

We have developed an ethos that ensures that carers feel cared for emotionally and practically, giving them the opportunity to shape activities to meet their needs. The Hospice role has been interpreted narrowly, caring for the dying, mostly cancer patients, in the community. We needed to create strong professional relationships with a wide range of voluntary services as well with the County carers support services and with the NHS. We also recognised that many carers as well as hospice staff were unaware of the support available from libraries, education, housing services, the Red Cross, and particularly Citizens Advice Bureau. Using a range of methods we have built relationships with these and other bodies.

The group has been continuously monitored and reviewed by an internal management group and by a steering group including external stakeholders with relevant perspectives. This is an invaluable source of information as well as providing an informed critique of the group's activities.

Over time, using publicity, attending and setting up local activities and taking part in training, the Carers Group has become recognised as specialising in the support of end of life caring but a significant part of carers support locally. As those relationships have developed Carers Group members are receiving an improved service not only from the Carers Group itself but also through accessing many other available services.

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DEVELOPING SUPPORT FOR CARERS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COMMUNITY

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We started a Carers Group 4 years ago with a grant from Help the Hospices and quickly realised that we needed to develop a perspective of all the other services that are, or should be, available in the local community.

We developed the activities of the Carers Group in parallel with developing our relationships with voluntary and statutory organisations. Those organisations were also becoming more aware of the needs of carers, committing themselves to a County wide carers Strategy.