

Supporting Self Directed Support

New VOCAL team members Tammy Easton and Carla Bennet join us this month in Edinburgh and Midlothian respectively. They'll be supporting carers to consider their options under self-directed support, and increase their confidence to plan and broker support for themselves and the person receiving care.

Self-directed Support (SDS) enables carers and families to choose from four options of receiving support. The new Carers Act strengthens carers' rights: when eligible for support, a carer must now be offered options for self-directed support. Any carer support will then be provided under section 24 of the Carers Act and cannot be charged for or means tested.



Tammy (left) & Carla (right) kindly pose for a snap at our December team meeting in Midlothian

In addition, Tammy and Carla will help carers identify their personal outcomes, prepare them for assessments and reviews and help them broker the right services and solutions for their caring role.

If you have questions about SDS drop us a line on 0131 622 6666 or email us centre@vocal.org.uk



A group of carers enjoy a wee break at Jupiter Artland

Time for a Wee Break?

The New Year often brings with it thoughts of resolutions and plans for the future. For lots of people this is the point in the year they'll start planning their breaks for the year ahead: a pleasure in itself. Regular "downtime" contributes hugely to our mental and physical health, and even just planning time off in the dark days of winter can help make them seem less... well, dark!

For carers under pressure this kind of recharging is even more important, but the demands of a caring role can make it seem impossible. In our 2017 survey of over 900 unpaid carers in Edinburgh, only half said they'd had a break from caring in the past year. One third had never had any time off, rising to a staggering 42% of carers aged 75 and over.

Taking time away from our responsibilities has a positive impact on everyone and carers are no different: in our survey 80% of those that had had a break say it made it easier for them to continue in their caring role.

To support carers to get the breaks they need VOCAL's Hayley Burton, (Respitality and Short Breaks Development Officer) has been building relationships with the hospitality, tourism and leisure sector to gift-in-kind breaks and experiences for carers. Based on this we're launching an online Wee Breaks hub this spring. As well as showcasing breaks that are available, the site will provide information and tools on planning breaks, funding, replacement care and even just deciding what kind of wee break suits you.

The Wee Breaks website will go live later this month: weebreaks.org.uk and in the meantime – if we've got you thinking about taking a break – why not get in touch with us on 0131 622 6666 or email us at centre@vocal.org.uk and ask about wee breaks.

Caring in the City - reaching 7,000 carers in Edinburgh

ABOUT VOCAL

VOCAL supports carers in all family or relationship settings, be they defined by kinship, partnership, friendship, affection or obligation.

What do we do?

Carers can access the following:

- Information & advice
- Individual support
- Legal & financial surgeries
- Training & groupwork
- Social & leisure opportunities
- Family Support (Addictions)
- Carer counselling service

Connect with VOCAL:



Email:

centre@vocal.org.uk



Website:

vocal.org.uk



Twitter:

@EdinburghCarers



Facebook:

/VOCALcarers

VOCAL Carer Centres

VOCAL Edinburgh Carers' Hub

60 Leith Walk
Edinburgh EH6 5HB
Tel: 0131 622 6666

VOCAL Midlothian Carer Centre

30/1 Hardengreen Estate
Dalhousie Road, Dalkeith
EH22 3NX
Tel: 0131 663 6869

Additional services:

Family Support

Addictions (FSA) 0131 622 6666

Counselling 0131 466 8082

South Edinburgh 0131 672 0987

South West Edin 0131 453 9457

VOCAL is an active member of the Coalition of Carers in Scotland and is affiliated to Carers Scotland, Shared Care Scotland and Eurocarers.



HAPPY TO TRANSLATE

Finding the Energy to Save

Electricity's one of those things we tend not to think about until it isn't there (How many times during a power cut have you found yourself still reaching for the light switch?). Our energy bills are often similarly invisible, just happening around us. They're also increasingly among the biggest financial burdens on households, and ones that can take time and – pardon us – energy to get on top of.

As bills rise carers can be hit worst. With little time or energy to spare for anything beyond a caring role, research tells us that as many as 66% of carers struggled to pay their bills in winter, while 92% of carers worried about being able to pay increasingly high energy bills.

Against this background uSwitch reported in September that rising wholesale energy costs had resulted in an average of one price rise a week by British energy supply companies in 2018, pushing some carers' bills even higher.

Happily it's not all doom and gloom and VOCAL can help. We host regular energy surgeries at our Edinburgh Hub and have yet to have a carer attend who didn't make a saving:



"I saved over £300, which was a real eye opener as I thought I was on a good deal. I would recommend that all carers go along"

– Wendy, parent carer.

If you'd like help saving money on your energy bills you can book onto one of our regular energy surgeries, either contact VOCAL's Carer Support Team on 0131 622 666 or email centre@vocal.org.uk.

2018 at VOCAL By The Numbers

As well as moving to our new home at 60 Leith Walk, last year saw a lot of big numbers at VOCAL in financial support, here are just a few:

- We raised **£11,846** for **46** carers to pay for essential items and breaks
- **£32,000** was given to over **113** carers for breaks from caring
- We provided welfare rights support to **389** carers in Edinburgh
- We facilitated legal support and estates planning for **121** carers
- **207** carers received support around power of attorney
- **61** attended long-term care planning surgeries
- We delivered energy surgeries to **37** carers
- and **10** carers accessed our new debt support service (which only started in October)

This year we'll aim to deliver even more so if any of the above sounds useful to you too, then **you can contact VOCAL's Carer Support Team to talk about how we can help on 0131 622 6666 or email centre@vocal.org.uk.**

Navigating benefits
is a headache.

Last year we
helped carers
to access over
£815,000
of benefits due
to them and the
people they care for...

... can we help you?

Janet first contacted VOCAL in 2017 after realising her own health and wellbeing had begun to deteriorate. She cares for her adult daughter Meg* who has physical disabilities and seizures.* names were changed for this article

When she contacted us Janet's own pre-existing health issues were becoming unmanageable alongside her caring role. The unpredictability of daily life caring for Meg was getting her down, and having to fight through long complex forms – just to cling onto such benefits as she and Meg received – left her frustrated and exhausted. She was unsure what to do, who to turn to for support or even what kind of support might help.

Money had become a real problem. Unable to work Meg was receiving Employment Support Allowance (ESA), but had been turned down for a Personal Independence Payment (PIP). Meanwhile Janet worked for herself earning around £50 a week. Money was very tight.

VOCAL supported Janet in addressing various welfare rights issues, both on her own behalf and on Meg's. Meg now gets both components of PIP (which she'd previously been denied) and – after submitting a mandatory reconsideration, drafted by VOCAL – has moved to the "support group" of ESA (with fewer requirements than the "work related activity group" which she was in before).

These benefit changes removed a great deal of stress for both of them. Janet says that without VOCAL's assistance with the paperwork she'd have given up from stress and fatigue never having achieved this.

We've also supported Janet to find some time for herself through complementary therapy sessions and a weekend break (see page 1) which really helped recharge her batteries. Our peer mentoring sessions enabled her to meet and share experiences with another parent carer from a similar caring role. Janet's built new skills in our free courses, both developing skills to help her caring role and simply for her own personal growth, something she now has time and energy to remember and think of now and then!

A year on from that initial meeting Janet tells us she's less stressed, her health and wellbeing are better, and she feels more confident.

For help with benefits, or with concerns or issues similar to any of Janet's, please contact VOCAL's Carer Support Team on 0131 622 6666 or email centre@vocal.org.uk.

Happy Hampers!

As all our reeling January bank balances attest, Christmas can put huge demands on our time and our pockets. Three years ago in the run up to the holiday, Destiny Church approached VOCAL to ask if we had any carers where the particular demands of their caring role made the festive season especially difficult. When we (of course) said yes, they invited us to become part of their annual hamper appeal, collecting for and creating Christmas hampers for carers.

Sadly we can't collect enough for all the carers in Edinburgh, so for three years we've worked with Destiny to give hampers to carers with two or more cared for people in their household, on the basis the strain is probably greatest on them.



The hampers contain food for Christmas day: vegetables, potatoes, soup, puddings, cakes, biscuits, gravy, sauces and crackers. As well as gifts to suit the ages of the carer and cared for.



This year 16 awesome volunteers from Destiny Church, together with VOCAL staff, packed donations into 21 hampers. We'd like to say a big thank you to Destiny and to those carers who kindly collected and delivered the hampers from Gorgie to people who couldn't make it to collect theirs.

If you'd like to help with next year's drop us a line on 0131 622 6666 or email centre@vocal.org.uk.

Carers Allowance Supplement Every Little Helps



Treasure Tree

The Difference A New Pair Of Wheels Can Make

The festive season can so often be a cash-flow crunch time, as much for carers as anyone else (if not more so!) with expenses from Christmas in particular it can be a financially trying time.

There's some small help at least: the first batch of payments of the Scottish Government's new Carers Allowance Supplement began landing with carers from October onward. As you read this the second eligibility date payments will be going out! A well timed boost for many after the expenses of the festive season.

Carers Allowance Supplement is a top-up benefit paid to carers living in Scotland. It's paid as a lump sum twice a year to people in receipt of Carer's Allowance on the qualifying date. The first qualifying date was 16 April 2018 and the second 15 October 2018. If you got Carers Allowance on either qualifying date, you will be getting the supplement. It's an automatic additional payment, and the latest round is being paid from 14 December 2018 onward. If you think you might be missing yours, contact Social Security Scotland on 0800 182 2222.

Going forward those eligibility dates will roll on every six months for the lifetime of the payment. The Scottish Government says this is an interim top-up while they negotiate for Social Security Scotland to take over from the Department of Work and Pensions in delivering Carers' Allowance. The supplementary payment of £221 (equivalent to a 13% increase) will then simply become part of Carers Allowance for carers in Scotland.

Remember that since both Carers Allowance and the Supplement are taxable, you'll need to let HMRC know you're receiving them if your income is more than the annual personal allowance (which is £11,850 a year for the 2018/19 tax year).

Treasure Tree is VOCAL's social enterprise, selling unwanted treasures. We specialise in care equipment that carers, former carers and their families no longer have use for. Treasure Tree makes money for carers and for VOCAL by selling goods online and sharing proceeds.

Recently a carer approached us looking for a wheelchair. Her mother was in care and using an unsuitable one. We had 4 in stock at that time and talked the carer through the options. Her mum needed slight reclined



back support, and her legs elevated. One of our chairs (a custom made IBIS) seemed ideal. We provided the carer with the specifications and photographs. She came into our office and saw the chair. Having consulted with her mother's Occupational

Therapist (who confirmed the chair was a good choice) she bought it. She later told us "The chair has changed the quality of life for my Mum. She is upright, supported and taking notice of the world around her."

The chair cost £2,200 new. Treasure Tree received 25% and the vendor (another carer) received 75% of that. Sometimes we receive 50% or 100% of monies raised.

You can contact Treasure Tree to buy or sell on 0131 622 6666 or email sell@treasuretree.scot



Keep it local. Sell through VOCAL

If you would like to update or remove your details, or would like your name added to VOCAL's mailing list to receive Carers News, then complete this form and return to: **FREEPOST RTYY-ZYUS-HBEY, VOCAL Edinburgh Carers' Hub, 60 Leith Walk, Edinburgh EH6 5HB**

Title: Name:

Address:

Previous address (if updating):

Postcode: Tel: Email:

Condition of person being cared for:

Relationship to person being cared for:

Add

Remove

Update

The information provided in this form will be stored on VOCAL's secure systems. We will use it to send you information about carer support and services by post and email. We may occasionally contact you by telephone. We will not share any personal information with a third party unless required to do so or with your consent. Information is regularly checked to ensure it is accurate and up to date. If you wish to view the information we hold about you or for your details to be removed, please contact VOCAL on 0131 622 6666 or email centre@vocal.org.uk You can read our full data privacy statement on the VOCAL website: www.vocal.org.uk/privacy