

# Understanding carers' need for breaks to develop innovative solutions through co-production

## Executive Summary

Bristol City Council (BCC) received funding from central government as part of the Accelerating Reform Fund (ARF) and formed a stakeholder panel made up of carers with lived expertise, commissioners, and carer representatives from local carers' organisations to co-produced innovative projects.

This project focuses on 'ways to support unpaid carers to have breaks which are tailored to their needs.' Between July and September 2024, four carers' support organisations (Carers Support, Rethink Mental Illness, Chinese Community Wellbeing Society, and Bristol Black Carers) conducted focus groups with carers to understand their experiences of different types of breaks and how they want to access information about them. The groups engaged with seventy carers from a range of cultural backgrounds, ages, genders, and unique needs for the person they care for.

The project's objectives were to develop innovative access to breaks and inform Bristol's All Age Carers Strategy (2025 to 2029).

Carers said the key barriers they face to taking breaks are:

- guilt at leaving the person they care for
- finding and planning breaks being too time intensive
- complex adult social care processes and delays in assessments or getting a carers' Direct Payment
- difficulty in finding good quality replacement care for the person that they care for
- a lack of family support

Participants experienced different types of breaks and highlighted their advantages and disadvantages and concluded that carers need a range of breaks. They also suggested new types of breaks that are not generally available to carers, such as short notice breaks, vouchers

for gaming and music for young adult carers and flexible use of carers' Direct Payments to reciprocate any family support.

The 70 carers from diverse backgrounds that took part in this project recommend the development of innovative solutions to:

1. Broaden the type of breaks accessible to carers. The breaks that carers need is a lot more diverse than most respite services and carers' Direct Payments offers, which tend to be central to adult social care commissioning and provisions. The need for different types of breaks changes over time, according to the intensity of caring, age and ethnicity.
2. Ensure that carers can get breaks quickly and when first identified
3. Making information about all kinds of breaks locally available is crucial. An easy-to-navigate carers breaks website covering all types of breaks should be locally available. It will need a search function or flow chart to enable carers to find the break that is right for them, without having to read lots of information. It should be promoted on local radio, GP surgery and hospital screens, and through social media pop up ads and other inclusive printed information.
4. Carers' organisations should be supported to offer support to carers to help find breaks that suit their specific needs and circumstances. A website or a leaflet alone is not thought to be enough. They suggested volunteer-run carers information services about breaks. This could include a phone number or callback option on the carers' breaks website, run by carers' support organisations commissioned to answer the phone.

These innovative measures would go some way to enabling local authorities to meet their duties under the Care Act 2014 and prevent any further care breakdown.