



# Lanarkshire Carers

## Caring Through Covid Fund Report

April 2021 | David McCord

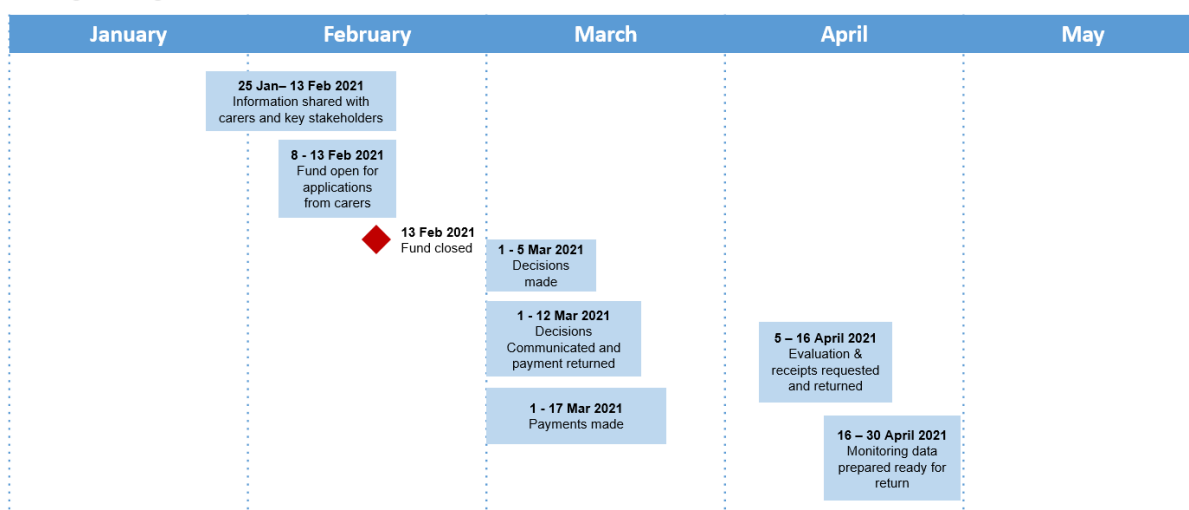


## Introduction

On 18 January 2021, the Scottish Government announced extra funding (£750,000 nationally) for local carer centres to increase support for unpaid carers of all ages, helping them to take a break from caring and access other much-needed help. This recognised some of the challenges faced by unpaid carers, with many regular sources of support having stopped or moved online due to the pandemic. It also comes in response to concerns about increasing pressure on carers; particularly while many traditional respite breaks are restricted or unavailable. The Scottish Government decided to distribute funding through Shared Care Scotland and their Time to Live delivery partners. This recognised the experience, expertise and processes already in place to manage this funding with the due diligence required within the restricted timescales.

On 20 January 2021, Lanarkshire Carer's accepted the offer of Lanarkshire's population equation (CPE) allocation of this new funding. Lanarkshire Carers announced on 29 January 2021 the newly established fund to assist carers who may be in need of support to take time out from their caring roles. This information and e-bulletin was widely shared with partners and stakeholders. Carers in Lanarkshire could apply for up to £300 towards the cost of a short break from caring and were encouraged to think creatively in relation to short break opportunities that could be taken in line with the current public health advice, local and national restrictions.

Caring Through Covid Fund - Timeline



The Caring Through Covid Fund was promoted through multiple communication channels which proved successful, generating high interest and engagement rates:

- An electronic mailer was issued to 6,222 subscribers on our mailing list; 2,736 recipients clicked the link to the Caring Through Covid Fund webpage contained within this mailer. The communication was shared wider to over 12,000 people.
- Around 2,000 carers were identified and contacted via post by South Lanarkshire Health and Social Care Partnership and information was circulated through North Lanarkshire Health and Social Care staff distribution lists
- 8,182 unique visits to the Caring Through Covid Fund webpage since the fund opened
- Social media engagement increased; 10,572 individuals viewed posts about the fund across all our platforms, 86 new followers on twitter, 426 new followers on Facebook and 71 new followers on Instagram.

The fund opened for online applications via Lanarkshire Carers website on Monday 8 February 2021. The high volume of applications received on the first day of the fund opening led to some technical difficulties with our online applications process and we temporarily paused applications in order to make essential technical changes, consult and communicate. The application form re-opened again on Friday 12 February 2021 until Saturday 13 February 2021.

We engaged with our contract monitoring officers from the Health and Social Care Partnerships in North and South Lanarkshire as soon as we were asked to accept this additional funding and work. During our ongoing discussions with them regarding this project we asked if they might be in a position to consider making up any of the shortfall. The fund had created a lot of interest and the number of carer responses and identified needs were high. We knew volume of applications was going to be substantial and match funding would help us award to as many eligible applicants as possible. Following our request, both North and South Lanarkshire provided additional funding to help meet the demand for grant funding.

We established a project team comprising of 8 staff who worked consistently on this project for a period 6 weeks, including weekend working and out of hours working to be available when carers called. We also provided targeted support to carers experiencing language and other barriers when applying. The project was managed by one of our management team who developed the processes, criteria and communications required.

During the period that the grant fund was open for applications, Lanarkshire Carers also experienced its busiest quarter to date:

- 757 new carers (South Lanarkshire) and 462 new carers (North Lanarkshire) were identified and registered with Lanarkshire Carers between January 2021 and March 2021.
- Around 270 new carers (Lanarkshire Wide) engaged with us as a result of the fund.

## **Application Process**

Due to challenges relating to lockdown measures and the requirement to process applications as quickly as possible for this particular fund, applications for this fund were online and payments to successful applicants via BACS payment. Carers who could not submit an application online or receive payment in this way were asked to contact us and discuss other ways they could be supported with their caring role, including other grant funding that may be more suited to their situation.

Carers were asked the following information as part of the application process for this fund to assist the decision-making panel to better understand their circumstances:

- Details about the carer, including contact details;
- Details about the person(s) they care for and the caring role they provide;
- Any additional support the carer and/or the person they care for receives currently;
- The impact that Covid-19 has had on the carer and their caring role;
- How the carer plans to use the grant funding to support them in their caring role and the difference it will make;
- How the carer would utilise a lesser amount of funding if the full amount requested could not be awarded.

The carer was also required to consent to Lanarkshire Carers using the information they provided for the purpose of processing their application and any relevant follow-up activity they agreed to.

The fund guidelines explained that applications for short breaks that did not meet the criteria for this fund would not be considered by the decision-making panel. This included:

- Overnight breaks away from home
- Any activity or item that cannot be taken in line with current local and national coronavirus guidance.
- Breaks for the benefit of the person being cared for, rather than the carer (the carer should directly benefit from the item or activity).
- Activities or items not deemed appropriate for this fund such as essential home items, white goods, bedding etc.
- Activities or items deemed excessive and out with the overall aim of this fund.

### **Decision Making**

1,210 applications were submitted by carers at the closing date, far exceeding the amount of funding received. To ensure funding was awarded fairly and consistently to as many carers as possible, we were required to prioritise applications in line with the guidance set out under the eligibility criteria for the fund. Maximum award amounts were also set for specific items:

- Laptops – up to £300
- iPads/Tablets/Mobile Phones – Up to £200
- Gardening equipment – Up to £200
- Exercise Equipment – up to £200
- Leisure and fitness wear – up to £150
- Hobbies, Arts and Crafts materials, Baking equipment – up to £200
- Takeaway meals – up to £150
- Entertainment passes and subscriptions – up to £100
- Televisions – up to £250
- Games console – up to £250
- Bicycle – up to £200
- Relaxation items/equipment – Up to £150

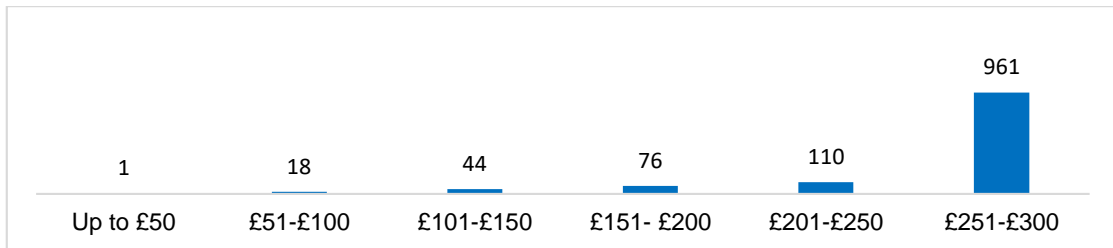
The decision-making panels, of which there were two, met each day for a period of 6 days to review and decide on each application. Two carer representatives from our board of directors also volunteered on each of the panels. This work concluded within the timescales set and all applicants were contacted with the decision made.

### **Decision Making Outcomes**

- 854 carers were successful and were contacted by email to request their payment information.
- 356 carers were unsuccessful due to them requesting items or activities that could not be taken in line with the funding criteria
- £84,155 has been awarded to 423 carers in North Lanarkshire to date
- £77,192 has been awarded to 431 carers in South Lanarkshire to date
- In total, £161,347 worth of funding has been awarded to carers in Lanarkshire to date.

### **Other key statistics (Lanarkshire-wide)**

- Applications received from parent carers = 39% (Total percentage of parent carers known to Lanarkshire Carers = 19%)
- Applications received from BAME carers = 6%
- Average amount requested = £274
- Funding range requested = £50 - £300:



Bank details were collected from all successful applicants and BACS payments were processed so the money would reach their bank accounts and could be spent on the agreed purpose by the end of March 2021.

### Evaluation and Carer Feedback



Evaluation and receipts were requested from all successful applicants by email on 9 April 2021. The overwhelming majority of carers feedback has been positive and a number have sent thank you cards and provided verbal feedback to the organisation to thank us for helping them through a challenging period. The fund has also increased awareness of the organisation, with many new carer engaged as applicants going on to access further support and services. All new referrals are being followed up through our normal service delivery model, resulting in new conversations, awareness raising, Adult Carer Support Plans, partnership referrals and ongoing support.

Due to the way this fund was initially communicated, carers expectations were raised prior to local delivery partners being able to make the necessary arrangements required to administer and safeguard this funding. There was a small number of negative responses/comments from some carers, which was perhaps inevitable. All of these were addressed and resolved and were predominantly due to raised expectations from national communication and to misinterpretation of the information provided and shared.

Many carers are taking on longer and more intense caring roles, and there are also many people in Lanarkshire who are taking on new caring roles and responsibilities. We recognise that the COVID-19 pandemic has, and continues to have, a disproportionate impact on unpaid carers and the demand for this limited funding package confirmed this. As part of our application and evaluation process, we asked carers to tell us what difference this funding would make and the benefit to them in their caring roles. We have gathered a wealth of information on carers experiences throughout the pandemic, which will help inform further developments within the short breaks bureau and the broader work of the organisation.

Feedback from carers included:

*"The person who took my call (at Lanarkshire Carers) could not have been more helpful and registered me on the spot via the phone. They were so welcoming and empathetic and told me about the services your organisation provides. I have browsed the website and I have to tell you, I am in tears! As a carer for many years, I wish I knew about you sooner! But it was*

*the online wellbeing library that made me start bawling like a baby; it is the resource I never knew I needed. I can't even imagine the amount of people you help and support every single day, especially within the past 12 months. All I wanted to say is; Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!"*

*"I am so grateful that I not only got funding to buy a new multi-cooker, but also that I received enough money to buy the model with extra features. Caring for my daughter can be extremely restrictive and this funding gives me the means to take care of the whole family while still fulfilling my caring role for my daughter. Thank you for awarding me the grant money, it is very much appreciated."*

*"I purchased knitting wool, planters for the garden, compost, herbs, roses, flowers, vegetable seeds and some shrubs. I knit and do gardening to help me relax. The things I knitted were topsy-turvy dolls and some knitted clowns. Thank you so much, the things I knit get used to help raise funds for good causes, for example one clown has gone to help raise money for combat stress. The person I care for said it was nice to see me relax and smile even though we were going through lockdown, which helped him relax."*

*"I purchased a table and chairs for outdoors. It's made a massive difference, we are spending all our time at home and will be much the same this year again. We now have somewhere to sit, I have somewhere outside I can sit and relax without feeling cooped up and confined indoors all the time. I've had to give up my little job completely now to care for my son and just having somewhere to sit outdoors may seem trivial but it's a huge help for me."*

*"I purchased a set of Garden furniture. Even though we are still very early into the year I have very much enjoyed being outside, even on the crisp mornings with a hot cup of tea before my day of caring even starts. Having somewhere to relax and enjoy the fresh air has helped my mental health most of all. It has been great. I'm looking forward to the nice weather to enjoy it even more. My daughter has also enjoyed some time outside with me. Before she didn't like being out for long as she has really poor mobility and doesn't like to be stuck in her wheelchair when trying to relax. It is bringing us both so much joy and I am better at my caring role now I have a bit of breathing space. Thank you so much. 2 years ago I was lost within my caring role. If it wasn't for this organisation telling me it's OK to ask for help I would still be drowning."*

*"I purchased some arts and craft materials. I'd like to make it clear that had I not received this funding, I would still have benefitted from it. The thought that there are people out there who have considered the need of carers at home just now, unable to do all the things that normally help them through their situation, is hugely comforting. Obviously I'm glad that I was one of the people who managed to benefit from the money but I just wanted to say thank you for even considering that there was a need there in the first place. Crafting literally brings me joy and helps me relax. Even the thought of all the new bits and bobs coming once I'd ordered them was a great mood booster. If I'm relaxed and in a good mood I have the patience to deal with all my sons complex needs, it's as simple as that. To be able to do something within my own home that I love just makes things less stressful and I'm able to be a better carer and mother (and wife!!). I believe my son benefitted from the funding in a round-about way. Although the money was for me and was spent on my hobby, like I said above, when I'm happy and relaxed, I'm just a better person, I think we all are! My son has autism and his needs can be quite complex. It's draining to constantly try and help him through the day. A happy mummy has more reserves to draw on to patiently help my son and end the day as friends not enemies."*

There is no doubt that carers benefit from individual grant awards to enable them to take a short break from caring, especially during lock down when times have been so challenging for so many. It was a significant ask of our organisation to manage this fund with extremely challenging timescales, particularly in terms of the impact this has had on a relatively small organisation already facing an increase in demand for our services.

Our organisation had the flexibility, capacity and experience required to respond effectively and meet this challenge, reorganising service delivery and plans to adapting quickly. A massive undertaking for Lanarkshire Carers but a fantastic achievement considering the timescales and funding constraints we were working with. This new funding was welcomed and supported hundreds of good outcomes for many unpaid carers in Lanarkshire. All of this would not have been possible without the Short Breaks Bureau, the staff team and grant management systems we invested in recently. Our investment in this grant management system has facilitated all aspects of the work and would not have been possible to securely manage such a large amount of money in such a short period without this.

### **Caring Through Covid Fund - Phase 2**

The Lanarkshire CPE allocation from Scottish Government was circa. £100,000. Whilst this was a significant investment, there is still demand for short breaks grant funding to enable carers across Lanarkshire to take a break from caring in line with the current restrictions. The additional funding received from North and South Lanarkshire Health and Social Care Partnerships will assist us to address this demand, without the restrictive timescales set by the Scottish Government.

Over the next few months the Short Breaks Bureau will open the fund again for new applicants. We will ensure those most in need are able to access funding to access a break from caring in line with current COVID-19 restrictions. Details will be shared with carers by our staff team and published on our Caring Through Covid Fund web page once finalised:

<https://lanarkshirecarers.org.uk/caring-through-covid-fund>

Dealing with such a high volume of applications in such a short space of time required the Short Breaks Bureau, as well as the wider organisation, to adapted quickly. We have reviewed and streamlined the complex processes and procedures relating to grant funding for carers. We have learned a lot from this work which will help inform our practice going forward. Carers feedback and insights gained has helped shape this and future activities. Lanarkshire Carers is well placed to continue with this work in the future and plan to utilise these improvements for the benefit of carers.