

Carers are urged to seek help



A CARER has urged people to swallow their pride and seek help as the pandemic makes looking after their loved ones even more difficult.

OLIVE Hobson had high praise for Durham County Carers Support, a charity with offices in Spennymoor and Darlington, which helps around 22,000 people who look after someone informally at home.

Its chief executive Jenni Wood said she was concerned that referrals had dropped since the pandemic took hold and Mrs Hobson urged people to get in touch with the organisation for help in accessing a range of support, from practical matters to benefits.

“They have been an absolute God send,” said Mrs Hobson, of Newton Hall, who looks after her husband Dereck who was diagnosed with cancer three years ago.

“I’d gone through life never asking for help and have worked all my life without a day off sick or having to claim benefits. But when it’s your husband you just do it not realising you can need professional help.

“At times it all becomes too much and it grinds you down. Then I came across a leaflet about Durham County Carers Support and gave them a ring.

“The carer support coordinator Carole Gibson has been amazing. I was trying to decorate during lockdown and having a terrible time. I couldn’t get rid of the rubbish and I needed my garden sorting. I asked Carole and it was all sorted, in fact, whatever I need gets attended to.

“Often I don’t want to talk to friends when I’m down or worry my family and I can pick up the phone any time to Carole and she is such a good listener. She has also helped me apply for carers’ allowances, get discounts on my carpets and access Macmillan nurses services. There are so many practicalities they help with but it’s also so nice to know that people care.”

Jenni said lockdown had seen a drop in referrals at a time when it was estimated that an additional 4.5 million people nationally had taken on caring responsibilities since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“People don’t see themselves as carers, they are just husbands, wives, children, siblings, looking after their family,” she said. “Carers tend to put themselves last and can end up with no energy left to help the people they are caring for.

“There is so much help available out there but if you don’t know what it is then how can you look for it.”

Durham County Carers Support receives around 250 referrals a month via word of mouth, social and health services, charities and voluntary organisations, providing a one stop shop for their needs.

“There are no criteria to meet, there is no stigma attached, just help in many forms, whether that is practical, financial



Chief Executive Jenni Wood

or moral support,” said Jenni. “When I first started this job most people seeking help were over 65, now it is anyone from 18 to their 90s with around a third in work trying to juggle caring with their jobs – and this percentage is rising. We are living longer and having to wait longer for our pensions. People could be still looking after their children and their parents and are living complex difficult lives. We are there to help in any way we can and we know we can make a massive difference to people who are really struggling.”

Carers UK will mark Carers Rights Day on Thursday, November 26, with a host of activities staged nationwide.

Carers UK Head of Policy Ruby Peacock said: “The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted every aspect of caring, affecting carers’ access to support and services, their finances, and their physical and mental health.

“Last year more than 400 carers’ support groups, carers’ organisations, local authorities, GP surgeries, hospitals, businesses and others got involved reaching thousands of carers with information, support and advice. With help we can reach even more.”

For more information on Durham County Carers Support visit www.dccarers.org or phone Durham: 0300 005 1213 or Darlington: 0300 030 1215.