

Carers Spring 2006 Newsletter

**For members of the Newcastle Carers Forum
Produced by Carers Centre Newcastle**

Pamper Room open to all

Previously, our Pamper Room Services have been aimed at carers who live in the regeneration areas of the City. However, we are very pleased to announce that from 1st April, this very popular service will be extended to all carers in Newcastle.

The Pamper Room offers a range of relaxation therapies including aromatherapy massage, reflexology and Indian head massage. Sessions are free, although for those who are able to, there is an opportunity to make a small donation towards running costs. We are taking bookings for 1st April onwards, so do give us a call if you would like to take advantage of this very special service.

To get you in the mood, here is a poem from a satisfied customer, former carer Rosemary Halsey.

The Pamper Room

Today I had a pamper
A most inspiring thing
I feel so much better
When Shirley does her thing
She fills her hands with oils
With most exotic scents
Massages my neck and
shoulders
It feels great after that event
And when she rubs her hands
together
I feel sad when she is done
So thank you Shirley for the help
You've given to my neck
And also to my shoulders
It's bliss until you stop.
So thank you Carers Centre
For giving me this chance
To feel so well and happy
That I feel that I could dance!!!



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Council Cuts

You may have heard about the proposed cuts to Council services from 1st April. Two services that are anticipating significant cuts are the Newcastle Welfare Rights Service and the Newcastle Loan Equipment Service. The Carers Centre works closely with both of these services and can vouch for the valuable work they do in helping both carers and those they care for. Our friends at Welfare Rights provide free, confidential one-to-one financial support to carers here at the Carers Centre and in people's own homes, and they have helped carers claim thousands of pounds of unclaimed benefit over the years; they also write the regular Benefits Column

in the Carers Newsletter (see page five). The Loan Equipment Service provides essential equipment to people in need across the City, and has a central information point here at the Carers Centre (see page seven for more information). Budget cuts are never good news but as nothing is set in stone, there is still time to make your voice heard by joining us in writing to the Council to express your concern about the cuts to these services or others that affect you. Letters should be addressed to: Councillors Brenda Hindmarsh or Peter Arnold at Members Services, Civic Centre, Newcastle NE99 2BN.

Free cinema entry card

The CEA (Cinema Exhibitors' Association) Card entitles the card holder to one free ticket for a carer, when visiting the cinema. All national cinema chains are in the scheme. To apply, the card holder must be in receipt of either Disability Living Allowance or Attendance Allowance; be registered blind; or have a disabled person rail card. Cards last for three years and cost £5. Application forms are available from cinema box offices, the Carers Centre or can be downloaded from the Internet at www.ceacard.co.uk For further information telephone the CEA on 0151 348 8020.

Tune in to mental health carers

Carers looking after a partner with mental health problems should tune in to BBC Radio Four, on 2nd March, 8.02pm to hear a half hour programme of interviews with carers in the same situation. Its Producer, Kim Normanton, also made an award winning programme last year about young carers.

Who cares?

This newly updated booklet, for anyone caring for someone with dementia, contains useful information about dementia, being a carer and how to get help. Telephone the Patient Information Centre for your free copy on 0191 256 3090.

News from the Carers Centre

Carers Forum

Come along and join us at the Carers Forum meeting on Monday 13th March, 1pm until 3.30pm at Brunswick Methodist Church (behind Fenwick's department store). It's a great chance to meet new people, enjoy the free buffet lunch and learn something new as Charlotte Loyd from Independent Age will be giving a talk and answering questions about how the charity can provide financial help to people in need in our area. If you can't get to this meeting but would like to know more about Independent Age, there are more details on page six.

Tell us what you think!

Is there anything you'd like to tell us about your experiences of using the Carers Centre? Whether it's an idea, a view, a compliment or even a complaint, we'd really like to know what you think of us so that we can improve our service. By giving us your comments you can help us to: make real improvements to our service for everyone who uses the Carers Centre; and deal with any individual concerns you have quickly and sensitively. There are lots of ways you can do this: by post, telephone, email or at the Carers Centre by talking to us or filling in a 'Tell us what you think' slip and popping it into the red comments box in the foyer.

New Support Group for 19 to 25 year olds

Are you aged between 19 and 25 and caring for someone? Would you like to meet other young adults for information, support and activities? We will be holding a meeting on Wednesday 8th March, 2pm to 4pm at the Carers Centre, to explore ideas, with a view to setting up a group for young adult carers. Please come along if you feel you might be interested in being involved in the group. If you can't get to the meeting, we'd still really like to hear from you. To register your interest, please contact Jane at the Carers Centre, and she will be in touch to hear your views and to tell you what is happening.

Monthly Relaxation Sessions

The regular relaxation sessions run at the Carers Centre, by Gill Foster from the 3N's NHS Trust, have changed from weekly to monthly from the beginning of this year. Sessions now take place on the last Monday of every month from 1pm to 2pm. Gill's sessions are open to all carers and provide information on how to recognise stress; practical techniques for coping with stress; and a chance to unwind and relax among friends. Come along for a single session or as often as you like. Ring Wendy at the Carers Centre to book your place.

News from the Carers Centre

Understanding mental health and related issues

This is a ten week course for carers who are supporting a family member or friend who is aged between 18 and 65 and experiencing mental health problems. It provides an opportunity to meet with other carers and share experiences and expertise both with each other and with a range of mental health workers.

Two courses will be offered at the Carers Centre this year, provided by Gill Foster from the 3N's NHS Trust and Barbara Quinn from the mental health charity, Making Space. Course one commences on 25th April and course two, on 12th September. All sessions take place on Tuesday mornings from 10am until 1pm, and include a light lunch and refreshments.

John's Top Tips . . .

This is a new item for the newsletter. In every issue, John Reid will pass on some of the practical tips he acquired during the many years he spent caring for his wife. John will also feature a selection of tips from other carers, so if you have a good idea that could help others, please let us know at the Carers Centre and we will pass it on to John.

Be prepared ... Before embarking on a journey with someone who uses a wheelchair always:

- check that the tyres are inflated correctly;
- ensure the wheelchair user is safely and comfortably settled in and any cushions are in place;
- always carry a rug, tyre inflator, umbrella, poly sheet, if needed, and a mobile phone, if you have one;

- always use a lap strap if one is fitted;
- always 'think safety'; and
- in winter or inclement weather, fit a light or carry a torch.

Check appointments ... If the person you care for is a wheelchair user and you are accompanying them to an appointment, inform all relevant people of this at the earliest opportunity, e.g. ambulance driver, dentist, optician, receptionist, hospital.

Medication... If the person you care for has trouble swallowing, ask their Doctor or Pharmacist if any medication that is being prescribed can be provided in liquid form until the person has recovered.

The Benefits Column

written by Newcastle Welfare Rights Service

Benefits changes in April – don't miss out!

April is usually the time when changes are made to the benefits system. Here are a few of the important ones we can expect this year:

Savings limits go up. You may now be entitled.

You may have been refused a benefit in the past because you had too many savings. However, you may now be entitled as the savings limits for some benefits are being increased. For example, for people aged under 60, the savings limit for Income Support and Jobseekers Allowance increases from £8,000 to £16,000. The lower limit of £3,000 increases to £6,000; income below that amount is ignored.

Social Fund

The Social Fund can help with one-off payments for those on Income Support and similar benefits. The amount you can get is affected by how much capital you have. The good news is that the Social Fund capital limits will be increasing from £500 to £1,000 and for people aged 60 and over, from £1,000 to £2,000. To claim a Social fund payment, telephone 0845 600 427.

Help for young people in training and work

Benefits such as Child Benefit can continue for a while beyond a child's 16th birthday if they stay on at school. More incentives are now being added to encourage young people to get training or work. For example:
Σ if a young person aged 16 – 19, goes on a Government work-based programme as an unwaged trainee, Child Benefit and Child Tax Credit will continue to be paid;
Σ if a 19 year old is completing their education or unwaged training and it started before they were 19, then Income Support, Child Tax Credit, Housing and Council Tax Benefit can continue until their 20th birthday.

Warning!

Don't assume that changes that affect you will happen automatically. You may have to contact the benefits office to make sure that they do.

How to find out more

Contact Carers Centre Newcastle to book a confidential one-to-one session with Newcastle Welfare Rights Service or to find your nearest advice service. Pick up a copy of "Where to get advice in Newcastle" from the Civic Centre or any public Social Services office. Visit the Welfare Rights website at www.newcastle.gov.uk/welfarerights

Carers Week Survey

Every year Carers UK carries out a new piece of research about carers and publishes the results in Carers Week. This year, to highlight the 2006 Carers Week theme 'In sickness and in health', they are surveying carers to find out about their health and wellbeing. The results will be sent to MPs, professionals, opinion-formers and decision-makers; and used to influence and improve the health and quality of life of carers and those they care for.

The survey is running now and Carers UK are asking for as many carers as possible to take part, to help make it a success. They want to hear your views and experiences about how caring has affected your health and wellbeing, as well as your ability to continue caring; what support you have received; and if you have had a health check.

If you would like to take part, contact the Carers Centre for a survey form or complete one online at www.carersweeksurvey.org.uk The form has been designed to take only a few minutes to complete and all information given will be kept confidential. The closing date for the survey is 13 March 2006.

Can Independent Age help you?

Independent Age, previously known as Rukba, helps older people to stay independent in their own homes.

A small additional income of up to £19 per week is provided, together with the friendship of a local volunteer visitor. Independent Age is currently helping around 250 people in the North East and would like to help more.

To qualify for help, applicants must have income and savings within the limits set by Independent Age. Applicants should be over 65 or alternatively, over 40 and permanently unable to work due to illness or disability. Priority is given to those who

have helped others, either in their working or private lives, for example, nurses, carers, teachers, those who have done voluntary work or have perhaps given up their own pension rights in order to look after a sick or elderly relative.

If you'd like to know more about how Independent Age can help you, come along to the March Carers Forum (see page three for details) where Charlotte Loyd from Independent Age will be giving a talk and answering questions. For one-to-one, confidential advice telephone Charlotte on 01434 220544 or Alice Murphy on 020 7605 4245.

Community Equipment

By Wendy Harris, Community Loans Equipment Service, Carers Centre Newcastle

Cuts in the Loan

Equipment/Adaptations budget

Council cuts could dramatically affect how the City's loan equipment service operates. Newcastle Loan Equipment Service offers a wide range of equipment which is free to people, following an assessment of their needs. Waiting lists are down and the Service is proud of its good record on supplying and recycling equipment. However, all of this could change with the proposed cuts. In real terms, over 200 people per month could be denied equipment which is vital to them in order to maintain a safe and independent life. Furthermore, a lack of suitable equipment could put people at risk of falling and lead to more people being admitted to hospital or having to go into care. Anyone wishing to express their concern should write to Councillors Brenda Hindmarsh or Peter Arnold at Members Services, Civic Centre, Newcastle NE99 2BN.

Good news for parents of disabled children

In December 2005, means testing for adaptations came to an end, making it easier for families in private accommodation to access the Disabled Facilities Grant for home alterations and extensions, stairlifts, ramps etc. The maximum grant available is £25,000.

Rollators

I have received a report from one of our carers about a rollator she bought after visiting Lydia Stephenson at the Dene Centre. She's thrilled with it and refers to it as the 'Rolls Royce' of rollators. It folds, has a basket and seat and excellent brakes. "It was pricey but worth every penny" says Rosemary. It is made in Norway by Ecco and is called Topro.

Stairlifts

I have received many recommendations about a stairlift company which provides reconditioned straight lifts for hire at the rate of £390 per year (£195 for six months). This presents an alternative to buying an expensive lift or waiting for the Disabled Facilities Grant. Call me if you would like know more.

Trades Register

Anchor Staying Put has now launched the Trades Register for homeowners aged over 60. This is a list of tradespeople who have been vetted to Anchor's own standards and who have agreed to work to its Code of Conduct. Anchor also offers help, through its Advisory Service, to support people through the process of getting estimates and, or having work carried out; this service costs £25. To find out more, telephone Anchor on 0191 482 8648.

Your Pension – don't miss out!

Home Responsibilities Protection... If you've been looking after someone at any time during the last three years and have not worked or have been on a low income, you may be eligible for more State Pension when you retire. To make sure you don't miss out, you may need to apply for Home Responsibilities Protection (HRP) to help build up your pension entitlement, no matter how far off your retirement is. If you looked after someone at any time during the 2002/2003 tax year, the latest date you can apply for HRP is 5th April 2006. A free Government guide tells you about the State Second Pension, the entitlement conditions and what you need to do. To get your copy telephone The Pension Service on 0845 7 31 32 33.

Pension Credit is a benefit for people age over 60. It is means tested, which means that the amount you are paid is affected by the amount you receive from other income that you get. Pension Credit can be paid in addition to State Retirement Pension. To find out if you might be entitled to Pension Credit telephone the Pension Service on 0800 99 1234.

The Carer Addition... If you receive Pension Credit and also get Carer's Allowance, you should check that your Pension Credit includes the Carer Addition. This is an extra £25.80 a week that is paid to carers in addition to 'basic' Pension Credit. To find out if you qualify, telephone the Pension Service on 0800 99 1234.

Have you have applied for Carer's Allowance but been turned down because you are already receiving another 'overlapping' benefit, for example State Retirement Pension? Well, don't be put off as you will still be recognised as a carer and that means that you may still be able to get the Carer Addition included in your Pension Credit. For more information telephone the national CarersLine on 0808 808 7777.

If you have any comments about the Carers Newsletter or other services provided by Carers Centre Newcastle, or you wish to make a complaint, please contact us (see front page for contact details).



If you have any difficulties reading the Carers Newsletter, please let us know and we will make arrangements to help you with this.