

# Midlothian

## *Carer survey 2017*

Summary report March 2018





# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background

VOCAL - The Voice of Carers Across Lothian - commissioned Scotinform to undertake its biennial survey of carers in Midlothian in November 2017.

A parallel survey was run at the same time with carers in Edinburgh; please see separate reports for the results of the Edinburgh Carers' Survey.

## 1.2 Research Objectives

The specific objectives of the research were:

- ▶ To obtain a profile of VOCAL carers;
- ▶ To assess satisfaction with services currently offered;
- ▶ To assess interest in other potential services and developments;
- ▶ To understand VOCAL's impact;
- ▶ To understand the impact of caring more broadly, in three areas:
  - ◆ Health and Wellbeing
  - ◆ Money and Work
  - ◆ Time away from Caring

The findings are to be used to inform VOCAL's strategic planning and to assist with communicating with stakeholders.

## 2. Response rate

- ▶ 2,391 surveys were distributed in Midlothian, with 313 returns received. This represents a response rate of 13%
- ▶ The response rate is slightly lower than in 2015 (14%), but the number of responses achieved is higher – 313 returns, compared with 180 in 2015.
- ▶ 57% of respondents replied to the paper format of the survey and 22% responded to the email.
- ▶ Increasing the use of electronic communications would improve the environmental and financial efficiency of the process, but must be carefully balanced against the characteristics of carers.

### 3. VOCAL satisfaction and impact

- ▶ VOCAL Midlothian has a highly satisfied cohort of carers.
- ▶ Nearly half of respondents have engaged with VOCAL in the past six months, and nearly 90% have engaged within the past year.
- ▶ Carers value the provision of services at a local level, with 94% of respondents saying that it was “very important” or “important” that they had access to VOCAL services locally.
- ▶ In Midlothian, carers particularly value the provision of information, signposting and emotional support/counselling.
- ▶ Satisfaction ratings are admirable across all measures, and particularly in terms of friendliness of staff. On every measure, nearly two-thirds of respondents rated VOCAL as “excellent”.
- ▶ Two thirds of carers say that the help they receive from VOCAL makes make a big difference to their ability to care.
- ▶ Respondents identify a range of positive impacts, focusing on health, the provision of information, financial assistance, time away from caring, and learning new skills.

*“Being a brand new carer, having such a comprehensive and easily accessed service calmed a lot of my fears.”*

### 4. Impact of caring on health and wellbeing

- ▶ 55% of carers in Midlothian reported that caring has had a negative impact on their health.
- ▶ Nearly a third of carers reported negative health impacts for each of the areas identified. The most frequent issues were concerns about contingency planning if respondents are unable to care, and insufficient sleep.
- ▶ This manifests itself in increased visits to the GP (31% of respondents) and experience of depression (45% of respondents).
- ▶ There are also social impacts as a result of caring: nearly half of carers feel isolated from family and friends.
- ▶ The sense of isolation and concern about contingency planning is underlined by the fact that only 58% of respondents felt that they had somebody to rely on for support.
- ▶ Carers of children and respondents who were not in employment or receiving a pension were particularly likely to identify a negative health impact as a result of caring.
- ▶ The open-ended comments made by carers underline the significant impact on carers’ health, often exacerbated by the stress of dealing with various support agencies.

*“I feel isolated from family and friends”*

## 5. Impact of caring on money and work

- ▶ 48% of respondents agreed that being a carer had made money and finances more difficult.
- ▶ There is tangible evidence of the financial and economic impact of caring: a third of carers are paying for care out of their own savings; a quarter have had to reduce their working hours and a fifth have had to give up work altogether. 11% have lost out on NI or pension contributions as a result.
- ▶ Respondents highlighted the long-term impact of giving up work, both on future career prospects and on pension entitlements.
- ▶ Carers of children and young adults (who have often been caring for a long time and who have had to reduce or give up work), and those not in employment or receiving a pension, were more likely to report negative financial impacts
- ▶ They were also more likely to say that they find it hard talking about these impacts. Funders and organisations working with carers must acknowledge the emotional impact of applying for financial support.
- ▶ 38% of respondents felt that they knew what financial support was available, with a third saying that they felt confident in applying for it and a similar proportion agreeing that it was sufficient. VOCAL should therefore continue to provide information to raise awareness, support carers in making applications, and lobby to ensure that the funding levels are fair.
- ▶ Paying for care homes is a key concern for carers of adults over the age of 75, who comprise approximately one-third of the Midlothian sample.
- ▶ There is some evidence (with the caveat of a very small sample size) that respondents who engage with VOCAL report smaller negative financial impacts than those who do not.

*“VOCAL helped with all the benefits we were entitled to.”*

## 6. Time away from caring

- ▶ Less than half of carers in Midlothian say that they have had time away from caring in the past year. More than a third say that they have never had time away at all.
- ▶ Time away from caring can have a positive impact on carers. 86% of those who have taken time away from caring say that it has made it easier for them to continue in their caring role.
- ▶ Barriers to effective time away include: the carer being able to relax; the preferences of the person being cared for; and the stress associated with planning and paying for a break.
- ▶ Carers of children and young adults aged 16-25 appear to experience the above barriers more frequently than carers of older people.
- ▶ The findings suggest that effective support for the carer and the person they care for is essential for beneficial time away.

*“Getting away helped me to recharge and come back with more energy.”*

## 7. Future development of services and support

- ▶ Existing users like what VOCAL is doing now, and want to see it continued.
- ▶ Interest in online services is not overwhelming. It primarily appeals to carers of working age and would need to be an enhancement of existing services, not a replacement.
- ▶ Some Midlothian users are reluctant to engage online and prefer face-to-face support.
- ▶ There is some evidence, however, that non-users would respond well to online support. This, with a focus on the provision of information, could be a means of engaging with new users.

## 8. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this report, Scotinform recommends that VOCAL Midlothian should:

- ▶ Communicate the excellent satisfaction ratings and feedback to staff, volunteers, funders and other stakeholders. VOCAL is an effective, authoritative voice.
- ▶ Recognise that long-term carers show slightly different characteristics and may require additional or different support.
- ▶ Consider the development of online services for some audiences, but as an additional service rather than to replace the current support mechanisms.
- ▶ Use the Mosaic profile (with caution, given its diversity) to inform marketing and communications strategies and to identify potential engagement targets.
- ▶ Communicate the enduring preference for personal and localised tailored support.
- ▶ Recognise the value of time away from caring whilst understanding that it is a complex and emotive issue and that the carer and the person being cared for will require support to implement it effectively.
- ▶ Consider developing additional support or guidance for carers of children, who appear to face increased barriers to securing effective time away from caring.
- ▶ Use the findings of the survey to demonstrate the financial and health impacts of caring, and to campaign for more support for carers.
- ▶ Communicate (with caution) the finding that carers who have not engaged with VOCAL appear to experience more negative benefits than carers who have done so. Consider further research with both groups to validate this initial finding.

*“Being listened to without being judged.  
I feel like a weight has been lifted.”*

# Appendix

## Methodology

In order to enable comparisons with previous surveys and reflect the characteristics of the likely audience the survey took the form of a self-completion questionnaire. The design of the questionnaire was undertaken by Scotinform and was informed by:

- ▶ The design of the previous survey, allowing for comparison where possible;
- ▶ A briefing meeting with VOCAL;
- ▶ Two consultation workshops, held in Edinburgh and Midlothian with a range of stakeholders, to test out the proposed content and terminology of the questionnaire design.

The workshops enabled Scotinform to refine the questionnaire in response to the feedback provided.

Different versions of the questionnaire were developed for Edinburgh and Midlothian, to reflect different service delivery and funding mechanisms. A paper-based and an electronic version of each questionnaire were produced and a prize draw incentive was offered in order to boost responses.

The questionnaire was mailed out to the VOCAL distribution database. A link to the electronic questionnaire was also shared on social media, which for the first time enabled VOCAL to capture the details of carers in Edinburgh and Midlothian who were not engaged with VOCAL.

Scotinform would like to thank VOCAL staff and volunteers for their help and support throughout the process.

## Carer characteristics

- ▶ Three-quarters of carers are female.
- ▶ Two-thirds of carers are of working age, with the balance mostly being aged over 65.
- ▶ Just over a quarter of carers are in paid employment, despite two-thirds of the sample being of working age.
- ▶ Caring often transcends local authority boundaries – carers of Midlothian residents lived across the Lothians, as well as in the Scottish Borders and Glasgow.
- ▶ The Mosaic Scotland profile of respondents is somewhat diverse, with three of the top four Types sharing some characteristics and the fourth being quite different. This reflects the diversity in the sample.
- ▶ 57% of Midlothian carers have been caring for more than 5 years.
- ▶ Long-term carers have a slightly different profile. They are more likely to be caring for a younger person and to be caring for more than one person.
- ▶ 38% of carers are looking after someone aged over 75.
- ▶ There are varying responses to using the internet to support caring, with 58% of respondents saying that they are confident in doing so. The Mosaic profile is diverse and a combination of email and postal communication is required.
- ▶ The profile is broadly similar to the sample in 2015, although the figures suggest that the number of young people being cared for may have increased.



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CARER POSITIVE  
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Midlothian



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