



An evaluation of the Carers Active Campaign

INTERIM REPORT – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

August 2023

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Introduction

This report provides an interim update on the reach and impact of the three-year Carers Active Campaign being run by Carers UK, with funding from Sport England. It is intended to provide learning and insights that can be used to inform the delivery of the campaign throughout its final year (July 2023 to June 2024), and to support discussions about how best to embed and sustain this work beyond the end of the current funding period.

The Carers Active campaign is a three-year, multi-faceted programme of work that aims to improve the physical and mental health of unpaid carers through becoming more active, and to influence wider system change that enables carers to be supported to improve their wellbeing and social connectedness. This is being done through a combination of online carer facing work (including online information and resources for carers, dedicated social media channels, and monthly online exercise sessions) and influencing work across the wider system (including targeted work with national and local organisations that can influence practice and facilitate access to physical activity opportunities for unpaid carers, and sharing of evidence and best practice).

Existing evidence shows that unpaid carers are much more likely to be inactive when compared to the wider population and, due to their caring commitments, can face significant barriers in relation to being physically active. These include a lack of time, financial constraints, or a lack of confidence due to the constant physical and emotional stress of their caring role.

In the UK, around two thirds (65%) of adults will provide care for someone in their adult life and there is 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. Research undertaken by Carers UK as part of phase one of the Carers Active campaign (prior to this current three-year period) found that increased physical activity among unpaid carers can lead to decreased loneliness, increased life satisfaction and happiness, and decreased anxiety and stress. The research also found that the adoption of a behaviour change model (in particular the COM-B model for behaviour change – see Section 3 of this report) could provide a useful framework for shaping the design of the Carers Active campaign and inform the delivery of campaign activities.

Evaluation methodology

This is a mixed method, formative evaluation that has been designed to enable a robust assessment of the Carers Active campaign's:

- **Relevance:** the extent to which the Carers Active project is designed to respond to the needs of beneficiaries, communities and the wider system
- **Coherence:** the compatibility of these initiatives with other interventions that aim to achieve similar or complementary objectives
- **Effectiveness:** the extent to which the project is achieving its intended objectives and outcomes
- **Impact:** the differences that engagement in these types of interventions can have for unpaid carers, specifically in relation to increasing levels of regular physical activity, improving carer wellbeing, reducing loneliness and improving social interactions, and improved physical and mental health
- **Sustainability:** the extent to which the impacts and benefits for participants and across communities and the wider system are likely to continue.

In order to do this, we have shaped our data collection methods and analytical approach around the COM-B model of behaviour change, which provides a framework for assessing how effective the campaign is (and how effective it could be) at creating long-lasting changes in behaviour among the target group.

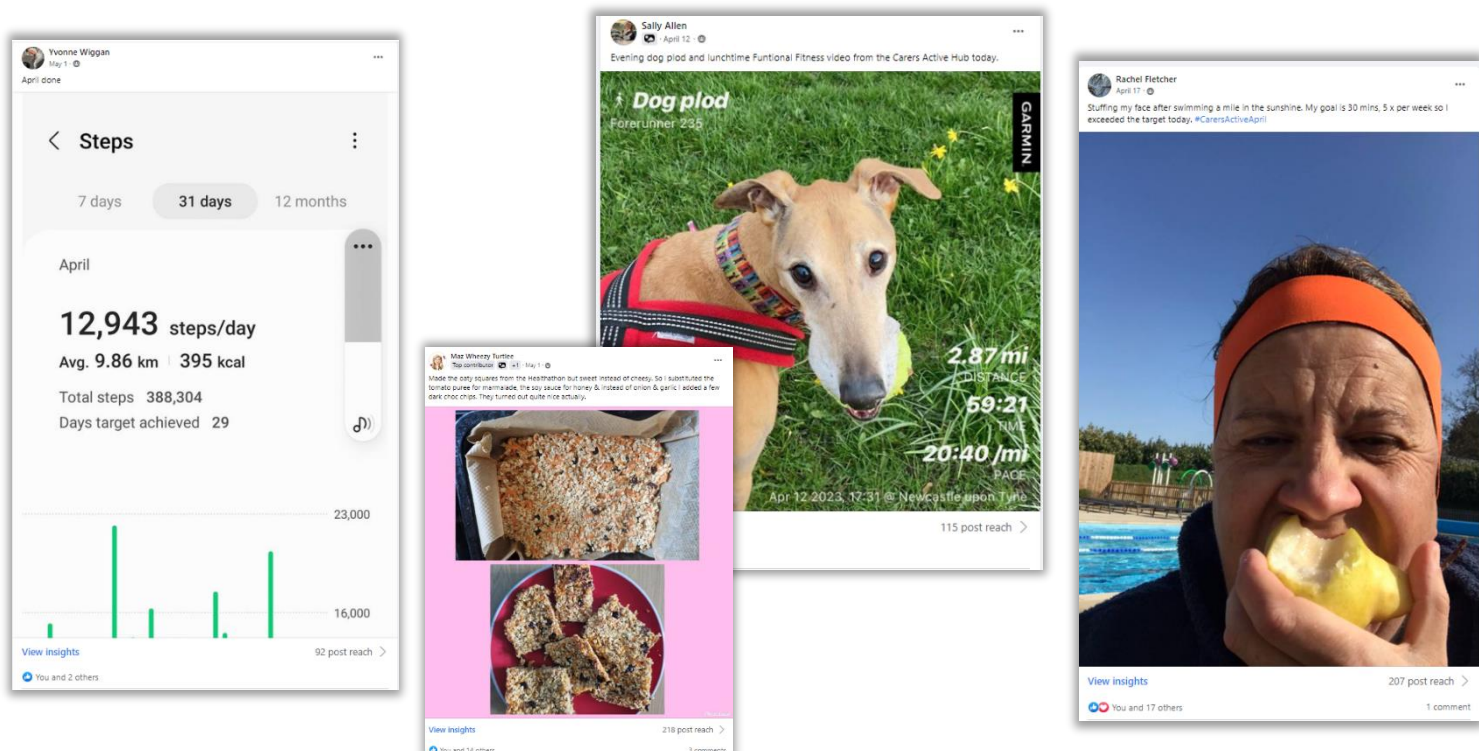
With this in mind, we have designed our approach to reflect the complex nature of this particular 'intervention', and the wide range of intended outcomes set out in the Theory of Change (see section 2). This means that we have gathered data from quite a wide range of those potentially impacted by the campaign, including those who may have had only minimal (or infrequent) contact with the campaign, while also building much deeper insights from a smaller group of people who have been in more regular contact with campaign activities over the past year (the 'cohort').

Key findings

We have found compelling evidence at this stage of our evaluation that the campaign is demonstrating progress towards a number of the outcomes related to improving physical activity levels among unpaid carers, including:

- Effectively engaging with a wide range of carers to address their specific challenges about being more physically active
- Helping carers to recognise the value and importance of physical activity in their lives
- Supporting carers to access new physical activity opportunities and to increase levels of motivation to be physically active, and
- Supporting carers to incorporate physical activity into their daily routines.

We have also found that the campaign is largely successful in removing well-documented barriers that carers face accessing physical activity opportunities, and that it has motivated carers to seek new opportunities and share opportunities with other carers.



We find that the campaign improves the wellbeing and social connectedness of carers, with carers getting a great deal of satisfaction out of being part of the campaign and reporting a reduced sense of loneliness and isolation as a result. This is particularly notable in carers who are housebound and who access online activities, or carers who build relationships in offline activities. The physical activity opportunities provided through (and as a result of) the campaign increase happiness and sense of worth, increase mental and physical wellbeing and resilience, and lead to a greater recognition from carers that it is important that their needs are met as well as those of the people that they care for.

There is also early evidence of system-level change and we intend to explore in more detail the impact (and potential impact) of the campaign on system-level efforts in year three of the evaluation. In this report we provide early-stage evidence that carer support organisations, local authorities, and leisure providers have a good understanding of carers' needs and that they value the campaign and the resources that are provided. There is some evidence of cross-sector partnerships being forged and new initiatives being developed for carers as a result of the campaign, and carer support organisations, local authorities and leisure providers would welcome greater guidance on the provision of activities for carers.

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Nearly 40 carers and their loved ones from all over Greater Manchester enjoyed a walk around #DebdalePark

Discover more about our day here:
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The findings set out in this report also support the idea of the Carers Active campaign (as with many campaigns of this nature) being progressive, in which awareness, engagement, and the development of resources that support behavioural change among unpaid carers and across the system, will continue to build as campaign activities continue. The evidence gathered to date shows that the necessary building blocks for wider scale impact (through sharing learning, stimulating local action, and establishing new and effective partnerships) are being established.

Looking forward

Going forward there are some possible actions for Carers UK to take as it goes into the final year of the campaign and looks to sustain its impact beyond this. These include:

- Furthering existing efforts to work with local leisure providers and other community groups promoting physical activity opportunities, to raise awareness and offer more 'offline' activities for carers at a local level, and in particular opportunities which are available at low or reduced cost.
- Further promoting the mental health benefits of physical exercise.
- Considering ways to engage and reach more male carers in the campaign, those carers in younger age groups, and those who may not be able to attend online physical activity sessions during working hours.
- Considering ways to collate 'local action' stories of where the campaign has acted as a catalyst for new or joined-up initiatives at the local level and between partners.
- Continuing to build and share tools and resources that can support local action.
- Continuing to disseminate evidence and learning about what works (and what doesn't) so that those organisations commissioning and delivering support for carers can further embed physical activity in local and regional support structures.

From an evaluation perspective, our priorities for the final year of the campaign will be to:

- Consider how best to capture more information about the profile of carers who engage in the campaign, in particular in relation to ethnicity and working status.
- Explore different and alternative ways of gathering data on the quality and depth of social connections that are developed as a result of the campaign.
- Place a strong emphasis on understanding the system level change created by the campaign, and the role that the campaign has played in different parts of the system, and the extent to which it has (or could) influence national and local policy.
- Formulate options and recommendations for how the impact of the campaign can be sustained beyond the current funding period.

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