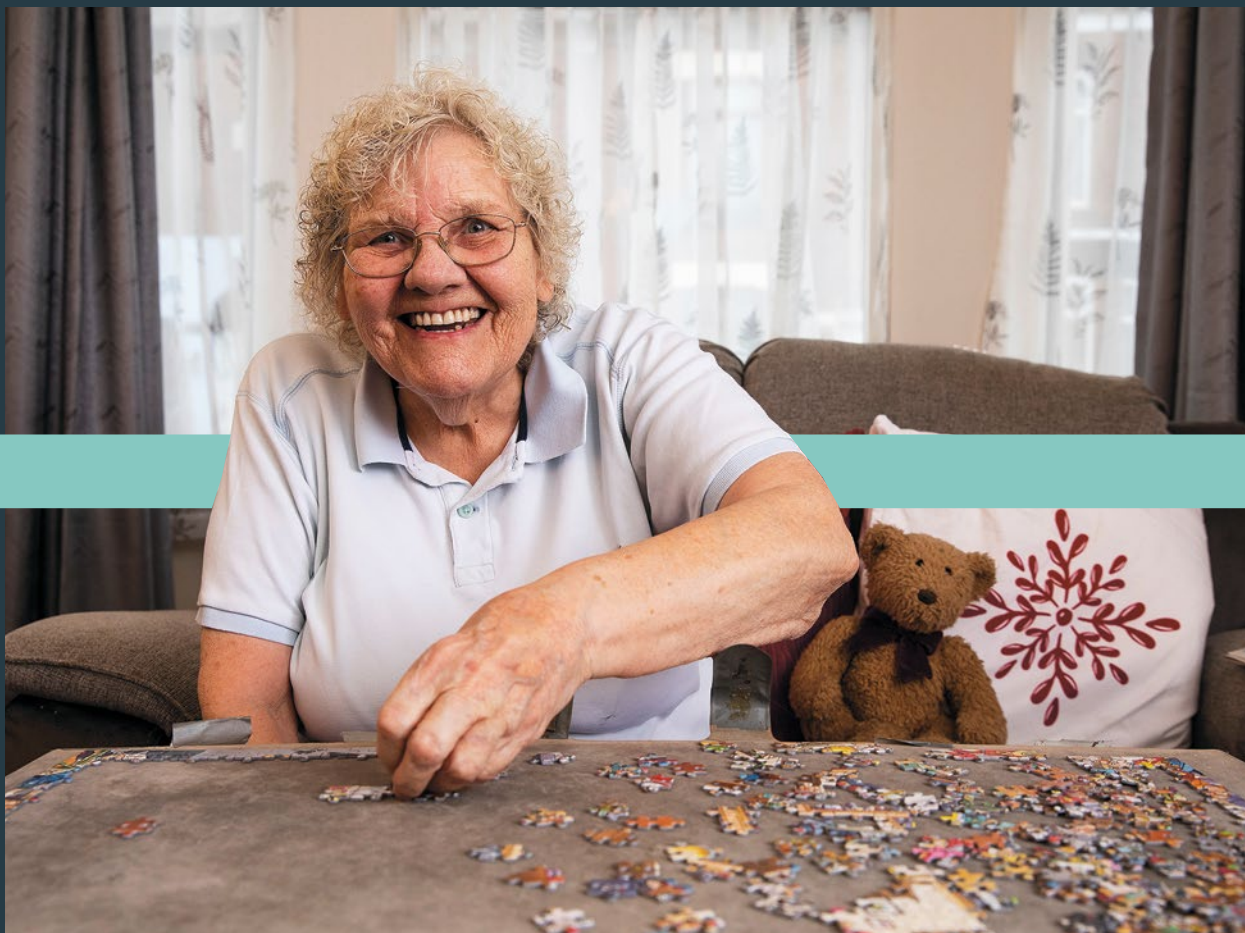


TIME TO LIVE IMPACT REPORT 2025–2026



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BACKGROUND

Across Scotland, **around 800,000 people** provide unpaid care to a family member, friend or neighbour. This could be due to disability, physical or mental ill health, frailty or substance misuse. Caring roles are diverse, and anyone can become a carer at any point in life – whether gradually or suddenly. Being an unpaid carer often reshapes every part of life and yet, too often, they go unseen.

Short breaks – or breaks from caring – offer unpaid carers the chance to rest and reconnect with themselves and their loved ones. From sustained periods of time away to brief pauses, this time can ease pressure, support physical and mental wellbeing, strengthen relationships, and help unpaid carers to continue providing care.

Short Breaks Fund

The Short Breaks Fund supports third sector organisations to deliver these breaks to unpaid carers. Three of the four Short Breaks Fund programmes are managed by Shared Care Scotland on behalf of National Carer Organisations and the Scottish

Government. These programmes are Time to Live, Creative Breaks and Better Breaks. The fourth, Take a Break Scotland, is managed by Family Fund. Each programme is shaped around the diverse needs of unpaid carers and the people they support.



Time To Live

Time to Live is a funding programme of the Short Breaks Fund which delivers microgrants directly to unpaid carers, supporting the right breaks at the right time. Whether it's pursuing a hobby, enjoying a social activity, taking a short trip, or simply having quiet time to rest, these breaks offer unpaid carers space that can be difficult to find on their own.

Unpaid carers often face a breadth of barriers to accessing breaks. This includes the cost of breaks, and the need for support to access breaks. Our 2024 research into carers' experiences of short breaks found that **over 40% of carers** felt that financial assistance programmes would best support them to take a break. Meanwhile, **more than a quarter (27%) of carers** said access to information and advice would most effectively help them.

However, for many carers it can be hard to ask for help, and even harder to put their own needs and interests ahead of those of the person they care for.

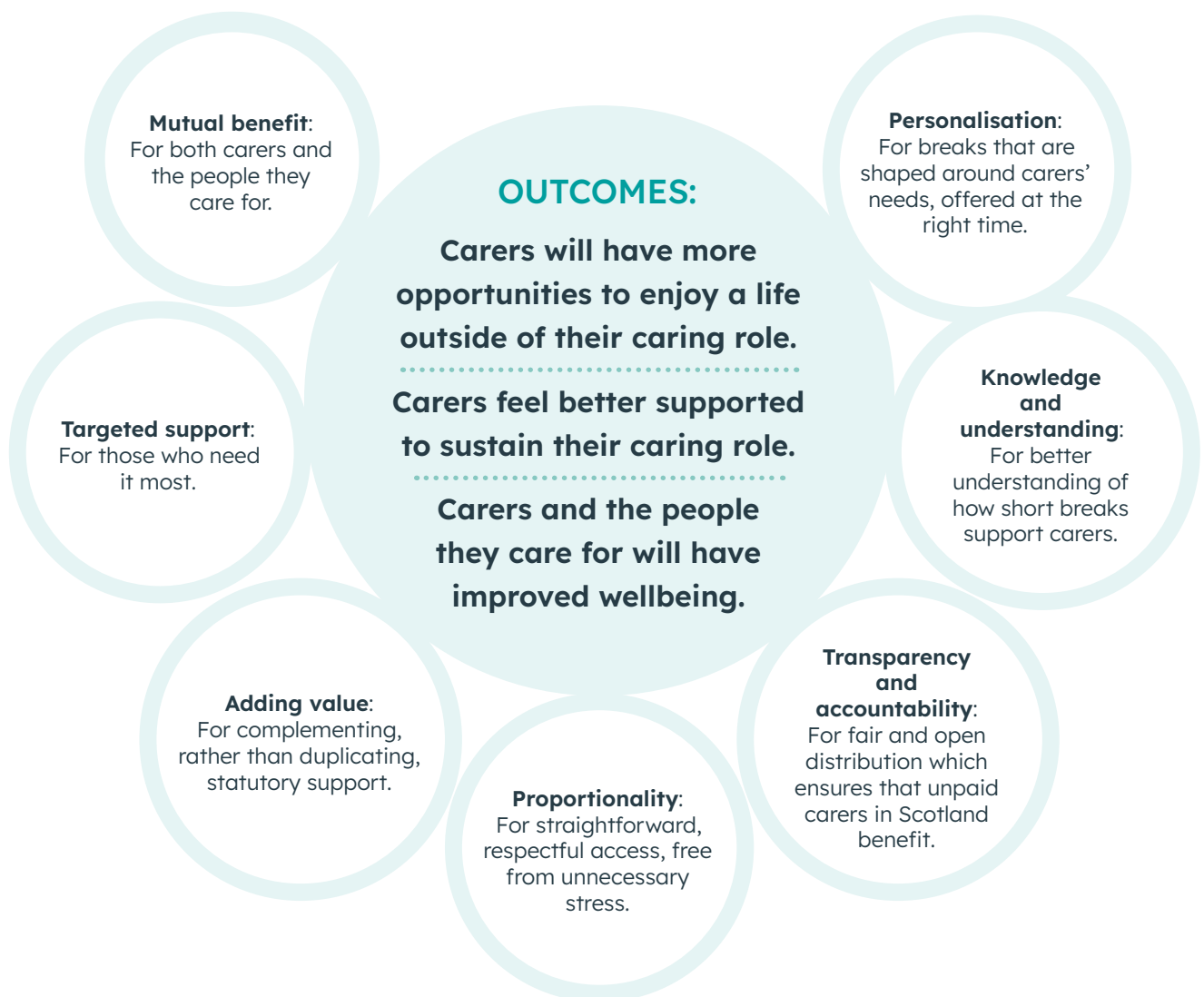
That's where Time to Live delivery partners come in. Rooted in their local communities, these organisations provide person-centred support, taking the time to listen and understand each unpaid carer and their caring role. They work with carers to identify and plan breaks that fit their individual needs and interests. This collaborative approach ensures that each microgrant creates a meaningful experience that maintains good wellbeing, and strengthens resilience, in turn ensuring carers are truly heard.

Thanks to ongoing support from the Scottish Government and the dedication of delivery partners across Scotland, Time to Live continues to empower unpaid carers to achieve and maintain life balance, so that both they and the people they care for can continue to thrive. The programme's flexibility allows delivery partners to respond to a wide range of needs, helping carers access breaks that are personal and meaningful to them. Demand continues to grow, reflecting both the importance of the fund and the ongoing pressures carers face.



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Time to Live funding aims to deliver specific outcomes for unpaid carers and the people they care for, linked to wellbeing, life balance and equal opportunity. To best meet these outcomes, delivery partners distribute funds using the following principles.



“Administering Time to Live funding brings a busy but rewarding workload, and we value the opportunity to support carers in meaningful ways. The guidance notes and guiding principles are essential in helping us deliver the fund consistently and with confidence. This creates a framework that enables delivery partners across Scotland to work together in offering microgrants to carers.”

OUTCOMES AND THEIR IMPACT

Fund outcomes are reflected in delivery partner feedback, and what carers themselves say about the impact of short breaks. As one carer told us, having a break **“gave me time to be myself again, not just a carer”**, highlighting the importance of opportunities beyond the caring relationship. This feedback brings the programme’s outcomes to

life, demonstrating how flexible, personalised breaks can help carers feel better supported.

From April 2025 to March 2026, **all 32 delivery partners** successfully achieved the fund’s outcomes for carers across Scotland, with consistent feedback highlighting the positive impact of Time to Live.



- 📍 **In Angus**, our partner regularly hears positive feedback and gathers personal stories that demonstrate the impact of the fund.
- 📍 **Renfrewshire** noted that the outcomes have been achieved largely due to the flexibility of microgrants. Highlighting that unlike some other funding, Time to Live can include the cared-for person, removing barriers and giving carers greater autonomy and choice to take breaks that truly suit their needs.
- 📍 **Meanwhile in North Ayrshire**, carers shared a wide range of ways they have used their grant, reflecting meaningful, personalised impact on meeting individual needs.

BREAKDOWN OF BENEFICIARIES

Increased microgrants funding

From May 2025 to April 2026, the Scottish Government provided **£4.7m for microgrants**, a **£2.2m increase** from the previous year.



The Scottish Government's continued commitment to recognising and understanding the vital contribution of Scotland's unpaid carers is crucial. The Time to Live programme reflects not only a willingness to listen to the voices and experiences of carers, but also an acknowledgement of the increasing complexities they face in their caring roles.

Impact on delivery partners

The **88% uplift** in microgrant funding brought significant opportunities, successes and challenges:

Successes:

- ▶ Enabled support to reach a higher number of unpaid carers.
- ▶ The programme was open for a longer period this year before funds were exhausted.
- ▶ Improved timeliness and efficiency, reducing delays in accessing support.
- ▶ Increased flexibility in delivery, including expanded short break options and wider use of voucher schemes.
- ▶ Allowed for higher-value grants and reduced reapplication periods, ensuring more meaningful and timely support.
- ▶ Supported stronger partnership working and more equitable distribution of funding across diverse carer groups.

Challenges:

- Substantial expansion of delivery activity was required, increasing administrative workload for organisations, e.g. enquiries and grant processing.
- Recruitment and retention of staff, particularly in the context of increased workload.
- Strain was felt from the increased financial and administrative workload around processing payments.
- Engagement with new carers, requiring additional outreach and support, and ensuring full utilisation of funding within the financial year required ongoing monitoring and planning.

While the uplift introduced additional pressures, delivery partners demonstrated strong adaptability and effective management. Rapid expansion of the model was facilitated by effective communication and by continually developing trust with local carers.

Importantly, these challenges reflect success rather than strain highlighting increased reach, higher demand, and deeper engagement with carers. The ability of partners to manage this growth ensured that significantly more unpaid carers benefited from timely, meaningful support, reinforcing the overall effectiveness and value of the uplift.

What delivery partners said

“We so appreciated the uplift and it was good to see the value of unpaid carers being recognised. Living on the islands, our travel costs are always so much higher, therefore it was good to be able to increase the individual awards to carers by £100.”

“After an initial period of trial and error while setting up our Time to Live, systems were established and refined to cope with the uplift, this proved to be very successful in supporting a greater number of carers.”

“As a result of the increase in allocation, not only did it allow the increase of grants awarded, but we could also reduce the reapplication period from 24 months to 12 months and increase the value of individual grant awards. Despite the extra workload, the benefits for carers far outweighed the challenges and in May 2025 we appointed a Short Breaks post, and they are continuing to refine the processes.”

Who Time To Live supported

A total of **13,691** microgrants were awarded to unpaid carers across Scotland. Following the significant increase in funding, there was a **60% increase** in the number of microgrants, alongside a **22% reduction** in unsuccessful applications.

16,157
carers
12,583
cared-for people



60% more Time to Live microgrants in 2025–2026.

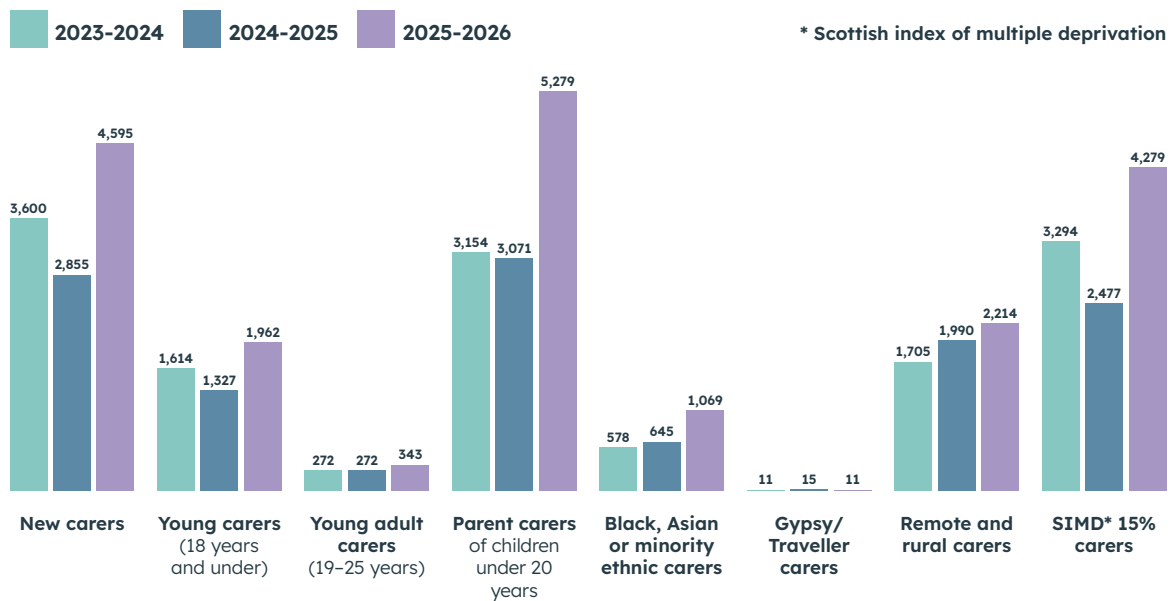
Increased funding resulted in the average grant figure rising by **20% to £336**, and the maximum possible grant by **26% to £520**. This provided greater flexibility, as well as the ability to more closely meet the true cost of short breaks. These increases also helped to offset rising inflation between 2025 and 2026, ensuring continued accessibility of support for carers. Delivery partners expressed appreciation for increased funding, which enabled them to support a greater number of carers.

For carers and their families, this translated into more timely access to personalised support, helping to reduce stress, improve wellbeing, and sustain caring roles. While the increase in funding did require additional staff time to administer, delivery partners said that established systems enabled them to manage this growth effectively.

“This uplift made a positive difference, allowing the support of many more carers and for us to support more applications previously declined due to exhausted funding. For carers, there were more opportunities as grants could be more – if needed – to support the full cost of the break.”

Delivery partners also shared valuable insights into the people supported through Time to Live, and their individual experiences. It is important to recognise that many carers have intersecting identities and circumstances, meaning some individuals may be represented across more than one category.



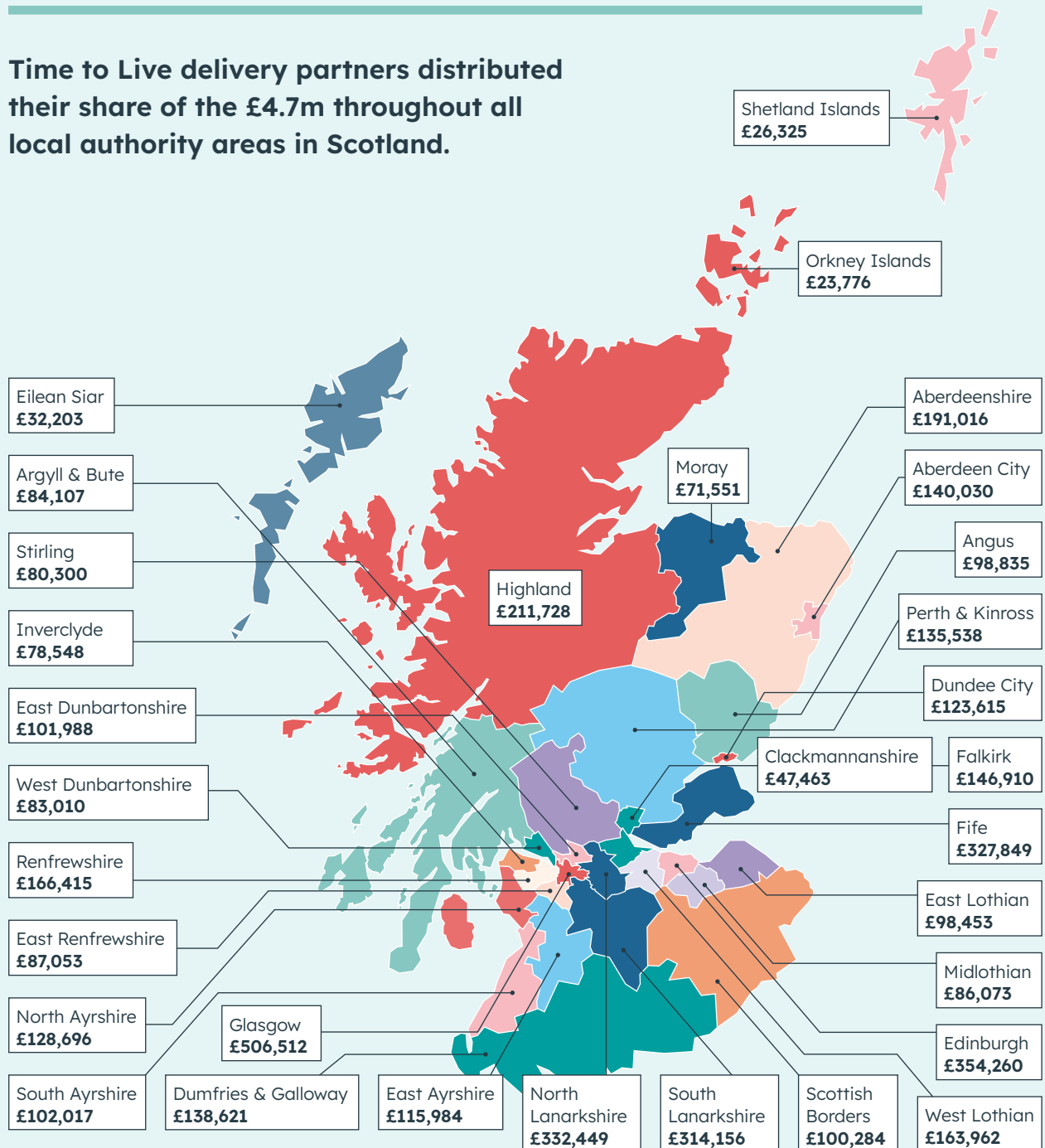


“Thank you so much for awarding my dad funding for a break, following his recent bereavement. We were absolutely delighted and he’s genuinely excited at the thought of having a break. He truly deserves this, and we hope it will give him the confidence to take more regular short breaks in future. We’re incredibly grateful. Please know that you and your colleagues have made a real difference to my dad at such an important time.”



BREAKDOWN OF FUNDING

Time to Live delivery partners distributed their share of the £4.7m throughout all local authority areas in Scotland.



Delivery partners are typically the main contracted providers of carer support and advice within their local authority or health and social care partnership (HSCP). They are usually carers' centres, though in some cases may be third sector interfaces. Many

delivery partners collaborate with other local carer support organisations to maximise reach and engage with more carers across wider geographic areas. Approaches can vary depending on locality. This ensures support is tailored to the needs of each community.

Demand on the fund

While the funding increase contributed to a **22% reduction** in the number of unsuccessful applicants compared to the previous year, demand on the fund remains high. In 2025–2026, there was a total of 741 unsuccessful applicants. Increased investment and promotion enabled more carers to apply but also highlighted the growing level of need and the importance of sustained, increased funding to ensure equitable access to meaningful breaks.

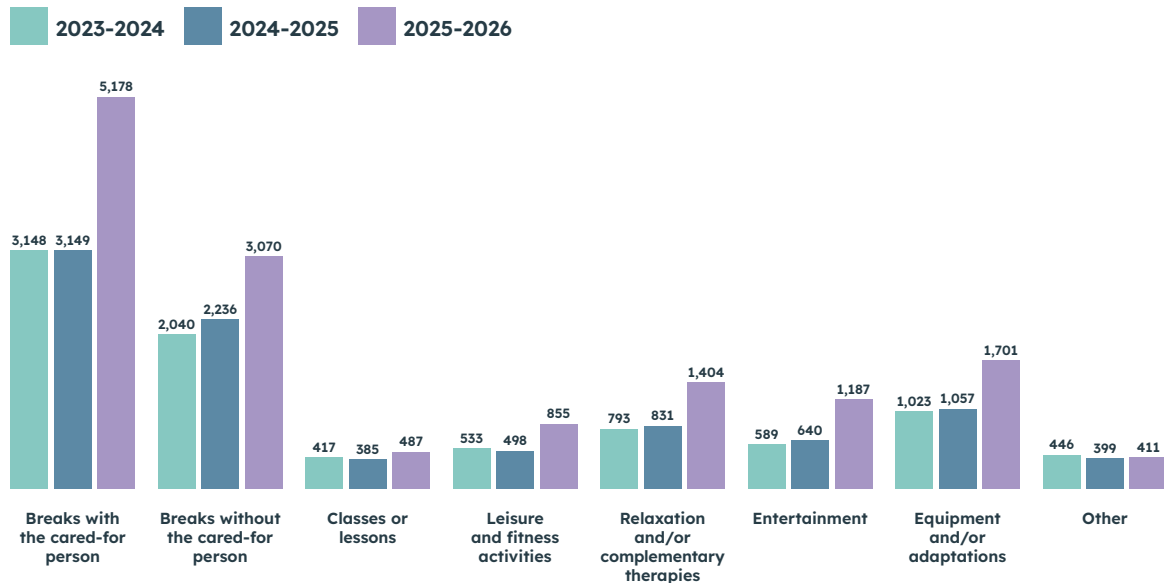
This demand is driven, in part, by increasing awareness of the forthcoming Right to a Break. Delivery partners also report increasing demand due to wider system pressures, workforce shortages, and regional variation in available support. A lack of suitable replacement care continues to impact access for some carers, often those most in need of a short break.

To respond, delivery partners have taken flexible approaches, including identifying alternative funding sources where possible; applying clear guidance on grant levels; and maintaining robust eligibility processes. While the significant increase in funding enabled organisations to expand reach and respond more effectively to demand, it also required additional staff time and administrative capacity, presenting challenges.

Overall, while increased funding brought additional pressures, the benefits to unpaid carers far outweighed the challenges:

- ▶ **Holistic household support:**
In many areas, delivery partners saw an increase in households with multiple carers or dual caring responsibilities. Through personalised conversations, partners took a whole household approach, using flexibility within the funding to increase grant levels where possible, helping ensure the full cost of breaks could be covered.
- ▶ **Blended and creative support:**
Delivery partners maximised impact by combining funding streams and local opportunities, such as microgrants alongside initiatives like Respite and voucher schemes. This enabled them to build more meaningful, tailored break experiences for carers.
- ▶ **Wider reach and inclusion:**
Increased microgrant funding allowed delivery partners to extend support to carers less likely to seek help, including those affected by cultural or religious barriers, as well as carers in rural or remote areas. Additional funding also helped reduce transport-related barriers, making breaks more accessible.

Types of grants



Overnight breaks and days away remain the most popular use of microgrants, offering unpaid carers a welcome change of scenery and respite from daily routines. Breaks shared with the cared-for person continue to grow in popularity, providing opportunities to spend quality time together and create lasting memories. There has also been an **85% increase** in grants used for entertainment activities, potentially reflecting rising travel and accommodation costs, increased support for young carers, and a shift towards shorter, more frequent breaks.

Similarly, spending on equipment and adaptations has **risen by 61%**, as carers increasingly value flexible, personalised options that provide ongoing benefits beyond a one-off break.

“Some carers needed support to think about what would be important to them to get a break. Interestingly, some carers who had previously had a break away decided to have something more enduring to last throughout the year, such as a gym membership, bike or cinema passes.”



“I am very thankful for this grant, as it has fully met my expectations. I am currently using it towards a gym membership and plan to continue doing so, as it is helping to improve my health and wellbeing. It has also supported better relationships with the person I care for, increased my personal freedom, and improved my overall quality of life.”

“The microgrant allowed me to purchase a camera, which has made a real difference to my wellbeing. When I’m out walking, I can take photographs, spend time in the quiet of the hills, and relax while focusing on capturing the perfect shot. This time away helps to reduce my stress and worries at home. I am very grateful for the funding, as it has enabled me to get out more often and take a much-needed break from my caring responsibilities.”

Examples of equipment supplied to assist breaks:

- ▶ Handheld gaming devices
- ▶ Camera
- ▶ Fishing equipment
- ▶ Hot tub
- ▶ Quilting equipment
- ▶ Boxing gear
- ▶ Bowling set
- ▶ Ice hockey kit
- ▶ Lego



Short Breaks vouchers

Demand for microgrants has grown significantly over recent years, driven by the high-quality and easily accessible breaks they provide. Despite the continued commitment of delivery partners, Shared Care Scotland and the Scottish Government, the programme is facing increasing pressure as demand continues to outpace available resources. Since 2024, the introduction of a voucher option has provided delivery partners with a flexible, additional method of supporting unpaid carers which also seeks to help meet this rising demand.

By purchasing vouchers in advance, delivery partners effectively cater to popular break options within their local areas, while also responding directly to feedback from unpaid carers. This approach offers timely support and relief, particularly for carers who do not have the headspace to plan a break themselves and often provides a small but effective intervention before challenges escalate.

While voucher delivery requires additional administration, delivery partners report that the benefits outweigh the difficulties. Vouchers have proven particularly effective in reaching carers who, traditionally, have been harder to engage with or who have limited time due to caring responsibilities and work commitments.

9,117

prepaid vouchers

benefitting:

8,101 carers and

4,451 cared-for people



They offer a flexible, less resource-intensive way for carers to take a break at a time that suits them, while also creating opportunities to start meaningful conversations and build stronger connections with support services and local hospitality providers.

18 delivery partners – **an increase of 4 from last year** – chose to distribute vouchers as part of their microgrant allocation in 2025-2026. This resulted in the pre-purchase of short breaks vouchers, supporting a significant number of carers and those they care for.

These figures clearly demonstrate the popularity and effectiveness of vouchers as a flexible and accessible form of support, enabling a substantial number of carers and cared-for people to benefit from short breaks.

This year, three times more carers enjoyed short breaks through vouchers.



What carers said

“I just want to sincerely thank you for giving my family the opportunity to visit Edinburgh Zoo. We had an amazing day together and enjoyed every moment. My children had a fantastic time, as did I. It meant so much to us as a family.”

“Using my voucher for a massage gave me a rare opportunity for me. The massage was incredible, the atmosphere was so relaxing, and I could feel the stress leave my body as soon as I lay down. It allowed me to take care of myself for once and just be still, rather than constantly running around after everyone else.”

“My voucher was for an afternoon tea, which was truly amazing. The scones with cream, cakes, sandwiches, and even a small cup of soup made it feel like such a special treat. The staff were welcoming and very attentive, and it gave me a lovely, indulgent few hours to relax. Thank you so much, Time to Live.”

“Vouchers are a valuable, flexible complement to the grant scheme, enabling us to offer timely and accessible support to carers. It has been particularly useful as a lower-barrier option, allowing carers to access a short break without the need for a full application process.”



Wider benefits of vouchers

A key strength of the voucher approach is the ability to support local short breaks infrastructure. By working with small, independent businesses, most vouchers were spent within local communities, directly supporting providers who continue to face economic pressures. This not only strengthens local economy but reinforces a circular approach in which funding is reinvested back into the communities it serves.

Time to Live vouchers also encourage unpaid carers to explore and revisit

local services independently in the future, encouraging confidence and longer-term engagement with community resources. This approach builds strong relationships between carers' centres and local businesses. Supporting businesses in this way allows organisations to confidently engage providers in initiatives such as Respite, encouraging contributions, partnerships and added value. This contributes to a shared sense of community, where carers feel they are both benefitting from and giving back to their local area.

CASE STUDY Carla's story

Carla is a parent carer to her daughter, who is neurodivergent and requires ongoing daily support. Alongside caring, Carla has also managed household financial pressures and navigating services, adding to daily demands.

Through Time to Live, Carla received vouchers to go ice skating with her daughter. This activity was chosen as something they could enjoy together, offering both fun and a meaningful break from their everyday routine. It also provided Carla with a rare opportunity to step away from her usual responsibilities and experience something positive and uplifting.

“It was so lovely to switch off for 90 minutes and simply be me. My daughter is a confident ice skater, and it was great for the two of us to swap roles and she was the one checking in with me, and I was the one being ‘cared for’. Ice skating with my daughter is always such a liberating feeling. I don’t have to be that strong and invincible person she relies on 24/7.”





Respitality connects carers' organisations with hospitality, tourism and leisure businesses that donate short breaks opportunities. Like Time to Live, breaks are coordinated by delivery partners who understand carers' needs and individual outcomes. At its core, Respitality aims to create opportunities for unpaid carers through thoughtful, complimentary breaks that make them feel recognised and valued.

Together, Respitality and Time to Live provide a complementary approach: combining gifted experiences from local partners with flexible financial support through microgrants and vouchers. This enables carers to access fully organised opportunities for rest and renewal.

Vouchers supporting Respitality

Delivering vouchers through Time to Live has also strengthened the impact of the Respitality initiative, supporting both partnership development and the creation of meaningful breaks for unpaid carers. In many cases, purchasing vouchers has resulted in previous Respitality donors re-engaging with the initiative through donations of additional experiences. In this way, vouchers act as a catalyst for raising awareness, building trust, and encouraging wider community participation. This creates greater opportunities for all, while encouraging communities to be carer aware and underpins a more sustainable, collaborative model.

“We purchased zoo family passes using funding, and this resulted in our service receiving £3,100 worth of complimentary vouchers from the zoo!”



CASE STUDY

Alexander's story

Alexander is an unpaid carer who is partially sighted himself. Despite the daily challenges he faces, he remains committed to spending meaningful time with his family and making the most of any opportunities.

Alexander and his family were offered a 3-day Respite break at Riverview Country Park in Forres. With the additional support of a Time to Live microgrant, their break was enhanced with travel, activities and eating out costs covered.

“This break provided more than just time away, it created the space for me and my family to relax, and reconnect, enjoying new experiences together. With the right support in place, I was able to travel beyond what might normally be possible, overcoming practical barriers such as distance and cost.”



Development and delivery allocation

The Development and Delivery Allocation (DDA) is a **£1m fund provided by the Scottish Government** to support the operational delivery of both Time to Live and Respite. This vital funding underpins the effective running of these programmes by covering essential costs such as staffing, administration and IT systems.

At its current level, the DDA enables delivery partners to build capacity, invest in appropriate equipment, strengthen local partnerships, and improve connections with other carers' organisations and short break providers in their local area.

A key strength of the DDA is its support for dedicated staffing. Having funded roles in place allows organisations to

provide meaningful, person-centred support to unpaid carers. Staff dedicate their time to in-depth conversations, arranging other support, and guiding carers through the process of accessing a break – something that would be significantly limited without this resource. In addition, the allocation supports essential communication, finance, and monitoring and evaluation costs.

Delivery partners consistently highlight that without the DDA, it would not be possible to deliver the current range or scale of short breaks, nor to remain responsive to carers' needs. The funding represents a clear recognition from the Scottish Government of the importance of infrastructure and capacity in enabling these initiatives to succeed.

What delivery partners said

“The availability of DDA funding has been extremely valuable in supporting staffing capacity. We recognise and appreciate that this has helped alleviate some of the ongoing pressures we navigate as an organisation.”

“The DDA has enabled further investment in our CRM system, significantly improving the administration processes. The introduction of an online application form has made a real difference for carers, streamlining access and allowing applications to be processed more quickly and efficiently, particularly important given limited care and staff time.”

Additional funding allocation

The additional funding allocation, **£600,000 made available by the Scottish Government**, provides flexible, responsive support to unpaid carers' wellbeing. This funding recognises that many carers experience significant stress and worry, often making it difficult for them to consider and access a meaningful break from caring.

The 2025–2026 allocation marks the fourth year of this investment and reflects the Scottish Government's continued commitment to a more holistic approach to supporting unpaid carers. It demonstrates a clear understanding of the importance of empowering delivery partners to respond flexibly to local needs, while strengthening the overall Time to Live network across Scotland.

Across Scotland, delivery partners supported carers' wellbeing in a range of ways, including:

- ▶ Expanding or establishing local carer hardship or financial support funds.
- ▶ Enhancing existing services such as befriending, counselling and peer support groups.
- ▶ Collaborating with other carer support organisations to broaden provision, particularly for young carers.
- ▶ Providing additional Time to Live microgrants to enable respite and wellbeing activities.

6,263 carers and **4,890** cared-for people benefitted directly from the additional funding



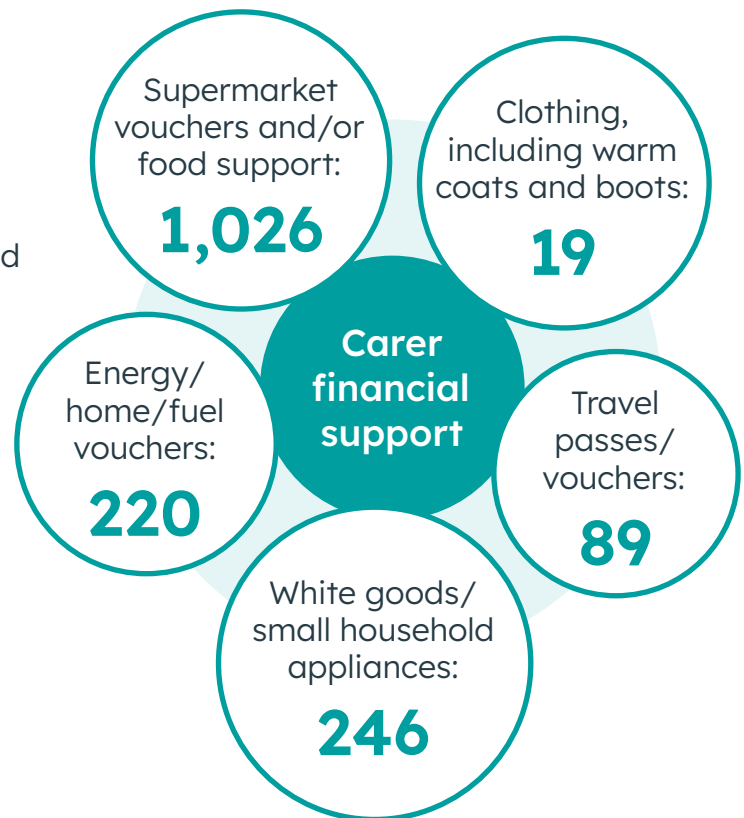
Beneficiary reach and impact

Despite funding remaining at the same level as the previous year, the additional funding supported more unpaid carers and cared-for people in 2025–2026.

Part of this increase can be attributed to improved reporting processes. Delivery partners have developed more robust methods for capturing data, enabling them to better record direct beneficiaries, wider family impact, and those supported indirectly through funded activities and services.

The rise in numbers is also strongly linked to the expansion and enhancement of services over the past year. Delivery partners report that demand has grown in key areas, particularly for counselling services. In addition, feedback from carers highlights the increasing importance of wellbeing-focused support such as mindfulness therapies. There has also been a notable increase in opportunities for shared family experiences.

For young carers, there has been an increase in support to access school trips and residential opportunities. This is especially important in enabling young carers to participate alongside their peers, fostering a sense of inclusion and ensuring they can take part in key milestone experiences as they transition through their education.



What delivery partners said

“The greatest need for assistance grants was for white goods. Many carers who accessed this grant highlighted what an impact the white goods had on their stress levels, especially in circumstances where the cared-for person’s needs depended on these being in good working order.”

“Single parent carers, and carers in multiple caring roles are experiencing greater levels of financial hardship, so being able to offer this type of financial assistance is a key part of the all-round support that we can offer.”

What carers said

“My new coat and boots kept me warm walking to school and helped me feel the same as everyone else. It showed me that someone was thinking about how I feel.”

“I was really struggling to make ends meet, particularly with gas and electricity, as I carry the financial responsibility for our household while caring for my partner, who is terminally ill and largely housebound. This grant provided essential support at a time when we needed it most, helping to keep our home warm and comfortable.”

“I have multiple caring responsibilities, and after my sibling passed away, I was evicted. The carers’ centre supported me with rehousing and resettling, including a hardship grant that helped me purchase essential white goods. This support has made a huge difference – I’m now starting to rebuild.”

“I care for my wife, and our car is essential for getting her to regular medical and mental health appointments. I’m very grateful that the grant helped cover urgent repair costs I couldn’t afford. It has been a huge relief for us both, and we’re now able to get to appointments reliably again.”

CASE STUDY VOCAL



In Edinburgh, VOCAL worked closely with Edinburgh Community Food to identify and reach some of the most vulnerable unpaid carers and their families. They allocated some of their funding to the distribution of food parcels, directly helping those in greatest need.

This collaboration raised awareness of unpaid carers and connected individuals to VOCAL’s wider support services. In addition, VOCAL provided Co-op vouchers to carers who may otherwise have been unable to consider taking a break due to the rising cost of food.

This joined-up, community-focused approach demonstrates the real value of partnership working. It ensures that support reaches those who need it most and makes a meaningful difference to carers’ everyday lives. It provided vital hardship support but has also strengthened the partnership working within local communities.

Counselling and emotional support

There is clear and growing evidence that unpaid carers are increasingly experiencing poor mental health, highlighting the vital importance of accessible counselling and emotional support services.

State of Caring 2025 found that **36% of carers reported ‘bad’ or ‘very bad’ mental health** as a direct result of their caring role. This reflects the emotional intensity and additional challenges involved in providing unpaid care. Meanwhile, there is rising demand

for therapeutic and wellbeing services, particularly counselling. **30% of carers** who took part in our 2024 short breaks experiences survey told us that health and wellbeing services would most effectively assist them to take a break. The additional Time to Live funding enables delivery partners to respond to this need, offering carers access to emotional support that can reduce stress, build resilience, and improve overall wellbeing. Counselling and similar services are not only beneficial, but increasingly essential in sustaining unpaid carers in their roles and supporting the health of families more widely.

CASE STUDY VSA Aberdeenshire



In Aberdeenshire, VSA used the additional funding to deliver a dedicated counselling service for unpaid carers, recognising the growing need for accessible emotional support. Referrals to the service highlight the wide range of challenges unpaid carers face, including grief and loss following bereavement; the emotional strain of balancing full-time work with caring responsibilities; and the difficulty of managing their own health conditions while continuing to provide care.

Carers are also seeking support to cope with the progressive nature of conditions such as Alzheimer’s and dementia, particularly the sense of loss associated with changes in the cared-for person’s personality, as well as ongoing stress and anxiety linked to their caring role.

For young carers, counselling has provided a safe space to explore complex emotions relating to life with a sibling who has a disability and coping with limited time with parents. These experiences highlight the importance of age-appropriate emotional support for younger individuals within caring families.

Through this additional funding, carers have been able to access counselling within 4-6 weeks, ensuring they receive timely support. This has been particularly valuable given that many carers reported being unable to afford private counselling themselves.

This year VSA also introduced a new counselling provider, significantly improving accessibility. The service is now available both online and in-person, removing previous geographic limitations and ensuring more carers can benefit.

What carers said

“After my mother died unexpectedly, I was struggling to cope with the loss after caring for her for so long. The specialist counselling came at exactly the right time, helping me to navigate my grief. I truly don’t think I would have got through it without that support. I feel stronger now and able to move forward so thank you.”

“I feel more heard and cared for now. I’m hopeful that, over the coming weeks and months, I’ll continue to make progress and begin to feel a bit closer to ‘normal’ again, whatever that means for me.”

“I’ve become calmer, more tolerant, and less stressed overall. Counselling helped me realise I wasn’t being kind enough to myself. It also gave me an hour of respite each month in a supportive space, where I didn’t feel alone.”



CASE STUDY Ria's story

Ria is a single mother caring for her two autistic children. Managing the demands and emotional pressures that come with her caring responsibilities can be challenging. She was offered the opportunity to access a block of counselling sessions through her local carers' centre.



Ria found the counselling to be invaluable. Having the time and space to speak openly with someone outside of her situation proved to be deeply therapeutic. It gave her a rare opportunity to focus on her own wellbeing, something that is often overlooked in her day-to-day life.

Since beginning counselling, Ria has made several positive changes that have had a meaningful impact across many areas of her life. She now feels more able to set healthy boundaries, with a clearer understanding of what she can and cannot take on. This has allowed her to have more constructive and confident conversations with her extended family, without feeling that she is creating conflict.

“I am learning to say “no” more often which has been an important part of my journey. This is not just an act of selfcare its essential for me to create more headspace and time for me.”

Partnership working

The additional funding enabled delivery partners to expand and enhance support for adult and young carers through stronger partnership working with local organisations and support services. This collaborative approach allowed partners to deliver a more holistic range of support, including complementary therapies, mindfulness

activities, counselling, wellbeing sessions, targeted young carer support, and hardship assistance. The flexibility of the funding helped services respond creatively to local needs, improving coordination, extending reach, and strengthening emotional wellbeing and resilience for carers and their families.

CASE STUDY Glasgow Association for Mental Health (GAMH) and Glasgow Partnership

In Glasgow, additional funding supported a citywide partnership approach, ensuring access to shared funding for a range of carers' support organisations.

To maximise awareness and uptake, GAMH regularly communicated with partners, including weekly updates highlighting available funding opportunities, as well as wellbeing activities such as citywide workshops. Ongoing engagement with organisations was maintained through direct contact and attendance at team meetings, where updates were shared, guidance provided, and queries addressed.

This collaborative approach strengthened partnership working across the city, ensuring that information was effectively shared and that unpaid carers were able to access the most appropriate and relevant support for their needs.

CASE STUDY Dumfries and Galloway



In Dumfries and Galloway, the additional funding supported the 'Mindfulness Journeys Project', which provided unpaid carers with tailored, therapeutic support to improve wellbeing and resilience. Carers were referred to a practitioner for one-to-one 'Walk and Talk' sessions, followed by access to structured mindfulness courses.

Ongoing support was a key feature of the project, with carers invited to join a quarterly mindfulness network, offering opportunities to reconnect, refresh their learning, and build peer support with others in similar situations.

The project has continued to receive very positive feedback, supporting carers to make meaningful progress in their wellbeing and daily lives. Over the year, 50 carers benefitted from the project, with 77 'Walk and Talk' sessions delivered, alongside three six-week mindfulness courses and a further 10 follow-up mindfulness sessions.

What delivery partners said

“We welcome the introduction of a shorter, year-round form to help streamline the collection of carer stories. April is a particularly busy period for our team, so having the ability to capture information at key points throughout the year will be far more effective, ensuring that details are recorded while they are still fresh and accurate.”

“The team have consistently demonstrated a high level of approachability and support, particularly when seeking advice or clarification. It is reassuring to be able to discuss any uncertainties and receive constructive guidance. The opportunity to hear from other carers' centres and learn about the different approaches to delivering the Time to Live programme is also highly beneficial.”

“We would like to extend our thanks to the SBF team on their ongoing support. Regular drop-in sessions, email support and a helpful attitude with questions is gratefully appreciated.”

“The flexibility and accessibility of Time to Live funding is truly invaluable and we very much appreciate the opportunities it offers carers and to our service. The team at Shared Care Scotland is supportive and always willing to help, which makes for a very positive experience all round.”

“The support from the Short Breaks Fund team is consistently excellent. We feel confident reaching out with questions or for guidance, and we always feel listened to, supported and understood. This open and supportive relationship has been instrumental in helping us deliver the fund effectively and reach more carers. Overall, Time to Live has had a significant, positive impact on carers locally, and we are very thankful for the continued support that makes this possible.”

Supporting delivery partners

In the year ahead, the Short Breaks Fund team are committed to supporting delivery partners through:

- ▶ Regular Q&A drop-in sessions.
- ▶ Respite and Time to Live joint sessions.
- ▶ Short breaks events and attendance at wider sector events.
- ▶ One-to-one support calls and face-to-face visits.
- ▶ Collaborative approaches to streamlining processes and decision-making, informed by delivery partner feedback.
- ▶ Creative communications via social media, email, quarterly updates and evaluation.

These interactions help to build and sustain trusted relationships, encourage open and honest dialogue, as well as innovation and creativity. Ultimately, this collaborative way of working strengthens the delivery partner network and leads to improved outcomes for unpaid carers.



CARERS' STORIES

*Edward's story

Edward has been the primary carer for his wife for many years. She lives with advanced multiple sclerosis, which affects her mobility. He is deeply committed to ensuring she can remain at home, and he takes great pride in supporting her with compassion and dedication. However, the physical and emotional demands of this role have had a significant impact on his own wellbeing.

Edward's sleep is frequently disrupted, as he remains alert through the night to respond to his wife's needs. Over time, this has contributed to periods of low mood, anxiety, and increased stress. More recently, Edward has also experienced health concerns of his own, which have added further challenges to his daily routine and independence.

Despite these pressures, Edward recognises the importance of maintaining activities that support his wellbeing. He has a strong passion for bowling and, through a microgrant from Time to Live, received support to cover his annual club fees and appropriate clothing to attend.

“Attending my local bowling club provides me with some time away, which is vital, consistent and my break from caring. It gives me the opportunity to relax, focus on my mental health, and connect with my friends, I enjoy participating in games and tournaments, as well as spending time socialising with friends.”

These regular breaks away from caring allow Edward to rest and recharge, helping to reduce feelings of isolation and maintain a sense of normality in his life. While his wife is safely supported by family members or services, bowling enables Edward to step outside of his caring role and do something he enjoys.



*Names have been changed for anonymity

CARERS' STORIES

*Lorna's story

Lorna supports her adult son, who is autistic and relies heavily on her for emotional support, structure, and day-to-day care. Her role is emotionally demanding, as she is always thinking about her son's safety, routines, and behaviours. As a result, she rarely feels able to fully relax.

During a conversation with her local carers' centre, Lorna shared her long-standing passion for arts and crafts, particularly sewing. However, she explained that her equipment was outdated and limited her ability to fully engage in this activity. Through the short break funding, she was awarded support to purchase new equipment and materials, enabling her to continue her creative interests at home.

Lorna has since joined a local craft group, where she has built new friendships and strengthened her social connections. Being part of this group has provided her with a valuable sense of community, alongside a supportive and creative outlet outside of her caring role.

“This is a powerful stress reliever, and I regularly use arts and crafts as an effective way of improving my wellbeing. However, in a caring role there can be peaks and troughs, and sometimes when a crisis or particularly challenging situation occurs, or when ill health affects my usual ability to cope, cognitive fatigue can become a real barrier to the creative process. I wanted something creative but also relaxing that I could still do, even when feeling fatigued. With my short break, I purchased a new loom with patterning heddles, allowing me to enjoy the calming process of weaving without the complexity of pattern calculations. I am so grateful for the short break as it has allowed me to continue using creativity as a tool for wellbeing, even during times when I'm fatigued.”



*Adam's story

Adam supports three family members, all with complex and individual needs. He provides care for his mother, who lives with a heart condition and physical disability; his father, who has dementia; and his wife, who experiences mental health challenges.

His caring responsibilities are extensive and demanding, including personal care, preparing meals, laundry and supporting with practical tasks. In addition, he accompanies all three individuals to medical appointments and manages most financial responsibilities and household bills.

“It feels like I am constantly ‘on call’, with very little opportunity for personal time. Nighttime is often the only period when I can get some time to myself, but I am still on edge.”

When Adam reached out to his local carers' centre, he initially felt unsure about what kind of support he needed. However, he expressed a clear desire for something that could help him relax and mentally switch off during the limited time he has to himself. Following a detailed discussion, he identified that a Nintendo Switch would be beneficial. Its portability means it can be used at home and during long waits at hospital and doctor appointments, offering him a practical and accessible form of respite.



“Having the Switch as a break helps by taking my mind off stressful situations or situations where I have a lot of waiting times, for example appointments at hospitals, doctors etc. However, I can just carry it with me, switch it on and de-stress for a bit and take my mind off what is going on. It is very hard for me to get some personal time, on the move!”

In addition, Adam provided positive feedback about the application process:

“The application process was so quick and easy, and the team so friendly and made me feel at ease and helped me fill in the form and deal with the application. I think this is a great scheme for unpaid carers, whether they face financial or time constraints. It offers lots of options to suit everyone. When you're doing full-time caring, everyone needs to recharge their batteries at some point and step away as it can be hard going. Time to Live is flexible and this award gives people the option that suits them.”

*Ella's story

Ella is 18 years old and provides support to her mother who lives with cancer, arthritis, mobility difficulties and ongoing mental health challenges. These conditions have a considerable impact on her daily life and ability to manage independently.

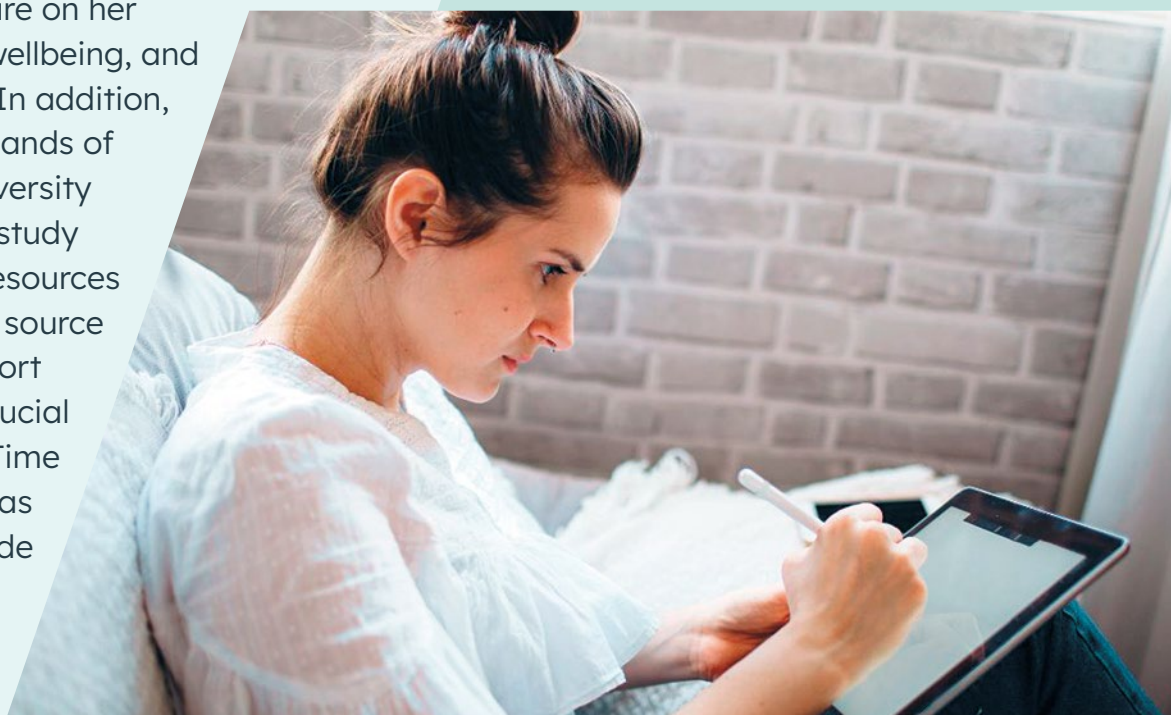
Ella has taken on the role of primary carer within the household. Her responsibilities are wide-ranging and include shopping, cooking, cleaning, collecting prescriptions, accompanying her mother to medical appointments, and providing consistent emotional support.

Alongside her caring role, Ella is in her final year of school and preparing for an important transition to university, where she hopes to study law. Balancing her studies with her caring responsibilities has placed significant pressure on her time, emotional wellbeing, and academic focus. In addition, the financial demands of preparing for university – particularly for study equipment and resources – have become a source of stress. To support Ella during this crucial stage in her life, Time to Live funding was awarded to provide an Apple iPad.

“Thank you so much, this will be an essential tool to support my learning and I can complete coursework, stay organised, and hopefully engage with my studies.”

The iPad will allow Ella greater independence and opportunities for personal time. It will help her stay connected with peers, access support, and maintain a healthy balance between her role as a carer and her own aspirations.

“I really do think that this iPad will help in reducing some of the pressures I face, but also as a young person this is something for me and I hope to move forward with confidence into university while continuing to support my family.”



FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

Following a successful and transformative year in 2025–2026, alongside the significant funding increase for Time to Live, the Short Breaks Fund has reached its 15th year. This achievement provides an opportunity to reflect, while remaining focused on ensuring that our work continues to align with and contribute to the wider priorities of Shared Care Scotland and national short breaks development.

Looking ahead to 2026–2027, our priority is to strengthen relationships with delivery partners. We aim to visit

projects, engage directly, and listen carefully to their experiences. Through informal conversations, collaborative working and shared learning, we will gather valuable insights and feedback. Our aim will be to remain open, honest and flexible, ensuring that our partnerships are meaningful and responsive.

At the heart of the Short Breaks Fund is a continued commitment to ensuring that successful outcomes for unpaid carers and those they care for remain central to our work.



From this engagement, our focus for 2026–2027 will include:

- ▮ Further streamlining of reporting processes to make them more efficient and accessible, while strengthening how we capture carer stories, impact and evaluation of funding.
- ▮ Increasing opportunities for collaboration across programmes, including links with Respite, to encourage shared learning, good practice, and stronger partnership working.
- ▮ Improving funding timelines, with a focus on earlier notifications and allocations to support delivery partners in planning ahead and working towards a more sustainable delivery model.
- ▮ Enhancing visibility and engagement, by getting out and connecting with projects across the country and listening, learning, and sharing knowledge to strengthen the fund.

Time To Live and Right to a Break

As a team, we continue to build upon Time to Live's strength and sustainability. We do so by working closely with our delivery partners and other key stakeholders in the short breaks sector, and this continues to remain a priority for our team. This collaborative approach becomes even more important with the upcoming Right to a Break. The right has the potential to be transformative for unpaid carers across Scotland; however,

implementation of this right must be met with variety within the short breaks market and must place unpaid carers' individual outcomes at the heart of decision-making. We recognise the role that Time to Live plays in this developing landscape, and through continued partnership working and listening to what works for unpaid carers, the fund plays a vital role ensuring unpaid carers have choice and control over their breaks from caring.



SUMMARY

Over 26,000 carers and their families supported to take short breaks in 2025-2026.



Between April 2025 and May 2026, Time to Live – supported by significant investment from the Scottish Government and delivered through a dedicated network of partners – has laid strong foundations for a robust and highly valued funding programme. This investment has strengthened the provision of short breaks and wider support for unpaid carers and their families across Scotland.

At its core, Time to Live is defined by personalised, targeted support that is mutually beneficial for unpaid carers and the people they care for. Delivery partners take the time to understand each carer's unique circumstances, offering guidance to shape meaningful breaks that reflect individual needs and preferences. Through trusted relationships, carers feel seen, heard and valued, with support rooted in the strength and connections of local communities.

The impact of the programme between 2025 and 2026 is demonstrated through its reach:

Microgrants:

13,691

microgrants awarded

16,157

carers supported/
benefitted

12,583

cared-for people
benefitted

Vouchers:

9,117

vouchers issued

8,101

carers supported/
benefitted

4,451

cared-for people
benefitted

Additional flexible funding (£600,000):

6,263

carers supported/
benefitted

4,890

cared-for people
benefitted

Together, these figures highlight the significant national reach of Time to Live. This makes a meaningful difference to their wellbeing, resilience, and ability to continue caring.

Over 26,000 carers and their families were supported by Time to Live. This is the highest number of carers benefitting from short breaks to date. We aim to support even more carers in the future.

Time to Live continues to be a vital source of support for unpaid carers across Scotland. In a time of financial uncertainty, recognising and investing in unpaid carers is not just valuable; it is essential. The impact of this investment is best understood through the voices of carers themselves.



Short
BREAKS fund
TIME TO LIVE

With thanks to our delivery partners:

Aberdeen City	Quarriers
Aberdeenshire	VSA Aberdeenshire
Angus	Angus Carers Centre
Argyll & Bute	Helensburgh & Lomond Carers Centre & Partnership
Clackmannanshire & Falkirk	Central Carers
Dumfries & Galloway	Dumfries & Galloway Carers Centre
Dundee City	Dundee Carers Centre
East Ayrshire	East Ayrshire Carers Centre
East Dunbartonshire	Carers Link East Dunbartonshire
East Lothian	Carers of East Lothian
East Renfrewshire	East Renfrewshire Carers Centre
Edinburgh, City of	VOCAL Edinburgh
Eilean Siar	Western Isles Community Care Forum
Fife	Fife Voluntary Action & Fife Partnership
Glasgow City	Glasgow Association for Mental Health & Glasgow Partnership
Highland	Connecting Carers
Inverclyde	Unity Enterprise
Midlothian	VOCAL Midlothian
Moray	Quarriers
North Ayrshire	Unity Enterprise
North & South Lanarkshire	Lanarkshire Carers Centre
Orkney Islands	Crossroads Care Orkney
Perth & Kinross	PKAVS
Renfrewshire	Renfrewshire Carers Centre
Scottish Borders	Borders Carers Centre
Shetland Islands	Voluntary Action Shetland
South Ayrshire	Unity Enterprise
Stirling	Stirling Carers Centre
West Dunbartonshire	Carers of West Dunbartonshire
West Lothian	Carers of West Lothian

Shared Care Scotland
Unit 2, Dunfermline Business Centre
Izatt Avenue
Dunfermline
Fife, KY11 3BZ

 www.sharedcarescotland.org.uk

 01383 622462



@carebreaks



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot