

Age Concern Hertfordshire

Age Concern Hertfordshire is a major voluntary sector provider of services for older people in the County. Age Concern Hertfordshire and other Age Concerns in Hertfordshire (AC Dacorum, AC Stevenage, AC Hatfield, AC St Albans and AC Bishops Stortford) are independent voluntary sector organisations affiliated to, but not part of, Age Concern England which is a campaigning and policy making organisation.

Age Concern Hertfordshire provides free or low cost services that help maintain the dignity and self-confidence of older people, supporting their independence; all products are designed to meet the needs of the over 50s. They cooperate closely with social services and health services.

Organisational Structure

The head office of Age Concern Hertfordshire is in Welwyn Garden City. Head office administration includes Finance, HR (with centralised volunteer recruitment/co-ordination) and Finance.

There are four area operations, which reflect the Hertfordshire County Council Adult Care Services areas:

- Watford, Three Rivers and Dacorum
- St Albans and Hertsmere
- East Herts and Broxborne
- North Herts, Stevenage and Welwyn Hatfield

There are two operational offices in Watford, one in Vicarage Road and the other in Exchange Road. The Exchange Road office is open to the public between 9.00 a.m. and 2.00 p.m. Monday to Friday.

There are over 100 volunteers helping to deliver ACH services in Watford.

Introduction

In Watford there is one day centre, open four days per week and three 10 to 3 clubs, each operating one day a week.

People in Watford are currently being supported to remain independent, safe and well in their own homes through services delivered by Age Concern Hertfordshire. By providing a range of low cost key support and information services it is intended that people will be able to access the correct level of support for themselves at an appropriate time without seeking greater intervention from statutory services.

Nearly 500 people from Watford called the Countywide Information Line for advice during the last 12 months. Around 100 people are listed on the visiting scheme and telephone club. The Harebreaks Day Centre usually entertains between 35 - 40 people per day and 10 to 3 clubs a further 20 each. There are 209 people currently supported through the Help in the Home scheme and over 100 on the waiting list for this service.

Age Concern Hertfordshire's mission is to promote the well-being of older people and help make later life a fulfilling and enjoyable experience. The organisation works to support people in Watford and throughout the County.

Age Concern Hertfordshire involve older people directly in defining needs, determining priorities and exerting control over the decisions which affect their lives. Services offered by Age Concern in Watford (including Dacorum, and Three Rivers) are:

Information and Advice Services (once included advocacy, but no longer, except in care homes)

This free and confidential service recognises the importance of senior citizens retaining their independence and dignity. Their aim is to clarify situations, explore various options, empower to make the best choice, maximise the income of older people and their carers across Hertfordshire by ensuring they are aware of, and are able to exercise their rights to benefits & services. They provide a totally independent service and are able to provide comprehensive advice on a wide range of benefits, grants and services thus enabling senior citizens to have choice and control in where and how they live, maintain their independence and participate in the life of the local community.

The service supports people through all stages of the claim process, including appeal representation when necessary. Because this is an independent service, it is also able to challenge decisions made by statutory authorities on behalf of senior citizens who may otherwise accept the decision that has been made and is final.

It appears that many thousands of pounds of benefit are unclaimed each year despite countywide publicity and awareness campaigns. Age Concern Hertfordshire also works with other agencies to try and increase benefits take-up and if it is unable to give advice on financial or legal matters it may direct older people to another agency offering the necessary expertise.

Advocacy in Care Homes

A support service for older people living in, or considering residential The service can embrace a range of matters such as queries ("how to do it") about benefit forms (80% cases), writing letters and representing service users. Advocates help to clarify options, provide a voice for residents, arrange support from other agencies and provide information on care home funding.

Home Matters

The aim of this free service is to provide older people throughout Hertfordshire with a service which will enable them to organise and manage their personal finances and other aspects of domestic administration. It is another example of enabling people to remain independent for as long as possible. The most popular requests under this scheme are organising the payment of bills, setting up a bank account, making funeral arrangements, looking at household budgets and helping to organise moving home.

The volunteers occasionally discover other problems, for example money may be missing from the budget every month, in these cases service users are directed to other organisations such as Citizen Advice Bureau or social services.

In Watford 7 volunteers (all properly assessed and with references) go to people's homes and help with home administration, the amount of work involved varies considerably.

Hertfordshire Voice

This scheme is developing across Hertfordshire. It is a network of older people that gives members the opportunity to have their say about local issues and concerns.

Active Ageing Services – 1 Day Centre and 3 x 10 – 3 Clubs

The Harebreaks Day Centre in Harebreaks, North Watford is currently open 4 days a week. The club is under threat of closure, due to lack of funds. There are 3 other smaller clubs called 10 to 3 Clubs (Treebridge House, Garston, Rutland Lodge, Nascot Wood & Swanston House, Watford). The capacity is 40 people per day at Harebreaks and up to 20 per day in each of the others. The criteria to be a member is just to want to come, supervisors do all further arrangements and an assessments. The clubs are popular and oversubscribed.

The social club style of meetings provides an opportunity for members to meet each other as well as volunteers and to discuss problems and gain direct feedback. The meetings help people to combat loneliness and to remain active.

There are currently 176 people in Watford in total who attend the clubs, aged 60+ but the average age is middle 70 and higher.

For people who can not get to one of the centres on their own Age Concern Hertfordshire will provide transport, there are usually 4 buses in the main centre and 2 in the others, these are owned and maintained mainly by Herts. CC.

Hot meals and refreshments are available to buy.

Age Concern Hertfordshire focuses on providing some form of activity for members at their centres, this may be involving people in chair exercise, quizzes and games – to keep their bodies and minds active. Members can also celebrate special events at the centres, listen to speakers on wide range of topics and go on regular outings.

Age Concern Hertfordshire would like to extend the activities they are able to provide, for example to organise computer classes (digital inclusion), Tai Chi exercises, head massage and more outside activities with personal trainer as funds allow.

Independent Living Services

The aim of these services is to support people living at home who need help with various aspects of daily living in order to retain their independence. It is an 'enabling' service rather than direct help.

Enquiries also come from relatives, neighbours and friends of elderly people perceived as in need of support.

Schemes include:

- Visiting Scheme and telephone Club
- Hospital discharge and Independent Living Scheme
- Carers' support and Complementary Therapies
- Help in the Home – a 'paid for' shopping and cleaning service

Visiting Scheme & telephone club

There are two parts to this scheme – visiting at home and telephone club. There are currently 80 volunteers in Watford who visit people living on their own. It seeks to address the problem of isolation which can cause depression and health problems. The aim of the service is to stimulate interests and provide some companionship by reading books to clients, playing board games and generally being friendly. If other problems come to the attention of the volunteer Age Concern Hertfordshire may contact family or friends and inform them. There are about 100 older people in Watford and Three Rivers who receive visits on a weekly bases.

If clients move to a care home there is a waiting list for new clients to take their places. Apart from home visits there are about 50 people who get a telephone call from Age Concern Hertfordshire at the same day and time every week, this number is steadily increasing. Some people are on both the visiting scheme and the telephone scheme.

Hospital Discharge and Independent Living

This service covers people newly discharged from hospital usually referred by hospital social workers. During a 6 to 8 week programme volunteers generally provide active and emotional support to clients, do some shopping and give help with cooking. This helps to get people back on their feet.

Carers Support and Complementary Therapies

Supports Carers over 55 by providing advice and information; emotional support and social activities.

Help in the Home

This is a 'paid for' service available in Watford, Three Rivers, parts of Dacorum and Hertsmere Borough Council areas, it helps older people do housework tasks that they find difficult.

The Home Helper visits every week for 1.5 or 2 hours, depending on the need, the customers is charged £13 per hour for this service. There are 209 customers using this service at this moment and further 120 people on a waiting list.

FiftyMatters

Fiftymatters is a free magazine produced by Age Concern Hertfordshire and has proved very popular. It provides the independent platform for all services to be promoted regardless of the provider, whilst providing a highly professional yet personal approach.

The magazine provides a useful communication link about a wide range of information, putting people in touch with contact numbers and services they might need. The magazine also allows older people to provide articles themselves.

The emphasis is on the positive benefits of accessing services for individuals across Hertfordshire.

Funded through advertising, 20,000 copies are usually produced. The magazine is circulated throughout Hertfordshire, through libraries, leisure centres, GP surgeries, garden centres, ACH clubs and services and other suitable outlets.

Funding & Funding Issues

Age Concern Hertfordshire is funded by a service level agreement with Hertfordshire County Council, Lottery & Comic Relief grants, and by its own fund raising activities. There is a marketing section which promotes and sells products through a trading operation and there is some income from charges made to clients. Other fund raising activities are under consideration.

There is a lack of service provision in some areas caused by financial constraints; demand for Age Concern Hertfordshire services exceeds available funding. There is no budget for wider advertisement to let older people know about the activities and services of Age Concern Hertfordshire.