

# Carer Breather Fund

## Impact and Learning Report - Phase Two

### Year Two (2024-25)



## Introduction and background

### Aim of this fund

The aim the Carer Breather fund is to **enhance and extend regular and locally based support for carers**, including:

- Those providing care but who do not necessarily wish to identify with a carers' organisation
- Carers currently unknown to formal services

### Learning and Improvement

The Fund's approach to evaluation, learning and improvement is guided by the Community Solutions **Performance Management, Evaluation, Learning and Improvement (PMELI) Framework**. Funded projects are required to capture information on the support provided, the reach, and the outcomes met by their projects. This report aims to share this impact and learning.

### This report includes:

- Reach and Impact - Funded projects and people supported
- Reach and Impact - Summary of Community Solutions Outcomes
- Learning - Phase 2 Learning and Improvement Event
- Learning - Unexpected positive outcomes
- Learning - Other feedback from funded projects
- Summary of all funded projects
- Case studies

### Fund management

The Carer Breather Fund is funded by University Health and Social Care North Lanarkshire (UHSCNL) to support community and voluntary sector (CVS) organisations in North Lanarkshire to provide ongoing breaks and activities for carers. Delivery of the fund, including the facilitation of the **Carer Support Network** (CSN), is co-ordinated by **North Lanarkshire Carers Together** (NLCT).

### Community Solutions Support for Carers

Support for carers has consistently been a key focus of the Community Solutions programme since its inception in 2012, with the programme's roots in the national 'Reshaping Care for Older People' initiative. In addition to funding this initiative, Community Solutions also provides funding for the North Lanarkshire Carer Support Network (CSN).

## Reach and Impact - Funded projects and people supported

Please see the [Community Solutions website](#) for reports on previous years

Many thanks to NLCT and the funded projects who contributed to this report

**£271.7k**

Total Funding  
Awarded in Phase 2  
Year 2

Note: the number of carers and cared for people/families is the number of unique individuals supported and therefore may differ from the number of carers/cared for people reported in the Carer Census

**11 projects**  
delivered by **11**  
organisations

supported  
**1,100** people, including  
carers and cared-for  
people and their families

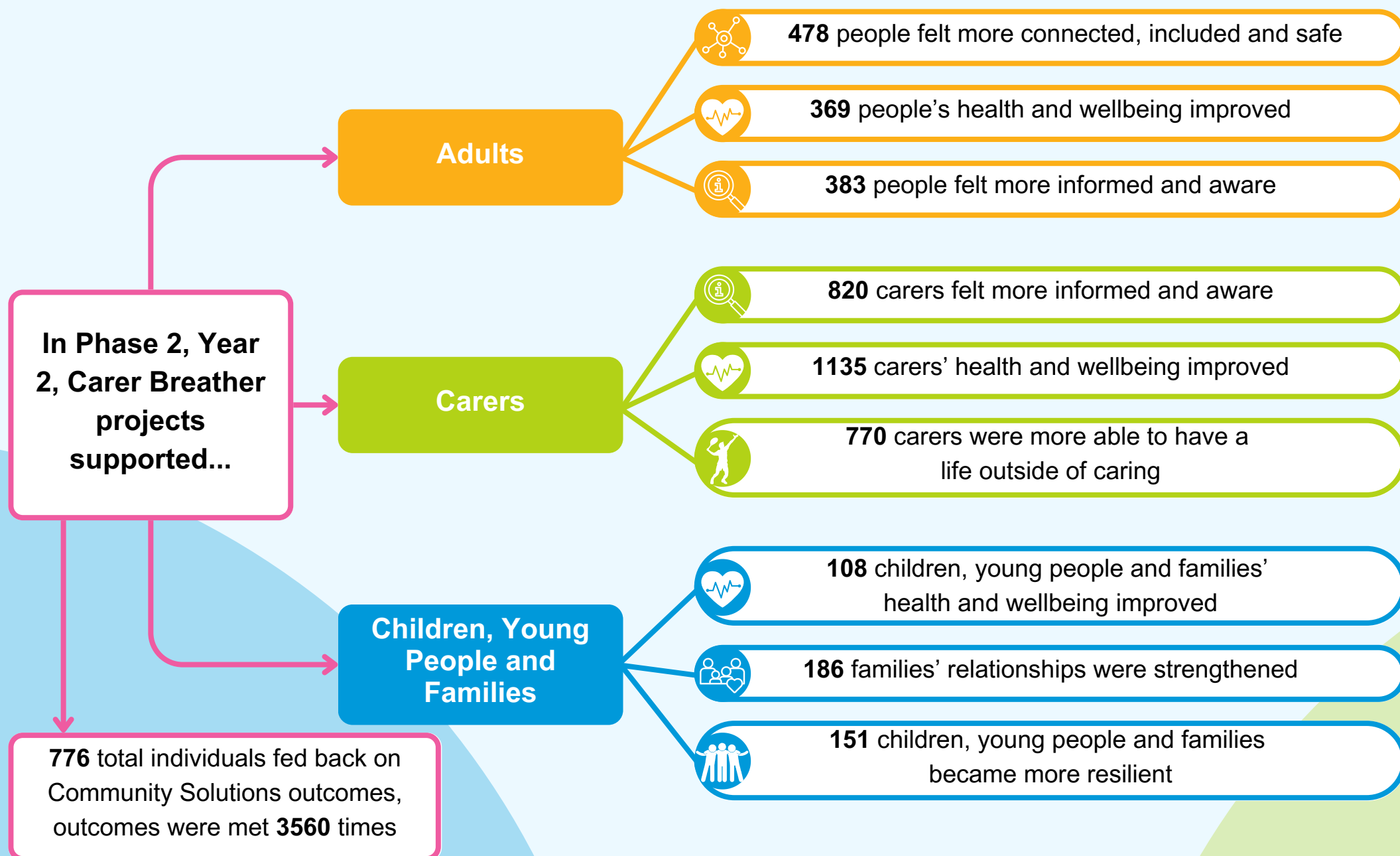
Supported by **102**  
volunteers, who devoted  
**5,220** volunteer hours

delivered **90** different  
activities/services

**4,126**  
sessions

That's equivalent to **2.8**  
people working full time  
every week over the  
past year!

## Reach and Impact - Summary of carers' reported Community Solutions Outcomes



## Learning - Phase Two Learning and Improvement Event

VANL hosted one Learning and Improvement event during Year Two of Phase Two for funded organisations – on the 4<sup>th</sup> November 2024. A total of eight out of 11 organisations participated. The event was organised at the half-way point of the second year of phase 2 of the fund to facilitate a two-way conversation between funded projects and VANL, maximise collective learning and knowledge sharing, feed into the 6-month flash report and Impact and Learning Report, and inform possible additional support from VANL.

### Projects came up with the following new ideas

- Getting Better Together **trained up staff members** to deliver **African drums** sessions because the cost for practitioners to deliver this was a barrier before
- Parkinson's Self-Help Group have started delivering monthly **Boccia** sessions within the centre
- PAMIS Lanarkshire delivered **paddle boarding** for the first time
- One Parent Families applied for funding to have **hubs in the local community** for children with additional support needs to reduce transport as a barrier for carers

### Projects are particularly proud of the following achievements

- The way **carers engage** with the project
- The success of **whole family activities**, particularly for families of ASN children
- Carers being supported to **access** the **benefits** they are entitled to
- Carers being able to **learn from one another** and form their own groups
- **Partnership working**. Allowing carers to access multiple services when it is convenient for them
- Creating a safe space where carers can be honest without feeling guilty

### Projects encountered the following challenges

- Projects want to deliver more but they are restricted by **lack of capacity** and staff numbers
- Increase of **people who are at a crisis point**
- Lack of accessible venues with **changing places**
- It takes time and effort for people to be comfortable enough to engage with services
- There is a need for **sitter services**
- It would be beneficial if VANL could offer **feedback on evaluation**

VANL staff can provide feedback on evaluation submitted by projects upon request

## Learning - Unexpected Positive Outcomes

In addition to their planned outcomes, funded project were asked to identify positive but unexpected outcomes. Some examples were:

“Many of our members are reluctant to undertake social activities outwith the centre and on an individual basis. Both the individual and the carer speak about being uncomfortable, anxious and embarrassed due to tremours, mobility and speech difficulties.

We organised a **group cinema trip**, with a staff member both visting the venue and speaking to staff at the venue to ascertain the suitability of the activity.

With information gathered we arranged a day when the cinema was quieter and received support from the staff at the cinema. Many of those attending had not been to the cinema for a number of years. Feeling more relaxed as they attended as a group and it was quieter.

A number of our members have attended since then on a independent basis, stating that **attending as a group had given them the confidence** to return.”

Parkinson's Self Help Group

Bazooka Arts

“Our project gained considerable national and international reach which we consider an unexpected and successful outcome. This was achieved through **strong partnership working** with national cultural partners: Scottish Ballet, International Teaching Artists Collaborative, Glasgow Print Studio and Summerlee Museum and through participating in **two national Arts and Health Festivals**: The Scottish Mental Health Arts Festival and the Healing Arts Scotland Festival. These events led to our Carer Breather Project being exhibited in Parliament twice in the last year. We were invited speakers at two national and international conferences, representing the project, sharing learning and our Arts & health methodologies and their role in **promoting health, wellbeing and in reducing social isolation and loneliness.**”

“Several unexpected outcomes have emerged:

Increased Peer Support Networks – Many carers attending our groups have formed their own peer-led networks outside of our sessions, meeting socially and providing ongoing emotional support to one another. This demonstrates the long-term impact of structured support in **reducing isolation**.

Carers Engaging in Volunteering – **A number of carers who benefited from our activities have gone on to volunteer** within the programme, sharing their lived experiences and providing guidance to new attendees. This has strengthened the sustainability of our support services.

Improved Wellbeing and Confidence – Several carers have reported **improved mental wellbeing**, with some expressing the confidence to take up new hobbies, and social opportunities.”

Getting Better Together

## Learning - Unexpected Positive Outcomes cont.

“A positive and unexpected outcome of this project has been **the initiation of a new piece of work by North Lanarkshire Council (NLC) to ensure that Changing Places facilities are both included in and maintained across local authority buildings.**

Throughout the project, families consistently highlighted the difficulty of finding suitable accessible facilities in the area. This lack of provision contributed significantly to the sense of isolation experienced by many carers. In response, PAMIS conducted an audit of the registered facilities and presented the findings to NLC. As a result, plans are now underway to make North Lanarkshire a more inclusive place.

The introduction of more accessible Changing Places facilities will make a significant difference in enabling people with profound and multiple learning disabilities—and their families—to participate more fully in their communities.”

PAMIS Lanarkshire

“Because of the wide age range of children who use our group, we have many parent/carers with a vast knowledge from learned experience and only happy to share their advice. This has highlighted for us to develop **more information days and learning about carers rights and benefit/grant applications with our fellow Carers Support organisations**, eg North Lanarkshire Carers Together, in order to signpost our Parent/Carers the accurate information. This support is equally as important as taking time out from the caring role.”

PlayPeace

“While writing the application I had planned for creating respite for carers. Over the period of the project I have **delivered courses and created a carers garden club**, all unexpected.”

Watch Us Grow

“One of our service users has had a great increase in positivity and prospects for her future. She felt hopeless and without support when she first came to us.

Since working with us, we have managed to encourage her to have a long awaited deep conversation with her mum, opening up their relationship and give her **more options when supporting her child who has autism.**

Since this conversation with she has felt a huge relief. Her engagement with us has increased and she has been feeling a lot more relaxed. I think this particular case was unexpected. She has been able to come so far and start to actually feel positive about her future and work may even be a possibility for her.”

One Parent Families Scotland



## Learning - Other Feedback from Funded Projects

Additional, selected feedback and learning from funded projects – provided in monitoring and evaluation reports submitted to VANL – is highlighted below.

“This project gave us the opportunity to get to know families, build meaningful relationships, and earn their trust. Through this sensitive, relationship-based approach, **we came to recognise the significant trauma that many, if not most of our carers are carrying**. With this awareness, our organisation has a deeper understanding of carer needs and how we can respond to trauma also how we can better support carers going forward. One important insight from the feedback we received was **the value of helping carers document their personal experiences**. This is now being supported through our “Writing for Well-being” sessions, alongside our bereavement and loss resources and training.”

PAMIS Lanarkshire

Throughout the duration of the project we have sought feedback and consultation with clients regarding current services and to inform future development. We received repeating feedback that clients would like **more group based support options which provide peer support as well as support for health/wellbeing needs**. We will develop and integrate this into future Carer services at The Haven.

The Haven

“One of the key challenges encountered was maintaining consistent attendance on a weekly basis. While initial engagement was strong, sustaining participation proved difficult. Based on this, we are exploring whether a fortnightly schedule might better **accommodate carers' availability and preferences**.”

The Health and Wellness Hub

“This cohort have a lot of support requirements. It has taken a lot of work to build up confidence, trust and consistency. Where we have seen this work, we have watched our service users grow in confidence, building trust with us to access different services, and open up to each other in group settings, building ongoing friendships and peer support networks.

What we do find though is that **once they have connected to one of our workers, it is difficult to introduce others**. They build the trust and the initial introduction of someone new can put us back to the beginning. We have tried to minimise this but encourage where we can as we know that **having more support options gives the parents more opportunities to progress forward** and start to feel the relief of things getting better.”

One Parent Families Scotland

Getting Better Together

“One of the most positive outcomes was the development of **organic peer support groups**. Many carers built friendships and continued supporting each other beyond our sessions, **reducing isolation in a sustainable way**.”



**Summary of All Funded Projects**

Organisation	Project	Total Funding Award (£)	No. of unique individuals supported
Bazooka Arts	Creative and Connected Carers	21,848	90
Getting Better Together	Caring Matters	27,212	174
Glenboig Development Trust	Carer Breather Sitter Service	20,760	48
North Lanarkshire Disability Forum	The Little Care Hub	28,052	197
One Parent Families Scotland	Connecting Carers	27,322	39
PAMIS	Family Carer Support Service North Lanarkshire	24,168	163
Parkinson's Self-Help Group	Time for Me - a life alongside caring	25,845	38
PlayPeace	PlayPeace Cares	21,918	186
The Haven	Carer Support	27,487	38
The Health and Wellness Hub	Wraparound Wellbeing Support Programme	26,476	52
Watch Us Grow	Our carers	20,565	75

## Case study\* - The Haven - Carer Support

\*Case studies edited for brevity

### Background

Three couples attended The Haven's Dementia Group in Wishaw. Some clients have struggled to access peer support due to other groups being quite large and intimidating, or their cared-for person not settling in that setting.



### Intervention

The lounge was prepared beforehand, with essential oils specific to relaxation diffusing, and soothing background music. The clients living with dementia were invited to do some **craft activities** with the Haven Nurse in the kitchen, and the Carers were invited into the lounge to participate in a **Haven Wellbeing group session**. On this particular session, the group's fifth meeting, the Carers participated in a relaxation session, using a Guided Visualisation: In the Meadow, and two carers were able to use the **recliner chairs**. One Carer discussed her anxiety about an upcoming holiday due to a personal fear of the type of holiday, and the Practitioner was able to impart **advice regarding breathing techniques and distraction techniques** (being fully inclusive to all). At the end of the Wellbeing Session, Carers were free to sit for a while longer in the lounge for some **peer support** or to utilise the recliners and blankets to maximise their self-care, before joining their Cared-for persons in the kitchen for a cup of tea and a biscuit, whereby the Nurse and Wellbeing Practitioner were available to clients for any **private discussions**.

### Outcome

- From the first wellbeing session, it was observed that the Carers really craved the **peer support** – some more than others. The more intimate setting within The Haven and the relationship with the staff has made attending this group more manageable than groups they tried to attend previously.
- The **attendees developed strong bonds**. One attendee sourced non-slip mats for the others to use, based on a previous discussion. Another attendee sought 24-hour support from a company used and recommended by another of the carers.
- The carers developed their ability to relax and switch off their conscious brain. The practitioner noted at the beginning of the relaxation how eager the clients were to prepare themselves for a Visualisation, with two clients reclining fully on the recliner chairs. One of these carers had been very apprehensive about relaxation, therefore to see her easily transition into a relaxed state demonstrated how safe she feels.

## Case study\* - PAMIS - North Lanarkshire Family Support Service

\*Case studies edited for brevity

### Background

Family A is a single parent family, with four dependent children. The referral for this family was received while a PAMIS staff member was attending an open afternoon at a local nursery school where a PAMIS information stand was present, the family self-referred. At the time of initial contact three of the children were under age five, two of the children had received a diagnosis of a rare genetic condition which impacts their mobility, communication, development of fine and gross motor skills, continence, learning capacity, behaviour and sleep. At the time the family lived in an inaccessible council house within the Coatbridge area. Mum works 30 hours per week, dad has no contact with the children and doesn't input to the family financially, mum feels exceptionally isolated and does not have a support network around her.



### Intervention

Over a period of 18 months PAMIS has provided intensive support to the family, this has taken the form of telephone calls, video calls, face to face meetings and emails, including to West Marc, social work, the local council, housing, the DWP, and a referral to One Parent Families Scotland. This support has had a huge impact on family A's quality of life.

### Outcome

- The family's son received a fast-track appointment with West Marc and now has **access to a bespoke wheelchair** to meet his mobility needs as well as supporting his postural care.
- A **Children and Families social worker** has been allocated to the family, and they have helped to secure an **SDS budget** which is being used to access community-based support for child A. DWP processed the application for **child disability payment** and the family are now in receipt of this vital benefit for child B.
- An offer of an **accessible family home** with off street parking was made to the family in December 2024, the family have now moved into their new family home and are settled.
- The family are now supported by **One Parent Families Scotland**, and continues to access **accessible leisure support** through PAMIS' monthly family friendship club and holiday clubs.

## Case study\* - North Lanarkshire Disability Forum - The Little Care Hub

\*Case studies edited for brevity

### Background

NLDF's Laura wrote: "After meeting a pupil support teacher at a community engagement event I expressed my interest of trying to have a presence in all the localities, particularly those on the outskirts of North Lanarkshire where there is a lack of supports and services to make this accessible to people. This pupil support teacher had been keen to offer support to parents for a while and was unsure how to go about it so I was happy to facilitate it and began an evening parent carer support group for parents of children with additional support needs to attend after work."

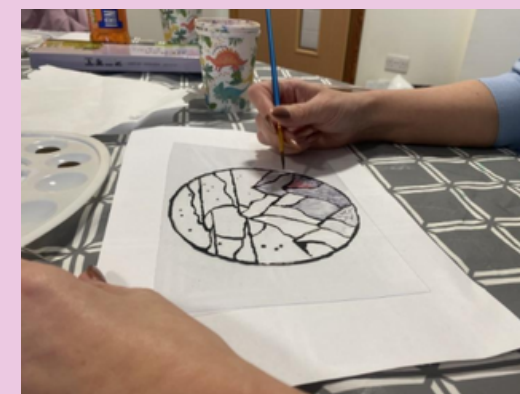


### Intervention

Laura organised a variety of activities for the parents including therapeutic art, a block of wellness sessions, silk painting, an information session on supports and services around accommodations in education and transitions, and signposted them to multiple resources and support. For example, she sourced multiple resources for a parent who was struggling to find information to help with her daughter's developmental language disorder, and referred one mum to NLDF community connectors for support with applying for child disability payment.

### Outcome

- The parents expressed this is their only night out and social interaction and they look forward to it every week. They never had the opportunity to connect with other parents in similar positions before and had been wanting something like this for a long time.
- The parents are now aware of supports and services available through carers associations Lanarkshire Carers and North Lanarkshire Carers Together. Most have gone on to access other benefits such as cinema cards and access cards, making outings more affordable and accessible for these families.
- Parents have found good peer support and connections in one another.



## Future of the Fund

### Future of this fund

NLCT served as the Carer Support Network Lead since 2014, and supported two Phases of the Carer Breather Fund, providing carers access to breaks from their caring role. In 2024-25, they supported the Carer Breather projects throughout the year, including delivering funding workshops and facilitating the funding panel for 2025-26.

Following the Community Solutions Thematic Funding Review, NLCT were successful in securing the tender for the Carer Breather Fund in 2025-26 from the University Health & Social Care Partnership.

In preparation for the upcoming third phase of the Carer Breather programme, NLCT conducted a comprehensive consultation with 307 carers, 11 Carer Breather projects, and additional stakeholders to evaluate the current services and identify any evolving needs or barriers to accessing breaks.

[Click here for more information](#)

### Funded projects

In Phase 3, **15** organisations were funded:

Bazooka Arts

Lanarkshire Deaf Hub

The Haven

Central Scotland Adventures

North Lanarkshire Disability Forum

VIP Pass Community Project

CACE

Promoting a More Inclusive Society

Volunteering Matters

Glenboig Development Trust

Play Peace

Watch Us Grow

The Health and Wellness Hub

PSHG North Lanarkshire

YMCA Bellshill and Mossend