

## Falkirk Carers' Voice



Monthly on Mondays  
10.00 AM - 12.00 PM



Falkirk Carers Centre  
or via Zoom



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### Adult Carers Voice Meeting

Held on 22nd June 2026

at The Carers Centre Falkirk

Chaired by Sharlene Ramage (Carers Centre Participation Development Worker)

Online option facilitated by Nora Deme (Digital Support Worker).

Notes by Dana Horsburgh Carer Representative, Sharlene Ramage and Zoom assistant.

#### Attendees

There were 21 people in attendance, Carers with a variety of caring situations, Carer Representatives, staff and staff who are also unpaid Carers.

Nora Deme – Digital Support Worker.

Lyn McKay- Citizens Advice.

Jessie Anne Malcolm- NHS Forth Valley

Sandra McAllister- Inclusive Support Co-Ordinator Children's Services

Val McInroy- Service Manager FDAMH

#### Quick recap

This meeting was led by Sharlene, who discussed various updates and services. Sharlene covered several key topics including Care Opinion feedback forms NHS and care service experiences, recent discussions with Social Security Scotland about Carers benefits and the need to inform them when anything changes for you, and feedback from NHS visitors about hospital experiences. The main portion of the meeting featured Val McInroy from FDAMH (Falkirk District Mental Health Association) providing an overview of their services, including mental health support, young people's services,

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family support, and new initiatives like tiered befriending programs for young people. Val explained how FDAMH has expanded from its original coffee morning roots to provide comprehensive mental health services across Falkirk, with over 15,000 people supported in the past five years through various counselling, support groups, and intervention services. Sandra McAllister talked about Falkirk Children's Services activity scheme and how Carers don't need to have a social worker to access this service, they just need their child/young person to have a diagnosis. Carers right to a break was discussed as was the lack of care/support provision for parent Carers to access a break.

### Care Opinion

Please use this platform to share your positive and negative experiences of NHS/Falkirk Care Services there are paper copies available if you cannot access online, please see link <https://www.careopinion.org.uk/>

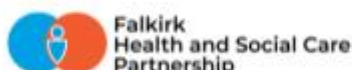
### Social Security Scotland Visit.

- Social Security Scotland came to talk about the changes to Carers benefits, although these improvements are great for many Carers, some of our older Carers and Sharlene shared Carers frustrations, particularly around state pension and removal of Carer Support Payment.
- Shirely Ann Sommerville Cabinet Secretary came to the Carers Centre's AGM and some Carers and Lyn from CAB were able to discuss Carers waits for the new benefits and the need to help hidden Carers self-identify and access supports.
- During this meeting a Carer mentioned that they were not aware that they had to inform SSS (Social Security Scotland) and the DWP (Department of Working Pensions) that the person that they care for had moved into a care home, this Carer now has a big bill, this Carer felt that someone should have informed his family about the importance of doing this.
- Sharlene has contacted the social work team and had a discussion with Lyn McKay at Citizens Advice about what we can do to prevent this happening to other Carers.

### Reply from Gordon McKenzie Social Work Localities Service Lead

- Gordon has said that there are 3 common 'points' where Carers are going to be seeing (or hearing from) people in relation to a care home placement - and therefore are good places to

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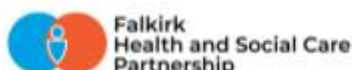


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promote this information. Those are the care assessment discussions with social workers, the financial assessment process (which all individuals going to a care home have to go through) and the meetings / discussions Carers will have with the care home managers/deputies.

- As part of the financial assessment process, the social work team already have a booklet for people going into a care home which explains the need to inform DWP (Department of Work and Pensions - which is Social Security Scotland (SSS) for this purpose) of any change in circumstance. This booklet goes out to every individual going to a care home (or their Carer) as part of the financial assessment process, but the feedback you've given shows that some people may not be reading this information or taking it all in as the booklet contains a lot of information. Gordon has e-mailed the manager of their financial assessment team and included them in the discussion about ways to improve.
- The 2 other common "points", the assessment discussions with social workers, and the meetings / discussions Carers will have with the care home managers/deputies. There'd be no harm in promoting this leaflet (or information about informing SSS at the care home manager discussion point). Also, as the requirement to inform SSS applies across Scotland, could SSS provide a national leaflet for care homes to distribute to prospective residents and their Carers? Sharlene has contacted SSS to see if a leaflet exists and will pass Gordons suggestions on to them too!
- As for the interactions with social workers, I think that (reminding individuals / Carers to advise SSS) is something our social work teams should always highlight, as they should be talking to the individuals / Carers about the need for a financial assessment. However, the more reliable pathway is to ensure it's given due prominence in the 'Paying for a Care Home' booklet.
- Gordon has also commented that once the leaflet is due for renewal more prominence will be given to this point within the "Paying for a Care Home" booklet, Gordon has kindly provided a copy of this leaflet if you would like a digital copy of this please ask Sharlene for this.

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### Tips from Lyn at CAB.

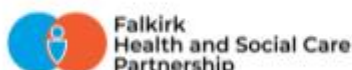
- **Did you Know?**
- **While claiming benefits you must inform the DWP and SSS of any changes in circumstances**
- **your personal or contact details change**
- **your condition gets better or worse**
- **the level of help and care you need changes**
- **the support you need with your mobility changes**
- **you move away from Scotland**
- **you go into or leave a care home, hospital or hospice (28 days)**
- **you enter or leave legal detention.**
- **You can go on holiday while receiving benefits, but you must inform the DWP or SSS to avoid payment disruption or fines.**
- **Key Rules for Traveling Abroad**

Universal Credit: You can travel abroad for up to one month without losing your Universal Credit, provided you notify your work coach and continue meeting your claimant commitments, such as job searching if required. Failing to report your holiday could result in your payments being stopped, reduced, or fines ranging from £350 to £5,000. In exceptional cases, such as medical treatment or bereavement, you may be allowed to stay abroad for longer, but prior approval is required.

Disability benefits): claimants can usually go on holiday for up to four weeks without affecting their benefit, as long as their medical condition remains unchanged. If your trip exceeds four weeks, you must inform the DWP, providing details of your destination, duration, and reason for travel. Extended absences may trigger a reassessment of your eligibility.

Child Benefit: You can continue claiming Child Benefit if your child is abroad for up to eight weeks for holidays or medical treatment. In cases of illness or family bereavement, this may extend to 12 weeks. Longer absences require notification to HMRC, and eligibility may be affected unless specific criteria are met.

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### NHS Visitors.

- Karen Goudie, Executive Nurse Director and Ross McGuffie visited the centre on Thursday the 18<sup>th</sup> of June 10am-12, Carers spoke about their experiences of the accident and emergency department, hospital discharge and admission, you can read more on our webpage
- Ross and Karen are happy to come back, watch this space for a new date.....

### Changes to care at home

This consultation is live please have a wee look and share your views before the 6<sup>th</sup> of July



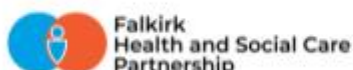
Take part now

Visit [www.falkirkhscp.org/care-at-home-survey](http://www.falkirkhscp.org/care-at-home-survey) or scan the QR code to learn more and complete the survey.

### Carer Reps, spreading the word.

- Many thanks to Dana, Mandy and Sharon who appeared on Social Security Scotland's Social Media Platforms and Mandy was in the Falkirk Herald too!
- Many thanks to Danny for filming us both for Dates N Mates! As well as being a Carer Rep Danny works for Dates N Mates and wanted to highlight unpaid Carers and the work Carers Centre's do, for Carers Week, in a Podcast! Danny shared that they have over 1000 views.
- By our wonderful Carer Reps appearing in the news on social media feeds, podcasts etc more Carers are likely to self-identify and seek support from their local Carers Centre's so a massive thank you!

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### FDAMH Mental Health Services Overview

Val McInroy, head of services at FDAMH, provided an overview of the organization's history and services during the meeting. FDAMH, established in 1981, has supported over 15,000 people in the Falkirk community in the past five years, offering free mental health services including one-to-one appointments, adult and young person's counselling, and family support. Val highlighted the organization's recent expansion from three to thirteen services, including the implementation of an automated online referral system and extended hours. Supports are available 9am to 8pm and people can self-refer to these supports or can refer others with their consent; Val spoke about different ways to access their services such as through the website or phoning if better, please find link to FDAMH <https://fdamh.org.uk/>

### Youth Counselling and Support Services

Val described their organization's services for people aged 11 and up, including one-to-one counselling, psychoeducational programs for parents, and group activities for loneliness and isolation. Val explained that their services are confidential and person-centred, with most sessions lasting 8-10 sessions, and noted that they work in partnership with other organizations like Barnardo's and Aberlour for younger age groups. Val also mentioned their bereavement services, Carer support programs, and the recent revamp of their group work offerings to better meet client needs.

### Mental Health Training Initiatives

Val discussed their organization's Training Academy, which provides mental health and wellbeing training to schools, businesses, and organizations including a new contract with INEOS to deliver mental health first aid to apprentices. Val explained their Distress Brief Intervention Service, an NHS initiative that provides immediate support within 24 hours for people in crisis, with over 90% engagement rate and positive outcomes including suicide prevention. The service has gained national attention and interest from Australia and England for its effective model of providing timely mental health support.

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### Tiered Befriending Service for Youth

Val discussed a new tiered befriending service aimed at young people aged 11-26 (older age limit if young person has care experience), with the goal of helping them develop social skills and build real friendships beyond online connections. The service will operate across Falkirk and Stirling with a one-to-four adult-to-participant ratio, featuring three tiers from initial small group meetings to community activities and potential support with education or employment. The initiative has secured funding for three years; Val emphasized the importance of careful planning to ensure sustainability.

### VAL Expansion and Services Update

Val discussed the expansion and services offered by FDAMH, including the addition of seven therapy rooms after a refurbishment and the introduction of new group programs such as neurodivergent support, pain management, and postpartum mental health. She highlighted the importance of confidentiality and explained how they work with external partners like Change Grow Live for addiction services.

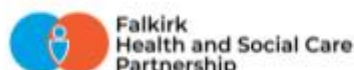
### Children/Young People's Activity Service Overview

Sandra provided an overview of the Children's activity scheme in Falkirk, explaining how the service has evolved over 22 years from serving 50 to over 150 young people. Sandra detailed recent changes to respite care, including a return to 28 nights per year for eligible families, and discussed challenges with recruitment of volunteers, the service is mostly operated through volunteers and there is limited paid staff. Sharlene explained that some Carers have told her that they would happily use their respite budget to access more activity scheme days as they feel this service is so beneficial for their young person and also for them as Carers. Sandra spoke about the activities that they provide such as days out, youth clubs and independence building through shopping experiences and cooking. The discussion centred on a question about whether families with respite budgets could pay for activity scheme services.

### Respite Services Challenges

Sharlene and Carers discussed challenges with respite services for children with disabilities in Falkirk, highlighting long waiting lists and insufficient services. Carers noted that during COVID,

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temporary respite services helped some families. Also, during COVID schools were used as spaces where services could operate, Sharlene wondered why schools are not being utilised at the moment ie out with school hours/evening and weekends. The discussion concluded with agreement to consult with parents about what types of breaks would be most beneficial for Carers.

### Carers Views/Comments and Suggestions

A Carer asked if FDAMH's services are totally confidential or if social work would be informed if a child disclosed harm etc, Val explained that anything child or adult protection would need to go to social work, Nicola (Carers Centre Team Lead) explained that this is the same for Carers Centre supports.

A Carer commented that there is a need for more flexibility regarding short break options for parent Carers as they feel that adults get much more flexibility.

A Carer asked if FDAMH could support the whole family, FDAMH don't provide group family support however can support individuals.

A Carer mentioned support for a young Carer, Sharlene spoke with the young Carer team who have reached out to the Carer.

Nicola Carers Centre emphasised to Carers the importance of informing DWP and SSS about any changes to avoid big bills, Nicola shared her own experiences of having a huge bill.

A Carer asked if FDAMH helps people whose children are on the CAMHS waiting list, Val explained that FDAMH's supports often help people who are on the CAMHS waiting list.

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Nicola commented that FDAMH's Carers programme is fab.

A Carer asked if FDAMH supports end at the end of the planned sessions, Val explained that sometimes people can finish their planned sessions and move into another of FDAMH's services.

Sandra McAllister explained that a young person that she supported many years ago had accessed FDAMH's services, they are now doing really well and have a job.

A Carer asked if FDAMH's services support people who are living with addiction or Carers supporting people with addictions, FDAMH can do this and where specialist support is required they reach out to addiction service supports such as Change Grow Live.

Sharlene asked how many beds there are in Tayavalla, there are 8 and these are shared amongst Falkirk, Clacks and Stirling's families.

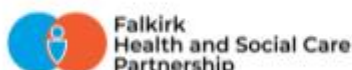
A Carer asked about respite out with the area; this can be looked at however it is not always suitable for families or the children/young person.

A Carer said that it would not be appropriate to extend the activity scheme as it would quickly become oversubscribed and there would not be enough staff to do this.

A Carer commented that they would not want their young person to be cared for by someone that they don't know, this Carer would prefer someone come to their home to allow the Carer to go to the cinema, this would be a break for this Carer.

A Carer said that their young person loves the activity scheme, and they trust Sandra to recruit trustworthy volunteers.

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Many Carers in the room commented that trust of the people watching your young person is so important and only comes with time.

It was apparent that parent Carers have very limited choice if any over respite options in Falkirk, some commented that family is their only means of a break.

A Carer mentioned that they are worried about the school holidays.

A Carer said that they cannot do many of the same things as people who have children without disabilities.

A Carer mentioned that they attended Andy's Man Club, they highlighted what a great service this is, this Carer is now a facilitator who helps others.

A Carer suggested the need for a multi-purpose respite facility, where activities can happen and young people can stay over to allow Carers time to have a break.

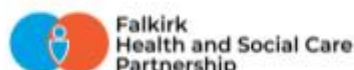
**Sharlene will speak with Ami (Short Breaks Coordinator) to discuss the possibility of conducting a consultation on what a break looks like for parent Carers.**

### **Future Voice Dates meetings are from 10am-12noon.**

In July on the 27<sup>th</sup> we will welcome Donald Johnstone from the Fire Service who will tell you about the services and supports that they provide (its more than putting out fires) and Heidi Anderson at Dial a journey who will tell you about the supports and services they provide that might help you in your caring role.

In August on the 24<sup>th</sup> we will welcome Pauline Phee from Neighbourhood Networks (service that supports adults with disabilities) who will tell you about the supports/services that they provide and Lisa Wilson NHS Falls lead will discuss supports in the community, how to

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prevent hip fractures and discuss findings from her questionnaire that you might have completed.

In September on the 28<sup>th</sup> we will welcome Clair Fair NHS Keep Well who will tell you about this fantastic service and how to access this and Kim Wylie from Falkirk Football Foundation who will tell you all about the groups and supports that they provide, many are free and not all are football related.

**Hopefully see you all at July's Voice! Many thanks Sharlene 😊**

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