**CAUSE: Member profile in PICO framework format**

**Background and need**

CAUSE provides emotional and practical support to carers – families, partners or friends – supporting loved ones with a serious mental illness such as depression, bi-polar, schizophrenia, psychosis and personality disorder. Established in 1995, CAUSE is uniquely a peer-led carers’ organisation directed and staffed by past and present carers.

CAUSE works collaboratively with a wide range of organisations and across sectors encompassing health and social care trusts, DHSSPHSNI, health agencies, community and voluntary groups, universities, colleges, professional and regulatory bodies and other mental health charities. In terms of formal partnerships, CAUSE is a partner in the *Health in Mind* project collaborating with Libraries NI, Aware Defeat Depression, AMH and Mindwise.

The health inequalities experienced by carers as group are well documented. In Northern Ireland, one in ten (9%) of all carers suffers from ill-health. For those providing substantial care, nearly one in five (18%), double this proportion, feel they are in poor health.[[1]](#endnote-1) Long term caring responsibilities impact on multiple levels impacting on carers’ ability to access economic and social opportunities: caring can impact on health, income and development of social networks for carers. [[2]](#endnote-2)

As we approach a new phase of change in health and social care provision outlined in *Transforming Your Care,* in policy terms the need to improve support for carers and change in mental health service provision is evident. In online and household surveys conducted as part of the review, over 40% of all respondents highlighted that support for carers and mental health services needed a lot of improvement. [[3]](#endnote-3)

**An overview of what CAUSE provides**

CAUSE aims to support mental health carers with a range of services. The help we offer to carers to assist them in their caring role includes:

* Support groups for carers in different locations across NI. Support groups provide an opportunity to express feelings and to hear other carers’ experiences.
* One-to-one carer advocacy service where carers can link with a local carer advocate to get help on their issue or merely have a listening ear
* Training for carers on mental illness, treatments, relevant services underpinned by skills and practical information on coping with caring
* Helpline for carers: open Mon/Wed/Fri 10am to 4pm  and Tue/Thu 12noon to 8pm excluding public holidays 0845 6030291
* Awareness training to health and social care practitioners and students on carers’ needs and working effectively with carers
* Working with other agencies to provide respite for carers
* Representing the views and needs of carers across sectors

CAUSE also offers specialist service advocacy services in Belfast to carers of loved ones with a personality disorder and carers of service users in Shannon Clinic, the medium secure regional forensics unit in Northern Ireland.

**The outcomes and impact of our work supporting carers**

Through the variety of ways CAUSE works to engage and support mental health carers we seek to achieve the following outcomes for carers:

* Through guidance and information carers feel more confident and effective in supporting their loved one recovery from mental health illness
* Reducing the social isolation and improving health and well-being of mental health carers
* Increasing the profile of carers’ issues and representing carers’ views in the policy arena and enabling carers to influence key decision makers and service providers in responding to their needs

The impact of our work is perhaps best relayed by verbatim comments from carers CAUSE has supported:

*"I have a great debt to* CAUSE*.  Without help from* CAUSE *and my Carer Advocate over the years, I feel I would be in a more negative place now and would not be able to support my loved one as effectively as I now do."*

*“I don’t feel quite so hopeless now. I know I have an important role in my husband’s care and won’t be afraid to speak up.”*

*“I have found the* CAUSE *group a lifeline at times of utter despair - I haven’t found anyone else who understands or cares like* CAUSE*.”*

**Community development principles**

**Collective action:**  CAUSE works with a wide range of stakeholders to achieve successful outcomes for mental health carers across NI. This includes membership of regional policy groups, local service user and carer groups and collaborative work with other carers and mental health organisations.

**Community empowerment:**  CAUSE is a conduit which brings the everyday experience of carers and their challenges into the focus of service providers, health and social care professional and policy makers. We work with carers to enable them to be confident to voice their issues and position themselves as a valued partner in caring for their loved ones.

**Working and learning together:** A key facet of our work is bringing together carers through support group and respite activities in cultivating networks of peer support and mutual learning between carers. Through the provision of training to carers and professionals CAUSE embraces the concept of working and learning together across sectors to improve the support to and value placed on the role of caring for someone with a serious mental health illness.

1. Northern Ireland Census of Population 2001 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. DHSSPS (2006) *Caring for Carers.* [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. *Transforming Your Care: A Review of Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland* (2011, DHSSPHS) [↑](#endnote-ref-3)