

# INNOVATIVE CARER PRACTICES

IMPACTING CARERS\* AROUND THE WORLD



## FAMILY CARER TRAINING

Building Capacity for Outcome-Focussed Carer Support



Ireland

Family carers represent a key part of social capital and are the backbone of all health and social care systems around the world. Caregiving duties range from assistance with activities of daily living and providing medical care, to navigating complex health and social care systems. Given the multifaceted and complex nature of the caring role, there is considerable evidence suggesting that carers have a significant need for specialised knowledge and skills to prepare them for the tasks they are expected to assume.<sup>1</sup> This Innovative Carer Practice showcases an outcome-based training programme for health and social care professionals in Ireland, which aims to build their capacity to engage more effectively with carers.

### CONTEXT

While caregiving can be a rewarding experience for many, it can also be challenging. Becoming educated about the person's condition, learning practical approaches to care and understanding how to access local caregiver resources are essential for carers in order for them to feel a sense of control and adapt to their evolving caring role.<sup>2</sup> It is also important for carers to learn how to manage stress and care for themselves in the midst of caring for another individual. Outcome-focussed and condition-specific educative interventions have demonstrated significant positive impacts for carers.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to caregiver training. Despite many common experiences, caregivers' roles are highly variable across the course of caring. As such, engaging family carers in training can be a challenge and requires careful consideration of the individual's specific needs, circumstances and goals. Although there is widespread agreement that family carers should be empowered with knowledge and information, professionals working in health and social services often have little understanding of how this can be achieved. Social and health care organisations have limited budgets and

less-than-optimal access to evidence-informed interventions. Their level of knowledge and understanding of outcome measurements, specifically in the area of family carers' support and well-being, are mediocre at best. As resources are becoming scarcer, it is more important than ever for organisations to ensure they are using their limited resources to deliver service and support that result in measurable benefits for the carers they engage with.

The Family Carer Training initiative, led by Care Alliance Ireland (CAI), aims to maximise the benefits of training and supports for family carers in Ireland. The initiative creates a space for expert-led and peer-driven learning among health and social care organisations. It is designed to build upon practitioners' pre-existing skills, knowledge and experience by sharing promising practices at a national and international level. It also emphasises the latest research and policy available, specifically in the area of measurement and outcomes. By providing carer-focussed information and training, health and social care professionals are equipped with the fundamental knowledge and skills to engage carers and ensure the delivery of high-quality and effective family carer support.

\* A carer, caregiver or family carer is an unpaid individual, such as a family member, neighbour, friend or other significant individual, who takes on a caring role to support someone with a diminishing physical ability, a debilitating cognitive condition or a chronic life-limiting illness. The terms caregiver, family carer and carer are used interchangeably by IACO members.



Embracing Carers is an initiative led by Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, in collaboration with leading caregiver organisations around the world, to increase awareness and action about the often-overlooked needs of caregivers. Learn more at [www.embracingcarers.com](http://www.embracingcarers.com).



The International Alliance of Carer Organizations (IACO) is a global coalition of 15 member nations committed to building a global understanding and respect for the vital role of family carers. Recognised as an official NGO by the United Nations, IACO works to improve the quality of life and support the needs of carers, through international partnerships and advocacy. Learn more at [www.internationalcarers.org](http://www.internationalcarers.org).

## DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

Through a one-time national funding programme in 2016, the Dormant Accounts Funds, Care Alliance Ireland (CAI) began delivering Family Carer Training interventions. The fund supported CAI's role in building capacity among its 85+ member-organisations, and other health and social care providers, in their direct work in the community to enhance the quality of life of approximately 360,000 family carers in the Republic of Ireland. A number of carer support organisations from across Europe have also been supported to take part.

The full cost of the initiative, including staff time, is approximately €50,000, with approximately 85 percent of the cost funded on a one-time basis by the funding programme and 15 percent covered by Care Alliance Ireland internal resources. The outcome-based training includes three inter-related strategies, each requiring a differing set of resources for successful implementation.

### 1. INTERACTIVE SEMINARS.

During 2016, CAI hosted three seminars that brought together organisations that were providing, or that were planning to provide, training and supports for family carers. As part of the seminar series, international experts in carer support and evaluation were invited to lead and facilitate discussions on various topics, such as:

- Planning for good training outcomes
- Implementing a personal outcomes approach with and for carers
- Co-creation of open educational resources
- Online support for carers
- How to evaluate the success of your family carer training
- Project reporting and evaluation

Collaboration is an important component of outcome-based learning, whether with colleagues or with recognised subject matter experts. Discussions focused on fundamental learning of concepts and skills in addition to reflection of knowledge and experience. Participants engaged in groupwork and structured feedback opportunities to share family carer training projects and concepts, application of learnings and identification of gaps. This interactive approach set the foundation for future training methodology and strategy.

Each seminar required approximately 70 hours of a senior practitioner/project manager's time to organise. Additional funds were also allocated for consultants costs. Access to the recognised subject matter experts, as well as having a good organisational reputation, were important to maximise engagement. There was also a nominal fee for participants to minimise no-show rates.

### 2. EVIDENCE-INFORMED RESOURCES.

A comprehensive booklet collating material from international research, good practice examples and learnings from the three seminars was developed and published in hard copy and in online format. The resource provides inspiration, support and guidance for the planning, implementation and evaluation stages of a Family Carer training programme. The resources address the following questions:

- Where do I start?
- Do family carers get 'on-the-job' training from health and social care professionals?
- Does training for family carers need to be different from that for paid care workers?
- How can I persuade my manager to allow me to use my time to organise family carer training?
- Where can I secure funds to deliver family carer training?
- How do I maximise attendance?
- How can I demonstrate real impact?
- Should I be thinking of setting up a support group for the participants when the training sessions have come to an end?

Creation of the comprehensive booklet required approximately 140 hours of a senior practitioner/project manager's time.

### 3. ONLINE SUPPORT PLATFORM.

The user-friendly online resource, [www.familycarertraining.ie](http://www.familycarertraining.ie), provides easy access to a wide variety of information to empower carers by improving their knowledge, coping skills, self-confidence, social networks and well-being. The platform links a variety of educational training opportunities for carers offered by different support organisations across Ireland, along with online resources and educational courses around the world. The resources range from condition-specific information (e.g., dementia or an acquired brain injury) to training for skills building, one-on-one or group sessions, video tutorials and more. For family carers, the website provides a searchable database of current and upcoming training available to them across Ireland. Information services such as carer resources, publications and toolkits are also available through this dynamic online platform. The development of the website required collaboration between the senior practitioner/project manager and a website developer to create and maintain updated content, as well as maximizing user experience and accessibility. The website also requires ongoing operational management of the hosting of the website.

**"This was so heartening—meeting lots of people with a shared interest, moving in new and interesting ways to address carers' needs. Big thanks."**

# DISSEMINATION AND IMPACT

Traditional and social media practices have been used to effectively communicate the Family Carer Training initiative.

800 stakeholders across Ireland and internationally have received the electronic or hard copy booklet.



An advertisement in the Spring 2017 edition of the *Irish Social Worker Journal* targeted 1,300 stakeholders.



Targeted paid Facebook posts have generated 80% of the referrals to the website.



80% of website traffic went to the "Information for Family Carers" section whilst 20% went to the "Information for Professionals" section.



FAMILY CARER TRAINING

Since November 2016, the online support platform has generated:



Approximately 1,500 direct downloads of the booklet resource



4,000 unique visits



87 participants, representing 35 organisations from five countries, have reported an overall positive experience with the materials and methods in the interactive seminars.

Over a 12-month period (post training), organisations reported a significant increase (20% from T1 pre 1st seminar to T4 post final seminar) on key outcomes:

✓  
Level of confidence in providing high quality training and supports for family carers

✓  
Level of awareness of training and supports to family carers outside of those provided by their own organisation

✓  
Level of knowledge in planning for and evaluating outcomes

As this project is focussed on the engagement of organisations that support family carers, it is not possible to measure the direct impact on family carers themselves. However, it is predicted that more skilled and confident practitioners will inevitably positively impact the well-being of family carers in receipt of support from these individuals.

## ELEMENTS FOR SUCCESS

The following factors have contributed to the success of the Family Carer Training initiative and should be included in future initiatives:

- **Align incentives and expectations:** Understanding benefits, relevance, feasibility and adoptability increases the likelihood that an innovation will achieve widespread engagement. At all stages throughout the project, participants were asked for feedback on materials and content. Training materials addressed their specific knowledge gaps in delivering outcome-driven support for carers. Tools and resources were developed to provide guidance for adaptation of the innovation and for management of the organisational context.
- **Identify innovation adopters:** The initiative not only targeted participations who had previous experience and understanding of family carers, it also focussed on those who had recently created and delivered family carer training. Both of these stakeholder groups serve as natural champions for the programme as they possess the appropriate attributes, such as interest, resources, capacity and influence.
- **Facilitate accessibility:** Innovations rarely spread spontaneously, but typically require concerted efforts to promote awareness and understanding of their value and benefit. The creation of the online platform increased accessibility of the relevant web-based resources and enabled the initiative to continue having a legacy impact. Care Alliance Ireland has secured the following domains: [www.familycarertraining.ie](http://www.familycarertraining.ie), [.eu](http://.eu) and [.com](http://.com).

**“I have information on training options and an insight into aspects of monitoring and gathering data on interventions. How to establish baseline data & impact is important.”**

## FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

By building on health and social care professionals' knowledge and skills, the Family Carer Training programme has resulted in a cadre of champions and enablers who can facilitate the spreading and scaling of outcome-based training for carers within their communities. The Family Carer Training website continues to provide professionals and carers with emerging resources and information to support them in putting the latest knowledge into action. Given the right conditions, Care Alliance Ireland is keen to collaborate with family carer organisations and others internationally to expand the Family Carer Training initiative to support both the delivery of 'train-the-carer' sessions, as well as to create a follow-up booklet, resources and a locally relevant website.

**“I did want to let you know that I really got great value from the 2 days in Athlone and have gone on to deliver Caring for Carers talks at a number of places in Louth as well as using the material on an individual basis with carers I work with.”**

### References:

1. Committee on Family Caregiving for Older Adults; Board on Health Care Services; Health and Medicine Division; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2016. Family caregiving roles and impacts. In Schulz R, Eden J (Ed.), *Families Caring for an Aging America* (Chapter 3). Washington, DC: National Academies Press.
2. Reinhard SC, Given B, Petlick NH, et al. 2008. Supporting Family caregivers in providing care. In Hughes RG (Ed.), *Patient Safety and Quality: An Evidence-Based Handbook for Nurses* (Chapter 14). Rockville, MD: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality.

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CARE ALLIANCE IRELAND is the National Network of Voluntary Organisations in Ireland supporting Family Carers. Our vision is that the role of Family Carers is fully recognised and valued by society. We exist to enhance the quality of life for Family Carers. We achieve this by supporting our member organisations in their direct work with Family Carers through the provision of information, developing research and policy, sharing resources and instigating opportunities for collaboration. For more information on the programme, contact: [info@carealliance.ie](mailto:info@carealliance.ie) | [www.carealliance.ie](http://www.carealliance.ie) | [www.familycarertraining.ie](http://www.familycarertraining.ie) | [@CareAllianceIrl](https://twitter.com/CareAllianceIrl)