carersUK

THE NATIONAL LOTTERY

SPORT ENGLAND

Carers Active

A best practice guide for professionals

Contents

Introduction	3
About Carers Active	3
Evidence for this guide	4
Carers' health	5
Why organise physical activity	7
Behaviour change	8
How you can help carers get active	9
The role you play	10
Involving carers	10
Activities	12
Removing barriers	14
Promoting activities	18
Involving other organisations	19
Volunteers	21
How to fund physical activities	23
Practice examples in depth	24
Swindon Carers Centre	24
Hitchin Netball Club	26
Sheffield Young Carers Project	28

"Thanks for organising all these activities for us. It makes us take time out and do something fun just for ourselves – as sometimes we forget that's important too!"

– Carer

"Exercise lifts the spirits but to have the company of other people really makes it worthwhile. It is a lovely group of people. Afterwards I feel less alone."

– Carer

Carers UK's Carers Active Campaign is funded by Sport England using funds from the National Lottery

THE NATIONAL LOTTERY

SPORT ENGLAND

Introduction

This best practice guide provides a valuable resource to help you support carers to be more physically active and benefit from increased health and wellbeing.

The guide is here to help you as a professional in whichever setting and whatever stage you're at in supporting carers to be more physically active.

It provides important data, tips, good practice examples, and links to resources to allow you to build activities which engage carers to be active in a way that's accessible, inclusive, and achievable, and that delivers positive social outcomes and health benefits.

About Carers Active

Carers UK's Carers Active campaign is a Sport England-funded, multi-faceted programme of work.

Carers Active improves the physical and mental health of unpaid carers by helping carers become more physically active, and by influencing wider system change that enables carers to be supported to improve their wellbeing and social connectedness.

We deliver the campaign through a combination of:

- online carer-facing work, including information and resources for carers, dedicated social media channels, monthly online exercise sessions; and
- influencing work across the wider system, including targeted work with national and local organisations that can influence practices and facilitate access to physical activity opportunities for unpaid carers, sharing evidence, and best practice.

The campaign is grounded in carers' experiences, using their insight and feedback about what they want and would find helpful in relation to being more physically active.

This is reflected in the background, data, and good practice contained in this guide.

Evidence for this guide

To help shape this guide, we explored what, how, and where carers are being supported to be active by different organisations across the country. Thank you to everyone who took part in the mapping survey, or provided information or examples of your work. Your knowledge and evidence are woven through the guide.

Our survey received nearly 150 responses. The findings show:

- There is a clear and growing interest in carers and physical activity
- Organisations are seeing the benefits of improved health and wellbeing outcomes for carers doing more physical activity
- Offering opportunities for physical activity is a key part of local strategies for prevention and tackling health inequalities
- Half of organisations provide regular or one-off physical activities for unpaid carers
- Most organisations offering physical activities deliver a combination of online and in-person activities. This fits well with carers' wishes for different options and makes physical activity accessible
- One third of organisations work with volunteers to deliver their range of physical activities
- Many organisations said that peer support was a key driver for carers coming together to be active together.

However, nearly one third of organisations do not run any physical activities for carers – and they felt there was more potential for sharing learning and practice.

"I found that doing activities online has been a way to be more active and I like trying new things, so I signed up for a Carers Active FLexercise session in July. I enjoyed the pace and flow of movement and felt great afterwards. Having music to accompany the movements also made me feel good. I decided to do FLexercise weekly as it was simple, online and within my ability and required no equipment and I can catch up with the recording if I miss the live session."

– Louise, an unpaid carer

Organisations are seeing the benefits in improved health and wellbeing outcomes for carers doing more physical activity

Carers' health

In the UK, around two thirds (65%) of adults will provide care for someone in their adult life.[1]

There is also 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.[2]

A survey of carers undertaken through GP practices in 2022[3] found that:

- Carers are more likely to have a long-term physical or 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
- Carers are less likely to make a GP appointment for their own health needs.

Given these challenges facing unpaid carers, they are, unsurprisingly, less active than non-carers. From Carers UK research, including the Carers and Physical Activity report[4] 2022, we know that:

- 51% of carers are inactive, compared to 27% of people without caring responsibilities, meaning they are not active at a moderate intensity for the recommended 150 minutes a week
- 76% of carers aged 55 or more would like to include more physical activity in their lives.

Carers are much less likely to be active

14% of carers compared with 54% of non-carers

76%

of carers aged over 55 do not feel that they are able to do as much physical exercise as they would like

1 Carers UK Will I Care report, 2019 https://www.carersuk.org/media/warllcph/carersrightsdaynov19final-2.pdf
2 Carers UK Will I Care report, 2019 https://www.carersuk.org/media/warllcph/carersrightsdaynov19final-2.pdf
3 (https://www.carersuk.org/media/shbb4c0s/carers-uk-gp-patient-survey-report-2021-web.pdf)
4 (2021) https://www.carersuk.org/media/rr2lwmxg/carers-and-physical-activity-report.pdf

We know that carers have an interest and desire to take part in physical activity, however there are often substantial barriers which prevent them from doing so. Any efforts to support carers to become more active will need to alleviate or reduce the following barriers:

Biggest barriers to physical activity:

88%
Not having the time

71%
Not being motivated

67%
Not being able to afford the costs

59%
Not having anyone to go with

Other barriers that carers have cited through the 2023 Carers Active April survey include:

- Lack of opportunities to get involved
- Apprehensive about trying something new or getting started
- Guilt about leaving the person they care for or taking time to do something for themselves
- Costs of activities.

For carers who are able to be active, physical activity offers a vital chance to de-stress and have some 'me time'. The information and examples included in this guide show that if support is tailored to carers' needs then it is possible for carers to maintain or start physical activity that they enjoy.

Why organise physical activity?

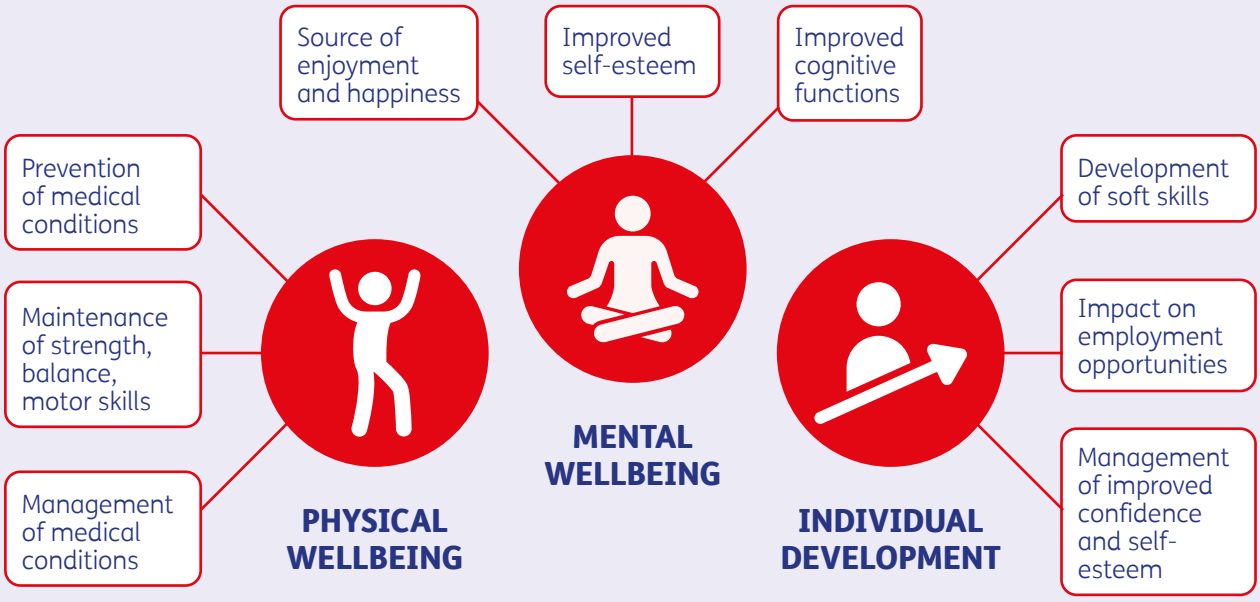
The importance of physical activity for physical and mental health is being increasingly recognised by healthcare professionals.

Phase one of the Carers Active project (2019-2021) involved research and a pilot with a cohort of unpaid carers, looking specifically at the potential benefits of physical activity. This research[5] found that:

- 73% of carers said being physically active makes them feel good about themselves
- 67% of carers said doing a range of physical activities helped them to feel more connected to other people
- 58% of carers said being active helped them to learn more about the importance of looking after their health.

Subsequent insight has highlighted that increased physical activity among unpaid carers can lead to decreased loneliness, increased life satisfaction and happiness, and decreased anxiety and stress. This is particularly notable across two groups: carers who are housebound and access online activities, and carers who build relationships at in-person activities.[6]

Image adapted from Public Health England website[7]



5 Carers and Physical Activity Report: https://www.carersuk.org/media/rr2lwmxg/carers-and-physical-activity-report.pdf

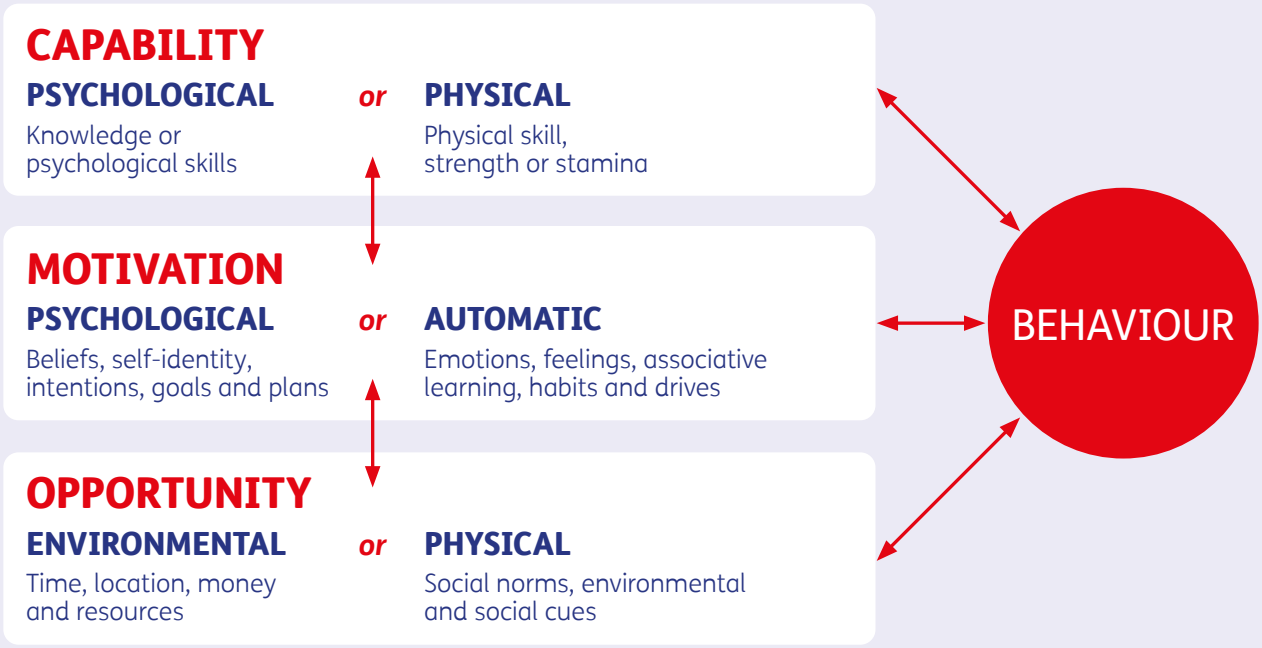
6 Carers Active year two evaluation report – https://www.carersuk.org/reports/an-evaluation-of-the-carers-active-campaign/

7 https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-matters-physical-activity/health-matters-physical-activity-prevention-and-management-of-long-term-conditions

Behaviour change

In our evaluation of the Carers Active campaign's second year, we found that the COM-B model for behaviour change could provide a useful framework for shaping the design of physical activities for carers.

Figure 2: The COM-B model of behaviour change[8]



Applying the COM-B model to carers would comprise of the following:

- Capability: Carers need to know what activities can benefit them and how to access them in order to have the confidence to put themselves first, and the opportunity to explore options.
- Opportunity: a lack of time, or control over time due to the unpredicatability of their lives, can affect carers' opportunities. Tailored activities to overcome barriers and fostering a supportive community can increase their chances of behaviour change, as can financial support, and practical support such as respite.
- Motivation levels might be low to start with but can be positively influenced by the relief and mental break carers find from being more active. Evidence also shows physical activity leads to decreased loneliness, increased life satisfaction and happiness, and decreased anxiety and stress.

8 togetheragency.co.uk/news/the-com-b-model-of-behaviour-change-explained

How you can help carers get active

Use Carers Active resources to enhance your local offer to carers.

- **Carers Active Hub**
  Carers UK has developed a range of free resources for unpaid carers in the Carers Active Hub, including helpful links, carer stories, activity videos, and free monthly online sessions. By integrating links to these self-help resources into your website or your newsletter you can enhance your existing offer, cost free. This can help to gain measurable outcomes for the carers you support
- **Carers Active social media toolkit**
  You can use this handy social media toolkit to help you raise awareness of the Carers Active Hub and the resources this provides, as well as ideas for sharing your own events and materials.
- **Take part in the Carers Active April campaign**
  The annual month-long campaign is an ideal time to get behind the Carers Active campaign by raising awareness, organising events or activities, or promoting the campaign on your social media or in newsletters
- **Carers Active online sessions**
  Free online activities that are run monthly by Carers UK
- **Activity and Wellbeing videos**
  A series of free, short, engaging videos, featuring carers themselves taking part in physical activities, alongside qualified fitness professionals
- **Carers Active Stories videos**
  Inspiring videos of carers who get active alongside their caring
- **Signpost to the Carers Active Facebook group**
  An online community of likeminded carers aiming to be active and a forum to share ideas, opportunities and relevant links or support each other
- **Share the Getting Started guide with carers**
  This provides useful starting point for carers with information, advice and ideas about being active in a way that works for them

- **Share the calendar tracker with carers**
  Another resource that helps carers track how they're being active and log their achievements.

The role you can play

Organising physical activities can be relatively low cost and still achieve hugely positive wellbeing impacts. Many activities are simple to set up and an easy way to reach a larger number of carers.

If you are supporting carers who are also managing a long-term health condition, being active is about finding what works for them. The We Are Undefeatable website has lots of information to help build activity into the lives of those with a long-term health condition.

Organisations such as MS Society, Diabetes UK, Versus Arthritis, and Parkinsons UK have also developed condition-specific advice which can be accessed on their websites. You may also find these resources useful if you are encouraging a carer to be active with the person they care for.

"We provide opportunities for carers to engage in activities to reduce isolation and improve physical and mental wellbeing."

– Trafford Carers Centre

"We find the activities very beneficial for health and wellbeing, social interaction and respite from the caring role."

– South Tyneside Adult Carers Service

Involving carers

Carers UK recommends conducting research and engagement with carers about the physical activity they want to do. The most common methods are:

- Online or hard copy surveys
- In one-to-one conversations or assessments
- Polls on social media or on forms
- Include questions on evaluation forms
- Allow carers to email suggestions

Organising physical activities can be relatively low cost and still achieve hugely positive wellbeing impacts

Mini case study

Subco Trust

"Subco Trust is an organisation that works with isolated and housebound elders from diverse South Asian communities. We are based in Newham borough, London, which is made up of 70% non-white British populations."

"We integrate physical activity opportunities into the daily lives of the carers we support, enhancing their wellbeing through various activities, groups, day trips, and events. With over three decades of experience in working with carers, we've identified common challenges such as loneliness, isolation, and poor health, particularly prevalent within the South Asian community. Our approach is tailored to address these needs by selecting activities that are accessible and engaging."

Inclusive approach to activity selection

"We prioritise the voices of carers by conducting group sessions to understand their preferences and needs, whether it's in-person or online. Recognising the language, cultural, and IT barriers faced by many carers accessing our services, we've found that face-to-face activities are most requested. These activities not only provide an opportunity to leave the house but also foster social connections, ultimately benefiting mental health and physical wellbeing."

Activities for both carers and the person with care needs

"We provide activities that both carers and the person with care needs can participate in, either together or separately, depending on their preferences. We acknowledge that language and cultural considerations must be embedded in every aspect of our activities, including physical exercises. Additionally, we ensure that our activities are accessible to disabled carers, promoting inclusivity and participation."

Activities

Being active means different things to different people. Equipment, special clothing or facilities are not necessarily required, it's about supporting a carer to find what works for them. While for some carers that may mean taking part in exercise sessions or structured activity, for others it will be about building more movement into everyday life.

There are lots of activities you can run that encourage carers to be more active. If you need inspiration, here are some examples:

- Aqua aerobics
- Cardio and strength
- Cycling
- Dance classes
- Gardening club
- Martial arts
- Nordic walking
- Pilates
- Seated exercises
- Step class
- Stretch and tone
- Swimming
- Tai chi
- Walk and talk
- Yoga

Mini case study

Asian women's cycling group: Blackburn with Darwen Carers Service

"We provide advice, referrals to support agencies, counselling, respite, information on benefits, and activities to help carers navigate their caring journey. Our mission is not only to assist carers, but also to promote their wellbeing and reduce isolation. Activity is embedded into everything we do. One of our initiatives involves offering free cycling sessions to Asian women carers in Blackburn, thanks to the generous funding from Sport England."

The cycling programme and benefits of cycling

"During the pandemic, outdoor activities became essential for maintaining both physical health and mental wellbeing. Recognising this, we introduced a cycling programme for Asian women carers in our community. This initiative not only provided a safe exercise option, but also promoted sustainability through bike servicing workshops. The programme included learn-to-ride sessions and leisurely rides in local parks, which proved to be immensely popular among the female Asian carers we support."

"Participation in our cycling programme had a significant impact on the carers' lives. They reported improved mental health, increased confidence, higher energy levels, and enhanced mobility. These benefits are invaluable to unpaid carers, who often face challenges in balancing their caring responsibilities with self care."

Promotion and outreach

"We employ various methods to promote our cycling programme and other activities. Our dedicated advisers inform carers about these opportunities during one-on-one sessions. Additionally, we distribute physical newsletters with detailed session information, both in print and via email. Our active carers forum is another effective platform for discussing physical activity opportunities, including the popular Bollywood dance sessions. We also have forums tailored to older carers and those with disabilities, ensuring inclusivity."

TOP TIP: Building community slowly

"Our experience with the cycling programme has taught us that building a community takes time and patience. It's crucial to understand the evolving needs and demographics of the carers you support and adapt your offerings accordingly. Don't be discouraged if only a few people attend initially; word of mouth can work wonders in building momentum. Just like with cycling, start small, and watch your initiatives grow over time.

"At Blackburn with Darwen Carers Service, we are committed to enriching the lives of unpaid carers in our community, and our cycling programme for Asian women carers is just one example of our dedication to their wellbeing."

Removing barriers

When thinking about activities you might run, it's important to recognise the main barriers that carers have said they face to being regularly active, and some possible ways you can help overcome them.

Barrier: Many carers do not have the time or ability to leave the person they care for on a regular basis, and sometimes have feelings of guilt if they do take some time for themselves.

Suggestions:

- Where possible, give the option for the person with care and support needs to take part in the activities as well, and be flexible in the approach to activities you offer
- Offer a range of events at different days and times, including evenings and weekends
- Generally, carers prefer regular days and times to plan support or respite care. To begin with, setting up one-off activities to keep carers thinking about activity and their wellbeing is a good way to get started
- Signpost to online activities, which can be done anytime. The Carers Active Hub has a free and comprehensive range of accessible and engaging video workouts.

"We try to offer short sessions at a time that suits carers, knowing that they can dip in and out, and there's no pressure to attend each session. Having a great instructor keeps carers coming back too."

– Carers' Support Service North Lincolnshire

Mini case study

Empower carers with Healthy Living Days: Enfield Carers Centre

"We extend our services to people with care needs through home care, and wellbeing services. Our focus is on enhancing physical and mental wellbeing in adults by offering a wide range of activities.

Healthy Living Days:

"One key initiative we offer is 'Healthy Living Days,' which introduces carers to physical activity and its benefits. The days promote active lifestyles with free health checks, activity 'come and try' sessions, and healthy lunches. Volunteer Carers Ambassadors join these events to meet fellow carers.

Respite care and home care support:

"We provide respite care through our home care service when available, enabling carers to attend events like Healthy Living Days.

Effective outreach:

"We keep carers informed through brochures sent every six months and monthly reminder emails. Additionally, we ensure that our activities are accessible to disabled carers, promoting inclusivity and participation."

Barrier: A challenging financial situation can prevent carers being active

Suggestions:

- Consider activities that have little or no ongoing cost, such as online sessions, jogging, walking, football, tennis, park gym equipment, or games provided in the park, like table tennis
- Partner with, or signpost to, a local service provider such as a leisure centre who may already be, or be open to, offering a subsidy or free access for unpaid carers. You could also advocate for carers, and ask that your council add unpaid carers to the list of people who can benefit from free or subsidised membership from council leisure centres
- There are lots of ways that carers can be active for free, like walking instead of driving, or getting off the bus or train a bit earlier and walking the rest of the way, taking the stairs instead of the lift, being active at home around the house or the garden. Carers Active Hub videos are always available at no cost
- Purchase low-cost equipment to support carers to be active, for example, rounders equipment, footballs, a pop-up table tennis set.

Barrier: Some carers are nervous to join a group they've never attended before or don't want to go alone.

Suggestions:

- Set up an introductory session so that carers feel welcomed to the group, especially if the group is already well established
- Introduce a buddy scheme so that there's someone for the carer to speak to beforehand with any questions or concerns and greet them the first time that they go to a session
- Partnering with local agencies and employing former carers or carers who are activity practitioners is a bonus, as they understand the needs of carers, for instance that they're not able to attend every session and keeping the exercises simple and effective
- Some carers do not wish to attend activities arranged or labelled just for carers and would rather join community activities with others that interest them.

Barrier: Lack of confidence or low self-esteem due to physical inactivity, weight gain, a long-term health condition, or a disability

Suggestions:

- Include positive and inclusive imagery in promotions about activities
- Provide sessions for all levels and abilities
- Online, as well as in person, options mean carers can be active in a comfortable environment, especially to begin with
- Aim for the messaging to sound less like "serious exercise" and more like "having fun" or "moving more", which makes it more inclusive.

Barrier: Lack of motivation or energy

Suggestions:

- Try to make physical activity part of a fun event, so carers enjoy it even if it is a challenge for them. Feedback is often positive from carers when they have tried something new and surprised themselves
- Having an engaging and understanding instructor keeps carers coming back

- Think about arranging short sessions at a time that suits carers – not too early or late, knowing that they can dip in and out, and there's no pressure to attend each session can help motivation
- Linking an activity with social opportunities can work well e.g., 'walk and talk' groups.

"Carers' lives are sometimes chaotic and last-minute cancellations have been a challenge. Linking an activity with a treat or reward has been popular, for example, every walk and talk session ending with a coffee."

– Carers First Lincolnshire

Barrier: Carers not understanding what physical activity is, the misconceptions about it, and lack of awareness of the benefits

Suggestions:

- Make activities engaging and upbeat – ideally exercise should be enjoyable
- Small groups can work well work to help create a sense of social connectedness alongside being more active
- Remind carers that lots of activities count as physical activity
- Encourage a "some is good, more is better" mindset and a "do what works for you" approach
- Include health benefits on promotional material or on web pages about physical activities
- Link to the Carers Active Hub for info about benefits and ideas – carersuk.org/help-and-advice/your-health-and-wellbeing/carers-active-hub/health-info

Barrier: Lack of transport to get to activities or venues

Suggestions:

- Organise in-person activities in a location that is easily accessible or close to public transport stops
- Arrange for carers to travel with a buddy or organise transport to collect and drop them home.

"Transport can be a challenge, especially for young carers. To help with that, the activities are run in different locations and there are different pick-up points for day trips so as many young carers can get involved as possible. Do pickups for carers on certain occasions and that's decided on a case-by-case basis. It's about being flexible and helping young carers as much as possible."

– Brentford Football Club Community Sports Trust

Barrier: Digital or online access can be a barrier for some

Suggestions:

- Ask what technology carers have in their home and help them learn to use it. You could provide some digital skills training for carers to use Zoom on their phone, tablet or laptop, or help carers learn how to use their smart TV to access the YouTube app
- Lend or provide tablets or laptops for carers if there is resource/budget to do so
- Send hard-copy newsletters or information sheets about how to be active and why it's important.
- Aim to offer or signpost to a mix of in person and online activities.

Remind carers that lots of activities count as physical activity

Barrier: Language and cultural differences can impact whether someone attends or enjoys a session

Mini case study

Mini case study

Chinese Community Wellbeing Society

"The Chinese Community Wellbeing Society (CCWS) specialises in supporting Chinese and Southeast Asian carers for Bristol City Council and South Gloucestershire Council. We understand that accessibility is key, and we offer both in-person and online workshops to cater to our diverse community.

Diverse physical activities:

"To promote physical wellbeing, CCWS offers a range of activities, including Chair Yoga, Tai Chi, functional fitness, and summer 'Walk and Talk' sessions. To ensure that these activities align with the preferences of our carers, we engage with them directly, either in person or over the phone. We recognise the language barrier many carers face and work with interpreters and translators to ensure that all materials are relevant and that essential information about activity sessions is accessible.

Cultural sensitivity and comfort:

"At CCWS, we understand that cultural sensitivity is essential. To create a welcoming and comfortable environment for carers who may be feeling apprehensive about participating in physical activities, we take steps to ensure that our instructors are briefed beforehand. This includes considerations for Chinese culture and religion. We also provide instructors with information and guidance on what to say or do, keeping in mind the cultural nuances that are important to our carers.

"We believe in empowering our carers to take charge of their physical wellbeing, and we're dedicated to providing them with opportunities that are both accessible and culturally sensitive. Through a combination of diverse physical activities and a supportive environment, we aim to enhance the overall wellbeing of our Chinese and Southeast Asian carers."

Promoting activities

- **Create an events/activities page with clear distinctions for physical activity and wellbeing options**, catering to young and adult carers of all abilities. Carers Northumberland' page is a great example.
- **Use positive and inclusive visual images** when promoting activities.
- **Consider offering activities that are not exclusively for carers but are inclusive of them**, targeting both adults and young people.
- When engaging young carers, **avoid using less appealing terms like 'wellbeing' and 'mental health'**; opt for more enticing phrases like 'fun in the sun' or 'let's get active.'
- **Engage with carers from diverse cultural backgrounds** through local staff or volunteers to bridge language and cultural barriers.
- **Provide comprehensive information about activities**, including timing, location, how to join, and contact information. Keep carers regularly updated, especially at the outset, and send reminders for online activities to ensure they don't forget.
- **Incorporate images or quotes from carers alongside activity listings**.

Highlight activities in a newsletter

Involve other organisations

Partnership working helps. Remember you don't have to do it all! Consider local partnerships when you can't organise activities yourselves.

You could explore local offerings or collaborate with local organisations or instructors to create affordable or free carer-friendly activities. Contact your local Active Partnership, local authority, or leisure centres for potential carer activities in your area.

"We have created a connection and relationship with the local young carers organisation. During young carers assessments they ask the young carers about being active and if they're interested, signpost to our netball club as a positive place for being active and socialising".

– Hitchin Netball Club

Mini case study

Partnership working case study: n-compass Towards a Brighter Future

"n-compass delivers essential Carers Services across Lancashire, Rochdale, Bury, Warrington, and Staffordshire, supporting a network of over 40,000 registered carers. We provide specialised support to carers, enhancing their health and wellbeing and enabling them to continue in their roles with their best foot forward. We offer a combination of face-to-face support and a digital online platform, ensuring carers always have access to the support of their choice.

Diverse physical activities

"Prior to the pandemic our Carers Services already offered physical activities, but during the lockdowns we expanded our offerings to include online sessions. These activities range from yoga and Zumba to Frank's Walk a Mile Club. Many of these sessions have remained highly popular, and we continue to offer them, both online and in person, providing carers with the choice of how they access these activities.

Inclusivity and adaptability

"Our sessions are designed to be inclusive, catering to carers of all fitness levels and abilities. For example, our 'Social Fitness' sessions can be completed either sitting or standing. Our online sessions have been beneficial for carers who cannot leave the individuals they care for. As one carer said, "They are a lifeline for me."

Community partnerships

"We have partnered with the Ramblers who organise inclusive walks and lunches in various locations throughout Greater Manchester and beyond. To accommodate the diverse needs of our carers, we introduced both slower and more active walking groups. We understand that some carers can't leave the individuals they care for, so we facilitate joint participation through initiatives like the Manchester and Salford Ramblers Carers Stepping Out project.

"In Bury, the Primary Care Networks (PCNs) offer wellbeing walks for all around the localities they cover. We support carers to access these via the Social Prescriber.

"We provide a rolling programme of opportunities for carers to access local leisure facilities, including spas and therapeutic massages, conveniently located to make it easier for carers to prioritise self care.

Support and discounts

"Additionally, we offer valuable support through partnerships with local leisure centres. For instance, Rochdale leisure centres offer discounted rates for carers, with the service covering some costs. The Carers' Hub Rochdale collaborates with Your Trust to provide three-month gym, fitness class, and swim passes through our My Time voucher scheme. Your Trust offer 'carers go free' sessions, free day passes, an exercise referral scheme and a Your Extra Card offering discounts to eligible carers on a range of swimming, sports and leisure activities. This initiative offers carers a much-needed break and an opportunity to focus on their health and wellbeing.

Positive impact

"The feedback from carers benefiting from these initiatives is very positive. Carers have reported feeling happier and less stressed, and improved their overall quality of life. These opportunities empower carers to continue their health and fitness journeys while taking much-deserved breaks from their caregiving roles.

"At n-compass Carers Services, we remain committed to supporting carers in every way possible, enhancing their quality of life, and fostering a sense of wellbeing. Through diverse support options and community partnerships, we strive to make a meaningful difference in the lives of our dedicated carers. One carer said:

"I used Aqua fit, swimming, the health suite and water walking. I made new friends and have improved my mental health."

Volunteers

Volunteers are the lifeblood of many organisations, events and services.

Their value in organising and running activities can be great. Through surveys carers have expressed taking part in activities that are led and supported by current or ex-carers can be a driver to participation.

Volunteers:

- **Support as champions**, encouraging others to have a go and take part
- **Act as friendly faces or greeters**
- **Accompany carers to events** or provide assistance with transport
- **Provide general assistance** such as refreshments
- **Lead walks or other activities**
- **Contact carers in between sessions** to see how they felt and encourage them to come again
- **Provide language or cultural insight**.

Top tip

Use Volunteers Week to say thanks or send cards to acknowledge their efforts. Feeling valued boosts volunteer satisfaction, encourages longer service, and aids in recruiting others.

Find resources at: ncvo.org.uk/help-and-guidance/involving-volunteers/valuing-and-developing-volunteers/thanking-volunteers/#/

Volunteers support as champions, encouraging others to have a go and take part

Mini case study

Sunderland Carers Centre and volunteers

Sunderland Carers Centre is a local carers organisation that offer triage and signposting for carers as well as assessments and provide other wider support services.

Carers on the Move

"This is a monthly walk for carers, led by two of our volunteers. The group meet at various locations around the city which are accessible to all levels of fitness and wheelchairs. The groups walk for approximately 45 minutes, finishing in a nearby café for refreshments and a chat. To build the and confidence and skills of the volunteers, the two volunteers attended a training scheme ran by Sunderland City Council and are qualified walk leaders.

Gardening volunteers

"We have a group of five volunteers who meet every Tuesday morning in the centre's gardens. They are all carers and come along when they can. They help to keep the gardens tidy by weeding, pruning, planting and watering. One of the volunteers said, "I like to give something back to the centre as they got me through a very difficult time and I don't know where I would be without them plus it gets me out into the fresh air, amongst others in a similar situation to me".

How to fund physical activities

If part of your core objective as an organisation is wellbeing and/or inclusion, encouraging carers to be physically active can be a good way of delivering this and delivering measurable carer health benefits.

However, if you don't have sufficient funds or need to reduce costs, you could:

- **Use free Carers Active resources into your website and your newsletter, encouraging carers to use them**. These will help achieve positive outcomes for local carers that you can measure with annual surveys and feedback
- **Work with a local service provider and signpost carers towards that activity**
- **Add a small charge to activities** especially if they can't be offered for free on a long-term basis
- **Local trusts, foundations, and businesses often have funding pots that can be applied for**. Your Active Partnership should be able to provide information on any current funding related to increasing physical activity levels. Nationally Sport England regularly have different funding that can be applied for to cover among other things, equipment, venue hire, and instructors' fees.

"We generate funds from a range of sources and try to be creative, for example approaching local building firms and supermarkets who might offer a small grant for local community projects. Likewise, parish councils fund activities in the community so they are worth approaching too, we look out for any grants that may be suitable to apply for."

– Swindon Carers Centre

"We aim to generate funds through local charitable trusts, community fundraising and support from local partners for example, at a recent Carers Week event at Ponds Forge, a local Women's Institute provided cupcakes as part of their support for us as their Charity of the Year."

– Sheffield Young Carers Project

Practice examples in depth

Swindon Carers Centre

At Swindon Carers Centre, we recognise the importance of physical activity in the lives of unpaid carers. We aim to provide activities and events designed to help carers improve their physical and mental wellbeing through movement. Our activities and events are free of charge to carers registered with our charity.

- **Walk and Talk programme:** Connect carers with nature and the outdoors. Carers and those they care for can attend together, making it more accessible for those who can't leave those they care for. We walk in both Lydiard Park in west Swindon and our Silver Linings Group in Stanton Park, north Swindon.
- **Weekly Pilates class:** We offer weekly in-person Pilates classes to support carers in their fitness journey.
- **Open Minds group:** This group, specifically designed for older carers and the people they care for, includes singing and dance activities.
- **Partnerships:** We collaborate with local leisure centers to provide carers with two free sessions, one involving circuit training and the other a low-impact workout. We've also partnered with a bowling club, offering carers six weekly sessions, resulting in new friendships and regular club attendance.
- **Health checks:** On Carers Rights Day, the Kingswood Surgery offers free health checks.
- **Holistic wellness:** We provide meditation and mindfulness sessions led by a Reiki Practitioner. A local Beauty Therapist offers appointments for carers, including massages, Indian Head Massages, and facials.
- **Volunteer support:** We work with a local care company who volunteer several hours a month.

- **Dance classes:** Swindon Dance Studios offers dance classes to carers from September
- **Otago Exercise Programme (OEP):** We refer carers to the Otago Exercise Programme, a home-based exercise programme designed to improve strength and balance in older individuals, reducing the risk of falls. Participants attend one face-to-face group class per week and commit to doing home exercises.

Connecting carers and building friendships

To make it easier for newcomers, we pair up carers. We also organise lifts for our attendees Our efforts have led to many stories of carers coming together:

K, who supports his wife living with dementia and has accessed our services and groups for several years, recommended our services to his neighbour, who now also attends our events, and they travel together.

D attended one of our groups for the first time, made friends with a fellow carer she was introduced to, and they have remained close years on.

Stay informed

We keep carers informed about upcoming events through our 'What's On' events form[9], distributed online or in hard copy. Additionally, we feature in the quarterly WOW Guide[10] in Swindon.

Inclusivity and support

Swindon Carers Centre has received funding to increase engagement with carers in Swindon's Asian communities. We have a dedicated Community Engagement Officer and Community Engagement Support Officer to ensure inclusive communication and activities. We have Language Line available for carers who don't have English as a first language

We offer support for up to 18 months post-bereavement and have a designated bereavement group called PATH (Planning an Alternative Tomorrow with Hope).

Volunteering

Volunteers play a valuable role in our organisation, giving up their own time to give back to their community. We offer volunteer supervisions and ensure we recognise and thank our volunteers during Volunteers week and gifts at Christmas to express our gratitude.

Community engagement

We keep up with what's happening locally so we can signpost activities carers may enjoy.

We participate in national campaigns like Carers Active April, Carers Week and Carers Rights Day to increase our profile and social media coverage and build partnerships.

We also mark key cultural dates, such as World Mental Health Day.

Funding and measuring impact

We source funds creatively, including approaching local building firms, Parish councils and supermarkets for small grants for local community projects.

To measure our impact, we encourage feedback through various channels, including verbal communication, event feedback forms, and physical sticky notes at the end of events.

Top tips

We've seen so many positive outcomes, such as peer support, information sharing, friendships, reduced loneliness and improved physical and mental wellbeing.

- Introduce a pair/buddy scheme to support newcomers joining or travelling to a session.
- Listen to carers and offer activities tailored to their wants and needs.
- Emphasise activities that support better mental wellbeing.
- Be passionate and enthusiastic to inspire carers.
- Approach local organisations and businesses for support, and look out for available grants.
- Promote events well in advance.

9 https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=DP6EmK-fwkabXdvTiBwLlja5ZxzEkppPpuXe88Bkc6hUNkFCNkswNEJQVjdYUUtCOEFPVUdSTlJMVC4u
10 https://www.homeinstead.co.uk/swindon/blog/swindon-wow-guide/

Hitchin Netball Club – sports club supporting young carers

Hitchin Netball Club is a junior sports club with a community of 150 members. Our membership is of girls aged between 7 and 17, and 10% of them are young carers (15 youngsters). Our committee and volunteers share a common commitment to growth and inclusivity, with a strong desire to give back to our local community.

A Young carer-friendly club

To become a club that welcomes and supports young carers, we've implemented several simple yet impactful measures:

- **Committee commitment:** Our committee is fully engaged in supporting young carers and contributing to the local community.
- **Informative webpage:** We have a dedicated page on our website to educate visitors about young carers, their roles and responsibilities, and provide links to support and further resources.
- **Emphasis on social skills:** For our teenage members, we place emphasis on social skill development by making sessions fun, with more game play, in addition to coaching. Teamwork helps combat the isolation that young carers feel. Our club prides itself on having fun, fostering social connections and promoting fitness.
- **Collaboration with Young Carers in Herts:** We've established a strong connection with the local young carers' organisation, Young Carers in Herts. During young carers' assessments they enquire about their interest in physical activity and refer them to our netball club as a positive place if interested.
- **Inclusive registration:** Within our registration forms and club membership process we've included a section to identify young carers. Parents and guardians can select this option. We express our commitment to supporting young carers and their families while maintaining their privacy, as only the coach and committee know a member is a young carer. We offer financial assistance to those facing financial difficulties, including young carers, to cover fees or costs associated with participating at our club.
- **Special trips:** We organise trips to watch Netball Superleague games and prioritise inviting young carers before extending invitations to our wider membership.
- **Future initiatives:** We plan to collaborate closely with young carers' organisations to host specialised young carers netball camps. These will offer an inclusive space and opportunity for young carers to experience the sport, find out about the club, and socialise with other young carers of the same age. We aim to incorporate fitness activity skills during these. We also plan to enhance our phone follow-up efforts for new young carer members and strengthen our network of local connections for increased referrals.
- **Engaging promotion and fundraising efforts:** To support our initiatives, we've established a Go Fund Me page. In terms of promotion, we find using animations instead of images is more appealing to young carers. Our promotional efforts are directed towards carers, recognising them as the key decision-makers. We also advertise through local schools and word of mouth.

- **Clear information:** A simple yet effective tip is to ensure our website features clear information so young carers and their families are aware of our inclusive and supportive approach and include a dedicated section for young carers on our membership form.

Young Carer question on the registration form:

Supporting Young Carers

A Young Carer is someone aged 18 and under who cares for a friend or family member who, due to illness, disability, a mental health problem or an addiction, cannot cope without their support. This support can be emotional, physical or a combination of both.

HNC wants to ensure Young Carers in our club are not missing out on opportunities because of their caring responsibilities. We will also be linking in with Young Carers in Herts and Young Carers in Beds to offer netball opportunities to Young Carers these organisations support.

Is your child a Young Carer *

- ○ No
- ○ Yes

☐ If you answered Yes, check here if you would like to discuss this with the Club Chair.

Sheffield Young Carers Project

Sheffield Young Carers Project is dedicated to supporting young individuals with caring responsibilities and those affected by familial substance misuse in Sheffield. We support over 200 young carers aged 8-25 per year. Our whole-family approach extends to the young carers, the cared-for individuals, and the entire family, including emphasising the importance of an active lifestyle.

Young people's support

Our Young People's Team offers a year of support to our young people, including one-to-ones, group work and holiday activities.

We use a range of activities to engage young people, including:

- Walking one-to-ones
- Interactive group games
- Rock climbing
- Canoeing
- Trampolining.

To boost their confidence we often accompany them to their first active session, helping to alleviate fears or nerves. Set in the picturesque Peak District, our summer residentials offer an opportunity for unforgettable experiences. Upon completion of their year of support, young carers receive a leavers pack that includes links to activities they have become familiar with through our programmes.

Family support

Our Family Project team assists up to 40 families each year, offering one-on-one sessions, group work and activities, parent networking events, and family-orientated holiday programmes.

Youth-led activities

At Sheffield Young Carers Project, we are young person-led, and prioritise the choices of young carers when planning activities. We have established a fruitful partnership with Sheffield City Trust (SCT), giving us access to free group facilities like Ponds Forge International Swimming Pool and Ice Sheffield for group and one-on-one activities. The prestige of these venues adds to the excitement of our sessions.

Popular activities and feedback

"I wanted to write and let you know what a wonderful experience it was for my daughter and other family members to go ice skating on Sunday evening. She spends so much time and energy looking after me, worrying about me, trying to include me so I can experience things too. That the SYC ice skating was open to other family members meant that she could actually relax and have fun, and finally be 'off duty'."

Family who received a free ice-skating session

Among the activities we run, swimming, horse riding, basketball, and trampolining are particularly popular with the young carers.

"I love these sessions, they make me feel so much better. I'm so excited for everything in the summer holidays!"

Young carer aged 9

To assess the success of our activities, we distribute feedback forms at the end of each event. Typically, the feedback is very positive, with young people saying they enjoy new experiences, feel happier, and get a chance to relax and 'be kids'.

Promotion, partnerships and funding

To promote the activities and events, we send text messages to all the families, including other services' offerings such as music festivals and theatre shows. Sheffield Young Carers Project collaborates with numerous leisure and cultural services in the city to leverage opportunities for those we support.

We strive to secure funding through local charitable trusts, community fundraising and support from local partners. Community support plays a vital role in our sustainability. For example, a local Women's Institute provided us with cupcakes for our 2023 Carers Week activities taster sessions hosted by SCT at Ponds Forge.

Accessibility

All our activities are free, and we provide food and transport where possible. We pay bus fares for older groups and arrange pick-ups for our 8-12 age group, ensuring their safety when attending sessions in venues around the city which may not be easily accessible by public transport. It is essential that no one is prevented from taking part due to their financial circumstances.

Top tip

Don't be afraid to ask for local support and free products or services. People generally want to contribute to a worthy cause.

carersUK

Across the UK today 5.7 million people are carers – supporting a loved one who is older, disabled or seriously ill.

Carers UK is here to listen, to give carers expert information and tailored advice. We champion the rights of carers and support them in finding new ways to manage at home, at work, or in their community.

We're here to make life better for carers.

Carers UK 20 Great Dover Street, London, SE1 4LX

T 020 7378 4999 | E info@carersuk.org

@carersuk /carersuk /carers-uk @carers_uk @carers_uk

Carers UK is a charity registered in England and Wales (246329) and in Scotland (SC039307) and a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales (864097). Registered office 20 Great Dover Street, London SE1 4LX.

ISBN: 978-1-873747-74-2 | Publication code: UK4125_1023 | © Carers UK, November 2023

carersuk.org