, with clear external signage. Parking in Abbey Square itself is restricted to annual permit holders, but plenty of paid parking is available within short walking distance in nearby city centre locations. Access to the front door is via a short flight of steps. It was explained that the Grade II listing prohibits installation of a ramp: the area in front of the ARC is kept clear of parked cars by warning cones to allow staff to place a portable ramp for wheelchair access if required.

View of Abbey Square and Chester Cathedral from a Respite Unit bedroom.

8.2 Initial impressions (from a visitor's perspective on entering the home)

The locked front door was answered by a staff member who initially appeared perplexed by the Healthwatch AR visit and by the fact that the manager, who had just that morning returned from holiday, was in a nearby office building. Daytime Senior Lead Brian Newman quickly appeared however, greeted us warmly, despite not being aware of our potential visit, and took us quickly upstairs to a small office where we started discussions. The immediate impression was of a large ground floor area with numerous rooms, quite a noisy environment with lots of activity, before we were led up a narrow, relatively steep staircase to the office. Brian subsequently explained that he was immediately aware of one of the service users becoming distressed and agitated as we arrived, so led us quickly away to allow staff to reassure and calm the individual. The Manager, Tom Grant, joined us for discussions and a tour of the building during which we were able to sign the visitor book.

8.3 Facilities for and involvement with family/friends

The purpose of The ARC is to provide a safe, reassuring environment for service users who may exhibit a range of challenging behaviours, in order to provide respite and a change of environment for the user and/or their carers from what may be difficult home conditions. Unsurprisingly therefore, day-to-day involvement from family in The ARC itself is limited. Referral to The ARC is by social services. For first admissions, a social worker will bring the relevant family to The ARC, either accompanied or not by the potential service user, for an initial discussion of risk assessment, care and support plans: The ARC always follows up with its own assessments in the user's home environment. Emergency

referrals to The ARC with as little as 2 hours' notice frequently take place however. Family are always involved in setting objectives for service users' activity plans, communication needs and learning objectives. Respite Unit stays can vary in length from 'one-off' short emergency stays to periods of several months, subject to agreement with Social Services

8.4 Internal physical environment

8.4.1 Décor, Lighting, heating, furnishing & floor coverings

Decoration throughout the building appeared in good condition. It is deliberately chosen to be autism-friendly, using muted pastel colours and often with non-reflective paint surfaces. Hard-surface vinyl floor coverings are equally selected in all rooms to be matt and easy-clean. Stairs and corridors are carpeted. Furniture in bedrooms was seen to be functional but comfortable, and is often bolted to the floor to prevent misuse during emotional outbursts. Curtains are made to be able to be easily detached and replaced. Polycarbonate LED light fittings are used to provide shatterproof, even, flicker-free illumination.
A TV set in the upstairs lounge was enclosed in a locked, non-reflective casing for protection.

Respite Unit lounge with autism-friendly décor.

8.4.2 Freshness, cleanliness/hygiene & cross infection measures

The facility was warm and clean throughout and exhibited no unpleasant odours. Care staff undertake cleaning activities themselves by rota during the day: one staff member was seen wiping down skirting boards with anti-bacterial wipes in a ground floor corridor.

8.4.3 Suitability of design to meet needs of residents

The ground floor accommodates the Day Centre, upper floors form the Respite Unit which has bedrooms. Respite intake is ideally limited to 6 service users, current occupancy is 5; ages range from 16 to 34 years old. The day service supports 12-20 users including those from the Respite Unit.

A typical Respite Unit bedroom. Note the enclosure of period fireplace.

Whilst there are limitations on how the building can be adapted due to its listed status (it has not been possible to install a lift for example), considerable thought and attention has been given to ensure autism-friendly design and incorporation of fixtures and furnishings. Care has also been taken to protect original period features, for example by enclosing stair cases, fireplaces and using floating floor surfaces over tiled floors, both for preservation of the feature and to minimise sensory disturbance for vulnerable service users.
The restricted accessibility of upper floors mean that the Respite Unit is not suitable for all potential referrals: mobility assessments are made in the service user's home.

8.5 Staff support skills & interaction

8.5.1 Staff appearance/presentation

Staff do not wear uniforms as it is not considered appropriate for the role they have with service users, particularly when accompanying users outside the facility. All were suitably dressed, clean, neat and tidy however.

8.5.2 Affording dignity and respect/Approach to care giving

Staff involvement with service users is on a 1:1 basis both in the Respite Unit and Day Centre and even 2:1 if required. They have constant involvement during their shifts. Staff are rigorously checked and assessed for suitability for what is a very demanding role. Staff are selected for their empathy and their ability to understand and relate to the specific needs of people with autism. As the manager explained, it is *'Care Work Plus'. 'Staff have to* want *to do what they do. The users who come here are in crisis. The aim is to give them a safe place and send them out in a better condition.'*
The Manager and Service Lead both have many years' experience of working in care roles, having previously worked in a care home run by Autism Together on the Wirral which they said was the first in N W England to have been awarded a CQC Outstanding rating.
Healthwatch ARs witnessed at first hand sensitive, caring interactions between staff and service users – staff who were clearly committed in their role.

8.5.3 Effective communications – alternative systems and accessible information

The whole ethos of The ARC is based around understanding the individual likes, dislikes, communication needs and styles of service users' complex needs and

responding to them. Daily activity and care plans provide stimulation but are also geared towards equipping the service users with a qualification which can assist them with integration into the wider community. See section 8.7.4 below for more detail on activities.

8.6 Physical Welfare

8.6.1 Appearance, dress & hygiene

All users observed by Healthwatch ARs appeared healthy, clean and were properly dressed.

8.6.2 Nutrition/mealtimes and hydration

The ARC has a large well-equipped kitchen which is specially adapted to provide culinary learning experiences for users varied abilities and mobility. Cooking tuition was in progress during the Healthwatch visit. A weekly menu is displayed; individual preferences and allergies are catered for.

Menu on display in Respite Unit. Alternative requests are accommodated.

8.6.3 Support with general & specialist health needs/Maximising mobility & sensory capacities

Close control and monitoring of medication procedures and guidelines are undertaken. It was highlighted that medication oversight in the service user's home environment can be an issue resulting in Social Services' referral of the user to the centre.

Day Service users are registered with their own GPs. Longer term Respite Unit users are registered with Fountains Practice which also provides general support to the centre. The Manager expressed warm praise for the service provided by Boots Pharmacy in the Forum, Chester, particularly when emergency prescriptions are needed for service users. He also praised the understanding of Countess of Chester staff when dealing with and treating autistic service users, for example in their accommodation in waiting rooms.

8.7 Social, emotional and cultural welfare
8.7.1 Personalisation & personal possessions
Personalisation of service is a key objective and component of care plans. Whilst furniture in bedrooms is uniform and deliberately low-key in appearance, users are encouraged to personalise their rooms. We saw one service user's room with a number of personal items: most like to have their own laptop/tablet/ mobile phone/ music playing. Wi-fi is available throughout The Arc. It has a Spotify account for users, but IT access is 'filtered' and cut-off at 11.00pm to avoid misuse.
8.7.2 Choice, control & identity
The priority of the unit is to keep its clients safe – from themselves, others and the environment. All service users have DOL's in place – either granted or in application (but treated as 'in place') for users' personal safety. Risk assessments are made for each individual. External doors are access/exit controlled by staff but users are able to go outside accompanied by their 1:1 carer to shops, park, clubs, external activities etc., as this is seen to be important for social integration and the ultimate objective of independent or supported living. Each Respite Unit user is 'assigned' a colour code which indicated on personal files, care plans, medication charts and is marked on clothing labels, bedroom doors to ensure consistency.
8.7.3 Feeling safe and able to raise concerns/complaints
It was stated that The ARC plans to undertake an annual survey to gain feedback from relatives, social workers etc. but as the facility is only just one year old this is presumably still to take place. The Manager stated that the facility is now well –known by social workers across East and West Cheshire and the Wirral so there is greater awareness and appreciation of the services provided.
8.7.4 Structured and unstructured activities/stimulation
Activities are a core part of the service provision. In the words of the manager '*We like to get everyone to do something each day*'. All users have access to the Day Centre where activities are overseen by qualified teachers to provide motivation and to work towards meaningful qualifications. The activities include: Cooking, Gardening, Creative Arts (sewing, painting crafts) ICT and media (newsletters, printing, VR headsets, online safety), Music Therapy. Healthwatch ARs saw most of these sessions in progress and were obviously well enjoyed. The Music session for example used a sensory table with symbols linked to a PC providing musical effects so it was not necessary to be skilled in a particular instrument to participate.

Examples of wall decorations undertaken in Creative Arts room

8.7.5 Cultural, religious/spiritual needs

The ARC is non-discriminatory with regards to the cultural backgrounds of staff and service users. Religious support was not really discussed during the Healthwatch visit although it is worth noting that Chester Cathedral is directly adjacent and is the landlord to Special Needs Care Ltd premises.

8.7.6 Gardens – maintenance & design/suitability for use/enjoyment

An enclosed, level rear garden was visited which is host to Gardening Group activities. The gardening group also tends to allotment facilities in Cheyney Road, and a plot in Grosvenor Park.

9. Observations

9.1 Elements of observed/reported good practice

- Staff experience in and understanding of the needs of service users with autism and other challenging behaviours
- Extensive adaption of building, decoration and furnishings to this purpose
- Range of therapeutic activities offered
- Service user safety an absolute priority
- Clear evidence of team work among staff
- Effort and commitment of Manager and Special Care Needs Ltd to recruit the staff who want to undertake the roles
- Clear observation by Healthwatch ARs of 1:1 staff: service user support in practice.

9.2 Other observations/findings of note applicable

Ideally the Respite Unit needs to be expanded. Special Needs Care Ltd have secured two additional buildings in Abbey Square which will be refurbished to provide a 75 place autistic and special needs school of which 35 places will be residential.
The residential unit will be housed in two further nearby buildings. Both are due to open in September 2020.
Statement of purpose and objectives of The Arc are attached

ARC Info.docx Statement of Purpose March 2018
10. Comparisons
10.1 Comparisons of observations against providers website
The ARC has separate pages within the Special Needs Care Ltd website. Whilst visually appealing the web pages only give a summary overview of the role and activities on offer.
10.2 Comparisons with previous Healthwatch visit(s) where applicable
No previous Healthwatch visits have taken place.
11. Recommendations
• Continue the excellent work • Conduct and publish an Annual Survey of service users and their family

Feedback from Provider of Service
To be completed prior to publication from comments received from feedback form. Healthwatch attempted to contact the provider twice by telephone and left voice messages requesting an email address to send the report to for checking before publication. We also wrote to the provider but have received no response.