**H’s Story**

H has been accessing Care for Carers (C4C) services for over 7 years now. The first time she visited our office she appeared extremely nervous, she didn’t make eye contact with anyone and spoke very quietly. We were concerned about the way in which we could support her, as it was clear that she had worked up the courage to visit the service in the first place showing that she wanted/needed support. A mental health support worker was able to offer her one to one support to build a relationship with our staff and services.

H continued to attend events at Care for Carers and very slowly she began to speak with staff members. Staff were then able to offer to meet her regularly for one to one emotional support meetings. She attended every planned meeting and began to open up. She had been caring for her mother who has dementia for many years. H’s mum went into long term care, the transition for H was very traumatic; she found it very difficult to cope living on her own and no longer providing care for her mum. She felt very guilty that she could no longer care for her mum; she was constantly worried about the care her mum was receiving within the care home. H had some issues with other family members visiting her mother at the care home. The family were estranged and there was often conflict if they met each other. H asked if a member of Care for Carers staff would come to a multi-disciplinary team meeting with her as she felt intimidated with the other family members being there and she would be on her own. H also has mild learning difficulties and isn’t confident, especially around professionals, people she doesn’t know and the family members that would be attending this particular meeting. A member of staff accompanied H to the meeting and staff observed the tension between the family members and in particular how they dismissed H. H had told C4C staff that no other family member had helped her care for her mum; she suspected they had a different agenda i.e her mum’s finances. H was very upset after the meeting and thanked the staff for attending with her, she said she wouldn’t have been able to go on her own and she was worried about what the other family members would have said to the Care Home staff regarding her mum’s care.

One to one meetings with H were often very emotional during this time; H said she wasn’t sure how she would have coped without this support. After her mother passed away, H was devastated. We met with her once a week, we also provided telephone support. H has a family member with drug and alcohol misuse issues who she has continued to provide support to even while her mother was ill. Since her mother’s death she has struggled with this other caring demand.

Overtime we were able to encourage H to begin to attend some of our daybreaks where she could meet other carers and feel less isolated. We also referred her to the Caire Project and their befriending project to support her with the carers loneliness and isolation she was experiencing. She also began attending our Portobello Support Group. Again she was quiet at first but the other carers showed her warmth and understanding which helped her to open up and engage with the other group members. The group also encouraged H to apply for a Stepping Out residential break place, they told her about their experience of the weekends.

H attended her first Stepping Out weekend, she was extremely anxious and nervous about the trip. Staff were aware of how nervous H was so made sure that she was supported, included and well informed about the itinerary of the weekend, who the staff were and the layout of the building to reduce her anxieties. Staff observed a huge difference in H over the weekend, from being very quiet and reserved, by the end of the weekend she was speaking and engaging with other carers and appeared more confident and less nervous.

Staff referred H to Link Up Women’s project to reduce the loneliness experienced by H now she was no longer a carer. H made friends with other women at the group.

H then began to help her daughter to care for her grand-daughter who has down’s syndrome. She continues to support the family member with drug and alcohol problems but is more able to control her contact with that person. H now has a number of different caring roles.

H has attended more Stepping Out residential weekends, C4C daybreaks and C4C Open day events. At the last weekend she attended staff observed the difference in H is very profound. Over the last couple of years she has changed her appearance, she volunteers with various charities, and she attends several classes including Indian dance (she first experienced Indian Dance at a workshop at a Stepping Out weekend). H attended every one of these classes and has been a regular to their classes for over 2 years now! She is also going to Yoga classes and it is clear she is taking care of herself. At the last Stepping Out weekend she made 4 new friends and they have all continued to meet each other twice a week.

H is now a happy, confident woman. The journey she has experienced has been long and hard. It has been an absolute privilege and joy to watch this carer grow.