An evaluation of the Carers Active Campaign

FINAL REPORT

July 2024

carersUK

THE NATIONAL LOTTERY SPORT ENGLAND

Apteligen

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1. **The campaign has engaged with a large number of unpaid carers** and is based on sound evidence and a solid understanding of carers' physical activity needs and support requirements. In years two and three of the campaign, approximately 280,000 contacts were made with unpaid carers and professionals regarding the campaign. The campaign successfully managed to overcome many of the barriers that unpaid carers face in relation to increasing their physical activity levels.

2. **Carers recognise the importance of physical activity** for their own health and wellbeing and report an **increase in fitness** following sustained engagement with the campaign. The 2023 Carers UK State of Caring survey reported a small increase in the proportion of unpaid carers in the UK that are physically active between 2022 and 2023.

> *I have found Carers Active to be invaluable in boosting my mental health and in motivating me to take time for myself to be more active and try new activities. I often revisit some of the online sessions and have booked onto the forthcoming Stretch & Tone Share and Learn session. Thank you*
> Unpaid carer

3. The online nature of the campaign was important for engaging unpaid carers and the Carers Active Hub and online activity sessions were praised for their **accessibility**, **and for providing inspiring and relevant content**. The Carers Active Hub had over 8000 views per year, and the live online activity sessions had a total of 461 attendees (an average of 15 to 18 people per session).

4. Time-bound initiatives and challenges, such as Carers Active April, promoted increased engagement with unpaid carers and professionals, and led to the development of new **offline physical activity opportunities** for carers across the country. 2,504 carers signed up to Carers Active April across 2023 and 2024, and over two-thirds of carers surveyed felt that they were more active after taking part.

> *I love it, it keeps me focused and motivated to do something good for me. It helps with a positive mindset and keeps me fit for the challenges that caring brings on a daily basis.*
> Unpaid carer

5. Carers enjoyed feeling ‘part of something bigger’ and that increasing their physical activity levels and being part of the campaign made them feel more positive, alongside a noticeable **reduction in anxiety** and an increase in emotional capacity, **resilience**, and optimism. We found that the campaign supported some carers to feel less isolated, but that more time is needed for a campaign like this to deliver deep and longstanding social connections for carers.

> *Great initiative - and all the better for making carers feel part of a supportive community. Most of us are not free to go off on those long cross-country walks or bike rides or join a gym etc because we have no cover for the person we support. So an online community matters.*
> Unpaid carer

6. The campaign has led to an **increase in awareness among staff and volunteers** from a wide range of organisations that directly or indirectly (e.g. through commissioning processes) are able to support carers to increase their physical activity levels. The campaign has engaged leisure and healthy lifestyle providers, carer support organisations, health and social care and commissioning organisations, and intermediary bodies such as Active Partnerships.

7. We have evidence that the importance of carers' physical activity needs and ways to support them has been **elevated in status amongst system actors**, in part through outputs such as the Best Practice Guide. The overall campaign and direct engagement by the Project Manager have led to the development of new cross-sector partnerships. The existence of a national campaign is important for creating a shared focus and galvanising cross-sector support.

> *There's an appetite for cross sector partnership, and greater cross sector knowledge about each other. And I think where [Carers Active] helps, is by giving the language and the framing for the development of these kinds of relationships and understanding of how you take it forwards*
> Programme Manager, Public Health, Lincolnshire County Council

8. **Overall, this evaluation has shown that the campaign has been successful**, given the resources available for campaign delivery and the timeframe within which the campaign has been delivered. We recommend that Carers UK works to continue to offer regular online physical activity opportunities, embed different aspects of the campaign into other Carers UK activities, and continue to use existing cross-sector connections to facilitate partnerships that lead to an increase in in-person opportunities for carers..

9. Commissioning bodies should use their influence to **position unpaid carers as a priority group** for engagement, and consider how commissioned services can be co-produced with carers to ensure that the support they receive is in line with their needs and goes beyond statutory service provision. Funding bodies should consider how existing funding streams can **support the provision of long-term physical activity opportunities for carers**, to be delivered by both existing physical activity providers and carer support organisations.

10. Sport and physical activity providers should consider how ethnicity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) strategies and approaches **address the specific needs of unpaid carers**, and how existing physical activity opportunities could be made 'carer-friendly'. Carer support organisations should map out the key sport and leisure providers in their local area, and, through fostering relationships with 'friendly' actors such as Active Partnerships, **develop ongoing partnerships with sport and leisure providers** to advocate for unpaid carers' needs and develop mutually beneficial support offers.

1 Purpose of this report

This report presents the findings of a mixed-method process and impact evaluation of the Carers Active Campaign, run by Carers UK with funding from Sport England through the National Lottery.[1]

The report is in three parts:

- Part 1 provides an overview of the Carers UK Carers Active campaign, the change model and intended outcomes, and the methods used for this evaluation
- Part 2 describes the findings and supporting evidence, for unpaid carers who engaged with the campaign in some way, and for the wider 'system', and
- Part 3 sets out the implications of these findings and recommendations for how the learning from this campaign could be taken forward by those commissioning and / or delivering support services for unpaid carers, and those organisations that promote and offer physical activity opportunities both for carers and across the wider population.

2 About the Carers Active Campaign

2.1 Background and context

Unpaid carers play a vital role in the lives of the people they care for. While there is evidence that carers can find the caring experience rewarding and deeply satisfying[2], many also experience significant challenges, particularly with respect to their own physical and psychological wellbeing, economic circumstances, and social and personal relationships.[3]

In the UK, around two thirds (65%) of adults will provide care for someone in their adult life[4], and there is growing evidence that unpaid carers have, on average, much lower levels of personal wellbeing compared to the wider population, and much higher levels of loneliness and social isolation (Table 1 below).

Unpaid carers are also much more likely to be inactive. Research undertaken by Carers UK in 2023 shows that 48% of carers are inactive, compared to 26% in the adult population.[5] This is most often due to factors such as lack of time (51% of carers haven't able to take a break from caring in the past year), financial constraints, or a lack of confidence due to the constant physical and emotional stress of their caring role.

[1] Also see our interim evaluation report, published in 2023 and available via Carers UK.

[2] Families Caring for an Aging America. Committee on Family Caregiving for Older Adults; Board on Health Care Services; Health and Medicine Division; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine; Schulz R, Eden J, editors. Washington (DC): National Academies Press (US); 2016 Nov 8.

[3] See for example: Girgis A, Lambert S, Johnson C, et al. Physical, psychosocial, relationship, and economic burden of caring for people with cancer: A review. J Oncol Pract. 2013;9(4):197–202.

[4] Will I Care? The likelihood of being a carer in adult life. Carers UK. 2019.

[5] State of Caring 2023 – The impact of caring on: physical activity. Carers UK. 20224

In addition to this, a survey of carers undertaken through GP practices found that:[6]

- Carers are more likely to have a long term physical mental health condition, disability or illness, when compared to non-carers, and are more likely to say that these conditions or illnesses affect their ability to carry out daily activities
- Carers are more likely to have problems with their physical mobility, and
- Carers are less likely to make a GP appointment for their own health needs.

Indicator	State of Caring survey 2022	National average (ONS)[7]
Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?	4.7	7.5
Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?	5.5	7.8
Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?	4.8	7.4
On a scale where 0 is 'not at all anxious' and 10 is 'completely anxious', overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?	5.1	3.3
Proportion feeling lonely (often or always)	29%	7.2%

Table 1: Results of Carers UK State of Caring survey (2022) on personal wellbeing and loneliness among carers, compared to the national population

The importance of physical activity on physical and mental health, and as an enabler of improved personal wellbeing and quality of life, has long been recognised in the literature. Physical activity for unpaid carers is of particular importance, since many carers face considerable emotional and physical stress, and face significant barriers in relation to being physically active.

Phase one of the Carers Active project (prior to this current campaign) involved looking specifically at the potential benefits of physical activity for unpaid carers, and the factors that may prevent or limit carers' ability to include regular physical activity in their daily routines. Research from phase one (pilot project) found that:

- Only 14% of carers aged 55 or more achieve the recommended physical activity level of 150 minutes per week (moderate intensity)[8], compared to 54% in the general population aged 55 or more

[6] NHS England GP patient survey 2022. Data available at: https://gp-patient.co.uk/

[7] Source: Quarterly personal well-being estimates – non-seasonally adjusted, Office for National Statistics, October to December 2023. Available at: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/datasets/quarterlypersonalwellbeingestimatesnonseasonallyadjusted

[8] For more information on recommended physical activity levels (including the supporting methodology) see: https://www.sportengland.org/research-and-data/data/active-lives

- 76% of carers aged 55 or more would like to include more physical activity in their lives.
- 50% of unpaid carers that took part in the pilot project said it helped them to increase amount of physical activity that they were doing
- 47% of unpaid carers that took part in the pilot project now fall into the 'fairly active' category
- 58% of unpaid carers that took part in the pilot project said it helped them to learn more about the importance of looking after their health
- 67% of unpaid carers that took part in the pilot project said that it helped them to feel more connected with other people.

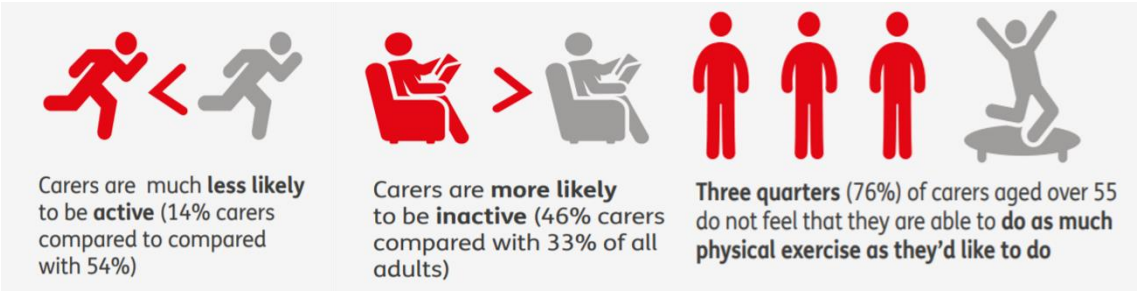


Figure 1: Overview of unpaid carer physical activity levels from the pilot phase of the campaign

The research also found that the use of the COM-B model for behaviour change[9], could provide a useful framework for shaping the design of the Carers Active campaign, given that the findings showed that:

- Capability is increased when carers have the knowledge about what activity they should be doing, the confidence to put themselves first, and when they have an understanding of what works for them
- Opportunity for carers is affected by a lack of time including a lack of control over their time and the unpredictability of their lives, but can be increased with tailored activities to overcome the barriers as well as social cues and a supportive community that encourage them to take part, and
- Motivation levels might be low to start with but can be positively influenced by the relief and mental break carers find being more active can give them.

Whilst the research demonstrated that all unpaid carers report lower levels of overall wellbeing than the general population, it showed that active carers reported decreased loneliness, increased life satisfaction and happiness, and decreased anxiety and stress, when compared with inactive carers. In addition, 73% of survey respondents commented that being physically active makes them feel good about themselves.[10]

[9] See for example: https://thedecisionlab.com/reference-guide/organizational-behavior/the-com-b-model-for-behavior-change

[10] Carers and Physical Activity: A study of the barriers, motivations and experiences of unpaid carers aged 55 and over in England. Carers UK. 2021.

Figure 2: Impact of increasing unpaid carers' physical activity levels (evidence from the pilot phase)

2.2 Overview of the campaign

The Carers Active campaign was a three-year, multi-faceted programme of work that aimed to improve the physical and mental health and wellbeing of unpaid carers through becoming more active, and to influence wider system change that enables carers to be supported to improve their wellbeing and social connectedness.

The campaign was delivered through two main strands of work:

1. Online carer facing work, including:
    a. The development of a dedicated online Carers Active Hub with information about how to be more active, exercise videos, and motivational content
    b. A monthly e-newsletter and access to a 'closed' Facebook page and other social media platforms with content posted by Carers UK, other agencies, and individual carers
    c. Regular online exercise and physical activity sessions, and
    d. The annual Carers Active April campaign, a period of more intense activity to raise awareness, and engage carers and professionals in promoting and taking part in a range of physical activity opportunities.
2. Influencing work across the wider 'system', including:
    a. Dissemination of the learning from the campaign to professional audiences
    b. Formation of a professionals 'steering group' to provide insights and to advise on campaign activities, and to promote engagement across the sport and leisure, and health and care sectors
    c. Inclusion of key physical activity messages as part of other Carers UK communications, campaigns and influencing work
    d. Targeted work with national and local organisations that are well placed to influence practice and facilitate access to physical activity opportunities for unpaid carers, and
    e. Sharing of evidence and best practice.

2.3 Intended outcomes

The campaign had 14 intended outcomes which are grouped into three outcome domains, all of which were within the scope of this evaluation.[11] These are set out in Table 2 below.

[11] Some of these intended outcomes will be explored in more detail in the final evaluation report as more evidence becomes available during the third year of the campaign.

Outcome domain	Individual outcome
Physical activity levels among unpaid carers	The project effectively engages with a wide range of carers to address their specific challenges about being more physically active
	Carers are more likely to recognise the value and importance of physical activity for their own health and wellbeing
	Carers feel more able in themselves to access opportunities that enable them to be physically active
	Carers have more opportunities to participate in physical activity
	Carers are more motivated to be physically active
	Carers are supported to incorporate regular physical activity in their day-to-day routines
Wellbeing and social connectedness	Carers have improved personal wellbeing as a result of being more active, including: - Improved life satisfaction - Improved feelings of worth - Increased happiness - Decreased anxiety
	Carers feel less isolated and have reduced levels of loneliness
	Carers have better quality and quantity of social connections through physical activity
	There is an increasing level of buy-in across Carers UK in relation to supporting carers' physical activity and it is increasingly seen as a key part of the charity's support offer for carers' wellbeing.
System level change	There is greater awareness among those working in the sport and leisure, and health and care sectors, about the importance of physical activity for carers and how to support them to be more active
	The project helps to identify and share evidence and best practice in relation to supporting carers to be more physically active ('what works')
	Resources and toolkits are developed and used by a range of organisations and professionals to support carers to be more active
	New partnerships and collaborations are developed that lead to more opportunities for carers to be more active, and increasing levels of take up among those carers least likely to be active

Table 2: Intended outcomes of the Carers Active campaign

2.4 Change assumptions

There are a number of important assumptions about the ability of the campaign to generate these intended outcomes, and which support the potential for this type of approach:

- Evidence shows that carers are more likely to be inactive than the wider population
- Carers are also more likely to be lonely than the wider population, and active carers are less lonely than inactive carers
- Positive case stories / examples demonstrate how carers can become more active and the benefits they have gained from this in terms of their own health and wellbeing
- Early evidence and feedback shows that the campaign's work has real potential to effectively engage a wide range of carers, to motivate them to achieve and maintain increased levels of physical activity, and to address feelings of isolation and loneliness
- Engagement with stakeholders across the system has been largely positive to date, and has already identified system level solutions that could be explored / developed
- Carers UK is effective at working at a national level and influencing the wider system, and is a trusted source of information and support for carers and those working to support carers
- Carers UK has a deep understanding of the needs of carers and the barriers they face in relation to being more active
- The overall objectives of the project align closely to Carers UK's wider objectives and existing narratives / influencing activities
- Wider messaging and evidence around the importance and benefits of physical activity (and mental wellbeing) provide a solid foundation for the project
- Carers UK has a track record of delivering effective online wellbeing and activity sessions for carers
- Social marketing campaigns can be an effective tool for reaching and influencing this group of people.

3 Evaluation methodology

3.1 Rationale for our approach

This evaluation was a mixed method, formative evaluation, designed to enable a robust assessment of the Carers Active campaign's:

- Relevance: the extent to which the Carers Active campaign was designed to respond to the needs of beneficiaries, communities and the wider system
- Coherence: the compatibility of these initiatives with other interventions that aim to achieve similar or complementary objectives
- Effectiveness: the extent to which the project achieved its intended objectives and outcomes
- Efficiency: how well resources were used to deliver those outcomes
- Impact: the differences that engagement in these types of interventions can have for unpaid carers, specifically in relation to increasing levels of regular physical activity, improving carer wellbeing, reducing loneliness and improving social interactions, and improved physical and mental health
- Sustainability: the extent to which the impacts and benefits for participants and across communities and the wider system are likely to continue.

In order to do this, we shaped our data collection methods and analytical approach around the COM-B model of behaviour change, which provided a framework for assessing how effective the campaign was at creating long-lasting changes in behaviour among the target group.[12]

The COM-B model cites three key factors capable of changing behaviour: capability, opportunity, and motivation. Within each of these are a number of further dimensions that provide the basis for the design of behaviour change interventions (such as considering both environmental and / or social factors when trying to provide opportunities for people to change their behaviour) and for assessing the effectiveness of those interventions.

With this in mind, we designed our approach to reflect the complex nature of this particular 'intervention', and the wide range of intended outcomes set out in the Theory of Change. This means that we gathered data from a wide range of people potentially impacted by the campaign, and who may have had only minimal (or infrequent) contact with the campaign, while also building much deeper insights from a smaller group of people who were in more regular contact with campaign activities.

Given the potential challenges of assessing causality and attribution of any changes observed among those who have been in contact with the campaign, we also used a small number of pre- and post-intervention measures to look at the potential impact of the campaign on physical activity levels, wellbeing and social connectedness, among a group that is broadly representative of the people who the campaign is trying to influence.

[12] See for example: https://thedecisionlab.com/reference-guide/organizational-behavior/the-com-b-model-for-behavior-change and https://social-change.co.uk/files/02.09.19_COM-B_and_changing_behaviour_.pdf

Figure 3: The COM-B model of behaviour change
(Source: https://togetheragency.co.uk/news/the-com-b-model-of-behaviour-change-explained)

3.2 Data available for this report

The following data was used to formulate the findings set out in Part 2 of this report (along with additional findings and evidence presented in our interim report of the campaign in 2023):

Data relating to carers:

1. A survey of carers who took part in Carers Active April in 2023 and 2024.
2. Three in-depth focus groups and a number of 1:1 interviews with carers who had some involvement with the campaign.
3. Surveys and fortnightly reflective journals from around 30 carers.
4. Attendance data and feedback from carers who took part in online physical activity sessions.
5. Data on the reach and engagement of the campaign through online media channels (including newsletter sign-ups, social media interactions, press coverage and visits to the Carers Active Hub).

6. A survey of carers signed up to the monthly Carers Active newsletter, to collect demographic data about those carers signed up to the campaign.
7. Individual case stories of carers who have been impacted in some way by the work of the campaign.

Data relating to the wider system:

1. A log of engagement activity (with individuals and organisations across the system) undertaken by the Carers Active project manager during the campaign.
2. Two surveys of Carers UK affiliates, which includes organisations that provide direct support to unpaid carers, as well as local authorities, other charities providing physical activity opportunities, and some NHS bodies and local community groups.
3. Case studies of sport and leisure providers, carer support organisations and local authority commissioners.
4. In-depth focus groups with professionals working in carer support services, the sport and leisure sector, and public sector commissioning.

4 Reach and engagement

4.1 Unpaid carers

Across all communications channels (including Carers Active newsletters, communications to all Carers UK members, hard copy publications, and other emails and bulletins) over 150,000 contacts were made to unpaid carers specifically about physical activity and the Carers Active campaign during 2023/24, with an open rate of approximately 40%.

Within this, the campaign regularly reaches around 750 unpaid carers each month through the targeted email newsletter. In December 2023 and June 2024, the campaign was featured in Carers UK's Caring Magazine, with ~14,000 people opening the digital version of the magazine. In addition, 14761 people opened a specific email promoting Carers Active April in March 2024.

Alongside this, in 2023-24:

- 747 carers signed up to take part in Carers Active April
- 96 social media posts across all platforms were shared, with a total number of 4,092 interactions.
- 29 Carers Active Facebook posts, with posts being reshared 164 times. The top-performing post was regarding the health and wellbeing videos, which had 250 engagements.
- 9 LinkedIn Posts, with posts being reshared 52 times. The top performing post related to the Get Elfy challenge, closely followed by a post promoting Carers Active April to physical activity providers.
- 24 posts on Instragram, with an average of 18 likes per post.
- 34 posts on X (Twitter), with a total of 218 reposts and an average of 11.7 likes per post.
- An average of 603 impressions per LinkedIn post (15 posts in total).

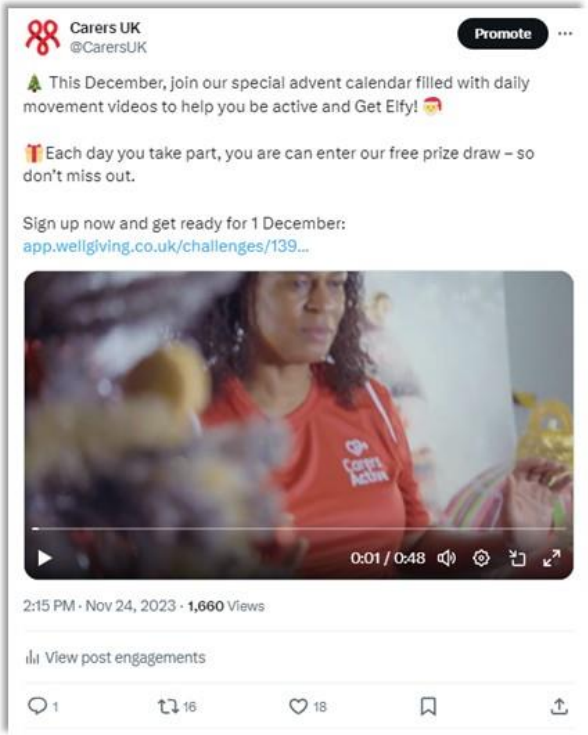


Figure 4: Example Carers Active social media post which received 1,600 views.

The Carers Active Facebook group had 585 members by the end of May 2024, growing by 151 over the past year, and growing significantly from 97 in June 2022. Much of this growth occured in response to newsletters being sent out and Carers Active April. Common posts include sharing of photos showing the physical activities people were doing, screenshots of step counts, challenges, and general content about leading a healthier lifestyle.

The Carers Active Hub (website) received a total of 8,295 visits, with the most visited content (other than the home page) being the Carers Active April landing page (2,907), and the activity and wellbeing videos (764). There was a total of 1,735 video views, including both activity videos and carer stories about physical activity, during the year.

A total of 262 people (although not necessarily unique individuals) attended at least one of the 14 online activity sessions held during the year, which is an average of 18 people per session. This is a 32% increase on the 199 people that attended 13 sessions in 2022/23.

In terms of the profile of carers who engaged with the campaign:

- Around two thirds (71%) were aged between 45 and 69 (Figure 5)
- 86% were from a white ethnic background
- 83% were female, and
- 48% had a longstanding health condition, of which 93% of people said that their health condition reduced their ability to carry out day to day tasks.

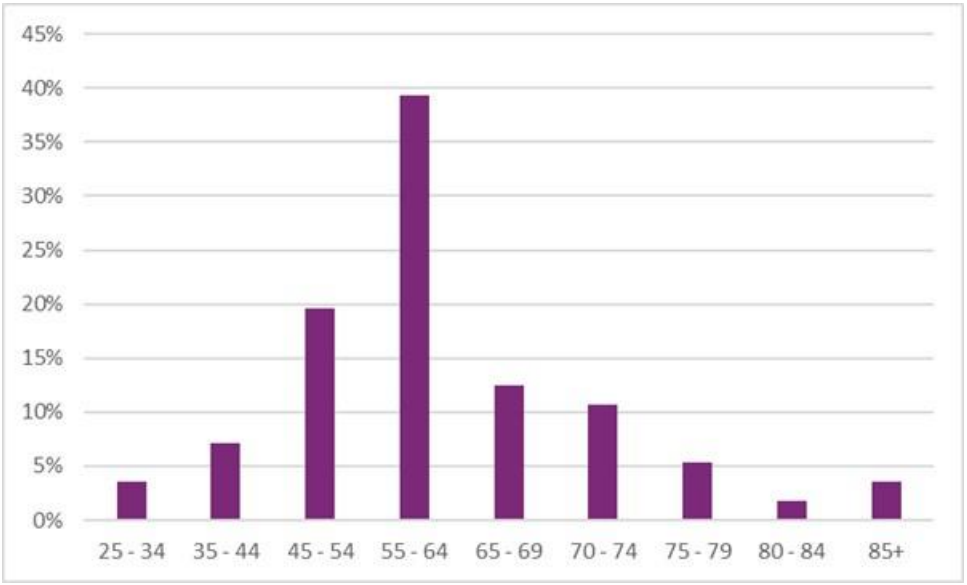


Figure 5: Distribution of Carers Active demographic survey respondents (n=56)

Data from participants who took part in Carers Active April 2024 also shows that Carers Active April post-campaign survey:

- 88% were currently caring for someone, with 12% having cared for someone in the past, and
- 58% were full time carers, with a mix across other intensities of caring.

These figures are broadly comparable with the profile of carers who responded to the State of Caring survey 2023.

4.2 Wider awareness raising and engagement with professionals

In addition to the work of the campaign to reach and engage directly with unpaid carers, a number of activities were undertaken during the year to connect with professionals and other groups that might be well placed to influence the wider system of support for unpaid carers, promote positive messaging about physical activity with this group, and create opportunities for carers to take part in a range of different physical activities.

A summary of the main activities and the level of engagement in these is provided in Table 3 below. In the year covered by this report, the campaign's Project Manager also made direct contact with a range of other organisations across the sport and leisure, health and care, and carer support sectors in order to build new partnerships, open up opportunities to cascade information, and explore new ideas that could increase the reach and impact of the campaign.

This has included:

- Better (GLL) and Everyone Active
- Foundation of Light (Sunderland Community Club Organisation), Blackburn Rovers, Sussex County Cricket Foundation
- Lincolnshire County Council
- Active Sussex

Outreach and awareness raising activity	Number and type of organisations engaged
Carers Active Webinar	48 attendees representing carer support organisations, other voluntary sector organisations, physical activity and healthy lifestyle providers, local authorities, active partnerships, NHS commissioning bodies.
Carers UK Active Medicine workshop (delivered in partnership with Leap (Active Partnership)	43 attendees representing a wide range of stakeholders from across the country, including carer support organisations.
Active Sussex Community of Learning forum session	15 attendees, representing a wide range of organisations. Introducing the campaign and the best practice guide.
Carers Active professionals monthly newsletter	An average of 420 recipients, and an average of 190 people opening and engaging with the email. 81 people opened up the 'best practice' guide specifically when sent in a 'launch of the best practice guide' email in December 2023.

Table 3: Number and type of organisations reached through campaign outreach activity.

5 Impact on carers

5.1 Physical activity levels among unpaid carers

5.1.1 Recognising the value and importance of physical activity

Across the evaluation we found strong evidence that the Carers Active campaign is successful in supporting carers to recognise the value and importance of physical activity in their lives. The COM-B model terms this 'reflective motivation', where people understand and acknowledge the reason why change is important.

Carers find the campaign helpful in acting as a reminder that they need to meet their own physical needs as well as the needs of those that they care for, which includes maintaining a physically active lifestyle. Regular communication (through the Facebook group and the newsletter as described above) act as "gentle nudges" to be more physically active and reiterate the importance of carers taking time out for themselves.

> *I have found it: Informative and supportive. More understanding of my role as a carer and that being healthy equals being a better carer. Think more of other carers. Explore areas I wouldn't otherwise. Such a wide / diverse programme of events and workshops offered. Make carers feel that yes, you are human; you count and so does the person you care for.*
> Unpaid carer (comment from survey)

Carers found that attending the online activity sessions helped them to consider the importance of exercise and how to build it into their existing routines, with many carers commenting on an increased self-awareness regarding their own fitness and exercise habits.

Feedback from carers who attended online activity sessions shows that the main reasons for attending were to increase the amount of physical activity they do (72% of respondents selected this reason), and because they thought that the session would be enjoyable and fun (67% of respondents selected this reason). 53% of carers also recognised that being active was linked to feeling better.

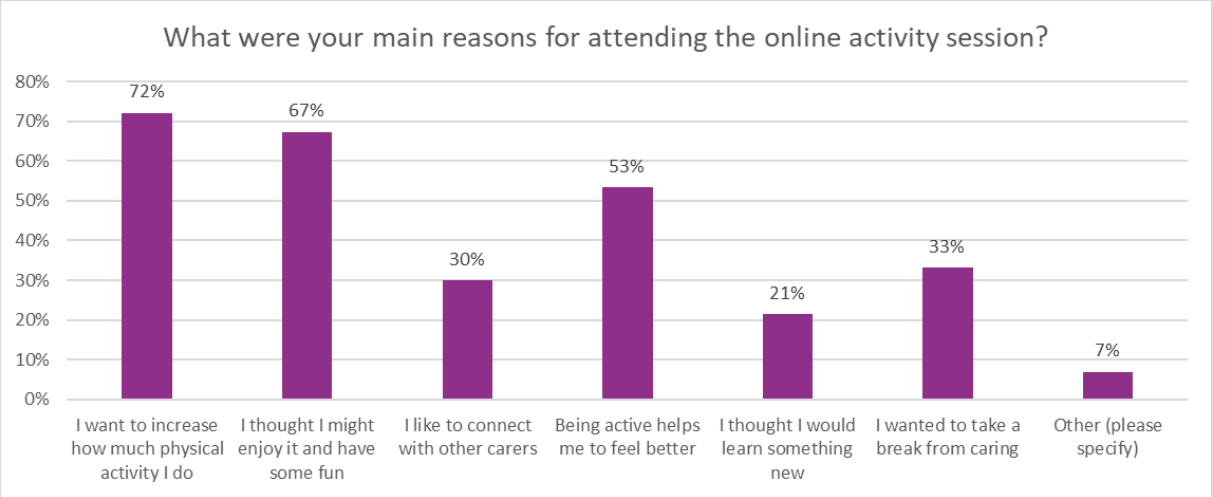


Figure 6: Feedback from carers who attended online activity sessions regarding main reasons for attending (n=187)

99% of survey respondents also said that they would recommend the sessions to other carers (Figure 7).

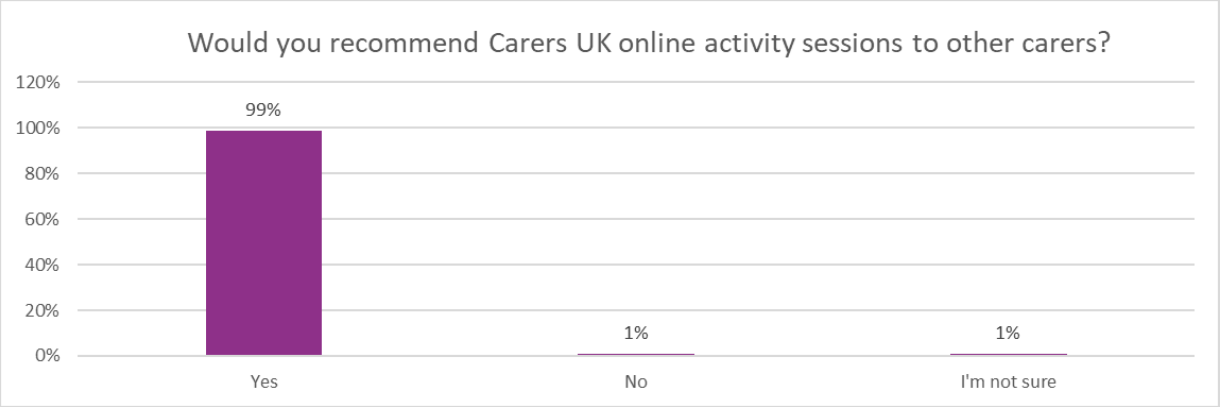


Figure 7: Feedback from carers who attended online activity sessions regarding recommending the sessions to other carers. Note: percentages add up to more than 100 due to rounding (n=134)

In addition to this, we found that:

- Carers found that tracking their physical activity was a strong motivator for being active more regularly.
- Reminders and prompts, such as those that appeared in the monthly newsletter, on the Carers Active hub, or in Facebook and other social media posts, were also strong motivators for increasing overall levels of physical activity for many carers involved in the campaign.
- Interviews with carers who are part of the cohort study revealed that the fortnightly cohort diaries that they were filling in gave them an opportunity to reflect on their activity levels which provided a useful prompt to consider how much exercise they could do in the coming fortnight. In some cases, the process of filling in the diary made people consider exercise in a different light, including what constitutes being active.
- Some carers reported feeling more resilient in their caring role as a result of increasing levels of physical activity and general 'fitness'.

> *Kelly has a lovely, friendly personality and took us through a session where we gently exercised our whole body. I learned that I should be doing more arm work daily and, from this class, could immediately see how easy it will be to work this in with current exercise regime. I look forward to the video being available.*
> Unpaid carer

5.1.2 Accessing opportunities to be more physically active

We know from evidence such as the State of Caring Report[13] and the Carers UK study[14] into the barriers to physical exercise for carers, that being able to find the time to exercise is a significant challenge for carers. Carers are often unable to leave the person they are caring for extended periods of time or are unable to arrange replacement care. Across the evaluation we have found that the predominantly online nature of the Carers Active campaign has provided new opportunities for carers to be more physically active and to feel motivated to begin exercising. It is notable that we found substantial evidence that many carers who took part in the campaign would not be exercising regularly without online access to resources.

> *I wouldn't be I wouldn't be good for anything like that. If it wasn't online, it would just be it would just be impossible for me to access everything like that. Because, you know, I'm a single carer on my own.* Unpaid carer.

The COM-B model of behaviour change identifies the need for people to have the 'social opportunities' to change their behaviour. We see this in online participants valuing the ability to leave a Zoom class part way through due to a caring need without feeling embarrassed or having to explain themselves. Knowing that their caring needs are understood and recognised is an important factor in carers feeling able to access opportunities to be more physically active. Carers also appreciated being able to watch the sessions back in case they did miss parts or all of it.

Of the carers who attended the online activity sessions, 85% said that they agreed or strongly agreed to session(s) helping them realise that there are opportunities for them to be more physically active in the future (Figure 8). 85% also agreed or strongly agreed that they felt motivated to do more physical activity in the future while 84% said that they felt a sense of achievement (an outcome that is likely to be an important motivator for more sustainable behaviour change).

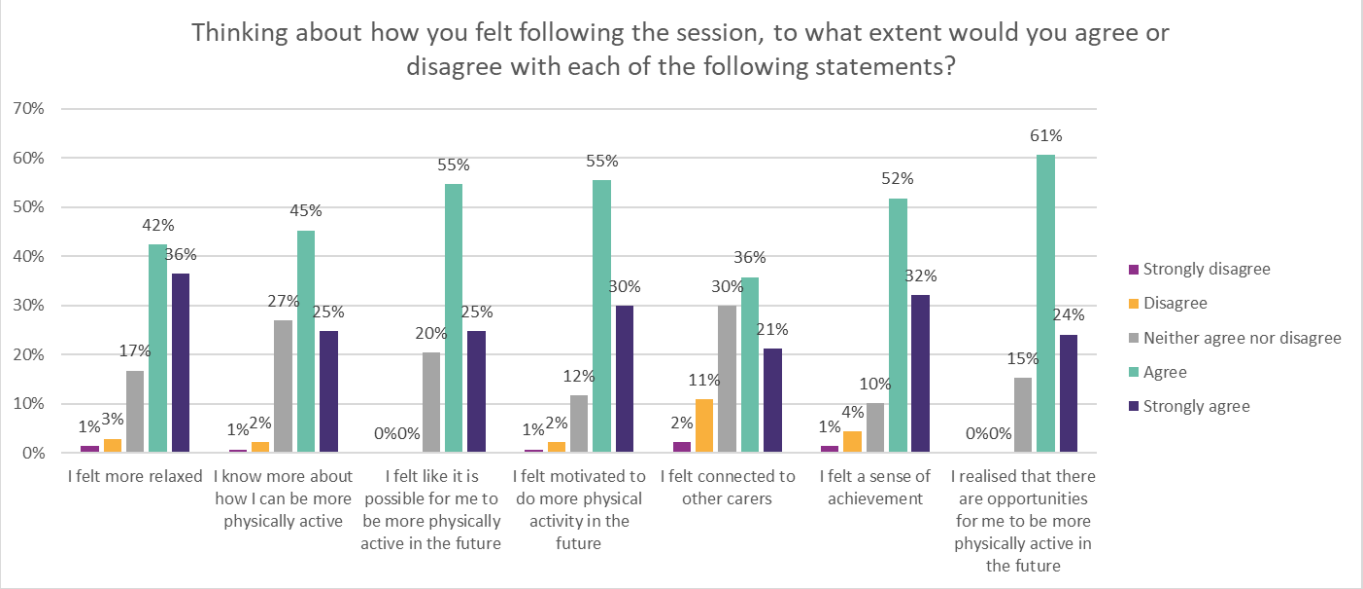


Figure 8: How carers felt following their participation in an online activity session (n=137).

[13] See: https://www.carersuk.org/reports/state-of-caring-2022-report/

[14] See: https://www.carersuk.org/reports/carers-and-physical-activity-a-study-of-the-barriers-motivations-and-experiences-of-unpaid-carers-aged-55-and-over-in-england/

In addition to this, 93% of survey respondents rated the session(s) they attended as 'good' or 'excellent' (Figure 9) and 96% said that they were likely to attend something like that again (Figure 10).[15]

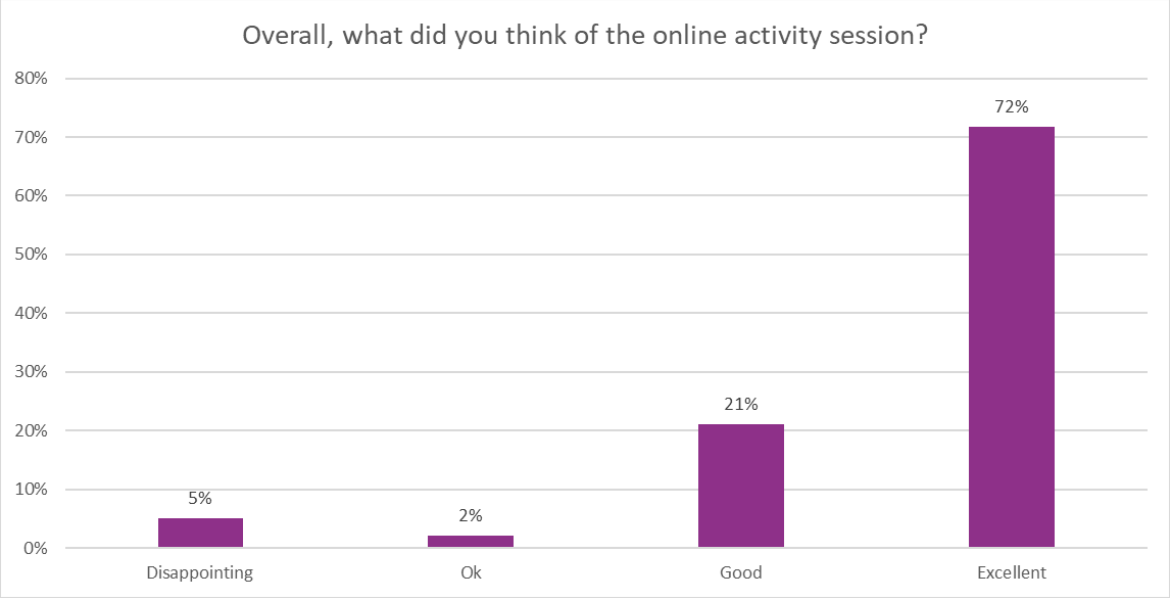


Figure 9: Carers' overall ratings for online activity sessions (n=138).

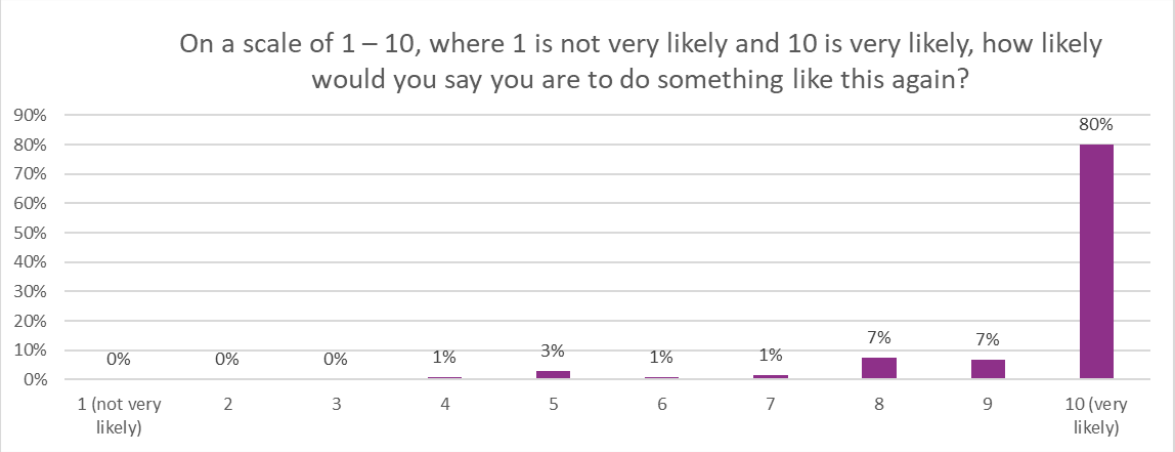


Figure 10: Carers' likelihood of attending an online activity session again (n=135).

We have also seen some emerging evidence that the campaign encouraged people to access offline opportunities, such as being motivated to go to a local gym, or to take up personal training.

> *It is just amazing- inspired me to join parkrun/ parkwalk.*
> Unpaid carer

[15] For the purpose of this survey question, 'likely' is considered a score of 8 or above (out of 10).

> *I have found Carers Active to be invaluable in boosting my mental health and in motivating me to take time for myself to be more active and try new activities. I often revisit some of the online sessions and have booked onto the forthcoming Stretch & Tone Share and Learn session. Thank you*
> Unpaid carer

> *I think its a great idea and has made me think about getting more active, although its hard to fit in with my caring responsibilities*
> Unpaid carer

In some cases, the campaign also motivated carers who were already fairly active to increase how much physical activity they were doing on a regular basis.

> *I intend to continue with 3 days a week gym sessions for the next month before reviewing results and implementing a fresh routine. I'm also aiming to continue with Pilates and add this to my training/fitness regime. After only two Pilates sessions (via Carers UK Share & Learn) I can already feel the benefits of this type of exercise.*
> Unpaid carer

5.1.3 Levels of motivation

Section 5.1.1 discusses the evidence for carers understanding the importance of undertaking physical activity. In order to encourage long-term behaviour change, carers need to see physical activity as both a necessary and a desirable activity. Across the evaluation we have found a wide range of motivational factors that can be attributed to the campaign, as well as learning about what factors lead to carers feeling less motivated.

Motivational factors

When asked to describe the campaign in three words in the focus groups, “motivational” or “motivating” was one of the most common responses by carers.

Carers found that the campaign motivated them by providing them with new ideas for exercise (for example through carers’ posts on the Facebook group) and through giving them access to activities that they otherwise wouldn’t have had access to, or wouldn’t have thought of trying.

Carers who engaged in online activity sessions found the instructors engaging and able to cater for a range of physical activity levels. Carers found themselves motivated to take part in future activities if they knew that they were being run by an instructor that they’d previously enjoyed.

Carers found that a significant motivational factor was feeling included as part of a national campaign which promoted the needs of carers and made them feel ‘part of something bigger’. Carers described the national aspect of the campaign as “essential” to their motivation and feeling ‘included and heard’. In some cases, carers felt that the constant prompts provided by the campaign and its national nature meant that it kept exercise ‘on the mind’ of carers in a way that a localised or short-term campaign might not.

Carers valued having specific parts of the campaign that encouraged them to engage for a select period of time and track their progress throughout this period. Carers Active April and the Healthathon were routinely praised by carers and for many carers they were the first point of engagement that they had with the wider Carers Active campaign. They were viewed as

motivating people to exercise throughout the campaign and beyond, and carers valued being able to track their progress and have goals to work towards. Over two thirds (71%) felt that they were more active after taking part in Carers Active April (Figure 11).

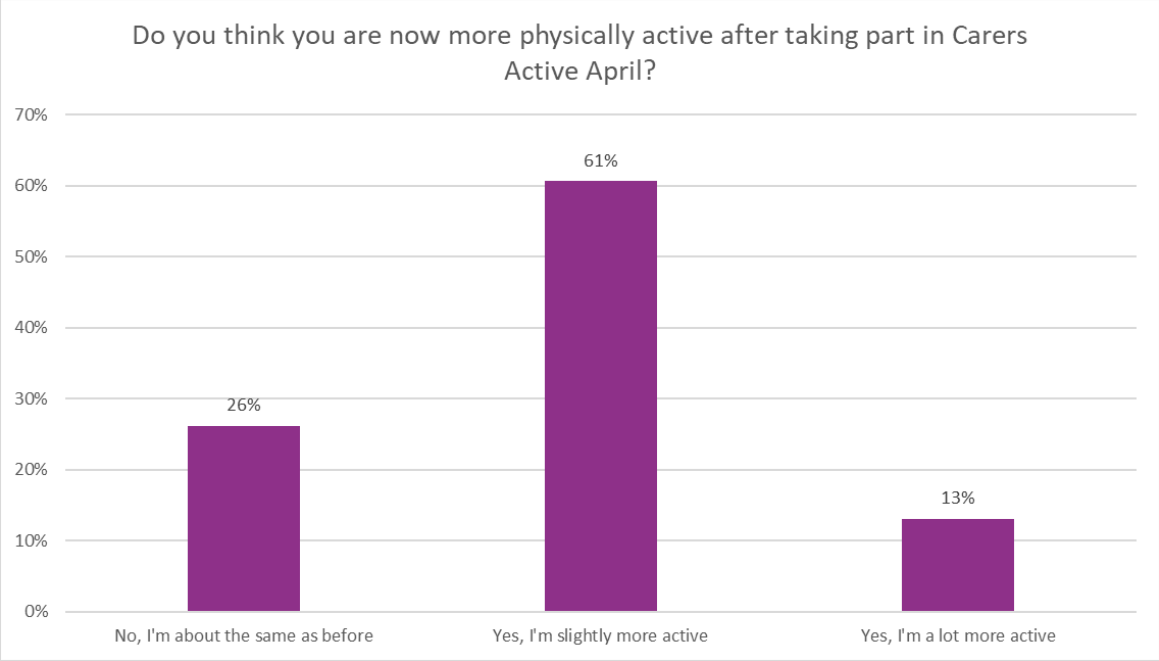


Figure 11: Carers' feedback on the extent to which they feel more active following Carers Active April 2024 (n=84).

> *I haven't been as active during the last 2 weeks due to having a cold. I spent most of last week resting indoors. This has had a negative effect on my mental well being. I'm hoping to get back into the swing of things through some of the opportunities available as part of the Active April programme.*
> Unpaid carer

Carers also found that knowing that other carers were engaging in the campaign, and were sharing stories about their successes and struggles, encouraged them to become more active. Carers commented on the importance of peer-generated content and engagement between carers as an ongoing motivational factor.

We saw a variation in the extent to which carers found an element of goal setting or 'pressure' helpful. Many carers commented on the importance of the online activity sessions and the wider campaign not imposing strict goals or making people feel guilty for the times when they didn't exercise. However, other carers valued an element of competition or challenge, such as the Carers Active 150 challenge, Get Elfy, and the Healthathon.

> *I went from feeling like it was really hard to reach 150 minutes, to exceeding this minimum and doing a lot more exercise. I've enjoyed resources found on the Hub or in the Carers Active Facebook group, such as an accessible aerobics DVD recommended by another carer. It's still early days, but right now I'm more active than I've been for many years. I have even started running!*
> Unpaid carer

Finally, carers felt motivated by receiving resources or merchandise, such as the Active Starter Packs which were provided during year 2 of the campaign. These promoted a feeling of being part of something 'bigger' and provided useful tools for setting and tracking progress towards physical activity goals.

> *Great initiative - and all the better for making carers feel part of a supportive community. Most of us are not free to go off on those long cross-country walks or bike rides or join a gym etc because we have no cover for the person we support. So an online community matters.*
> Unpaid carer

Demotivational factors

For some carers, time exercising in-person with other people can be a preferred option. Some carers reflected that they spend a lot of time by themselves already and would rather go to a gym or an in-person exercise class. In addition, some carers felt that there were technical barriers to joining online exercise classes.

Carers valued the regularity of online sessions and found it demotivating to have sporadic or one-off sessions, preferring to be able to commit to a regular online activity session by scheduling it around their existing commitments and caring duties.

However, the majority of the factors that carers mentioned which led to reduced motivation were not linked directly to the campaign, but to their caring role, their health, or external factors such as poor weather.

> *Not been that active these last two weeks. A lot of icy pavements doesn't help. Other caring issues seem to have got on top of me recently. Hopefully once the pavements clear I can start getting out jogging again, which I look forward to.*
> Unpaid carer

5.1.4 Sustainable behaviour change

In order for the campaign to generate long-term and sustainable behaviour change, it is important for carers to be able to incorporate regular physical activity into their day-to-day routines. Across the evaluation we found strong evidence that the campaign supported carers to see physical activity as part of their daily routines, as well as identifying the factors that might support longer term changes in behaviour.

Carers frequently mentioned the importance of the Carers Active resources being free, which removes a known and often significant barrier for carers. Figure 12 shows that 79% of online activity session attendees who responded to the survey also said that those sessions had either:

- Motivated them to include more physical activity in their daily life, or
- Given them new ideas about the type of physical activity they can do, or
- Made them realise that they can include more physical activity in their daily life.

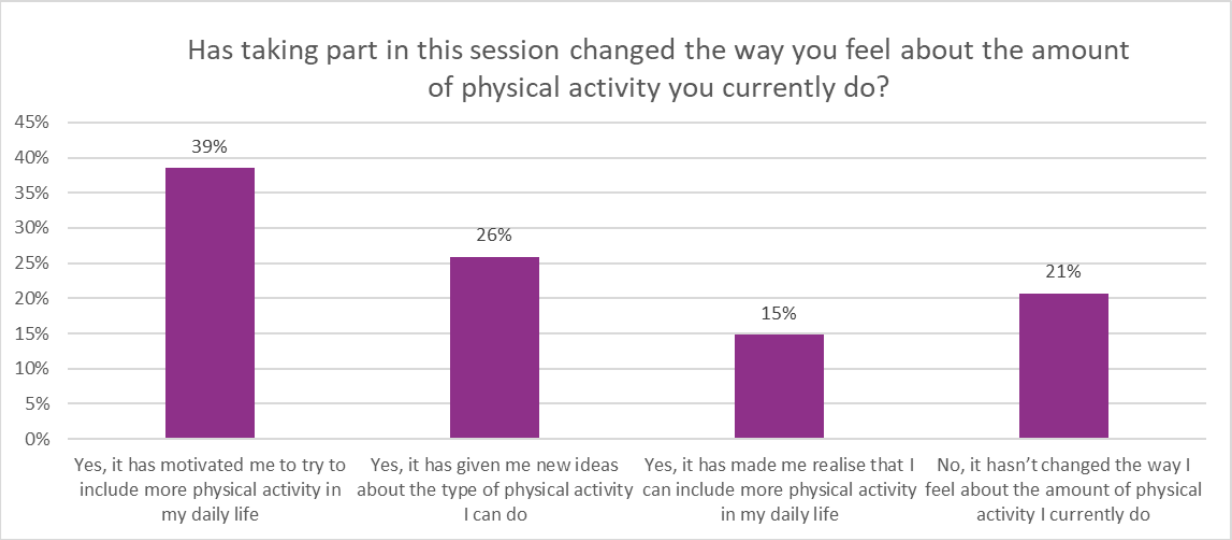


Figure 12: Carers' feedback on how they feel about their level of physical activity following participation in an online activity session (n=135).

The campaign also encouraged carers to reconsider what they may count as physical activity and to find regular opportunities for exercise in their daily lives. For example, carers in the cohort study often included 'housework' or 'gardening' as exercise once they considered that it was causing an increase in their heart rate, as well as some participating in more traditional types of exercise (see Figure 13). Walking was by far the most common regular activity.

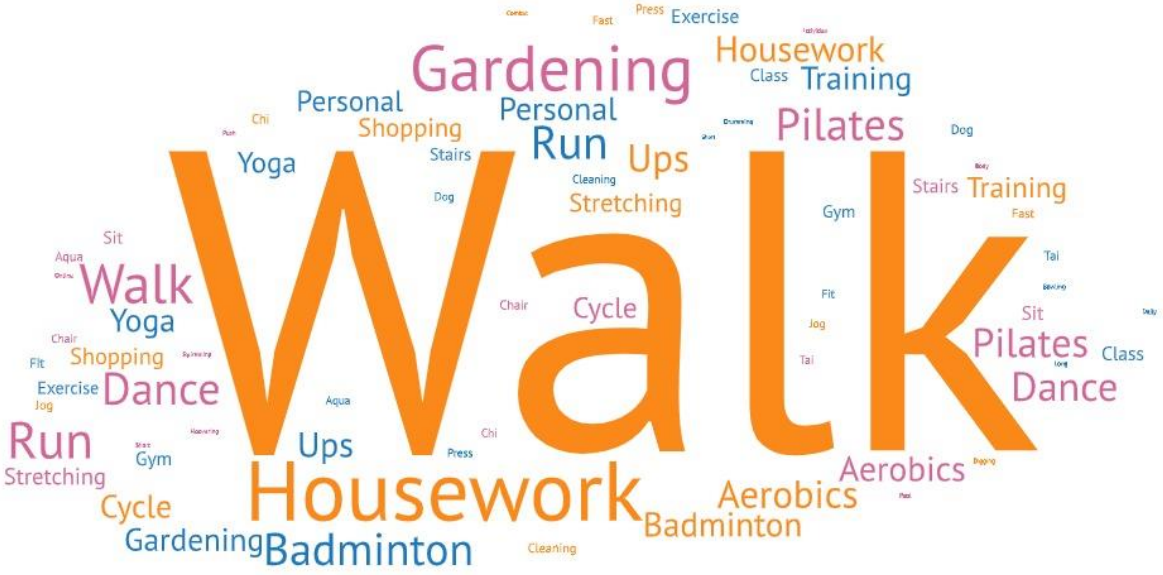


Figure 13: Types of physical activity regularly undertaken by cohort members, as mentioned in the fortnightly cohort journals

However, while the data on physical activity levels among cohort members that we presented in the interim report did show a tendency towards higher levels of physical activity over time, the final results show a more mixed picture. This most likely reflects the variable nature of caring responsibilities that many carers experience over time (which makes it difficult to sustain behaviour change on a consistent basis) and the period of time over which the data was collected (a longer period of time may be needed to provide an accurate picture of any changes in levels of physical activity.

Many carers also have quite fixed routines, around which they need to schedule time for engaging in physical activity. Therefore, having regular sessions or groups (in-person or online) for people to commit to is an important factor in ensuring that physical activity becomes part of someone's weekly routine. Linked to this is the desire for carers to book multiple sessions at once, both to save the hassle of having to book individual sessions, and to get greater buy in.

For the campaign to establish longer term and sustainable behaviour change, it is likely that there will need to be a mix of both online and in-person activities available, in order to accommodate the different needs of carers.

Some carers explicitly referenced the need for greater incentives to embed physical activity into their lives beyond the campaign. In some cases, this could be ongoing tracking of their exercise levels through a dedicated app (as with the Move into Spring distance challenge and 150 minute challenge), or small 'challenges' such as the Healthathon that they can look forward to and use to find renewed motivation. For other carers they would value a financial incentive, such as a discount on gym memberships.

Finally, it is important to note that the campaign itself was an important part of carers finding renewed motivation to exercise despite the ongoing challenges they may face in day-to-day life.

> *I love it, it keeps me focused and motivated to do something good for me. It helps with a positive mindset and keeps me fit for the challenges that caring brings on a daily basis.*
> Unpaid carer

> *When I first became aware of the Carers Active April something clicked in me regarding mental wellbeing. I've long been aware of the benefits of keeping physically fit especially as a carer but neglected the wellbeing. Through the campaign I registered for the online Hatha Yoga - this spurred me on to register for a beginners yoga class in my local community.*
> Unpaid carer

Claire's story

'I was surprised by what a natural energy boost I felt doing the activity videos. I felt less frustrated and tense and it gives me a sense of achievement.'

I care for my three teenage daughters who are autistic (neurodivergent). They also have other co-occurring conditions including ADHD, sensory processing difficulties, social anxiety, dyspraxia, and depression presenting in different ways. My daughters are each very different, as are their support needs. They need help to manage their time and make sure they take medication. A typical week will also require discussions with medical specialists, therapists, and the school over different issues. Encouragement is also needed to help them with managing their own personal care, environment and social interactions.

Before I had my daughters I used to work as a women's health nurse on a gynaecology ward. As the girls got older, their varying needs became more apparent, along with the extra support required in daily living, and I have not returned to a paid working role.

I have never been someone who enjoyed exercise, and to be honest would avoid it if I could. It always felt like just another thing to do and not something that interested me. I would try at different points to join friends for a workout class, but my efforts were short-lived.

I found fitting in physical activity once my caring role increased more and more difficult. There is so much to do with what feels like so little time in a day. I used to go to the gym a few times a week, but found travel time, working out and getting changed took a lot of time out of the day. I also found I would have calls, appointments or would need to address issues throughout the day, so the gym time soon got pushed out.

I do benefit from getting out of the house and having a change of scenery. It's great to get some fresh air or be in nature. We have a small dog which is a great motivator to go out for daily walks, and having her with us helps with anxiety levels. Due to our family's specific preferences we go to places like the forest or the beach, at quieter times of day to avoid areas being too busy. In addition, one of my daughters enjoys outdoor gym equipment at our local park. I have found as my activity levels have improved, so has my self-esteem.

It was such a privilege to take part in the filming of the videos. I loved that different fitness levels were represented, which made the videos more relatable. I also feel passionate about the importance of looking after yourself as a carer. Working out at home is so much easier to fit in our lives. There's no need to travel to it and get cover for the person you care for. It is not weather dependant. The 15-minute videos feel manageable too. They are easily slotted in at different times of the day. You don't need any special equipment or lots of room.

I was surprised by what a natural energy boost I felt doing the activity videos. My stress symptoms also improved; I felt less frustrated and tense and it gives me a sense of achievement. I am hoping to improve my strength and flexibility by regularly doing the videos.

My advice to other carers who would like to be more physically active but struggle to fit it in is to make time for yourself. Look at your schedule and book the time in. It can be easy to put it off, but 15 minutes is easily achievable, and you will soon feel the benefits.

5.2 Wellbeing and social connectedness

5.2.1 Personal wellbeing

One of the intended outcomes for the Carers Active campaign was to demonstrate that it can effectively support improving personal wellbeing through engaging in physical activity. This includes:

- Improved life satisfaction
- Improved feelings of worth
- Increased happiness, and
- Decreased anxiety[16]

In our interim report we highlighted some promising evidence emerging that demonstrated the effectiveness of the campaign in achieving this outcome. Among cohort members, we saw a definite trend towards higher levels of wellbeing among those carers at the end of a six-month period during which they were engaged in the campaign in some way (Figure 14).

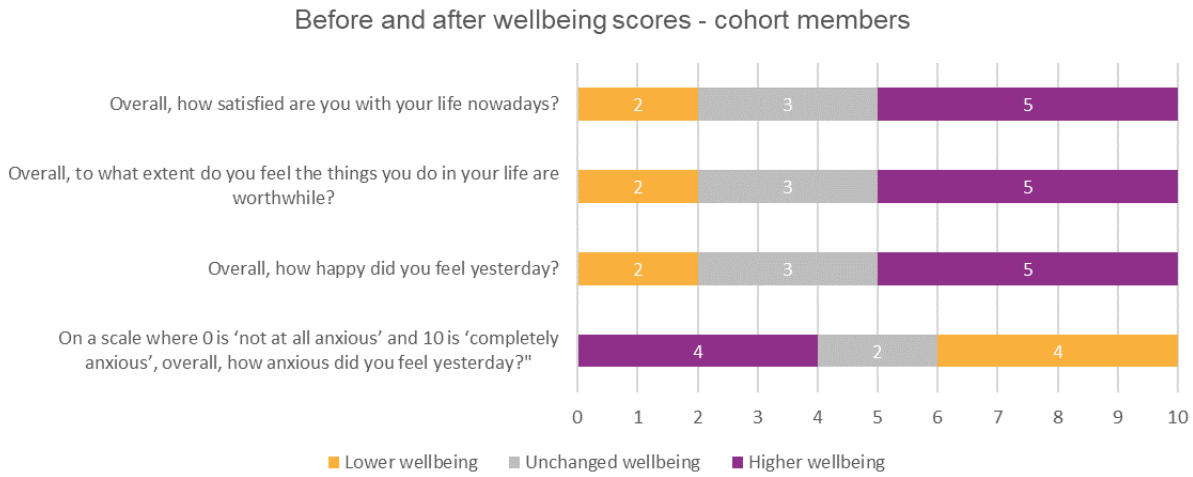


Figure 14: Before and after wellbeing scores for cohort members (n=10)

Although the sample size was relatively small, we also saw a positive trend (at the end of six months compared to the beginning) in relation to the number of carers who:

- Wanted to continue including more physical activity in their daily life (motivation)
- Found it easier to be more physically active (opportunity and / or capability)
- Knew more about the different type(s) of physical activity they could do (opportunity)
- Felt more confident when it came to doing physical activity (capability)
- Found it easier to motivate themselves to do more physical activity (capability)

Across the evaluation we also saw other evidence of the campaign contributing to improved life satisfaction and sense of self-worth through carers being able to find some 'me time' – time when they were not defined by their caring role.

[16] As measured using the ONS4 wellbeing measures.For more information see: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/methodologies/personalwellbeingsurveyuserguide

Other benefits of playing have been the opportunity to go somewhere where I can just be myself, I'm not there as someone else's daughter, mother, wife - just me. Also, the game gives me opportunities to express whatever mood I'm in - often I start off smashing the shuttle around getting rid of pent-up frustrations but by the end of the session I'm laughing and having fun with more playful, interesting shots.
Unpaid carer.

In several situations, carers commented that the campaign (and exercise) had improved their quality of life after a difficult period in their lives:

I lost my beloved husband and father last year to cancer in March and May and found Carers UK great in lots of areas and the yoga sessions are great for my wellbeing.
Unpaid carer.

I think [the online share and learn sessions and the campaign] has completely changed me because this time last year, I was told my husband was at death's door by a GP and he wasn't, she made a mistake. She came and apologised and everything but I went into a spiral. I didn't realise I was getting depressed or was depressed. And it was the Healthathon that got me going that started me off... I thought I'll give it a go. I'll give it a go, and it was such a lovely day and I've gone from there really. But it has taken near enough nine months for the depression to go.
Unpaid Carer.

There is also some evidence to suggest that being part of the campaign, and the associated increase in physical activity levels, increased happiness among carers. In focus groups and interviews, feedback from online activity sessions, the reflective journals, and published case studies, carers consistently comment on the fact that exercise and being part of the campaign makes them feel more positive, lifts their mood, and that they get a 'feel good factor' after being involved in some sort of activity.

Feeling much better for having been more active recently and more positive too.
Unpaid carer

Some also commented on specific mental health benefits, including reduced anxiety and an increase in emotional capacity, resilience and optimism.

Much fitter and able to do more! Helped me cope better! in an especially stressful time.
Unpaid carer

I feel refreshed and have more patience to deal with [the person being cared for].
Unpaid carer

I am enjoying the activities and feeling a lot fitter and happier within myself.
Unpaid carer

[I'm feeling] much better, more positive in my mood, more relaxed and more motivated.
Unpaid carer

As mentioned in Section 5.2.1, the fact that sessions are online means that carers can take part in a physical activity without having to arrange alternative care provision. In addition, we found that it helps to reduce anxiety around complex timings and additional commitments while giving carers a genuine break:

It basically gives me a break without having to do anything other than perhaps change my clothes and go into a different room. It means I don't have to be thinking, right, if the class starts at half past 10, I've got to leave here at about 20 past 10. But I've got to get [person being cared for] a drink. I've got to get his tablets, he'll need a snack and then the doctor is ringing but then I've got to pick up the prescription. So let's say the shortest trip is an hour and a half if you're going to do a class. It just takes the weight off. And it does give you a break. I know that I'm physically here but it does give my brain a break.
Unpaid carer.

5.2.2 Loneliness and social isolation

We know from the State of Caring Survey (2023) that 50% of carers feel lonely. The Carers Active campaign sought to reduce levels of isolation and loneliness among carers. We found some evidence that the campaign was able to achieve this, with several carers stating 'connected' (or similar words) when asked to give three words that described the campaign for them.

Carers also commented that the online activity sessions provided 'a supportive community' where they know that the other participants are carers and understand the challenges they face. The element of 'caring solidarity', even if unspoken, came through as a significant factor in carers choosing to engage with Carers Active sessions as opposed to other 'public' sessions. It was also a significant factor in many carers choosing to take part in the live sessions, where even if they didn't directly speak to other people, they got a sense of being part of a group of people who (to an extent) understood each other.

But it's kind of quite nice to know that there are other people who are probably going through similar sorts of things as you and yeah, you sort of you kind of have like, a similar kind of outlook on what's going on. And different, like challenges, I guess you could say, day to day. So you sort of like understand what's kind of how you're all kind of doing rather than it being someone who doesn't sort of have that kind of caring side, to their lives.
Unpaid carer.

It does make a difference to be seeing these people and for it to be live. Not everyone wants to be on camera. And that's fine. I don't have a problem with that at all. But you're doing it with a group of people who sort of get you.
Unpaid carer.

I have found the general Carers UK sessions, and the ones organised by my employer with Carers UK to be helpful, both for resources provided and as a breathing space to reflect on how to juggle conflicting demands. So many people are in the same situation and it helps to be reminded of that.
Unpaid carer

I'm an isolated carer, which means that the person I care for doesn't actually leave the house very much. So we're at home 24/7, I can't go to the gym, or go to a group and, you know, do walking or anything like that. So all of my physical activity is taking place at home. So for me, I think it's the motivation of knowing that I'm not alone. Yeah, and that I've got the opportunity to take part in a collective exercise group. So yeah, that really motivates me to keep going.
Unpaid carer.

There was also a positive shift towards greater social connectedness among cohort members following their involvement with the campaign. More carers agreed that there were people who would be there for them if they needed help (Figure 15) and if they wanted company or to socialise there would be people they could call on (Figure 16).

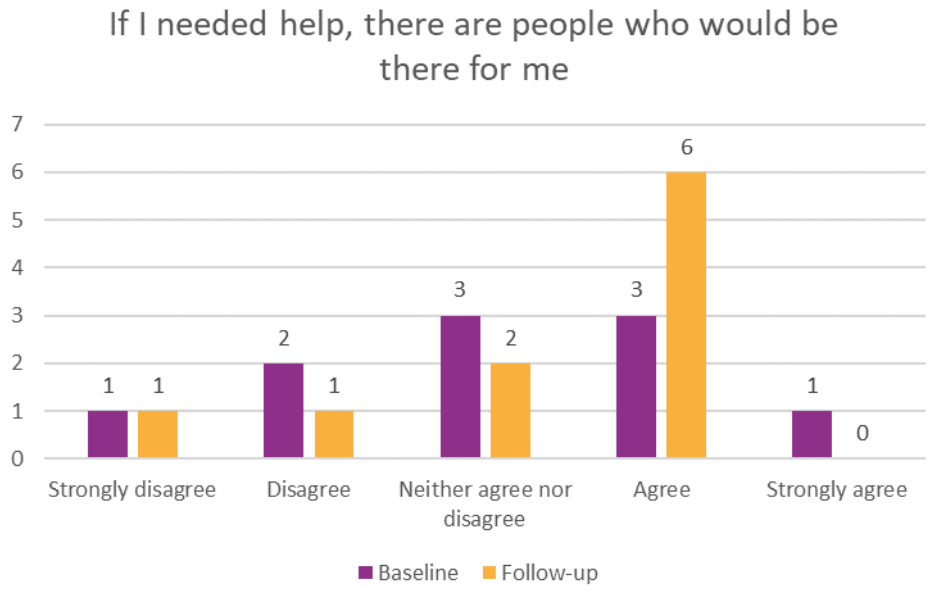


Figure 15: A comparison of baseline and follow-up responses for cohort participants who responded to the statement "If I needed help, there are people who would be there for me" (n=10)

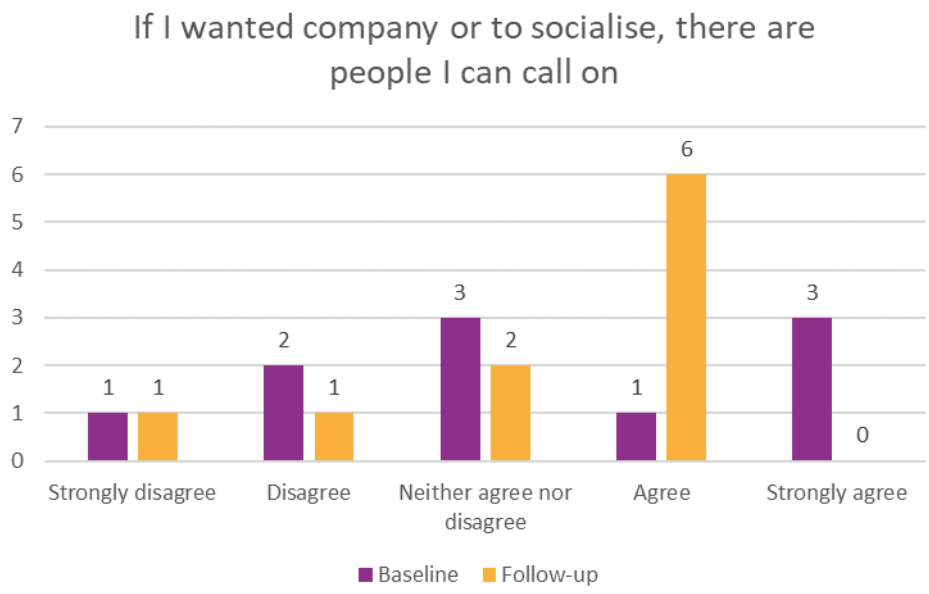


Figure 16: A comparison of baseline and follow-up responses for cohort participants who responded to the statement; "If I wanted company or to socialise there are people I can call on" (n= 10)

5.2.3 Quality of social connections

A desired outcome of the Carers Active campaign was for carers to experience better quality and quantity of social connections through physical activity. We found that while carers who are involved in the online aspects of the campaign feel 'part of something bigger' and 'connected' with other carers, it is the in-person activities that carers seek for breadth and depth of social connections. Carers mentioned that significant social interactions range from greeting people while they're out exercising, to being part of a regular sports group which provides quality social connections. Some carers suggested that Carers UK could facilitate local walking groups, or work further with local voluntary sector partners to set up physical activities for carers.

> *I noticed I was feeling a bit low so I've been making an effort to get out for a short (20 minutes) walk in the fresh air most mornings before breakfast and this has really helped. I enjoy noticing the birds, sharing a greeting with people I see often along the cycle track and just feeling more active.*
> Unpaid carer in cohort study

> *For me, the 'Active Retired Rackets' sessions at the local leisure Centre have been life-saving. It was relatively easy to get back into sports like badminton and table-tennis and, at the level we play, it wasn't necessary to be especially for to begin with. The group is friendly and welcoming of new players and most of us are just there to have fun and keep active without taking ourselves too seriously. I feel that without this group to attend I would have really struggled to cope.*
> Unpaid carer in cohort study

We're completely isolated, unless we're very lucky and that we're at work and we've got friends, we tend to lose our friendships. So I think trying to get out and do activity requires some sort of befriending. So if there could be something where there could be a consistent group, so for example, healthy walks, and so on, where you can get to know other people. So it might rotate in an area from one place to another every month or whatever. But actually, if you could have some sort of equitable provision, then maybe if you get people to go out and about and they won't feel so isolated, and then they could link together when they're online.
Unpaid carer

It would be good to see greater encouragement for people to join things like this and for local councils/leisure centres to promote such groups among carers. Many of us at the group do have caring responsibilities so it is also mutually supportive without the focus being solely on our caring roles.
Unpaid carer

Bernie’s story

I am a full time carer for my daughter who is 27 years old. Jodie has autism/disability and needs one-to-one support. The main challenge is helping her pass the day, she is not very hands-on, so she can find the day long and can get very stressed out - so it’s up to me to keep her occupied. She doesn't have any local services to suit her needs, so after she left school I set up a group in our local community to give her the opportunity to socialise and provide activities that she is able to be part of with other adults in the same situation. This is something that if I didn't do, she wouldn't have the opportunity to mix with others and feel part of something. So as a carer this is just another role I provide.

I have always kept active and I believe 'your health is your wealth', especially as a carer, as you want to be there for your loved one. I took up running over 10 years ago - motivated by Jodie to keep healthy and fit - and also to do some fundraising for autism. I've continued to run as I've found that I can forget about everything and stick on my earphones: time for myself, to boost my physical and mental health. I go out 3 or 4 times a week, and then most of my time after that is spent with Jodie. Me and my husband also started doing Park Run about 10 years ago and got Jodie involved. I felt that there was no point being fit and healthy without helping Jodie also, and I believe physically and mentally it helps us all.

As carers this has helped us socially too as we've met lots of good people through running. They are supportive and understanding as they know we always have to put Jodie's needs first. As a full time carer you can sometimes feel you don't have enough time for yourself, but then you also appreciate just how lucky you are to have such a special person in your life, and how much they need you - and it is so rewarding to see them happy.

6 System level change

6.1 Cross sector awareness

This section assesses the evidence for the campaign having delivered the following intended outcome *There is greater awareness among those working in the sport and leisure, and health and care sectors, about the importance of physical activity for carers and how to support them to be more active.*

The interim evaluation report, which covered the period July 2022 to June 2023, found that whilst the campaign had made some progress in raising awareness of carers' physical activity needs across all sectors, there was further work to be undertaken in the final year of the campaign to engage a broader variety of organisations. In the final year of the campaign, we find good evidence of a broader variety of organisations having recognised, and acted to support, the physical activity needs of unpaid carers following engagement with the campaign. While much of the more direct systems influencing work has taken place in England, the digital nature of the campaign and the nation-wide reach of Carers UK means that we've seen impacts of the campaign across the United Kingdom.

6.1.1 Sport and physical activity sector

A greater focus has been placed on engaging the sport and physical activity sector in the final year of the campaign, with the following types of organisations being engaged:

- **National sport and leisure providers,** such as Better (GLL) and Everyone Active. The interim report presented a case study of Better's work with Carers UK to support carers across the country. Through ongoing engagement between the Carers Active Project Manager and Better, support and opportunities for carers have become further embedded across Better's national network, with more of their sites being reached and carer's needs being recognised and addressed, particularly throughout Carers Active April. Everyone Active's National Inclusion and Wellbeing Manager has worked with the Carers Active Project Manager to disseminate the campaign's best practice guide, and run a workshop with regional Everyone Active managers to explore how carers are currently, and could be, supported by Everyone Active to increase their physical activity levels.

> *We recognise the vital role that carers undertake to support and improve the lives of others. As a national social enterprise that works to improve local communities, we want to offer better wellbeing and health opportunities for carers across the UK. We are delighted to have partnered with Carers UK to drive this ambition.*
> Peter Bundey, Better's (GLL) Chief Executive in Better news feature.

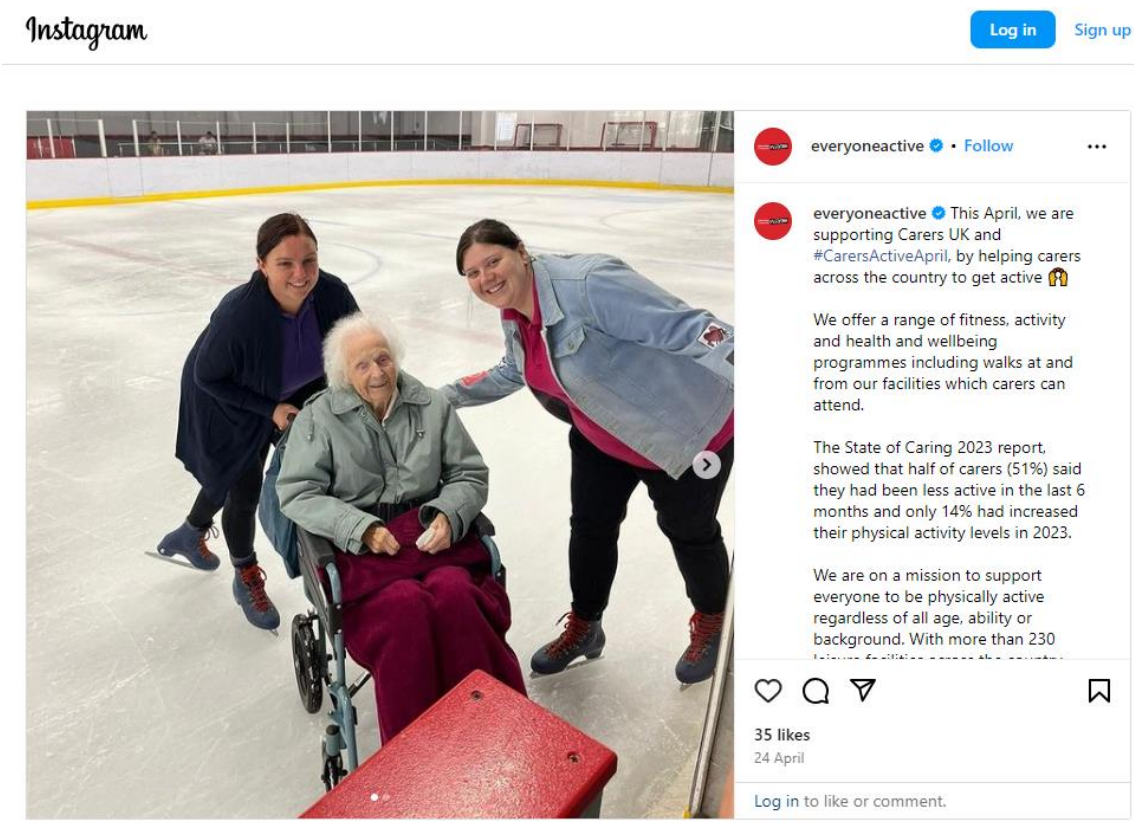


Figure 17: Everyone Active promoting Carers Active April on Instagram and stating their support for the campaign and opportunities for carers to engage with Everyone Active sites.

- **Active partnerships,** which are 43 local organisations that receive long-term funding from Sport England to deliver place-based approaches to reduce inequalities and to partner with local and national stakeholders to help transform lives through movement, physical activity and sport. As the work of the active partnerships aligns closely with the Carers Active campaign, it is not surprising that many active partnerships promoted the campaign and its resources (including the best practice guide) amongst their networks and engaged with the Project Manager to find out how they could take learning from the campaign into their own work. As demonstrated by the case study of partnership working in Lincolnshire (see page xx), active partnerships often have good working relationships with sport and leisure providers.

  The Carers Active Project Manager and Active Sussex held a community of learning session to share details of the campaign and how carers' physical activity needs can be better met. There were 15 attendees representing local authorities, carer support organisations, sport and leisure providers and other voluntary sector providers. The evaluation team held a focus group session for professionals working in the sport and leisure sector, which was predominantly attended by active partnership employees. The focus group supported active partnerships to consider how else they could facilitate organisations in their networks to engage and support unpaid carers.

- **Individual sport foundations and club community organisations (CCOs)**, such as Foundation of Light (Sunderland FC), Blackburn Rovers Community Sports Trust, and Sussex County Cricket Foundation. The awareness raising meeting with the Foundation of Light led to Carers UK connecting the Foundation with Sunderland Carers Centre and

for the Foundation to express a desire to develop more opportunities for carers in the community and at the Beacon of Light facility. The awareness raising meeting with Blackburn Rovers Community Sports Trust led to the Trust hosting a walk during Carers Active April around Ewood Park Stadium in partnership with Blackburn with Darwen Carers.

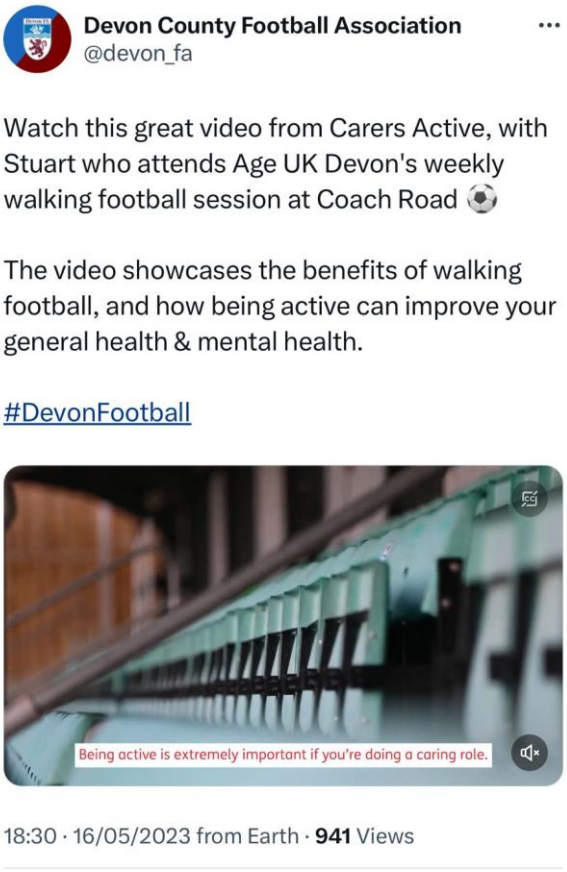


Figure 18: Devon County Football Association's tweet promoting Carers Active coverage of a walking football programme.

- **Healthy lifestyle providers**, which are organisations that are commissioned to provide targeted behaviour change and physical activity programmes. For example, the case study featured on page xx describes how One You Lincolnshire, a healthy lifestyle provider which recognises unpaid carers as a priority group, partnered with a local carer support organisation to provide specific physical activity opportunities for unpaid carers during Carers Active April.

6.1.2 Carer support organisations

Throughout the campaign we have seen significant evidence of the campaign engaging with carers support organisations from around the UK, with a particular focus on strengthening relations in the final year. Across the evaluation we have evidence of the Carers Active campaign enabling carer support organisations to:

- Highlight key messages around carer inactivity and the importance of physical activity for short and long-term carer health and wellbeing. Often, Carers UK statistics would be used as headlines or leading messages in carer newsletters and activity promotions.

- Promote the Carers Active campaign, the Carers Active Hub, the activity and wellbeing videos and specific campaign initiatives such as the Healthathon.
- Share local and national carer stories, where carers share stories of increased health and wellbeing through engaging with physical activity opportunities.
- Link their own activities that support carers to increase their physical activity levels with a national, broader campaign.
- Develop partnerships with other carer support organisations and physical activity providers and deliver new physical activity opportunities for carers.

In this year's mapping survey of physical activity opportunities for unpaid carers, organisations were asked "What difference would you say the Carers Active campaign has made in relation to physical activity opportunities for carers? This could be in relation to your own work or the work of others". Responses from carer support organisations included:

> *Raising awareness of Carers and the potential impact of caring on their physical and mental wellbeing*
> Gloucestershire Carers Hub/ PeoplePlus

> *Raised awareness to the need to encourage carers to think about their own well-being and take time out for physical exercise, at a level which suits them.*
> Southampton Mencap

> *It raises the importance of physical activity and how it not only impacts on the physical wellbeing of the Carer but also the mental wellbeing and can reduce isolation in addition to physical attributes.*
> Carer Support Furness

> *Huge difference - physical and emotional wellbeing need to be treated as one.*
> Crossroads Care Richmond and Kingston

> *Has raised the profile. We are a Voice organisation so whilst we can raise the work that Carers UK are doing we need to adapt what we can do within our organisation hence offering as part of a wider session.*
> Carers Voice Norfolk and Waveney

> *It has provided alot of opportunities for Carers, Carers have reported that they feel better for joining health walks as they not only feel fitter but are also meeting new people.*
> East Sussex, Brighton & Hove Crossroads Care

Get active to boost your physical and mental wellbeing

At Swindon Carers Centre we offer a range of activities and events for adult carers to help them improve their physical and mental wellbeing through movement.

The benefits of physical activity are wide and varied. Not only can it help reduce your risks of developing health conditions in the future, but it can help your mental wellbeing by reducing stress and giving you some breathing space.

We are delighted that our approach to enabling carers to be active has been recognised by Carers UK, who have included us in their Carers Active Best Practice Guide for professionals.

We welcomed the Carers UK team to one of our **Walk and Talk** events at Lydiard Park, Swindon, last year. On these pages are a selection of the wonderful photos they took.

As well as the activities our Adult Carers Events Team offers (see pages 14 and 15), Carers UK also has events you can participate in.

Carers Active Hub

Visit Carers UK's Carers Active Hub, where you'll find activity ideas, video sessions, carer stories and more to support you getting active in whichever way works best for you.

More information here: **www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/your-health-and-wellbeing/carers-active-hub/**

Activity and Wellbeing videos

Getting active outside or at the gym can be a challenge at this time of year, when the cold and dark weather can easily put us off going out. And that's on top of caring responsibilities which might make it hard for you to be active away from home at any time of the year.

Carers UK have a selection of activity and wellbeing videos online:

www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/your-health-and-wellbeing/carers-active-hub/physical-activity-and-wellbeing-videos/

These 15-20 minute sessions feature real carers getting active alongside instructors and are designed to be done at home, in your own time and without any special equipment.

Mark your calendar for Carers Active April!

Have you heard of Carers Active April? It's an annual campaign by Carers UK throughout the month of April and registered carers can join in.

Carers UK will be sharing more details of Active April on their website and opportunities to get involved.

Figure 19: Swindon Carers Centre featuring the Carers Active campaign and their own activities in their quarterly newsletter 'Caring Matters'

Through the Carers Active mailing list, 1:1 engagement with carer support organisations by the Carers Active Project Manager, events such as the Carers Active webinar and Active Medicine workshop, and broader promotion across the carer support sector, a wide range of carer support organisations have supported the campaign and reiterated its key messages.

Organisations we have observed positively engaging with the campaign include: Carers Trust, Carers First, Signpost Stockport for Carers, West Norfolk Carers, Carers Link East Dunbartonshire, Carers Support Centre (Bristol), Northamptonshire Carers, Carers Wales (part of Carers UK), South Ayrshire Carers Centre, Redbridge Carers Support Service, Gaddum Salford, Carers Support East Kent, Carers Northern Ireland (part of Carers UK), Shetland Carers, Carers Guernsey, and Harrow Carers.

6.1.3 Public sector and health and social care organisations

Engaging staff and organisations from across the health and social care sector, and the broader public sector was a primary aim of the campaign. For unpaid carers to be recognised as a priority group for initiatives that prevent and address the determinants of health inequalities, key public sector and health and social care organisations need to recognise the barriers unpaid carers face to accessing physical activity opportunities and develop approaches to address

them. Local authorities have a statutory responsibility for identifying carers in their area, and providing or arranging help, support and information to improve their own wellbeing, as well as the wellbeing of the people they care for. Public sector and health and social care organisations that have engaged with the campaign and demonstrated increased awareness of the physical activity needs of unpaid carers includes:

- **Local authorities and public health professionals.** There is good evidence that a number of local authority staff and public health professionals are aware of and have meaningfully engaged with the Carers Active campaign. The case study of good practice in Lincolnshire on page xx, and the description of GLL's work in Barnet (pg xx) both evidence the importance of engaging local authorities and public health teams for progressing access to physical activity opportunities by unpaid carers.

  A good example of local authority engagement is documented in the minutes of a Health and Wellbeing Board meeting at Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council in 2023 described how a newly appointed Carers Strategy Manager would be tasked with progressing work to increase the physical health of carers, by "for example, through promotion of national initiatives such as Carers UK – Carers Active Hub, a resource to help carers to increase activity levels and improve their health and wellbeing"[17]. A further notable example is that of South Ayrshire Health and Social Care Partnership, who in a 2023 report on progress against the Partnerships' Adult Carers Strategy[18], reported that extending free access to leisure facilities to adult carers (in addition to young carers) as a specific Carers Active April initiative led to positive engagement from carers. The success of the initiative led to further conversations between the Partnership and leisure providers to consider replicating and expanding the offer in 2024. Specific feedback regarding the initiative included:

  > *"Thank you, too, to the lady who phoned me in connection with Carers Active April. an initiative by South Ayrshire Council to benefit unpaid carers. I most certainly have benefitted! When I collected the card at the Citadel, I was told that it was for one month. I have now been going swimming twice a week since & it doesn't expire until the 23rd of May. It's been wonderful, cost me a new swimsuit but I've lost some of that extra weight which I've been carrying. A win, win situation which I will continue in the future. Thank you to everyone for your kindness".*
  > Unpaid carer

  The mapping survey undertaken as part of the evaluation found that the Carers Active campaign had been positively received by local authorities. An employee of Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council commented "*This is providing an additional opportunity for carers to become more active"*, a Health Improvement Specialist at Wakefield Council commented that the Council had promoted Carers Active April, a Commissioner at Gloucestershire County Council commented that the campaign had helped *"Raise awareness and give a focus"*, and a Commissioning Officer at Central Bedfordshire Council commented that the campaign has influenced the development of their strategy.

[17] https://moderngov.rotherham.gov.uk/mgAi.aspx?ID=95850

[18] https://hscp.south-ayrshire.gov.uk/media/10702/7-Adult-Carers-Strategy-2019-2024/pdf/7._Adult_Carers_Strategy_2019_-_2024.pdf?m=1701261025197

- **NHS Trusts and Integrated Care Boards.** There is good evidence of the campaign engaging staff from NHS Trusts and Integrated Care Boards (ICB). Many Trust and ICB social media accounts promoted the campaign and its key messages, and staff from NHS Trusts and ICBs attended the Carers Active 'Active Medicine' workshop and Carers Active promotional webinar, as well as completed the most recent mapping survey. Staff roles included occupational therapists, physiotherapists, carers leads for specific Trusts, GPs, nursing staff and commissioning officers.

  There is additional promotion of healthy lifestyles for carers from the campaign.
  Joint Carers Programme Manager, NHS Surrey Heartlands ICB

  Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust's Carers at Work Network ran a 'step challenge' for Carers Active April 2024, with over 25 teams from across the Trust signing up[19]. One participant commented:

  ''I really was walking everywhere in my spare time and on lunch breaks. I came third out of our team so it was fun while it lasted. A lot of the team enjoyed it and I've added this walking habit to my arsenal."
  Carers at Work Network participant

- **Elected officials.** In 2024, Carers UK were successful in gaining the support of MPs from across different political parties, with MPs tweeting their support for Carers Active April. In 2022, the Minister of State for Social Care recorded a video of support promoting the campaign and the importance of increasing unpaid carers' physical activity levels.

Figure 20: Compilation of tweets from MPs stating their support for Carers Active April

[19] https://www.cnwl.nhs.uk/news/carers-active-april-making-every-step-count

- **Sport England**. Alongside funding the campaign (through National Lottery funding), Sport England has promoted Carers Active April, the best practice guide, State of Caring survey results, and Sport England developed briefings based on campaign materials for their staff.

- **Social prescribers.** The National Academy for Social Prescribing supported the Carers Active campaign by promoting the best practice guide amongst its network of social prescribers and promoted activities taking place during Carers Active April.

6.1.4 Voluntary sector organisations

Finally, the campaign has engaged a range of voluntary sector organisations that deliver a broad range of services (including for carers), are voluntary sector infrastructure bodies, or delivery physical activity opportunities. Examples include Dance Free Community Interest Company, which believes that the campaign *"raises the profile of the importance of activities for carers",* Telford and Wrekin CVS recognises that the campaign raises *"Awareness and importance of supporting carers".* Other organisations that have engaged with the campaign and/or have responded by offering carer-specific physical activity opportunities include local AgeUK and Mind charities, dementia support organisations, Dementia UK, organisations that work with specific community groups (e.g. Chinese Community Wellbeing Society), learning disability support organisations (e.g. local Mencap charities), and a range of small and volunteer-run services.

6.1.5 Carers being supported to be more active

It is likely that the Carers Active campaign has encouraged the development of new opportunities for carers to increase their physical activity levels that are not able to be directly attributed to the campaign through the evaluation. However, activities that were hosted as part of Carers Active April 2024 give an indication of the opportunities that are either offered specially for Carers Active April, or increase in visibility to carers through the campaign. A record number of activities and events were organised for Carers Active April 2024. Successful events and initiatives include 20 carers signing up to the reduced membership offer at Better (South Buckinghamshire and Hillingdon), and 12 carers taking part in the Sunderland Carers Centre 'Carers on the Move' walk.

> *This is my first time and won't be my last. It's been lovely to join the group and be outside in the fresh air, getting exercise and learning about our local surroundings.*
> Unpaid carer on taking part in the 'Carers on the Move' walk

A selection of the activities offered as part of Carers Active April 2024 are listed in Table 4 below.

Activity description	Organisation(s)
• Half-price gym membership for Carers UK members across all Better leisure sites • Welcome and taster days for unpaid carers • Free swimming, tennis, aqua aerobics, Zumba, social sports	Better (GLL), national sites and Better Islington, Kensington and Chelsea, Hammersmith and Fulham, and Ealing, St Austell (Cornwall) and Vale of White Horse (Oxfordshire)

Activity description	Organisation(s)
• Concessionary rate on membership for carers, free day passes when attending with the person being cared for, community café sessions, and free access to the Everyone on Demand home workout app. • Free or reduced- rate walking netball, badminton, table tennis, swimming and aqua classes, bowls, seated exercise classes.	Everyone Active sites (nationally), with particular activities at Everyone Active Sunderland and West Midlands
• Free and reduced-rate gum memberships and access to classes	Active Nation, Magna Vitae, and Geoff Moulder leisure centres, Lincolnshire
• Over 60 walks across Lincolnshire and Newark, including dementia-friendly and visually impaired wellbeing walks.	Lincolnshire Co-op Wellbeing Walks
• Free dance sessions for carers, using silent disco headsets in natural locations	Dance Free CIC Lincolnshire
• A range of online and in-person free or subsidised physical activity sessions, often delivered in partnership with physical activity providers. • Sessions for young carers, such as Enfield Carers' Kindness Club sessions, featuring yoga and a chance to make new friends with other young carers, and Warrington Carers Hub Boxing sessions for young carers.	Gloucestershire Carers Hub, Carers Support Centre Bristol, Carers Link, East Dunbartonshire, Enfield Carers Centre, Derbyshire Carers, Swindon Carers Centre, Warrington Carers Hub (Young Carers), Carers Bedfordshire, Carers Northumberland, Signpost Stockport for Carers, Redbridge Carers Support Service, Worcester Association of Carers,Carers Link Lancashire, Carers Leeds

Table 4: Activities undertaken by external organisations that link to the Carers Active campaign.

Figures 21 and 22 compare responses from the 2023 and 2024 mapping survey of physical activity opportunities for carers. While the same respondents did not complete both surveys, we can see a small shift towards more organisations seeing physical activity opportunities for carers as a priority, and a perception that organisations are more aware of the importance of unpaid carers' physical activity needs. When viewed alongside the qualitative data gathered from organisations that have engaged with the campaign and its resources, we can conclude that the campaign has had a positive effect on the prioritisation of unpaid carers' physical activity needs, both within individual organisations and more widely.

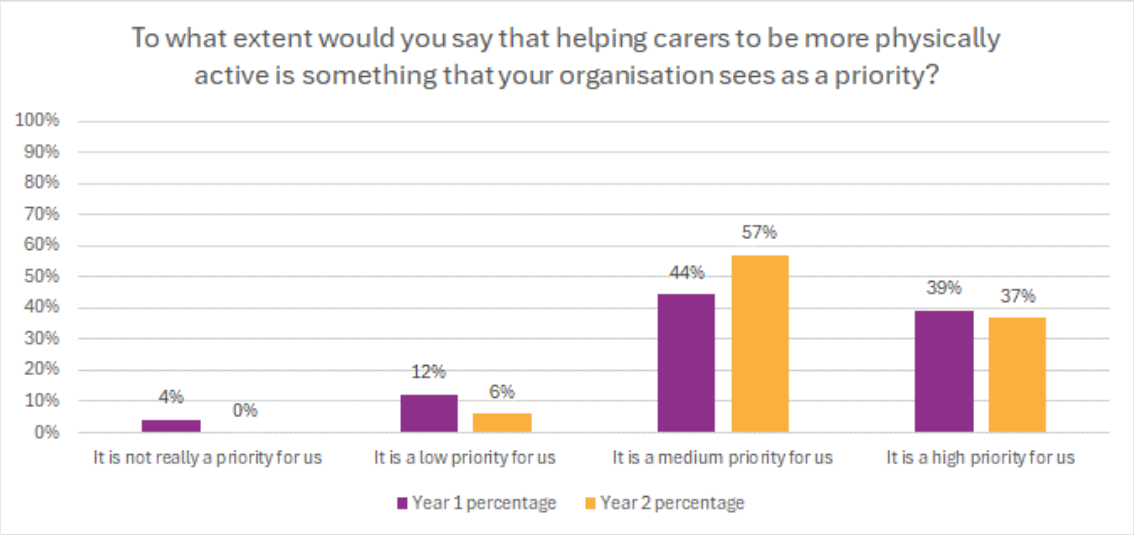


Figure 21: Chart comparing the 2023 and 2024 mapping survey responses for the question "To what extent would you say that helping carers to be more physically active is something that your organisation sees as a priority?"

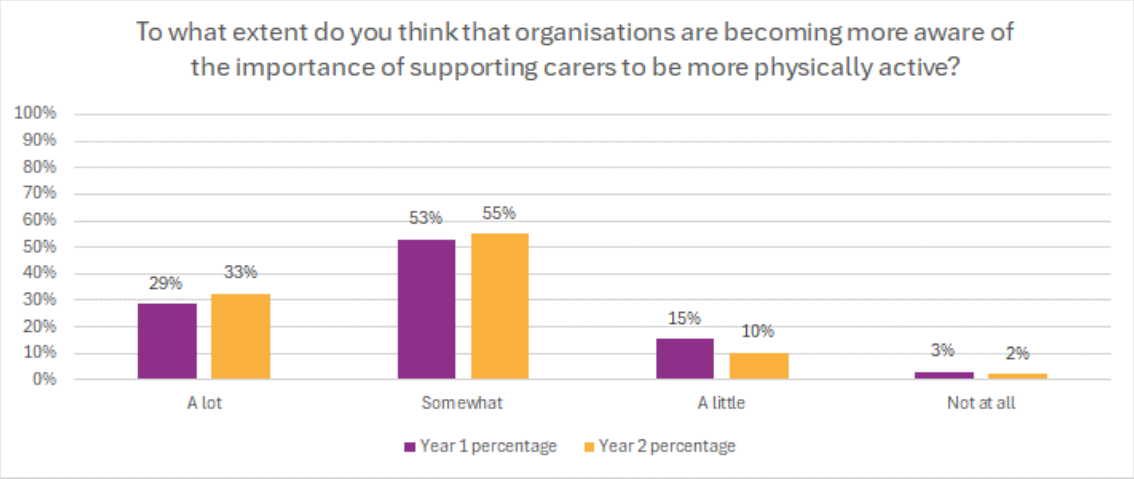


Figure 22: Chart comparing the 2023 and 2024 mapping survey responses for the question "To what extent do you think that organisations are becoming more aware of the importance of supporting carers to be more physically active?"

6.1.6 The challenge of engaging organisations and raising awareness of the Carers Active campaign and carer-specific needs

The campaign has been successful at engaging a wide range of stakeholders from across the sport and physical activity sector. Throughout the evaluation, we have gathered evidence on the challenges and barriers to engaging organisations and encouraging them support carers to increase their physical activity levels:

- The campaign's Project Manager has developed significant relationships with a wide range of stakeholders over the past three years. However, the development of strategically significant relationships takes time and perseverance, therefore the relatively short delivery time for the campaign will have meant that some strategic relationships were not able to realised or come to fruition in the lifespan of the campaign.
- Carers are a cross-cutting demographic; whilst identifiable as a single group of people who provide unpaid carer, many unpaid carers will also be supported through initiatives aimed at people with disabilities, for people with low incomes or who are unemployed,

or for people who are retired or elderly. Therefore, carers may be benefitting from other initiatives that target these groups of people, and it can be challenging for providers of physical activity opportunities (including sport and leisure providers) to focus on carers as a specific group alongside existing targeted initiatives.

- Across all providers and organisations responsible for supporting carers to increase their physical activity levels funding is a significant challenge. Responses to this year's mapping survey of physical activity opportunities revealed that there is little funding available which can specifically be put towards providing physical activities for carers (and supporting them to overcome challenges relating to capacity and motivation. Where funding exists, it is often short-term and doesn't adequately cover the cost of staffing in a meaningful way.
- Providers may have delivered physical activity opportunities for carers before and, for various reasons, found that there was little uptake from carers. They are therefore reluctant to commit resources to providing further opportunities.

6.2 Partnerships and collaborations

This section assesses the evidence for the campaign having delivered the following intended outcome: *New partnerships and collaborations are developed that lead to more opportunities for carers to be more active, and increasing levels of take up among those carers least likely to be active*

The interim report presented findings that the campaign has proved an important catalyst for initiating or developing cross-sector partnerships or partnerships between carers groups, and that the fact that it was a national campaign gave carer support organisation's communication with partners greater weighting. The interim report also presented evidence that new partnerships and collaborations are being formed, which increase levels of take up among carers.

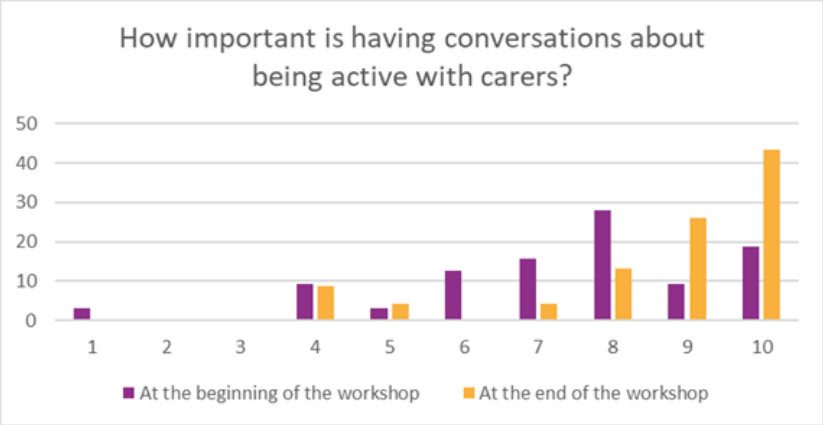
Evidence gathered in the final year of the evaluation confirms the findings presented in the interim report. Findings relating to partnerships and collaborations can be split into partnerships developed with Carers UK, and partnerships and collaborations that have been developed locally, but where the campaign has played a significant role as a galvanising force.

6.2.1 Opportunities to collaborate with Carers UK and signpost to the Carers Active campaign

The wide range of stakeholders engaged in the campaign (described in section 6.1) is the product of the work of the Carers UK team and the Carers Active Project Manager in building strategic and far-reaching relationships with organisations and individuals. We find good evidence that the campaign has led to new partnerships being developed between Carers UK and other organisations. In addition to the work described in section 6.1 (such as partnerships being developed with football and cricket club community organisations), notable examples include:

- **Better / GLL.** Over the duration of the campaign, Better staff and the Carers Active Project Manager have fostered a closer working relationship, leading to more of Better's sites being engaged with and delivering activities in support of the campaign, and to a Better site sharing good practice with colleagues at the Carers Active promotional webinar.

- **We Are Undefeatable**. We Are Undefeatable is a cross-organisation movement supporting people with long term health conditions to increase their physical activity levels. The shared aims and similar target groups of both We Are Undefeatable and the Carers Active Campaign promoted collaboration regarding the development of resources, joint promotion of case studies and campaign resources, and shared communications during week 1 of Carers Active April, which looked at moving well with a long-term disability. A We Are Undefeatable staff member also sits on the Carers Active Steering Group.
- **Leap, an Active Partnership in Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes**. Leap and Carers Active jointly ran an online workshop titled " Active Medicine workshop: supporting carers to become more active". The workshop was attended by 43 people from across all sectors. A poll was held before and after the workshop, asking attendees whether they felt that discussing physical activity with carers was important, and if they felt confident to do so. Figures 23 and 24 show that the workshop increased understanding of the importance of discussing physical activity levels with carers, and an increase in the confidence of attendees to do so.



Figures 23 and 24: Results of polls asked before and after the active medicine workshop. (Before n=32, after n=23)

6.2.2 Carers Active as a galvanising force for local campaigns and opportunities to be developed

Data gathered in the final year of the evaluation confirms the findings presented in the interim report that the Carers Active campaign is important in joining up local action amongst carers groups, as well giving carers groups an opportunity to market existing resources which they have in place. In this sense, the campaign acts as a vehicle for encouraging wider utilisation of resources by carers. In addition, the existence of a national campaign is important for giving weight and legitimacy to local efforts to increase physical activity uptake by unpaid carers.

In particular, we find that Carers Active April is an important catalyst for establishing new partnerships that seek to address inactivity amongst unpaid carers. The existence of a time-bound, well publicised and evidence-backed aspect of the campaign was important for giving purpose and energy to new partnerships.

> *Carers Active April is obviously an opportunity for us to try some things that are new, so we've tied in with Simply Cycling, so we're gonna go and use their adaptive bikes and carers can bring the people they're caring for with them. We also tie in with Mind, they work with a local supplier who does things like dance sessions, they've done yoga, but because they're one of our partners in the Carers Hub in Stockport, they lead some of the things like that for us. And we also tie people in with Stockport County who run sessions just for the community. So they're not carers specific sessions, but they are things like walking football, where again, people can just sort of tie in with that.*
> Signpost Stockport for Carers

A notable example of partnership working which used Carers Active as a galvanising force is that of a partnership in Lincolnshire which worked to support unpaid carers to increase their physical activity levels. Lincolnshire is a large, rural and coastal county in the East Midlands. There are an estimated 70,000 unpaid carers in the county, with this number likely to increase due to the ageing population of the county. Organisations across the county are working together to reduce health inequalities and support carers to increase their physical activity levels:

- **Lincolnshire County Council's** Public Health team regard unpaid carers as a priority engagement group for preventing and addressing health inequalities. The Council has a longstanding history of co-producing carer strategies in consultation with unpaid carers, the issue has good executive member support amongst Councillors and senior leaders, and there is a dedicated carers' budget within the Public Health team.

- **One You Lincolnshire** is the integrated healthy lifestyle service in Lincolnshire, commissioned by Lincolnshire County Council to provide behaviour change programmes to help residents improve their overall health. One You Lincolnshire's service specification states that unpaid carers are a priority group, and unpaid carers are referred to One You Lincolnshire by Carers First, and are able to self-refer to access One You Lincolnshire's offer. One You Lincolnshire works closely with Active Lincolnshire to align and adapt its offer.

- **Carers First (Lincolnshire)** is a carer support organisation, commissioned by Lincolnshire County Council to deliver statutory carers' assessments and personal health budgets. Carers First delivers a range of support for carers, including improving health and wellbeing through offering physical activities.

- **Active Lincolnshire** is an Active Partnership and is responsible for influencing and connecting physical activity providers. It advocates for the needs of carers and works with the sport and physical activity sector to consider how carers' needs may be addressed.

Key partnership activities and the role of the Carers Active campaign

- **Putting unpaid carers' needs on the agenda**
  Lincolnshire County Council have been key in fostering inter-agency working and making sure that unpaid carers' needs are addressed. Alongside designating carers as a priority group in One You Lincolnshire's service specification, the council strongly encourages and facilitates partnership working between service providers, such as Carers First and One You Lincolnshire. It maintains a list of key carer support partners for service providers to engage with. A Public Health officer facilitates regular cross-sector meetings to help create shared responsibility and ownership of the goals, vision and approach to address carers' needs in Lincolnshire. Active Lincolnshire holds regular meetings with sport and leisure providers to share good practice and support providers to address the needs of unpaid carers.

- **Carers Active is a galvanising force for change and cross-sector working**
  Carers Active has proved important for not only providing physical activity resources for providers to signpost carers to, but as a backdrop against which to raise the profile of unpaid carers' physical needs and gain momentum for cross-sector working. In 2023 and 2024 Active Lincolnshire have been hosting Carers Active April planning meetings, bringing together sport and physical activity providers, carer support organisations, and other agencies and organisations to help coordinate and plan activities for Carers Active April and beyond. The meetings have led to the development of new relationships, a greater understanding of unpaid carers physical activity needs, and sharing of learning regarding engaging carers in their services. Carers Active April has given an important focus, a set timeframe for action, and an overarching message and brand for organisations to get behind.

> *There's an appetite for cross sector partnership, and greater cross sector knowledge about each other. And I think where [Carers Active] helps, is by giving the language and the framing for the development of these kinds of relationships and understanding of how you take it forwards*
>
> *Programme Manager, Public Health, Lincolnshire County Council*

- **Carers' physical activity needs are made visible and addressed**
  The emphasis placed on carers' needs by the Local Authority and other agencies, and the galvanising force of the Carers Active campaign, has increased the visibility of carers' needs and led to a wide range of physical activity opportunities being offered for carers, both throughout April and across the year. An overview of some of the activities

offered for the 2024 Carers Active April campaign in Lincolnshire can be found here. Across the year, carer specific activities are highlighted on Active Lincolnshire's 'Activity Finder' platform.

For Carers Active April 2023 (and repeated in 2024), One You Lincolnshire worked in partnership with Carers First to offer a four-week physical activity challenge for carers, encouraging them to do 21.4 minutes of physical activity and signposting them to One You's 'Gloji Gym', local health walks, Lets Move Activity finder, and Carers Active videos. By developing a data sharing agreement, One You Lincolnshire contacted 5000 unpaid carers, with 233 carers signing up to the challenge. Carers completed two 'check-in forms', with 16 unpaid carers achieving 150 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity per week, who had previously been inactive.

6.3 Developing resources and tools, and sharing learning

This section assesses the evidence for the campaign having delivered the following intended outcomes:

- *Resources and toolkits are developed and used by a range of organisations and professionals to support carers to be more active*
- *The project helps to identify and share evidence and best practice in relation to supporting carers to be more physically active ('what works')*

Through focus groups and engagement with organisations that are aware of the campaign, we have good evidence that the stakeholder groups listed in section 6.1 make use of the campaign branding and materials in promoting the Carers Active Hub, online activity sessions and pre-recorded exercise videos. Organisations receive positive feedback from carers about the accessibility and quality of the online resources and activity sessions, and therefore they feel that they are able to offer carers physical activity opportunities that they may not be able to offer themselves.

> *We would signpost people to have a look at [the Hub] because obviously, there's so many online videos and they're really accessible. So for somebody who was short of time, short of money, can't leave their cared for, then they're excellent. When we're talking to people, and if they say they want to come to our groups and events, but they haven't got the half an hour it's gonna take for them to travel to get to the group and event then we know we can signpost them to Carers Active to have a look on there to see what's available.*
> Carers First

> *Great to have a comprehensive online resource to share with carers*
> Care for the Carers

> *It is a resource that we can signpost people to for info.*
> Cloverleaf Advocacy

I mean, the content that's been created on the YouTube tube platforms was really impressive, really polished and professional content. So again, it's just good to be good to be able to offer as much support as we possibly can and signpost to different areas.
One You Lincolnshire

We know from the 2023 and 2024 mapping surveys (Figure 25) that guidance on the barriers carers may face in relation to accessing physical activity opportunities and advice on engaging with carers to find out what activities would be useful for them is sought after by professional's that deliver sport and physical activity or support carers.

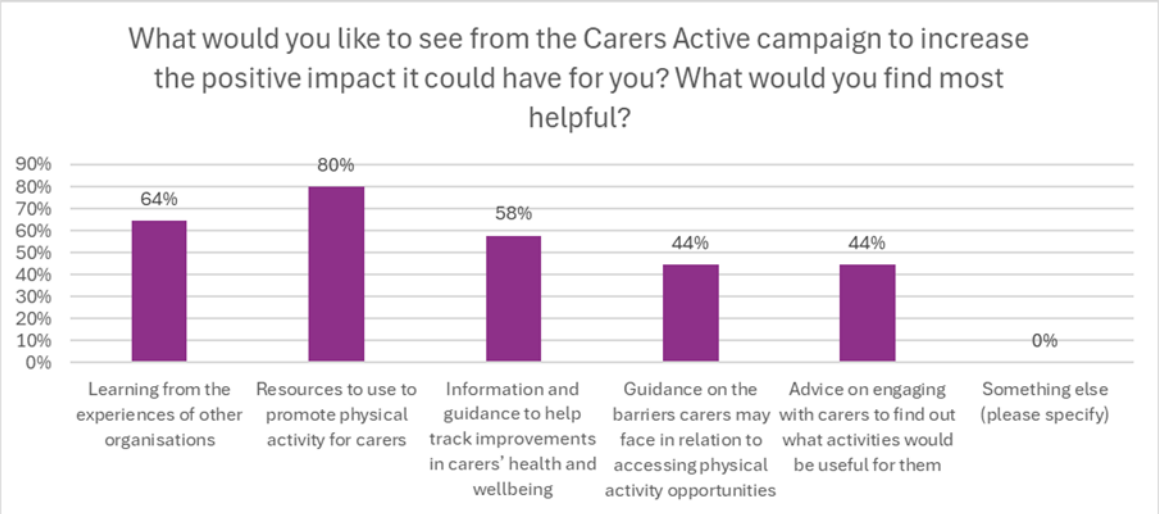


Figure 25: Chart from the 2024 mapping survey, showing the percentage of respondents that would value different resources from the Carers Active campaign

In December 2023, the Carers Active campaign launched the Best Practice Guide, a document featuring practical examples and guidance to support physical activity and carer support professionals to deliver physical activity opportunities for carers. The best practice guide was widely shared across professional networks and introduced in many of the activities stated in section 4.2. We have limited data on the extent to which the best practice guide has informed practice as it has only recently been released and will require further promotion and time to impact organisational practices. However, we have good evidence that the best practice guide was warmly welcomed by professionals and was viewed as being "professional", "informative" and "inspiring". Feedback on the Best Practice Guide included:

It's great and we're so pleased to be included, thank you
n:compass Towards a Brighter Future

The guide looks amazing.
Carers' Support Service North Lincolnshire

I read it through and it's very inspiring.
Blackburn with Darwen Carers Service

The document is really informative, well done
NHS England - East of England

The publication looks great
Sheffield Young Carers Project

I've just seen the launch of this Good Practice Guide land in my inbox. It's fantastic!! I'll get It shared across our LinkedIn channel this week.
We Are Undefeatable

It allows the sharing of information to focus on activities that have been proven popular and how these were managed. It also gives access to feedback directly from participating carers so that they can shape local offers as stakeholders. Apart from looking to introduce a Zumba session we are still offering the same types of activities and Carers Active may help us rethink how we do things.
Enfield Carers Centre

I've not used it, but just wanted to say it looks like an absolutely brilliant resource, just so thanks for introducing me to it today. And yeah, that the section on Swindon, and the examples of things that have already been done just looks really, really helpful. I thought I already had a few ideas, but I've just scribbled loads of things down It's great to have the focus on volunteering and the idea of doing things that are sort of cost effective for your local organisations as well. So just want to say it looks great.
Carers of East Lothian

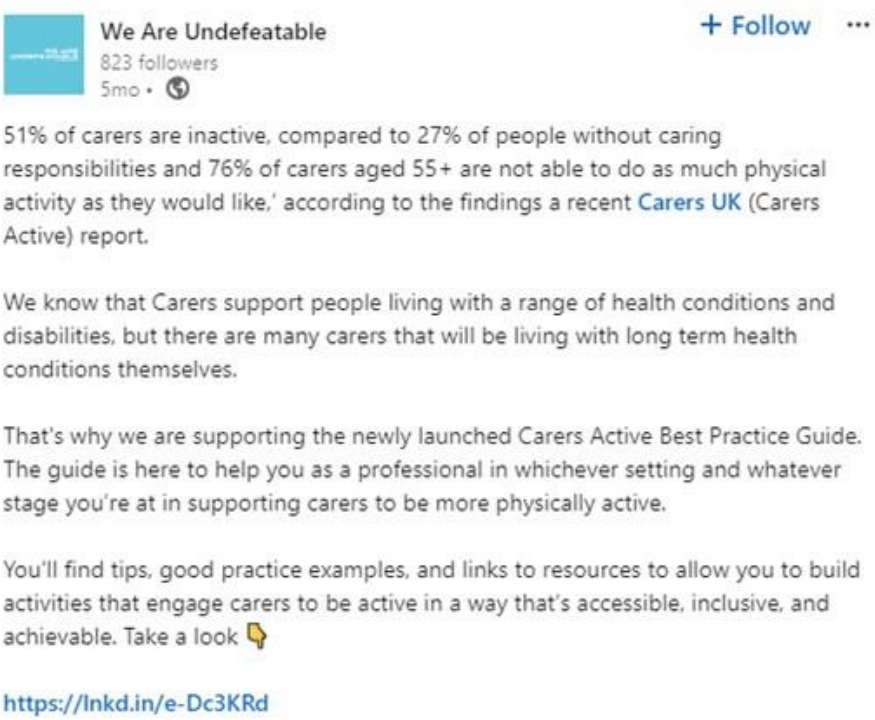


Figure 26: We Are Undefeatable campaign promoting the Best Practice Guide

As well as the Best Practice Guide, physical activity providers and carer support groups presented case studies at the Carers Active Webinar demonstrating how they have supported carers to increase their physical activity levels, and recommendations for other groups looking to do the same.

In addition, focus groups conducted as part of the evaluation began with an overview of the Best Practice Guide and the presentation of a featured case study that is of relevance to the focus group attendees. Case studies have been presented in the Carers Active Professionals' Newsletter, and through the Project Manager meeting with individual organisations.

7 Summary of key findings

Based on the findings presented in the interim evaluation report, and in this final report, we assess the strength of evidence for each of the intended outcomes of the campaign.

- '**Strong evidence'** indicates that we have enough evidence to be confident that the campaign has delivered this outcome
- **'Promising evidence'** indicates that we have enough evidence to be confident that this outcome has been delivered, but that we lack evidence on the extent or depth of impact.
- **'Limited evidence'** indicates that there is little evidence of this outcome having taken place. Please note, this is not to say that the outcome has not taken place, but that the evidence gathered in this evaluation does not indicate fulfilment of the outcome.

7.1 Physical activity levels among unpaid carers

In summary, the campaign has delivered significant a impact upon physical activity levels among unpaid carers. The campaign has opened up new opportunities for carers to take part in physical activity by broadening perceptions of physical activity by encouraging carers to make use of every-day opportunities and providing non-standard, accessible, and fun exercise opportunities (e.g. Daytime Disco online session). Carers better recognise the importance of their own physical health, and report an improvement in their physical and mental wellbeing through sustained engagement with the campaign and physical activity opportunities provided by Carers UK and partner organisations (e.g. leisure providers or local carer support organisations).

Outcomes relating to physical activity levels among unpaid carers	Level of evidence (Strong evidence / promising evidence / limited evidence)
The project effectively engages with a wide range of carers to address their specific challenges about being more physically active	**Strong evidence.** The campaign engages a significant number and diverse range of unpaid carers, and is built on good evidence and an understanding of the carers' physical activity needs and support required.
Carers are more likely to recognise the value and importance of physical activity for their own health and wellbeing	**Strong evidence**. Carers understand why increased physical activity is important for them, and report that the campaign is a helpful reminder that they need to meet their own needs as well as those they care for.
Carers feel more able in themselves to access opportunities that enable them to be physically active	**Strong evidence**. Carers reported an increase in fitness following sustained engagement with the campaign and physical activities, leading to confidence to seek further physical activity opportunities. The 2023 Carers UK State of Caring survey reports a small increase in the percentage of carers that are physically active between 2022 and 2023.
Carers have more opportunities to participate in physical activity	**Strong evidence**. Carers have taken up opportunities to engage in online and offline physical activities, and the campaign has led to the development of new physical activity opportunities by a wide range of stakeholders.

Outcomes relating to physical activity levels among unpaid carers	Level of evidence (Strong evidence / promising evidence / limited evidence)
Carers are more motivated to be physically active	**Strong evidence**. Some carers face a wide range of challenges in their lives, but the ongoing presence of the campaign provides the motivation to exercise when they are able to and to find ways to embed physical activity in their routines.
Carers are supported to incorporate regular physical activity in their day-to-day routines	**Promising evidence.** The campaign has supported carers to reassess their perception of physical activity and to incorporate it into their lives, however, we lack stronger evidence on the extent to which this is observed across the population of carers that were engaged in the campaign.

Table 5: Extent to which intended campaign outcomes relating physical activity levels among unpaid carers have been met

7.2 Carers' wellbeing and social connectedness

In summary, the campaign has been successful at increasing the physical and mental wellbeing of carers. Specifically, through increased physical activity levels and delivering a campaign that has addressed many of the barriers that unpaid carers face. Carers that engaged in the campaign reported an increase in life satisfaction, happiness, a sense of belonging, and emotional capacity and resilience. We find that the campaign has improved carers' sense of isolation, however, the largely online nature of the campaign means that we have little evidence of the campaign delivering deep and longstanding social connections for carers. In addition, we have some evidence that the Carers Active campaign has increased the prominence of carers' physical activity needs amongst Carer UK's work and carer support offer.

Outcomes relating to carers' wellbeing and social connectedness	Level of evidence
Carers have improved personal wellbeing as a result of being more active, including: - Improved life satisfaction - Improved feelings of worth - Increased happiness - Decreased anxiety	**Promising evidence**. The campaign contributes to improved life satisfaction and sense of self-worth through carers being able to find some "me time" where they are not defined by their caring role. Carers commented that the campaign has improved their quality of life overall, as well as their physical and mental wellbeing, and that increasing their physical activity levels and being part of the campaign makes them feel more positive, lifts their mood, alongside a noticeable reduction in anxiety and an increase in emotional capacity, resilience, and optimism. In addition, we find that undertaking carer specific (and online) activity sessions reduces carer anxiety around complex timings and care-giving commitments.
Carers feel less isolated and have reduced levels of loneliness	**Promising evidence.** Carers feel that they are 'part of something bigger' when they engage with the campaign. It gives them motivation and a sense of being heard and belonging. They value being in the presence of people who understand the challenges they may face as carers. However, we lack evidence on the extent to which the campaign has delivered deep and longstanding social connections for carers.

Outcomes relating to carers' wellbeing and social connectedness	Level of evidence
Carers have better quality and quantity of social connections through physical activity	**Limited evidence**. We have little evidence of the campaign delivering deep and longstanding social connections for carers. Whilst we have some evidence of local physical activity opportunities leading to the development of friendships, we have little evidence of the extent to which this is widespread across the campaign's direct activities, and activities delivered as part of the campaign (such as those delivered during Carers Active April).
There is an increasing level of buy-in across Carers UK in relation to supporting carers' physical activity and it is increasingly seen as a key part of the charity's support offer for carers' wellbeing.	**Promising evidence**. Physical activity and the importance of it for carers' overall health and wellbeing is recognised by Carers UK staff, many of whom have supported the campaign directly or have heard updates and internal presentations given by the Project Manger on the progress and impact of the campaign. Since the campaign began, physical activity has been specifically included in the State of Caring Survey as its own section and has led Carers UK to produce ongoing data and insight on the subject. The charity will strive to continue being a leader and influencer around carers and physical activity, however this will be determined by the amount of financial resource available to dedicate to additional campaign activity.

Table 6: Extent to which intended campaign outcomes relating to carers' wellbeing and social connectedness have been met

7.3 System level change

In summary, the campaign has been successful at improving the knowledge and practice of key system actors that are in a position to increase unpaid carers' physical activity levels. The campaign has been highly successful at raising awareness of the importance of recognising unpaid carers as a distinct user group for prioritisation, the barriers that carers face and ways of overcoming them, and at fostering the development of successful partnerships between organisations, leading to increased physical activity opportunities for carers.

Outcomes relating to system level change	Level of evidence
There is greater awareness among those working in the sport and leisure, and health and care sectors, about the importance of physical activity for carers and how to support them to be more active	**Strong evidence**. We have good evidence that the campaign has led to an increase in awareness among staff and volunteers from a wide range of organisations that directly or indirectly (e.g. through commissioning processes) are able to support carers to increase their physical activity levels. The campaign has engaged leisure and healthy lifestyle providers, carer support organisations, health and social care and commissioning organisations, and intermediary bodies such as Active Partnerships. We have evidence that the importance of carers' physical activity needs and ways to support them has been elevated in status amongst system actors.

Outcomes relating to system level change	Level of evidence
The project helps to identify and share evidence and best practice in relation to supporting carers to be more physically active ('what works')	**Promising evidence.** We have evidence that the campaign has undertaken activities (e.g. webinars and engagement events) to identify and share best practice in relation to 'what works' when supporting carers. However, the work undertaken to progress this aim is limited in scope due to the length of the campaign.
Resources and toolkits are developed and used by a range of organisations and professionals to support carers to be more active	**Promising evidence.** We have evidence that the resources and toolkits (notably the best practice guide, and briefings produced by organisations such as Sport England) produced through the campaign have been well-received by organisations and professionals. We have limited evidence on the extent to which the resources and toolkits have led to an increase in accessible physical activity opportunities for carers.
New partnerships and collaborations are developed that lead to more opportunities for carers to be more active, and increasing levels of take up among those carers least likely to be active	**Strong evidence**. We have strong evidence that the campaign has been instrumental in the development of new partnerships and collaborations, both between Carers UK and other organisations, and between organisations that have used the Carers Active campaign as a central point of focus for partnership working. We have observed partnerships which extend physical activity opportunities to minority groups or with organisations that typically do not offer carer-specific activities.

Table 7: Extent to which intended campaign outcomes relating to system level change have been met

Overall, it is our conclusion that the campaign has been successful at increasing the physical activity levels of unpaid carers and at improving the overall wellbeing of unpaid carers that engaged with the campaign. It is clear that significant work has been undertaken which has led to the development of new opportunities for unpaid carers, a greater recognition among key system actors of the importance of unpaid carers' physical activity needs, and the development of fruitful partnerships between organisations.

It is our assessment that the campaign has been successful, given the resources available for campaign delivery and the timeframe within which the campaign has been delivered. Should the campaign have continued for a longer duration of time or had a greater amount of resources committed to it, we believe that the outcomes regarding systems change would've been clearer and more observable. Many of the outcomes we have observed have manifested from the relationships established by the Carers Active Project Manager. Developing such relationships takes considerable time, as does developing a broad range of resources in different formats to share learning and best-practice suggestions.

8 Recommendations and implications for wider policy ambitions

Following the evaluation and engagement with carers, carer support organisations, physical activity and leisure providers, and health and social care organisations, we believe that there are some clear recommendations for organisations that are (or could be) concerned with increasing physical activity levels amongst unpaid carers.

For Carers UK

- Consider how best to continue offering regular online physical activity opportunities for carers, and / or the delivery of future dedicated physical activity campaigns (such as Carers Active April). Through the evaluation we found that online activity opportunities and the galvanising force of Carers Active April have led to impacts that would otherwise not take place, especially when partner organisations have sufficient lead-in time to plan for and engage with more targeted campaign activity.
- Consider how different campaign activities can be 'adopted' or embedded into other parts of Carers UK, such as the 'We Move More' action day, and in relation to future policy influencing at a national level. This could include, for example, ongoing engagement with Sport England to identify place-based opportunities that align with Sport England's 'Uniting the Movement' strategy, and which might benefit from dedicated funding to test and learn from new innovations in reaching and supporting carers to be more active (building on the evidence and learning from this current campaign).
- Continue to provide advice regarding the actions organisations can take to support carers to increase their physical activity levels, with a focus on clear messaging around the practical support needed by carers, and suggested activities and individual case stories.
- Continue to use existing cross-sector connections to facilitate fruitful partnerships. For example, connecting national leisure providers with local carer organisations to develop place-based partnerships.
- Consider ways to provide support, or to signpost to support, for local carers organisations to identify and pursue funding opportunities that will support the delivery of physical activity sessions for carers. Through engagement with a wide-range of organisations, we found that a lack of funding for physical activity opportunities for unpaid carers is one of the biggest barriers for organisations, with many carer support organisations funding opportunities themselves through existing funding streams.
- Consider ways to provide adaptable tools and resources which local carer support organisations and physical activity providers can use in their own marketing and promotion of 'carer-friendly' activities.

For commissioners and funders:

- Commissioning bodies should use their influence to position unpaid carers as a priority group for engagement and encourage and facilitate partnership working. We have observed this being delivered effectively in Barnet and Lincolnshire, where unpaid carers have been included in service specifications as a priority group for engagement and partnership, working across key commissioned services (healthy lifestyles, physical activity providers and carer support organisations).
- For local authorities, support for carers at the senior and executive levels is important, alongside ringfenced carer support budgets and specific strategic approaches. Positioning carers' needs as a public health concern is important for being able to address and prevent broader health inequalities, as many unpaid carers suffer from poor health themselves.

- Consider ways that existing funding streams can be opened up to support the provision of long term physical activity opportunities for carers, to be delivered by both existing physical activity providers and carer support organisations. In addition, consider how direct payments can be used to pay for physical activity opportunities (such as exercise classes or gym memberships).
- Consider how commissioned services can be co-produced with carers to ensure that the support they receive is in line with their needs, and goes beyond statutory service provision.

> *With funding from local authorities being scrutinised, priority is often given to their statutory requirements, such as Carer Assessments. In our experience, carers would rather have regular access to activities than further assessments.*
> Carer support organisation

For Carer Support Organisations:

- Map out the key sport and leisure providers in their local area, and, through fostering relationships with 'friendly' actors such as Active Partnerships, develop ongoing partnerships with sport and leisure providers to advocate for unpaid carers' needs and develop mutually beneficial support offers.
- Co-produce activities with carers, as findings from our engagement with carers, carer support organisations and sport and leisure providers suggests that involving carers in the design and delivery of activities leads to greater engagement and impact.
- Focus on young carers as a distinct group to engage with and consider how the physical activity needs of young carers differ from those of adult carers.
- Use specific campaigns as a galvanising force. It is important for all partners to understand the distinct challenges faced by carers, and for partner organisations to feel ownership over approaches designed to address these challenges. However, creating time-bound initiatives that galvanise support and create shared responsibility (such as Carers Active April) are crucial for encouraging cross-sector buy-in.

For the Sport and Physical Activity sector:

- Consider how existing physical activity opportunities could be made 'carer-friendly', in addition to how new physical activity opportunities for carers could be developed.
- Consider how ethnicity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) strategies and approaches address the specific needs of unpaid carers, and whether carers are able to be identified as a unique group of service users through increased carer identification and engagement.
- Work to engage with local carer support organisations to develop mutually beneficial offerings that support the needs of unpaid carers.

Appendix A – Carers Active Campaign Theory of Change

Overarching Theory of Change – Carers Active Campaign

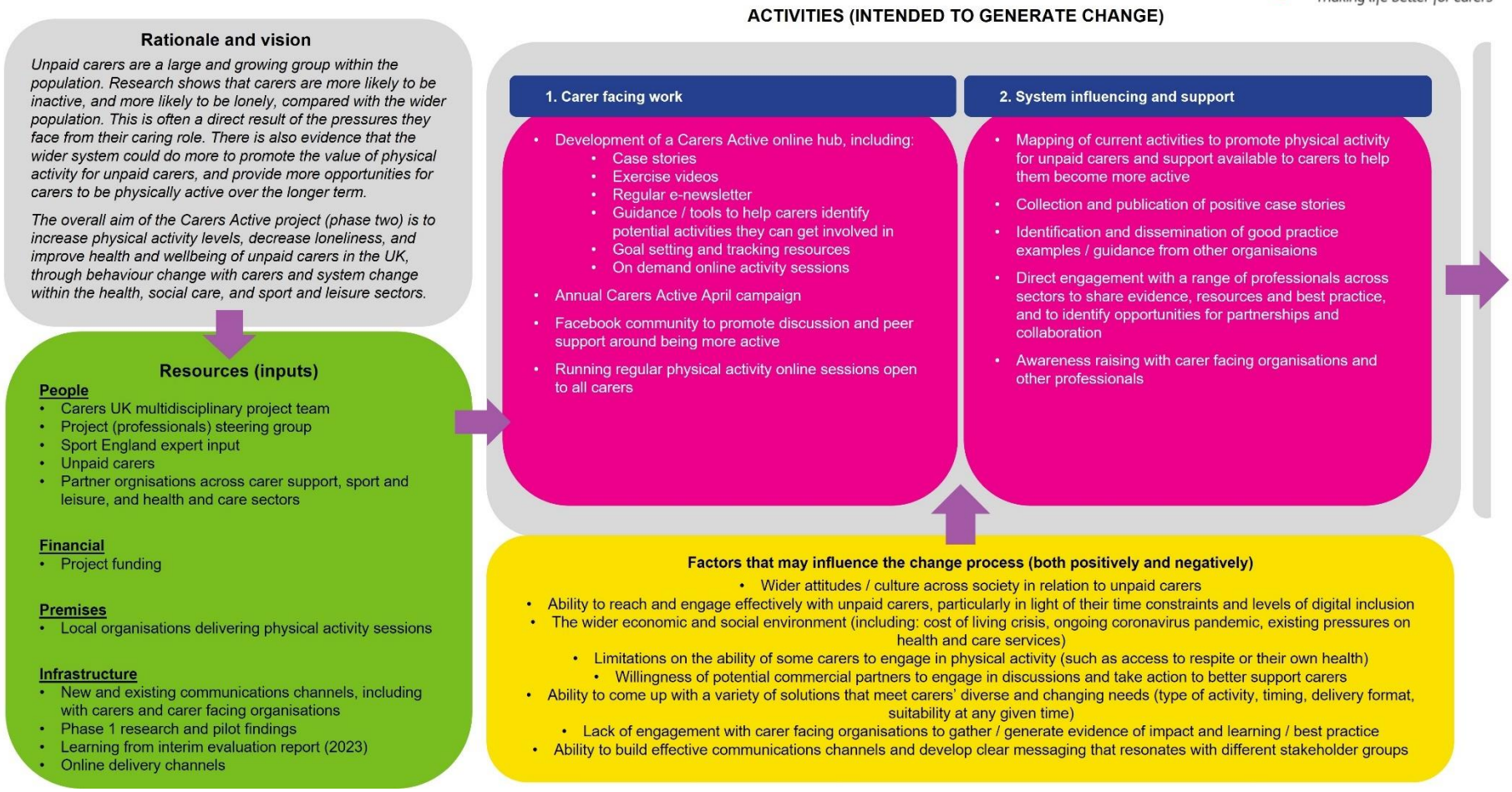


Figure 27a: Carers Active Theory of Change part 1 (see part 2 below)

Overarching Theory of Change – Carers Active Campaign

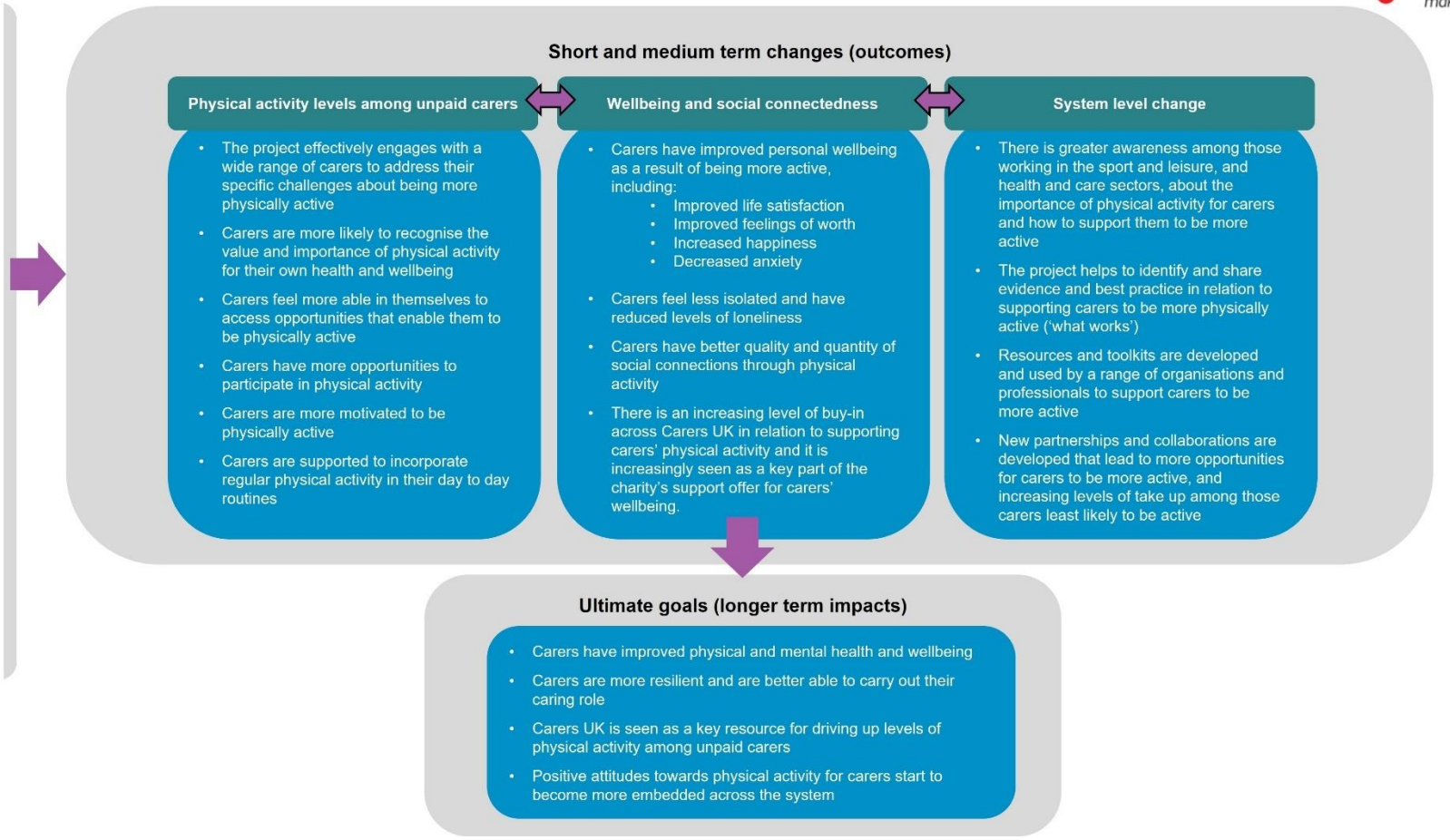


Figure 27b: Cares Active Theory of Change part 2

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