April 2026

VOCAL's magazine for unpaid carers

vocal
working *with* carers

Carers news



Hospital discharge:

Planning ahead and knowing your rights

Lindsay's caring story:

How an Adult Carer Support Plan made a difference

Our work in communities:

We're delivering support near you!

Carer poverty event:

Join us to help shape a plan of action for carers



Lora Vernon, Head of Digital and Communications, 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,

Across Scotland, more unpaid carers are facing growing financial pressures, and the issue of carer poverty has never been more urgent. Research by Carers UK found that the rate of poverty amongst unpaid carers is **56% higher than those who do not provide unpaid care**. At VOCAL, we are seeing an increasing number of carers facing hardship, with demand for our financial wellbeing services increasing by 31% over the past year.

In response to this we are holding a **Carer Poverty event on Wednesday 3 June** (more on page 3). Carers, partners and support organisations will share experiences, highlight the financial cost of caring and identify actions to tackle it.

Our attention is also focused on the right to a break and how this right is translated into reality for carers. We encourage you to take part in the Scottish government consultation by Friday 22 May: **https://consult.gov.scot/dementia-and-unpaid-carers-unit/unpaid-carers-right-to-breaks-implementation/**. Access to meaningful breaks is not a luxury. It is essential to sustaining caring relationships and protecting carers' wellbeing.

With the Scottish elections approaching, there is also a clear opportunity for the next government to demonstrate leadership on this issue. Encouragingly, short breaks has received cross-party support, but we recognise that priorities often shift post-election. The short breaks commitments must be implemented without delay. Read more about how you can get involved in the elections and ask your candidates about the issues that matter to you on page 8.

Alongside this national focus, our local work continues at pace. Our team is active across communities in Edinburgh and Midlothian, delivering support close to home for carers. Whether meeting carers locally, working with partners, or travelling between our locality bases to ensure our services remain accessible regardless of your postcode, we are committed to staying connected and responsive to carers' needs.

Warm regards,

Lora Vernon
Head of Digital and Communications, VOCAL

News in brief

New resource for carers of someone who uses alcohol or drugs

Looking after someone who uses alcohol or drugs has a unique set of challenges. If you are in this situation, our Family Support: Drugs and Alcohol (FSDA) team can help you.

We recently updated our guide on this topic, called 'It's hard for me too'. It talks about:

- **The overlap between alcohol or drug use and mental health difficulties**
- **Feelings you may have in this caring situation**
- **Problems you may face and some of the psychology behind them**
- **What you can do differently**
- **Other organisations you can get help from**

To read more on this topic and see how we can help you, visit **vocal.org.uk/fsda**. If you would like a printed copy of the guide, please contact us.

Carer poverty event

Nearly 30% of carers in Scotland are living in poverty, and 50% say they have been forced to cut back on essentials such as food and heating and are just surviving. 17 years on from the 2009 Carers Poverty protest in Edinburgh - and despite significant legislative and policy changes - the dial has not shifted on carer poverty.

We want to bring together carers, partners and support organisations to discuss the growing concerns of carer poverty and identify solutions for the future.

Join us on Wednesday 3 June, 10am – 3pm, to help shape a plan of action.

To register, please visit **http://bit.ly/4bE10Fj**

LGBT Charter Accreditation

We are proud to have achieved the LGBT Silver Charter Accreditation! The LGBT Charter is a programme run by LGBT Youth Scotland, which supports organisations to proactively include LGBTQ+ people in every aspect of their work.

The accreditation lasts for three years and ensures that VOCAL is an inclusive place for our staff and volunteers, as well as carers and their families.



Our work in communities

Having access to support which is mobile, flexible and close to where you live is important for carers. We are continuing to expand our locality bases and community partnerships to offer carers even more choice and control.



Edinburgh Community Stroke Service

Since December 2025, we have been working in partnership with the Edinburgh Community Stroke Service in Longstone. Carers can now access a range of support at the Centre, including:

- **Monthly carer support group through our Carer Training programme**
- **Monthly drop-in advice sessions with a Carer Support Practitioner**
- **We also deliver training for service staff to raise awareness of unpaid caring**

University of Edinburgh

We have been working with the Richard Verney Health Centre at the University of Edinburgh, which employs 20 GPs. Leesa, one of our Carer Support Practitioners, runs a monthly session at the health centre where carers can have an in-person, phone or video appointment.

The sessions have supported carers in a wide range of roles and situations, including student carers who are balancing their studies with caring. Having access to flexible support has made a huge difference. The chance to complete an Adult Carer Support Plan has been particularly helpful as it allows carers to reflect on their needs and practical steps that might make their responsibilities more manageable.

Wee Breaks

Our Wee Breaks service offers carers free tickets or vouchers for local leisure and hospitality events. We work with many partners to provide opportunities for carers to take a short break, whether that means trying a new sport, eating out, or going on a family day trip.

We have recently been building connections with more partners across Edinburgh, including:

- **Gravity Active trampoline park**
- **Ratho Park Golf Club**
- **The Corner Cafe, Currie**
- **Edinburgh Zoo**

To reach more carers who may not be registered with us, we also distribute vouchers via partner organisations including MECOPP (Minority Ethnic Carers of People Project) and young carers' organisations: Capital, SPACE, and Edinburgh Young Carers.

Craigmillar

Building on existing community networks in Craigmillar has helped us to identify carers in different groups – particularly those who have not had contact with VOCAL before. Mark, our Carer Support Practitioner in this area, and Jeanne-Marie, our Carer Training Officer, are working with:

- **The fortnightly health drop-in at Craigmillar Library**
- **Mother and baby groups**
- **Caring in Craigmillar: Setting up 1:1 and peer support**
- **Edinburgh Food Social: Helping carers cook delicious and healthy food, for themselves or the person they care for**
- **Hay Community Centre**



Midlothian

Caring for someone can be rewarding, but it can also be challenging. Having local support makes a real difference. That's why more of our work is now taking place within communities across Midlothian, making it easier for carers to connect with support closer to home.

Face-to-face appointments with carer support practitioners are available in familiar settings like libraries, GP practices, and community hubs, making support more accessible and less daunting.

Community-based training and activities are also opening up, including events like the Carers' Cuppa in Dalkeith and Walk and Talk sessions in local green spaces, giving carers opportunities to connect and share experiences. New initiatives developed with local groups, such as Men's Shed and cold water therapy, encourage carers to try new experiences and take time for themselves.

Our expanding approach to support in the community aims to strengthen our connections, raise awareness, and ensure carers feel supported.

Lindsay's caring story: How an Adult Carer Support Plan made a difference

Lindsay cares for her eight-year-old son Angus, who has ADHD and is awaiting an Autism diagnosis.



At first, Lindsay didn't see herself as a carer – she considered the tasks she did for Angus just part of being his mum. It was only as Angus got older that she began to burn out and felt herself living from hour to hour. Lindsay started to realise that everything she was doing for Angus wasn't 'everyday' parenting. She describes this as a really hard realisation.

Lindsay came to VOCAL after speaking to other parents of neurodivergent children at Angus's school, one of whom gave her VOCAL's number. She called VOCAL and met with Lizzie, a Carer Support Practitioner, who immediately made her feel safe and supported.



Lizzie worked with Lindsay to create an Adult Carer Support Plan (ACSP). It's a document setting out a carer's personal outcomes, needs, and any support that can be provided. Under the Carers Act (Scotland) 2016, any individual who is currently providing or intends to provide regular care is eligible for an ACSP. The plan acts as a roadmap, helping carers to consider what type of support is needed to continue in their caring role, and what could help to maintain a balanced life alongside caring.

Lindsay's key outcomes in her ACSP were to improve her wellbeing, and to arrange temporary care for Angus to enable her to have a hip replacement.

Lindsay described how articulating her needs in the ACSP immediately helped her mental wellbeing:

> *I can finally breathe or see the light a bit […] I feel like my shoulders have dropped.*

An advocacy tool

Having an ACSP to refer to helped Lindsay feel more confident advocating for herself. The plan was shared with Lindsay's GP, which made her feel legitimised when asking for support. When Angus was in hospital over Christmas, having the ACSP boosted Lindsay's confidence in speaking with hospital staff, sharing her needs, and feeling like staff understood that she was both Angus's mum and his carer.

> *I never had a problem advocating for Angus, but I didn't know how to advocate for myself. It's like on a plane when you are told to put your own oxygen mask on before helping others – I needed to be able to look after myself in order to look after my son.*

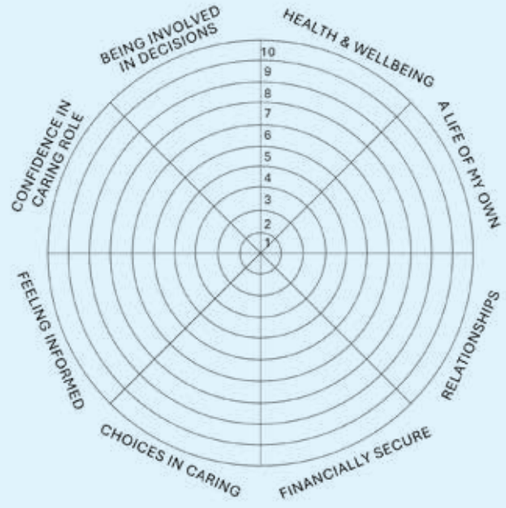
Conversations at work

The ACSP has also helped Lindsay at work. She works for the NHS, and VOCAL made her aware of the NHS Carer Passport scheme. A Carer Passport is a document created by a carer and their line manager, recording their caring role and any support which has been agreed. Having a Carer Passport helped Lindsay to speak more openly about her caring role with her manager, and be up front when she needed flexibility.

Taking a break

Another of the key outcomes identified in Lindsay's ACSP was the need to arrange replacement care while she had a hip operation. This was a huge stress for Lindsay, and before contacting VOCAL she was seriously considering cancelling the much-needed surgery because there would be no one to support Angus while she recovered. However, Lindsay was able to get a grant from VOCAL's Wee Breaks fund to cover the cost of Angus's replacement care. She was able to have surgery, knowing that Angus was looked after while she recovered.

Your ACSP



If an ACSP sounds like a useful tool for you, you can use The Caring Life Wheel to start thinking about your caring needs:

Rate each area on the wheel from 1 to 10 based on how things feel for you right now.

- **1 - 4: Things really need to change**
- **5 - 7: Things could be improved**
- **8 - 10: Things are as good as they can be right now**

You may wish to join the points or shade the sections to help you see the overall picture.

Take a moment to reflect on which areas score the lowest, and why that might be. If this exercise highlights areas where you would like more support, you may wish to explore an Adult Carer Support Plan with one of our Carer Support Practitioners.

To find out more, please visit **vocal.org.uk/acsp**

Scottish Parliament election: Your voice

The 2026 Scottish Parliament election will take place on Thursday 7 May, and is an important opportunity to get your voice heard. The National Carer Organisations' Carers Manifesto sets out key changes carers want to see.

Manifesto asks

The manifesto highlights ten key policy commitments:

Ensure unpaid carers are supported

1. Guarantee carers can fully benefit from their right to a break
2. Allocate at least 25% of Carers Act funding to local carers' support organisations in addition to current funding
3. Introduce mandatory Young Carer Awareness Training to all education staff

Ensure unpaid carers can stay well

4. Invest in and deliver a dedicated 'Tackling Carer Health Inequalities' strategy
5. Provide annual health checks, flexible GP and hospital appointments, and improved access to regular screening
6. Ensure carers can access support locally for their mental health and wellbeing

Ensure unpaid carers are financially secure

7. Revise Carer Support Payment by increasing the rate and making it available to more unpaid carers
8. Deliver a Minimum Income Guarantee for carers
9. Require publicly funded organisations to be Carer Positive
10. End social care charging

Ask your candidate

Asking about carer issues ensures unpaid caring is valued and supported in Scotland's next Parliament.

- **How will you ensure carers access the support they're entitled to?**
- **How will carers be supported to take meaningful breaks?**
- **What steps will you take to improve carers' mental health and wellbeing?**
- **How will you address health inequalities among carers?**
- **Do you support increasing Carer Support Payment?**
- **Would your party back measures like a Minimum Income Guarantee?**

Party manifestos

Keep an eye out for party manifestos which will be released soon. They will outline overarching commitments to unpaid carers.

How your donations are used

For over 30 years, VOCAL has supported carers to maintain their health and wellbeing alongside their caring role. One way that supporters make this possible is through The 100 Club.

The 100 Club is our monthly lottery, where participants donate at least £5 per month to support carers, and 50% of all funds raised are paid out in prizes. It's a simple, affordable way to make a difference, while also being in with a chance to win each month. We've recently made it even easier to join with a new sign-up form on our website.

Thanks to the generosity of our supporters, including 100 Club members, donations in 2025–2026 reached over £32,000! In response to growing demand, this money contributed to our services for carers, helping us to:

- **Support 6,456 carers**
- **Hold specialist information surgeries for 613 people**
- **Provide our Carer Training programme which was attended by 1,917 carers**
- **Provide 3,625 counselling sessions**
- **Train 1,489 employers and professionals to recognise and support carers in the workplace**

Every contribution, big or small, helps us reach more carers when they need us most. To help support VOCAL's vital work with carers, contact **fundraising@vocal.org.uk** or visit **vocal.org.uk/100-club**.



Hospital discharge: Planning ahead and knowing your rights

A hospital admission for the person you care for can be hugely stressful. It can also be a catalyst for change in your caring role - the needs of the person you care for may have changed, or it may provide an opportunity to reflect on the amount of care you provide and whether this is sustainable.

Beth and Denise, VOCAL's Partnership Training Officers, provide training sessions on the hospital discharge process. Here they share some advice on making sure this transition is as smooth as possible.

Knowing your rights

Under the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016, local health boards and hospitals have a duty to involve carers in discharge planning if the person being discharged is likely to require support afterwards. You have a right to:

- **Be informed of the discharge date**
- **Share your thoughts about the discharge plan**
- **Have your views on the discharge plan considered, when reasonable and practical**

These rights apply whether the person you care for is being discharged to go home, or into another facility.

NHS Lothian also has a Discharge and Transfer Policy, which you can find on their website. It outlines some of the key responsibilities that the hospital has for carers and the person you care for, including that:

- **Discharge arrangements should be confirmed verbally and in writing**
- **A discharge letter should be sent to the patient's GP**
- **The patient and carer should be told about any follow-up appointments or referrals**

A patient should be discharged with an adequate supply of medication (usually 7 days as standard).

Terminology

The language used in hospital can be unfamiliar and confusing. Here we've explained a few terms that might be used in relation to the discharge of the person you care for:

- **A future care plan is a personalised plan created to outline a patient's future care preferences and needs, aiming to help them manage long-term health conditions and prevent crisis.**
- **A self-management plan is a personalised guide that helps individuals manage their health conditions independently. It outlines daily routines, medication schedules and strategies to help symptoms and manage emergencies.**
- **An MDT (multi-disciplinary team meeting) is a meeting between hospital staff involved in a patient's care.**

You can learn about all the process in our online course 'An Introduction to Hospital Discharge'.

Confidentiality

The person you care for needs to give consent to hospital staff if they want you to be included in discussions around their care.

Ideally this should be achieved through a conversation with the person, and recorded at the time by hospital staff. You can also let the staff know if you have any legal measurements in place, such as Power of Attorney or Guardianship.

Even when the person you care for is unable to, or prefers not to, provide consent, staff can still talk to you about the discharge process. They're allowed to share general, non-personal information. For example, what usually happens during discharge, typical support options, and general safety guidance. This information doesn't relate to the individual's private medical details, so it doesn't breach confidentiality.

You can find a list of resources to help you when the person you care for is coming from hospital, at **vocal.org.uk/hospital-discharge**.



Update your details

Has your caring situation changed or do you need to update your personal details?

If you are no longer a carer and wish to stay in touch, you can become a Friend of VOCAL. This would mean receiving information about our developments, annual reports and fundraising events.

We appreciate your help in keeping your information up to date. More information is available in our privacy policy, at: **vocal.org.uk/privacy**

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
carerstraining.co.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.

vocal
working *with* carers