

# Guide To Engaging a Homecare Agency.



## *Where To Go and What To Ask...*

For many people, trying to find the right support to help within the home happens at the time of a crisis. Illness or injury is often the catalyst when individuals realise they do need to get some help to maintain their independence at home.

Recent research published by 'Putting People First' shows that people really don't know how to set about finding a homecare agency that will meet their needs. The report states;

*“Initial approaches to providers are often made by adult children or other relatives, and they don't know what it is they are looking for beyond a general idea that they need some help.” and “Major life changing decisions were often made on the basis of little information; people had little idea about where to seek such advice or information.”*

As part of a national charity Crossroads Care Wessex are often asked for this kind of advice and have produced a helpful guide and checklist for people who are looking to engage personal homecare.

## **Where To Start?**

Before you begin to look for an agency, spend a bit of time considering what you want. You need to be sure that you will get a high quality service with trained staff who can definitely provide the exact care that you need. Be very specific about your requirements and make some notes so that you are clear about what you are asking for.

What kind of support do you think you will need? This varies, of course, from person to person and you will find many agencies have their own particular strengths and weaknesses. Try to think ahead and consider how your care needs may develop over time and whether the agency in question will be able to cope with your needs long term.

**Crossroads Care Wessex** group homecare services under specific headings to make it easier to identify the different tasks.

### **Personal Needs:**

Help with dressing, washing, toileting needs, eating and drinking, companionship etc.

### **Around The House:**

Cooking, cleaning, laundry etc.

### **Out and About:**

Shopping, collecting prescriptions, assisted trips for appointments or leisure etc.

Is it occasional support or regular visits that you are looking for? When do you require the help? Will you need weekends and bank holidays?

### **Where To Start Looking...**

Homecare agencies often advertise their services in the local papers and telephone directories. Alternatively, contact Bath and North East Somerset Council on 01225 396000 and ask to be sent their Care Home Guide which also includes, on page 56, a section on Homecare.

Any agency delivering care at home must be registered by the Care Quality Commission and you can contact them on 03000 616161 or go to [www.cqc.org.uk/registered-services-directory/rsquicksearch.asp](http://www.cqc.org.uk/registered-services-directory/rsquicksearch.asp) to check the latest quality rating of the agencies listed in your area.

This will provide a good starting point and should enable you to produce a shortlist of two or three homecare agencies to talk to about your needs. The following list will help you to decide if the agency is right for you or not. If they are unable or reluctant to answer your questions, it may be you are talking to the wrong person. Ask if there is someone who would be able to give you the answers and request that they call you back. Do not feel pressured into agreeing to a home visit until you have all the information that you need in advance.

## **12 Questions To Help You Judge The Quality of A Homecare Agency**

- 1) Are all of your care workers interviewed by you? Do you follow up references and carry out criminal records checks? Do you check staff against the Protection of Vulnerable Adults register?
- 2) What training do new staff receive before they start working and can I see a copy of your training guidelines?
- 3) How are your care workers supervised to ensure that they are doing what we have agreed to an acceptable standard?
- 4) Will I have the same care worker wherever possible? What happens if they are on holiday or off sick?
- 5) Is there a written code of conduct for staff and, if so, may I see it?
- 6) Do you have a confidentiality procedure that sets out how my personal details will be kept secure?
- 7) Do you have a formal complaints procedure?
- 8) Do you have full professional and employer's liability insurance and can I see confirmation of it?
- 9) What are your rates? Many agencies charge half hourly and hourly and have different rates for different times of the day, weekend rates etc. Make sure that this is explained clearly to you. Also check if there are any extras like travelling and parking expenses and ask if there is an admin fee and if so, is it a one off charge or ongoing?
- 10) Are you contactable at all times when you are providing care for me even if it is out of office hours?
- 11) When were you last inspected by the Care Quality Commission and what was the outcome of that?
- 12) Am I able to talk to any of your existing clients who may be in a similar position to me?

## **Make a note of the responses that you had and consider the following:**

- **Were the staff helpful and friendly?**
- **Did they tell you exactly what services they provide?**
- **Did they explain their costs and charges properly?**
- **Were they happy to let you contact existing clients?**
- **Did they ask many questions about you and what your needs are ?**
- **Were they able to answer all your questions?**

If you are not entirely happy with the answers or were unable to get all of the information that you wanted, do go back to them and try again. Most agencies provide a high quality professional service. If someone seems unwilling to provide the answers that you want, you may wish to consider why.

We hope that this guide has been useful for you. Please remember to include Crossroads Care Wessex on your list of agencies as we are confident that we provide one of the best services available in the area.

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