

8th April 2022

You can read a summary of this letter in bullet points on page 4.

Dear family member,

As you may know, I am the new Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Dimensions group. I took over from Steve Scown following his retirement last month. As I've said lots of times, Steve was a fantastic CEO and we were very sad to see him go – he has left me with a big pair of shoes to fill!

I joined Dimensions in 2019 as the Managing Director, having worked in social care for over 30 years – including many years working for the Care Quality Commission (the regulator for adult social care). I also have experience of being a relative of someone in receipt of social care. My mum has advanced dementia and has lived in a fantastic care home for eight years; we supported her in her own home until it was no longer possible to keep her safe there. So, I understand social care from both a professional and personal perspective.

This is my first letter to families since I took up the CEO role. I do intend to write to you regularly and, as we emerge from the pandemic, there will be the opportunity to share other news with you. In this first letter I want to say a little about some of the things that are important to me, update you on how we will be managing Covid-19 for the time being, mention what we're doing to alleviate staff shortages and say a few words about our commitment to involving and engaging families.

So, let's start with what really matters to me about our support and working with families. For me, it's about:

- Always striving to deliver the best support we can to people, helping them develop and achieve their goals and aspirations.
- Engaging with the people we support and their families. I regularly visit services unannounced to meet people we support and will engage with families by writing to you, and through our regional listening events. And please do feel free to contact me directly.
- Doing all we can to get a fair deal for our skilled workforce in terms of pay and working conditions, both at a local and national level.

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- Ensuring we have an open and transparent culture where families and friends feel able to raise any concerns about their loved ones without fear of reprisals and knowing that we take all concerns seriously. We must work with families as partners. As the parent of someone with a learning disability once said to me, 'there's no better ally than a mum on a mission'.

And so, on managing Covid. We are beginning to emerge from the most extraordinary two years of going through a global pandemic. It has been a tough time for everyone and it's great to start seeing life returning to normal in so many ways. You will know that the government has relaxed almost all Covid restrictions for the general public. However, there will still be some things we will be keeping in place here (mainly based on government guidance). We've come so far in keeping people safe and well, and we don't want to let our guard down now when Covid rates are so high in the general population.

So, for the time being, we will be asking family members to continue to test before you visit your loved ones. If you are unable to source your own tests, we will make them available to you at the service and you will be able to take the test outside before you come in. We will also be asking you to continue wearing PPE (in line with our colleagues) when you visit, continue having your temperature checked and continue signing a (shortened) health declaration form. Our Pandemic Emergency Response Team (PERT) will continue to meet as needed and we will keep all of this under regular review. We'll let you know if the rules change.

One of the other things I wanted to mention in this letter is the staffing shortages that are happening across several sectors, including travel, hospitality and retail as well as health and social care. You might have heard about this in the news and you might have experienced it in the service where your loved one lives. I want you to know that we are doing all we can to recruit people with the right values to come and work for us, and we are also raising our views on fair funding for social care with government. I recently gave evidence at the House of Commons Health Select Committee on recruitment in social care and was clear that central government needs to increase funding to local authorities so they can pay providers a better rate – and so we can in turn increase the pay levels for our skilled and dedicated workforce. This is not an easy issue to fix but we will continue to keep raising it at every opportunity.

I want to end this first letter with a few words about our approach to involving and engaging families in all we do. I want to make sure that every family can communicate and work together with the team supporting their loved one – we know that working together makes for the best possible support. Families know their loved ones and their history so well.

In this regard, our [Person Centred Reviews](#) are very important and should take place each year. This has been difficult due to the pandemic but they are starting to happen again (I attended a virtual one for my mum with her care home manager and keyworker last week and it was so useful).

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Discovery Support Ltd is a charitable registered society number 12345.
Building 1430, Arlington Business Park, Theale, Reading RG7 4SA.

We have opened up our **iplanit system** to families. iplanit enables you to view your loved one's diary and photographs and also notes that relate to their daily life – it is a great way of keeping up to date with what's going on for them. In order to get access, you will either need the consent of your loved one or a Best Interest Decision if they don't have the capacity to consent. Your locality manager or our helpline for families will be able to tell you more about iplanit and how you can access it. Almost 200 family members are now using iplanit regularly (although don't feel you have to if you'd rather not).

We also have our [Family Charter](#), which sets out our commitment to you and how we will work together. As we emerge from the pandemic and things become easier, our colleagues will be working with every family to set up a personalised agreement based on the family charter.

And I'd like to highlight our **Family Zooms** – these are online chats for families across the country. They are an opportunity to ask questions in confidence, learn about the sector and good practise, meet other families and offload to people who 'get it'. The next monthly meetings are at 10am and 7:30pm on the following dates:

- Tuesday 19th April: The topic is circles of support, building effective relationships with our colleagues.
- Wednesday 11th May: The topic is making choices, supporting you with decision making.
- Thursday 16th June: The topic is positive ways of staying in touch.

Finally, I hope that you are happy and content with your loved one's care and support. However, should things ever go wrong and you need some support, please do speak to your locality manager or contact our helpline for families on 0300 303 9161, Monday to Friday from 9.30-1.30, or email family.helpline@dimensions-uk.org.

I do hope to meet some of you at the forthcoming regional listening events, and I'm always happy to hear from family members – please do feel free to drop me a line anytime.

Yours sincerely,



Rachael Dodgson
Chief Executive
Dimensions group (including Discovery)

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Key points from the letter

- Covid update: For now we're continuing to ask for negative tests before visits as well as temperature checks before entering a service and the use of PPE.
- The new Chief Executive Officer (CEO) for the Dimensions group is Rachael Dodgson.
- Staffing challenges: We're doing all we can to employ more people who share our values.
- Family Helpline: Contact members of the families team directly via the Family Helpline on 0300 303 9161, Monday to Friday from 9.30am to 1.30pm or by email at family.helpline@dimensions-uk.org
- Person Centred Reviews are important in involving family members in the support their loved one receives.
- The Family Portal on iplanit gives access for families to the online daily notes.
- Family Charter: our pledge to working with families.
- Family Zooms: online chats for families, hosted by the families team – book via the Family Helpline.

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