

Care home use of social media

Keeping in touch and staying connected



As care homes across the country closed their doors to visitors to reduce the risk of COVID-19 spreading to residents and staff, residents and their friends and families were suddenly disconnected and unable to see each other.

Three Healthwatch Sunderland volunteers have looked at how our care homes in Sunderland have utilised social media platforms as one way to interact and stay connected with friends, families and the wider community during this time.

This short document outlines what our volunteers found and shares some of the good practice they noted.

Our volunteers undertook either online research or telephoned all of the 47 care homes in Sunderland to see what social media platforms they were using.

Only one of the care homes had an active Twitter account with 34 of the homes using Facebook.

The volunteers therefore focused their efforts on Facebook and looked at the frequency, quality and style of posts used.

Here is a summary of their comments and findings:

They found the set-up of Facebook accounts was a combination of community or business page, a group or place pages.

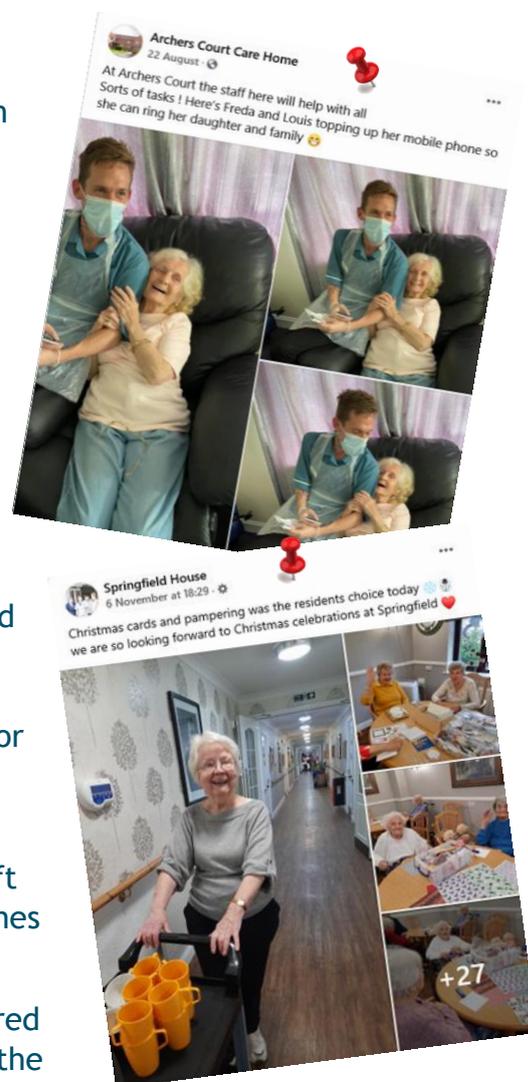
From the 34 Facebook pages they found only 14 homes were posting on a very regular basis, with some homes ceasing regular posting during the months of March and April 2020 when the COVID-19 outbreak began.

13 of the care homes either had no visible presence on social media or relied on their provider/company to post on their behalf on a shared page.

The active Facebook pages they found generally contained engaging posts, using photographs of residents enjoying activities, events and celebrations. One of the pages contained a promotional video of the home instead of a profile picture. Others shared regular updates on COVID-19 guidance, visiting procedures and thank you messages to their local community for gifts they had received.

Some of the homes used videos to engage with visitors to their pages which brought life to their posts and, from comments left by friends and family members, reassurance that their loved ones were well, well presented, happy and enjoying themselves.

At the beginning of the first lockdown, many of the homes shared videos on Facebook of their residents and staff joining in with the Thursday evening clap for carers and ways in which staff were entertaining residents, to lift their spirits, one of which was shown on Good Morning Britain TV programme and sparked our dedicated newsletter; 'How our care homes are keeping their residents chipper'.



Good practice examples

During their research our volunteers found some vibrant, engaging Facebook posts, which included;

- Daily 'Good morning' posts which included information of what activities residents were looking forward to that day. These were often followed up by posts throughout the day showing photos of residents enjoying the activities.
- Happy Birthday messages to residents showing their photograph surrounded by their cards and gifts and often being presented with a birthday cake.
- Thank you messages to the local community, for donations and gifts for residents or staff.
- Residents preparing for prominent calendar dates, such as Halloween, Bonfire Night, Remembrance Day and more recently Christmas preparations have begun.
- One home promoted their offer to elderly people living in their community of fish and chips delivered as part of the home's 'Fishy Friday'.
- Posts to keep residents connected to their community were seen, eg some showed the live stream of the unveiling of this year's Fenwick's window and one showed residents reading letters they had received from local school children.
- Photos of residents during and after pamper sessions often sparked comments from family and friends showing that these interactions are appreciated.
- Importantly are the posts of residents and staff having fun together, looking happy and relaxed!



Thank you to the care homes who gave permission for us to share photographs from their Facebook pages in this document.

What can your care home do?

- Keep in touch with Healthwatch Sunderland, we can share your successes and your good practice.
- Entrust the role of 'Social Media Champion' to one of your team, maybe the Activity Co-ordinator would be best placed for this.
- Like and be friends with other care homes in Sunderland and beyond, this will enable you to share ideas and keep in touch.
- If you haven't got a Facebook page, think about setting one up, give friends and family members the opportunity to see what is happening within the home, especially when they are unable to visit their loved ones.



Other ways of keeping connected

As well as Facebook, care homes informed us about some of the other ways they were keeping residents connected with their friends and families during these times. These included; Skype, email, video messages and calls, telephone contact, WhatsApp (individual and groups) and Facetime. Some went on to say that some residents have their own phones, iPads and laptops which enables them to connect with their loved ones at any time.

One of the homes informed us that they have a dedicated Facebook page which is supporting staff during these difficult times.

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