

ourcommunity

NEWS

Eddie's Quarterly Round-up

■ HEE pilot scheme

Gate House has just come to the end of an important pilot scheme, funded by Health Education England, with a view to helping to secure more funding for the rollout of PECS across not only Optima Care but the learning disability sector as a whole in Kent. Read more on page 8.

■ New team members

The official lowdown on various new team members who've joined us recently. Turn to page 2 for more information.

■ London service launches

In partnership with Southwark Council, we launched two supported living services in London this summer with a view to establishing a recovery and independence pathway across the services. We also launched a new service in Hounslow. See page 7.

■ Well done Gary

Gary is our latest Making a Difference award winner, where we acknowledge members of staff who have gone above and beyond to either give great service to the people we support or to other staff team members. Gary is one of those people and it's heartening to read the nominations that we received. You can read these on page 3.

■ New IT support provider

From 14th December, our IT support will switch from Bleckfield to RunTech. From this date, please use the following contact info for all Optima Care IT support needs:
Tel: 0203 640 6030 / Email: customerfirst@runtech.co

■ Seasons greetings!

And last but not least, a huge thank you to everyone for all your hard work during this busy year. I'd like to wish you and your families a very merry Christmas and a happy new year.



Eddie Coombes,
Chief Executive



Awards finalists

JO NEILES



Jo Neiles, Registered Manager of Gate House and Eastry Villas, recently became a finalist in the Learning Disability Service Manager category of the National Care Awards. The submission focused on her overseeing of the recent reconfiguration of Gate House from a residential service to a young adult transition service. It focused on the success of this project and the fact that throughout Jo has inspired her staff team, ensuring they are engaged, empowered and loving



what they do. Jo's entry was up against thousands of others so it was an amazing achievement to make it to the finals and the gala awards evening at the London Hilton Metropole.

Unfortunately, Jo didn't win this time but she's a winner as far as we're concerned!

OPTIMA CARE

LaingBuisson
Awards 2017

Specialist
Care
FINALIST

Meanwhile, Optima Care was recently shortlisted for the LaingBuisson Specialist Care Awards, up against much bigger, national providers. This award focuses on excellence in specialist care for adults and children with physical or learning disabilities or mental health problems in a residential setting. Alas, we didn't take home the top

award on the night. But, again, it's credit to the staff teams at Optima Care that we made it that far. Well done everyone.

Warm welcomes and new news



Angela Howe

Angela Howe, General Manager

Angela will take on a pivotal group role as General Manager, overseeing strategy, HR and administration, and all Kent-based operations. She joins us following 13 years with the Huntercombe Group, part of Four Seasons Healthcare, where she oversaw all strategic and operational HR aspects for a large staff team of nurses, support workers and doctors across 26 hospitals and centres in England and Scotland, delivering mental health and learning disability services for adults and children.

Peter Crascall, Regional Manager, Kent

We are delighted to welcome back Peter, who previously worked for Optima Care between 2007-2011, when he founded and oversaw the set-up of our high acuity community residential service, The Chilterns. In the interim, Peter was Operations Director for Inmind and Danshell,



Peter Crascall

and most recently National Lead Nurse for mental health and learning disabilities at the Huntercombe Group.

Lynsey Robertson, Director of Development

Lynsey joined us earlier this year with over 13 years' experience in care services for the charity Norwood, with roles

spanning mental health, learning disabilities and forensic. She began her career as a Support Worker, progressing through to Head of Operations and part of the senior management team, whilst



Lynsey Robertson

studying for three part-time degrees in children's development, early years education and business and leadership.



Matthew Brett

Matthew Brett, Management Accountant

Matthew joined Optima Care this year from Beadles motor dealership in Aylesford, where he was Financial Controller. At Optima Care he has the dual role of Management Accountant plus overseeing maintenance and capital expenditure. Matthew works closely with the maintenance team, assessing work that needs to be done and project managing. In his spare time...he's also studying for a HND in Construction at Broadstairs College.

A New Camp

By Stephanie Sinclair, Group Administrator/Receptionist at Optima Care

Back in September, we decamped from Manston Industrial Estate to Eastry Village, to open our new Kent Regional Office. The move itself took two days, but the planning



and preparation took much longer and a big team effort. We packed up the whole office, ruthlessly discarding a lot of junk along the way! We then spent time planning the space, installed new electrics and a toilet, and Gary and Owen kindly helped with the decorating. The new office is now a lovely bright space with great views, and it is wonderful to see all of our hard work come to fruition.

As well as the new regional office, Optima Care now has a central office in Teddington. More information can be found here <http://www.optimacare.co.uk/contact-us>



BEFORE



AFTER

Gary gets the recognition he deserves



Gary Clark, part of Optima Care's maintenance team, is the worthy winner of the latest Making a Difference award. Here he is receiving the 'big cheque' for £100. Gary was nominated by a number of members of staff. Here's what they had to say:

"Gary is a credit to his team at Eastry."
Matthew Brett

"Nothing is too much trouble for him and he can turn his hand to anything. He never says "no, can't do", he just gets on with it and every time he does a really good job."
Christina Harrison

"Gary completes all maintenance and ground works and regularly goes the extra mile helping out whether he can. He has at times been a driver for us when we've needed to attend appointments with the people we support but haven't had a driver on shift. He completes vehicle checks and water checks weekly, which has reduced the paperwork load for staff and enabled them to be focused on increased activities and life skills.

"Gary is upbeat and always walks around with a smile on his face. He interacts with all the people we support appropriately and has at times encouraged their participation in tasks (gardening). Gary has made a real difference to the environment at Eastry and this has meant that all our individuals and their families have felt comfortable and relaxed in such a well presented and maintained environment."

Zoe Lamb

WIN

Competition! £100 prize

The competition is open to all Optima Care staff (the families of the people we support and their carers can nominate staff members too). Simply let us know in no more than around 50 words how you've 'Made a difference' in your job role recently - this can be with reference to how you've made a difference to another team member, the individuals we support or their carers and loved ones. It doesn't need to be a huge thing - just something to show you've gone the extra mile. You can also nominate other people if you think they'll be too modest to tell us!

Simply email your entry to Suzanne@optimacare.co.uk by Friday 16th February 2018. The winner will appear in the next issue of the newsletter.

News in brief

■ Eastry House: the last few months

- Eastry House residents have enjoyed regular visits from Elvis this summer and he is due back in December for a Christmas special.
- We raised £103.00 on a fun day for the Eastry Theatrical group.
- Everyone enjoyed a pamper night, which was accompanied by a chocolate fountain. This was particularly popular with our male residents.
- Our Christmas in July party was a huge success, even Santa managed to pay us a visit.
- We'd like to congratulate Louise Pemble (catering coordinator) who is expecting her first baby next April.
- And on a completely separate note, Barbara Chater has been an employee of Eastry House since 27.3.1989. She remembers her first shift and still has her first payslip to prove it. She was earning £2.10 an hour when she started!



Elvis entertains fundraiser for Eastry theatrical group



Christmas in July

■ Heron House fundraiser

Heron House raised £70 for Children in Need by playing games, colouring, as well as charging for drinks, cakes, crisps and biscuits. The team also invited family and friends from other services. A big thanks to everyone who helped make it a fun day.



News round-up

SPENSER ROAD: LOCAL MOTORCYCLE GROUP GRANTS WISH

Ben, one of the people we support at Spenser Road, has long dreamt of riding on a motorcycle and this dream came true towards the end of the summer when, after



Optima Care investigated ways to make this happen, a member of a local motorcycle group – the BMW Airheads Fellowship (a social group for enthusiasts of air-cooled BMW motorcycles) – offered to take Ben out in his sidecar.

After comprehensive and dynamic risk assessments, Ben enjoyed trips around the local area and along the seafront on a beautiful, sunny day.

We'd like to thank Derek and Ken – the two members of the Airheads - for their willingness to help make Ben's dream come true. Also thanks to the staff at Spenser Road and Ben's family, for their willingness to support this event. It's something we will all remember for a long time.

GREEN-FINGERS AT BON SECOUR

Karen from Bon Secour has really enjoyed growing vegetables this year. She dug up enough potatoes to last the service a month, and took some home to her parents too. Karen also grew rhubarb and made rhubarb crumble. She was planning to grow more potatoes and brussel sprouts so that everyone at Bon Secour could take vegetables home to their families over the Christmas period.



HERNE BAY SUPPORTED LIVING: A REAL TEAM EFFORT

The staff team at Herne Bay Supported Living, along with the people we support and their families, have all worked together to create a sensory room and also personalise bedrooms.

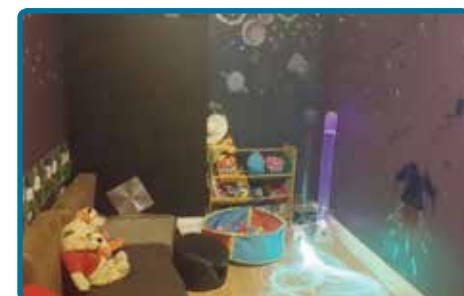
Team member Beth Letchford explained: "We used dark colours to paint the walls and created an outer space effect. We had to be creative on a budget so Laura [Hancock's] mum gave us some samples of astro turf, lino and carpet. We cut these into squares and stuck them on the wall to provide different textures."

Beth added that the parents of two of the people we support very kindly provided a TV for the room and blackout curtains.

In addition the team have been busy helping the people we support personalise their rooms, taking one young lady to B&Q to choose wallpaper and paints and Poundstretcher to

select rugs and other items. Beth added: "One of the team Chrissie [Doolan] even did some of the painting during her wake nights. She's also our odd job lady as she always has a supply of tools in her car!"

"It was a real team effort throughout, with other staff members including Gemma, Laura, Steph, Vlad and the maintenance man Chris all helping out."



Weight-loss outcomes at The Chilterns

The Chilterns has developed a positive weight management programme, allowing us to track outcomes. We're making changes in the kitchen and focusing on portion control and healthy ingredients. We also have a programme of complimentary diet and exercise initiatives in place, including: a cookery school, food hygiene course, food champion / healthy eating programme, Tai Chi classes, weekly walking group and participation in sporting activities and events.



CASE STUDY

One of the people we support, Essie, came to us in January 2015, suffering from mental health problems and having spent some time in secure services. She was also severely overweight at 22 stone, and walking caused her pain. With support, her self-motivation grew and she started walking little by little, did swimming and also started paying attention to her diet. She independently decided to enroll at Swimming World and, with staff support, she started to manage her own budget and menus. This led to independently planning and cooking her own meals.

Today, Essie is a much healthier 16 stone. Thanks to life experiences, therapeutic interventions and weight loss, she's now enjoying planning her own days, spending time in the community, seeing shows in London, attending college; she has completed Entry Level II and III in mathematics and English. She was enrolled in self-defense classes, sang solo at last year's Christmas dinner, made friends and now has people she could meet up and have a coffee with. Essie is now looking forward to leaving in time and leading a well-adjusted independent life.



**JUNE 2015
(22 STONE)**



**DECEMBER 2017
(16 STONE)**

A Spook-tacular Halloween Party

Nicola Howard, Team Leader at Eastry Villas, organised a fantastic Halloween party on 27th October for all those we support. Individuals and staff were invited from across our services in Kent, with over 30 attendees from various locations, including Seahaven, Spenser Road, Gate House, Heron House and Eastry Villas itself.

All attendees threw themselves into the theme, with some fantastic fancy dress costumes, from pumpkins to pirates. For just £2 per guest, Nicola and the team organised music, dancing, some spooky decorations, fiendish food and ghoulish games such as 'pass the intestine', which saw guests getting their hands dirty to search through spaghetti and find the sweets!

Congratulations to the winners of the spookiest outfit competition; Daniella at Mill House who won a £10 Argos voucher for her highly original Day of the Dead Princess costume, David at Seahaven, whose Zombie

outfit won him the £5 voucher, and Pirate Linda from Spenser Road, who won chocolates and a balloon.

Nicola deserves huge recognition for all her efforts in organising the party, which she managed to pull off whilst juggling a staff shortage at Gate House (due to an individual being taken into hospital until the early hours of the morning), organising cover at just three hours' notice, and having just completed her third 14-hour shift in a row.

"The event was really successful considering everything that happened. It was great to get people together from across the different services, and to help keep friendships going," said Nicola.

A huge thank you goes to Nicola, who organised a successful event against all the odds, to Sue Dale who did the bulk of the cooking and cleaning up, and to all the staff who helped on the day and after the event.



Show You Care

The search is on for some new I Care... Ambassadors, a national team of care workers whose aim is to inspire others to embark on a career in social care, and dispel some of the misconceptions that surround our work.

Visiting schools, colleges and job centres, and talking openly and passionately about our job is the most powerful recruitment tool we have, and research shows that one in three people are more likely to consider entering into social care having heard from an ambassador.

We're looking for managers to nominate staff or for individuals to nominate themselves. If you'd like to become an ambassador, contact dawn.dale@optimacare.co.uk.

As well as attracting new staff, the scheme is hugely motivating for existing staff and a great way to reward your most talented team members.

For more information, visit <http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk>



New services launched in London

This year has seen Optima Care successfully opening three new Supported Living Services in London, created with the aim of moving individuals along the recovery pathway, to the point where they can lead a more independent life. By working closely with local councils, including a partnership with the London Borough of Southwark, and registered social landlords, we have been able to move individuals closer to home, friends and families, establishing a recovery and independence pathway within a supported living progression model.

We're also working closely with South London & Maudsley NHS Trust, who provide intensive support during transition and for a period after.

The idea is to create an environment with much less intensive staff support, with the ultimate aim of supporting independence and future employment, whether paid or unpaid. The accommodation is embedded with assistive technology to help increase independence, and individuals receive the amount of support that they personally require, based on stringent risk assessment and management, allowing for daily community access and inclusion in society.

We facilitate regular recreational activities such as swimming, companion cycling, bowling and visits to museums, whilst teaching essential life skills such as cooking, laundry, road safety and budgeting. The support staff work across the services and are encouraged to skill share, as much amongst their fellow staff as the people they support.

Through the Keyhole

Grosvenor Terrace, opened May 2017

A five-bedroom supported living environment for individuals in their 20s with learning disabilities, complex needs and – for some – physical conditions also. The people we



Meet the Manager: Michela

Michela joined Optima Care this year and manages the three London-based Supported Living Services, bringing with her 18 years' experience in care settings. She previously worked for the Care Management Group as a Registered Manager for 11 flats, and an additional site for people with multiple disabilities. Michela moved to England from Italy in 2008. She taught herself English and also studied whilst working, gaining NVQs up to and including Level 5.

Michela comments: "I am happy to have the opportunity to bring my expertise and past experiences to Optima Care to help launch and oversee these new services. I have previously worked before with a large team and believe that staff happiness, engagement and development are the key to success."

support are provided with a key to their own room, whilst the living space is shared. We have transitioned four people into the service so far (& one imminent), two of whom are brothers who were given notice by their previous provider. We managed to open the service within 6 weeks to help keep them together, also hiring some of the staff known to them to help ease the transition.

New Heston Road, opened Summer 2017

A similar model to Grosvenor Terrace: there are five individual bedrooms with a communal living space. All five tenants moved into the accommodation from a residential care service upon provider closure, transitioning them into a modern supported living environment.

Half Moon Lane, opened 4th December

Ten tenants will live within self-contained flats to enable as much independence as possible for those with a range of diagnoses including autism, learning disabilities, schizophrenia and physical impairments. The transition process is underway and all tenants will have moved in by the end of January 2018.

Meanwhile, it's great to see that 69% of respondents agreed with the statement 'I'm aware of how and when to use the confidential staff phone line', but not so great that 20% disagreed and 10% neither agreed nor disagreed. The phone number is displayed in all settings (see poster on this page) and initial training is provided in its use, but we clearly need to do more to explain when and how it should be used so that 100% of staff are aware.

More information on next steps will be shared once we've had a chance to analyse the results properly and discuss with managers and SCC representatives.

Successful Transition Stories

In May this year, we transitioned a 22-year-old man with profound learning disabilities into Grosvenor Terrace. He was attending a college in Southwark full-time prior to the move, so the key priority was to ensure the continuation of his studies. His previous placement had come to an end due to behavioural issues, but we managed to place both him and his brother together, whilst ensuring he was able to continue his course. The college was a 45-minute journey from the accommodation, so we arranged funding for transport via the education department, and requested a social worker from the college to escort him back and forth.

In October, we transitioned another young man into Grosvenor Terrace from children's services. He is on 2:1 due to challenging behaviour and was previously told that he would never be able to use public transport. Undeterred, we focused on teaching him everyday life skills, and thanks to a combination of communication devices, pictorials, assistive technology, risk assessment and well-trained staff, he recently travelled successfully on a bus for the first time.



Flexing our PECS: HEE visit to Gate House

Back in October, two representatives from Health Education England (HEE) visited Optima Care's Gate House, our service for young adults who have recently left school or college, to see the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) in action. The visit came following funding that the service was awarded by HEE earlier this year, to support the training of 20 staff members on PECS. This represented part of a new pilot scheme to ensure adequate NHS funding is awarded to learning disability services, in recognition of the fact that the social care sector helps take the pressure off the NHS.

HEE put out the funding offer to various health and social care sectors – including doctors, hospitals, schools, elderly care etc – all of which could then opt to respond with a case for why they should receive the support. The HEE then decided upon 20 very individual projects that spanned all these sectors, based upon what they thought would benefit the region most. The outcome of the pilot then determines in which sector the project will be scaled up.

The British Institute of Learning Disabilities is hoping to make this a sustainable model.

The two HEE representatives who visited Gate House were Rhona Westrip (Programme Manager) and George Matuska (Clinical Advisor). They spoke with staff and managers to gain feedback on PECS and discuss next steps for the training programme.



What is PECS?

The Picture Exchange Communication System, or PECS, allows people without the ability to speak to communicate using pictures. Originally created for use by those with autism, the system can also benefit individuals with a wide range of learning disabilities.

Why doesn't everyone use it?

PECS is used by many special needs schools but not all of them. Some might use objects of reference, sign language and Makaton instead. Equally, most community residential services don't have any formal communication systems in place. This lack of a standardised system – coupled with poor liaison around communications between schools and health and social care services – means that when individuals are transitioned from school or college to community residential services, this learnt knowledge can sometimes become lost. An inability to communicate leads to frustration and this can be exhibited through challenging behavior, including self-harming or aggression towards staff.

PECS in action

Claire Baker, Team Leader at Gate House explains how the pilot scheme has benefitted the service: "One of our young ladies now uses PECS to form full sentences, and her improved communication has also helped improve her relationship with her mum. There have been no incidents of challenging behavior for over four months now. She prefers to use pictures rather than symbols, so it's a case of working out what works for each individual, and adapting the system from the way schools use it to make it applicable to a residential services environment.

"For example, in schools it's used in a one-on-one environment but it's very different when people leave school and are in regular contact with more people and support workers. It's also key for us to get the family involved in learning PECS too.

"As well as the benefits to the people we support, PECS is also making a positive difference to staff. Previously, they were being pulled around by our individuals to find whatever they needed. All the staff and the people we support had to be trained in its use.

"Some individuals have experience of PECS at school but not all. One of our boys didn't have any experience, but can now express his wants and needs. Previously his behaviours escalated if he struggled to be understood.

"It's making a positive difference to staff and the people we support."



Next steps

Optima Care will assist HEE by writing two reports on the PECS pilot; an experience-based case study version, and an 'easy read' version, to include recommendations for future use within Optima Care and services similar to ours.

Pete Craswell, Optima Care's Regional Manager - Kent, said there are further opportunities to rollout the programme across the company's services in Kent and London: "We are looking at sharing this knowledge across other services within the group. We are also going to reintroduce Life Star and other systems to help measure and demonstrate outcomes. The communications aspect will be incorporated into this."

Christina Harrison, Training Manager at Optima Care, added: "We are keen to roll this learning out to other services in the new year. In addition to using PECS we are looking to invest in Makaton training as an additional communication tool for the people we support."

Jo Neiles, Registered Manager of Gate House, commented: "The more it cascades out, the more empowered people feel and staff can come up with their own ideas for personalising PECS and taking it further."