

Care and Support Alliance Pen Portraits Template

About the project

The Care and Support Alliance (CSA) is developing a series of 'pen portraits' to help the Casey Commission better understand the real-life experiences of people who need, use, or provide care and support. These personal stories will reflect the diversity of individuals across England - including older people, disabled people, and unpaid carers - whose lives are directly affected by social care.

The portraits will show not only the challenges and barriers that people face - such as gaps in provision, difficulties accessing services, or emotional and financial pressures - but also the positive difference that good care can make when it is available, personalised, appropriate and consistent.

By sharing these stories, we aim to highlight common themes across the system and demonstrate what needs to change. These portraits will serve as a test for the Casey Commission, helping the team to assess whether future proposals will meet the needs of the people behind these portraits and many more like them.

We believe that everyone deserves good care and support, and that reform must be informed by the voices of those with lived and frontline experience. These pen portraits are an opportunity to make those voices seen, heard, and central to the case for change.

Writing pen portraits

Thank you so much for participating in the CSA's pen portraits project!

- We encourage you to **include quotes** allowing people to highlight what they feel, want and need in their own words.
- We recognise that some people's stories may be complex, but we'd be grateful if you could keep each portrait to a **maximum of two pages**.
- It would be fantastic if you are able to **include a photo** if you have consent; however, we want to ensure that people feel comfortable sharing their stories, so pen portraits can be anonymised, photos withheld, and names changed to protect an individual's privacy if preferred.
- **Please fill in the consent form** sent with this template and return it to us, specifying how the person would like to be referred to.

Championing the real life, lived experience of carers and care users is what we do at the CSA. We will however also consider using composites and personas if necessary to ensure we have the right balance of lived experience.

Template

This template questionnaire has been designed to help you interview carers and care users about their experiences of social care. The aim is to build a collection of real stories that reflect the diversity of people's lives and highlight both the strengths and the challenges of the current system.

The questions in the template are intended as prompts to help guide a **conversational and open-ended interview**, rather than a formal or rigid assessment. The goal is to support you

in writing a pen portrait - a short narrative piece (ideally no more than two pages) that brings a person's story to life in their own words, where possible.

We understand that **not all questions will be relevant or appropriate for everyone's** circumstances. Please adapt the wording of questions as needed, skip any questions that don't apply or feel intrusive and follow up on themes or topics that emerge naturally.

Your judgement and sensitivity are essential in helping people feel at ease and share their story in a way that feels authentic and respectful.

If you have any questions or would like to talk through the process, please don't hesitate to get in touch with Rhian or Olivia.

Prompts for care users and carers

1. About You

Can you tell me a bit about yourself and your life right now? Where and who do you live with? What does a typical day look like for you? Do you work or volunteer? What are your hobbies and interests? What are your goals and aspirations?

2. Why care matters to you

What kind of care or support do you currently receive or provide? Who else is involved in your care or the care you give? (e.g., family, professionals, community). Who is responsible for organising and funding your care? Do you have a personal budget? Is there any care or support you need right now, but aren't currently getting?

3. What's Working Well?

What aspects of your care or support are going well? Can you share an example of something that's made a positive difference?

4. Challenges and Barriers

What are some of the main challenges or barriers you've faced with care or support? Has it been difficult to get the help you needed? Are there things in the system or process that make it harder than it needs to be?

5. The Impact on Your Life

How has your experience with care or support affected your wellbeing, independence, or daily life. What's changed for you over time — for better or worse?

6. What Could Be Better?

What would good care or support feel like for you? If things worked better, what would your life look like? What kind of help or change would make the biggest difference?

Personal Quotes

"I need..."

"I want..."

"What matters most to me is..."

"I struggle with..."