



Using direct payments to improve delivery of an outcome focused short breaks service for carers

NHS Highland

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NHS Highland has developed a local short break service for carers, ensuring choice and control by utilising direct payments via Self Directed Support (SDS).

This impact story looks at how the carers team planned and implemented this innovative approach to short breaks that has reduced complexity and focused on achieving good outcomes for the carer.



“ The application itself and speed with which applications are processed allows me to provide a quick and effective response and solutions to carers needs. A very welcome change from long and drawn-out assessment processes which can take months. One of the most satisfying parts of the job as results are so fast and tangible.

Adult Support Care Worker (NHS Highland)



Background

COVID-19 significantly impacted on carers' needs and opportunities to access short breaks, with support services reduced and traditional respite options not available. The NHS Highland Adult Social Care Leadership Team recognised this need and decided to design and implement a new approach to delivering short breaks with this work being led by the small carers team.

Using an additional allocation of £1 million from the Scottish Government, the team aimed to utilise SDS option 1 to ensure carers had choice and control and were able to access breaks that met their needs. To ensure this was successful the team recognised the need to redesign assessment processes and the importance of involvement and clear communication with staff and carers.

Approach

The Carers Team worked with the head of Quality Assurance, the Business Support Team, Carer Centre staff, carers and social workers to co-design their approach.

- **Developing a shared understanding of 'short breaks' for carers:** moving away from traditional models of breaks/respite and the impact of local and national policy and legislation on practice
- **Understanding the local 'market':** the team researched what options existed locally beyond traditional respite, the cost involved and what was currently having the biggest impact for carers
- **Creating an efficient, person-centred assessment process:** the application form was reduced to focus on the good conversation and identifying carer outcomes. This was a shift away from asking staff to write detailed reports and applications for funding and instead focused on what the payment would be used for
- **Workforce communication:** virtual information and learning sessions were held regarding changes to processes with a wide range of care staff across NHS Highland
- **Ongoing learning and improvement:** the team have continued learning during the implementation phase and have responded to challenges identified by carers and staff. An FAQ sheet has been created as a live document that is regularly updated with recent carer stories added to generate ideas on how funding can provide short breaks unique to each individual carer

Impact

Between September 2021 and March 2022, using the additional allocation of funding, over 380 carers accessed a short break via direct payments. The programme is continuing into this financial year, with a further 270 carers accessing a short break to date this year.



**650 carers
supported via
direct payment**

Impact for carers

- Carers can exercise **choice and control** when spending funding on short breaks that work for them,
- carers health and wellbeing outcomes have been met in **creative ways** that are unique to the individual,
- **person centred** conversations resulting in carers understanding and accessing an increased range of short break options, for example, a skateboarding course or musical instrument

Impact for staff

- **100%** of staff surveyed considered the process as positive due to the simplified application process and flexibility of approach,
- Reduced time taken to complete application forms
- **Staff self-esteem and motivation was increased** as they were able to offer support for carers in circumstances when no other provision was available,
- **Staff felt more liberated and empowered** as they were able to move away from structured assessment to focus on carer outcomes and provide more creative solutions.



Key enablers

- **Partnership and co-production with leadership teams**

Working in collaboration with colleagues across NHS Highland ensured buy-in to implement changes to process and that the approach aligns to the strategic vision for short breaks to ensure sustainability of this new way of working

- **Responsiveness and flexibility of staff**

Staff were quick to implement the new process and ensure improved access to short breaks for carers. This was helped by actively involving staff in the design of the new approach and implementing a clear communication strategy

- **Established relationships with the community**

The team was able to utilise and build on long established relationships within the locality to develop understanding of the potential 'market' and support creativity

- **Access to funding**

The allocation of additional Scottish Government funds enabled the new approach to be implemented quickly

- **Learning from practice**

Actively learning during implementation enabled challenges to be identified and improvements to continually be made. Capturing carer impact stories has also supported staff creativity and challenged them to find solutions in different ways

Opportunities for improvement

Recognising the continued demand for traditional respite

- Alternative approaches to short breaks needs to be seen alongside traditional respite as there is still demand for this

Tackling inequalities

- Opportunity to improve engagement with carers in the most vulnerable groups e.g. those caring for people with addictions, Gypsy communities, and those that don't have English as a first language

Early Identification

- Having conversations with carers earlier and providing access to a short break before they reach crisis point.

Further information

Find out more about NHS Highland's approach to supporting unpaid carers on their [webpages](#).

The Unpaid Carers Improvement Programme is part of Healthcare Improvement Scotland's Improvement Hub (ihub). Visit our webpages to read more about our improvement work, including further impact stories, on our [webpages](#).