

My Views Matter: Decoy Farm & Barn care home Browston



Healthwatch Norfolk visited Decoy Farm on 22/11/2022 to see and hear how people experience care there.

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Who we are and what we do

Healthwatch Norfolk is the independent voice for patients and service users in the county. We gather people's views of health and social care services in the county and make sure they are heard by the people in charge.

The people who fund and provide services have to listen to you, through us. So, whether you share a good or bad experience with us, your views can help make changes to how services are designed and delivered in Norfolk.

Our work covers all areas of health and social care. This includes GP surgeries, hospitals, dentists, care homes, pharmacies, opticians and more.

We also give out information about the health and care services available in Norfolk and direct people to someone who can help.

At Healthwatch Norfolk we have five main objectives:

1. Gather your views and experiences (good and bad)
2. Pay particular attention to underrepresented groups
3. Show how we contribute to making services better
4. Contribute to better sign posting of services
5. Work with national organisations to help create better services

We make sure we have lots of ways to collect feedback from people who use Norfolk's health and social care services. This means that everyone has the same chance to be heard.

Introduction

Enter and View

Part of Healthwatch Norfolk's work programme is to carry out Enter and View visits to health and social care services, to see and hear how people experience care. The visits are carried out by our authorised representatives. We can make recommendations or suggest ideas where we see areas for improvement.

The Health and Social Care Act allows local Healthwatch authorised representatives to observe service delivery and talk to service users, their families and carers on premises such as hospitals, residential homes, GP practices, dental surgeries, optometrists and pharmacies.

Enter and View visits can happen if people tell us there is a problem with a service. Equally they can occur when services have a good reputation, so we can learn about and share examples of what they do well from the perspective of people who experience the service first hand.

Healthwatch Enter and Views are not intended to specifically identify safeguarding issues. However, if safeguarding concerns arise during a visit, they are reported in accordance with Healthwatch safeguarding policies.

My Views Matter

From September 2022 – March 2023, our Enter and View visits will be part of a project called 'My Views Matter'. This project is specifically focused on residential and in-patient care for people with learning disabilities and autistic people in Norfolk. We are implementing this project in response to the tragic events at Cawston Park, in which three residents with learning disabilities died between 2018 and 2020. One of the key findings from the Safeguarding Adults Review was that residents and their families were not being listened to.

My Views Matter will involve visiting around 20 residential homes across Norfolk to find out what people with learning disabilities and autistic people, and their families, want from their residential care. It will also investigate whether residents' and their families' views are being taken into account in how care is delivered. The 20 homes have been selected to provide a representative sample of homes in different areas of the county, different Care Quality Commission (CQC) ratings, different sizes of home, and different sizes of provider chain. These are all aspects which professionals have told us affect the ability of homes to deliver personalized care effectively.

Alongside the Enter and View visits to homes, we are also interviewing family members and professionals in the sector and organizing focus groups with care home residents outside their homes. The project is being implemented with the assistance of About with Friends, NANSAs (Norfolk and Norwich SEND Association) and Opening Doors.

A final report from this project, which will report on data from across the county, will be published in May 2023.

How we gathered people's views on this care home

We visited Decoy Farm on 22/11/2022, and the visit was announced in advance, in order to minimise disruption to the residents. We spent around two hours talking to residents and staff, and observing life in the home on that afternoon, and examining the building and its facilities. Shortly after the visit, we interviewed the family member of one resident about their relative's care. In total, we spoke to two of the nine residents, and spoke to five staff, including the manager.

The visit team was:



Daniel Norgrove –
Community
Development
Officer



John Spall –
Enter and View
Co-ordinator



Lisa Franks –
Project Officer

About Decoy Farm

Decoy Farm is a residential care home, split between three different buildings, set in extensive grounds in the village of Browston. There were nine people living at the home when we visited, with one vacancy. This service looks after autistic people and people with learning disabilities, and particularly specialises in caring for people with a history of distressed behaviour. Decoy Farm is part of the Kingsley Specialist Services group which runs five homes across the east of England.

The most recent CQC inspection was carried out in August 2022, and the home was rated as 'Requires Improvement'. The provider had asked for a review of some aspects of this report and was still awaiting the outcome of this review at the time of writing.

Summary

During this Enter and View visit we focused on what residents thought about their care, and the degree to which they were being listened to by the home staff. We considered the following themes, with the following findings:

- Voice choice and personalisation: People at Decoy Farm had ample chance to have their views heard through monthly residents' meetings, as well as through regular one-to-one consultation between staff and residents. The family member we spoke to was very happy with how staff responded to their requests.
- Premises: The premises were undergoing extensive renovations when we visited, and will provide excellent facilities once this work is complete. We also saw that people's bedrooms were well personalised, and there are plans to personalise communal spaces further. The home also provides new facilities in response to residents' requests.
- Activities: The relatively high level of one-to-one support provided for people allowed them to go on regular outings of their choice. There was also a good range of activities to choose from inside the home, which people talked about enthusiastically.
- Relationships and community: There was a real feeling of togetherness when we visited, and the home's efforts to support this through their staffing arrangements seemed to have paid off. Some residents seemed to have close friendships with one another, and staff helped them to spend time with their families. People also made regular outings into the local community.
- Food and health: The people we spoke to both said that they liked the food at Decoy Farm, and they were regularly consulted about what they wanted to eat. They were offered healthy options, and were encouraged to exercise regularly.
- Relations with the broader health and social care system: After a difficult period for the home due to a high staff turnover, good relations are being re-established with NCC and the CQC. Staff reported some concerns to us about the extent of specialised expertise amongst some inspection staff, and questioned some of the CQC's rules on the registration of new residential services for people with learning disabilities and autistic people.

Overall, Decoy Farm seems to be an important service providing specialised care that can help to keep people with distressed behaviour out of secure units sustainably. After a period of instability due to high staff turnover, the service now seems to be re-establishing some stability and to be delivering responsive and personalised care in a pleasant and well-equipped setting.

Findings

Voice, choice and personalisation

More detail on the ways that the home takes people's views into account in specific areas are detailed in the sections below. In this section, we give some more general detail about how residents and their families were supported to take control of their care and their home.

Mechanisms for ensuring residents' voices were heard and responded to

As in most of the services we have visited, there is a house meeting at Decoy Farm once a month to discuss things like activities, renovations, and any concerns that people might have. Not all of the residents are able to speak, so their key workers will also have input into the meeting, letting everyone know what they believe their resident might think about any proposals, and any changes that they would like to see implemented. People were consulted on a weekly basis about the food they would like to eat (including the Christmas meal), and the activities that they would like to do.

In other services we have visited, we have found that good ongoing communication between staff and residents is just as important as more formal mechanisms for gathering people's views. As detailed in the section below on relations between staff and residents, there seemed to be very good relations between staff and people living in the service, and staff seemed to understand people's preferences and needs well, and to respond to them. We also saw evidence during our visit that staff members allowed residents to make their own choices, even if they disagreed with them.

People in the service were also encouraged to broaden their horizons and develop more independence. For example, one person, who had lost some of their confidence during the pandemic, was being encouraged to start going on holiday again. They had successfully been for a short trip and were very proud to have done so, and their relative considered this success as testament to the strong relationships carers had developed with this person.

One way that people can start to have more control over their lives in residential care is by getting involved in the running of their home. At Decoy Farm, we saw examples of people being encouraged to do this: some residents liked to help out with the cooking, and one person enjoyed typing up the week's menu once

it had been agreed, and printing it out to put on the wall.

Responsiveness to family members



I always felt that I was accepted by the staff
and I was trusted by the staff



- Relative

The family member we spoke to was very happy with how the home communicated with them and how their relative was being cared for. This person has quite complex needs and can be challenging to care for. Their family member reflected that, given the circumstances, "where he is now is the best situation I can envisage. It isn't perfect. Nothing's perfect. But [my relative] calls it home and sends me home, and that tells me that [they are] happy there."

As mentioned in the section below on relations between staff and residents, there has recently been a problem with the turnover of staff, and especially with turnover of managers. This family member told us that this led to some difficulty in communication with staff. However, the current manager has been in place since January 2022, the staffing has become more stable, and this family member was now satisfied with the situation.

They told us that staff respected them and took their feedback seriously, and would give a good reason if did not act on it: "I always felt that I was accepted by the staff and I was trusted by the staff ... if I felt something wasn't right, I would raise the issue, and the issue would be addressed. And if I was wrong, then they'd tell me so, and I'd say, 'Well, sorry. I never thought about that.'"

Premises

Decoy Farm is set in attractive grounds in the small village of Browston, near Great Yarmouth. It consists of four main buildings: the main house, an annex, one self-contained flat in its own building, and another self-contained flat in a building which also contains a jacuzzi room, and a sensory room, which is under construction. There is also an activity shed and a large greenhouse in the grounds.

We were given a tour of the site by two of the people who live there. The main entrance to the home is from a rural lane with no pavement. It has a low wooden security gate leading to the car park, which contains both staff cars and the vehicles of seven of the nine residents, who have these provided as part of their care package. The main building is a former farm house built around the 19th century, and four people were living there, with one spare bedroom. There were renovations underway in this building, with the construction of a conservatory, intended to act as a quiet room, and a lift being added, to go up to the first floor. As a result, it was difficult for us to judge what the house will be like in normal times, but it did seem homely rather than institutional, with tasteful and modern décor throughout. The building was clean, tidy and well-maintained, and was in good repair. It has a dining room, a kitchen and a lounge on the ground floor. The living room is spacious with lots of seating and a large television. On the back wall of the room was a finger painting of the Union Jack that residents had completed, and there were plans to use this wall to display people's artwork once the renovations are complete. There are French windows from this room leading out into a pleasant garden with a well-maintained lawn, a trampoline and football goals.

There is a steep and narrow staircase leading up to the first floor, which would not be suitable for people with mobility problems. This makes the installation of the lift particularly welcome. On the first floor we were shown the spare room, and a resident invited us to see their room. All of the rooms except one have ensuite bathrooms, and there is also a communal bathroom on this floor. The rooms are bright, with attractive views out of the window, and a television in each. The person's room that we saw has clearly been well personalised by them, with lots of pictures of friends and family and other pictures that are meaningful to them and equipment for pursuing their hobby. In addition, there is a noticeboard with useful information on it, and a laminated sign from the chain, asking for people's feedback, and including a phone number for people to call if they have a complaint.

The house is spacious, but a member of staff explained that it can be quite crowded when everyone is in there with their carers. The new quiet room is

intended to provide more communal space to ease this problem.

We were invited in to see the two self-contained flats, which both have three rooms. There is a living area, containing a well-equipped kitchenette, dining space, sofa and television; and a bedroom and a bathroom. They are both very homely with lots of personalisation in the form of photos, posters and artworks that the residents have produced themselves.

One of the buildings containing a flat also contains the jacuzzi room, which is currently being renovated to be put back into use after the pandemic had put it out of action. There is also renovation going on in the other room in this building, which will become a sensory room for the use of all residents.

There is another garden space next to these buildings which contains a pergola, raised beds and an activity shed. The shed was established at the suggestion of residents, and contains art supplies, and has artworks on the walls made by residents and members of staff. The people giving us a tour spoke happily about times they had used this facility with the staff. The home were also having a new shed built for someone who would like an outdoor space which was just for them.

Further along from here is a section with animals, which are an important feature of life at Decoy Farm. They have some guinea pigs and three standard pigs. There is a farm team who look after these animals, but the residents also help, and talked enthusiastically about how they are looked after. The manager told us that they are also going to get pygmy goats and donkeys.

There are also birds here - ducks and chickens, mainly. However they were temporarily shut away in a large greenhouse, because of the risk of bird flu. There are lots of plants being grown in the greenhouse, and there are also raised beds in this area, containing a mix of flowering plants and food crops. Some of these beds are communal, and some have the names of residents on, for them to grow the plants of their choice.

We were not able to enter the annex on our visit, because one of the people living there was having a bad day, and would not have welcomed visitors. Overall, the site is very pleasant and homely, and will have excellent facilities once the renovations are complete. Importantly, people seem to have ample opportunities to personalise the space, and moved around all areas of the premises freely, clearly feeling both at ease and at home.

Activities

Most of the residents have a funded car and at least one-to-one support most of the time. This enables them to go on regular outings, and three people were out when we visited. One had gone for a drive and to feed ducks, one had gone walking and another had gone shopping. People can also go out to the gym, and go to local cafés and restaurants.

Due to the high levels of one-to-one care provided here, there were not any communal activity planners on the walls as we have seen in some other settings. Rather, a more flexible and personalised approach is taken, and activities will depend more on what a person wants to do on a given day, giving them a good level of control.

There were a range of activities for people to participate in the home. Looking after the animals, art activities, helping to cook meals, playing computer games, trampolining, playing football, watching television, disco nights, karaoke, playing board games and gardening are all options. Some of the produce from gardening and eggs are sold from a box outside the front gate, marked 'Decoy Farm Shop'. Sometimes visits from animals are also organised, and an external provider comes in to run music-based activities.

There are also regular activities to celebrate big calendar events. People spoke to us about the Halloween party that they had recently enjoyed, and we saw some art they had produced for remembrance day, and they talked about celebrating the Queen's Jubilee. We also heard them discussing where they would like to go for their Christmas lunch, and staff members were talking about visiting potential venues with the residents, to help them to decide.

People's birthdays were also taken seriously here, with staff members coming in on their days off, to celebrate with residents.

Relationships and community

Between staff and residents

Relations between staff and residents were close, caring and respectful. People genuinely seemed to enjoy one another's company, and were often laughing and joking. We got the sense that all of the staff knew all of the residents well and the residents knew all of the staff. This was confirmed when we were talking with the manager, who explained that this was the result of a conscious effort. Rather than relying on a keyworker system, staff are rotated between residents, working with a different resident in each shift. This is specifically designed to promote a sense of togetherness, and to try to break down the barriers

between staff and residents, and to stop people just living in separate silos from one another. On the evidence we saw, this has really paid off, and there was a real sense of wellbeing in the home. It was also encouraging to see that even the Regional Operations Manager, who was visiting the service when we were there, seemed to know all of the residents well, and had lent one of them her exercise tracker for the day to encourage them to do more walking by counting their steps. We also saw a resident chatting happily to one of the maintenance staff and asking them to fix a broken cupboard – suggesting to us that residents felt at ease with all of the people working at the service.

This service is particularly focused on trying to stop the 'revolving door' that can develop for some people between residential care and in-patient units. This is where someone can be discharged from an inpatient unit to a care home, but then have a crisis involving distressed behaviour, which the care home cannot cope with, and they then have to discharge the person back to a secure unit. In the view of the manager at Decoy Farm and the Regional Operations Manager, it is often possible for such people to stay in care homes, if they have the time and support to work through crises and to understand what is at the root of them. The two residents who we spoke to on the day had been living at Decoy Farm for much longer than any of their previous placements, and had been helped to overcome quite acute crises through the specialist help that is provided at the service. They both talked about how happy they were in the service and said that they wanted to stay there.

These episodes can be challenging for staff to deal with, and the service provided extra supervision for them, and extra training, to allow them to participate in people's treatment and rehabilitation. They also drew on the support of the local multidisciplinary learning disabilities team.

Decoy Farm has had some problems with staff turnover in the past few years which caused some problems with the continuity of training systems and the quality of care given. The staff body is more stable now, with only two vacancies out of 50 posts, which has been achieved partly through raising the wage. The home occasionally needs to use agency staff, but is able to make sure that the same few people come in each time, so that they are familiar with the service.

When a new permanent member of staff comes in, they have to do a range of online training courses, and they have an induction, and they have to shadow a staff member over several shifts and to read all of the residents' care plans, before they are allowed to start work. They continue to have regular supervisions, and have a weekly drop in session with the manager to discuss any concerns.

Kingsley Specialist Services has a dedicated staff member who specialises in

Positive Behaviour Support (PBS), a person-centred approach to supporting people with a learning disability and helping to pre-empt instances of distressed behaviour. This specialist has helped to develop a PBS plan for each of the people at the service, and visits once a month to talk to staff and to update each person's plan.

Relations between residents

The relations we witnessed between residents were warm, easy and natural. They seemed to feel free to call on each other, and talked a lot about the other people who had gone out that day. They were also discussing activities that they could do together, and were enjoying planning what they would do at Christmas time. This suggested to us that people had developed meaningful relationships in their home. On the other hand, as might be expected in a service specialising in caring for people with distressed behaviour, there were two people who staff told us it was best to keep apart. One advantage of the increased communal space that is being created with the renovations is that there will be more space to achieve this.

Relations between residents and the broader community

As mentioned in the sections above, most people were able to undertake regular outings to do activities in the community. The residents we spoke to also mentioned that their relatives come to visit them, and they go to visit their relatives. People also have regular opportunities to go on holiday away from the home.

Food and health

A weekly menu for most people is produced each week, in consultation with residents. For those living in the self-contained flats, a weekly menu is written up on a whiteboard, with the meals being chosen by the person who lives there. The options that we saw sounded tasty, contemporary and healthy. The people we spoke to both seemed to consider the Sunday roast as an important weekly event, both as a social occasion, when everyone would eat together (including the people living in the self-contained flats), and because they enjoyed the food. Both of the residents we spoke to said that they enjoyed the food, and one of them said it was better than at the other places they had lived.

For some people living at the service, it can be difficult to explain why they ought to eat less of foods that are not good for them, and they may become upset if they are not allowed to eat what they would like to. This can mean that a delicate balance has to be struck between keeping a person happy and trying to keep their diet healthy. In the view of the family member we spoke to, the staff were successful in keeping their relative healthy and giving them some freedom of choice in their diet.

As mentioned in the activities section, people living at Decoy Farm were active, and they were encouraged to stay physically fit. Activities included walking, going to the gym, trampolining and playing football. Both of the people we spoke to appeared to be healthy and physically fit.

Interactions with the broader health and social care system

The manager told us that Norfolk County Council (NCC) have had justified concerns about how Decoy Farm has been run in the past. After the 2021 CQC inspection, 5 breaches of regulations were recorded, and these meant that there were embargoes on the home taking any more residents. This year, these have been lifted, both by CQC and NCC. The most recent CQC report still rates the home as 'Requires Improvement', but notes the progress that has been made since the new manager has come in, including that all of the breaches have now been remedied. The manager found that NCC staff at first reacted negatively to her due to the home's recent history, but relations have recently improved.

The only sticking point in relations with NCC is that funding has not increased in line with rises in cost of living and energy prices, which could make it difficult for the home to attract and retain staff in the future.

Decoy Farm has also had cordial relations with the CQC and NCC's Integrated Quality service in recent times. However, they felt that neither service fully appreciated the specialised nature of the service that Decoy Farm provides (see the section on relations between staff and residents above for more details). In addition, they told us that some of the people sent to do inspections have general quality improvement expertise but lack sufficient specialist knowledge of how to care for people with learning disabilities.

In the case of NCC's quality service, they also mentioned that advice could sometimes be inconsistent – a particular practice would be recommended as best practice in one Kingsley Service, and then criticised in another similar service.

A broader point was also raised about the the perceived rigidity of CQC's rules on registering new residential services looking after autistic people and people with a learning disability. In particular, these specify that homes in rural areas must be on a bus route. In the case of the residents of Decoy Farm, this was not so relevant as only one of the residents would be able to use the bus, and even they were unlikely to. We were told that this regulation was preventing Kingsley from opening another home like Decoy Farm, which would be similarly focused on keeping people out of secure units.

Recommendations

The visit team were impressed by the standard of care and responsiveness we observed at Decoy Farm, and the residents and family member we spoke to were very happy with the service they are receiving. As mentioned above, the service has had problems with the stability of staffing and management in recent times, but these issues seem to have mostly been resolved. We hope that the service will continue to improve and deliver on the promising changes of the past year.

Service Provider Response

Thank you for such a positive report and the staff and residents at Decoy enjoyed the teams visit with us. We strive to provide a high level of care for our residents at Decoy and it is extremely beneficial to receive feedback to help us to continue to develop and enhance the service we provide.

Kind regards

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