

**CARERS
TRUST**
WALES



Ariennir gan
Lywodraeth Cymru
Funded by
Welsh Government

CARERS SUPPORT FUND 2020/21

**SUPPORTING UNPAID
CARERS EXPERIENCING
FINANCIAL HARDSHIP**

INTRODUCTION

Before the pandemic there was strong evidence that **unpaid carers** were more likely than those who don't provide care to experience financial hardship or live in poverty. The School Health Research Network Data shows that this is also true for young carers as whilst on average 16% of learners provide care this rises to 21% in low-income families.

The 2011 census demonstrated that Wales is a uniquely caring nation with the greatest number of older carers, young carers and those caring more than 50 hours a week than any other nation of the UK.

Research undertaken during the pandemic has shown a significant increase in the number of people of all ages providing unpaid care in Wales. Those that are providing care have seen a growth in the number of hours they spend caring with a marked increase in the number of carers supporting multiple people.

The pandemic has undoubtedly amplified the pressures facing carers reducing opportunities for respite and increasing the difficulty of balancing caring with work or education. The impact on carers has been profound with many describing a decline in their mental health and wellbeing as well as their short - and long-term financial security.

Carers Trust's Emergency Fund for Carers provided small grants during the early stages of the pandemic. This fund was significantly oversubscribed despite some local authorities and local health boards providing match funding.

THE £1M CARERS SUPPORT FUND WAS LAUNCHED IN LATE OCTOBER 2020 WITH AN ADDITIONAL £0.25M MADE AVAILABLE AT THE END OF JANUARY 2021

To help meet growing demand, Carers Trust Wales and our Network Partners were pleased to work with Welsh Government to develop and deliver the Carers Support Fund across Wales, ensuring that those most in need were able to access essential support quickly.

The £1m Carers Support Fund was launched in late October 2020 with an additional £0.25m made available at the end of January 2021 in recognition of the substantial demand identified through the first phase of delivery. The fund was openly advertised and promoted to a broad range of audiences nationally and locally.

Feedback from unpaid carers and the services delivering the Support Fund demonstrated that it helped to address significant unmet need having a direct and positive impact on unpaid carers.

“Thank you so much! I can put the heating on more as then the children won't be cold. It will make a massive difference for me and the children. It's been so cold.”

“I'm just so thankful to be able to fill my cupboards and freezer and not having to worry about finding the money to pay back ... it's a little bit of sunshine in one hell of a storm ... thank you so much!”

“Thank you for sorting the hardship grant for me and my family. The £150 food voucher has helped us more than you will ever know especially me as I worry so much about money and paying my bills. By having the voucher to pay for food, has freed up some money, which has helped me clear some extra payment on my heating bills. Thank you.”



“I was very very thankful for the grant I received, took a huge amount of pressure off me that month regarding how I was going to be able to keep my children warm, I was issued a shopping voucher and the money I saved from having to shop I put straight into my gas meter. Thank you so so much.”

Not only did the scheme address immediate needs through the purchase of food, heating and clothing it also helped to connect previously unsupported carers to wider support services.



“Thank you so much for my laptop. It will make doing my school work so much easier now and I won't feel stressed anymore that I haven't done what the teachers have asked. I'm excited to use it to join in with the young carers stuff too.”

“I just want to say a few words about the small grant I received in January. The grant allowed me to buy some quality warm clothes for my 2 year old, it enabled me to pay for some childcare. As a single dad, I've been alone, hungry and forgotten, the grant gave me some respite.”

The Support Fund has strongly demonstrated that many unpaid carers are living hand to mouth and there is further work to be done to fully understand the extent to

which this has resulted from the pandemic or been amplified by it. The sheer demand for the Support Fund and the very basic needs it has been used to meet, provides further evidence that addressing the financial impact of caring should be a continued priority for Welsh Government. As plans for recovery from the pandemic are developed it will be important to understand how unpaid carers can be better connected to services, supported to maximise their income, and provided with the tools and support they need to be as emotionally and financially resilient as possible.

Evidence and learning gathered through the delivery of the Carers Support Fund will undoubtedly help to inform longer term plans to ensure that unpaid carers are supported to be financially secure and well connected to carers services.

This report sets out:

- The reach of the Carers Support Fund
- The factors that made the delivery mechanism effective for carers
- Demographic data on the individuals supported and those they care for
- Information about what the direct grants were most used for
- Case studies capturing the impact of the funding
- Key areas of learning
- Next steps and recommendations

THE REACH OF THE CARERS SUPPORT FUND ACROSS WALES

Through the provision of grants and services the Carers Support Fund reached **6444 carers**. Total funds for grants and direct services were allocated to each local authority area based on the number of carers identified through the 2011 census. At a local level this total funding was split between direct grants and the provision of services based on local need.

Carers Trust North Wales

Spend:



119,762.50

Carers supported:



427

NEWCIS

Spend:



66,541.33

Carers supported:



764

Bridgend Carers Centre

Spend:



35,625

Carers supported:



205

Carers Trust South East Wales

Spend:



601,220

Carers supported:



2006

Carers Trust West Wales

Spend:



141,625

Carers supported:



757

Carers Outreach

Spend:



55,720.83

Carers supported:



235

Swansea Carers Centre

Spend:



182,700

Carers supported:



907

Credu

Spend:



219,116

Carers supported:



1143

HOW OUR REACH WAS ACHIEVED

Carers Trust worked collaboratively with our Network Partners to achieve reach in all 22 local authorities in Wales working proactively with other local carers organisations where appropriate.

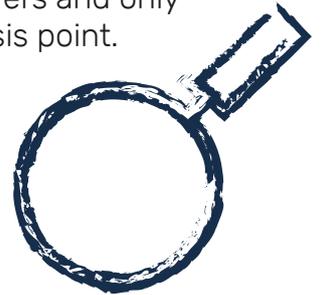
All Network Partners worked actively within their communities to advertise the support fund with the intention of connecting with unpaid carers who were not already connected to support services.

As a result of this approach 42% of the carers supported by the fund were previously unknown to services. Carers Trust North Wales reported that 90% of recipients had not been connected to services prior to applying for the grant. This was also the case for 69% of those who accessed the support fund via Carers Trust South East Wales.



We know that many unpaid carers do not recognise themselves as carers and only access services when at crisis point.

This support fund is further evidence that many carers in very significant need are not accessing any type of preventative support. The fund has also clearly demonstrated its potential to identify carers, provide them with much needed grants quickly and connect them to a range of services to provide wider support and to build resilience for the future.



WE KNOW THAT MANY UNPAID CARERS DO NOT RECOGNISE THEMSELVES AS CARERS AND ONLY ACCESS SERVICES WHEN AT CRISIS POINT.



WHY THIS APPROACH WORKED

Unpaid carers and staff within our Network Partners fed back a number of reasons why the approach used to deliver the Carers Support Fund was successful, including:

- The delivery mechanism meant that carers were asked to contact and engage with trusted local carers services. Many carers expressed that they felt more comfortable disclosing financial pressures within this context.
- Routing the funding through third sector organisations that specialise in supporting carers also gave an additional benefit of connecting unpaid carers to other preventative support services that they may previously been unaware of including benefit and income maximisation schemes.
- The application process and scope of the grant was simple. Carers are often time poor and describe feeling too exhausted to navigate seemingly complex systems. Network partners were able to support unpaid carers to make an application if they didn't feel confident in doing so independently.



- Network Partner staff were also equipped to have meaningful 'what matters' conversations with carers to identify how a grant could most usefully help them, supporting person centred approaches to meeting carers' needs.

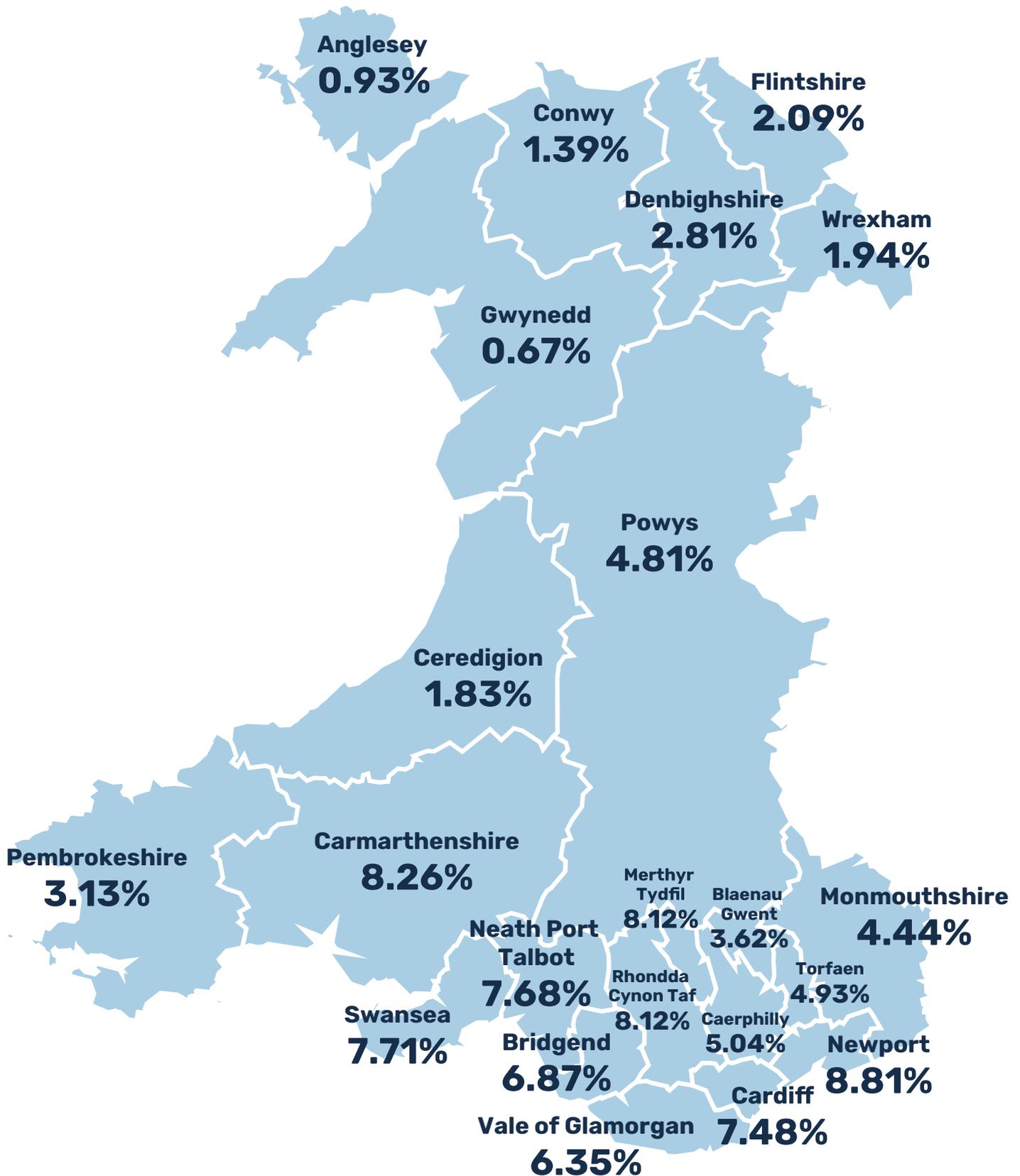
“I certainly feel that I have benefitted from the service. It has been life changing and I have recommended the service to my friends who are caring. For myself it has been a positive experience. I have many complex issues and challenges. It has helped me obtain clarity on my situation and feel less overwhelmed, which I expect is a common feeling amongst carers.”

“I just wanted to send a little note to say Thank you so much for helping me obtain the Carers Support Fund Grant, you made it such an easy process which was most appreciated. As a full time carer to my mum who is 80 and my daughter who is autistic it was so nice to have someone give me a hand with something that didn't involve more stress in my already pretty stressful day. You took me through what i needed to do step by step and you made it very clear and easy. I can't express how much it helped us with the cost of the oil going up and the weather getting suddenly colder it was so nice to be able to say to mum to put the heating on without worrying how quickly it was going to run out and needing to find the money to top it up again. It just meant I had one less thing to worry about which is a Christmas gift in itself.”

“In the two phone calls you have provided me with more support and advice than the two years I have been with NHS. You listened, you care and you don't judge me.”

WHO WE SUPPORTED THROUGH DIRECT GRANTS

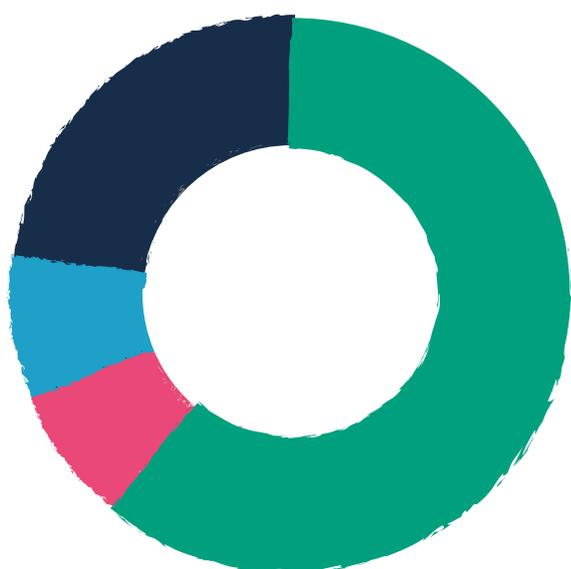
Direct Carers Support Grants reached **3497** carers.



Grants available through the Carers Support Fund were open to carers of all ages, including young carers. Eligibility was based on locally delivered assessments supported by a national screening tool ensuring that all recipients could demonstrate that they were both an unpaid carer as described by the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 and in immediate financial need.

Although not all carers consented to sharing personal data, the majority did, and the below percentages are based on their responses. These figures relate to direct grants only with direct services addressed further on in this report.

A wide age range of carers were reached, with percentage breakdown of age for those who shared this information as follows:

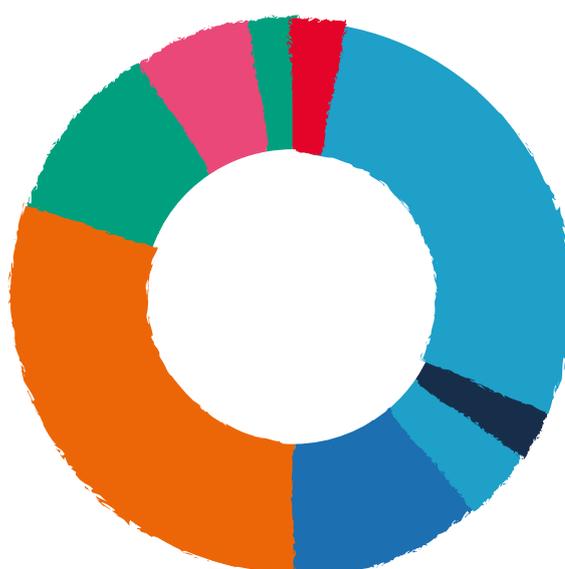


Carers aged 26-59	60.99%
Carers aged 60 and over	22.94%
Carers aged under 18	8.36%
Carers aged 18-25	7.71%

The Carers Support Fund reached disproportionately more female than male or non-binary people, with 78.06 % of recipients identifying as female.

Just under 5% (4.84%) of recipients identified that they were from a minority ethnic background. However, a significant number did not disclose their ethnicity. Our analysis and feedback from our Network Partners suggests that this figure is likely to be an underestimation.

Notably carers of autistic people and those with long term conditions were most likely to access grants under the Carers Support Fund. We have removed conditions where it was relevant to less than 2% of recipients. However, those caring for people with addictions and life limiting conditions also accessed support through the fund.



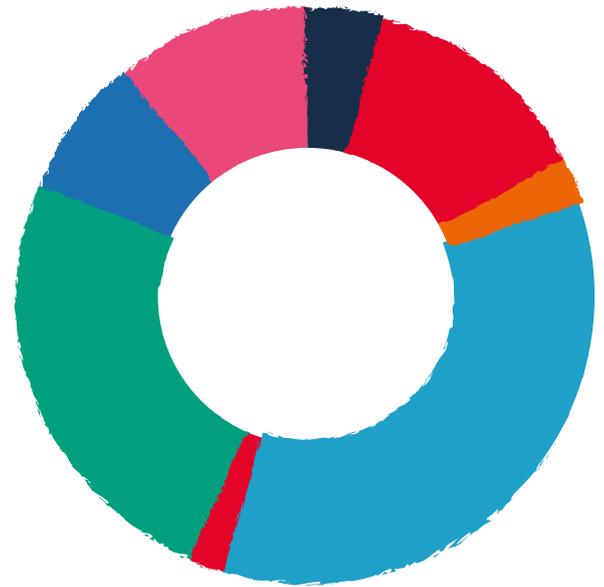
Long Term Condition	30.32%
Autism	28.90%
Learning Disability	11.17%
Mental Health	10.45%
Physical disability	6.78%
Dementia	4.20%
Cancer	2.83%
ADHD	2.83%
Sensory impairment	2.50%

HOW THE FUNDS WERE SPENT



The funds were allocated based on individual needs in line with the agreed parameters of the grant scheme. There were some common themes in what carers asked for funds for as set out in the chart below.

Food	35.13%
Household items (including furniture and carpets)	24.82%
Digital (including mobiles and data)	13.06%
White goods	11.00%
Laptops, chromebooks or tablets	7.69%
Beds, bedding or mattress	3.92%
Entertainment (including wellbeing boxes and subscriptions)	2.59%
Household Bills	1.78%



Where the use formed less than 1% of the total spend we have not included in the above chart. However, it is worth noting that unpaid carers requested funds to buy health care related items, clothing, incontinence pads, dental treatment, safety equipment, counselling and respite through the fund.

Notably, despite reassurance that school-aged young carers could access laptops for home learning through their local authority, this was a frequently requested item for young carers.

Although a comparatively small number, carers requesting beds or mattresses because the ones they had were unsuitable or in some cases non-existent was unexpected.



SUPPORT THROUGH DIRECT SERVICES

The services made available through the Carers Support Fund had a wide reach across Wales supporting 2947 carers through a range of activities including:

- Food boxes
- Wellbeing boxes
- Loaning of IT equipment
- IT and digital inclusion training
- Winter warmer packs
- Sensory play packs
- Income maximisation support through welfare benefits services
- Counselling services
- Pop up respite services

CASE STUDIES

THE IMPACT OF THE CARERS SUPPORT FUND

Case Study 1

Ms Williams returned to Swansea to live with her two children three years ago. She was homeless but eventually housed in the home she lives in now. Living on a low income with caring responsibilities for her son, without any family support has contributed to her hardship and feelings of loneliness and anxiety.

Ms Williams main hardship is financial; being on a low income made up of Welfare benefits. Alongside the grant, Swansea Carers Centre supported her to claim Disability Living Allowance for her son which she wasn't aware that she could claim, given his age. She was connected to a Food bank to see her through to her benefit payment.

Ms Williams was struggling with her 10-year-old son's destructive behaviour. When he has a 'melt down' he causes considerable damage to the home: holes kicked in walls, laptop and mobile phone destroyed which she cannot afford to replace. She also suffers with anxiety and depression which is triggered by several factors involved with her sons care and the pandemic. Ms Williams is very aware that she needs to focus on her wellbeing to regain her emotional strength. She asked for help with food purchasing and shared that she would love a bike.

The Carers Support Fund was used to provide a voucher for food and for the purchase of a bike. This grant made a big difference to Ms Williams: "I would like you to understand the gratitude and compassion I felt receiving this grant. When you have a child with special needs everything costs money.

Forget the fact that it's impossible to work when you have a child running out of school or his behaviour is so extreme you're told to pick him up relentlessly. Then he comes home, his anxiety puts everyone on edge, the melt-downs mean things get broken. His fidgeting breaks chairs, his clumsiness scrapes walls or pulls down things like shower curtains to iPad screen. He constantly needs stimulation so pulls the foam out of chair seats or tears the soles off his shoes.

As a result we're forever seeking the support of food banks.

“As much as you appreciate them, it destroys your pride and dignity. There's been many a time where I've broken down at the financial position I'm in. To receive a grant of £50 for food was overwhelming, I could choose more food other than the meal basics. The kids could choose their treats. We had FUN food shopping, rather than the guilt of saying "you can get that next time".

“Then wow!!! We were fortunate enough to receive a grant of £150 at Argos!!!! It sounds silly to say that it's been a dream for four years to go for a bike ride with the kids. But because of you, this dream came too. I bought the one I'd always wished for that has a basket on the front.”

Case Study 2

The carer was not known to North East Wales Carers Information Service (NEWCIS) prior to calling about the Carers Support Fund grant, she had seen it advertised in the press.

She cares for her daughter who has severe OCD, learning disabilities and autism alongside looking after other children who were all home being home schooled.

The carer enquired about the grant as her washing machine had broken and she was having to mop up the kitchen every time she used it. She also wanted to keep in touch with NEWCIS should she need more support in the future.

She was able to have a Carers Support Fund grant for a new washing machine. Additionally, she loaned a tablet from NEWCIS so she could access their website, online courses and assist her daughter with any school work.

NEWCIS discussed other support the carer currently needs but she felt due to current situation as a result of the pandemic she would ok for the time being. However, she was glad that she can now look on the website and see what support we offer.

The carer was so grateful to be able to replace her washing machine as she uses this every day. She is extremely happy to be aware of the wider services available to her and to know that NEWCIS are there as a support. The carer described that a big stress had been lifted for her and the promotion of the grant had helped her access services.



KEY AREAS OF LEARNING

Through the delivery of the Carers Support Fund significant learning was achieved both regarding effective routes to reach carers experiencing hardship and a better understanding of the scale of unmet need.

Key learning points are as follows:

- Lead in time was insufficient to enable all services to have the staff and systems in place. Effective delivery was only achieved due to the dedication of staff across our Net work going above and beyond expectations to ensure the Fund could be delivered.
- Significant staff time was needed to administer the funds effectively including making sure that all carers were effectively supported in a person-centred way and connected to wider support. The delivery of funds of this scale is not sustainable without dedicated resources to ensure that there is sufficient capacity within carers' services to cope with this surge in demand.
- Linked to the above point, the delivery of the Carers Support Fund reinforced the existing pressures on our Network Partners, local and regional carers support services, many of which have been inundated with additional demand as a result.
- The Carers Support Fund demonstrated that carer specific schemes delivered in a carer specific way are hugely successful in connecting with unpaid carers who have not felt able to access other preventative or crisis support. The number of carers identified who had no support and were in crisis was significant with large regions of Wales seeing up to 90% of recipients in need of urgent financial support and without any previous connection to preventative services.
- Professionals like GPs and Social Workers significantly increased referrals into carers services when the grant was live, helping to connect carers to services and to build relationships between carer services and statutory partners. However, the surge in demand placed pressure on existing services who did not have the capacity to take on such substantial additional numbers of carers in need of support. Some services are still reporting waiting lists of more than 200 people per support worker, a demand created in part through the identification of carers in need through the Support Fund.
- Demand for immediate financial support was in many areas greater than initially expected. The funds were spent very quickly, in some areas each round of funding was fully spent within 24 hours of advertising. With greater investment this Support Fund has real potential to reach thousands more unpaid carers in significant need. However, this won't be achievable without investment both in funds for direct grants and in the staff needed to process grant applications and support carers effectively. Local authorities and local health boards did provide match funding once the fund was in place – a consistent national scheme delivered through trusted partners has been a positive way to generate more carer focused funds at a local level.
- As well as Direct Grants the Carers Support Fund enabled the provision of direct services enabling expert services to mobilise locally and provide a range of support services focused on respite, wellbeing and income maximisation. These services have proved to be an effective way to meet carers' needs and they could not have been delivered at scale without this additional investment from Welsh Government.
- The demand for the Carers Support Fund and the unmet needs it was able to identify strongly demonstrates the need for significant further investment in carers and the services they rely on.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

The Carers Support Fund has demonstrated that there are thousands of unpaid carers across Wales who are living in poverty or experiencing immediate financial hardship. For many, the Support Fund has not only been a route to help ease immediate financial pressures it has also helped to connect them to preventative services and wider support structures.

Learning from this phase of the Carers Support Fund it is clear that the delivery mechanism chosen, focused on connecting with local carers' services helped to connect with carers in a way that was trusted by them. However, those services are under pressure and are struggling to meet the scale of unmet need that has been identified.

There is work to be done to understand whether the extent to which the significant financial hardship demonstrated by the demand for the Support Fund has been caused by the pandemic or rather better identified because of it. There is some evidence that has shown that unpaid carers have been negatively financially impacted by the pandemic. However, our Network Partners have been keen to emphasise that the demand for a grant scheme to help meet carers' basic needs pre-dates the pandemic. There is a need to explore the systemic causes of financial hardship experienced by carers and to take a long-term approach to reducing the causes of poverty and financial insecurity. Alongside this, it is important to identify and invest in ways to support more carers to build their own financial resilience.

Greater investment is needed both for immediate and direct support for carers and to ensure that the services that are best placed to reach them and meet their needs are put on a sustainable footing.

It will be important to identify how this learning can be shared locally, regionally and nationally to inform the work of Regional Partnership Boards, Regional Carers Strategies and plans and Welsh Government's Strategy Delivery plan.

There are opportunities within the Carers Strategy Delivery Plan to take a more holistic approach to ensuring that unpaid carers are supported to be financially resilient, both in terms of income maximisation and being able to maintain employment if they so choose.

It is important to recognise that the pandemic amplified existing need and therefore there remains a current sustained need for a support fund whilst the root causes of financial hardship are better understood and addressed.