

THE RELATIVES & RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION



by Emma Williams

Moving into a care home is not something a lot of us think about. For many our first involvement will be when we, or someone we care about, need support after a crisis and so, very often, going into a care home is rarely planned. Not only is it a distressing time for all those involved, it can be confusing trying to find the right home and understanding the funding system. Even those already living in care homes frequently remain unsure of what level of care to expect or what their, or their relatives', rights are.

There are currently almost half a million older people living in residential and nursing homes in the UK today (*Care Quality Commission, 2010*) and The Relatives & Residents Association (R&RA) is the only national charity dedicated specifically to the welfare of older people in care. The charity also supports their family and friends and speaks up and out on their behalf.

Our Helpline...

R&RA runs a daily Helpline which concentrates entirely on older people living in care homes. Through our helpline, we provide support and information and enable people to make better informed decisions about looking for a home, their rights under guidance and regulations, and the benefits and standards they should expect. Given that the whole process of moving into a care home can be distressing and

disruptive, few wish to repeat the experience, so getting it right the first time is important.

With over half our calls relating to concerns over quality of care, our helpline provides support and information as to how best to challenge and improve the quality of care of their loved ones and often act as brokers between the relative/concerned individual and the care home.

We also act as a listening ear to help support families and individuals at what is often a time of crisis and trauma for them, when it becomes apparent that a partner, parent or friend can no longer live at home.

Sarah rang the helpline in great distress. Her mother, Jean, who had recently been taken ill, needed to move into a care home. However instead of moving Jean to the home her husband lived in, social services were moving her to a care home in a different location. Sarah felt social services were being unhelpful and oblivious to her parents' relationship.

R&RA's helpline worker talked Sarah through various options, bringing to her attention her parents' legal rights and the local authority's discretionary powers. She was encouraged to go back, empowered by her new found knowledge, and re-assert the needs of both her parents.

Sarah rang back, very relieved, to say that her mother was being placed in the same care home as her father.

Campaigning for changes...

Our helpline is key to identifying issues affecting those living in care homes and underpins our campaigns and calls to action. We work in harness with others to help improve service and standards.

We also work to influence policy and practice using evidence

based comments on the case we make, the research and training we carry out and the policies we advocate.

In early 2012 R&RA was involved in the Panorama programme exposing the shocking experience of one woman's inhumane and abusive 'care' in a care home. Subsequently five workers were sacked and one of them, a nurse, was convicted for assault and ill treatment and sentenced to 18 months imprisonment.

R&RA believes a robust regulatory body is crucial to ensuring good quality care and to prevent vulnerable older people being subjected to abuse. R&RA is currently running an e-petition calling for more frequent and thorough inspections, along with an approachable regulator which listens to and acts upon individual complaints about care. You can support it by logging on to the R&RA website and clicking on the 'Our Petition' tab on the homepage.

Find out more about R&RA at our website www.relres.org or for help and advice call our Helpline (Monday to Fridays 9.30am to 4.30pm) on 020 7359 8136 or email on info@relres.org