

# Carer's Support

BANCHORY · STONEHAVEN · INVERURIE · ELLON · PETERHEAD · BANFF · WESTHILL



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When mental ill-health strikes, the impact is felt by partners, children, other family members and friends. They may witness acute distress, confusion, erratic behaviour, aggression – and their own feelings towards the loved one whose behaviour has changed may be mixed and hard to manage. Familiar relationships can become much stressed and practical consequences such as low income and debt can flow from inability to work or erratic budgeting. Without warning, people may find themselves thrust into a very different and complex role – that of carer.

This abrupt change can be overwhelming. Carers need help to cope with it – to meet their own needs, while they in turn help the recovery process. MHA can also help.

MHA's support for carers is currently concentrated in Aberdeenshire – but our simple and effective model can be put into practice elsewhere as soon as we secure funding.

The service provides support, practical help, information, advice and training for family members and other carers of people experiencing mental ill-health. Both one-to-one sessions and regular carers' support meetings are offered. The groups encourage and facilitate mutual support from carer to carer – people understand each other's difficulties and draw on their own experiences to help each other to find ways to cope, overcoming the sense of isolation that so many carers feel.

The MHA service for carers has been increasingly in demand throughout the year with a significant increase in people being referred. Recent changes to the benefit system have been a topic of particular interest to the groups and our staff have been able to offer guidance and signposting to carers, assisting them to find their way through the benefits maze.

This year we were able to support an exciting initiative where the Scottish Recovery Network visited Aberdeen to meet with carers, ascertain their views and hear their experiences and suggestions. This was part of a Scotland-wide consultation and will lead to a report due to be published in September 2009. We hope that this will help to bring about practical improvements in the support available to carers and their families.

Shared concerns are channelled to decision makers who have the power to change things and carers are enabled to have their say in the strategic planning arguments that will affect them and those they care for. Newsletters and mail shots keep people who might otherwise be isolated "in the picture".

Carers deserve our support – please help us to help them.

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