

H-Connect Project Narrative Progress Report

November 2024 - May 2025

Purpose

The purpose of the H-Connect Project is to support hospitals in Derbyshire (including the city) to improve the identification, involvement and support of unpaid carers. This includes improving the behaviours and practices of professionals, as well as the systems. The project is a preventative initiative which informs the hospital trusts of their statutory duties and to help reduce the health inequalities unpaid carers often face. The projects key aim is to improve the inclusion of carers in the hospital discharge process and drive transformative change.

The journey so far.....

The H-Connect Project was launched on 1st November 2024 but it has taken several months to recruit and skill up the project team in order for us to feel competent and confident to motivate, influence and train health professionals. It has also taken several months to start building trusting relationships with hospital trusts, clinical managers and carer leads, and to support them to prioritise unpaid carers and understand the benefits of doing this. What the project is teaching us is that hospitals and local Carers Support Services need to work in partnership to improve outcomes and over-all wellbeing for carers. Over the past seven months, collaboration between the H-Connect Project and Derbyshire hospitals is resulting in better communication, shared goals and delivering a more holistic approach to care for carers, ultimately benefitting patients and potentially reducing costs in the NHS. By improving the identification, involvement and support for carers in the hospital discharge process, we can support carers earlier in their caring journey, help prevent carer breakdown, and reduce hospital re-admissions.

This report summarises some of the journey of the H-Connect Project so far....

Project Promotion

Between 1st November 2024 and end of May 2025, the 'Carers Hospital Discharge Liaison Project (H-Connect) Team' have attended 118 online meetings to promote and update on the H-Connect Project. Most of the meetings attended were in November 2024 when the project was mainly promoted at Place Alliance and NHS Trust meetings. Meeting numbers have also remained high between January 2025 and April 2025 as efforts to engage and establish working relationships between the Hospital Liaison Workers and pilot-sites have taken place. There have also been two meetings to introduce the project to carers and one meeting where carers have reviewed the training resources. One meeting has also been with the University of Derby and Burton Hospitals Safeguarding Lead and another has been with the Care Transfer Hub Development Lead. Online/Face-to-face meetings continue to be a key part of building trust between the H-Connect Project and key stakeholders, and an online project progress meeting has been planned for 30th July 2025, which carers and professionals can attend.

Pilot Sites

In the months of January 2025 and February 2025, the MacMillan Unit at Chesterfield, the Radbourne Unit at Derby Royal, and Cubley Court Ward at the Kingsway Hospital volunteered to become pilot-sites for the H-Connect Project. In April 2025, Ward 3 and 5 at the Florence Nightingale Community Hospital also volunteered to become pilot-sites and in May 2025, the Cavendish Community Hospital (Fenton Ward) also signed up to be a pilot-site. Engagement with the MacMillan Unit has been the strongest as this team were the first to complete their baseline review and access the H-Connect Projects new 'Carers Awareness' training. A baseline review is an opportunity for a pilot-site to review their current provision for unpaid carers with a Hospital Liaison Worker and pledge actions for improvement, and work towards a quality mark accreditation. Engagement with the other pilot-sites has been slow but positive, and four of them have now had their baseline reviews and accessed training. Reasons for struggling to engage with the H-Connect Project has mainly been hospital staff turnover and time limitations.

Towards the end of May 2025, the ARF/H-Connect Project Lead and Derbyshire Care Transfer Hub Development Lead (CTHDL) met online and discussed the need to identify, involve and support unpaid carers at the front door of hospital admission (elective or non-elective

admission) and at every transition point of the hospital discharge pathway process. Alison Hill (CTHDL) agreed to explore adding the question "Is someone helping look after you?" on the paperwork and to ensure unpaid carers are discussed within Derbyshire Joined-Up Care 'Quality Conversations' training. Stephanie Smith (Project Lead) agreed that the H-Connect Project Team could provide members of the Care Transfer Hub Multi-Disciplinary Team(s) with free Carers Awareness training. It has been agreed that the Chesterfield Royal Discharge Lounge will now be the seventh pilot site for the H-Connect Project, as this is an opportunity to make some transformational and systematic change.

Also, on the 27th May 2025, a meeting was held between Stephanie Smith (Project Lead), Tina Munro (Project Hospital Liaison Worker) and Dilprit Shergill (Dementia and Safeguarding Clinical Lead at University Hospitals of Derby and Burton NHS Foundation Trust) to discuss the H-Connect Project and to confirm that the Trust really wants to improve their provision for carers. It was therefore agreed, that the Dementia Team would become the eighth pilot site and that two Hospital Liaison Workers would lead the team on the pathway towards Carers Awareness accreditation.

H-Connect / Hospital Discharge Project (ARF) Site Listing

Current Sites (May 2025)

Site / Ward	Patient Group	Location	Allied NHS Trust
Macmillan Unit / Chesterfield Royal	Cancer	Chesterfield	Chesterfield RH NHS FT
Cubley Court wards / Kingsway Hospital	Dementia / Organic Mental Health	Derby	Derbyshire Healthcare NHS FT
Radbourne Unit	Acute mental health	Derby	Derbyshire Healthcare NHS FT
Ward 3, Florence Nightingale Community Hospital	Stroke / Neurological Rehab	Derby	University Hospitals of Derby and Burton NHS FT
Ward 5, Florence Nightingale Community Hospital	Neurological Rehab (Discharge Unit)	Derby	University Hospitals of Derby and Burton NHS FT
Cavendish Hospital	Fenton Ward (Geriatric)	Buxton	Derbyshire Community Healthcare Services NHS FT
Chesterfield Royal Care Transfer Hub / Discharge Lounge	Varied Conditions	Chesterfield	Derbyshire Community Healthcare Services NHS FT
The Dementia Team at the University Hospitals of Derby & Burton NHS Foundation Trust	Dementia	Derby Royal	University Hospitals of Derby & Burton NHS Foundation Trust.

H-Connect Carers Awareness Training

Between February 2025 and May 2025, ten Carers Awareness training sessions were delivered with forty-seven health professionals attending in total from the MacMillan Unit, Florence Nightingale Wards 3 and 5 and the Cavendish Community Hospital.

Some feedback from the Carers Awareness training (all feedback is from clinicians, including Ward Managers):

- *"The interaction from the trainers and the opportunity to ask questions and feedback throughout the session was really good"*
- *"I rated this training as very good. It gave me a wider understanding of carers' needs, the services available to support them"*
- *"The best part of this training was insight into every aspect of a carers experience and the videos".*
- *"This training has really made me think about the carer more and the legal side and rights of the carer".*
- *"It has helped me reflect more and the legal slide has supported me to understand my responsibilities".*
- *"Thank you for this training. I can't wait to receive the links to the videos and to watch them again – very powerful".*

Call for Carers: Learning & Development Programme

It has been recognised that initially 'Carers Awareness' training was only being provided to pilot-sites. However, other hospital teams who are not pilot-sites have expressed an interest in accessing specific training and information sessions about carers and the local support that is available. In response to this, the H-Connect Project has worked in partnership with internal and external services to plan and deliver a comprehensive programme of learning and development for health and social care professionals working in NHS Derby & Derbyshire hospitals. Please see below:

Already, we have had professionals booking on the sessions, especially the Carers Awareness training, Carers Contingency Planning and Young Carers.

Please see the promotional poster for the programme below:







Call for Carers

Are you a Healthcare Professional looking to better support and involve Unpaid Carers in hospitals?

Join the **Call for Carers: Learning & Development Programme** — a **FREE** series of sessions designed to help NHS staff and volunteers improve how carers are identified, involved, and supported during the hospital discharge process. The programme includes carers awareness training, access to resources and best practice examples to better understand a carers journey.

Open to all healthcare professionals and volunteers working in NHS Derby & Derbyshire hospitals.

Live Webinar Sessions:

Monday 9th June	General Carers Awareness Training	2:00 - 3:00pm	H-Connect Project Team
Wednesday 2nd July	Carer Contingency Plans for Adult Carers	10:00 - 11:00am	H-Connect Project Lead & DCC Carer Support Worker
Wednesday 23rd July	Caring and Cancer - Information Session	2:00 - 3:00pm	Michelle Jacklin (The Macmillan Unit)
Thursday 14th August	Support for those caring for people with Dementia	10:00 - 11:00am	Susan O'Malley (Alzheimer's Society)
Wednesday 17th September	Support for Carers: Derby & Derbyshire County	2:00 - 3:00pm	H-Connect Project Team & Universal Services for Carers
Thursday 2nd October	Carer Money Matters - Information Session	10:00 - 11:00am	Emma Weatherston (Money Matters Project)
Tuesday 18th November	Working Carers & Their Rights in Employment	2:00 - 3:00pm	Jayne Davies (CIE Project)
Wednesday 3rd December	Identifying and Supporting Young Carers	1:00 - 2:00pm	DAACSS Young Carers Team

Check out the session list and register by scanning the QR code – it's quick, easy and FREE!

register here! →









www.derbyshirecarers.co.uk

Hospital Engagement

Setting up engagement events between the pilot-sites and the H-Connect Project has been slow but significantly increased in February 2025 when the MacMillan Unit, Cubley Court and Ilkeston Community Hospital started to work with the project to deliver regular information stands/drop-ins and presentation talks to carers. Between November 2024 and January 2025, the project reached 46 new carers but by May 2025, we had reached an additional 247 carers, and the majority of these are new carers. This is due to the promotion of carer's information stands/drop-ins at hospitals and the presence of a dedicated Carers Support/Engagement Worker from the project.

Photo below is a table of carers' resources now available at Cubley Court. A Carers Support Worker from the H-Connect Team is also available at a monthly drop-in at Cubley Court. Resources include information about Universal Services for Carers as well as Derbyshire All Age Carers Support Service. Cubley Court are now working with the H-Connect Carer Support Worker to set up an on-site Carers Support Group



Photo above is the H-Connect Project Team working in partnership with the MacMillan Unit, which is an integrated service at Chesterfield Royal Hospital. Claire Travis (Hospital Liaison Worker) and Emma Weatherstone (Carers Money Matters Project Lead) attended the new Carers Support Group at the MacMillan Unit to deliver vital information to carers about local carers support services, emergency card planning and welfare benefits and energy saving advice.

Consultation with Carers about their Experiences of Hospital Discharge

The H-Connect Project is committed to listening to the voices of carers across Derby and Derbyshire to acknowledge and understand their experiences of the hospital discharge process. The H-Connect Consultation and Co-production Worker has captured feedback from 317 carers so far, and their voices are vital to helping shape the improvements to ensuring more health professionals are identifying, involving and supporting carers.

Some carers told the H-Connect Project that they couldn't find information about local carers support services. When asked what would make the difference, the carers informed that it would be good for wards in hospitals to have up-to-date information on accessible carers' noticeboards.

The H-Connect Hospital Liaison Workers have been supporting all the pilot-sites to create carers noticeboards in prominent and accessible places on their wards.



Photo is the new carers' noticeboard at the Florence Nightingale Community Hospital Ward 5. The H-Connect Team are creating some guidelines for hospitals on what a good noticeboard could look like for carers.

Quote from carer - *"I like the new Carers Noticeboard. It's situated at the ward entrance and is not overcrowded. I hate it when I can't find information. I found out about an event for carers in the community which I attended. It was really useful".*

Carers have also been involved in reviewing and co-designing new resources for the H-Connect Project. In January 2025, 4 carers reviewed and provided feedback on the new training session to health professionals, which helped improve the content. The 'Sight Loss Council' also reviewed some resources to ensure the project was making resources to be as accessible as possible.

Resources Sent Out to Hospitals

To-date, 433 resources have been either sent or given out to hospitals, which includes bundles of leaflets about the 'Derbyshire All Age Carers Support Service', 'Caring with Confidence course', 'Money Matters Project' and the 'Universal Services for Carers'. We have also promoted events for Community Action Derby and the University Hospitals of Derby and Burton. We have also shared carers newsletters from Derbyshire All Age Carers Support Service and the Universal Services for Carers.

Partnership Working

Although Derbyshire Carers Association is leading on the H-Connect Project, it recognises that partnership working is the best way forward to ensure that outcomes are improved for carers and the people they look after across Derby and Derbyshire. Over the past few months, the H-Connect Project has built strong links with the staff team at Derby Universal Services for Carers in Derby (USfC) and we have shared training ideas and resources, as well as attended a staff team meeting together. The H-Connect Project Team has also met with Community Action Derby, Disability Direct Derby, Derbyshire Home from Hospital and Rethink to share updates about what projects and services are doing and to better understand and promote each other. The H-Connect Engagement Worker has also joined up with the Community Worker from Universal Services for Carers to hold a joint Carers Information Stand at the Derby Royal Hospital on a regular basis.

A project steering group has also been implemented that is made up of representatives from the local authorities, local Carers Support Services, and other stakeholders. The steering group provides key direction and scrutiny for the H-Connect Project and ensures all aims and objectives are continuously reviewed. Working together so well fosters collaboration and better resource allocation, and supports members to share knowledge, expertise and best practices for carers within Derby and Derbyshire.

Webpage and Professional's Portal

Derbyshire Carers Association already has a platform on their website where professionals can log in to access resources. The H-Connect Project has been added to the platform so that health professionals can log-in to access resources such as posters, digital leaflets and top tips. The project also now has its own webpage to promote our training programme and showcase good news stories.

H-Connect Model

The H-Connect Project follows a 'behaviour change model' in order to support health professionals to be ready to embed their new knowledge and understanding of carers into practice, and learn and reflect on new skills. The model focuses on helping the pilot-site teams to contemplate and prepare for the changes needed to improve their provision for carers, and then to take actions and sustain effective changes made. The model provides the H-Connect Project Team and pilot-sites with a framework for understanding readiness to change and improve provision for carers, and the development of effective interventions that will enable the changes.

The H-Connect Project also focuses on empowering people to recognise that they are carers and to advocate for themselves and the people they are caring for.

The H-Connect Project is a preventative initiative that promotes the health and wellbeing of carers by supporting health professionals to be proactive in identifying, involving and supporting them at the beginning of a hospital journey, or before (See case study).

Communications

The H-Connect Project now has a strong presence on social media, especially on Derbyshire Carers Association Facebook and Linked-in profiles, where it has generated quite a bit of attention. In April 2025, the carers session that was supported by our Hospital Liaison Worker and Money Matters Project Lead at the MacMillan Unit received the most 'likes' on social media for that month.



Carers Community Fund

Through the H-Connect Project, we are seeing an increase in referrals to local Carers Support Services and so to make sure that carers are connected to accessible support as soon as possible, the Carers Community Fund was launched. The applications process started in March 2025 for voluntary, community and social enterprises to bid for small grants to pilot innovative projects that support carers within their local communities. Thirty-nine applications were received, and the scoring and final decision making was completed by a panel of representatives from Derbyshire County Council, Derby Universal Services for Carers and Derbyshire Carers Association. The successful pilots will be announced shortly.

Some Impact

The H-Connect Project has so far...

- Reached and provided information and support to 247 new carers;
- Consulted with 317 carers about their experiences of the hospital discharge process;
- Worked with and will continue working with 8 pilot-sites towards a 'Carer Friendly Quality Mark';
- Delivered Carer Awareness training sessions to 47 health professionals;
- Supported 2 pilot-sites to set up Carers Support Groups;
- Provided 433 resources to hospitals.

The H-Connect Project is also seeing an increase in referrals for carers to local carers support services and is empowering carers to register with their GP practice to access vital support in primary care and to link with Social Prescribing.

Next Steps

- Continue to work in partnership with the pilot-sites;
- Set up the H-Connect Project research with carers about communication in the hospital discharge process;
- Set up an online Carers Champions Network;
- Plan, deliver and evaluate specific Carers Champions training;
- Deliver and evaluate part one of the Call for Carers: Learning & Development Programme;
- Host an online H-Connect Progress session for professionals and carers;
- Start co-production with carers to co-design and improve resources for hospitals.

Project Lead Acknowledgement

"I am so grateful to the Department of Health and Social Care for providing the Accelerating Reform Fund, and to Derbyshire Carers Association, Derbyshire County Council, Derby City Council, Derby Universal Services for Carers and Community Action Derby for our strong partnership working. All of our commitment and hard work to the ARF Projects, which includes the H-Connect Project, means we are learning 'together' and improving outcomes for carers 'together', which is valuable. I am also grateful to representatives from Derbyshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, Derbyshire Community Health Services NHS Foundation Trust and the University Hospitals of Derby and Burton NHS Trust, for their interest and support with the H-Connect Project.

However, my special thanks must go to the 'amazing, robust and fantastic (ARF) ARF team, which includes the H-Connect Project Team, for their endless dedication, passion and hard-work in setting the H-Connect Project up, delivering it with such enthusiasm, and for 'never giving up' when adversity has challenged. We are a 'strengths-based team' with an abundance of skills and knowledge, and we are a force for 'championing carers' and I am proud to lead such an influential team as well as the exciting ARF Projects.

Finally, my thanks to all the carers across Derby and Derbyshire who have so bravely and honestly shared their experiences (good and not so good) of the hospital discharge process. Whilst the H-Connect Project cannot perform miracles, I promise that myself and the amazing H-Connect Team will do all we can to raise the awareness of carers in hospitals and make changes for the better. The power of listening to carers stories is at the heart of the ARF Project and I am proud that carers are having more opportunities to be seen and heard."

Report summary written by Stephanie Smith (ARF Project Lead) 29/05/2025.