Rowcroft completes pioneering course to support homeless at the end of life

Tuesday 13 December, 2016

Devon's Rowcroft Hospice has become one of a number of hospices to offer a pioneering course that aims to improve access to end of life care for homeless people in the UK.

Specific funding has been made available by Health Education England for hospices to close the gap between services available for homeless people in their regions.

The funding was allocated in response to a report by the Care Quality Commission, which highlighted inequities in the provision of services for homeless people at the end of life.

Kerry Macnish, Rowcroft Hospice's Education Facilitator, explained: ***"People who are homeless have a significantly lower life expectancy than the general population with the average age of death just 47.***

"Homeless people also often have complex health and social needs, but it is not easy to assess when someone may be approaching the end of life."

So far this year Rowcroft has delivered two courses for 19 support workers engaged with homeless people in South Devon.

Kerry said: ***"Thanks to a successful bid to Health Education England we've been able to deliver two end of life education programmes for staff ranging from local hostel and outreach workers to street pastors and people in local authority roles.***

"The courses covered a range of end of life issues pertinent to the attendees' roles, with sessions about recognising ill health and decline, learning how to recognise rapid changes that may be life threatening, and having conversations about emergency decision making."

She added: ***"We also explored how to manage change and grief in a residential setting, such as a hostel, how to talk with a homeless person about what they may want if they are dying, and how to support people on the streets or those estranged from support networks such as their family."***

The course was facilitated by Kerry with Rowcroft Community Services Manager Jo Anthony, Rowcroft Social Worker Mandy Pearman and Sarah Pengelly, Project Manager within the Safer Communities Team at Torbay Council.

Kerry said those who attended are now much more aware of the ways Rowcroft can support them, and added: ***"A major achievement from the course is the development of a local resource that maps contact details of all known services available to the homeless across Torbay and South Devon, a copy of which has been sent to Commissioners and the Police."***

The course also provided attendees with an opportunity to build a relationship with Rowcroft and network with other service providers and charities offering support for homeless people in South Devon.

Jo Anthony, Rowcroft's Community Services Manager, said: ***"We feel incredibly grateful to be in a position to have provided this course to people working with the homeless in South Devon and look forward to being part of this growing community of support workers.***

"Since completing the course we have received one referral from a support worker who attended the course and are now working with the team to support the homeless person to enable the best care possible.

"Courses such as this are only possible thanks to the generosity of local people, as though the

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course was not funded by donations, Rowcroft's staff, premises and expertise in end of life care are a direct result of our local community's support."

Rowcroft announced earlier this year that it was facing a funding shortfall and needs to raise an additional £585,000 by next year to ensure it can continue to provide education about end of life care to local service providers and healthcare professionals.

Kerry added: ***"Rowcroft offers a wealth of educational opportunities regarding the support and care of patients and their families at the end of life that are of vital importance to the local community.***

"We now ask that all those who are able please support the hospice to continue this work and help to make every day the best day possible for people living with life-limiting illnesses in South Devon, no matter what their circumstances."

For more information on Rowcroft's emergency fundraising appeal visit www.rowcrofthospice.org.uk/appeal.

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