

Housing Learning & Improvement Network

The Health and Social Care Change Agent Team (CAT) was created by the DoH to improve discharge from hospital and associated arrangements. The Housing LIN, a section of the CAT, is devoted to housing-based models of care.



Supporting Diversity in Tower Hamlet

Sonali Gardens - An Extra Care scheme for Bangladeshi and Asian Elders
Case Study prepared by Maria Brenton for the Housing Learning & Improvement Network

Sonali Gardens - An Extra Care Scheme for Bangladeshi and Asian Elders

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Architects: PRP Ltd

External partners: Circle 33 Housing Group, London Borough of Tower Hamlets Social Services Department; Supporting People team, London Borough of Tower Hamlets.

Aims and objectives:

To provide an environment that enables older people to make the most of the skills and abilities they have and to retain them as long as possible

To create choices, care and support for Bangladeshi and Asian elders

To re-provide residential care



Sonali Gardens, exterior

Key strategic issues:

To establish a culturally sensitive environment with care and support for a core population (40-60 per cent) of Bangladeshi and Asian elders. It is recognised that the traditions and customs of this community effectively debar them from participating in mainstream forms of provision. The scheme is primarily focused on the needs of this group but it is available as a mixed community to anyone who can benefit from its particular kind of environment as long as this is appropriate to their need (minimum requirement at least 12.25 hours personal care per week). There is strong encouragement of integration and mutual understanding.

To maintain Sonali Gardens as part of its local community.

To develop Sonali Gardens and its adjoining day centre as a flexible resource for older people.

Local service context:

Almost every national index of deprivation defines the London Borough of Tower Hamlets as socio-economically deprived. With one third of its population expected to be Bangladeshi by 2011, the borough is an overwhelmingly young one, with a population of older people below the national average. 13 per cent of local elders are Bangladeshi, 2 per cent Other Asian, 5 per cent Black and 1 per cent Chinese. The majority White British population of elders (78 per cent) is steadily declining. The health of older people in the Borough shows a higher incidence of chronic illnesses than found among older people nationally.

A shift away from institutional care to home support in recent years has seen the development of culturally specific home care services catering for the diverse Black and Minority Ethnic groups. Six local residential care homes have been replaced by a mix of home care services and four extra-care schemes (a total of 161 places). The last of these, Sonali Gardens (pronounced 'Shenali' and meaning 'warm heart') was opened in July 2004 and is intended to provide for Bangladeshi and Asian older people in the Shadwell ward where nearly half the population belongs to these two groups. In the re-provision of residential care, it became evident, despite high levels of morbidity and mortality among Bangladeshi and Asian elders, that they were severely under-represented in these services where 98 per cent of service users were White British. The current tenants of Sonali Gardens have been living with their families, often in statutorily over-crowded conditions; some have been homeless; others have come from local hospitals.

There is a combined extra care and day care scheme whose component parts are as integrated as possible. The adjoining Sonali Gardens day-centre is run by Tower Hamlets from 10.00 am to 4.00 pm on weekdays.

Specific outcomes:

By the end of its first six months, Sonali Gardens had 26 tenants, among whom were three couples. The gender balance is more evenly distributed here than is customary in Extra Care schemes, reflecting the predominance of men among early immigrants. Average

age is 70 years, a function of premature ageing in this particular ethnic group.

Care staff have been recruited and EPIC runs its own in-house training programmes with the aim of all staff reaching NVQ level three.

Sonali Gardens has seen continued and significant involvement of tenants' families in care and support arrangements.

Along with the adjoining day-centre, the scheme has begun to develop a programme of cultural events and activities.

Whole system approach:

Sonali Gardens is run on person-based principles. Flexibility of individual care arrangements is given prime importance and levels of support are negotiated with individual tenants. Staff support is based where preferred on shared care with family members. EPIC staff fit in to the schedules of tenants and their relatives and promote tenants' connections with their families and with their local clubs, mosque and shops.

A clear example of this flexible approach was demonstrated during Ramadan, when care staff work schedules were adjusted to the fasting period. Staff were available from 5.00 am and a communal meal was also provided in the day-centre facilities after 6.00 pm at the break of the daily fast.

Specification:

Sonali Gardens provides 30 one-bedroom (average size 45 m²) and 10 two-bedroom flats (62.7 m²). A secure entry system is controlled by the service co-ordinator via intercom, with tenants having their own fob keys, and the garden, shared with the day-centre, is enclosed and safe for wanderers. It is intended that the garden, with its fountain and flower beds, should be a significant external space for residents, whose cultural preference is to be outside as much as possible. Facilities include several lounges overlooking the garden (for men and women to meet separately), a prayer room, laundry, buggy room, offices, training space and a treatment room. Internal walls in the flats are removable and surface levels in kitchens and bathrooms are adjustable. Flats are provided with tracking for hoists, walk-in showers, satellite and cable points and wiring for telemonitoring if needed. Each floor has a distinct colour, front doors are different colours and visual prompts exist where needed. Asian art forms decorate the walls and signage is bilingual.

Sonali Gardens, communal dining room



With advice from the local Imam, the large adjoining day-centre is also designed to be culturally specific, with separate facilities for prayer and ablutions for men and women, capacity for separate social gatherings, a therapy room with kitchen, a hair-dressing salon and assisted bathing facility. A culturally specific menu is provided by a large restaurant and kitchen. The building's architecture and furnishings reflect Asian culture.

Sonali Gardens is managed by EPIC on a three year contract. 80 per cent of its staff speak one of the three main languages: Urdu, Sylheti or Bangla. The scheme manager performs a traditional, non-residential warden role, funded by Supporting People. He coordinates services, facilitates integration and sustains tenants by visiting them daily, giving benefits advice, connecting them to their local communities, arranging social activities and running a newsletter. He feeds into individual care plans agreed with tenants and operated by the Care Team. The latter provide physical care services as necessary and actively support the building up of skills and re-engagement in the local community.

Resources:

The original six residential care sites supplied the main resource input to a £10 million development of four Extra Care schemes. For the Sonali Gardens scheme and its adjoining day-centre, the site allowed for the sale of some land for owner occupation and the construction of a number of shared ownership dwellings for local council tenants. This cross-financing helped resource the social care provisions. Revenue costs are financed by rents, Supported Housing funding and Social Services department funding.

Challenges:

Care not provided by the family is an unfamiliar concept for Bangladeshi and Asian elders. For them it is 'stranger care' and requires a leap of faith. Take-up has been slow initially, despite a six month marketing exercise funded jointly by EPIC and the Borough. The ethos promoted by EPIC is that of 'the honoured elder who can offer hospitality with the security of care to hand' and outreach is ongoing.

Misrepresentation by the local press of the facility as 'an Asians-only estate' and a 'recipe for race riots' proved an early and unanticipated threat to the project which had to be vigorously defended by local councillors.

Fuller use of the generous facilities of the day-centre would augment this resource for local elders generally and it is intended that its services would be extended eventually to evenings and weekends. Closer integration and management with the Extra Care scheme could offer opportunities for greater flexibility and maximum use, building on the successful co-operation around Ramadan.

Experience with this development found that Supporting People funding is too narrowly focused to encompass wider cultural provisions easily.

Learning Points:

In the light of early racial antagonism whipped up by the local press and the slow take-up of Sonali Gardens' tenancies since July 2004 by Bangladeshi and Asian elders, it is recognised that efforts by the Borough to engage the local community at an earlier stage would have paid dividends. Although a marketing drive was funded for six months, it is acknowledged that a well worked out communications strategy was needed to help the local population and local Borough staff to understand the unfamiliar concept of Extra Care and its benefits for this particular group of elders. The original stimulus to developing Extra Care was the re-provision of residential care, rather than the mapping of needs among Bangladeshi and Asian elders. In retrospect, the Borough would correct this emphasis and the lessons will be applied to further provisions among other ethnic groups.

'Sonali Gardens shows Bangladeshi and Asian elders that we have listened to how they want to live' (Commissioning Manager for Elders).

It is intended that the role of Extra Care in the Borough should be reviewed in 2005 to explore what has been achieved and what potential the model offers for such groups as the Somali and Chinese communities and for people with conditions like functional mental illness and dementia. The extent to which it can substitute for residential care in dealing with the highest dependency levels needs to be examined.

Further areas of development are likely to be the use of Extra Care facilities for local health services and advice sessions, for the provision of intermediate care and for assertive outreach to older people with mental health issues.

Links with the Housing Department have been improved with the local Supporting People team developing a useful role as champion of Extra Care within the Department.

Other Housing LIN publications available in this format:

Case study no.1: Extra Care Strategic Developments in North Yorkshire

Case study no.2: Extra Care Strategic Developments in East Sussex

Case study no.3: 'Least-use' Assistive Technology in Dementia Extra Care

Case study no.5: Village People: A Mixed Tenure Retirement Community

Case study no.6: How to get an Extra Care Programme in Practice

The Housing LIN welcomes contributions on a range of issues pertinent to Extra Care housing. If there is a subject that you feel should be addressed, please contact us.

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