

Improving lives together



Cygnet Carer, Family and Friend Strategy **2025 - 2028**



Foreword

Carers, families and friends play a vital role in the lives of the people we support. Their knowledge, compassion and lived experience enrich our services in ways no training or policy could ever replace. When carers are recognised, supported and included, outcomes improve not only for the person receiving care, but for the whole family and community. This is more than a strategy. It is a commitment: to listen, to learn, and to lead the way in carer partnership.

Laura Sheridan

Group Head of Carer and Service User Engagement

As Board Sponsor for Carer, Family and Friends Engagement, I am honoured to support this strategy and the important work it represents. This strategy sets out a clear, ambitious plan to strengthen how we recognise, involve, and support carers across Cygnet.

As Board Sponsor, I will provide the leadership to ensure that carer engagement remains a priority across Cygnet. Together, we will continue to recognise the essential role carers play in the recovery and wellbeing of the people we care for, and ensure that the carer's voice is listened to and acted upon.

Shane Mills

Group Executive Director of Nursing

Carers' Network Voice

Coming together as a network and co-producing the Carers Strategy, we now look forward to working with Cygnet in delivering the outcomes.

The Strategy provides a clear framework with 6 groups of measurable priorities alongside the further adoption and integration of the Triangle of Care. It further outlines a transparent and collaborative working partnership with Carers, with co-design and co-production at its core.

Working with and supporting carers through communication, consultation, inclusion, and involvement is the culture that Cygnet embraces, and this improves the lives of our loved ones, their families, and the communities in which they live.



Improving lives together

Integrity	Trust	Empower	Respect	Care
<i>We have Integrity</i> Guided by a strong moral code, we act with the best intentions and for the right reasons; making person-centred decisions based on individual assessment.	<i>We Trust</i> Forming the basis of our therapeutic and working relationships, we work hard to build and maintain trust.	<i>We Empower</i> We empower people to make informed decisions and forge their own path. We encourage people to take every opportunity.	<i>We Respect</i> We treat people fairly as individuals. We understand the strength that lies in our diversity. We ensure people have the ability and support to make a positive difference.	<i>We Care</i> We listen to each other and care for each other. We care deeply about everyone who is part of the Cygnet community.

Who is the Strategy for?

Cygnets' Carer, Family and Friend Strategy is for carers of all ages, roles, and experiences. Caring can look very different depending on circumstances, from young carers, parent carers, sibling carers, and partners, to staff who balance caring responsibilities alongside professional roles.

For this strategy, we define carers as people who provide unpaid help and support to a family member, friend, or individual who would otherwise not be able to manage. This includes those who may not always identify as carers but who nonetheless are.

Play a vital role in supporting the wellbeing, recovery, and quality of life of the people we care for. Our strategy reflects the diversity of carers' experiences and commits to working alongside carers from all backgrounds, with particular attention to young carers, carers from racialised communities, carers of people with complex needs, and carers who may be hidden or overlooked.

Vision Cultural Changes

Cygnets' vision is to ensure that carers, families, and friends have a strong sense of recognition, belonging, and influence. We know that diversity of background, culture, and lived experience brings vital insights, creates challenge, and drives innovation.

Building on the foundations of 2023–2025, our vision for 2025–2028 is to:

- > Embed carer recognition and involvement as 'everyone's business', not an afterthought.
- > Apply the Patient Carer Race Equality Framework (PCREF) to ensure equity for carers from racialised and minority communities.
- > Ensure carers are involved in governance and quality improvement, not just consultation, create opportunities for young carers, parent carers, sibling carers, and staff carers to have a distinct voice within our culture.

Our Aims for 2025 - 2028

During this period, we will continue to:

- > **Consult** – provide diverse opportunities for involvement (forums, surveys, digital platforms, outreach to seldom-heard carers).
- > **Co-Design** – work with families and carers to shape service improvements, including new digital and accessibility tools.
- > **Co-Produce** – empower carers as equal partners in leading, delivering, and evaluating improvement projects.

New commitments include:

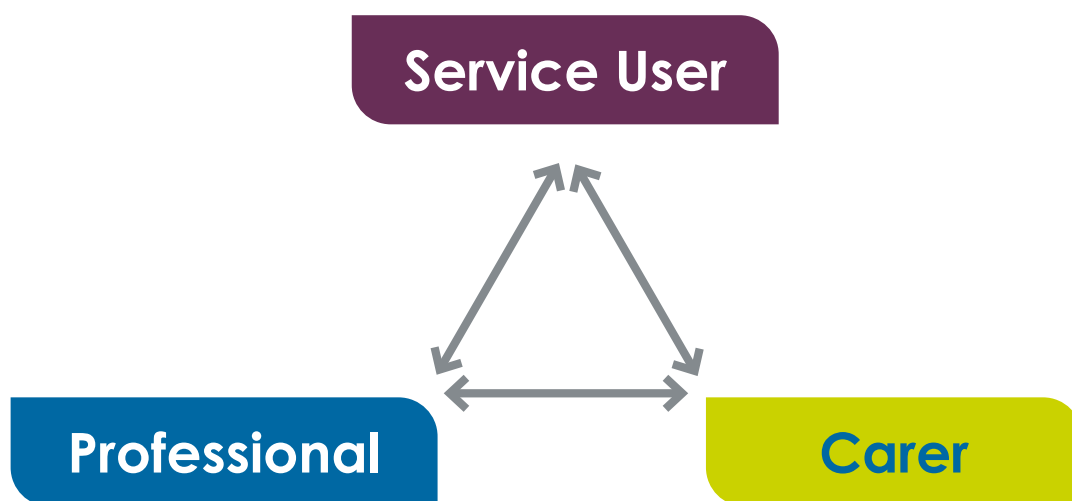
Embedding carer voices into PCREF delivery and governance boards. Introducing mid-strategy reviews (2026/27) to check progress and adjust priorities. Expanding recognition of hidden and staff carers, ensuring they receive tailored support.

Triangle of Care - How We Will Deliver Our Strategy

Our aim for 2025–2028 is to strengthen and expand the ways we work with carers, families, and friends so that they are not only informed and engaged, but also recognised as equal partners in care.

The Triangle of Care model remains central to our approach, ensuring meaningful involvement and inclusion of carers, families, and friends.

By embedding the Triangle of Care, we will deliver better outcomes for service users, carers, and families alike, and embed carer partnership as everyone's business across Cygnet.



The Six Standards of the Triangle of Care State

1. Carers and the essential role they play are identified at first contact or as soon as possible thereafter.
2. Staff are 'carer aware' and trained in carer engagement strategies.
3. Policy and practice protocols regarding confidentiality and sharing information are in place.
4. Defined post(s) responsible for carers are in place.
5. A carer introduction to the service and staff is available, with a relevant range of information across the care pathway.
6. A range of carer support services is available.

Cygnets Priorities

Through our work with carers, the people who use Cygnets services, staff, and our wider partnerships, we have committed to embedding the Triangle of Care as the foundation of how we work. In doing so, we strengthen meaningful collaboration and ensure that carers are consistently recognised and valued as equal partners in care.

The Triangle of Care is a nationally developed model that shapes our priorities and carer pathways. Our updated priorities reflect the six national standards and our wider commitments for 2025–2028:

- > Identification and recognition actively identifying and recognising carers, including those who may be 'hidden' or seldom heard.
- > Dedicated responsibility ensuring posts and roles are in place with clear accountability for carer support and involvement.
- > Carer awareness and training equipping staff to be 'carer aware', skilled and confident in engaging with carers.
- > Information and communication – co-producing policy, practice, and accessible information with families and carers.
- > Support and signposting providing tailored support for families and carers, with particular attention to young carers, staff carers, and those from racialised and minority communities.
- > Involvement and partnership, embedding carers in decision-making, governance, and quality improvement, ensuring their voices influence service development.

1. Identifying and Recognising Carers

Many people do not immediately recognise themselves as carers. They often see their role simply as being a relative, friend, or neighbour helping someone. As a result, carers can sometimes miss out on the support and recognition they need.

Early identification of carers and family members is essential. People should be encouraged to identify themselves and understand their rights at the earliest opportunity. By supporting individuals to self-identify as unpaid carers, and by raising wider awareness so that others can recognise the role they play, Cygnet can open up access to information, advice, and other forms of support. This is a vital first step to ensuring that unpaid carers are not left without help.

Carers should be guided towards appropriate information and advice as early as possible, enabling them to make informed decisions and to better understand both their rights and the impact of their caring role.

To support this, we will:

- > Actively promote awareness of what it means to be a carer across all our services.
- > Provide clear and accessible information so that carers understand how to access support.
- > Ensure that staff are trained to identify carers early and signpost them effectively.
- > Work in partnership with local carer organisations to strengthen recognition and support.

What we did in 2023 – 2025	By 2028, we will:
Review the admission paperwork to ensure information can be recorded to identify who is the carer, family and friend, and who has any legal instrument in place, e.g., LPA, or Deputyship.	Increase identification of carers: Record a 25% increase in the number of carers identified and logged across Cygnet services.
Review the admission and discharge policy to ensure the role and needs of the carer are recognised.	Staff capability: Ensure 80% of frontline staff complete annual training on identifying and supporting carers.
Offer carers the opportunity to provide feedback on their experiences through the Carers' Experience Survey Questionnaire.	Carer awareness: Deliver at least one national carer awareness campaign each year, with measurable engagement (e.g., social media reach, attendance at events, or uptake of resources).
Cygnet will involve carers as experts.	Carer information access: Ensure that 100% of services have up-to-date carer information packs and digital resources accessible to carers at the point of admission.
Cygnet will ensure there is a straightforward process of signposts in place that support carers if there is a crisis once the person is discharged.	Feedback loop: Introduce a survey question asking carers whether they feel "recognised in their role" and aim for a positive response rate of at least 80%.

2. Defined Post(s) Responsible for Carers

Professionals need to understand and value carers' expertise, skills, and insights to ensure that support for them and for the person they care for is as strong as possible.

Effective collaboration with carers means empowering them with accessible information about the types of support available and giving them genuine choice over how this is delivered. Carers consistently tell us they want to be recognised as experts by experience and to have their knowledge respected by staff.

We also recognise that some carers may find it difficult to participate fully due to heavy caring responsibilities, distance, work commitments, or literacy and language needs. This must never lead to carers being excluded. Technology, flexible approaches, and proactive communication are essential in reducing barriers.

In some circumstances, carers also hold legal responsibilities such as acting as a court-appointed deputy, which means they are key decision-makers under the law. Staff must understand and act in line with these responsibilities.

To support this, we will:

- > Cygnet will ensure every service has a named Carer Lead with defined responsibilities. The Carer Leads will champion carer involvement, not only signposting but actively supporting carers, escalating issues, and ensuring carers' voices are heard.
- > Embed carer feedback within governance structures: carer feedback to be a standing agenda item at service-level governance and will feed into national Committee discussions.
- > Ensure staff appraisals and supervisions reflect engagement with carers, reinforcing that "supporting carers is everyone's business".
- > Build on existing good practice by reviewing carer engagement processes annually, with outcomes shared back to carers through "you said, we did" feedback loops.
- > Recognise the diversity of carers by ensuring policies, training, and practice explicitly include young carers, parent carers, sibling carers, partner carers, staff carers, and out-of-area carers.
- > Provide accessible formats of information and involve carers in service development, ward rounds, and discharge planning wherever possible.

What we did in 2023 – 2025	By 2028, we will:
Cygnet will ensure all sites have a defined post responsible for carers in place.	Leadership in place: 80% of services will have a named Carer Lead in place.
Cygnet will develop Regional Carer Leads, who will report to the Head of Carers to discuss local and regional carer needs.	Carer Leads will attend the Monthly Peer Support Carers Lead hosted by the Corporate Carer Lead, ensuring consistency, shared learning, and stronger national oversight.
Cygnet already has many effective processes in place to support carers. Cygnet knows that particular aspects of caring remain challenging. Cygnet will build on the existing structures that work while addressing things that need improvement by listening to carers and formulating solutions and plans.	Cygnet will host an annual national meeting for Carers Lead, providing shared learning, updates on best practice, and a platform to strengthen consistency across services.

3. Staff are 'Carer Aware' and Trained in Carer Engagement

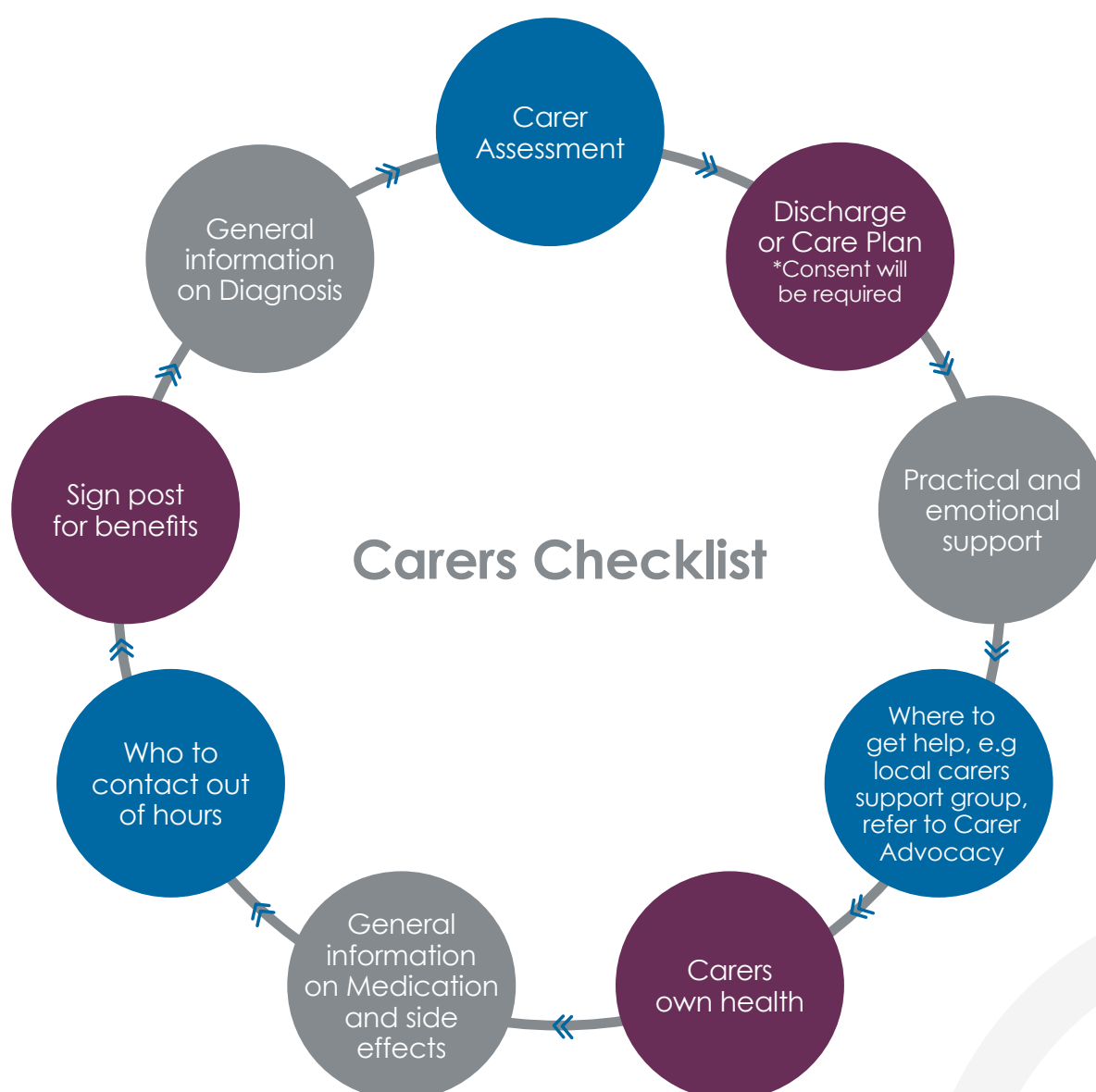
Carers need professionals who are 'carer aware' staff who recognise, value, and include the vital role of unpaid carers across health and social care. Being carer aware means going beyond awareness to actively involving carers as partners in care, supporting professional practice, safeguarding, and improving outcomes for service users and families.

To support this, Cygnet will:

- > Ensure all staff complete carer awareness training and can confidently signpost carers to community support networks, peer support, and services that improve quality of life outside of caring.
- > Provide carers with clear and accessible information, education, and resources so they can better understand health conditions, behaviours, treatments, and medication.
- > Strengthen Carer Networks so carers have opportunities to connect, share experiences, and support their own wellbeing, including access to local and national signposting services.
- > Maintain up-to-date knowledge at every site of the full range of benefits, entitlements, and community support, ensuring carers know and can access their rights.
- > Equip staff to understand how and when carers should be involved in care planning, ensuring they are respected as equal partners in decision-making while upholding confidentiality.
- > Identify and support young carers (under 18), ensuring they are safeguarded, protected from inappropriate caring responsibilities, and referred into specialist support services.
- > Apply holistic care values in practice, ensuring carers, families, and friends are fully involved as active contributors to recovery and wellbeing.
- > Involve carers directly in service development and training, ensuring lived experience drives staff learning, innovation, and cultural change.
- > Monitor impact through systematic feedback: carers will report feeling recognised and valued, and staff will demonstrate increased confidence in engaging carers as equal partners. Provide accessible formats of information and involve carers in service development, ward rounds, and discharge planning wherever possible.

What we did in 2023 – 2025	By 2028, we will:
Staff will have the training and will knowledgeably be able to actively signpost carers to local community support networks, including support from other carers (peer support) and support to improve life outside of caring.	80% of frontline staff will complete annual carer awareness training, with carers' voices embedded as part of delivery.
Cygnet will provide information to carers so they will have access to education to improve their understanding of health conditions, behaviours, medication, etc.	Carer feedback will be systematically collected at all sites, with 80% of carers reporting they feel recognised and valued by staff.
Cygnet will provide Carer Networks so carers will have opportunities to learn about managing their own well-being, including providing signposts to wellbeing service options for carers.	100% of sites will have a young carer protocol in place, with clear referral pathways to external support services.

Cygnnet will ensure sites have knowledge and information on the range of available community support services and how to improve life outside of caring.	80% of services will deliver carer-led training sessions, embedding lived experience into staff learning.
Cygnnet will ensure sites have guidance and information on how carers can access the full range of benefits available to them and raise awareness of their entitlement to support.	100% of services will provide carers with a standardised information pack on admission, co-produced with carers and updated annually.
Cygnnet will ensure staff clearly understand how and when carers can be involved in planning care.	New Carer Awareness training will be launched.



4. Policy and Practice Protocols for Sharing and Co-Producing Information with Families and Carers

Carers bring knowledge and insight that are essential to safe and effective care. Failing to involve carers risks poorer outcomes, a higher risk for service users, and unnecessary pressure on families. Cygnet's focus is not only on sharing information but on co-producing how information is created, delivered, and used in practice. Carers must be able to access timely, accurate, and meaningful information, and their voices should be embedded in decisions that affect the people they care for.

It remains essential that staff balance confidentiality with good communication, ensuring carers receive the guidance they need without breaching trust. By doing this well, we protect service users, empower carers, and strengthen recovery.

To support this, Cygnet will:

- > Use Carers' Passports in every service (where carers agree), ensuring carer involvement and rights are clearly recorded and reviewed.
- > Make it standard practice that carers who have consent are included in care planning, discharge discussions, and reviews, with their contributions documented.
- > Provide accessible opportunities for carers to contribute to Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) meetings – in person, remotely, or through structured feedback – so their insights inform decisions.
- > Ensure every carer has clear, practical discharge information covering medication, relapse signs, crisis plans, and support contacts, so they feel prepared and confident.
- > Strengthen protocols for situations where service users do not consent to share information, making sure carers are still supported, recognised, and signposted to help.
- > Support carers and service users to plan for the future, using advance statements, joint care planning, and decision-making documents that reflect shared goals.
- > Promote awareness of Lasting Powers of Attorney (LPA) and Deputyship, providing carers with accessible guidance and signposting to independent advice.
- > Ensure all staff are trained and kept up to date in information governance, with annual audits to confirm practice is safe, clear, and consistent.
- > Involve carers directly in designing and reviewing information resources and communication protocols, ensuring lived experience shapes how services share information.

What we did in 2023 – 2025	By 2028, we will:
Staff will complete the Carers' Passports with carers if the carer agrees.	80% of services will use Carers' Passports, where carers agree, reviewed annually to ensure carer involvement is meaningful and consistent.
Cygnet will ensure staff engage with families / those who are caring and who have the consent to do so from the service user.	90% of carers will report that discharge information prepared them to continue supporting recovery safely at home.
Create an accessible opportunity for carers to either feed in remotely, access MDT (Multidisciplinary Team) meetings, or take into account their views before MDT meetings, best interest meetings, and annual reviews.	100% of services will have a clear, audited protocol for supporting carers when service users do not consent to share information.

Improve communication around discharge to ensure the service user and the carer have all the information they need before leaving the hospital.	At least 75% of MDT meetings will evidence carer contributions in care planning records.
Develop a protocol for when a service user doesn't consent to share information, so that carers are still identified and offered support.	90% of staff will be up to date with annual information governance training, confirmed through audit.
Cygnnet will proactively promote planning for the future and advanced. Statements with carers and people who use Cygnnet services.	All new carer information materials (leaflets, packs, digital resources) will be co-produced with carers and reviewed every year to ensure accuracy, accessibility, and inclusivity.
Cygnnet will proactively promote Lasting Powers of Attorney (LPA), and awareness of Deputyship for personal welfare and/or personal, financial affairs.	Cygnnet will proactively promote Lasting Powers of Attorney (LPA), and awareness of Deputyship for personal welfare and/or personal, financial affairs.
Cygnnet will ensure staff keep up-to-date with information governance training.	Cygnnet will ensure staff keep up-to-date with information governance training.
Cygnnet will involve carers to provide their perspective on policies and protocols.	Cygnnet will involve carers to provide their perspective on policies and protocols.

5. Supporting Family and Carers

Clear communication is the foundation of meaningful support. Families and carers should not only be given information, but also feel genuinely listened to, valued, and included as partners in care. Cygnet's commitment is to move beyond simply signposting carers to creating a sustainable culture of support, where carers' wellbeing is valued and their voices shape how services are delivered.

Carers need timely, accurate, and accessible information about what support is available, who to contact, and how to raise concerns. They also need open, honest conversations about confidentiality, decision-making, and their rights.

To support this, Cygnet will:

- > Provide every carer with a Carer Welcome Pack that is co-produced, easy to understand, culturally inclusive, and available in both digital and printed formats. This will be regularly reviewed and promoted so carers know what help is available.
- > Ensure that carers' and families' views are consistently recorded in service user care plans, demonstrating their role as active contributors.
- > Strengthen regional Carer Networks, building momentum into a National Carer Network that enables shared learning, peer support, and influence at the organisational level.
- > Create a Carer Resource Hub (digital and site-based) with materials developed by and for carers, ensuring every site has a named Carer Lead responsible for championing support.
- > Involve carers in co-designing and leading improvement projects, recognising them as experts and ensuring their contributions shape practice, service design, and staff training.
- > Develop wellbeing pathways for carers, offering opportunities to access peer support, training, and respite signposting, so their own health and resilience are sustained.

What we did in 2023 – 2025	By 2028, we will:
Develop a corporate Carers' Welcome Pack and ensure that information leaflets for carers are readily available, regularly updated, and promoted.	100% of carers offered a co-produced Welcome Pack (digital and paper) on admission.
Record family and carers' views on the person who uses the Cygnet service care plan.	80% of care plans will evidence carer and family views.
Strengthen regional Carers' Networks, which will feed into a National Carers' Network.	A National Carer Network is fully established, with at least two national meetings per year and active regional representation.
Create information that could be used by carer leads and ensure all sites have a carer lead.	80% of sites have a named Carer Lead, trained and supported through the corporate Carer Network.
Cygnet will invite carers to support and help lead improvement projects through co-design and co-production in their capacity as experts with lived experience.	At least 50% of service improvement projects should evidence carer involvement in co-design or leadership.
	80% of carers surveyed will report they feel supported in their role and know where to go for help.

6. Improving the Involvement of Families and Carers (2025–2028)

Carers and families bring perspectives that no professional training can replace. Their insights, knowledge, and lived experience are vital to safe, compassionate, and effective care. Involvement must be more than occasional consultation; it must be consistent, meaningful, and influential, shaping both individual care and the wider culture of services.

From 2025 to 2028, we will strengthen the way carers are involved at every level of Cygnet. This means creating regular and reliable opportunities to be heard, embedding advocacy into practice, and ensuring equality of voice through the Patient and Carer Race Equality Framework (PCREF).

To support this, Cygnet will:

- > Hold monthly Carer Drop-ins via Zoom and at least three monthly site in person carer drop-ins, providing regular spaces for carers to share experiences, raise concerns, and receive updates from staff.
- > Ensure carers' and families' contributions are formally recorded in care plans, MDT reviews, discharge planning, and Best Interest Meetings, with evidence of how their input shaped decisions.
- > Embed carer advocacy across all services, so carers have independent support to express their views, influence decisions, and safeguard their own wellbeing.
- > Embed carer involvement within the Patient and Carer Race Equality Framework (PCREF), ensuring carers from racialised and seldom-heard communities are represented and their voices influence action on inequalities.
- > Involve carers as co-producers in service improvement projects, working alongside staff to address challenges and develop practical, innovative solutions.

What we did in 2023 – 2025	By 2028, we will:
Work with all locations to develop consistent carers' events (e.g., coffee mornings and opportunities to share experiences) to occur at least every 12 weeks.	80% of services will host three monthly carer drop-ins, with outcomes and actions reported locally.
We will respect carers' and families' views and knowledge of their loved ones.	80% of care plans and discharge records will evidence carer input, where consent is in place.
Implement a formal requirement to include carers in the assessment process, Multidisciplinary Teams (MDT) review meetings, discharge planning, Best Interest Meetings, and annual reviews.	Carer advocacy is available in every service, with annual audits of accessibility and impact.
Cygnet will work with carers and staff to identify opportunities and challenges and apply creative and innovative thinking in developing solutions.	PCREF delivery will demonstrate carer involvement in at least 75% of local and national reviews on inequalities.

Statement from the Carers Trust Triangle of Care

“Carers are vital partners in care. As family members or friends, their knowledge of the cared-for person provides important insight to support safety and recovery, and carers deserve support for their own needs too. It's wonderful to see Cygnet's continued commitment to rolling out Carers Trust's Triangle of Care quality improvement scheme across its hospital sites, and setting clear targets to improve carer inclusion and support in the coming years.”

Debbie Hustings and Mary Patel,
Triangle of Care Programme Leads, Carers Trust



Legal Responsibilities

Under the Care Act 2014, carers are entitled to a statutory assessment where they appear to have needs. This matches the rights of the person being cared for to their own assessment. Local authorities are responsible for carer assessments (or this may be delegated), ensuring carers have equal recognition in law.

Young carers have specific protections under the Care Act. They should be identified as early as possible and supported so they are not left with inappropriate caring responsibilities. Schools, health services, and local authorities have a joint duty to make sure young carers are recognised and their wellbeing safeguarded. Cygnet has strengthened this by signing the Carers Trust's Young Carers Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), which commits us to making young carers visible, supported, and prioritised in every service.

Staff must therefore be aware of carers' rights and responsibilities, and able to link carers, including young carers and carers from racialised and seldom-heard communities, to the full range of support available through local authorities, voluntary and community organisations, and universal services.

The Opportunity for Cygnet to be a Leader in Carer Support

The legal framework provides the foundation, but our ambition is to go further. Cygnet's opportunity for 2025–2028 is to move beyond compliance and become a leader in carer partnership.

We have already made progress in carer identification and inclusion. Building on this, our next steps are to:

- Embed the Young Carers MoU into everyday practice, ensuring every site actively identifies, supports, and protects young carers.
- Strengthen equity and inclusion by embedding the Patient and Carer Race Equality Framework (PCREF) into all carer work.
- Ensure carers have access to independent advocacy so their voices are heard and acted upon.
- Move from “information sharing” to true co-production and co-leadership, with carers influencing service design, delivery, and governance.

By 2028, Cygnet will be recognised not just as a provider that meets its legal duties, but as a sector leader in carer support, ensuring carers of all ages and backgrounds are visible, valued, and empowered.

Acknowledgements

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- > Cygnet Carers Network
- > Cygnet Staff
- > The Carers Trust
- > Karen Ibrahim
- > Kate Mercer Black Belt Advocacy
- > NHS Providers

Without their participation in shaping Cygnet's Carer, Family and Friend Strategy, our plans for the future could not be developed with such valuable insight.

References

Carers Trust. The Triangle of Care Toolkit – A Resource for Mental Health Service Providers; 2015. <https://carers.org/resources/all-resources/53-the-triangle-of-carecarers-included-a-guide-to-best-practice-in-mental-health-care-in-england>

A lasting power of attorney (LPA) is a legal document that lets you (the 'donor') appoint one or more people (known as 'attorneys') to help you make decisions or to make decisions on your behalf. <https://www.gov.uk/power-of-attorney>

The Care Act 2014 relates mostly to adult carers – people over 18 who are caring for another adult. This is because young carers (aged under 18) and adults who care for disabled children can be assessed and supported under children's law.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/care-act-2014-part-1-factsheets/care-act-factsheets>

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/23/section/10/enacted>

<https://www.nhs.uk/social-care-and-support/support-and-benefits-for-carers/carers-assessments/>



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