

About with Friends

About with Friends

Inspection report

Unit 22D
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Ratings

Overall rating for this service	Good ●
Is the service safe?	Good ●
Is the service effective?	Good ●
Is the service caring?	Good ●
Is the service responsive?	Outstanding ☆
Is the service well-led?	Good ●

Summary of findings

Overall summary

About the service

About with Friends is a charitable organisation that offers support, activities, guidance, and care to younger adults with a learning disability and/or younger autistic people. At the time of our inspection there were 125 people using the service however only 5 were receiving support with personal care in their own homes. CQC only inspects where people receive personal care. This is help with tasks related to personal hygiene and eating. Where they do, we also consider any wider social care provided.

People's experience of using this service and what we found

We expect health and social care providers to guarantee people with a learning disability and autistic people respect, equality, dignity, choices and independence and good access to local communities that most people take for granted. 'Right support, right care, right culture' is the guidance CQC follows to make assessments and judgements about services supporting people with a learning disability and autistic people and providers must have regard to it.

Right Support

The service's values focused on people being supported to achieve their potential through dedicated and individualised care that met their needs; this was demonstrated throughout this performance review and assessment. People were included in all decisions about their care, and we saw many examples of where the service's support had helped people achieve better independence and wellbeing. People were supported to have maximum choice and control of their lives and staff supported them in the least restrictive way possible and in their best interests; the policies and systems in the service supported this practice.

Right Care

People told us the service people received was exceptionally person-centred and achieved positive outcomes that met their needs. The service was forward-thinking, proactive, and dedicated with a focus on assisting people to be fully engaged members of their local community. Staff were kind, caring, motivational and supportive. People's dignity was maintained, and they were supported to be who they wanted to be. Feedback was sought from people and this was listened to and acted upon.

Right Culture

The management team were described as supportive, nurturing, and accessible. They and the trustees had a good oversight of the service and systems were in place to monitor the quality of it to aid improvement and sustainability. The registered manager responded positively to the few minor shortfalls identified as part of this performance review and assessment and understood their regulatory responsibilities. Staff told us they worked well together as a team and felt valued. People said they would recommend the service due to its person-centred approach and the skills, values, and abilities of its staff.

For more details, please see the full report which is on the CQC website at www.cqc.org.uk

Rating at last inspection and update

The last rating for this service was good (report published on 03 September 2017).

Why we inspected

This inspection was prompted by a review of the information we held about this service.

Recommendations

We have made a recommendation about the use of 'as required' (PRN) medicines.

Follow up

We will continue to monitor information we receive about the service, which will help inform when we next inspect.

The five questions we ask about services and what we found

We always ask the following five questions of services.

Is the service safe?

Good ●

The service was safe.

Details are in our safe findings below.

Is the service effective?

Good ●

The service was effective.

Details are in our effective findings below.

Is the service caring?

Good ●

The service was caring.

Details are in our caring findings below.

Is the service responsive?

Outstanding ☆

The service was exceptionally responsive.

Details are in our responsive findings below.

Is the service well-led?

Good ●

The service was well-led.

Details are in our well-led findings below.

About with Friends

Detailed findings

Background to this inspection

The inspection

We carried out this performance review and assessment under Section 46 of the Health and Social Care Act 2008 (the Act). We checked whether the provider was meeting the legal requirements of the regulations associated with the Act and looked at the quality of the service to provide a rating.

Unlike our standard approach to assessing performance, we did not physically visit the office of the location. This is a new approach we have introduced to reviewing and assessing performance of some care at home providers. Instead of visiting the office location we use technology such as electronic file sharing and video or phone calls to engage with people using the service and staff.

Inspection team

The inspection was carried out by one inspector and an Expert by Experience. An Expert by Experience is a person who has personal experience of using or caring for someone who uses this type of care service.

Service and service type

This service is a domiciliary care agency. It provides personal care to people living in their own houses and flats.

Registered Manager

This provider is required to have a registered manager to oversee the delivery of regulated activities at this location. A registered manager is a person who has registered with the Care Quality Commission to manage the service. Registered managers and providers are legally responsible for how the service is run, for the quality and safety of the care provided and compliance with regulations.

At the time of our inspection there was a registered manager in post.

Notice of inspection

We gave the service 4 days' notice of our performance review and assessment. This was because we intended to use remote technology to undertake the assessment and needed to ensure the provider was able to facilitate this type of assessment. This included uploading documents into a secure portal and

facilitating calls, and providing support, to people who used the service to enable them to speak with us. The provider also facilitated calls to relatives, staff, and professionals.

Inspection activity started on 22 September 2023 and ended on 06 October 2023.

What we did before the inspection

We reviewed information we had received about the service since the last inspection. We sought feedback from the local authority. We used the information the provider sent us in the provider information return (PIR). This is information providers are required to send us annually with key information about their service, what they do well, and improvements they plan to make. We used all this information to plan our inspection.

During the inspection

We spoke with 2 people who used the service, 5 relatives and 1 professional. We spoke with 6 staff including the registered manager, HR manager, a trustee for the organisation and support workers. Written feedback was received from an additional 7 staff and 3 professionals. We assessed the care plans, associated records, and medicine administration record (MAR) charts for 2 people. Several governance records were also assessed including staff recruitment records for 3 staff, quality assurance audits, training and supervision records, policies, and procedures.

This performance review and assessment was carried out without a visit to the location's office. We used telephone calls and emails to enable us to engage with people using the service, their relatives, professionals, and staff, and electronic file sharing to enable us to review documentation. Performance review and assessment activity started on 22 September 2023 and concluded on 06 October 2023 when feedback was given to the registered manager and nominated individual.

Is the service safe?

Our findings

Safe – this means we looked for evidence that people were protected from abuse and avoidable harm.

At our last inspection we rated this key question good. The rating for this key question has remained good. This meant people were safe and protected from avoidable harm.

Using medicines safely

- People received their medicines as prescribed and safely.
- Staff had received training in administering and handling medicines and their competency to do so regularly assessed. Regular medicine audits were completed to assist in mitigating the risk of medicines errors or misuse.
- There were detailed medication administration record (MAR) charts in place to ensure people received their medicines as prescribed including where medicines were administered via a PEG (a type of feeding tube which is inserted through the skin of the abdomen into the stomach).
- However, whilst MAR charts contained detailed information for staff in relation to 'when required' or 'PRN' medicines, no dedicated protocols were in place as per best practice guidance. This had not led to any errors or negatively impacted people however the provider needs to consider implementing 'PRN' protocols to fully mitigate the risk of errors or misuse.
- The provider had a current and up to date medicines policy in place however this could be improved by referring to current best practice guidance.

We recommend the provider consider current guidance in relation to the management and administration of 'PRN' medicines and their own medicines policies and procedures.

Systems and processes to safeguard people from the risk of abuse

- The people who used the service told us they felt safe from abuse and improper treatment, and we saw that systems were in place to mitigate the risks associated with this.
- One person who used the service told us, "I feel safe with them all [staff]. They encourage me to be independent. I feel the staff follow my rules and not me their rules." A relative said, "I am very protective of [relative's name] and I am completely comfortable with them being with staff."
- Staff had received training in safeguarding and were able to explain what action they would take should they have any concerns, including reporting inside the organisation and externally.
- We saw that safeguarding was an agenda item at every staff meeting and that staff had easy and quick access to an electronic form where they could report any safeguarding concerns; an immediate alert was then sent to the registered manager for action.

Assessing risk, safety monitoring and management

- The risks to people had been identified, recorded, mitigated, and managed. People told us they felt safe whilst using the service and their relatives, and the professionals we spoke with, agreed.
- The relative of one person who uses the service and experiences seizures told us, 'Staff can cope with the

seizures. A risk assessment was done, and I am completely happy with [relative's] safety."

- Records demonstrated that risks had been identified, recorded, and reviewed. Staff were able to tell us how they managed these risks and relatives told us they had confidence in staff's abilities to manage risks.

Staffing and recruitment

- Staff had been safely recruited and people told us they consistently saw the same small group of staff. People told us staff stayed for the allocated time and had the skills, experience, and abilities to meet their needs.
- The people who used the service told us they knew in advance who would be supporting them and when. One person said, "Staff come when they say. If they are going to be late, they will phone. The staff rota works well. I have pictures of new staff on it so I can recognise them."
- Some of the people who used the service were included in the recruitment of potential staff. One person who assisted with this told us, "I am on the interview panel for About with Friends. I interview new staff and ask them questions. I feel included. "
- Potential staff had been assessed for good character to ensure they were appropriate to provide support to vulnerable people. This included seeking references from previous employers and the completion of Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks. DBS checks provide information including details about convictions and cautions held on the Police National Computer. The information helps employers make safer recruitment decisions.

Preventing and controlling infection

- The provider had policies, procedures, and systems in place to manage infection prevention and control (IPC) including in the event of infectious outbreaks.
- Staff told us they had access to personal protective equipment (PPE) and IPC training as required. One staff member told us how well a case of an infectious disease was managed by the provider and staff. They said, "We had a lot of support and had access to everything we needed."
- One relative told us they had no concerns in relation to IPC and how staff managed this. They told us staff wore PPE as required.
- An IPC champion was in place, amongst others, and we saw that meetings had taken place for champions to meet and discuss good practice. IPC audits were also completed on a regular basis.

Learning lessons when things go wrong

- The registered manager told us they used reflective practice to help improve the service and we saw from meeting minutes that any incidents were discussed.
- Whilst few incidents had occurred at the service, we saw a log was in place to record any adverse incidents including actions and outcomes. These were analysed to identify any trends and patterns.

Is the service effective?

Our findings

Effective – this means we looked for evidence that people's care, treatment, and support achieved good outcomes and promoted a good quality of life, based on best available evidence.

At our last inspection we rated this key question good. The rating for this key question has remained good. This meant people's outcomes were consistently good, and people's feedback confirmed this.

Ensuring consent to care and treatment in line with law and guidance

The Mental Capacity Act 2005 (MCA) provides a legal framework for making particular decisions on behalf of people who may lack the mental capacity to do so for themselves. The MCA requires that, as far as possible, people make their own decisions and are helped to do so when needed. When they lack mental capacity to take particular decisions, any made on their behalf must be in their best interests and as least restrictive as possible.

People can only be deprived of their liberty to receive care and treatment when this is in their best interests and legally authorised under the MCA. When people receive care and treatment in their own homes an application must be made to the Court of Protection for them to authorise people to be deprived of their liberty. We checked whether the service was working within the principles of the MCA.

- People told us staff consulted them in decisions and staff were able to explain to us how they did this. The relatives we spoke with agreed staff were good at encouraging and supporting people with making choices and decision-making.
- Whilst the service was meeting the MCA in practice, records did not always demonstrate this. For example, relatives had signed consent forms for their family members who used the service yet there was no evidence to show whether their family member's capacity to make these decisions themselves had been assessed.

We recommend the provider consider current guidance and legislation in relation to the MCA.

- There were no Court of Protection authorisations in place at the time of this performance review and assessment.

Assessing people's needs and choices; delivering care in line with standards, guidance and the law

- People told us the service met their needs in an individualised and holistic manner, considering their physical, emotional, spiritual, and social needs.
- One person who used the service told us about the many aspects of their life the staff supported them with and the positive impact this had on them. This included in relation to improving their life skills, independence, confidence, and awareness of sexual relationships.
- One relative told us how the staff supported their family member to be all they wanted to be in relation to the different roles they had such as a daughter, aunt, sister, and friend. The relative described this as a 'sense of belonging' for their family member. They concluded, "The service is a very holistic one."
- The care plans we viewed demonstrated this holistic and person-centred approach and we saw that guidance and best practice was considered throughout.

Staff support: induction, training, skills, and experience

- People told us they had confidence in the staff's skills and abilities to meet people's needs. One relative described staff as, "Brilliant" whilst another said, "I'm very confident in whichever staff member walks through the door."
- Staff had received inductions, training, competency assessments, supervisions, and ongoing support to ensure they could effectively perform their roles. Records demonstrated this.
- Staff confirmed they had received the training and support they needed to meet people's needs. One staff member told us how they shared the training they had received with the people they supported to help them improve their skills. For example, when preparing meals with people they supported, they shared knowledge around health and safety and safe food storage.

Supporting people to eat and drink enough to maintain a balanced diet

- Staff supported people to eat healthy balanced diets by providing support with meal planning, shopping, and meal preparation.
- For one person, staff had supported them to achieve and sustain a healthy weight through attending classes and planning meals with them. The person said about the class, "I like it. I feel like I am learning. The lady who teaches me shows me meals and food that is good for me, and the staff help me."
- One relative told us, "Staff are really good. They help with the menus and try and keep it healthy."
- Care plans demonstrated people's nutritional and hydration needs had been considered on an individual basis and gave staff good information on what support they needed to provide.

Staff working with other agencies to provide consistent, effective, timely care; Supporting people to live healthier lives, access healthcare services and support

- We received feedback from several professionals that demonstrated the service worked in collaboration with them to ensure people received not only continuity of care that met their needs but actively developed their skills.
- One professional told us the service offered, "Outcome-focused opportunities" for people and told us that for one person they worked with, they no longer needed the service of About with Friends due to the improvement in the person's daily living skills. They told us the support the service had provided had contributed to the person's ability to lead an independent life.
- Another professional told us that the service was, "Very enthusiastic and determined" to work with them to improve the skills of people who used the service. The professional said, "There is a strong commitment at About with Friends to helping people to gain as much independence as possible and to develop their skills."

Is the service caring?

Our findings

Caring – this means we looked for evidence that the service involved people and treated them with compassion, kindness, dignity, and respect.

At our last inspection we rated this key question good. The rating for this key question has remained good. This meant people were supported and treated with dignity and respect; and involved as partners in their care.

Ensuring people are well treated and supported; respecting equality and diversity

- All the people we spoke with talked positively about the staff employed by About with Friends. They described them as kind, caring, professional, motivated, and proactive. They told us the service had a person-centred approach that worked with people as individuals. We saw staff had received training in equality and diversity to support this approach.
- One relative told us, "About with Friends lead from the heart. They are conscious of a person having a good time and getting the most out of their time together (with staff)."
- One professional we spoke with told us, "Throughout all my interactions with the staff at About with Friends, they have always been very professional, approachable, and friendly. The service genuinely cares about their service users and respects their needs and wishes."

Supporting people to express their views and be involved in making decisions about their care

- People were fully involved in planning the support they received, and the service placed them at the heart of decision-making.
- One relative told us, "Staff picked up on [family member's] needs and communication methods quickly and this is very important to them for their sense of belonging. Staff help [family member] with their skills and this is really important for their self-esteem; staff have made [family member] feel involved."
- Care plans demonstrated that people had been involved in care planning and staff confirmed this through feedback and discussions.

Respecting and promoting people's privacy, dignity, and independence

- People consistently told us that one of the service's strengths was their ability to promote people's independence. People told us staff were respectful and we saw through care plans and speaking with people that privacy and dignity was considered and maintained.
- One relative told us of the positive outcome achieved by their family member through the support of the service. They said, "[Family member's name] quality of life has improved along with their independence. They will never be able to live independently but with staff support, they now have initiative."
- Another relative explained the impact staff's support had on their family member's dignity by completing care tasks in a discreet manner. They told us how important this was to them and their family member.

Is the service responsive?

Our findings

Responsive – this means we looked for evidence that the service met people's needs.

At our last inspection we rated this key question good. At this inspection the rating has changed to outstanding. This meant services tailored to meet the needs of individuals and delivered to ensure flexibility, choice, and continuity of care.

Planning personalised care to ensure people have choice and control and to meet their needs and preferences

- People told us needs were met in an especially individualised manner and that they were in control of the support they received. They told us this was achieved by being consistently supported by staff with outstanding skills; staff who were intuitive, proactive, and innovative.
- Staff worked across a number of services managed by the provider meaning people received consistent care and support from staff that knew them exceptionally well in each setting; this resulted in people receiving a coherent and harmonious service. For example, people received personal care from the same staff member that then supported them with their day activities.
- The service's values of supporting and encouraging growth in people's knowledge, ability, and skill by providing person-centred support was demonstrated throughout this performance review and assessment. We saw many examples of this being achieved. The examples showed us that the service adapted their approach to meet people's specific needs and, together with maintaining constant dialogue with people and their families and the close monitoring of the service, this achieved outstanding results for people.
- For one person, the impact the service had had on their life was momentous. With staff support, the person had gone from having significant mental health issues requiring hospitalisation to living an independent and fulfilling life. The service had achieved this by supporting the person to be involved in projects that had improved their confidence and, as a result, their skills and ability to live an autonomous life.
- The service had adapted the days and times they provided support to a person in order to research and attend classes to improve their cognitive skills. This had resulted in an improvement in the person's daily living skills which had contributed to their quality of life and ability to live independently. The person said, "This has been one of the best things I have done."
- One relative said, "About with Friends take the individual very seriously. They are aware of how [family member] deals with a situation and they adapt their support and approach accordingly to manage their expectations. They work with them to keep them calm."
- Another relative told us how the service engaged with the whole family to meet their family member's needs. They told us, "Family is acknowledged as it's a big part of [family member's] life and that's really appreciated. They go over and beyond and support all of us."
- One professional said, "In my opinion, About with Friends offer a more modern, forward-thinking approach to services for adults with a learning disability. I feel what I most like about them as a service, is that they truly see the individual, and do their utmost to provide a service that not only recognises their care and support needs, but that really focuses on achievable outcomes and future plans also."
- Care plans were exceptionally person-centred allowing the person to shine through. Daily notes showed

that care and support was being delivered as planned and included people's wishes, goals, interests, family, and hobbies. People were leading fulfilled lives with the support of About with Friends.

Meeting people's communication needs

Since 2016 all organisations that provide publicly funded adult social care are legally required to follow the Accessible Information Standard. The Accessible Information Standard tells organisations what they have to do to help ensure people with a disability or sensory loss, and in some circumstances, their carers, get information in a way they can understand it. It also says that people should get the support they need in relation to communication.

- People's communication needs were considered in every aspect of the service meaning they were fully engaged and involved. People told us this and records demonstrated this.
- For some people who required it, rotas were in pictorial formats showing photographs of the staff who were due to support them. We saw that other information, such as the complaints policy and safeguarding information, were in easy-read formats.
- The service also provided face to face awareness sessions for the people who used the service. For example, at the time of this performance review and assessment, the service was delivering a course on sexual awareness.
- From the care plans we saw, and from the feedback we received, we saw that people's communication needs were considered and met.

Supporting people to develop and maintain relationships to avoid social isolation; support to follow interests and to take part in activities that are socially and culturally relevant to them

- For all the people who used the domiciliary care aspect of the service, we saw that staff supported them to meet their social needs and to be involved in their local community. This included supporting people to be part of their extended families.
- One person who used the service told us about the many and varied activities and hobbies staff supported them with, including activities which improved their quality of life, health, and wellbeing.
- One relative told us the steps the service had taken to make an activity that their family member had shown an interest in, happen. They said, "Staff went out of their way for us. They advocated for [family member] with the local authority regarding the lack of this type of activity for people with complex needs. They found out about local classes and spoke with the teacher for us. We now go to the class, and this is all down to the staff. Staff knew it was important to us as a family – amazing support."
- For another person who loved music, staff had arranged tickets for, and supported them to attend, concerts. One staff member said of the person, "Their face lit up. I feel that not only did they achieve something but also it improved their quality of life and left them with lasting memories."

Improving care quality in response to complaints or concerns

- The service had received few complaints however policies were in place to address this as required including in an easy-read format for those people who used the service.
- People told us that the service was exceptionally responsive to any concerns they may have and that they felt listened to. This mitigated the risk of formal complaints and explained why so few had been raised with the service.
- One relative told us they were satisfied in how the service had managed some concerns they raised. They said, "About with Friends listened and tried to resolve the problem."
- People told us they knew how to raise concerns and would feel comfortable in doing so, including professionals one of which said, "I would feel comfortable raising concerns about this service, and feel that anything highlighted to About with Friends, would be actioned in a timely and appropriate manner."
- The service kept a log of any concerns or complaints raised and this allowed identification of any trends or

patterns to improve the service.

Is the service well-led?

Our findings

Well-led – this means we looked for evidence that service leadership, management and governance assured high-quality, person-centred care; supported learning and innovation; and promoted an open, fair culture.

At our last inspection we rated this key question good. The rating for this key question has remained good. This meant the service was consistently managed and well-led. Leaders and the culture they created promoted high-quality, person-centred care.

Managers and staff being clear about their roles, and understanding quality performance, risks, and regulatory requirements; Continuous learning and improving care

- We identified a few minor shortfalls during this performance review and assessment that the registered manager responded positively to. For example, improvements were needed in documenting adherence to the MCA and records in relation to PRN medicines. These shortfalls had not, however, negatively impacted on the service people received.
- Systems were in place to monitor the service people received to continue to make improvements and ensure the quality standard remained consistently high. This included auditing such aspects of the service as medicines administration, care planning and delivery, and staff competency.
- The registered manager understood their regulatory responsibilities however whilst the correct action had been taken to safeguard people, they had failed to report one incident to CQC as required. This was discussed as part of this performance review and assessment and the registered manager has provided assurances in relation to this minor shortfall.

Promoting a positive culture that is person-centred, open, inclusive, and empowering, which achieves good outcomes for people

- People's quality of life was being improved by the support they received from About with Friends. The service was achieving positive outcomes for people who were fully engaged and involved in the care and support they received.
- People told us the culture of the service was positive, encouraging and nurturing. The people who used the service, and their relatives, told us they felt included and listened to.
- Staff spoke of feeling valued, listened to, and supported by management and each other. One staff member said, "From my first initial interview the service has been wonderful, staff morale is brilliant, and we all support each other."
- Professionals agreed that the service had an open and flexible approach and was achieving clear and positive outcomes for people. One professional told us of the impact the service had had on one person they worked with. They said, "The service has been quite fundamentally important for this person's quality of life. They would often talk excitedly to me about the work they are doing with About with Friends."

How the provider understands and acts on the duty of candour, which is their legal responsibility to be open and honest with people when something goes wrong

- People spoke about a progressive service that was open to suggestions and transparent in its operation. Whilst few incidents had occurred where things had gone wrong, people had confidence and trust in the

service meaning should incidents occur, they felt these would be managed appropriately and safely.

- The registered manager understood their responsibilities under the duty of candour requirement and told us they had an open door policy and worked openly and honestly.

Engaging and involving people using the service, the public and staff, fully considering their equality characteristics; Working in partnership with others

- Throughout this performance review and assessment people consistently told us they felt engaged, involved, listened to, and treated as individuals.
- The service used different methods to seek feedback from people. This included formal surveys, care plan reviews and meetings. However, people told us they did not need formal methods to provide feedback as they were regularly engaged with the service meaning this was an ongoing process.
- All the professionals we spoke with talked positively about the service. They told us they worked well with them as professionals and ensured their focus remained on the people who used the service and the outcomes they wished to achieve.
- People told us they would recommend the service. One relative said, "I have never come across a seamless service before. We have fought for one and now we have one. I thought it didn't exist. We feel so fortunate."