

Offering bereavement counselling to homeless people has given one nurse the opportunity to add new skills and insights to her work. Lynne Wallis hears how

REACH OUT, BUILD TRUST

Jane Carpenter qualified as a nurse in 2007 after years of working with vulnerable people. She is now acting clinical outreach manager for a Suffolk hospice and decided to find out what the burgeoning local homeless population wanted from its services.

'Average life expectancy for homeless people is just 44 and they find it hard to cope with the loss of their homeless friends. They said they wanted bereavement counselling,' says Ms Carpenter, whose work is based at St Nicholas Hospice in Bury St Edmunds.

She now offers bereavement counselling and finds that, gradually, recipients with life-threatening illnesses themselves will ask for support and help.

Overcoming barriers

Her investigations form part of a leadership project organised by charity Help the Hospices and funded by the Burdett Trust for Nursing. Help the Hospices believes that encouraging nurses to find creative solutions is the best way to improve hospice access.

According to the independent Palliative Care Funding Review, more than one fifth (92,000) of those who



Jane Carpenter: 'I found myself being more and more inventive'

needed palliative care in England in 2012 were not being reached.

Nurses, such as Ms Carpenter, can also devise ways to tackle the barriers to vulnerable groups receiving the help hospices can offer.

She worked on her project for three days a week throughout 2012 and credits the experience with boosting her professional development, helping her build trusting relationships, improving her empathy skills and encouraging her to think creatively.

'I held drop-in sessions at hostels and tutored hostel support workers to talk to people who are bereaved. Over time, I found myself being more and more inventive.'

St Nicholas Hospice has moved from having no homeless referrals before the project, to eight in the last three months of 2012. Ms Carpenter adds: 'By giving homeless people bereavement support, we have increased access to palliative care.'

Good with patients

Help the Hospice's practice development facilitator Marie Cooper says: 'Nurses see where organisational improvements could be made. They are good at compromising with patients and we encourage them to apply these skills in their organisation.'

'The Burdett banner provides an opportunity to develop their capabilities and now their organisations are seeing these nurses with new eyes. All of the 40 nurses participating in the project have delivered.'

Ms Carpenter has been promoted from senior nurse to her present post as a result of the Burdett funding. She spoke at the national Help the Hospice conference last year and says: 'I hope it will encourage innovation among other nurses too' **NS**

Lynne Wallis is a freelance journalist

Leaders in the making

The Help the Hospices/Burdett leadership programme has:

- ▶ Offered opportunities to consolidate and develop leadership skills through specific projects.
- ▶ Tackled barriers to nurse innovations such as lack of confidence.
- ▶ Encouraged nurses to recognise their worth,

RESOURCES

Help the Hospices/Burdett Trust widening access scheme tinyurl.com/HtHWAGS
RCN Pain and Palliative Care Forum tinyurl.com/RCNPPCF
Seminar: End of Life Care February 4 tinyurl.com/WHF-EoLC-seminar