

SUMMER 2021



**Carers Week Special**

**Making Caring Visible  
and Valued**



**MENTAL HEALTH WALES**



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# Carers Week 2021: Charities call on UK Government for better breaks for unpaid carers



**Carers Week 2021 runs from Monday 7 until Sunday 13 June and its theme is to 'Make Caring Visible and Valued'.**

Carers Week is an annual campaign to raise awareness of caring, highlight the challenges unpaid carers face and recognise the contribution they make to families and communities throughout the UK. It also helps people who don't think of themselves as having caring responsibilities to identify as carers and access much-needed support.

The campaign is brought to life by thousands of individuals and organisations who come together to provide support for carers, run activities and highlight the vital role carers play in our communities, drawing attention to just how important caring is.

This year, people across the country are continuing to face new challenges as a result of the coronavirus outbreak. Many people are taking on more caring responsibilities for their relatives and friends who are disabled, ill or older and who need support.

There are 6.5 million people in the UK who are carers. They are looking after a family member or friend who has a disability, mental or physical illness or who needs extra help as they grow older.

The Carers Week campaign stresses that carers need to be recognised for the difficulties they are experiencing, respected for all they are doing, and provided with information, support and understanding.

## **Charities call for better breaks for unpaid carers**

Caring has an impact on all aspects of life from relationships and health to finances and work, and carers are facing even more difficult circumstances this year. While many feel that caring is one of the most important things they do, caring without the right information and support can be tough.

The charities supporting Carers Week 2021 have launched a new campaign calling on the UK Government to urgently increase funding for carers' breaks, so all carers providing significant hours of care can take a break.



Millions of carers have gone to extraordinary lengths over the past year to look after and support those they care for, with many caring around the clock without any meaningful breaks. This increased support has often come at great personal cost and left carers exhausted, burnt-out, and increasingly worried about the future.

Before the pandemic, carers struggled to be able to take the breaks they needed from caring, and over the last year many have been unable to access essential support services and have been less able to rely on friends and family, meaning this situation has become more difficult. Carers have not only taken on more care, but two thirds of carers have not had any breaks since the start of the pandemic.

That's why this Carers Week the charities involved will be shining a spotlight on the lack of breaks that carers have been able to take in the past year, and the worrying impact this is having on their health and wellbeing, as well as their ability to work and live a meaningful life beyond caring.

Specifically, they are calling on the UK Government to urgently increase funding for carers' breaks by an additional £1.2 billion in England, so all carers providing significant hours of care can take a break, and also provide additional funding for the devolved administrations including the Welsh Government using the Barnett Formula.

For more information on Carers Week visit: [carersweek.org](https://carersweek.org)

## Researchers reveal new tool to help prevent suicide

**A team of Welsh academics has developed a new method of supporting health professionals to make clinical decisions about people who may be at risk of taking their own lives.**

While the UK may have one of the lowest rates of suicide in the world, it is still the biggest cause of death in men under 45, so being able to make a Structured Professional Judgement about who might attempt suicide and knowing how to intervene is vitally important.

Researchers at Swansea and Cardiff universities have put together the Risk of Suicide Protocol (RoSP) which guides a professional to look at 20 aspects of a person's life known to be related to suicide. They can then formulate what the person's problems are and how they can be helped.

In two studies the team first examined if the RoSP could identify suicides from accidental deaths in people known to mental health services living in the



Swansea  
University  
Prifysgol  
Abertawe



community who had died unexpectedly, and secondly, if it could determine who would be likely to attempt suicide in a hospital caring for people at very high clinical risk.

The research, which has just been published by leading international journal *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, showed just how effective the RoSP is in both settings.

Professor Nicola Gray from Swansea University said: "We were asked to develop something to identify and improve safety planning in those at-risk people. Looking carefully at best practice guidelines we were able to put together a list of known risk indicators that were reasonably easy to identify for clinicians, and, importantly, could be the focus of intervention."

[Read more at mentalhealthwales.net](http://mentalhealthwales.net)

## One in four say mental health worsened after receiving NHS treatment remotely

**A new report from Mind – 'Trying to Connect' – looks at people's experiences of accessing mental health treatment remotely via phone or online during the pandemic.**

Mind's survey of almost 2,000 people reveals that more than one in three found support from NHS mental health services given over the phone or online difficult to use, and one in four say their mental health actually got worse as a result of using this support.

Geoff Heyes, Head of Health Policy & Influencing at Mind said: "As restrictions continue to ease, and we begin to deal with the long-term impacts of the pandemic – bereavement, grief, redundancy, and insecure employment, it's really important everyone is offered a range of options – including face-to-face treatment – so that they can pick the most convenient and appropriate option."

[Read more at mentalhealthwales.net](http://mentalhealthwales.net)

**Mental Health Wales** is published by **Hafal**. If you have any comments, please contact us at:

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**We hope you found the latest issue of our journal useful! To support our work in providing the latest mental health news and information you can make a donation to Hafal at our JustGiving page.**

**JustGiving™**



**For more of the latest news visit: [mentalhealthwales.net](http://mentalhealthwales.net)**

# INTERVIEW: Karen Butler

We talk to Karen Butler, Carers Service Manager for Hafal Crossroads in Pembrokeshire, who manages Pembrokeshire Carers Information and Support Service (PCISS), Pathways and the Hospital Discharge Project.

**Tell us a bit more about the vital support your services provide to carers in Pembrokeshire?**

All our services are focused on unpaid carers and the information and support we can provide to them is based on what is available in Pembrokeshire.

By contacting our service we can offer a carer's recognition card, carer's emergency card, information about support services that will help someone in their caring role, and the *Carers' Gazette*. We also have an Outreach Service which provides an assessment via our outreach workers to access support in the county. And of course, we provide a listening ear.

We also run a weekly carers group through our Pathway project which has just started meeting again in the garden of our office. Our Hospital Discharge Project is designed to improve carers' experience of their loved ones' discharge from hospital, and raise awareness of the issues facing unpaid carers among hospital staff.

**Carers Week is an important date in your calendar. Tell us more about what the week means to you and the carers you work with?**

Carers week is an annual campaign to raise awareness of caring and it is a very important date in our calendar, along with Carers Rights Day in November.

**In Pembrokeshire over 12% of the population have caring responsibilities and the role they play is invaluable**

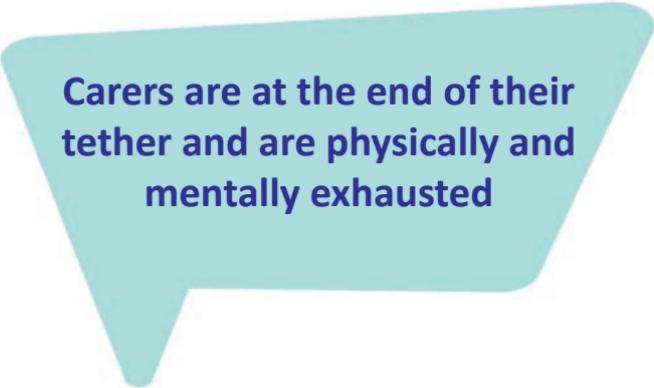


As we all know, caring does not just start and finish on Carers Week, but it is our way of highlighting the challenges unpaid carers face and recognising the contribution they make to our society. In Pembrokeshire over 12% of the population have caring responsibilities and the role they play is invaluable.

This year, as indeed last year, due to Covid-19, we have had to think of different ways we can run activities during Carers Week. We would normally have organised a buffet lunch and pamper spa session in a local hotel for our carers, and as you can probably imagine this was very popular! Due to government guidelines this was not to be, so as providers we have had to think outside the box and come up with other suggestions. Instead, to celebrate, we are putting on a range of free activities that will hopefully whet the appetite of carers. These activities will be widely promoted by ourselves, Third Sector providers, Hywel Dda University Health Board and Pembrokeshire County Council.

**What do you think have been the biggest challenges facing carers during the pandemic?**

One of the biggest challenges was that our local day services, such as our Day Centres, had to close during



**Carers are at the end of their tether and are physically and mentally exhausted**

the lockdown. These Centres provide a much-needed break for carers and when these closed, carers had no break from their caring role. Fortunately, we are able to provide a respite service at home which is such a help for carers.

If carers are working and living with the person they care for, during lockdown, some have been teaching their children from home, working from home and caring for elderly parents who are very poorly!

Also, protecting the safety of loved ones has been a challenge. I am a carer and care for my elderly mum who cannot manage without our daily support. We obviously take precautions and thankfully we have all had the vaccine, but we are terrified that she will catch the virus from us.

Carers are at the end of their tether and are physically and mentally exhausted.

**Do you think carers will be more valued following the pandemic?**

I hope so. I think this pandemic may have raised the profile of unpaid carers and the challenges that they face.

In Pembrokeshire we are trying to make sure carers have a voice. As providers we are coming together through forums, strategy groups and networking to think of opportunities for carers to have a voice in shaping services.

As a county we are networking more and aim to put carers at the centre to be more valued.

**The theme of this year's Carers Week is 'Make Caring Visible and Valued'. What do you think are the key ways that this could be achieved?**

In Pembrokeshire we are working together as providers of services for carers to raise awareness. The key ways we are trying to achieve this is through networking, sharing information, carers groups and forums.

We often talk about hidden carers and how we can reach out to them. As this year's theme is 'Making Caring Visible and Valued', hopefully people who do not think of themselves as having caring responsibilities will be encouraged to identify as carers and see our activities and access support.

The recent vaccination programme for carers certainly increased the number of referrals into our service which was great as these carers might not have come forward otherwise. The Welsh Government released a round of funding for carers and this also encouraged people to come forward. All these initiatives raise awareness and hopefully encourage carers to feel valued and visible.



**I think this pandemic may have raised the profile of unpaid carers and the challenges that they face**

**Many carers feel isolated and unsupported in their role, which has an impact on their wellbeing. What would be your advice to them?**

Please don't be afraid to ask for help. I understand first-hand how difficult it can be to talk to family and friends about your caring role, they may be too close to you and might find it hard to comprehend what you are going through. Plus, you may not want to burden them with your problems.

We are a listening ear for carers, sometimes it is easier to talk to a stranger who is a professional and will just listen and offer support and not judge. As staff we understand and will listen.

I appreciate how difficult it can be to make that first move, to reach out for support. As one carer said to me: "I was too scared to ask for help and open up Pandora's Box but I am so glad I did! I didn't realise there was so much help out there."

**For more information on Hafal Crossroads carers' services in Pembrokeshire call 01437 611002, email [pciss@hafal.org](mailto:pciss@hafal.org), or visit: [hafal.org/in-your-area/pembrokeshire](http://hafal.org/in-your-area/pembrokeshire)**

# Making Caring Visible and Valued



**Carers Week 2021 is about making carers 'visible and valued'. We spoke to four carers about their experiences of caring during the pandemic - and what they think would help them be more visible and valued in their caring roles...**



## Christian:

"I think carers are finally getting the recognition they deserve due to the pandemic. People are now realising how important they are in the community as there's not enough professionals to go to visit people. The biggest challenge I have as a carer is to get my son to go out to do things again as he's read everything he could about Covid so is worried about getting it and constantly washing his hands. He's also concerned about potential side effects of the vaccine but we're trying to get back to normality as best as possible.

"I maintain my mental health by taking my dog for a walk so I can get some time to myself and also managing the football club (Coity, Nolton & Brackla United) helps a lot with having other people outside my family who I can talk to and take my mind off things.

"To help me more in my role I'd like to see more autism centers in place around by me. It would be good have a designated space where I can take my son or talk to other carers about things that concern me, or just give and receive advice about dealing with different issues."



## Jayne:

"Our lives haven't been that different through the pandemic really, as my son is agoraphobic so wouldn't go very far anyway. But it's benefitted him in some ways, such as overcoming addiction, he's done really well and I'm really proud of him – so it's actually been a huge benefit in that respect.

"The biggest challenges for me as a carer has been missing my friends after a while. My son and I have been stuck in the house for so long and it's been very overwhelming at times. However, walking the dog has helped maintain my mental health, as I have an obligation to go, and it always lifts me to go outside and get some fresh air. It's been nice to chat to other dog walkers from a distance as well.

"There's been a general enlightenment from the general public, from recognising care home workers to unpaid carers. I think carers are on the way to being more valued, but I still don't think we're anywhere near where we need to be.

"I think some respite would be the most helpful thing to me as a carer - I'm in the process of applying for some, as well as some extra support with caring. It's been a long road to get the recognition that I am a carer but we're getting there which will definitely make me feel more valued."



## Suzanne:

"It's been a challenging time through the pandemic: it's been difficult to access services, see professional people and have some support. It's been really isolating and it's become much more difficult to manage day-to-day.

"I think the biggest challenge has been the isolation from family. I've accessed support from Hafal, and that's been a brilliant help to have someone to talk it all through with.

"I spoke to my GP and the mental health practitioner and sourced some help for my own mental health. I've had some medication and I'm currently taking part in Silvercloud CBT to try and help, to try and push those positive thoughts forward rather than keeping negative.

"I think the clap for carers was really good last summer but I think through the winter lockdown it was a really tough time for many and throughout that time support services like Hafal and Carers Trust South East Wales were extremely valuable. The Covid emergency fund has been really helpful for me and my daughters as I've been able to access some financial help.

"I think it became apparent that carers can be overlooked during the prioritisation of the vaccination groups. We're a key part in keeping the people who we care for safe and we've had very little support at all - and we came quite low down in that list really. I think we should have been prioritised a little bit further. I get they've got to go through certain procedures but that did feel difficult, we're doing an unpaid role and I don't think we get the recognition that's deserved. It's not all about money, we do it because we love our families and whoever we care for but it can be frustrating when they say 'you've got an increase in your carers allowance' and it would only just go up by a minor percentage when we are saving the government millions by caring full time."



## Alison:

"As a mother and advocate for my son, the pandemic has been quite hard because I'm disabled myself and I have to ask my son to do things physically for me. It's been very hard not being able to properly access the doctors as well.

"It's been good to have someone like Janet from Hafal who calls me and can sort out problems for me. She's helped me access certain groups or helplines so in that way it's been very good.

"I would think carers are more valued following Covid, even in the way that people were displaying kindness and going shopping for people last year. Janet got me into something where I could call lonely and elderly people. Even just a friendly face and a chat and people picking prescriptions up for others, it makes a difference.

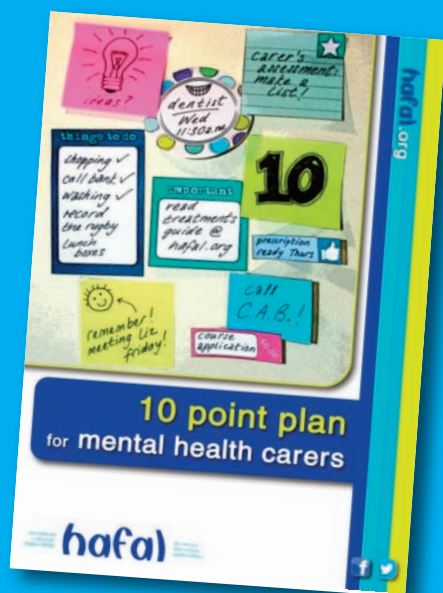
"If they aren't, then I think carers should be valued hugely. There's so many things involved in a caring role.

"I'm not sure I have a flashing light around me saying 'help me' but wherever I seem to be I'll always get somebody sitting next to me who tells me all their troubles and worries and I'll sit and listen because I'd like to think if I was in their shoes somebody would listen to me. And sometimes that one person who gives a damn about what they're going through means they may not choose to do something seriously to hurt themselves when they get home - it should be an emergency service."

# What are the top ten tips mental health carers give to fellow carers?



Carer members at Hafal have come up with a “10 Point Plan” for fellow carers which is based on real life and applies both to new and experienced carers. The plan sets out the positive steps carers can take to help improve their lives and support the people they care for. So what are the 10 tips? Here we list them - in no particular order! - from 1 to 10.



Download the full  
10 Point Plan at  
[hafal.org/publications](http://hafal.org/publications)

TIP  
1

## Get the right information

“As a carer it’s useful to understand the mental illness of the person you care for as much as possible. The more you understand the illness, the more you’ll be able to support them”.

TIP  
2

## Get the support you need to be a carer

“Make sure you get the support you need – especially from your GP and Community Mental Health Team (CMHT). Most importantly, ask your local social services department for a Carer’s Assessment.”

TIP  
3

## Work alongside health and social care agencies

“We have found that building a positive and supportive relationship with services is an important step in providing good care.”

TIP  
4

## Look after yourself

“It is particularly important to look after both your physical health and mental health – don’t be ashamed to take trouble to protect and improve your own well-being.”

TIP  
5

## Let the person you care for find their own way

“Stepping back and letting the person you care for make their own decisions can be challenging – and it can mean taking risks. But this is necessary as they take steps towards becoming more independent and achieving recovery.”

TIP  
6

## Get help in an emergency

“One idea is to make a crisis plan with the person you care for where you agree what you will do in an emergency.”

TIP  
7

## Take a break

“Be clear with the Community Mental Health Team, the GP and other health and social care agencies about this and ask for their cooperation in supporting you to take breaks.”

TIP  
8

## Get financial help

“To make sure you are receiving all the financial support you are entitled to, get a benefits check. Contact your local Citizen’s Advice Bureau for more advice.”

TIP  
9

## Know your rights

“As a carer you have rights. One of the most important rights is to have a Carer’s Assessment where social services look at your situation and decide if you are entitled to any support.”

TIP  
10

## Focus on recovery

“It’s important for a carer to help the person they care for to focus on recovery and not simply on coping with a mental illness. Recovery means taking short steps towards long-term goals and achieving the best possible quality of life.”