

October 2025

VOCAL's magazine for unpaid carers



Carers news



Take a break from caring

Markus' caring story:

Recognising his caring role and LGBTQ+ identity

Future and emergency planning:

What to consider and why

Getting ready for winter:

Preparing your home for the colder months



Laura Hill, Deputy CEO, VOCAL

Welcome

Welcome to the latest edition of Carers News, VOCAL's magazine for unpaid carers in Edinburgh and Midlothian.

If you have feedback or would like to share your story, please email our communications team social@vocal.org.uk

You can view a digital version of this magazine at vocal.org.uk/carers-news

Have you moved house or changed phone number? Has your caring situation changed?

To update your details with us, visit vocal.org.uk/privacy

Dear carers,

The Care Reform (Scotland) Act 2025, introduced in July, is a milestone for carers in Scotland, as it makes provision for carers to have a legal right to breaks from caring, following years of campaigning by carer groups. Secondary legislation is needed to implement this right and we will continue to keep you informed as it progresses.

In the meantime, taking meaningful time away from caring responsibilities remains a top priority for carers. Every year our Wee Breaks service supports over 2,000 carers to access a break, and the demand continues to grow. Carers tell us that quality replacement care, time to plan breaks and affordability are barriers to taking a break. Our Carer Support Team is here to support you, and on page 9 of this issue, we have created a short guide to help you take the first steps. Answer the questions and get in touch with us to see how we can make your break a reality.

Carers consistently tell us that finding information and accessing support can be exhausting. One carer said:

“There’s no roadmap. You’re just thrown into it and have to figure it all out.”

VOCAL is often described as a gateway to other services and supports, and our online Carer Support Finder can help you to navigate the different options. It brings together services in Edinburgh and Midlothian specifically for unpaid carers. You might be looking for emotional support, funding options, time away from caring, or someone to talk to. Read more on page 7 about how to use this valuable resource.

We hope you enjoy our Carers News magazine and I encourage you to continue to send us your feedback and contributions. Special thanks to the carers who kindly shared their poems for this issue, and to Markus for telling his story.

Warm regards,

Laura Hill

Deputy CEO, VOCAL

News in brief



Investing in Volunteers

We are proud to have achieved the Investing in Volunteers (IiV) accreditation, the national benchmark for excellence in volunteer management.

The award recognises VOCAL's commitment to supporting the vital role volunteers play in improving the lives of unpaid carers across Edinburgh and Midlothian. Over the past year, VOCAL's team of more than 40 volunteers have contributed more than 2,000 hours of support!

Szilvia Zarda, Volunteer Coordinator at VOCAL, said:

“*Our volunteers give their time, skills, and expertise to help carers. We are so grateful for their support, and we're proud to have created a space where they feel supported and valued.*”

Scottish elections

Unpaid carers in Scotland provide care worth £13.1 billion each year and 3 in 5 people have caring responsibilities at some point in their lives.

To ensure carers' voices are represented ahead of the Scottish Parliament election, we are supporting the National Carers Organisations to create a 'Carers' Manifesto' which will include carers' key asks of elected representatives.

The manifesto will launch this autumn, and we are encouraging carers to get involved. Please share the manifesto and ask your candidates how they'll support carer issues.

From breaks from caring to employment support, help us get carers' needs heard!

Family Support: Drugs and Alcohol service

Are you affected by a family member or friend's drug or alcohol use? Our Family Support: Drugs and Alcohol service can help you with the challenges you may be experiencing in your relationship.

You can talk to us about any stress, guilt or confusion you may feel.

We can also look at how your whole network of family and friends are affected. We'll help you find the right support for yourself and the person you care for.

Visit vocal.org.uk/fsda or call us on **0808 196 6666** to find out about one-to-one and peer support options.



Markus' caring story

Markus, 19, cares for his mum, Marianne, who lives with multiple physical health conditions. These began before Markus was born and continue to impact her today.

Markus and his mum have always been close, especially as Marianne is a single parent.

By the age of 11, Markus was helping his mum with food shopping, cooking, gardening and DIY. He also started providing emotional support as Marianne sometimes finds it difficult to cope with shame around her non-visible disabilities. She sees her friends regularly at social clubs, but her disabilities make it hard for her to be mobile for long periods of time.

Markus explains: "I enjoy it but sometimes I feel the pressure of being her only carer."

In school, Markus had supportive friends but was wary of being out for too long, as he felt he needed to be at home. This was a difficult time where he had been recognised as a young carer by his school, but not yet received formal support.

At age 14, Markus told his mum and friends that he is transgender. Although the transition period was hard, it brought Markus and his mum closer together.



Markus and Marianne

Caring has sometimes been emotionally demanding for Markus, especially when he feels he has to hide his own stress or tiredness. Going through a gender transition has been similar – Markus used to spend a lot of energy thinking about how others saw him.

"I've learned to worry less about what other people think, but it can still be difficult," he says.

To manage these feelings, Markus finds that mindful activities help. When he and Marianne have time, they like doing something creative. They both enjoy painting and regularly attend North Edinburgh Arts Centre together, which also helps them feel part of their local community.

Now studying to become a paramedic, Markus balances his course with his caring role. While it can be hard to manage both roles, he also says he has learned from them. Being a carer first sparked his



“Our relationship has changed over the years, as I’ve recognised my role as her carer.” ”

Support for LGBTQ+ carers

We also spoke to Diane, who provides carer support at our partner organisation, LGBT Health and Wellbeing, about the unique challenges faced by LGBTQ+ carers. Diane explains:

“Coming to our services can help LGBTQ+ carers find a sense of belonging for both parts of their identity. Joining our community can really help to reduce social isolation and the associated risks of depression and anxiety, for example by meeting others through our WhatsApp groups.

Being around other people who are going through similar experiences, without having to explain who they are, makes a huge difference to people’s mental health.”

LGBT Health and Wellbeing offers support to anyone in the queer community, including trans people, and carers. They provide one-to-one advice, counselling, social events, and more. Find out more at lgbthealth.org.uk

interest in supporting others, while his paramedic training has given him new skills for caring at home, such as better knowledge of the medication his mum takes and how to talk to people when they feel low.

Studying has also helped reduce the social isolation that Markus once felt. Spending time caring has often meant it’s hard to connect with people, but being around his new coursemates helps. While he can’t leave his mum alone for too long and sometimes feels guilty, it’s good to be around people who understand.

Markus was referred to VOCAL by his university. Since then, he has received one-to-one support to explore how his caring role impacts him. He has also applied for Wee Breaks funding to get a new laptop to use at university, which will free up some time to have short breaks from both roles.

Thanks to Markus for taking the time to share his caring story with us.

Future and emergency planning

We spoke to Sophie, one of our Carer Support Practitioners, about how carers can plan for the future and how VOCAL can help.



Hi, Sophie. First of all, can you tell us why it's important for carers to forward plan?

It can feel scary to think about an emergency, or a significant change in someone's condition, but planning ahead is essential.

This is particularly true for carers. If someone relies on you for support, it's important to consider how unexpected events might affect them and others in your life.

So what kind of things do carers need to plan for?

Start by thinking about key areas like money, housing, and healthcare. If something were to happen to you or the person you care for, you would want these things to be easy to manage.

Setting up a will or trust is a good way to plan for what happens with your assets after you die. Legal tools like Power of Attorney or Guardianship allow someone to make financial, legal, or healthcare decisions on someone else's behalf if they lose capacity. We can help carers set these up at VOCAL.

What about emergencies – how can carers prepare?

In an emergency, once everyone's safety is ensured, the priority is that the person you care for continues to get the support they need. We do this by creating an emergency plan – a document that outlines what needs to happen during the first 3 days of an emergency.

This plan includes contact details of the person you care for; their medication, treatments or routines; and who else can provide care and what they're willing to do.

We can provide a template to help you. Once completed, keep it up to date. Share it with your contacts, neighbours and GP.

Anyone who registers with VOCAL will receive an emergency card. Can you explain the difference between an emergency card and plan?

You and the person you care for should always carry your emergency cards. If something happens to you, like an accident, injury or sudden illness, it helps others quickly understand your caring situation and get in touch with you or your named contacts.

The emergency plan is the next step. Once your named contacts have been reached, the plan gives them detailed instructions on what to do, such as where medications are kept or who else can step in to provide care.

Thanks, it's important to understand the difference! Is there anything else useful in future planning?

Yes. An Adult Carer Support Plan (ACSP) is another useful tool. We can help carers create one.

An ACSP is a written summary of your caring role, including what you do, your relationship with the person you care for, and the level of support they need.

It's especially helpful when speaking to professionals like hospital staff or social workers, as it saves you from having to repeat your situation. It also keeps all the key information about your caring role in one place.

That sounds good. Thanks so much for your time, Sophie.

No problem!

If you have any questions about future and emergency planning, feel free to contact us. We're here to help.

Carer Support Finder

There are many support services available for carers in Edinburgh and Midlothian. But sometimes it can be hard to find the right support at the right time.

VOCAL's Carer Support Finder is an online tool which helps carers to find support. You can filter by the type of support (such as peer support, groups or events), or by the condition of the person you care for, or your location. There's also a map so you can easily see services nearby.

You can contact some services directly, while some others need a referral from a health and social care professional.

Explore the Carer Support Finder and see what support is out there for you! supportfinder.vocal.org.uk



Carers' poetry

We run poetry workshops in our Carer Training programme, giving carers some me-time. Some have shared their poems – enjoy!

Can You Remember?

- Anonymous

Avignon, Arles,
Montpelier, Nimes,
Copenhagen, Helsinki,
Stockholm, Sao Paulo,
Ouro Preto, Lisbon,
Paris, Barcelona,
Plockton, Gairloch
And Orkney.

Can you remember?
Have you taken your pills?
And here is your porridge.
Then we'll take a walk to the park,
when the sun shines.

Mum

- Carol Black Arthur

*She's fresh clean clothes flapping gently
in the warm breeze
She's a new build bungalow surrounded
by a neat garden and small trees*

*If she was weather, she'd be sunshine
followed by soft fragrant rain
If she was a country, she'd be Scotland
with the need for independence again*

*She's a Dolphin with her young playing
on the waves for hours
She's an old Mini Cooper covered with
sticky back plastic flowers*

*If she was an insect she'd be a busy
buzzing bee and Over the Sea to Skye
is the song that she would be
She's a Robin, bobbing like a needle
on an old singer treadle*

*She's a host of golden daffodils
glowing in springs early sun
If she was a TV show she'd be Strictly
Come Dancing, she really could have won*

*If she was an actress she'd be Bette Davis
on the silver screen
Or perhaps she's just a just a butterfly
and knows it's all a dream*



Find out what other events are coming up, including more creative and wellness sessions, at carerstraining.co.uk, or get in touch to request a paper copy.

Since opening our holiday homes at Seton Sands in September 2024, we have supported 145 carers and 100 people they care for to take a break!

Take a break from caring



Taking a break is the top issue for unpaid carers, but it can be challenging to do so - due to lack of time to plan, financial restrictions, or uncertainty about what your break might look like.

If you're thinking about what a break means to you, would you like to design your own break? We can help you think about what you're looking for, and how to make it happen.

Getting started

A break doesn't always mean a trip. Time away from caring can take many forms and be tailored to your needs. Have you considered a:

- Gym membership
- Meal kit subscription
- Kindle
- Visit from a cleaner
- Games console
- Or theatre or concert tickets?

Reflections

It might have been a while since you've taken a break, making it hard to imagine what a good break would look like.

Use these prompts to reflect on the difference a break could make.

- **When was the last time you did something you felt passionate about?**
- **Do you feel recharged by time alone, or time with others?**
- **Are there any hobbies you used to enjoy, but no longer do since you started caring?**
- **Is there a household or admin task that often stops you having free time?**

Turn over the page to answer questions about your break. Keep the examples and reflections in mind as you go.

Contact us when you're ready. You can tear out this page for the conversation.



0808 196 6666



Edinburgh: centre@vocal.org.uk

Midlothian: midlothian@vocal.org.uk

Designing your break

These questions can help clarify what you want, and how to make it a reality.

1. What would your ideal break look like?

(An overnight stay? Reading or doing yoga?
Learning something new? Taking a walk?)

2. What difference would this break make for you? (Feel more rested, feel less overwhelmed, maintain friendships?)

3. What's making it hard to take a break right now? (No time to plan or get away, no-one to cover care, money worries, feelings of guilt?)

4. What steps could you take now?

(Ask friends and family for help with care, research day centres, apply for funding?)

[illegible]

5. Who or what could support you to make this break happen? (Family, friends, local group, our Wee Breaks team?)

[illegible]

6. What is one thing you can do this week to bring you closer to your break?

(Look up a class, check your calendar for potential dates, contact VOCAL?)



Getting ready for winter

Although winter feels like a long way off, now is the perfect time to prepare your home for the colder months.

Carers can often face increased energy bills, whether you need to have the heating on more, or power medical devices.

It's important to ensure you are on the best possible tariff - Lyndsay, our Safe and Warm Practitioner, can advise you. There are also practical steps you can take to keep your home comfortable this winter.

Draught proofing

You can reduce draught by covering gaps in your home. For example, you could put draught excluder tape or DIY glazing around your windows. Or, if you have a chimney, you can buy inflatable draught excluders that fill the space and stop cold air from coming in – just remove it if you light the fire!

If you are a homeowner, you might be eligible for a loan or grant for insulation or other home energy measures: homeenergyscotland.org/home-energy-scotland-grant-loan

Managing damp

Wet Scottish winters mean that damp is often a problem. You can reduce damp by keeping pot lids on while cooking, or buying a heated laundry rack to dry clothes more quickly. You can also turn on the extractor fan and close doors while cooking or showering.

Check what financial support you are entitled to

If you are over state pension age, receive certain benefits, or have a child with a disability living at home, you may be eligible for energy bill support.

Visit mygov.scot/help-energy-bills to find out if you're entitled to any of the following:

- [Winter heating payment](#)
- [Warm home discount](#)
- [Pension age winter heating payment](#)
- [Child winter heating payment](#)

For advice on energy payments and keeping your home warm, visit vocal.org.uk/warm

Wordsearch

F	I	H	S	O	U	P	M	A	E	S	O	R
Z	O	R	E	T	Y	W	L	T	N	Y	L	I
H	R	L	A	N	E	E	W	O	L	L	A	H
I	O	P	I	S	G	C	V	Z	O	Q	J	L
B	Q	Y	D	A	H	J	E	R	O	K	S	L
E	I	A	L	W	G	B	P	P	M	H	C	E
R	O	W	E	L	P	E	S	B	L	A	N	Q
N	L	A	E	R	D	G	E	O	E	C	N	U
A	V	G	A	U	T	U	M	N	A	L	D	I
T	S	B	V	C	Q	R	T	F	S	A	P	N
E	A	D	E	H	I	F	O	I	U	D	F	O
T	A	U	P	O	E	R	H	R	N	Z	S	X
S	O	P	C	O	S	Y	L	E	G	L	O	R

Take a moment to
pause and rest with our
autumn wordsearch.
Find these words:

Cosy
Bonfire
Autumnal
Hibernate
Equinox
Foliage
Halloween
Soup

Contact

Edinburgh Carers' Hub

60 Leith Walk, Edinburgh, EH6 5HB

centre@vocal.org.uk



@VOCALEdinburgh

Midlothian Carer Centre

30/1 Hardengreen Estate, Dalhousie Road,

Eskbank, Dalkeith, EH22 3NX

midlothian@vocal.org.uk



@VOCALMidlothian

0808 196 6666

vocal.org.uk

supportfinder.vocal.org.uk

Scottish Charity: SC020755
Company Registration: SC183050

About us

VOCAL (Voice of Carers Across Lothian)
is a Scottish charity, run by carers and
for carers since 1994.

VOCAL supports unpaid carers in
Edinburgh and Midlothian, offering
tailored support for all caring situations
and relationships. This includes caring
for a family member, partner, relative
or friend, of any age, who might need
help to manage a long-term condition,
a disability, a physical or mental health
condition or substance use.



working *with* carers