

A Healthier West Wales:

West Wales Carers Development Group

Annual Report, 2023-2024



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Our West Wales Carers Strategy 2020-2025: Improving Lives for Carers

This report is prepared by the West Wales Carers Development Group (WWCDG) and summarises key activity to deliver these priorities across West Wales during the period 1st April 2023–31st March 2024. The WWCDG is a formal sub-group of the West Wales Regional Partnership Board which includes representatives of Hywel Dda University Health Board, the three local authorities of Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, and Pembrokeshire, as well as third and voluntary sector organisations.

During 2020/21 significant engagement was undertaken with carers, initially via regional and local authority based workshop discussions and then moving to the development of an online survey in response to the pandemic. 558 carers responded to our online survey including 18% who were young carers under the age of 18.

The West Wales Regional Partnership Board published our West Wales Carers Strategy 2020-2025: Improving Lives for Carers in November 2020. The Strategy has established four key priority areas which take a longer-term view and set the vision for the future. These priorities were reviewed in 2023, and the Carers Development Group added “confident” to priority 4.



As the strategy is in its final year, a series of public engagement activities are planned for May through June of 2024, to support a refresh of the strategy. This includes a public

survey, open to current and former unpaid carers, professionals, and other interested parties, to help shape the new strategy.

The work described in this report has been delivered utilising a range of funding to ensure that carers priorities are embedded in services across the region in line with the requirements of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. Funding sources include ring-fenced grants for short breaks and carers outreach discharge support provided by Welsh Government, the Regional Integration Fund and core funding from partner organisations. Welsh Government set out their expectation that health, local authorities and the third sector will work in partnership to support carers under the Act to deliver the four national priorities set out their “Strategy for Unpaid Carers” (March 2021):

- Identifying and valuing unpaid carers
- Providing information, advice, and assistance
- Supporting life alongside caring
- Supporting unpaid carers in education and the workplace.¹

Responding to the requirements above, and the priorities set out in the West Wales Regional Carers Strategy, form the basis of this 2023/24 Annual Report, which provides evidence of progress against each of these areas and the benefit experienced by unpaid carers.

¹ Welsh Government (2021) Strategy for Unpaid Carers. <https://www.gov.wales/strategy-unpaid-carers-html>

The Needs of Carers in West Wales

The 2021 Census offers the most up-to-date data on the population in Wales. In total, around 311,000 people of all ages in Wales reported that they provided any amount of unpaid care in a typical week in 2021. At 10.5% of the population, this represents a 2% decrease in the number of carers reported on the 2011 census.² While the overall number of people reporting themselves as unpaid carers in Wales has decreased since 2011, this is primarily driven by a substantial decrease in the proportion of people providing 19 or fewer hours of unpaid care per week. Most carers in Wales (44%) provide fewer than 19 hours of care per week, but 34% provide 50 or more hours of care a week, with little change in this figure since 2011 (Figure 1).

In the State of Caring in Wales 2022 report, Carers Wales 2022 report estimates that the total number of carers in Wales is closer to 500,000; this gap of 189,000 carers represents 'hidden carers', who may not recognise themselves as carers and therefore may be missing out on support.³ Experts have calculated that Welsh carers contributed the equivalent of around £8.1 billion to the Welsh economy in each year.

Most people who spend only very limited time on caring will not require any additional support. However, Wales has the highest proportion of older carers and carers providing more than 50 hours of care a week.

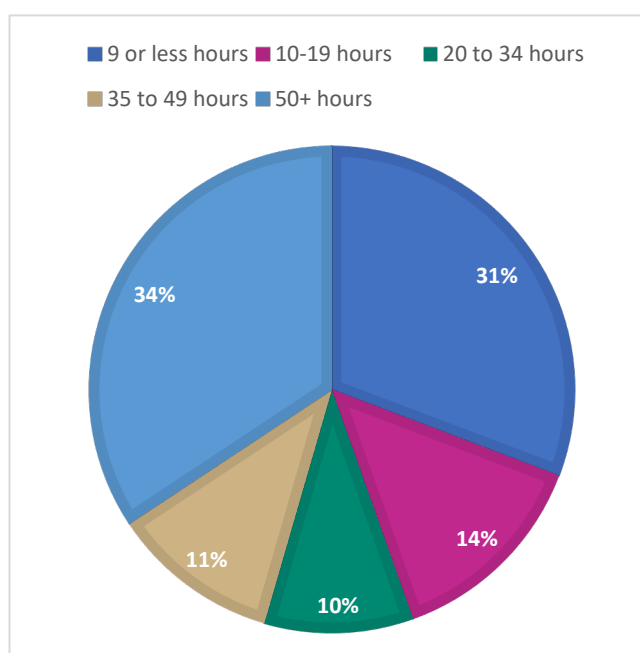


Figure 1: Weekly hours of care provided by unpaid carers in Wales (2021 census)

40,535 people in West Wales identified themselves as carers on the 2021 Census. Approximately a third of carers of all ages in West Wales provide over 50 hours of care per week; this rises to 51% of the over-65 population of carers who provide over 50 hours of care per week. Data from the Office of National Statistics illustrates that the number of people aged over 85 is projected to increase by 27.8% between 2021 and 2031, whereas the working aged population is projected to fall by 3.1% over the same period. This is likely to place increasing pressures on the need to identify and support unpaid carers.

In 2023, Carers Wales published their annual State of Caring report which looked at the impact of caring on health and on finances. They also published a separate report on

² Welsh Government (2023) Health, disability and provision of unpaid care in Wales (Census 2021).

<https://www.gov.wales/health-disability-and-provision-unpaid-care-wales-census-2021-html>

³ Carers Wales (2022) State of Caring in Wales 2022: a snapshot of unpaid care in Wales.

employment. These were based on their annual online survey, of nearly 1,182 carers, of which 16% of respondents were from West Wales. The themes within the report align to our own regional strategy work and these areas remain a priority for carers.

Health and Wellbeing⁴

79% of carers in Wales said that the impact of caring on their physical and mental health would be a challenge over the coming year, with 49% of those whose mental health was bad or very bad saying they were not receiving any support with their mental health. More than half the carers surveyed said that being able to take regular breaks from caring would be a challenge, and that they needed more support to be able to look after their health and wellbeing. The lack of carer involvement at hospital discharge is reported to have remained high, with only one-third of carers agreeing that they were involved in decisions about discharge from hospital. Less than one-fifth said they were asked about their willingness and ability to care.

The development of a broad range of short breaks which provide a variety of opportunities for carers to have a meaningful break from their caring role. This is a priority in West Wales, aligned to priority 2 of the regional Carers Strategy. There is also a programme of carers discharge support services being funded across West Wales aimed at ensuring that the health and wellbeing of carers is considered when the person they care for is discharged from hospital. More information about both of these can be found on [page 18](#).

Finances⁵

Despite the additional support available to carers in 2022 by way of the carers' recognition payment, Carers Wales reported that most carers continue to struggle with their finances and an increased number are going into debt. Carers are cutting back on areas such as food and utilities (23%), seeing friends and family (51%), luxuries and hobbies (63%). More than a third of carers are struggling to make ends meet, and two-thirds say that the cost-of-living crisis has had a negative impact on their physical and/or mental health. Carers in receipt of Carer's Allowance are even more likely to be struggling financially.

The West Wales Carers Development Group recognises the significant financial hardship facing carers, and there are a range of services across the region which respond to this need, including the regional Income Maximisation programme. More information can be found on [page 21](#).

Employment⁶

Reducing hours or giving up work to care has been found to increase the risk of poverty in later life. For young carers, research tells us they are less likely to gain qualifications and

⁴ Carers Wales (2023) State of Caring 2023: The impact of caring on health in Wales.

⁵ Carers Wales (2023) State of Caring 2023: The impact of caring on finances in Wales.

⁶ Carers Wales (2023) Carers' employment rights today, tomorrow and in the future.

enter the labour market. People over 45 years old are most likely to have given up work to care, and women are twice as likely as men to leave their jobs due to caring responsibilities.

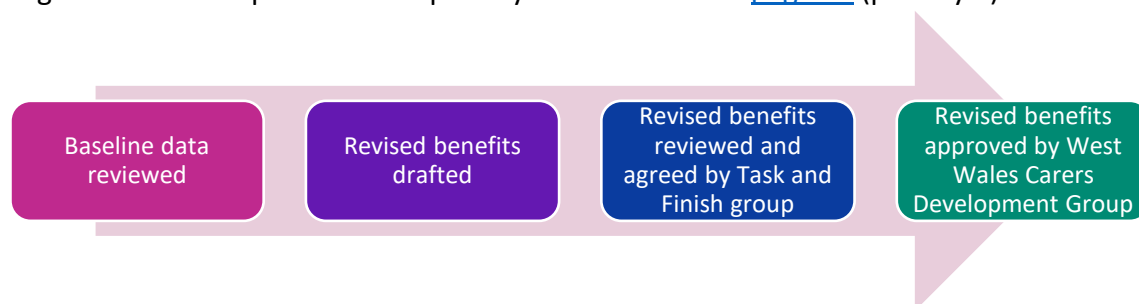
In Wales, at least 10% of those in employment are carers and of those, 20% provide 50 or more hours of care per week. Most (59%) provide 0-19 hours of care per week. Carers who were providing more hours of care were less likely to be working full time, as were those who had been caring for longer. Of significance within the report is that 41% of carers said they had given up work to care.

The Carers Wales employment report highlights the Carers Leave Act 2023 and Employment Relations (Flexible Working) Act 2023, which have the potential to make a key difference to unpaid carers in Wales. The report also highlights further areas for improvement in employment support for carers. It discusses paid carers leave (which is not a part of the Carers Leave Act), further enhancement of flexible working rights, and making caring a protected characteristic to enhance the protection that carers have from discrimination. The report notes research that indicates that enhanced flexible working and carers leave policies could have significant positive benefits to the UK economy, along with productivity, worker satisfaction, and employee wellbeing. Amongst its recommendations, the report states that employers should consider joining Employers for Carers Wales to make the most of leading knowledge and expertise in the sector and should raise awareness of unpaid caring within the workplace and promote a positive culture of understanding and support.

Statutory partners across West Wales participate in the Carers Wales Employers for Carers scheme through an umbrella membership hosted by the West Wales Carers Development Group. The scheme provides practical advice and support for employers seeking to develop carer friendly policy and practice and retain skilled workers. More information about the scheme can be found on [page 30](#). Feedback from those participating in the regional Investors in Carers programme indicates that this is also having a positive impact on recognition of and support for carers. More information on Investors in Carers can be found on [page 12](#), and in the Ysgol Gyfun Bro Teifi story on [page 27](#).

Progress against the strategy

In spring 2023, the West Wales Carers Development Group identified a need to improve the evidence that is gathered about the impact of the Carers Strategy actions. It was identified that many of the benefits in the strategy were unclear or unable to be quantitatively measured. To achieve this, a Task and Finish Group was formed, including representation from all 3 local authorities, the third sector, and the health board. This work aligned to wider work being undertaken within the Regional Partnership Board around improving the measures within Regional Integration Fund and other ring-fenced funded projects, in line with Welsh Government expectations. The graphic below shows the steps taken to deliver a new set of measurable benefits, which were approved by the West Wales Carers Development group in May 2024. This work also supported the priority set last year, to explore the use of consistent carers' outcome measures within carers services across the region. A further update on this priority can be found on [page 36](#) (priority 6).



As these measures are new, the 2023-24 data will mark the baseline against which progress will be reviewed at the end of 2024-25. The new measurable benefit targets are listed below, and the graphic on the next page shows the baseline data which is available.

- 5% increase in the number of adult carers supported by Carers Information Services.
- 5% increase each year in the number of young carers* supported by Carers Information Services.
- 5% increase each year in the number of young adult carers[†] supported by Carers Information Services.
- 15% increase each year in settings across West Wales who engage in the Investors in Carers scheme.
- Percentage of adult carers each year who report that the support they accessed has promoted wellbeing and/or achievement of personal outcomes.
- Percentage of young adult carers each year who report that the support they accessed has promoted wellbeing and/or achievement of personal outcomes.
- Percentage of young carers each year who report that the support they accessed has promoted wellbeing and/or achievement of personal outcomes.
- 15% increase each year in the number of carers supported by Carers Discharge Support Services.
- 15% increase each year in the number of visits to the regional carers' website.

* In all measures, 'young carers' refers to carers between the ages of 5 and 18.

[†] In all measures, 'young adult carers' refers to carers between the ages of 18 and 25.

2023-24 baseline data for the new strategy measures



*Only these counties were able to report on these measures for 2023-24. Full regional data will be available at the end of 2024-25.

Priority 1: Improve the early identification and self-identification of carers, including young carers and young adult carers

The continued progress in delivering the ambitions of the regional Carers Strategy would not be possible without strong partnership working across the region. The promotion and development of carers recognition cards schemes across the region is an impactful example of partnership working across local authority, health, third sector, as well as other businesses and organisations across the culture and leisure spectrum. Each local authority currently runs their own carer recognition card scheme, but a regional working group has been established to review how they can be used regionally across county boundaries for access to leisure, health, and social benefits. The group are also considering developing a standard design so that cards are easily recognisable. Overall, 1,204 new adult carers recognition cards and 192 young carers identification cards were issued across West Wales during 2023-24. Ceredigion saw the most significant increase in the number of carers ID cards issued. Across the region, 4,050 adult carer recognition cards and 612 young carers ID cards have now been issued since the schemes began. Each county also runs their own Carer Emergency Card Scheme; these are linked to crisis response schemes. There is a total of 1292 live Carer Emergency Cards across the region.

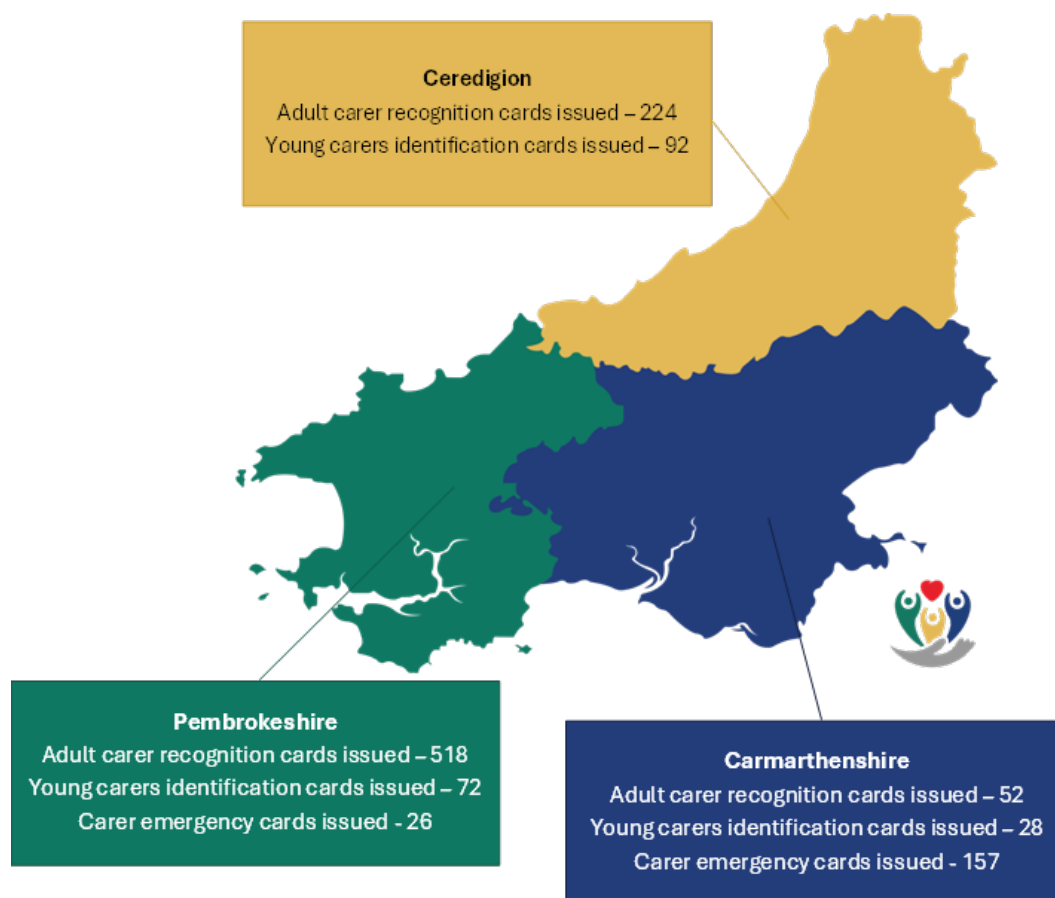


Figure 2: Carers cards issued across West Wales, 2023-24

In the Spotlight: Carers Cards in Ceredigion



The uptake of the adult carer cards has increased significantly in Ceredigion this year, with a **235%** rise compared to the previous year, representing an increase of **634** additional carers who are now benefiting from the offers provided. **92** new young carer ID cards were issued, an increase of 67%.



47 unpaid carers registered as a member of Ceredigion's leisure and wellbeing centres, for free. Unpaid carers accessed and participated in **3904** leisure activities. Carers who have obtained the free cards can now enjoy a broader range of accessible activities, which include:

1. Free gym membership and unlimited use of council run leisure facilities
2. Free use of community run swimming pools
3. Outdoor activities and training
4. Historical and fun visitor attractions
5. Wellness and health services

"Being a carer is difficult and can be very isolating; any facilities or opportunities that can be provided or created for carers in the area are welcome, and definitely needed! It often seems that there is a gap in provision - for carers in the young adult to middle aged range - there is some provision for 'young carers' and for more senior carers but seems to be less provision for the years in between. The ability to use the Wellbeing/Leisure Centres is the one notable exception here - Thank you."

"Attending the gym, nearly daily before school pick-up has had a massive impact on my physical and mental health."

Investors in Carers

On behalf of the West Wales Carers Development Group, Hywel Dda University Health Board has continued delivering the regional Investors in Carers scheme, which aims to promote a whole-system approach and responsibility for the early identification of unpaid carers and ensure that staff have the knowledge to be able to proactively signpost carers for additional early help and support. The Investors in Carers Scheme enables settings to progress through three levels, bronze, silver, and gold. The scheme has continued to expand and is being adopted by a broad range of settings where carers will visit, e.g. libraries, GP practices, schools, colleges, community teams, hospitals etc. This is creating a consistency across the region to embed carer awareness, but most importantly it is an “everybody’s business” approach to making every contact count.

Pembrokeshire County Council’s Commissioning Team are signed up for Investors in Carers and working towards their Bronze / Silver award. The team has four identified Carer Leads. Most staff have completed their Carer Awareness training, which has improved the early identification and self-identification of carers within the team.

Staff involved in the scheme say that they have increased confidence to be able identify unpaid carers at an earlier opportunity and their confidence to be able to approach the unpaid carer to have a conversation. The project is therefore playing a significant role in the increased identification of unpaid carers, and critically, their referral to services who can provide direct support to address their issues or concerns, as well as their own health and wellbeing.

The Ceredigion County Council Carers and Community Support team achieved the gold level Investors in Carers award. The gold award recognises that the team has demonstrated an advanced understanding of carers issues, has adopted a cultural change, developed a lateral approach to carer support, and can demonstrate outcomes. Iwan Davies, Corporate Manager for Early Intervention, says, “We are immensely proud of our team's recognition at the regional level, and grateful for the acknowledgment of our collective achievements.”

A core element of the Investors in Carers scheme is a simple system that enables individuals to register as an unpaid carer with their GP surgery, which in turn can instigate a referral to the local Carers Information Service who are commissioned to provide information and

support. The graph below shows the number of carer referrals over the past four years. The number of referrals increased in 2020/21 due to the pandemic, and whilst they have dropped slightly in subsequent years, the numbers of carers being referred via this method remains at a consistent annual level.

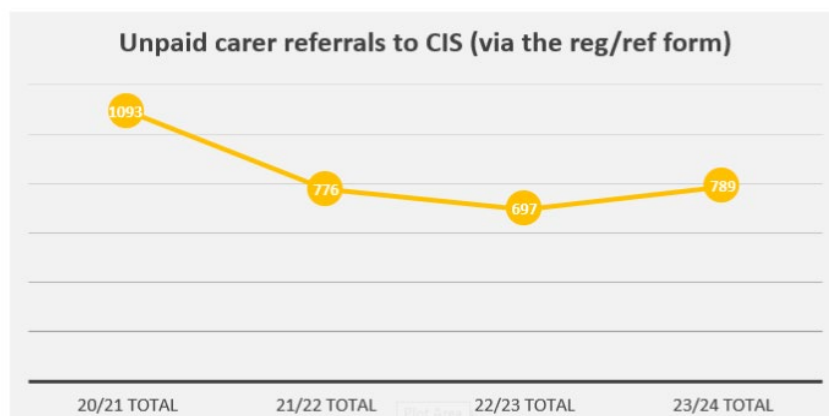


Figure 3: Unpaid carer referrals to Carers Information Services via GP Surgeries since 2020

The bar graph below shows the number of Investors in Carers awards achieved over the last four years at bronze, silver and gold levels. The Investors in Carers team deliver training either as a bespoke Investors in Carers carer awareness sessions for a particular setting, or via open access monthly drop-in sessions. These will include the carer lead from the setting but can include the wider staff members.

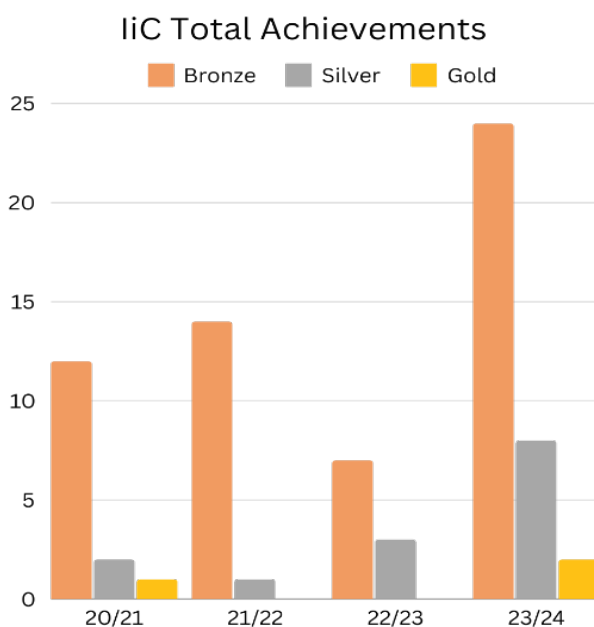



Figure 4: Total Investors in Carers Awards achieved since 2020



Number of training sessions held:

2022/23
72 sessions / 811 attendees

2023/24
90 sessions / 1634 attendees

Carmarthenshire County Council

In 2023/24, a new Community Preventative Services model was launched in Carmarthenshire. The model takes a locality approach, with 5 service collectives in a hub style, across the county. Each 'hub' has a lead provider and central point of contact and a suite of specialist services. The specialist services include unpaid carers information and support services.

The new service contracts have transformed preventative services in the county, enabling more people to access early intervention services, low level support, opportunities, and information. The contracts take services to people, active and visible across digital platforms and in communities across the 5 locality areas. This has increased the potential to support carers to self-identify as a carer at an earlier stage, and improved the mechanisms for enabling people to access services including development of the Connect Carmarthenshire online platform which provides residents with a one stop shop to find out about activities and events in their local area in addition to links to information such as the regional Carers Support West Wales website, Dewis, local authority libraries and health services libraries.

Furthermore, the new model has set expectations for partnership working which has strengthened relationships between organisations, giving an increased understanding of each service, thereby enabling staff to signpost carers to carer services at an earlier point. All partners have consistently evidenced commitment to partnership working, signing up to a partnership agreement and working collaboratively. This was visible in key carer events including Carers Week in June 2023 and Carers Rights Day in November 2023 at which all partners were represented and engaged in promoting carers rights, entitlements, and support services. The new contract also set expectation that all leads, and specialist providers achieve Investors in Carers accreditation. This reflects the belief that unpaid carers should be reflected in each service portfolio and has supported partners to increase their understanding about unpaid caring relationships, the impact of undertaking an unpaid caring role and the rights and support available for carers.

Through 2023/24 Carmarthenshire recognised that there are many unknown carers who are not currently accessing support. One specific group identified was carers of people with substance misuse issues. A bespoke research project was undertaken to gain a better understanding about the needs of this group. The final report provided a suite of recommendations to improve access to services and support for carers of people with substance misuse issues to improve early identification and access to support.

Ceredigion County Council

During the past year the Carers and Community Support team have been able to extend the reach and increase the numbers of young and adult carers in the following ways:

1. Printed and distributed **8700** magazines across Ceredigion, which has supported the take up in early identification and self-identification.
2. Increased Carers Information Service membership by **30%** (over 18s) (*2450 from 1888*)
3. Increased Young Carers Information Service membership by **54%** (*233 from 151*)
4. Worked with Gofalwyr Ceredigion Carers to support **134** young carers to have a life outside their caring role.

Public engagement across the county

Drop ins and events helped promote the rights of unpaid carers, as well as supporting people to identify themselves as carers. In addition, the community team the team offers further routes of support and leaflets of information to third sector organisations. The team have dedicated spaces in both the Mid and North County offices that provide a variety of information regarding available support.

Service presentations and internal support

The Carers and Community Support team delivered service induction presentations to **136** members of council staff, third sector staff and health professionals. This included:

1. Social Services, Porth Gofal staff
2. Hywel Dda Community Outreach Team and Physiotherapists
3. Gofalwyr Ceredigion Carers
4. Wellbeing centre staff
5. GP trainees
6. Ceredigion County Councillors
7. Carmarthenshire County Council
8. Admiral Nurses
9. Macular group
10. Penmorfa Centre for Independent Living staff

Pembrokeshire County Council

Pembrokeshire County Council engaged with carers of the design and development of the Service Specification for the re-tender of the Carers Information Service. This will link in with the existing Young Carers service. Feedback received identified that carers wanted a service that would help improve early identification and aid self-identification for carers.

In August 2023, the Social Care and Housing team attended the County Show. This was a great opportunity for the team to engage with citizens, in particular the farming community, and reach out to hidden carers. This included internal council staff members who hadn't identified themselves as an unpaid carer until they chatted to the team in a relaxed environment.

The Occupational Health Department held their Winter Wellbeing events and invited the Carer Leads from the Commissioning team to attend. The Carer Leads had a stand with leaflets, booklets and guides to support working carers. This provided an excellent opportunity to network with Human Resources teams and staff who hadn't thought of themselves as having a caring role.

In the Spotlight: Uncovering solutions for hidden carers in Carmarthenshire

In partnership with Nacro and Pobl, Carmarthenshire County Council secured additional funding from the Shared Prosperity Fund to “uncover solutions for hidden residents”. This was in response to the demand profile experienced by services which typically saw below expected levels of males, people of other languages and people in very rural areas accessing services. The funding has been utilised to engage communities, residents, and partners to explore the barriers to service access and find solutions. The findings of this activity thus far have enabled the services to have a greater understanding of communities, what they need and how services can be planned and delivered to remove barriers.



A drop-in event at Pencader Family Centre, as part of the rural support initiative

Everyone that came out from speaking with the organisations said they felt helped and supported by the information they received. Thank you.

-Family Centre Coordinator/Family Support Worker

Examples from service providers of how they supported citizens on the day:

Signposted to a befriending service – Carers Trust West Wales

Given a mum of children with additional learning needs information about short breaks – Carer's Trust

Wanting wellbeing advice / stress / loss / depression. What we do - what support we offer – carers support / courses on offer – Mind Carmarthen

A couple who has a mum living who is at the start of memory loss, advice on registering with GP as a carer (form given), Delta Wellbeing, Nest, looking after themselves leaflets given – Carers Wales

Gave information about carers support – Marie Curie

Priority 2: Ensure a range of services is available to support the well-being of carers of all ages, in their life alongside caring.

Carers Breaks

The development of a broad range of short breaks provides a variety of opportunities for carers to have a meaningful break from their caring role is a priority in West Wales, aligned to priority 2 of the regional Carers Strategy. This builds on the Rethinking Respite work previously undertaken by Swansea University (and commissioned by the West Wales Carers Development Group). Carers breaks activity across the region is being funded through Local Authority core budgets alongside Welsh Government AMSER and Regional Integration Fund (RIF) funding. In 2023-2024, we have seen the number of unpaid carers accessing breaks opportunities continue to increase. There has been an increase in the flexibility of break options across the region, which offers greater choice to carers. The number of engagement opportunities has increased with unpaid carer input and feedback integral into the development of services. 2,871 carers accessed short break opportunities funded by RIF or AMSER, supporting them in their caring roles and in looking after their own health and wellbeing. 70.4% of participants reported that they maintained or improved their emotional health and wellbeing through accessing activities provided, and 96.4% were satisfied with the service they received.

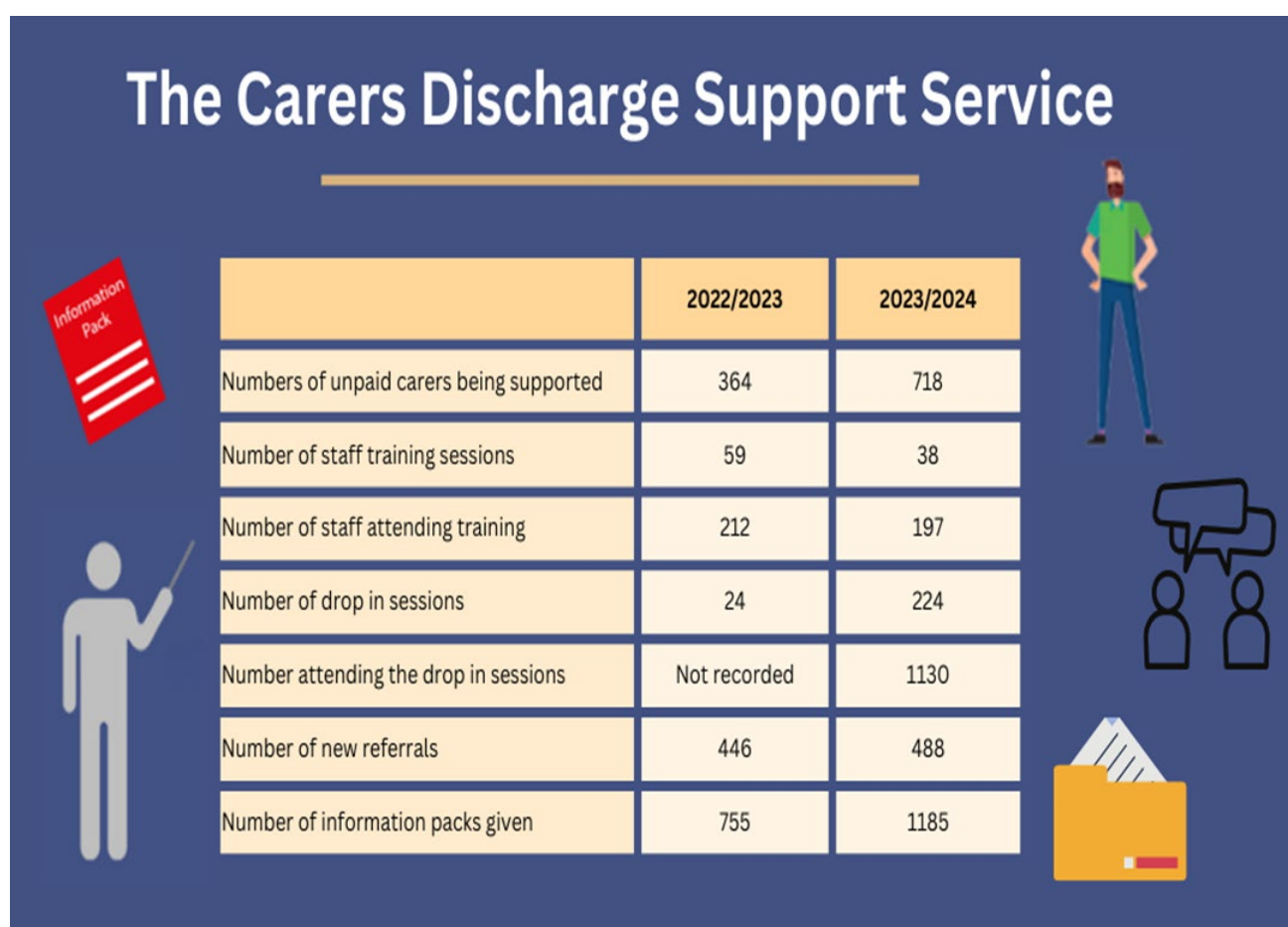
Carers Discharge Support Services

Supporting carers when the person they care for is in hospital and ensuring the carer is involved in discharge planning remains a key priority across the region. Two complementary services have been commissioned to provide a continuum of support to carers; the Carers Community Outreach Discharge Support Service, and the Carers Hospital Discharge Support Service, are both funded via Welsh Government through a variety of funding streams. Together, these services form a continuum of support for unpaid carers and play a key role to aid in the timely discharge of patients from hospital by supporting and involving the unpaid carer in the discharge process for the person they care for. The services share similar objectives, with a focus on ensuring the involvement of carers during hospital admissions and during discharge planning, increasing carer awareness at ward and community level, and improving the availability of information, advice, and assistance to all carers. Both services are commissioned and delivered in partnership with Credu (Ceredigion), Adferiad (Pembrokeshire), Carers Trust Crossroad West Wales (Carmarthenshire), and the Carers Information and Support Services across the region.

New outcome and satisfaction measures were introduced this year and demonstrated the following:

1. Within the hospital service, **75.2% of individuals** felt they had influenced decisions that affect them and **72%** felt more confident accessing services following their support.
2. Within the community service, **98% of individuals** felt they had influenced decisions that affect them and **98%** felt more confident accessing services following their support.

A summary of the number of carers supported by the Carers Hospital Discharge Support services during 2023-24 is illustrated in the infographic below.



Admiral Nurse Service

Launched in 2021 and the first of its kind in Wales, the Admiral Nurse service aims to provide wrap-around support for carers and relatives of people living with dementia when caring is becoming complex. Dementia UK provide branded training, limited business support and ongoing clinical supervision for staff. A team of 7 nurses working across the region provide casework with the following expected benefits:

1. Carers/relatives of people living with dementia can access dedicated and tailored support when their caring roles are becoming stressful and complicated.
2. Carers/relatives of people living with dementia will experience improved health & wellbeing following delivery of specialist psycho-social intervention by the Admiral Nurses.

The Admiral Nurse team also works to support best practice with key stakeholders to improve knowledge, skill, and confidence in supporting carers of people living with dementia. Successes in the last year included the establishment of strong working relationships with key stakeholders,

including setup of regular multiagency meetings with key partners, and the roll-out of the “STrAtegies for RelaTives” (START) programme intervention⁹, an evidence-based intervention for carers of people with dementia which has been found to lead to a reduction in symptoms of depression and an improvement in quality of life. A total of 487 carers were supported by the service this year. The service saw an increase in the appropriateness of referrals, suggesting that it is becoming more established and understood within the system, which should enable improved access and better direct support for carers. The service is in the process of changing their carer related outcome measure tool from the Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale to the “Scales measuring the Impact of DEmentia on CARers” (SIDE CAR), as the latter is carer specific.

“She made me feel totally supported, like a good and close friend but without the inhibitions that even the closest friendship can bring. She was there for me through all the dreadful times that dementia brought to me and my husband and saw us both through the process with tenderness and understanding, continuing to support me after his death. Whenever I had a really awful day and talked to her I always felt better at the end of the conversation. Everyone should have access to Admiral Nurses.”
-Carer feedback

⁹ <https://healthtechnology.wales/reports-guidance/strategies-for-relatives-start-intervention-to-improve-the-mental-health-of-carers-of-people-with-dementia/>

Income Maximisation

Recognising the significant financial hardship facing carers, the West Wales Carers Development Group launched its Income Maximisation programme in 2022/23. This service model aims to deliver both emergency response solutions and preventative information and advice, through a holistic service model. This programme compliments existing local arrangements, such as welfare benefit and information services, to add another layer which is bespoke to carers, ensuring carers needs are met through provision of specialist services. It is funded by the regional integration fund, with match funding from all 3 local authorities.

Now in its second year, this programme continues to deliver significant benefits to carers. In 2023/24, a service was established in Pembrokeshire, which was a priority action identified in last year's annual report. The services have worked well with other third sector and community groups to maximise resources to support carers to access financial support, through collaborative delivery of awareness raising events and education sessions and Onward referrals for other applicable services of benefit to the carer, applying 'Making Every Contact Count' principles. Services have utilised a range of online & digital, face to face, group, and one-to-one sessions to provide carers with choice about how they access the service. This approach has enabled the service to meet the needs of carers who have presented with a broad range of needs.

The services take a solution-focused methodology, delivering a whole family approach to crisis response which has supported the most vulnerable caring relationships to navigate challenging financial circumstances. The whole family approach has proven to be successful. Carers have undertaken holistic 'what matters' conversations, to discuss and identify solutions to their unique family circumstances. For example, this is evidenced in access to free school meals and uniform grants for the unpaid carers' children.

Across all initiatives in Carmarthenshire, financial health for carers was improved by £610,077. Equivalent figures are not known for Ceredigion or Pembrokeshire at present; however, this demonstrates significant return on investment as the total regional programme investment for 2023-24 was £88,000. The longer-term improvements will need to be measured in 24/25 to determine whether the carer has sustained their financial health and applied the learning acquired independently.

Examples of direct financial support received by carers through this programme include direct grants for the following:

1. **Furniture and white goods** – bed, washing machines, garden equipment
2. **Household essentials** – gas/electricity, food
3. **Hobbies and wellbeing** – massage and spa sessions, acupuncture, sublimation printer
4. **Other** – driving lessons

Carmarthenshire County Council

It is widely acknowledged that carers need choice and options about the support available to them to promote their wellbeing alongside their caring role.

In Carmarthenshire, carers have been able to access a wide range of support including but not limited to the following:

1. **Financial Support** in the form of the Money Matters income maximisation service which takes both a proactive approach (preventative information, opportunities, and resources) and reactive approach (crisis response).
2. **Emotional Support** in the form of preventative mental health and wellbeing information and support, socialisation opportunities and peer support sessions advertised on Connect Carmarthenshire, and carers forums.
3. **Practical Support** both statutory and non-statutory including support from personal assistants and micro enterprises, sessional community support and replacement care, and accommodation based overnight care.
4. **Home improvement**, accessing funding from the Housing with Care Fund (HCF) to improve the suitability of the caring environment to protect the safety and wellbeing of the carer and the cared for in undertaking care activities within the home.
5. **Digital Support**, accessing equipment and training to explore technology available which meets their wellbeing needs including Virtual Reality headsets which provide both the opportunity to try a new experience or revisit cherished memories from the past.
6. **Physical Health Support**, with free access to local authority leisure centres which includes a range of fitness classes, gym and swimming in addition to Actif Anywhere classes that can be undertaken at home or in a place of the carers' choice/convenience.

In West Wales there are a plethora of organisations, groups and individuals who are well placed to support carers many of which are citizen led groups and encompass knowledge and lived experience. With support from Carmarthenshire Association of Voluntary Services (CAVS), a Carers Support grant funding opportunity was delivered in 23/24, which enabled grassroots groups and organisations to provide additional opportunities for carers. These groups maximised local talents, skills and passions, utilised local services, business and community spaces, and explored opportunities that included nature, technology, arts, creativity, and social connections.

Ceredigion County Council

The council's support service for unpaid carers, of all ages, was recommissioned during 2023/24. Gofalwyr Ceredigion Carers (GCC), who were the previous service provider, was awarded the contract, and their continued involvement promises to build on the existing foundations of support and enhance the scope of services offered to carers of all ages.

In response to feedback regarding the lack of accessible events for carers with traditional working hours, the Council organised two special events outside of these hours—one in the

evening and another over the weekend. These events were designed to accommodate the schedules of working carers and delivered in partnership with the Citizens Advice Bureau and Gofalwyr Ceredigion Carers to provide targeted support and comprehensive resources tailored to the unique needs of working carers.

During Carers Week, the Carers and Community Support team organised a special live music event at Constitution Hill in Aberystwyth. The event aimed to provide a fun and relaxing evening for unpaid carers. More than 70 carers and their guests enjoyed a journey via the funicular railway to the venue, where they were welcomed with non-alcoholic sparkling drinks and a delicious buffet prepared by Y Consti restaurant. The evening's entertainment featured performances by a local carers' singing group, who presented songs from various cultures, followed by The Hornettes: Take Two band, who delivered a lively selection of music from the 1960s to the 1980s. The event offered the carers and their chosen guests a chance to unwind and enjoy themselves.

"Just wanted to say a big thank you to everyone involved in organizing and working at the event for carers at Constitution Hill on Friday 9th. I am a carer and was able to take a friend with me it was lovely. Everything was so well organized. We thoroughly enjoyed the event. It was very well thought out and was well timed 6-9pm not too late to get back for the people at home. The evening was flawless. Thank you so much"

"I would like, to firstly say a personal 'thank you', for the enjoyment we had on Consti, on Friday. To see my husband and friend, both, men with Parkinson's, laughing, singing and doing 'the moves!' was a delight, as was, dancing with him.... Thank you to you all, for organising the event; very special."

For Carers Rights Day, along with partner organisations, Ceredigion County Council hosted a large event at Theatr Felin Fach. The day incorporated a series of TED style talks in the auditorium, including Direct Payments, Lasting Power of Attorney, support for parent carers and employment support.

The team developed a detailed easy read style venue guide and program to help carers efficiently plan their day around their caring responsibilities, minimizing the possibility of unexpected disruptions. The event was attended by approximately 80 carers and professionals.

Carers groups and cafes delivered in partnership with Gofalwyr Ceredigion Carers are going really well, with increasing numbers attending. There are Chat and Connect sessions (North and South Ceredigion) and dementia cafes in Llandysul, Aberaeron, and Aberystwyth, which

carers say is a really useful resource as they know where they can find us to speak to on a regular basis.

Pembrokeshire County Council

Two key schemes are delivered by Pembrokeshire County Council to support carers wellbeing. These are the Scolton Manor offer and the Passport to Leisure Scheme. The Scolton Manor offer entitles carers to a parking pass and a free hot drink on every visit and 244 carers were issued parking passes during 2023-24.

Passport to Leisure offers discounted membership to Pembrokeshire Leisure services for carers. To support continued delivery of services that meet the needs and preferences of carers, the Council completed a series of engagement campaigns with carers; this included a short breaks survey, an Age Friendly Communities Consultation, and a survey reviewing the Passport to Leisure scheme.

283 carers were supported by the Passport to Leisure scheme in 2023-24, with ages ranging from 9 to 87. Carers were emailed, via the email address held by the leisure centre, to complete a survey to gain their feedback on the value of the service and how it helps their wellbeing. 91 carers (32%) responded. A sample of their feedback is shown below, demonstrating the value that the scheme provides to carers in managing both their physical and mental wellbeing.

"It keeps me sane! I love the gym, I put my headphones on and try and forget what faces me at home."

"I'm not able to work because I care 24/7 and can't afford the membership. When someone is able to look after my partner, I go straight to the leisure centre and vent off all my frustrations and anger there rather than at home! I feel a lot better afterwards"

"I have met some lovely people and if I have time, we all go for a cuppa in the café afterwards"

"I wouldn't have thought of myself as a carer until my friend persuaded me to ring up for a carers' card. Now we go to the gym together, as often as we can, when our children are in school. It keeps us going"

"I don't know how I would manage without my free membership. It gets me out of the house to do something I enjoy"

In the Spotlight: Carmarthenshire Young Carers Service

Carmarthenshire Young Carers Service supports young carers who are in a substantial caring role that is affecting their education, social life or emotional health. The service works with young carers and parents to develop bespoke support plans based on identified need. Support includes peer group support, social opportunities, focussed 1-1 support and advocacy. They also produce identification (ID) cards for young carers across Carmarthenshire, and work closely with the parent/other family members to signpost/refer them on to other agencies to alleviate the young carer's caring role. This can include Adult Services, health sector, third sector organisations and housing.

Key elements of this partnership service include project workers based within Carmarthenshire County Council Education and Engagement service and Young Adult Carer service delivered by Carers Trust Crossroads West Wales. In 2023-24, the service provided targeted support to 99 young carers. New outcome and satisfaction measures were introduced and in 2023-24, the service demonstrated the following:

1. **93% of parents and 90% of young people** were satisfied with the support provided
2. **84% of young people** reported that they feel less isolated as a direct result of support from the service
3. **80% of young people** reported that the service has helped maintain or improve their emotional health.

Toby's* Story of Change

Toby was referred to Carmarthenshire Young Carers Service in Nov 2020 as he is in a caring role for his mother; she is paralysed, uses a wheelchair, and has complex medical needs. Toby lives with his mother and maternal grandmother (aged 79yrs); there is no contact with his father. Toby helps with a lot of household chores and offers mum a lot of emotional support. Toby has his own health needs, including hyper flexibility syndrome, a speech disorder and learning difficulties. During initial assessments Toby and his mum identified the need for Toby to meet other young carers and have someone to talk to about things that are worrying him.

Initially Toby had one-to-one support from a Project Worker to discuss his worries and anxieties. He developed a good relationship with the worker but did find expressing his feelings difficult due to his additional needs. Toby joined online youth clubs and really enjoyed these. He was anxious when these finished and reverted to face-to-face groups, but with encouragement did eventually decide to join and has flourished ever since. Toby even attended the 3 day All Wales Young Carers Festival in Builth Wells, camping overnight.

* Name changed to maintain confidentiality

The Project worker took Toby to a college interview and supported his transition to college. Toby was referred to the Young Adult Carer Team for ongoing support as a young carer and to the 0-25 Disability Team to request support with his independence skills. When Toby's mum's care package needed reviewing, the Young Carers Service worked with his mum's social worker to ensure Toby's caring role could be alleviated as much as possible.

Toby has made friends and benefitted from a break from his caring role; he is less isolated and now attending college. Toby's story demonstrates the benefits of working with both the young person, parent, and other professionals to ensure the family's needs are coordinated.

"As a parent who becomes disabled you worry about the effect that it will have on your child; physically, mentally, and socially. The support that Young Carers has given the family as a whole, but especially Toby, has given me peace of mind that his needs are being met. Without the service he would never have had the opportunity to be a teenager and learn to socialise with his peers (as opposed to all the adults in and out of the house). I cannot thank Mags and the Team enough for all that they have done."

Priority 3: Support carers to access and maintain education, training, and employment opportunities

Education and Training

Providing support to carers to access and maintain education and training is delivered collaboratively by a range of services and organisations across the region, working closely in partnership with schools and colleges.

Gofalwyr Ceredigion Carers delivered 19 information outreach sessions within schools all over the county this year, reaching over 250 young people. Carers in Pembrokeshire are supported to access education, training and employment opportunities via the commissioned carers service, Pembrokeshire Carers Information & Support Service, and the Council's carers services have good links with education providers to support carers, including local schools and Pembrokeshire College.

The Investors in Carers scheme has been demonstrating a valuable impact through its work in schools, which this year included 5 sessions to a total of 281 in-person attendees delivered on inset days. In Ysgol Gyfun Bro Teifi's Story of Change below, the Investors in Carers Development Officer shares their reflections on one of their experiences in supporting schools this year.

Ysgol Gyfun Bro Teifi's Story of Change

Working with Ysgol Gyfun Bro Teifi was a pleasure, as it was clear from the outset that the school was passionate about supporting their young carer pupils, staff and extended school family and were open to learn and take on the work and commitment with enthusiasm.

The process worked well within the school environment, as the Investors in Carers scheme and agenda were supported directly from the headteacher, allowing the Carer Leads to implement changes that required Senior Management Team (SMT) approval. This fostered a clear holistic approach to the agenda and ensures the Carer Leads are supported with the work and possible changes that require implementation. This structure has since been recommended to other school and college settings.

The Investors in Carers Carer Awareness training, delivered in Welsh, was welcomed, and all staff were present. Changes introduced and implemented because of the lessons learned during this session included adjustments to the school staff system that identifies 'vulnerable learners' to also include young carers. Teaching staff agreed that this valuable information would allow them to better understand their class dynamics. I was also notified by the Carer Lead that following the training, they were approached by several staff who had realised that the roles that they were doing outside of the school were caring responsibilities and required support.

Ysgol Gyfun Bro Teifi were the first school to work fully in Welsh, and as a team we realised that some documents supporting the scheme, including the Carer Awareness Training, were not available in Welsh. This required amending promptly, so that we could ensure that the support and service we provided as a team was equal and fair. There is no doubt that being able to offer the process through the medium of Welsh, including the documentation and support, as well as being able to submit the portfolio and training in the preferred language was an extremely positive factor in the process and the Investors in Carers team were only too pleased to deliver this.

On presentation of their bronze level certificate a press release was issued via Ceredigion County Council. This led to an invitation to present at the County Head Teachers meeting and as a result, two more schools have come forward to get involved in the Investors in Carers scheme as they see this as a foundation for improving the work that they do for young carers.

The key to the success of the setting was that the agenda was led from the headteacher, and this filtered into the working practices of all staff within the school. It was and will continue to be managed and monitored by the pastoral care team, but it is an agenda that weaves throughout school practices, as a result impacting and benefitting young carer pupils, the extended school family as well as the staff. It is evident that the health and wellbeing of the school is of utmost priority and that practices can change and develop to support this further.

“Ysgol Bro Teifi is delighted to receive the Investors in Carers quality mark. The mark confirms the good work that goes on at the school to support the unpaid carers amongst our pupils and staff. Following training through the medium of Welsh the quality mark indicates that the school is able to identify and support unpaid carers and then refer them to the appropriate place for further support. Acting Headteacher, Gareth Evans would like to thank all the staff who are working tirelessly to support unpaid carers and also Mrs Delyth Evans for co-ordinating the application for this valuable quality mark.”

Employment

Providing support to carers to access and maintain employment is delivered collaboratively by a range of services and organisations across the region.

Pembrokeshire County Council delivers training to support carers via the Social Care Wales Workforce Development Programme (SCWWDP); this is a mixture of online and face to face. Staff can request to be added to their training distribution list. Training that will support carers includes:

1. Dementia awareness
2. Personal resilience
3. Wellbeing resources



Members of Pembrokeshire County Council's Commissioning Team (Unpaid Carers) pictured at Norman Industries

One of the raffle prizes for the Ageing Well and Short Breaks Consultations created an opportunity to engage with Pembrokeshire's supported employment services – Norman Industries. The manager designed a bespoke planter that could easily be manufactured by his staff in their workshop and was then sold at their Christmas Fayres and put on display at their shop in Scolton Manor.

Pembrokeshire Council's Supported Employment Services also support carers to access employment opportunities. As well as the carpentry workshop Norman Industries, mentioned above, they have three cafes to support employment:

1. Edie's Tea Room in Scolton Manor
2. Café No.5 in Haverfordwest
3. Café in Milford Haven Leisure Centre.

Any opportunities in Pembrokeshire for carers are flagged to the Project Manager of the regional carers' website who will then post them on the website and share on social media pages.

The new Community Preventative Services model in Carmarthenshire takes a holistic approach and starts with a wellbeing conversation. This conversation begins the process of exploring the improvements that a carer wishes to achieve, looking at their whole life and their family, and is used to form a wellbeing plan to empower and support the carer to

improve their wellbeing. This process is outcome and solution focused. Carers are supported to explore education and training and employment in all forms during these discussions. The Community Preventative Service delivery partners are well connected with a range of other services to signpost appropriately in accordance with their personal aspirations.

A volunteer development project was delivered this year in partnership with Carmarthenshire Association of Voluntary Services. The project explored opportunities to enable people to access volunteering roles, through exposing and promoting opportunities, reducing complexity, and supporting streamlined systems. Importantly, the project captured case studies and feedback from stakeholders to help inform residents about the opportunities available and how they could be beneficial to them.

Employers for Carers

Statutory partners across West Wales participate in the Carers Wales Employers for Carers scheme through an umbrella membership hosted by the West Wales Carers Development Group. This membership is due for renewal and Pembrokeshire County Council, Ceredigion County Council, and Hywel Dda University Health Board have agreed to jointly fund the renewal for a further two years. A regional steering group is being established, with appropriate representation from each partner organisation, to collaborate on plans to make best use of this membership and make better use of the umbrella membership to engage with small and medium enterprises and offer eligible local businesses support for their staff who are unpaid carers. Carers Wales have a consultant who will support the Employers for Carers members with this. There is access to a digital portal of resources for members. Each individual partner organisation has taken forward specific actions.



Ceredigion County Council continues its partnership with Employers for Carers, emphasising its commitment to supporting employees with unpaid caring responsibilities. Regular informational sessions and support are provided for staff and managers, and monthly newsletters focused on carer issues are distributed through MS Teams, detailing both internal and external resources. In collaboration with the Human Resources Team and Carers Wales, 8 online sessions were conducted in 2023/24 to aid carers within the workforce. The Carer Café, initiated in September 2023 and held bi-monthly during office lunch hours, provides a relaxed environment for staff to seek advice and discuss their caring roles, with active participation from HR staff. A total of 35 members of staff have been supported through these activities.

In the Spotlight: Support for carers in the workplace at Hywel Dda University Health Board

Health board employees can record a supplementary role in their Electronic Staff Record to self-identify their role as an unpaid carer. On the 14th July 2023 when baseline data was collected, 57 staff members had identified themselves as unpaid carers. In September 2023 the health board launched a guidance document on how to record supplementary roles, and as of March 2024 the number of self-reported staff carers is 158. As this is self-reported and not mandatory data, it is acknowledged that this may not be truly representative of the number of staff with unpaid caring responsibilities but demonstrates the work that the health board has been doing to promote self-identification of carers.

The Carers Wales employment report released last year emphasises the importance of support for carers in the workplace, which goes well beyond identification of carers. The top three things that participants in their survey said help them to juggle their caring role were 'working from home most/all of the time' (76%), 'understanding line manager' (74%) and 'flexible working' (74%). Hywel Dda University Health Board have a number of these elements of carers support embedded within their structures and policies. These include the carers peer support group for staff who have a caring role. This continues to be run monthly over MS Teams and is facilitated by the Health Board's Carers Team. Between April 2023 and March 2024, 11 peer support groups took place attended by 124 Health Board staff (some attended more than one session). There are currently 108 staff members on the Carers Peer Support Group distribution list who receive regular relevant updates and invites to the Peer Support group meetings.

Between April 2023 and March 2024, the Carers Team delivered 10 Lunch and Learn sessions for line managers as part of the continual awareness raising work and these were attended by 52 managers.

In November 2023 the annual staff carers survey was launched by the Health Board, and 140 responses were received.

The survey identified the range of support staff had utilised:

1. **28.3%** said that they had agreed flexible working arrangements,
2. **26.7%** said they had attended carer awareness training,
3. **17.5%** said they had used the Carers Policy,
4. **16.7%** said had used the carers SharePoint page to access external sources of information and support,
5. **10.8%** said they had used the Carers Passport which was an increase on last year when only 7.8% had ticked this option (and compares positively to the 2021 results when only 4 had ticked this option).

Priority 4: Support carers to become digitally included and confident

Regional Carers Website – Carers Support West Wales



2023/24 has marked the first full year for the Carers Support West Wales website, which was launched in November 2022. Pembrokeshire Association of Voluntary Services continue to run the website on behalf of the West Wales Carers Development Group, and carers have continued to play a vital role in the development of the website, helping to ensure it remains up to date, relevant, and useful. At the West Wales Regional Partnership Board Awards held in March 2024, Carers Support West Wales were recognised with a Certificate of Excellence after being nominated for an award in the Coproduction category.

This year, two new sections of the website, cost of living support and short breaks, were developed in response to what unpaid carers said matters most. The team are also developing short videos to support carers in partnership with the Income Maximisation programme, which will be hosted on the website.

Website visits and social media interaction data is very positive, showing an excellent level of interaction from the public. This is a result of a planned and coordinated marketing and promotion campaign, both online and in the community. Visitor satisfaction data shows that those who visit the website are finding what they were looking for and rate their experience nearly 100% of the time as Good or Excellent. The website has received support nationally from organisations such as Carers Wales and Versus Arthritis.

“Mum’s washing machine broke, and I couldn’t afford to have it fixed, let alone buy a new one. I searched for carers financial support online and found the Carers Support West Wales website. I hadn’t realised as a carer I could access grants. I am eligible for help with a new washing machine and have been allocated an outreach worker.”

Innovative Digital Solutions

In Ceredigion, ringfenced funds have been strategically allocated to enhance support for unpaid carers, focusing on both carers' breaks and maximizing their incomes. This investment includes a range of technical solutions tailored for carers, set to be implemented in the first quarter of 2024. Additionally, the team will collaborate with staff at the Penmorfa Centre for Independent Living to determine the most effective ways to support unpaid carers and the people they care for through these technological advancements.

Pembrokeshire has a tablet loan scheme for unpaid carers which is administered by PAVS. The existing loan scheme was extended last year to focus on tablet loans to support carers. The scheme has proved so popular and beneficial to carers, some remaining Carers Breaks RIF funding was used this year to purchase an additional 20 tablets. There were 55 tablets in total on loan to Carers in Pembrokeshire at the end of the financial year.



“

The loan of a tablet has helped me carry out some of the online day to day tasks a lot quicker than when I only had an old PC. I care for my mother who has dementia and it's definitely given me more time to focus on her and the rest of my family. I've also setup an account to have groceries delivered to her and I just meet them there to put it all away.

PAVS

SARAH
Neyland

**Cymorth Gofalwyr
Gorllewin Cymru**
GOFALU AM OFALWYR



**Carers Support
West Wales**
CARING FOR CARERS



“

Our son is 9 years old and has autism. We are trying extremely hard to improve his communication. We've been able to install some great apps on the tablet to practise and improve our understanding on how best we can all communicate. Thank you so much for the loan!

PAVS

LUKE
Narberth

**Cymorth Gofalwyr
Gorllewin Cymru**
GOFALU AM OFALWYR



**Carers Support
West Wales**
CARING FOR CARERS

In the Spotlight: Virtual Reality

In all three counties, virtual reality (VR) technology is being used to support the wellbeing of carers and offer them short breaks from their caring role. In Ceredigion, this work was commissioned as a pilot in partnership with Age Cymru Dyfed, providing not only VR experiences but also support on digital literacy and advice on financial issues related to cost-of-living challenges. The VR sessions were held in four diverse locations to ensure broad accessibility. Participant feedback highlighted the beneficial effects of the VR experiences in offering mental and emotional relief. However, there were some logistical challenges, including low attendance at some venues and sporadic Wi-Fi issues, which sometimes impacted the VR sessions. The initiative highlighted the need for ongoing community-based interventions to support unpaid carers' mental and emotional health and demonstrated the potential benefits of integrating technology into support services for unpaid carers.

"Lovely, I have always wanted to go skiing and today I got to have a go."

"Intrigued and rested by the whole experience."

"Great to experience the milky way."

"Appreciate all the additional advice and support you offered me today."

"Enjoyed being able to share this experience with my husband."



In Pembrokeshire, the Council's Digital Community Support team, in collaboration with Connecting Realities, are offering unpaid carers the opportunity to borrow a headset. These are for use at home as part of a loan scheme, free of charge. The Virtual Breaks project supports unpaid carers, who might struggle to get out and reach physical wellbeing opportunities, to enjoy virtual breaks at home using Virtual Reality Headsets. The headsets are set up and simple to use, full training and support is given. Available experiences range from locally filmed places and events to footage from all around the

world. Some new experiences have been created in collaboration with artists and musicians. Pembrokeshire Carers Information & Support Service held an event during the week of Carers Rights Day. The team invited various providers who would be of interest and support unpaid carers these included PCC Digital Telecare support team who showcased the VR headsets. This was an opportunity for carers to have a go and take up the offer.

Priorities for 2024/25

The key actions of our Regional Carers Strategy are based on the views and feedback from carers and key stakeholders, gathered during the development of the refreshed 2022 Population Needs Assessment which confirmed that the existing priorities in the Regional Carers Strategy remained relevant. The West Wales Carers Development Group will continue to work to implement the priorities outlined in the Carers Strategy and:

1. Address key requirements, gaps and improvements identified through the West Wales Population Assessment and the objectives within the Area Plan.
2. Respond to Ministerial priorities for supporting carers.
3. Complement and integrate a range of carers' initiatives across the region to increase the visibility about the needs of unpaid carers.
4. Ensure that the needs of carers are represented through the Health and Social Care Regional Integration Fund programme.
5. Increase the voice of carers in the development of services by creating additional collaboration and coproduction opportunities.

The West Wales Carers Development Group agreed the following priorities for 2024/5*

- 1. Continue the development and uptake of carers' cards and their associated benefits, to encourage carers of all ages to self-identify themselves and access additional support which is available via carer's information and outreach services.**

This report has demonstrated the continued growth of the carers' cards scheme, and the benefits it can deliver. The key priority here in 2024/25 will be exploring the harmonisation of these schemes across the region.

- 2. Map the support offered to young carers in West Wales and engage young carers in the process to ensure a best practice innovative service is provided.**

Though there are examples of good practice in support for young carers, this was not fully delivered this year. Work by the carers Measurement Task and Finish Group highlighted the need for enhanced partnership working young carers services and Children's Services to ensure that the needs of young carers are fully understood and incorporated into the work of the West Wales Carers Development Group. This will be progressed in 2024/25.

- 3. Actively promote the regional Employers for Carers membership and resources, focusing on working collaboratively with other public sector services as well as small and medium size enterprises (SMEs).**

* Priorities 1, 2, 3, 5, and 8 are carried forward from 2023/24, as while there has been progress against these which is reflected in this report, the group recognises the need to continue to keep these at the top of the agenda.

This report has demonstrated some of the positive benefits that Employers for Carers work is delivering across the region, and this will remain a priority in 2024/25.

4. Undertake a refresh of the Investors in Carers themes, standards, and assessment criteria to enhance the inclusion of carers with a variety of protected characteristics and co-existing needs.

This aligns to the Investors in Carers scheme's demonstrated commitment to continuous improvement, and recognition of intersectionality of need.

5. Develop an annual carers' survey to understand carers' experiences and what is important to them.

The development of new high-level measures to demonstrate delivery of the West Wales Carers Strategy prompted further conversations about the potential benefits but also challenges of this; further consideration will be given, and a decision made this year. The response to the Carers Strategy refresh survey will also inform this

6. Embed and evaluate the use of consistent carers' outcome measures within carers services across the region.

The Measurement Task & Finish group supported key carers services across the region to collaborate and agree on adjusted outcomes measures; where possible and practical these are being introduced into commissioned services as part of recommissioning processes and there is now greater alignment of outcome measures across the region, enabling better comparability of data and experiences.

7. Continue to develop our understanding about the needs of those accessing short breaks, with a particular focus on improving our understanding of the demographics of this population to enhance our understanding of needs and inform the development of future offers.

Enhanced national reporting requirements against the short breaks funding highlighted a gap in monitoring of the demographics of those accessing short breaks; this has been identified as an area for improvement this year.

8. Agree an approach to develop, promote, and maintain Carers Support West Wales and evaluate its impact.

While CSSW is a regional website with support and buy-in from RPB partners through the steering group, there is still work required to establish a sustainable future funding and delivery model.

Conclusion

The continued prioritisation of unpaid carers and delivery of the West Wales Carers Strategy is highlighted in the West Wales Regional Partnership Board Area Plan 2023-2028¹⁰, aligned to the strategic priority 'Supporting people to manage their own wellbeing'. The Regional Partnership Board adopted carers as an integral priority, particularly recognising the cross-cutting impact and links across all its key programmes of work, including the new Health and Social Care Regional Integration Fund. We are facing unprecedented challenges in health and social care and with an ageing population, a cost-of-living crisis, and the need to deliver services differently as we respond to continued pressures on statutory services. Going into the final year of the current West Wales Carers Strategy, the Carers Development Group is committed to working together to deliver support for carers in our communities in new and innovative ways, and to ensure that the needs of carers are considered at every stage of caring.

This Annual Report has provided an overview of the wide range of activity which has been ongoing in West Wales to improve outcomes for carers during 2023-24. Whilst the focus of the report has been on the work lead via the West Wales Carers Development Group and statutory partners, it is acknowledged that there are many other organisations and groups within West Wales who also provide valuable support and services to carers.

¹⁰ West Wales Regional Partnership Board (2023) West Wales Regional Partnership Board Annual Plan 2023-2028. [West Wales Area Plan 2023-28 – West Wales Regional Partnership Board \(wwrpb.org.uk\)](https://www.wwrpb.org.uk)