

Consultation with Sharlene Ramage Carer Participation Development Worker

Held on 20 August 2026

at The Carers Centre, Falkirk

Online facilitation supported by Justine Wilson, Adult Carer Support Worker and minutes supported by Dana Horsburgh, Carer Representative.

Meeting summary

The meeting, led by Sharlene, was intended to discuss mental health services in the Falkirk area, but was disrupted by the absence of the scheduled speaker, Kara Connor. 17 carers and 3 staff members attended on the day.

Jessie Anne Malcolm (NHS Forth Valley attending in the audience) kindly called Kara's office, an explanation was provided to the carers in the room. Carers in the room were upset that they had arrived at the Centre and no one from the NHS team was available to listen to their views.

During the meeting, carers shared both positive and negative experiences of mental health services, including long waiting times, lack of follow-up care and transition support, difficulties accessing GPs, good care and support that is provided by dedicated mental health staff and appreciation and understanding from many carers in the room that the staff working are operating under very challenging circumstances.

The conversation also touched on broader systemic issues within the NHS, including staff shortages, poor coordination of appointments, and the need for better advocacy and training for staff. Sharlene committed to escalating the concerns raised today to Kara's team and hopes to provide an update at future sessions.

Carers Strategy and Events Update

Sharlene discussed upcoming events and opportunities for carers, including a Carers Strategy that is currently live with a deadline of 13 September 2026. Sharlene offered to help to fill in the form, for those who need assistance. Sharlene announced that Pauline Phee from Neighbourhood Networks and Lisa Wilson from AHS will join a meeting on 24 August 2026 to discuss hip fracture prevention work and Independence Services for Adults with Disabilities. Sharlene also promoted a Women's Conversation Cafe event hosted by Falkirk's Alcohol and Drug Partnership on 1 September 2026 at the Trinity Church, and mentioned that Ross and Karen, the chief executive and nurse director, will visit on 20 October 2026.

Mental Health Services Discussion

Jessie Anne (NHS Staff in attendance however not a planned speaker) highlighted that every GP practice in Falkirk has a mental health nurse available for primary care. Jessie Anne mentioned that Kara's team lead would reach out to Sharlene to arrange a future date to meet with carers. A carer suggested that Sharlene should reach out to the speaker a week before the session to gain confirmation that the speaker would attend, Sharlene explained that she had did this, however, she did not receive an out of office reply and had hoped that Kara would attend on the day.

Sharlene apologised to carers in the room and thanked them for taking time out of there very busy schedule to come along, Sharlene did not want carers to feel that they had wasted their time and explained to carers that she was keen to hear their experiences which she would then take to Kara's team.

A carer discussed her concerns about how people with mental health issues and substance addiction are treated in A&E, emphasizing that everyone should receive the same level of care. A professional in the room shared a personal experience where someone they knew did not receive timely treatment at Forth Valley Hospital which resulted in a tragic situation. A further comment made offended some carers in the room who are caring for people where addiction is present. A carer responded that many carers are already facing stigma from peers, members of the public and others. The professional apologised and the conversation moved on. Sharlene has taken steps to address carer feedback about the professionals' comments.

The discussion touched on challenges with NHS services, including limited GP appointments and staff shortages, leading to increased pressure on A&E departments.

The conversation highlighted issues with information sharing between professionals and carers, inconsistent care between different practitioners and the limitations of current mental health services. Jessie Anne mentioned new walk-in services being piloted across Scotland for minor health concerns, Sharlene explained that this service is not available for Falkirk carers. A carer highlighted that these walk in services will not specifically address mental health needs during crises and Jessie Anne commented that she hopes these services will reduce some strain from other services, another carer commented that currently there is problems trying to recruit and retain GP's and they worry how this service will recruit staff. The conversation moved on to the lack of transition support for people who are in children's services moving to adult services, many carers expressed their frustrations trying to work through this period with some carers commenting that they are still awaiting support for their cared for person who is in this age bracket. The discussion also highlighted the need for improved aftercare

and ongoing support for mental health patients, highlighting gaps in service continuity between hospital discharge and community care.

Carers discussed challenges with accessing mental health services for young people, particularly highlighting issues with the CAMHS crisis intervention team being overwhelmed and understaffed. Some carers discussed the challenges with guardianship and others their experiences about the difficulty of obtaining power of attorney. Carers finished the first part of this meeting by highlighting the practical challenges carers face when trying to coordinate medical appointments and communicate with healthcare providers.

After the break, Sharlene asked carers to tell her..... What is working well and where improvements are needed. Carers Views are attached below.

What is working well with Mental Health Services? /Carers Comments.

- Crisis is managed well.
- Police responded well when managing carer for person's psychotic episode.
- Mental Health nurse at Meadowbank is really good.
- Mental Health services at Carron bank, some very positive comments others not so good.
- Huts 3 and 4 at Falkirk Community hospital are "really good at checking in" on the carer and "listening" to their views.
- Wards 4 and 5 at Forth Valley "are excellent" at supporting both carer and cared for person.
- "The mental health sessions from the GP are good, however I only got 4 sessions and would have liked more, instead I got referred back to the GP who doubled my dose of antidepressants, this was 6 years ago and I have not had my medication reviewed and I'm on a lot of medication".

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- “The attitude and understanding of neurodivergence has improved recently, however it really does depend on the staff”.
- A carer spoke about the improvement of their treatment and feels that this was only after they officially complained.
- During COVID a carer got referred to specialised trauma supports, this carer feels that this was the right support for them, this carer still uses these strategies and feels confident that they could reach out for future support if needed.

Where are improvement needed in Mental Health Services? /Carers Comments

- “When staff are off sick you can’t get an appointment, they are clearly overworked and understaffed and this is making the staff ill”.
- “I had to ask for an appointment at psychology; you shouldn’t need to do this”.
- Many carers in the room feel that there needs to be more supports for young people aged between 14-20, one carer commented that supports at this age is like “falling into a black hole”.
- Many carers feel that there needs to be better support to transition from children to adult services, one carer commented that “you are just cut off from children’s services”.
- A carer commented that mental health nurses need “more power and access to requests that ordinarily a GP can only access”.
- “No more 9-5 services, crisis doesn’t wait to 9 am on Monday’s and stop at 5pm on a Friday”.
- More appointments are needed to prevent crisis.
- A carer commented that “it is not helpful being told.... when you are eventually seen, that there is nothing we can do for you”.
- “Better aftercare, ask how I am, visit me, call me”.

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- “I have today received a message from the GP advising they will be dealing with emergencies only due to staff shortages. This happens regularly now”.
- “MHATS is great, however after this the support just drops off”.
- “Support staff so that they are not worried about false accusations, staff are worried in case they lose their jobs”.
- “It sounds like the whole NHS is broken, as limited doctor appointments are available, people are forced to attend A&E rightly or wrongly, which increases waiting time”.
- Secure units for under 18’s out with the area are not good enough.
- A carer mentioned that the person they care for is on time critical medication, they feel more training is needed for staff as they often had to give the cared for person medication as staff did not appreciate the importance of the medication being given at set times.
- carers feel that they should not have to carry a list of the cared for person’s medications with them, hospital staff should have this information.
- Services are “overwhelmed”.
- “When people with mental health issues reach out for support or they are at crisis point, I think it is important that they get immediate support, as in my experience they only reach out when they are at rock bottom”.
- carers in the room stated that “communication needs to improve” keeping people informed stops people complaining.
- Communication between NHS services is poor, co-ordinate appointments etc and this will alleviate some carer stress.
- Text messages for some “older people’s” appointments doesn’t work, people should be able to receive paper copies.

Carers View/Comments/Suggestions

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- A carer received 4 NHS appointments all on the same day, all in the morning and at three different places, this carer had no choice but to cancel much needed appointments.
- “Shame the speaker didn’t show but it sounds like Sharlene has a lot to go with”.
- “Unfortunately, the speaker didn’t turn up”.
- Carers in the room discussed the lack of secure unit accommodation for under 18’s in Forth Valley, many carers in the room feel that young people should not have to travel out with their local area.
- “Typical of mental health services, missing in action”
- Some carers spoke about the lack of contact when you are working with mental health services, many carers feel that there should be check in’s ie your next appointment is in 6/12 months’ time, however we shall check in with you in x number of weeks.
- Carers in the room spoke about awaiting a diagnosis for Autism, receiving this, expecting specialist support and this not being available, other carers spoke about feeling like they did not know where to get help after diagnosis.
- “Someone should take over people’s work when they are off sick, this happens all the time with mental health services, they are always off sick”.

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- A carer said that they contacted the mental health nurse in the GP surgery and were told “if they are not suicidal or in a mental health crisis, we cannot help”.
- A carer said that they had a great experience at their GP surgery with the mental health nurse.
- A carer said the mental health nurse at their GP surgery is very good, but it is difficult to get an appointment with them.
- A carer said that they can access appointments with their mental health nurse easily, there is around a 2 week wait, however this works fine for them.
- A carer spoke about their experiences trying to get power of attorney, the person that they care for has capacity and they feel NHS Forth Valley could do more to help them to gain power of attorney.
- A carer spoke about the person they care for being supported by mental health services for many years, they spoke about the negative impact that this has had on the whole family.
- A carer shared their experience of taking the person they care for to A&E for mental health treatment, they waited five hours to be seen and then had a poor experience with a health professional, this carer feels that the staff were not trained sufficiently to support someone who is currently in active addiction.

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- A carer spoke about the poor standard of care that their loved one received when awaiting admission to hospital, the standard of care continued to be poor, and this carer has been advised to raise a formal complaint.
- Carers in the room spoke about complaining and why this is not achievable when you are trying to manage your way through a crisis, many carers said that there should be people you can chat with rather than having to send a message to care opinion.
- A carer spoke about their complaint to NHS Forth Valley, regarding the care their cared for person received, this carer stated that the complaint was looked into but felt that “they were lied to” in the response, this carer stated that they are now reluctant to complain.
- A carer in the room said that they felt they received a better service from professionals when they let people know that they were aware of their rights, Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs training was mentioned and many carers in the room are keen to learn more about their rights as a carer. Sharlene has let the Carers Centre training staff know carers are keen to learn more about their rights.

Thank you for taking the time to come to the session and for sharing your views. Hopefully see you soon! 😊

Meeting Minutes

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