

Evaluation of the Short Breaks Scheme for Unpaid Carers in Wales

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Interim Report: Summary

Introduction and overview

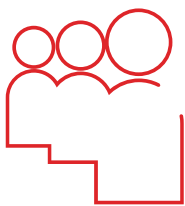
In 2022, the Welsh Government announced £9million funding for a Short Breaks Scheme for unpaid carers to be delivered over three years to reach 30,000 unpaid carers across Wales. The delivery of funds is split between Carers Trust Wales and seven Regional Partnership Boards. Carers Trust Wales was appointed the National Coordinating Body of the scheme. By 2023/24 24,331 unpaid carers had accessed a short break through the Scheme. Of these, 12,556 unpaid carers accessed a short break via the Carers Trust Wales' Amser grant to third sector and local carers organisations and 11,775 via Regional Partnership Boards.

Surveys and research

Carers Trust Wales commissioned Bangor University to complete an independent evaluation of the scheme to understand the effectiveness, reach, impact and sustainability of the scheme. Carers are surveyed at three time points: prior to taking a break and on two occasions following their break. They are also invited to complete a Most Significant Change story to share insights about the impact of the short break. There have been 729 responses at the time of analysis in October 2024. Scheme impact reports are also analysed.

Key Findings

The Short Breaks Scheme is helping to meaningfully support a diversity of caring relationships. It is reaching carers who have significant caring responsibilities, with many providing more than 50 hours of care each week, and it is predominantly reaching carers who have not previously taken a break.



24,331 unpaid carers received a break by 2023/24



86% of adult carers surveyed have not accessed a short break from elsewhere in the last 12 months



729 individual responses

Programme reach

Based on delivery partner monitoring reports and survey responses

Adult carers

- Of those respondents who answered, 7,317 identifying as adult carers received a break in 2023-24 (Carers Trust Wales only*).
- Only 14.2% of adult carers have accessed a short break from elsewhere in the last 12 months, so the Short Breaks Scheme is meeting a crucial support gap for carers.
- The majority of those adult carers who took a break (80.5%), are carers providing high intensity caring of at least 50+ hours a week of care.
- Of those who responded to the survey, only just over a third (36.1%) of carers are aware of being offered a carers needs assessment and 69.5% of carers offered an assessment have completed it.

Young carers

- Of those respondents who answered, 3,930 identifying as young carers received a break in 2023-24 (Carers Trust Wales only*).
- Of the young carers who responded to the evaluation survey, almost half (48%) are supporting a parent and more than a third (36%) are supporting a sibling.
- Only a quarter (25%) of young carers have accessed a short break from elsewhere in the last 12 months.
- Just over a quarter (26.1 %) of young carers who accessed a break through the scheme are not in any type of education, employment or training. Of these, all are over the age of 18. Almost a third (30.4%) of young carers who have accessed a break are in high school, just over a quarter (26%) are in college and a small percentage (4.3%) are in university or are in primary school (4.3%).
- 40.9% of young carers who responded to the survey are aware that they have been offered a carer needs assessment, and 44.4% of young carers offered an assessment have completed one. Half (50%) of young carers who completed an assessment report discussing a short break as part of this assessment.



48% of young carers are supporting a parent



80% of adult carers who took a break are providing 50+ hrs a week of care

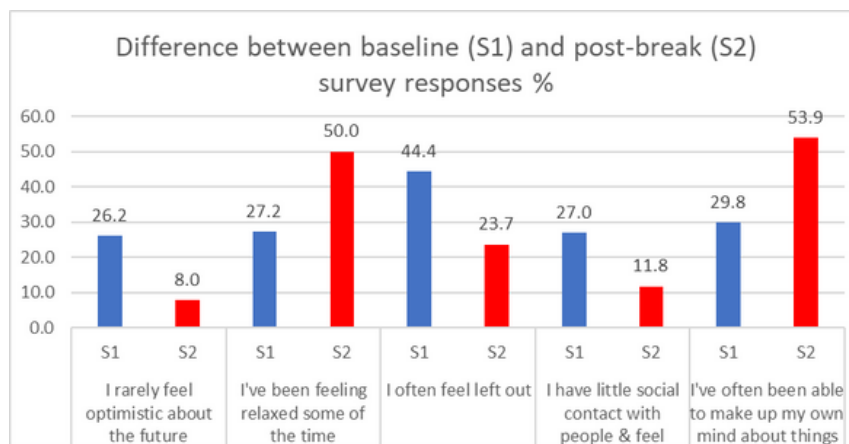


Almost a third of young carers who have accessed a break are in high school

The impact of breaks

Quantitative data captured by the evaluation, comparing carers' self-reported quality of life and wellbeing measures before and after taking a short break, demonstrates the positive impact taking a break through the Short Breaks Scheme has had:

- Carers are more optimistic about the future following a break
- Carers feel more connected and less socially isolated
- Carers report improved feelings of control
- Carers report improved feelings of relaxation



Quantitative data captured by the evaluation survey indicated the positive impact of taking a break on carer wellbeing

Qualitative data captured by the evaluation indicated that the new scheme is supporting carers to take bespoke breaks that reflect what matters to them:

- Carers note that after a break they have improved sleep patterns and feel more relaxed which has a positive effect on their ability to continue caring and their caring relationships.
- Carers value the opportunity to take breaks together and to create memories.
- Some carers report that the offer of a break signifies a recognition by others of their caring role, and this contributes to them feeling valued.
- Breaks are helping carers to connect with other carers, to learn from people in similar circumstances, and to build networks of peer support without feelings of judgement or differentiation.
- There is evidence of carers forging sustainable links in their communities, including links with business owners who are offering discounts to help people take future breaks from their caring role.
- Carers have modest break expectations. They value the opportunity to have time to do things that others would take for granted, like having an uninterrupted night's sleep, catching up on housework or meeting friends.
- Carers are gaining confidence to try new things to support their wellbeing going forward.

Short breaks that make a difference: learning

Understanding the breaks carers want

Adult carers

- Whilst over a third of adult carers (38.7%) requested a residential/overnight break, just over half of carers either wanted a day trip (19.2%) or another form of break (31.8%), such as a subscription, attending a regular event or the funding of a hobby.
- Having 'me time' is a key component of taking a break yet only just over a quarter of carers (28.9%) planned to access a break on their own. Many wanted to take a break with the person they care for: 19.8% of carers planned to access the break along with the person they care for and 22.7% of carers planned to access the break with the whole family. The remaining 28.6% planned to take a break with company, such as with a friend, with a group of carers or with a partner.



"I feel as though there is a world of possibilities out there, that I'm not just a carer and I have had a real taste of doing something for myself that I enjoy. So, it makes me want to do more of what I enjoy. To discover myself again."

"The activity weekend was life changing for us. Together as a family, we cycled, rowed, climbed... and LAUGHED!...My children have told me it was the best time they can ever remember."

Young carers

- Over half (56.5%) of the young carers who accessed a break did so as part of a planned day trip or activity, with adult support, indicating the need for facilitated breaks.
- While 20% planned to access the break along with the person they care for and 20% planned to access the break with the whole family, 60% of young carers planned to access their break without the person they cared for, either on their own, as a group or with friends.



Over a quarter of adult carers planned to access a break on their own.



Over half (56.5%) of the young carers who accessed a break did so as part of a planned day trip or activity



60% of young carers planned to access their break without the person they cared for

Benefits of flexibility and time

- Carers emphasise the importance of having the flexibility to use their break time how they choose – their whatever time. Carers commend the scheme, which is not prescriptive about the types of break to be taken or the use of break time.
- Carers value the gift of time afforded by these breaks, be that time for themselves, time spent with the person they support, time spent with other family members and, for some time, spent with other carers.



Thanks again for giving my partner and me this opportunity to reconnect and do something for us two, to recharge our batteries and rekindle our relationship and to enable us to carry on parenting our lovely but often tricky children. Since coming back I've had more patience and am better equipped to deal with the four of them! I am so very grateful. This break literally lifted my whole mood. It was so nice to remember the little things matter.

Added value and third sector capacity

The scheme is increasing the capacity of third sector organisations to deliver preventative bespoke breaks to carers. Improved, and more timely, short break conversations are happening. Such conversations are key to a preventive approach to supporting carers and caregiving relationships over time. Organisations report that more carers are contacting them, and they are reaching a greater number of people providing opportunities for them to offer additional information and advice to carers, and to signpost them to other sources of support.

The Short Breaks Scheme is helping to support the translation of the Welsh Government's national priorities for unpaid carers into practice, specifically priorities one (identifying and valuing carers), two (providing information, advice and assistance), and three (supporting a life alongside caring).

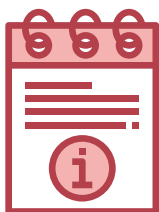
"This project offered an important opportunity to have a dialogue with carers on the importance of their own wellbeing and what this means to them. Carers say they don't have the chance to think of their own wellbeing or do anything for themselves."



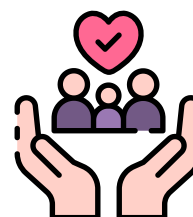
Carers Outreach Service



Identifying and valuing carers



Providing information, advice & assistance



Supporting a life alongside caring

Additional benefits of the Short Break Scheme

The scheme is:

- Capturing essential data about short break needs, short break preferences, and short break outcomes and using this data to inform future practice.
- Monitoring data is supporting identification and outreach work, and it is providing essential intelligence to help organisations reach “hidden carers”, such as male carers and carers from minority ethnic groups.
- Helping to raise the profile of third sector organisations with carers themselves, including those individuals who may not previously have identified as a carer.
- Encouraging the meaningful involvement of unpaid carers and the person(s) they support in the co-design of short breaks.
- Enabling collaborative working to deliver creative short break options.
- Supporting engagement with key sectors such as hospitality, tourism, arts, and leisure. There are examples of local businesses making practical adaptations to premises, to support breaks to happen, leading to wider community benefits.

We anticipate that we will have insufficient funds to deliver breaks to every carer that has expressed an interest in the grant. As a result, we have set up a secondary waiting list to place carers on where carers are aware they may not receive the grant this year so as to manage expectation.

Neath Port Talbot Carers Service



It's been an absolute pleasure delivering these grants and has given staff a real boost to be doing something positive for people rather than continual firefighting and problem solving.

Race Equality First



....by working with hospitality sector partners, we have created useful links to continue conversations on what can be offered longer-term when it comes to breaks for family carers, this is a real unanticipated positive.

All Wales Forum

Conclusions

The Short Breaks Scheme is enabling much needed breaks to happen, for unpaid carers and those they care for. It is facilitating the planning and delivery of short breaks that are inclusive, welcoming, practically accessible, and culturally sensitive.

It is meeting its key aims:

- Increasing the availability and accessibility of short breaks.
- Providing personalised, flexible, and responsive break options.
- Prioritising and targeting short breaks to those who need it most.

Organisations welcome the new scheme; however, they are mindful of raising carer expectations and are worried about meeting the demand for breaks which has exceeded initial projections.

Whilst acknowledging that there are challenges, and there is learning to be taken forward, the evaluation to date demonstrates positive impacts for unpaid carers and those they support, as short breaks are re-imagined to be broader and more inclusive, are personalised to meet individual needs, and are used in a preventive capacity.

The positive impacts for carers align with the Welsh Government's (2021) vision of a society that recognises, values and supports unpaid carers of all ages and backgrounds to live well and to achieve their own wellbeing outcomes.

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WALES**



Ariennir gan
Lywodraeth Cymru
Funded by
Welsh Government

Ariannwyd gan Lywodraeth Cymru a chydlynwyd gan Ymddiriedolaeth Gofalwyr Cymru.
Mae'r Cynllun Seibiannau Byr yn rhoi cyfle i ofalwyr di-dâl yng Nghymru gymryd hoe hollbwysig o ofalu.
Funded by Welsh Government and co-ordinated by Carers Trust Wales.
The Short Breaks Scheme enables unpaid carers in Wales to take a vital break from caring.