

Carers Trust Scotland is part of Carers Trust, a major charity for, with and about carers. We work to improve support, services and recognition for anyone living with the challenges of caring, unpaid, for a family member or friend who is ill, frail, disabled or has mental health or addiction problems. With locally based Network Partners we are able to support carers in the community with information, advice, emotional support, hands on practical help and access to much needed breaks. We offer specialist services for carers of people of all ages and conditions and a range of individually tailored support and group activities.

It was with great interest that we reviewed the document A Collective Force for Health and Wellbeing. Libraries have always been an essential part of any community and are, for the most part, accessible to all. It makes sense to use these resources therefore to refresh the image of libraries and the future sustainability of such buildings and resources.

We were also pleased to note that unpaid carers had been identified as being at risk of exclusion, we would perhaps make one suggestion and that is re-phrasing this as “unpaid carers of all ages”. This considers the well over 29,000 young carers there are in Scotland, many of whom are at risk of exclusion from school or further education and therefore a primary source of access to library facilities.

Vision, Focus and Objectives

These are bold yet achievable in the timescale set out for the first two years. The focus and objectives set out seem to take account of the ever-changing needs of communities following the pandemic. As we move towards a recovery phase, we must consider the fact that we may, in future, face another situation similar to COVID-19 and by providing people with accessible sources of reliable information to help them with their own health and wellbeing can go a long way to ensuring people are more resilient and healthier should the country face another situation as we did in 2020.

We in Carers Trust Scotland have seen the impact COVID has had on unpaid carers of all ages.^{1 2} The building back of stronger, more resilient communities will take time as people adjust to new social habits and precautions. Unpaid carers have always faced such dilemmas, due to caring role, but now many are faced with difficulties in maintaining employment, (majority of carers are female and tend to work in the type of services damaged by pandemic and lockdown³). Young carers are having to go back to school amid the uncertainty of what will happen to the person they care for now they are no longer at home. Having community-based resources such as digital

¹ 2020 Vision: Hear Me, See Me, Support Me and don't Forget Me, Carers Trust Scotland 2020, <https://carers.org/downloads/scotland-pdfs/2020-vision.pdf>

² COVID 19 in Scotland: The Impact on Unpaid Carers and Carer Service Support Workers, Carers Trust Scotland, 2021 <https://carers.org/policy-and-strategic-influencing-in-scotland/covid-19-in-scotland>

³ Carers Week Research, Carers UK 2020 <https://www.carersuk.org/for-professionals/policy/policy-library/carers-week-2020-research-report#:~:text=Read%20the%20full%20report%20here>

health within libraries can go a long way to re-establishing skills and confidence amongst unpaid carers.

The pandemic has also seen a rise in the number of new unpaid carers, people who perhaps did not have to take on much of a caring role but who were catapulted into this role as services withdrew or reduced. For these unpaid carers navigating the system around changes in employment status, benefits, relationship changes can be overwhelming and greatly impact on their health and wellbeing. Knowing that there may be help via a library may go a long way to encouraging such new carers to reach out for more specific help.

Outcomes and Impact

This section is well thought out. Our only request would be to include unpaid carers of all ages at page 14 where you talk about, “[People at risk of exclusion for whom COVID has highest impact- due to age, ethnicity, poverty, low digital or health literacy, isolation](#)”. We would suggest adding into this list, “[unpaid caring responsibilities](#)” as this more accurately represents the fact that the number of people providing unpaid care has now reached 1 million in Scotland and this is as a direct result of the pandemic⁴

In the section on short term outcomes (within 2 years), at the part which states, “[Greater understanding of how to co-design library services with partner health and care services and service users](#)”. This could be strengthened by the inclusion of third sector services.

Potential for your organisation to collaborate with library services to support shared aims outlined in this action plan.

We would welcome discussions on how we could work in partnership with library services to ensure relevant unpaid carer information is available, including carer rights. This would be a way of assisting to fulfil aspects of Carers (Scotland) Act, 2016, in particular Part 6, s34, Information for Carers⁵. Although specifically referring to the provision of carer services, providing information in accessible community settings for unpaid carers can also be encompassed here.

We are also keen to ensure local carer services can play as active a role with libraries in ensuring information on local carer services is held and displayed within libraries. Similarly, there could be scope for Carer Awareness training for library personnel so that they are able to identify and signpost unpaid carers of all ages to relevant unpaid carer support services.

⁴ <https://www.carersuk.org/for-professionals/policy/policy-library/carers-week-2020-research-report#:~:text=Read%20the%20full%20report%20here,Carers Week Research Report, Carers UK 2020>

⁵ Carers (Scotland) Act, 2016, Scottish Government.

However, a great deal of the partnership working will be dependent on capacity within our own, and local carer services. There would also be the potential for issues around funding for specific types of work, in partnership with libraries, but this could also be seen as a positive move in being able to create bespoke information points within libraries which are for the use of unpaid carers of all ages.

Your thoughts on priorities for development beyond the two-year mark

A concern here would be the sustainability of such plans as outlined in your document. There is a fear of establishing welcome and needed services, with good partnership working, but for it all to fall by the side due to lack of resources adequate to keep the service going.

General Comments

This recovery plan is welcomed by Carers Trust Scotland as one way of ensuring access to reliable and up to date health and wellbeing information, and as a way of maintaining the use of our library services. A note of caution however has to be the ability of such library services reaching remote and rural communities. The document does not give specific ideas as to how these communities will be served at a time when many local authorities are cutting back or reducing services such as mobile libraries.

On a point of language, it is requested that the use of “charity information” (4.4.1 page 6), it might be more up to date to refer to this as “information from third sector organisations”.

We look forward to welcoming this plan into action and will promote such activity to unpaid carers of all ages across Scotland and to the many carer services who support them.

If you require further information, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Regards

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