



Enter and View Report

July 2023

healthwatch
Lambeth

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Introduction

Enter and View involves visiting publicly funded health and social care services to observe how care is delivered and talk to service users, carers and staff. We are not inspectors, and we focus on what it is like for people receiving care. Our visits are carried out by staff and volunteers who are trained as Enter and View Authorised Representatives.

The Tree House offers short stay (eight weeks) supported living for people when they are discharged from hospital, before returning to the community. It has six bedrooms for male and female service users with depression, anxiety, unstable personality disorder (UPD) and PTSD. Seven permanent staff support residents through individual support packages tailored to their specific needs.

The Tree House works in collaboration with local mental health teams, clinical teams, housing officers and health and social care teams. Family members and carers are encouraged to visit.

Methodology

Two Enter and View Authorised Representatives visited The Tree House on Friday 10 February 2023 and interviewed 2 service users, 1 carer, 2 support workers and the manager. Our interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

Executive Summary

Physical environment

The shared physical environment was clean and tidy, with a good communal area, kitchen, bathroom and garden. We did not see the residents' rooms so we cannot comment on them.

Resident interviews

There were good relations between residents and staff, and residents were very positive about the care they received from staff. There were mixed views about residents' involvement in decision-making about their care. The main challenge highlighted by residents was having to stay longer at The Tree House than they wanted/needed due to the lack of suitable housing for them to move on to. There was also the fear of being discharged back to accommodation that was unsuitable or not fit for purpose.

Carer interview

The interview with the carer reinforced the messages highlighted by interviews with residents. She was happy with the care given by staff, felt informed, and was able to visit when she wished. But she was very concerned about her loved one being discharged back to accommodation that was unsuitable and unfit for purpose.

Staff interviews

Staff enjoyed working at The Tree House and found the work fulfilling and rewarding. They were motivated to support residents to the best of their ability.

Manager interview

The Manager also highlighted the challenges the residents told us about. The biggest challenge was the lack of suitable housing for residents to move on to, so people were staying within the service much longer than was necessary. Residents had real problems accessing GP services. Many GP services are now primarily accessed online, and residents may not be confident with technology or may not have a smartphone. Face-to-face appointments with a GP were not available. Even getting through to a GP practice on the phone was very difficult, with calls going unanswered for a long time, residents facing lengthy periods on hold, or being cut off altogether. The Manager also said there were issues with contacting, and communicating with, care coordinators, care workers, and community mental health teams (CMHTs). This meant residents were not as well supported as they should be in terms of discharge planning and moving on.

Key challenges

The main challenge highlighted by residents, a carer, staff and the manager was the lack of suitable housing for residents to move on to, which meant residents were staying at The Tree House for far longer than 8 weeks, and much longer than was necessary (sometimes months). The other key challenge faced by residents was in accessing and using GP services. There were problems getting through to the practice on the phone, in accessing face-to-face appointments, and in using digital/online services.

The Manager also highlighted issues around contacting, and communicating with, care coordinators, care workers, and CMHTs, which made discharge planning difficult.

Recommendations

- 1. Communication and the relationship between staff at The Tree House and care coordinators, CMHTs and the housing department should be improved. Stronger joint working will ensure better ongoing care and that suitable housing arrangements are in place, enabling a shorter stay.**

Response from The Tree House

Normally we enjoy good working relationships with care teams and CMHTs. However, there have been occasions when care coordinators are not available to visit our residents or are not able to provide as much support as our residents need. This becomes an issue when we are trying to move residents on within agreed timeframes.

Following the Healthwatch Lambeth visit, we met with the Community Living and Support Service (CLaSS) team to discuss ongoing issues around moving on, the lack of suitable accommodation, and better joint working and collaboration. A named social worker from the CLaSS team has now been appointed to act as the liaison between The Tree House and the CLaSS team, and we have weekly meetings with them to discuss any issues or concerns.

- 2. Staff should provide more support to residents in accessing primary care and GP services, especially around getting appointments, including face-to-face. People with special mental health needs**

should be able to access in-person appointments if that is what they need.

Response from The Tree House

Some GPs do not offer face-to-face appointments. Minor issues can often be resolved through a phone consultation, and GPs will call or send a link for a video consultation to our email or the resident's mobile phone. We support residents to access GP appointments by reminding them of their upcoming phone consultations or by helping them access the link to video consultations.

Some residents are anxious about attending GP appointments and, in these cases, we support them by escorting them to their GP.

Some residents do not want to go to their regular GP, as this may bring back bad memories. We have supported residents to change their GP to one close by The Tree House, enabling them to access GP services.

We are very proactive in encouraging and supporting residents to access health services and have supported residents to have their annual health checks, their dental checks, and their eye checks.

3. Staff should ensure all residents, family, and carers are as involved as they can be in decision making about their care. How they have been involved, and the choices they have made, should be clearly documented in their notes.

Response from The Tree House

We use an electronic system where we record all aspects of care, and these records include the resident's wishes and choices. We review these records every month to check residents have been involved in decision-making about their care and their wishes are being met.

We keep carers and family members informed of a resident's progress in a range of ways. Carers and family members contact us for updates, and we provide these promptly. Carers and family members also visit The Tree House regularly, and during their visits we share updates and progress, especially around wellbeing and moving on. If it has been agreed with a resident, we keep carers and family members informed of any concerns.

- 4. Following any incidents, staff should ensure they keep all residents informed and updated about the situation and what action has been taken as a result.**

Response from The Tree House

Our policy and procedures state we must inform residents of the outcome of any incidents promptly. We followed our policy recently when we received bullying and harassment complaints about a resident from two other residents. When we receive a complaint, we have to carry out an investigation and this takes time (a couple of days). Some residents were disappointed they did not receive an update sooner but we could not report back to them until we had conducted our investigation.

5. There should be a suggestions box at The Tree House, for residents to make suggestions or comments to improve services.

Response from The Tree House

We have installed a suggestions box on the ground floor by the main entrance. Residents have been informed and are encouraged to make suggestions and put forward ideas. Residents have been told anything they write is anonymous and confidential and The Tree House welcomes their suggestions and ideas to improve the service. We have also placed a folder on the ground floor containing feedback forms, and we offer these forms to residents and to carers, family and friends visiting The Tree House. We also hold monthly resident meetings where residents are encouraged to provide feedback and make suggestions for improvements.

6. There should be information and leaflets for residents and carers to take away.

Response from The Tree House

Following the recommendations from the recent report, we have printed leaflets and made them available to residents and relatives. The leaflets are placed by the main entrance, staff have been advised to give them out whenever relatives, friends and families visit the service. The leaflets outline the support provided at Tree House, as well as information on the local area, including transport links, amenities, shops and place of interest.

Recommendations for Commissioners and other services

1. Commissioners need to ensure there is suitable and appropriate housing for residents to move on to after their short stay at The Tree House. A delay results in a longer stay in a service not designed for that purpose and in the erosion of service user independence.
2. The Community Mental Health Team, working closely with staff at The Tree House, should ensure residents receive the right care at the right time.

Findings

Physical environment

- The Tree House has a good communal area with a small library, a TV and comfortable seating. It has good décor and was clean and tidy.



- The kitchen was clean, uncluttered and there was enough space to sit.
- The bathroom was clean and pleasant to use.
- There is a garden, which is a pleasant and tidy environment, with seating available.



- We were not invited into any of the residents' rooms. We understood

the rooms are their personal space, which we respected.

- In the corridor there is a noticeboard with information on safeguarding. However, there were no leaflets that could be taken away and no suggestions box.

Resident interviews

The interaction between residents and staff whilst we were there seemed relaxed and friendly. Residents were positive about the care they receive from staff at The Tree House, "Staff are good here, they listen. I can tell them what's what".

There was an episode involving a resident in crisis recently which strained the relationship with staff. One resident said "I was not happy about feeling threatened by another resident. I complained but was not kept in the loop about what was done about it. You should be kept updated". But another resident had a more positive experience of the same incident, "Things are getting easier here now that the situation with the resident has been resolved".

There were mixed views about residents' involvement in decision-making about their care. One resident said, "I feel involved in my own care, and I'm asked for my opinion more", but the other resident felt very differently, "I'm not happy about the care team. I don't feel involved in decisions about me...the care team will not tell you anything".

Residents told us about how important it was for them to be listened to and housed, when ready, after eight weeks. However, a key issue, and an ongoing challenge for residents, was having to stay at The Tree House for much longer than necessary because of the shortage of appropriate housing to move on to. "This service is meant to be interim but is becoming permanent!" said a resident.

One resident and their carer were very concerned about being discharged back to a mouldy flat, which was unfit for purpose, "I don't want to go back to my old damp flat as that would set me off again. I need to swap the old flat for a new one. I don't want to move on until I feel better". Being discharged back to an unsuitable flat could have a negative impact on that person's mental health.

Carer interview

We interviewed one carer (a mother) about the care her son was receiving at The Tree House. She was very positive about staff attitudes and their genuine interest in, and care for, the residents. She was kept informed about her son's treatment, was happy staff were available when needed, and was happy with the visiting times, "I can come here any time". She could not think of anything that needed to be done to make care at The Tree House better.

However, she was very concerned about her son's housing situation and had not been able to contact his care worker, "My son has been at The Tree House since October 2022 (now February 2023). He was living in a

mouldy flat. Initially, his poor mental health prevented any improvements to the flat. However, to this day, no work has been done to the flat. If my son goes back to that flat, he will relapse because he was harassed by some men ... He needs supported housing but there has been no contact with his care worker since mid-2022. If he could get a new flat, my son would be able to move on”.

Staff interviews

Staff were mindful of the time required to build relationships with residents as they arrived from hospital and settled into their new environment, “They need to adjust and may not want to talk to you or trust you initially.”

Staff said they enjoyed working at The Tree House. It was good to “Build the relationship with the clients, talking to them to find out what they like doing so we can plan activities based on their needs”. It was “Very fulfilling to support residents before they moved on”.

Manager interview

We interviewed the manager, who highlighted the challenges of running the service:

1. Lack of suitable housing for residents to move on to. The Tree House is a short stay (eight weeks) supported living service. But some residents are not able to move due to a lack of suitable social housing for them to move on to. “We have one young man who has stayed

here for one year because of the delay in being housed”.

2. Problems accessing primary care. Since the Covid pandemic, many more GP services are primarily accessed online which has caused problems for the residents. “Residents find it difficult to access GP services as they may not be confident or don’t have a smartphone. They cannot get face-to-face appointments with GPs”. Going to a different GP can be an issue for someone with anxiety who may be made anxious by having to deal with a new doctor. Some residents have had problems getting through to GP practices, calls going unanswered for long periods, being placed on hold for a long time, or being cut off altogether.

3. Problems communicating with care coordinators and/or CMHT. “On one occasion, a service user was in crisis, but we could not get hold of the care coordinator”.

Acknowledgements

Healthwatch Lambeth would like to thank the residents of The Tree House, as well as the carer and staff who took the time to talk to us. Thank you also to the management for their cooperation and hospitality.

Appendix A: Questions

Service users' / Residents' questions

1. What do you think of the care you receive at The Tree House?
(Prompt: What works? What could be done better?)
2. How involved are you in the decision-making about your care?
(Prompt: What is good? What could be done better?)
3. What is important to you in your recovery journey?
(Prompt: What could really help you recover, what could be done differently?)
4. What are the staff like?
(Prompt: Do you communicate well with them? Are you asked for feedback?)
5. Do they give you information about advocacy? What could they do better?)
6. If you could change anything at The Tree House, what would it be?
7. Is there anything else you'd like to say about The Tree House?

Relatives' / Carers' questions

1. What can you say about the care that your relative is receiving at The Tree House?
(Prompt: What's good? What could improve?)
2. Do you have enough information about your relative's treatment?
(Prompt: Know enough about current plans? What comes next? Choices to make?)
3. Please describe your relationship with the staff

(Prompt: Can you talk freely and ask them questions; do you feel involved? Have you been asked for feedback?)

4. How do you feel about the visiting/appointment times?

5. What do you think about the physical environment?

Prompt: do you think your relative is safe?

6. If you could change anything to make the service better, what would it be?

7. Is there anything else you'd like to tell us?

Staff Questions

1. Please describe your role at The Tree House

2. Do you like your work at The Tree House?

(Prompt: what is good? What could be improved?)

3. What training have you had while working here?

(Prompt: what training would you need?)

4. What are the challenges you face in providing good care to service users?

5. What else could be done to improve the care provided at The Tree House, from admission to discharge?

6. Do voluntary sector, health/social care services work well with this service?

7. Is there anything else you would like to say?

Management questions

1. Tell us about The Tree House

2. How many service users do you have?

3. What mental health needs do they have? How long do they stay here?

4. What support mechanisms are in place? Any IMHAs?
5. What challenges do you face in running the service?
6. Which service users can we meet today?
7. Any other information you think is useful?



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Healthwatch Lambeth
1 Brixton Hill
London
SW2 1RW

www.healthwatchlambeth.org.uk
t: 020 7274 8522
e: info@healthwatchlambeth.org.uk
📱 [@HWLambeth](https://www.instagram.com/HWLambeth) 📘 [Facebook.com/HWLambeth](https://www.facebook.com/HWLambeth)