

Reflections on Practice – Self-Directed Support Across Scotland

Short breaks in Fife

The Short Breaks team was established five years ago and sits within the Self-directed Support (SDS) team. Following assessment, supported adults (aged 18 – 65 years) who are eligible for short breaks are referred to the team by their assessor with their short break budget in place.

The assessor calculates the budget using a resource allocation questionnaire which considers the needs of the carer and the person they care for. The short break staff have a conversation with the person and their unpaid carer to explore and identify the types of breaks which would work best for them.

The team continue to support the family to use their budget throughout the year to maximise the breaks and to ensure the carer gets a regular break from their caring role.



Our work links with
SDS Standard 8:
Worker autonomy

SDS Standard 12:
Access to budgets and
flexibility of spend



Our learning approach

Prior to the establishment of the Short Breaks Service, many supported people accessed their respite in traditional building-based resources (both internal and external). This was mainly due to people and their families being accustomed to using the service and they were confident in the support being provided; they had also established relationships with the provider.

However, there was an increasing number of requests for creative, innovative breaks which allowed families to access breaks together or from people wanting to try different resources. In these circumstances it was up to the practitioner to explore the alternatives, undertake any checks and assessments as to the suitability of the resource, establish costings then follow the lengthy process for the local authority to book and pay. Not always an easy task.

Following some research into how other local authorities supported adults to access respite or short breaks and discussions with practitioners from all adults' teams and carers representatives, a proposal was submitted to senior management to establish a Short Breaks Service in Fife. The proposal also included the establishment of a short breaks resource allocation system to introduce a more equitable way of allocating annual budgets.

The establishment of a central service alongside an equitable method of allocating budgets would

- Provide eligible people and their carers the opportunity to be offered a range of short break options to best suit their circumstances, assessed needs and outcomes.
- Provide an equitable process for allocating short break/respite provisions (services and financial)

linked to eligibility as well as individuals needs and outcomes.

- Improve and streamline the process of how short breaks are arranged, recorded and paid for.
- Create a central bank of knowledge and experience of the types of breaks available – locally, nationally and beyond.
- Provide support to social work practitioners.

Our story of change

We undertook research into how our partners across other authorities offered short breaks and the learning from those who had established similar services. In addition, we joined the network facilitated by Shared Care Scotland to learn more about their approach to supporting unpaid carers.

Additionally, we spoke to practitioners from the teams that the service would be supporting to gain their views as well as the carers representative from the Integration Joint Board.

The feedback on the proposal was all positive.

Carers of supported adults were offered the opportunity to attend a short session to discuss their views on how short breaks were arranged and offered at that time, the range of options available and to obtain their views on the proposal. Whilst attendance was low, the input and comments obtained at the session and via workers was positive and gave an insight into how important respite/short breaks were to families and carers. Some of the feedback given at the time is below:

Here's what people told us about what matters to them:

“ the most important thing about a respite break is that A is happy there – if A is happy then so am I – which gives me a proper break ”

“ My [family member] tends to go to the one place which they really like, although we do have to travel a bit as there are no similar places in Fife. ”

“ I have confidence that when A goes for respite they are looked after. It feels like a holiday – they have a plan of activities available for the week and they can choose what they want to do. ”

“ P and I plan the breaks together – P is able to choose when and where to go · We are both really happy with the respite breaks but would like to know more about other places that might be nearer to home. ”

“ B would love to go on a micro-light – B used to love sports and activities – we try and do as much as we can together. ”

“ If this new way of booking respite goes ahead, it would be good if the staff visited the various places first so they know what's available – accessibility, space for wheelchairs etc – that way they can inform people ”

Once the proposal was approved, we established the team, established a Short Life Working Group and worked extensively with colleagues from Finance, Contracts, Performance, Operational and Audit to develop our processes and procedures.

Whilst the planning was underway, the staff joining the team started to gather information on resources and services both local and national, making connections and introductions.

We have six adults teams in Fife and introduced the service in phases – two teams at a time to try the new way of working.

Barriers and tensions

On the whole, the change was welcomed by colleagues. The main change was moving from paper applications for funding to using the customer database (SWIFT/AIS at the time) to automate requests and budget approval. Referrals came to the team as an online workflow.

Initially, the service was established to support people to access overnight breaks however we have noticed a change in requests over the last year or so. We are receiving more requests for different types of breaks which don't involve overnight stays. This can be for a variety of reasons however our rationale is that if it's what the person wants, it's going to meet their outcomes, is within their budget and ultimately provides their carer with a break – we will support the request.

Enablers

As indicated, the change was welcomed by colleagues in the Partnership. Sourcing respite/short break facilities for people was time consuming for practitioners and due to the demand for specific services, it was often a first come first served process.

Centralising the process introduced a more equitable approach. The Short Breaks team works with providers to try to accommodate people's choice, but we also work to prioritise those most in need or where carers haven't accessed a break for some time.

The change was also welcomed by providers as it gave them a central point of contact to check for breaks booked, co-ordinate breaks and payments.

Finally, centralising the process meant that one team was responsible for data input to the system which helped to improve accuracy for performance and planning statistics.



What we have achieved

Many people still prefer the familiarity and security of traditional commissioned breaks in a care home or respite unit and others like to make their own arrangements using SDS option 1 (direct payments).

The team has seen an increase in families choosing SDS option 2 as it offers flexibility and choice, without the responsibility of managing the budget. The short breaks team book the break on their behalf using a purchasing card. Some carers choose to go away with the person they care for as it offers them a welcome break from daily domestic chores and caring routines. The budget covers the cost of the cared-for person and one carer. Some families pay extra towards a larger property for additional relatives or friends so that the caring responsibilities are shared.

Hotels, cottages, apartments, lodges and caravan breaks are all popular. Destinations to date include London, Blackpool, Carlisle, the Highlands, the Campsie Fells, Edinburgh, Campbelltown, Loch Lomond, Stirling, Fort William, Northumberland, Spain, the Faroe Islands and the Lake District.

In a recent short breaks survey carried out by the short breaks team, supported people and their carers provided the following feedback about what short breaks mean to them.

“ We went to the theatre, visited Tower Bridge and took a boat trip on the river. It was a relaxing break. Everything went great, from planning the break to contacting the short breaks team who arranged the booking. Having these breaks helps me recalibrate and lets us enjoy each other's company and to have fun. ”

“ Now that I know the short breaks team are there, it's much easier to keep track of the budget. ”

“ My son has something to look forward to and we can take other family members with us, so he gets to spend more time with them, which he loves. I am able to be more relaxed. My head feel less like as though it is going to explode (less stress). ”

“ It was lovely to get away with our daughter to visit family in England. Our relationship improved dramatically, and I found that my daughter and I were much more relaxed. Being with other family meant that we also got time away from each other. I find that everything seems to reset itself in terms of our relationship which can be strained due the never ending routines for us both. ”



If you would like more information about our approach, contact Alison Morrison, Planning Co-ordinator, Self-directed Support team, Fife Health and Social Care Partnership at alison.morrison@fife.gov.uk