

Short Breaks Bureau

Final Evaluation of Short Break Voucher Pilot

Completed December 2011

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Falkirk Council gratefully acknowledges the following for their participation and support in conducting this Pilot Study

Voucher recipients and carers

Falkirk Integrated Community Mental Health Team

Short Breaks Bureau Administrators

Penumbra care at home services

1st Homecare care at home services

SAMH care at home services

Printworks

Shared Care Scotland (Evaluation tools)

1. Introduction

1.1 This pilot project was set up to determine whether the use of vouchers for short breaks could help to address the low uptake of short breaks among people with severe and enduring mental illness and their carers, and also to provide an alternative to Direct Payments. The project was developed in response to:

- the low numbers of short breaks being accessed by this group
- discussions with the Integrated Mental Health Team
- previous discussion with the FDAMH Carers Group
- information contained in the research report carried out by the FDAMH Carers Group (September 2005)
- the apparent reluctance of people with mental health needs to access direct payments

1.2 The use of vouchers also provides a safe and reliable method for people to self-direct their support in line with the Scottish Government National Strategy for Self Direct Support (2010). They enable people to take more control over how and when their support is delivered and provide more flexibility over the type of support they receive. They also allow services users/carers and providers to engage more directly in determining how support is provided.

2. Aims and Objectives of service

- 2.1 To deliver flexible respite breaks to carers which effectively meet the needs of both the carer and the individual in need of care and support.
- 2.2 To increase the amount of respite which is accessed by this group, as current levels remain low compared to other groups.

3. Background

3.1 The Falkirk Council Short Breaks Bureau has been operational since 2001 and has worked steadily to improve the provision and experience of short breaks for individuals and their carers in the Falkirk area. One area where uptake of short breaks has remained consistently low has been among people with mental health care and support needs. Discussions with mental health staff and the Falkirk District Association for Mental Health Carers Group indicated a number of reasons for this including:

- Breaks away from home often increased anxiety and were frequently unsuccessful
- Despite the option of using Direct Payment funding for a more individualised short break experience, individuals often expressed concerns about having to manage the money and it was considered by some that this would cause more anxiety

4. Set up Process

- 4.1 The Short Breaks Bureau identified that vouchers schemes have been used for carer respite in other parts of the UK with some success e.g. Surrey County Council.
- 4.2 Meetings were arranged with the Integrated Mental Health Team Manager, MH team workers and Mental Health Development Worker to discuss the voucher scheme as an option and establish support for the project. Some discussion and correspondence also took place with the Service Manager for Mental Health who agreed to support this approach. It was subsequently agreed that scheme would be piloted for one year with a mid pilot evaluation and a final evaluation.
- 4.3 Mental health workers were asked to identify individuals and carers, with an assessed need for short breaks, who could potentially benefit from the use of Short Break Vouchers but were not currently accessing regular short breaks. They were asked to approach them and ask if they would be willing to participate in the Pilot Project, including evaluation of the scheme. Seven individuals and their carers initially agreed to participate. Individuals/carers who agreed to participate in the pilot were asked to provide details of the providers they would want to engage using the vouchers.
- 4.4 Three providers were identified (Penumbra, SAMH and 1ST Homecare) and approached to ask if they would be willing to participate in the pilot – all agreed.
- 4.5 Mental Health workers advised the Short Breaks Bureau of the numbers of hours of support (per week) that each individual was assessed as needing.
- 4.6 **Printworks** assisted with the development of a non-transferrable voucher which could be issued quarterly as a book of vouchers. (Appendix 1)
- 4.7 Providers, service users and carers were given verbal and written information on a simple process for using the vouchers and submitting invoices for payment to the Council.

5. Evaluation Methodology

- 5.1 Shared Care Scotland, through an Action learning Set, has developed Short Break evaluation tools for service users and carers. These are in the form of a questionnaire. The Short Breaks Bureau opted to use these tools for evaluation with service users and carers to establish satisfaction levels with the scheme. Questionnaires were distributed after 6 months and then again at the end of the pilot period. (Appendix 2 and 3)
- 5.2 Separate evaluation questionnaires were developed by Short Breaks Bureau staff for use by mental health workers and providers. (Appendix4)
- 5.3 Small focus groups were held with the three providers and the MH workers separately to discuss their experience of the Voucher Scheme at the end of the Pilot Period. One MH worker was unable to attend the focus group and was interviewed separately. One MH worker left the team before the end of the Pilot and her pilot participants were allocated to the other workers.

- 5.4 Face to face interviews were carried out with individuals using the vouchers. One person was not able to participate in the evaluation interview at the end of the pilot. Another was unable to complete the questionnaire but was interviewed. One person had not engaged with the voucher scheme and was not included in the evaluation.
- 5.6 Where possible, face to face/telephone interviews were carried out with carers.

6. Short Breaks Voucher Scheme Details

6.1 Participation

Seven service users were provided with short break vouchers based on needs assessment by a mental health worker. Each voucher is equivalent to one hour of support. Vouchers were allocated quarterly based on average weekly need for support (a book of vouchers contained a thirteen week allocation). Vouchers could be carried forward from week to week but not from one quarter to another. This was agreed to enable the service users and providers to determine what the pattern of use might be and to make planning of support more consistent and manageable.

6.2 Assessed Need

- 1 service user was assessed as needing an average of 1 hour of support per week.
- 2 service users were assessed as needing an average of 2 hours of support per week
- 4 service users were assessed as needing an average of 3 hours of support per week

6.3 Statistics

Over the course of the pilot a total of 884 vouchers were issued. By the end of the pilot 237 vouchers (237 hours of support) had been used which is 26.8% of the allocation. The cost of the support provided was £4148.22 – average cost was £17.50 per hour of support.

7. Evaluation

7.1 Service user Questionnaire Results

3 questionnaires were returned

- 1 service user had help from a care worker to complete the questionnaire
- 1 service users completed the questionnaires themselves
- 1 service user had help from another person to complete the questionnaire.
- The results of the Questionnaire are contained in Appendix 4

7.2 Service user interviews

- 7.2.1 In general people found the vouchers simple to use and that they provided more flexibility and control. It is a way of fitting services around individual need instead of the other way about. One person said using the vouchers:

'make me feel a lot happier. General well-being, physical health and mental well being are much better now ... can talk to carers. I usually have the same support worker ... good to know vouchers are there and support is available. Good to talk ... gives reassurance.'

- 7.2.2 One person said he would like to join a user group and talk to other people using vouchers.

- 7.2.3 Another person commented:

'The vouchers have done a lot for me. I have been making soap, bubble bath and have taken up glass painting. This is a completely new hobby. I was asked display my work at a road show...I didn't make it on the day ...my support worker gave me photos of the stall of my work. This gave me a good feeling and it was great to see all my work on display. My plans are to go out which I find difficult. If I use my vouchers to go out I can plan the day out and not be rushed.

I would never have been able to do glass painting, ceramic painting and soap making and give gifts to my family and friends. I am looking forward to Christmas and decorating my home.'

- 7.2.4 One person has used the vouchers to go swimming, try bingo and bowling. They also use them for days out to various places across Scotland. Some of these activities are new.

- 7.2.5 Another uses them to go to the gym and shopping in Glasgow/Edinburgh/Stirling. He likes to shop for his own clothes but doesn't like going with his carer as she spends more time in the shops than he likes. He prefers to be able go with the support worker and to focus on what he needs to get. He plans to use the vouchers to go Christmas shopping.

- 7.2.6 One person has used the vouchers to start going to concerts again. Has been to a comedy show and is going to a classical concert in Glasgow. The vouchers enable him to plan and book ahead.

Another person saves the vouchers and uses them for days out. This allows her carer to have a day at home relaxing and listening to his music, which is difficult to do when she is at home.

7.3 Carer Questionnaire Results

2 Questionnaires were returned

- 2 carers were also interviewed briefly face to face (one had also returned a questionnaire).
- 1 carer was interviewed by telephone

- The results of the Carer Questionnaire are contained in Appendix 4

7.4 *Carer Interviews*

- 7.4.1 Overall the carers involved seemed to be more focussed on the needs of the person they were supporting and did not seem to attach as much significance to the benefit they should receive from the vouchers – it seemed to be perceived as a welcome spin off from using the vouchers.

“Overall happy with the support service. Very thankful for support and I fully appreciate the support when given and I feel more content both for me and for him”

- 7.4.2 Carers said they are able to have more time to themselves and use that time to catch up on some sleep or relax. This (temporarily at least) improved their stress levels. Some carers welcomed the peace and quiet as they are often faced with difficult conversations, frequent questions and the need for reassurance, which can be exhausting.

7.5 *Provider Questionnaire Results*

- 7.5.1 The results of the Provider Questionnaires are contained in Appendix 4

7.6 *Provider Interviews*

- 7.6.1 The Providers all stated that they found the vouchers easy to use.
- 7.6.2 One provider acknowledged that choice sometimes includes compromise based on availability of support. It was also acknowledged that administration of the vouchers could be more difficult with large numbers. Currently providers are asked to submit vouchers with each invoice. It might be difficult to continue with this if the numbers increase significantly. It was suggested that it would be easier to use a spreadsheet/monitoring form to enable providers to record the support provided. It was agreed that the vouchers were important to the service users as they provided a tangible method of planning and budgeting hours of support.
- 7.6.3 Providers were very positive about the impact on service users including the range of activities and levels of confidence. One person has become much more aware that social activities are not free and is improving money management skills in the process i.e. transport/ mileage cost, entrance fees etc. Another person is planning activities ahead which he didn't do before. He has bought new clothes for going out.
- 7.6.4 The way the vouchers are used varies. Sometimes they are used for short periods of support every 1-2 weeks and at other times they are saved to provide a full day out. One person uses the vouchers intermittently as this suits him better.
- 7.6.5 It was agreed that a level of creativity is needed in how the vouchers are used. A couple of people got off to a slow start as they needed time to think and plan how the vouchers would be used.

7.7 MH Worker Questionnaire Results

7.7.1 The results of the Provider Questionnaires are contained in Appendix 4

7.8 MH Worker Interviews

7.8.1 Workers were generally very positive about how the vouchers had been used and had already identified other people they thought could benefit from the system. There has been some limited availability of support from provider/s due to staff constraints.

7.8.2 Individuals found the vouchers easier to manage than cash (direct payment). Using the vouchers had resulted in increased confidence in some individuals:

- “Mr X was starting to neglect himself; His motivation to do anything had diminished. He was requesting to go into hospital, but suggested he use the vouchers. He did this, his mental health improved and this support prevented a hospital admission. He is now looking forward positively.”
 - “Mr Y is socially isolated and this can lower his moodsince the introduction of the vouchers his mood has lifted, his confidence and self esteem has been boosted and he feels more in control in preventing crisis times going any further.”
 - “A client who has mobility problems and anxiety cannot attend Cairdeas House for breaks, so has enjoyed using the vouchers to allow her some respite. This has also benefitted her main carer.”
 - “Unfortunately another client did not engage with the voucher system. This was not due to a fault with the system, but the client’s issues at the time.”
 - “One person used the vouchers to add to support in place initially but later, when discussed and explained other possible uses, was able to arrange days out. This had a positive impact on the person, who rarely goes far without family. The biggest impact was on the family who had longer periods of respite.”
 - “The other person also initially used the vouchers to add additional time to existing support but this changed once more explanation was given. It was not as helpful initially as it has become. The vouchers are now being used at the weekend to give the carers respite. The person likes this to a degree but it is actually the carer who is getting most benefit.”
 - One gentleman tended to spend most of his time with his carers. He has now started to use the vouchers to go to a gym and days out. His usage depends on his mood.
 - Another had decided to have a weekend away from home – something he would not have done before. This went well and he is now considering another trip away.
- 7.8.3 The impact on carers has been positive with a reduction in stress. One family carer, who was compelled to provide large amounts of care daily, has been able to reduce the level of support due to the Voucher Scheme. This has reduced the pressure on them.

8. Conclusion

- 8.1 The administration of the scheme has been largely straight forward for service users, carers, workers and providers.
- 8.2 Some service users needed time to get used to how the vouchers work as well as the level of flexibility they can provide. Some people clearly found it difficult, at first, to think of ways in which the vouchers could be used which are different to the everyday support they receive. However, with support and explanation from their mental health worker and support workers they were able to start using the vouchers more creatively to increase the benefit they get from them.
- 8.3 There have been clear benefits for some service users in terms of their mental health. Some have reported increased confidence and self esteem and one person avoided hospital admission by using the vouchers to increase support during a difficult period. Another reported improvements in mood which led to them planning ahead and engaging more with social activities.
- 8.4 Carers' responses suggest they are mainly satisfied with the voucher scheme but they seem to think mainly in terms of support to the individual than breaks for them. Having said that some have reported clear benefits in terms of feeling less worried, being able to get some time to themselves to rest and relax and that the level of support they needed to provide had eased to an extent.
- 8.5 It may have been better to have more face to face contact with service users and carers at the outset to explore the opportunities the vouchers can provide. This may increase and improve the flexibility of the vouchers and the variety of use which could be achieved.

9. Recommendations

- 9.1 Continuation of the Short Break Voucher Scheme to current service users/carers.
- 9.2 Scope the potential impact of extending the Scheme on providers and the local authority in terms of operational and monitoring requirements
- 9.3 Consider extending the scheme to other people with severe and enduring mental illness.
- 9.4 Consider extending the scheme as an alternative to direct payments for individuals who want to use self-direct their support but don't wish to be responsible for and manage cash payments.
- 9.5 Use the learning from this report to engage further with carers of people with a mental illness to determine how support to this group can be enhanced/improved.
- 9.6 Work with Providers, including mainstream services, to extend the number of options for which the vouchers can be used

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