

Guidance for Applicants

2023/2024

A. General information

VOCAL's Wee Breaks Fund aims to benefit carers and the people they care for and seeks to support carers, who provide unpaid care to someone in Midlothian, to stay in good health, despite the pressures of their caring role. It is anticipated that average grant awards will be in the region of £400 - £450, however for those with the most significant needs the panel can consider grants awards of up to £800.

Applications can be submitted at any time (dependent on funds being available). Grants must be spent within three months of receiving the funding and receipts returned within four weeks of completing the break. The Panel will meet monthly to review applications. The Panel is made up of former carers with a wide range of caring experiences, as well as representatives from Health & Social Care, Children & Families and VOCAL.

B. What can be funded?

The Panel is keen that the fund is used as creatively and flexibly as possible to help carers achieve the kind of break that will be most effective for them. Please see the list at the end of this guidance for some examples of how other carers have organised a break from caring. However, you do not need to restrict yourself to these examples and we encourage carers to be as creative as possible when considering what would be the ideal break.

C. Who can apply?

The Panel is keen to support as many carers as possible, but due to limited funds, applicants must meet the following eligibility criteria. The panel will also consider some priority areas when making grants.

D. Eligibility criteria

Applications must meet the following criteria:

- ✓ The carer must provide care for someone who lives in Midlothian (out with a long-term residential care setting) A carer is someone who provides unpaid care to a family member, partner, relative or friend who needs help to manage a long term condition, disability, physical or mental health problem or addiction.

- ✓ The carer **cannot** apply for something that should be provided by statutory services.
- ✓ The application should complement, and not replace or duplicate, services which local authorities, the NHS and other agencies already fund or provide.
- ✓ The application must be supported by someone who has supported the carer and/or the person they care for in a professional capacity e.g. a GP, District Nurse, OT, Social Worker, CPN, Carer Support Worker, Teacher, Community Worker.
- ✓ Carers must demonstrate that they are **NOT** able to fund the break themselves and are willing to provide a breakdown of their household income/expenditure, if necessary.
- ✓ The health and wellbeing of the carer or the person receiving care is under strain and is likely to be improved by a wee break(s).
- ✓ The balance of caring and a life outside caring is seriously compromised and a wee break will assist the carer to re-dress the balance.
- ✓ The relationship between the carer and the person receiving care, or the wider family, is under strain, and relationships are likely to benefit and improve with a break(s).
- ✓ Only one VOCAL Wee Breaks grant will be made to the same household in a twelve month period.
- ✓ If the request is for a holiday or overnight stay then the holiday or overnight stay must be taken in the UK.
- ✓ VOCAL will not support more than one holiday or overnight stay from the Wee Breaks Fund within a 24 month period.

Please Note: VOCAL has a broader Wee Breaks and Fundraising policy which sets out the level of support carers can receive from VOCAL over specific periods of time. The eligibility criteria outlined above is governed by this broader policy.

E. Priority areas

The panel will consider applications against some priority areas, which include:

- ✓ Carers who have not received financial support from the fund previously.
- ✓ Carers who are unable to fund the break themselves, due to low income or those living in areas of Midlothian which fall into the most deprived 20-30%.
- ✓ Applications that can evidence a long term benefit of the award.
- ✓ The carer has been providing support for more than 2 years.

- ✓ The carer has required hospital or sudden medical treatment in the last 12 months, or supports someone who has been in hospital within the last 12 months.
- ✓ The carer receives little or no break from caring in an average week.
- ✓ The demands of the caring role threaten the balance with the carer's work or social life and a break is likely to improve this balance.
- ✓ The break will help to foster family relationships – spending some quality time together or apart. This may be attendance at important family or social occasions i.e. weddings, birthday parties, family visits or weekend breaks.
- ✓ The carer finds it difficult to cope and may be unable to continue in their caring role without intervention.

F. Desired Outcomes

A Short Break should help to achieve at least one or more of the following outcomes and your application should demonstrate to the panel how this will be achieved.

- ✓ The carer and the person receiving care will benefit from improved physical and emotional wellbeing.
- ✓ The carer will be better able to sustain their caring role.
- ✓ The carer will be better able to balance the caring role with a life outside of caring.
- ✓ The carer will be more confident dealing with the impact of the caring role on their relationships.

Examples of Previous Carers Breaks

Time off from Caring

Driving Lessons

Peter used his Wee Breaks grant to take driving lessons and pass his test. This gave him more independence and a better quality of life. It also enhanced Peter's confidence in his caring role and made it more manageable, in terms of dealing with shopping, medical appointments and outings with his sister, who had a physical disability and learning difficulty.

iPad

Shirley used her Wee Breaks grant to purchase an iPad, as she was feeling isolated during the Covid restrictions. The device allowed her to stay in touch with friends and family, while also allowing her to switch off and relax when she got the opportunity, by watching movies and reading books. Shirley son had Autism, was very demanding and needed a great deal of care and attention, so the iPad could also be used to entertain him and allow the two of them to play games together.

Sitter Services

Linda used her Wee Breaks grant to purchase a weekly sitter service from a local care provider. This allowed her to get out one day per week for three hours at a time. She used the time to catch up with friends, go to the cinema and swimming. Linda's husband had dementia and the sitter service allowed her to relax knowing her husband was being cared for by a trusted care provider. It also allowed her to recharge her batteries and sustain her caring role.

Gym Membership

Catherine used her Wee Breaks grant to purchase a membership for the local authority gym. This allowed her to attend exercise sessions at times and dates that were suitable to her and could be worked around her caring commitments. Catherine's father was disabled and had recently suffered a stroke which meant he needed a great deal of care and support. The flexibility of the gym membership allowed her to attend gym sessions and exercise classes when other members of her family were available to look after her dad. She found this a great way to relax, unwind and look after her own health and wellbeing.

Garden Furniture

Donald used his Wee Breaks grant to purchase a table, chairs and patio heater for the garden. His wife had dementia and could not be left alone in the house for any period of time. The garden furniture created an outside space where he could spend some time on his own relaxing, while still being close enough to care for his wife and ensure she was safe. The garden furniture also provided a valuable space for him and his wife to enjoy some quality time together.

Complimentary Therapies/Acupuncture

Claire used her Wee Breaks grant to purchase a package of complimentary therapies and acupuncture treatments. Claire's daughter had cerebral palsy and was confined to a wheelchair, which meant Claire had very little free time as she provided a significant amount of care for her daughter. The therapies were spread over a 12 week period and allowed Claire time each week to completely switch off, relax and enjoy the therapeutic benefits of the treatments.

Outings, Theatre and Cinema

Rose used her Wee Breaks grant to purchase a series of outings and visits to the theatre and cinema. Rose and her husband cared for their adult son, who had a mental health condition, which significantly impacted on his mood and personality. He needed a lot of reassurance and emotional support, as well as one to one support with medication and personal hygiene. Regular outings for meals, as well as trips to the cinema and theatre allowed Rose and her husband to get some time away from their caring roles. This was invaluable and gave them the opportunity to relax, unwind and spend some stress free time together.

As stated previously, these are only examples of how some other carers have used their Wee Breaks grant to support their break. However, you do not need to restrict yourself to these examples and we encourage carers to be as creative as possible when considering what would be the ideal break for them.