

Putting the Home into Care Home.

Howard Matthew reports on the progress of Advocacy Aware and comes up with some pleasant surprises.

The Advocacy Aware Project is now well underway and already making an impact on our three pilot projects: The Brooklands (Bakewell) The Hawthorns (Buxton) and Pendlebury Court (Glossop)

In October we brought together staff from our pilots along with the Older People's Advocacy Project co-ordinators and volunteers to meet each other together for the first time

It is all too common to find that, as an Advocate, you are called on to visit a care home to resolve a problem . This may be to do with the service provided by that home, and even if it is not the impression you get is often of neglected residents, indifferent staff and a decaying and often dirty environment.

Advocacy Aware aims to give a voice to residents in care homes and helps protect their rights so they can enjoy a safe and dignified life. For this reason we thought it was important when selecting our pilot projects they should be good care homes which understood and supported our aims.

Now we had selected three it was time to see if we had made the right choices.

Our training session, facilitated by Peter, was a more getting to know you occasion but it soon became clear that we had identified some common elements - probably the most important ones. What came across clearly about our pilots was that they

demonstrated two important indicators of a successful care home. Firstly the passion and commitment of the managers for the residents needs - this included a genuine understanding of the principles of advocacy. Secondly the fact that they were able to motivate their staff by their own example.

During the training session one of the care home workers brought out a really important point. The discussion centred on why should residents should have say in their care. She said (though not exactly in these words) "This is her **Home** -so why shouldn't she have a say to what happens in her own **Home**" Talking to staff and volunteers later everyone remembered that phrase - and it got me thinking.

We call ourselves "Friends with a Purpose" if we really see ourselves as friends then we have to gain the trust and friendship of our partners, as we would any other friendship. To be welcome in their Home we have to follow the spirit of Citizen Advocacy and get to know people properly.

When we first visited the pilot care homes some of the volunteers asked me 'how do we introduce ourselves - how do we approach people when they don't know us and haven't brought a problem to us?' My suggestion was just get to know them by having a chat, on a regular basis so you get to know more about them. If you are going to be a "friend with a purpose" do the friend bit first - purpose second. The problem we have had in the past we are called in for a purpose and the friendship bit often gets lost along the way.

'So', I am asked " what if someone doesn't want to talk to me" "That's fine", I say," remember you are there by invitation - It is their Home !"

