



Press Release

Immediate Release

16 April 2024

### **Lewisham Carer Receives British Empire Medal**

A CARER from Lewisham has received his British Empire Medal in recognition of the work he does to support carers and highlight the life-changing work they do.

Matthew McKenzie was nominated for the prestigious honour by Carers UK due to his local services to the community in London. He is also a Carer Ambassador at leading health and social care company, Cygnet.

He received his award at a special ceremony at the Tower of London and was presented with it by The Lord Lieutenant, Sir Kenneth Olisa OBE.

Matthew, of Catford, Lewisham, said he was honoured and delighted to be the recipient of a New Year's Honour.

He added: "The day was such a special occasion. I have done so much raising carer awareness and being a voice for carers. It is not enough to be recognised; we also need to be valued by those who hold the same ideals.

"I hope my award sets an example for the importance of community and serving others. There of course will be challenges, but deep down I know people will always remember when we go that extra mile and make a difference in their lives."

Matthew, who previously cared for his mother and now supports his two brothers with autism, is Cygnet Health Care's Expert by Experience Carer Ambassador and makes a difference to the organisation by ensuring carer's voices are heard and that they continue to play an integral role in shaping the support provided to their loved one.

He helps to shape Cygnet's carer plan and takes part in a range of opportunities for discussion and feedback across carers' councils, workshops and one-to-one conversations in all service areas. He also runs several carer forums that cover large parts of London. He is the chair of the National Triangle of Care community group and campaigns heavily for carer rights with the support of national carer charities.

Laura Sheridan, Cygnet Group Service Improvement Manager, was invited by Matthew to be one of his special guests as he received the award. She first met Matthew over two years ago when setting up the Cygnet Carers Network.

She said: "It was truly a special day to be there with Matthew as he received this well-deserved honour.

"All of us at Cygnet Group pass on our enormous congratulations to Matthew and are delighted that his dedication, commitment and support to carers have been recognised by Carers UK.

"I am personally grateful for the support he lends to other carers across our organisation and it was a genuine privilege to celebrate with him on the day he received such a prestigious honour."

Matthew often uses social media to raise awareness of mental health and carers and is also an NHS Citizen to continue promoting awareness of carers including cancer carers and ethnic minority carers. He has written four books to continue raising awareness of mental health carers.

Talking about the difference he wants to make through his role at Cygnet, Matthew added: "I always felt that carers should get involved to create change within organisations. I am involved in several mental health NHS trusts, but felt I could make a difference at Cygnet.

"As a carer ambassador I can use my profile to connect with carers who often feel lost within the system. Even though I heavily promote carer causes, I believe staff, patient and carers should work together to increase communication and understanding. There will be challenges, but I also believe we should avoid shutting people out.

"Cygnet has done a lot to raise the profile of carers and I am excited to see what will develop from their latest carer initiatives.

"I am sure Cygnet is up to the challenge to identify and support carers."

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**Notes to Editors:**

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