

Family Rooms for young carers visiting relatives using inpatient mental health services



What is the initiative?

Mersey Care NHS Trust and Barnardo's Family Rooms

Who runs it?

Mersey Care NHS Trust in partnership with Barnardo's Keeping the Family in Mind (KFIM)

Who does it benefit?

Mersey Care NHS Trust service users and their family members aged under 18. Mersey Care NHS Trust provides specialist mental health, learning disability and substance misuse services in Merseyside.

Mersey Care NHS Trust runs this service in partnership with Barnardo's Keeping the Family in Mind (KFIM) – a project to engage young carers in the delivery of services for families affected by mental health issues. This is part of the Barnardo's Action with Young Carers (AWYC) service in Liverpool.

What does it do?

Family Rooms provide a safe, comfortable and homely environment for children, young people and their families when they visit a family member staying in a specialist mental health, learning disability or substance misuse service. The Family rooms have all been designed with young carers to make sure they are in an environment which is a home away from home.

When did it start?

2001.

Why was it started?

The Family Rooms initiative came about as a result of a groundbreaking partnership between Barnardo's and Mersey Care NHS Trust. Barnardo's KFIM, works to ensure

that the voices of young carers and young people affected by parental mental ill health are listened to and acted upon by service providers and commissioners.

A major concern for young carers was the lack of private, supportive and child-appropriate spaces for family visits, which meant that young people had to visit their parents or other family members who were receiving in-patient treatment in psychiatric or substance misuse units, on busy and often distressing wards. The Trust managers understood these concerns and together with young carers and supported by Barnardo's KFIM, they designed England's first Family Room in psychiatric services.

What are the aims and objectives?

- To provide a high quality, modern and therapeutic mental health environment.
- To provide a safe and comfortable environment for young carers to visit their family members when in hospital.
- To maintain family links during hospitalization.
- To involve young carers in the design of services.
- To promote more family focused services.

How is it funded?

Mersey Care NHS Trust funds the Family Rooms. Each unit funds their Family Room from their capital costs budget. Many of the units have been able to convert existing lounge areas. In new builds, a Family Room is provided as an integral part of the building and is financed from the unit's core monies.

What has it achieved?

“You need to have privacy, and going on those wards is pretty scary, you need time together, and just getting a little space away can make all the difference when so much is happening. You know your mum is ill but she is still your mum and just being with her really helped me and her too.”

Young carer

“Having a Family Room was to me like having medication; it helped me to get well. The Family Room was situated outside of the ward which meant they did not see any other sick patients when visiting. I believe the Family Room is vital to families with children and plays a huge part of the recovery process for the patient who is detained in hospital.”

Parent

Family Rooms in Mersey Care NHS Trust services have received an overwhelmingly positive response from young carers, service users, family members and staff. An environment which makes visiting safer and less stressful for both young people and families is seen as an essential part of helping families stay in contact and this can have a positive impact on mental health recovery.

An evaluation by Barnardo's and Save the Children of the original Family Room in 2004 found that it had helped bring in a more family-focused approach in Mersey Care NHS Trust. Staff more readily recognised the importance of service users' parenting role and reported greater confidence in undertaking proactive work with families.

The Family Rooms project also won an NHS Centre for Involvement Impact Award in 2007 for working with patients and the public as equal partners. Since this award, the pace of expansion across the Trust accelerated: from four to 16 Family Rooms in just five years.

How have carers been involved in planning and delivering this work?

Through Barnardo's KFIM, young carers have been greatly involved in the design, promotion and evaluation of the Family Rooms. Young carers helped select the room to be converted into the Family Room and the décor, furniture, facilities and toys.

The standards expected of Family Rooms and the evaluation criteria were drawn up by young carers and the Jelly Baby Logo, designed by a young carer, is the kite mark awarded by young carers to Family Rooms which have met their standards.

Young carers have also helped design information leaflets to promote the rooms and a training programme for Mersey Care NHS Trust inpatient staff, as well as co-facilitating workshops with Barnardo's KFIM to disseminate the Family Rooms initiative.

How is the initiative run?

Family Rooms are provided by Mersey Care NHS Trust. Barnardo's acts as a critical friend and ensures that the views of young carers are heard and acted upon.

There are 16 Family Rooms located at Mersey Care NHS Trust specialist mental health, learning disability and substance misuse inpatient services. Family Rooms are available to all families with children under the age of 18 who have a family member who is an inpatient of a Mersey Care NHS Trust service.

Young carers and their families are made aware of the Family Room facilities by posters and staff on the ward. The rooms are available every day and with hours outside of traditional visiting times. A room booking system is in place, although staff are accommodating and do recognise there may be exceptional circumstances which take precedence over pre-booked visits.

From the outset, Family Rooms have been provided with the involvement of users. The idea of the rooms and their design came from young carers, as facilitated by the Barnardo's KFIM project, and young carers continue to be actively involved in promoting and steering the direction of the Family Rooms initiative. Young carers are consulted for their opinion by Mersey Care NHS Trust and when they participate in forums or answer surveys they are reimbursed for their time and expenses in the form of gift vouchers.

Young carers have drawn up information leaflets for each of the Family Rooms, ten key messages for mental health professionals about young carers, and have helped produce the Barnardo's and Mersey Care NHS Trust Keeping the Family in Mind resource pack. This is a guide for those working with parents with mental health problems and their families. It includes the DVD Telling It Like It Is which explains

the family approach from the point of view of young carers and offers creative solutions for involving children and young people. The pack is now part of the Trust's mandatory safeguarding training and has helped embed the Think Family ethos among staff.

A Trust-wide steering group called Think Family meets quarterly and evaluates the provision of Family Rooms. A standing agenda item of the Think Family steering group ensures that the Clinical Business Units of Mersey Care NHS Trust share operational feedback of the Family Rooms, including any issues brought up by service users and other staff from community mental health services.

The Think Family Steering Group has also conducted two larger scale reviews of the Family Rooms services – one in 2011 of provision in local services, and another in 2012 of provision in secure mental health services. These **Reviews** involved the evaluation of Family Rooms by young carers, staff, service users and family members. The views of young carers were gathered using a survey designed by young carers supported by Barnardo's AWYC. This survey was also used as a guide to develop the questionnaire for service users, family members and staff. Issues of concern to young carers, service users and staff, such as ensuring that there is always a leaflet available about each of the Family Rooms and that there is clear signage to the Family Rooms, have then been acted upon.

What methods have been particularly effective?

User involvement and the fact that the initiative was driven from the bottom up has been a key factor in the project's success. The Family Rooms meet the needs of young carers because they have been very involved in their design and implementation.

Family Rooms have helped bring about more family-focused professional practice among staff and have cemented the Think Family ethos into the Trust's approach. When staff have seen the benefits of a Family Room the Think Family approach becomes less abstract. It is now something that is championed by staff at the ward level and a more family-focused approach is taken to care planning and young carers assessments.

That the initiative is fully co-owned between a mental health trust and a voluntary organisation representing young people has been instrumental to the success of the project, along with recognition by the NHS Centre for Involvement.

Have there been any challenges along the way?

In 2001 there was some hostility to the initiative as children and young carers were not considered the index patient for staff on acute wards. However, since the initiative has not had heavy resource implications and has generated plenty of praise from service users and their families, hearts and minds have been won over more easily than had been envisaged.

Other challenges have been practical ones concerning space and privacy. The need for the Family Room to be away from the ward and not used for any other purpose had been highlighted by young carers as critical. This was challenging for units with limited space, but these units have arrived at solutions in consultation with the young carers. For instance, the location of a Family Room in one of the units does involve walking through the ward to access it, but as this area of the ward is not busy this has been agreed upon by the young carers as the most appropriate solution.

Privacy was of the utmost importance for young carers and the Trust has ensured that only one family at a time uses the room by implementing a booking system. This has worked well for families, and staff can be flexible when needed.

What hints and tips might help me get started?

NHS trusts looking to develop a similar service are encouraged to develop strong partnerships with their local young carers services and ensure that young carers drive the agenda forward. The successful development of the Mersey Care Family Rooms has been underpinned by the involvement of families, particularly young carers.

Trusts should ensure that their policy and procedure for visits by children is in line with the practice they wish to implement.

Are there any useful documents or resources that could assist me?

View the Family Rooms Reviews and a case study video on the **Mersey Care NHS Trust Think Family webpages**.

Guidance and resources on whole family approaches for parental mental health and child welfare can be found on the **SCIE website**.

The Keeping the Family In Mind resource pack, created by Barnardo's and Mersey Care NHS Trust with the input of young carers, can be ordered from the **Barnardo's website**.

Where can I get further information?

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