

Cambridgeshire Innovation Project

Problem

In Cambridgeshire, a learning gap was identified among social care and health professionals who have limited confidence in having conversations with carers during palliative care. This creates a gap in support, both for carers themselves, and in empowering them to support the person they are caring for.

Innovation

To address this, Cambridgeshire proposed to produce learning content to develop a consistent approach across health and care systems, empowering professionals to facilitate meaningful and supportive conversations to aid unpaid carers. The training aims to increase practitioner skills, knowledge and confidence when dealing with difficult and distressing situations, ensuring that care is more holistic.

*"Through this training we are **raising skill, knowledge and confidence so [practitioners] are better able to support unpaid family carers.***

"We know that carers first and foremost need to be recognised, and then offered support for themselves. As what we hear time and time again is that all the focus is on the patient, understandably – and yet our care must be holistic. We need to work with carers and loved ones to support them, so they can carry on being somebody's wife, daughter, husband, brother."

Sharon Allen, Chief Executive Officer, Arthur Rank Hospice

*"What today did was bring those two languages together, it was almost like a translation. It really felt like that bridge was crossed, and in the room **you could see health and social care coming together.**"*

Becka Avery, Head of Wellbeing and Community Support at Sue Ryder Thorpe Hall Hospice



Project overview

A strong partnership existed between Cambridgeshire County Council and Arthur Rank Hospice Charity, who are a key community health partner for the local authority and integrated care system. This includes a dedicated Palliative Social Worker employed by the Council being seconded to work with the charity. It was this individual who identified the need for and led on designing the training. The proposal was endorsed by senior representatives throughout the council and the charity, including the Service Director for Adult Social Care.

The training supports practitioners to be more competent and confident in their approach, with more consistent record-keeping. This will help with wider governance, identification and support needs for carers, and ensure support is more informed, compassionate, and proactive throughout.

Training has been designed for both face-to-face sessions and e-learning, that will include videos, podcasts and periodic updates with case studies to ensure continuous learning. The partnership will then market the online resource to other local authorities and integrated care system areas for national scaling.

Learning from this project is being shared with system partners including Sue Ryder Thorpe Hall Hospice and the wider voluntary sector. Training is being adapted for various audiences, including care providers. The e-learning modules will also form part of grassroot training for newly qualified social workers from Anglia Ruskin University.

Key project activity

- Early-stage feedback from practitioners and hospice staff through 'huddles', particularly focused on terminology
- Initial pilot sessions with relevant stakeholders and audiences to help shape course design
- Five face-to-face training sessions delivered between October 2024 – March 2025, with over 120 attendees
- Surveys with training attendees to capture impact data
- E-learning materials to be finalised and launched by June
- Communications and marketing plan to support the e-learning launch, working towards the goal of national scaling
- Training passport and professional development guide to be developed, which will include a repository of key resources and signposting
- Training to be further tailored for voluntary sector and providers



Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) support

SCIE's involvement has included feedback to shape training content, following participation in a pilot session, as well as capturing promotional content via film and stakeholder interviews.

Cambridgeshire are involved with two of SCIE's peer-to-peer learning Communities of Practice, where they have gained insights on smart and sensitive ways in which carer identification can be increased through the hospital admission / discharge process and into developing sustainable and effective digital self-care solutions.

SCIE will continue to work with Cambridgeshire to support the seamless transition to e-learning format, including feedback on content, packaging, and supporting with national marketing to various audiences.

"Given the critical role SCIE has played in supporting our work so far, it will be great if this partnership can continue ... Your continued involvement will provide the stability and expertise needed to maximise the impact of this initiative and ensure that we achieve our shared goal of improving support for carers and those they care for."

Kulvinder Kaur, Transition Programme Manager, Cambridgeshire County Council

Emerging learnings and insights

This project is one of the more advanced, presenting a valuable opportunity to capture insights.

Emerging learnings include:

- Addressing unmet needs increases project value and relevance
- Collaborative approaches that bridge health, care and voluntary, community and social enterprise create a wider benefit
- Pilot sessions are useful for feedback and refinement
- Buy-in from senior leadership enables project success
- Digital solutions allow for scalability
- Ringfenced funding makes room for innovation

"What the [ARF] did was offer us an opportunity to work out of our typical systems, where there may be more restrictions to being innovative, and because of that we have been able to develop this fantastic training opportunity that we hope will reach far and wide."

Kirstin Clarke, Service Director for Adult Social Care, Cambridgeshire County Council



Emerging impact

Survey data from attendees is yet to be fully captured, however impact is already demonstrable, with 100% of attendees at the November 2024 workshop agreeing that they would recommend the training to colleagues.

For unpaid carers, this project will lead to a more compassionate and prepared workforce, where social care practitioners are confident in supporting them during difficult periods. While yet to be measured, there is also potential for increased carer identification through proper recording practices for conversations being established and covered in training materials.

*"I would **encourage all commissioners** to look at how this particular scheme is working and consider ways of doing something similar elsewhere... That's the benefit of innovations, we can do small amounts and then grow gradually."*

Gurdev Singh, Head of Services (Commissioning) Contracts, Cambridgeshire County Council

*"It's great that our practitioners have had the opportunity to come and reflect on that experience and hear some stories and case studies, and a real refresher on how we can take forward some of those changes in practice. I think **the training has a real opportunity to be scaled up and rolled out nationally** so we can support our practitioners to have conversations with people to support [who they care for] towards the end of their life, so that they can have a dignified death."*

Fran Marshall, Principal Social Worker, Cambridgeshire

