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A Carer is someone, who, without payment, provides regular and substantial help and support to a partner, child, relative, friend or neighbour, who could not manage without their help.

Editorial

I would like to wish you all a happy new year from the staff at Carers Centre Tower Hamlets. Again, 2009 looks as though it will be another eventful year as carers strive to get the recognition they deserve.

As you will probably know, there is a Carers Protest planned for 2009 to campaign for an increase in the Carers Allowance and greater attention from the government to the needs of carers considering the massive savings that carers make for the government. If it was not for the army of carers that you are part of, so many people would not have the quality of care that they receive from their loved ones and the bank balance of the government would look even worse.

I am confident that in 2009, the Carers Centre will be at the forefront of seeking a better deal for carers.

Best wishes,

Neil

Tower Hamlets Carers Centre provides advice, information and support services to all Carers in the borough. Services include:

- ◆ Carers Support Service
- ◆ Counselling & Psychotherapy
- ◆ Social Activities
- ◆ Complementary Therapies
- ◆ Carers Forum
- ◆ Over To You men's group
- ◆ Welfare Benefits Service
- ◆ Care-Plus Project
- ◆ Mental Health Carers Support
- ◆ Bengali Carers Support
- ◆ Support Groups
- ◆ Access to trust funds & bursaries
- ◆ Vocational support & training
- ◆ Young Carers Project
- ◆ Basic Computer Training
- ◆ Quarterly Newsletter
- ◆ Relaxation Days
- ◆ Internet Access & use of computers

Please contact the Carers Centre if you would like more information on any of our services

Services for Working Carers

Carers in employment and unable to use our services during office hours are now able to book appointments for benefits advice, carer support or a therapy.

On the second Wednesday of every month, a Benefits Adviser, a therapist and a Carer Support worker will be available from 5.30 to 7.30pm to see carers by appointment only.

Please note that **this is not** a drop-in session so if you haven't booked an appointment, then we'll be unable to help you and you will then need to make an appointment to attend another evening session.

If you are interested in this service please contact a member of staff on **020 7790 1765**.



One-Off Carers Direct Payments

So far, we have sent in 72 applications and they were all successful. The One-Off Direct Payments have been used for a wide range of things such as short break, leisure cards, fridges, cookers, driving lessons and pampering sessions. It has given us great pleasure to see Carers get the benefit of these payments.

Due to the popularity and high take up of this benefit, we have not always been able to process all of the applications as quickly as we would have liked but the Carers Centre team have been working hard along with our colleagues in the Direct Payments Team in Tower Hamlets to get the payments out as quickly as possible.

At the moment, Young Carers are not eligible for One-Off Carers Direct Payments but we will let you know if the situation changes.

Please contact the Carers Centre team if you would like us to assess your eligibility for a One-Off Carers Direct Payment and we will make an application for you. Remember that if you have already received this, you cannot be considered for another payment until next year.

■ Changes to Incapacity Benefit and Income Support

From 27th October 2008 a new benefit, **Employment Support Allowance** (ESA) replaced Incapacity Benefit and Income Support paid on grounds of incapacity for new claimants. All existing Incapacity Benefit claimants will be transferred to Employment Support Allowance between 2009 and 2013.

Employment and Support Allowance comprises of an entitlement paid at basic Jobseekers Allowance rate, with two additional tiers:

- **Work related activity component:** paid to those considered to be fit to work.
- **Support Component:** paid to those considered unable to engage with work-related activities.

From 24th November 2008, lone parents with older children making a new or repeat claim for benefit will no longer be entitled to Income Support only on the grounds of being a lone parent. These changes will be introduced in 3 phases and will affect:

Lone parents making new or repeat claims with:

- a youngest child aged 12 or over from 24 November 2008;
- a youngest child aged 10 or over from 26 October 2009; and
- a youngest child aged 7 or over from 25 October 2010.

Existing lone parents' Income Support which will cease by:

- December 2009 for lone parents with a youngest child aged 12 or over;
- September 2010 for lone parents with a youngest child aged 10 or over;
- April 2011 for lone parents with a youngest child aged 7 or over.

These changes will not affect carers, please note that you are a carer only *if you are getting Carers Allowance or carer's premium* (additional amount of money on other means-tested benefits). The following are practical things you can do:

- If you receive a letter from the Jobcentre asking to attend an interview, tell the Personal Adviser that you are a full-time carer and not required to carry out any work-related activity.
- If you are not getting Carers Allowance but the person you look after is in receipt of either higher or middle rate of the care component of Disability Living Allowance or gets Attendance Allowance, you should claim Carers Allowance.
- If your caring role is about to change or end, then the changes might affect you. For more information please contact our Welfare Benefits Advisor, Abdul Abdullahi.

■ Benefits Take-Up Campaign – Your Rights for Carers & Older People

The “Your Rights” campaign is being run for the first time in early 2009; it is intended to be annual thereafter. It is a local poster campaign across London with central messages on benefit take-up and the campaign is timed for January 2009 to address people's low finances after Christmas, extra heating costs in winter, council tax bills being sent out.

This campaign is being partnered by the Citizens Advice Bureau London, Energy Savings Trust, Age Concern London, Princess Royal Trust for Carers and Greater London Authority Teams working in Social Inclusion.

It will cover issues on benefit take up for carers:

- Getting information and support when you need it
- Claiming Carers Allowance (CA) if you care for 35 hours a week or more
- Access to confidential advice on benefits
- Access to wider practical and emotional local support

The campaign is focused on the following areas:

- Are you a carer? Do you look after someone?
- Do you know what benefits you're entitled to?
- Claiming Carers Allowance can provide extra carer's income on other benefits you receive eg Council Tax Benefit, Pension Credit.
- Thousands of pounds go unclaimed by carers in benefits, amounting to millions in London
- Do you know what other support is available for carers?

If you have any queries, please contact the Carers Centre.



■ Carers Protest “Enough Is Enough!”

As you may be aware, a Protest March will be held on Wednesday 22nd April 2009 in London, Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast to campaign for a decent, non-means tested personal income for all carers and quality and affordable respite care which is a concern that is shared by a huge number of carers.

The aims of the demonstrations are:

- 1 Carer Poverty
- 2 Affordable and accessible respite care
- 3 To fight against Carers being put onto Jobseekers Allowance
- 4 Students to be able to claim Carers Allowance while studying

The London Protest and Rally will be held in Old Palace Yard between 11am and 2.30pm on Wednesday 22nd April 2009. Banners may be carried unfurled along the pavements only.

The protest is a grassroots, carers-led event which has been organised by some of the online carers' forums who have set up a shared blog to discuss it at:

<http://carerspovertyprotest.myfreeforum.org/index.php?component=indexpage>

Keep Wednesday 22nd April 2009 free in your diaries if you would like to take part in this protest as we need as many people to participate to show the government the strength of feeling among carers in this country.

Carers UK printed an interview with 2 members of the Carers Poverty Protest committee in their November Carers magazine:

“Keeping Up The Pressure and Enough is enough!”

This is the message coming through from carers who are organising a nationwide protest on 22nd April 2009. A group of carers have started the ‘Carers Poverty Protest’ group. The group are appealing to Carers UK members to get on board and help organise and support the protest.

Christine Steel and Tony Dennis are two of the organizers. Christine cares for her husband and Tony is a carer for his wife. We spoke to them about their plans.

1 What are you protesting about?

Tony: the protest is about carer poverty and the ridiculously low level of Carers Allowance. Carers need to be paid a non means tested benefit for the work we do.

Christine: we also want to high-light the lack of affordable, reliable and appropriate respite that is currently patchy due to the government cut backs.

2 What do you want to achieve?

Christine: hopefully both of the above will be increased to acceptable levels! But we also want to raise public awareness of how much we save them, as tax payers, what we have to go through in our daily lives and the fact that we are not scroungers.

Tony: we are trying to rebuild the carer movement as a force to be recognised. We want the public and the media to see how anybody could become a carer in a matter of seconds and how we are abused by the government and left to live in poverty. A fair wage for a fair day's work.

3 How can carers get involved?

Tony: carers who want to get involved should contact us. We have information on our website

<http://carerspovertyprotest.myfreeforum.org/index.php>

They can also make contact by e-mailing carerspovertyprotest@googlemail.com or people without computer access can write to:

Mr. A. Dennis at 1 Glenview Backbarrow, Ulverston, Cumbria, LA12 8PL
or ring me on **015395 31757**

Christine: information has also gone out to all the carer centres so you can also contact your local carer centre to find out what they are organising for the protest. The protest is being orchestrated by carers for carers, so that we can, all together, show our concerns and our voices. It is time for the ‘unsung’ heroes to be sung about!



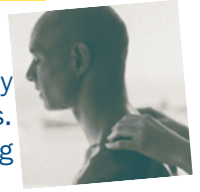
The Disabled Living Foundation



They provide free, impartial advice about all types of disability equipment and mobility products for older and disabled people, their carers and families. You will find more information on their website www.dlf.org.uk or you can call them on 0845 130 9177.

Volunteer Shiatsu Therapist for carers of Children with Disabilities

A shiatsu therapist is volunteering her services to carers of Children with Disabilities each Friday afternoon. Please note that this service is only available to carers of Children with Disabilities. If you are a carer of a disabled child, please contact Layla or Sofina if you are interested in having a therapy session.



London Buddhist Centre - Breathing Space Drop-In

Breathing Space is a relaxation and stress reduction drop-in for carers.

A chance to relax and enjoy the company of other carers.

11.30am - 12.45pm every
Tuesday.

No need to book – just drop in.

Held at the **London Buddhist Centre, 51 Roman Road, Bethnal Green, E2 0HU.**

(Nearest tube Bethnal Green – look for the old fire station on the corner of Globe Road and Roman Road)



Welcome Back Layla

We are pleased to welcome back Layla Wood who will be returning from maternity leave to her post as Carers Support/Sessional Breaks Worker on 13th January.



Relaxation Day & Additional Therapies

There have been instances where carers have used therapies as a way of treating their medical conditions. Therapies are designed to relieve stress caused by the caring role and they are not there to fix aches & pains and other medical conditions. If you have aches & pains or another medical condition, you need to consult your GP.

Diary Dates

Relaxation Days

Thursdays, 29th January, 26th February, 26th March 10am – 3pm

Additional Therapy Sessions & Working Carer Sessions

Wednesdays, 14th January, 11th February, 11th March 10am – 7pm

Carers Craft Group – all welcome

Mondays Mondays, 12th January, 26th January, 9th February, 23rd February, 9th March, 23rd March 10:30am – 12:30pm

Carers Forum

Tuesday, 13th January & 14th April 1.30 – 3pm

Former Carers Coffee Morning

Thursdays 10:00am – 12:00pm

Mens Group

Weekly – Wednesdays 1.30 – 3pm

Mental Health Carers Forum

10th March 11am – 1pm

Basic Computer Skills

Weekly – Fridays 10.30am–12.00 noon
Basic computer training provided covering the basics – using e-mail, Internet & basic Word for writing letters

