



# Home Sweet Home

CareLink Services enable people to live independently and with dignity in their own homes and within their local communities.

**S**OMETIMES THE LITTLE things can mean so much. When you are an older person or someone with a disability, having someone who calls into your home on a regular basis to cook you dinner, go grocery shopping, or help you get up, washed and ready for the day ahead, can make all the difference.

CareLink, the brand name for RehabCare's home support service,

has been providing a range of services to older people and people with disabilities since 1997. Today, nearly 160 CareLink home support workers assist 679 clients in the Dublin and Wicklow region, the majority of whom are over 65 years of age. In addition, RehabCare also provides support to just under 80 clients in Waterford, Wexford, Monaghan, Limerick, Mayo, Sligo, North Tipperary and Clare.

The service CareLink provides supports the individual client with activities of daily living on a permanent or as-needed basis. Supports range from companionship and help with household chores, to personal care and home-based respite. CareLink also offers a hospital discharge service, which enables an older person to return to their own home and community once medically stable, if this is the person's choice. Thus, CareLink

provides a real alternative to residential or nursing home care. Speaking to *Rehab News*, Kris Dhondt, RehabCare's Home-Based Services Manager, says, "All of the services we offer are based on enabling people to live independently and with dignity in the familiar surroundings and comfort of their own homes, and within their local communities."

"In order to support people to achieve the quality of life that they desire, the services we provide are flexible and tailored to the specific daily living needs of the individual client. We sit down with them and their families to design a care plan that not only looks at their personal care needs, but that also looks at their leisure activities and their involvement in the local community.

"We also try to ensure that clients are matched with home support workers and that staff are not rotated unnecessarily. In addition, CareLink provides an on-call service that offers an emergency out-of-hours support to clients and staff alike. All home support workers are recruited in line with stringent RehabCare policy including references and Garda checks."

Once recruited, all staff participate in a specially-designed induction programme that trains workers to FETAC Level 5 in Care Skills. Manual handling, first aid, disability awareness and communication skills are just some of the topics covered in the intensive two-week training programme.

With such levels of training, it is not surprising that CareLink has earned its reputation as a top provider of home care for older people and for people with disabilities and is a Health Service Executive (HSE) Preferred Provider. Its commitment to quality is reflected in the responses to a recent evaluation

**RICHARD NOLAN** (77) has been a CareLink client for the past three years. Here his wife, Phil, tells *Rehab News* about what RehabCare's home support services have meant to them.

"Richard suffered a massive stroke over four years ago. It left him paralysed down one half of his body and changed both of our lives forever.

Richard was in the Royal Hospital in Donnybrook for 12 months after his stroke. He desperately wanted to return home, to be back in familiar surroundings. The hospital linked us up with CareLink, RehabCare's home support service, and we have

used them ever since. Apparently, 90 per cent of people who have Richard's level of disability do not return home, but my husband is determined and, with the support of CareLink, he moved back home over three years ago.

My husband is a big man – he's 18 stone in weight – and I'm not as young as I once was. It would be impossible for me to care for Richard completely by myself. We now have the same rota of carers that come into us twice a day, seven days a week. They get Richard up in the morning. The home support workers wash and change him and get him ready for the day ahead. In the evening, they put Richard to bed and ensure he is comfortable for the night.

The home support workers are such lovely lads – so nice and gentle. People ask if we mind the intrusion, but the carers don't infringe on our lives at all. They arrive on time, they do their work and then they go.

Richard likes chatting with the home support workers, particularly if it's on the topic of sport! It helps having people coming in to the house everyday – I guess it's a new face, and a link with the outside world.

The ongoing support we get from RehabCare is really good. I know that if there is ever an issue, the CareLink staff are just a phone call away. When you care for someone at home, that level of support makes a big difference.

What does the CareLink service mean to me? Well, quite simply, without RehabCare, Richard would not be able to stay at home. We're so grateful for everything that they have done for us."



(see panel below) and in the fact that, as part of RehabCare, CareLink has been recognised with the European Foundation for Quality Management's Recognised for Excellence award. It also completes its own internal quality audit through ongoing monitoring and reviews and complies with the HSE's draft National Quality Guidelines for Home Care Support Services.

If you are interested in finding out more about RehabCare's range of home support services, you should contact the CareLink team directly on 00 353 1 205 7237. The team will be happy to discuss your exact requirements and the range of home care packages available, either privately or following prior assessment and approval by the HSE. ■

**CareLink's most recent internal evaluation by 359 clients took place in November 2009. The results indicate a high satisfaction rating with the CareLink service:**

- 99 per cent of the respondents were either 'very satisfied' (72 per cent) or 'satisfied' (27 per cent) with the service from CareLink
- 95 per cent of respondents felt the home support workers were adequately trained to meet their needs
- According to respondents, the most important positive impact of the service was on 'reducing/preventing dependency on family members', followed by 'maintaining and promoting independence' and 'the ability to remain at home'

**ANDRZEJ CHUDZINSKI** arrived in Ireland in December 2007 and quickly found a job with RehabCare's Carelink service. Here he tells his story.

"I love my job. I've been with CareLink for nearly two-and-a-half years and no day is ever the same. I've worked with the elderly and people with disabilities of all ages – in fact, my clients have ranged in age from four to 95!

Before moving to Ireland, I'd graduated with a Degree in Special Studies and had spent time working with people with learning disabilities and teenage boys with mental health difficulties.



Working with RehabCare has enabled me to send money home to Poland to my wife and two children – Marta and Iga. My eldest daughter has cerebral palsy and endured complications as a result of a brain haemorrhage. My money ensures that she gets the equipment she needs and it also pays for carers to come in and help her three times a day.

My job with RehabCare varies depending on who I'm working with and the time of day that I am calling into them. In the morning, I support my clients as they get ready for the day ahead, assisting them as they wash and dress and have their breakfast. I also do some housework during the day. In the evening, the jobs are reversed as I cook clients their dinner and then put them to bed.

Most of the people I visit are more than just clients. I think that's why my English has really improved so much – my clients are the best English teachers! The elderly clients, in particular, have lovely stories to tell and they often ask about life in Poland.

I love the Irish, but particularly the elderly people. I guess they are quite like the Polish people in character. It's touching to see how elderly couples look out for each other, even after so many years of marriage.

I really enjoy my work, it makes me happy to think that I am making a difference. I never get tired, I get energy from it and from the people I care for. I suppose the worst thing about my job is Dublin traffic, but I know I'm not the only person who thinks that!"