

# VSA TODAY



Aberdeenshire Carers  
Service Newsletter

JANUARY 2025 • [VSA.ORG.UK/CARERS](https://VSA.ORG.UK/CARERS)



## VSA Aberdeenshire Carers Service

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### Cover Photo:

Saying hello to Paddington Bear thanks to a Creative Breaks trip to Edinburgh!



# Welcome!

## Dear Carers

Happy New Year to you all, I'm delighted to welcome you to our latest edition of the Aberdeenshire Carers Service Newsletter, and my first as Service Manager, after taking up the post in December.

To some I will be a familiar face or name, having spent time over the last four years working within the team as a Carer Advisor and then as Young Carers Team Lead. I'm looking forward to continuing to connect with carers and ensuring that the service delivers high-quality advice, information and support to our Carers across Aberdeenshire.

In this edition, we will be reading about the various events the service has run across Aberdeenshire, what funding is available to carers, access to SVQ for carers, carers testimonies and blogs, and so much more.

Sadly, our Carers Rights Day events had to be cancelled in November due to the snow that blanketed Aberdeenshire. But, that hasn't stopped us or "dampened" our spirit! The team is planning to host these events in the coming months, so please keep an eye out for the new dates on our Facebook page and website.

I'm also delighted to welcome to the team, Angie Howarth as Team Lead (Adult Carers), and Sarah Hekelaar as Carer Advisor (Young Carers and Adult Carers). They have both been settling into their roles and making a positive contribution to unpaid carers.

## Kirsty and the Team



# Meet the Team!



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# Carers Connect

**The Vinery Café (Duff House Gardens, Airlie Gardens, Banff, AB45 1AZ)**

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VSA's Aberdeenshire Carers Service are delighted to introduce **Carers Connect** - a **free** session for Carers to have a cuppa and a chat with one of our highly skilled Carer Advisors for information and advice, including...

- Registering as an Adult Carer
- Carers Rights
- Carer Support Plans
- Emergency Plans
- Hospital Discharge
- Signposting and peer support

*Starts January 2025*

**No appointment required - sessions will run from 3:00pm to 4:00pm on the last Monday of every month.**



Contact our team today who would be happy to help with any questions...

01224 727670  
carers.shire  
@vsa.org.uk

# Staff Focus



Angie

“ I was employed by VSA, as an administrator, a long time ago, but it was a job I looked back on with a sense of achievement and pride.

So, you can imagine my delight, in September, when I returned as Team Leader for the Aberdeenshire Carers Service, covering North and Central Aberdeenshire.

The years in between then and now? Well, I have continued to work in the charitable sector, delivering care, emotional and practical support services for various organisations such as: Cornerstone; Clan Cancer Support; Victim Support; Homestart NEA – with this experience, my passion for helping people and the support of a great team - this is the perfect job for me!

When I'm not working, I treasure making memories with my husband and our family – I particularly enjoy taking our two adorable grandchildren, Kai and Lylia, away in our caravan, with our three daft doggies (Chester, Whisper and Tuppy). We all love going to the beach, the cinema and the theatre, but I also think it's important to 'give something back', so I set aside some time each week to volunteer as bar staff, at a local bowling club.

So far, being back at VSA has been absolutely amazing – the whole team here are fantastic and there isn't a day that I am not overwhelmed by each and every Carers circumstances.

I am so proud to be a part of a team that really want to make a difference to our service users and I'm looking forward to what 2025 brings!

In each newsletter, get to know our staff better - in this edition, we introduce you to the newest members of the team, **Angie Howarth** and **Sarah Hekelaar...**

Sarah

“ I recently joined VSA in July after completing various courses in college with my most recent being a health and social care course which I absolutely loved.

Hello Everyone my name is Sarah Hekelaar I have worked with the Carers Service since September working with both young carers and adults carers, the Team has made me feel very welcome I am enjoying learning some new skills, everyday is a school day as they say! And the hours I work are perfect for me and my family.

I have worked in the care sector for a number of years, in various roles and positions. I find working with people very rewarding and I enjoy working with them to help find ideas and solutions to the issues they are struggling with. I am a very bubbly person, and I just enjoy seeing people smile .

In my spare time I enjoy going out for a walk with my Dog with my music on, I'm sure anyone seeing me would argue that my dog is taking me for the walk.

I also enjoy spending time with my family and going to the cinema or out for some nice food.





We look back on some of the activities the Male Carer Peer Group have enjoyed in 2024...

- Visit and tour of Peterhead FC
- Erskine provided a talk about the valuable work they do.
- Men United SCIO had an open session, see Facebook for meeting times and locations, to explore the support for guys, Sandy Garvock and his team provide across the North East.
- We had several walks and tours, using the National Trust Cards kindly donated by NTS, to Fyvie Castle, Crathes Castle and Castle Fraser.
- A trip to Fraserburgh Lighthouse was also enjoyed.
- Trip to Stonehaven recreational grounds and had a talk on Respite and Creative Breaks.
- We rounded up the year by getting competitive at Garioch Ten Pin Bowling, each team won a game.



# Young Carers Family Day

We were delighted to have a lovely dry day in October for our Family Dun Day which was held at Easter Anguston Farm.

Our Young Carers brought their family along to enjoy some fun at the farm. Starting off with the Stickman Trail, our families experienced the peaceful surroundings whilst hunting for clues on the trail with a surprise appearance from the magicians, Dean and Victoria who made some fantastic balloons for the children.

Next, it was time for a seat where we got to enjoy the Magician's Show. Lots of fun was had by all, especially when being taught a balloon trick. Flying balloons and the sound of giggles in the air brought smiles to everyone.

With all the fresh air, fun and laughter it was then time for lunch. Some young carers decided to make the most of the farm facilities and spent some time in the play area whilst others used their creative side and relaxed while enjoying some Halloween themed crafts. Fully refreshed and raring to go, we all set off for a walk around the farm to meet the animals with the farm staff sharing stories about them.

The day went by so quickly that before we knew it, it was time to go home. Heading off with a VSA goody bag, some young carers still had the energy to have a wander around the Halloween trail whilst others were glad of the rest in the car for their drive home.

These events take quite a bit of planning with many different people involved but seeing our young carers and their families enjoy the event makes all the hard work worthwhile.

Thank you to everyone who played their part, no matter how small, and of course to the families that came along for helping to make it a truly magical day!





## The North Carers Cafe Festive Brunch

Recently, attendees of the North Carers Cafe came together to enjoy a festive brunch in good company and to have a much-deserved break from their caring roles.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank **Macduff Shipyards** for their very generous donation making this event possible & also thank Tina and her staff at The Ban-Car Hotel for their welcoming hospitality throughout the year.

The North Carers Cafe will meet back again at the Ban-Car Hotel Lonmay on the **5th of February 2025** which all unpaid carers are very welcome to attend.

# Have you had a Creative Break?

Most of you will know what this is, but for those who may not, "Time To Live-Creative Breaks" is a government funded grant available to all unpaid carers, who care for someone in Aberdeenshire.

The award is to help provide you with some rest and relaxation, and give you something to look forward to that makes getting through the days a bit easier. It's whatever gives you, the Carer, a break from your caring role, whether that's an hour away at the hairdresser, going for some afternoon teas with a friend, materials or equipment for a hobby, a night away somewhere, the list is endless.

Feeling rested and relaxed can have a positive affect on your relationship with your cared for, and either directly or indirectly improve not only your wellbeing, but theirs too.



"Thanks ever so much for helping to organise our break to Edinburgh Crown Plaza.

We had a lovely relaxing chilled couple of days."





"First off I'd like to say thank you as drumming is who I am and for years I've been lost, depressed and just generally low for the past 3 years. I thought I'd never get to finish my degree but now I am more than equipped to finish my course.



On top of that, it is also an electric hybrid kit, meaning I can also use it to make music easier which I've struggled to do for years, having this drum kit has opened up so many different avenues for me. I'm not sure if it will mean much but it's a Stagg TIM kit converted to an electric using triggers, having a kit like this has been a dream of mine since I started drumming 15 years ago.

Again thank you for allowing me to continue my life, I hugely appreciate everything VSA has done for me."

**From a Carer who wanted to purchase some drumming kit...**

**From a few Carers who took a break away...**



"Back in August I applied for a creative break grant which was so kindly given and had a really nice weekend in Glasgow and took my mum, as my husband needed to be at home to look after our daughter.

It was so nice being able to look round the shops which is something I never get to do, taking the train to Glasgow and just relaxing without the organising and caring for everyone for that few days, and I'm extremely grateful.

Thank you so very much again it did us all the world of good having the bit of time out that was desperately needed."

For more information about Creative Breaks or to fill in an application form, please go to [vsa.org.uk/carers](https://vsa.org.uk/carers) or you can call us on **01224 727670**.

All breaks or activities must be completed and evaluations received by the 31st March 2025.



"We are on our way home from an amazing time in Paris with our son, using his grant money. Thanks again so much for helping our son have a wonderful weekend with myself and his dad - was lovely spending quality time with him on his own and recharging all our batteries."



Visit our website to find out more about applying for a Creative Break...

**[vsa.org.uk/  
carers](https://vsa.org.uk/carers)**

# Carefree

**Short hotel  
breaks for  
unpaid carers.**



Access VSA's  
Carefree Referral Form  
by scanning this QR code

# Carer's Blog

## Singing the January Blues

**It's chilly outside. The sky is full of heavy rain clouds. It's only 3.30pm but I've already shut the curtains against the encroaching dark outside.**

It's January. Ugh.

I'm always glad when the Christmas hullabaloo is over, but was there ever a more dismal month than January? I know that in theory the daylight is lengthening but somehow it never feels that way. Instead, spring seems a long way off.

The darkest winter months are always a mental health challenge for me. As the days shorten towards Christmas, SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder) strikes and I struggle to stay positive, my mood sinks and the usual challenges of being a carer become that bit harder to deal with.

My favourite escape from carer demands is the garden. I love nothing better than popping out into the fresh air to do a little weeding or planting or deadheading, out amongst the flowers and the insects and the birdlife. Fat chance in January.

At this time of year I don't have a lot in the way of energy or motivation (and as a carer there is never, ever, enough time) so instead I stick to small and achievable ways to stay healthy, both physically and mentally, until the brighter days of spring come around.

For many years I've taken a low-dose anti-depressant during the winter months and that's undoubtedly a big help for me, Nevertheless, I still try to get outdoors for a short walk whenever I can, especially on a day when the sun is shining.

Even ten or fifteen minutes outside, feeling the sun on my skin, breathing fresh air and moving my limbs, can shake off the winter sluggishness.

If the weather is foul I stick to some easy stretching exercises indoors. I often feel that I can't be bothered but I always feel better afterwards.

A nutritious and nourishing diet also helps. It's never easy to find the time for cooking amongst everything else that needs to be done, but I can rustle up a big pot of hearty lentil soup or chicken and vegetable stew fairly quickly, and putting some portions in the freezer saves time later.

Sticking to basic ingredients and using seasonal vegetables keeps the cost down too.

Little treats now and again help cheer up the darkest days. They don't have to be fancy or expensive (on Carers' Allowance that's just as well). It might be a soothing mug of hot chocolate enjoyed with Dad, getting some wool from the charity shop to knit some cosy socks or sipping my tea while I drool over the garden catalogues and remind myself that spring will be here again one day,

Last, but by no means least, are the benefits of sharing worries and problems with others. I am lucky in having good support from friends and family but there's nothing like talking to fellow carers, people who really understand my situation.

That applies at any time of the year, of course, but I find it especially helpful during the darkest and chilliest months, when I'm stuck in the house even more than usual.

It might be an online coffee and chat session, sharing ideas on keeping fit or taking up a carer-friendly hobby or getting advice on respite breaks and practical support. It's important to remember that there are groups and organisations out there that can help.

So as the daylight fades and a few flakes of snow drift to the ground I'll be staying in, staying cosy and reaching for the hot chocolate.

This winter don't forget to look after yourself, as well as your loved one.

# Carer's Blog

## A Woman with A Dual Role

**They say the hardest job you will ever have is being a parent, add carer to the mix and the outcome can make you feel extremely out of your depth at times, stressed, exhausted both physically and mentally and often lonely and isolated.**

There is definitely no manual to support you!

There's a lot of pressure especially when that child needs extra support from you. I am a mother and a carer, I have a "dual role". I am a mother of twins, a boy and a girl and my life completely changed as I started on a journey that has brought many emotions.

My son has Autism and received this diagnosis when he was ten years old, he is now approaching his thirteenth birthday. His twin sister is his Young Carer. They were born prematurely at 34 weeks and within a few weeks we knew that my son was a very different baby to his sister as we observed his behaviours and it became more apparent he was not meeting his milestones. That's when the battles and probably the hardest part of the journey began, trying to make people listen & get the best support for my son.

Many times, I left toddler groups early with the twins to go back home, actually thinking I must be doing something wrong, and even blamed myself that he was born too early and my fault! All I knew was that I needed to get him the help he needed. Finding the right help was a huge struggle and all through this I felt very alone. Teachers would say to me "he is such a lovely boy so quiet we don't see anything wrong with him!" However, the boy who came home at 3pm was like a bottle of fizzy drink been shaken with the lid exploding off.

Getting his diagnosis at ten, just a year off starting High School, meant ten years of his life had passed without professional support. He or I will never get those years back.

The diagnosis was bittersweet, in one way I felt relieved he could now gain the support he rightfully deserved, and on the other hand, I felt so sorry for him as I knew life was going to get harder for him.

His sister is a godsend acting as his Young Carer, especially at school. She is my eyes and ears, and alerts me to any potential problems arising, and I can intervene quickly. School can have a big impact on children's lives, and I have seen the impact it has had on him. If school gets it wrong the impact on myself and his sister is enormous, he will have a full-blown meltdown that can last all evening, refusing to go to bed or sleep, which in turn impacts all of us as a family.

However, when School works in partnership with home this can really help take the pressure off our caring role.

I am so grateful to have VSA Aberdeenshire Carers Service for support, they are always at the end of the phone when you just need someone to talk to when you feel alone.

There are also coffee mornings you can go to, so you can meet with other carers. My daughter also has her own support from VSA who meet with her every couple of weeks to "check in" with her and this has proven invaluable.

We have also taken the Time to Live-Creative Breaks funding and spent a weekend together in Dundee last year. Without this funding it would never have been possible, plus it allowed us some quality time together which is very difficult to achieve at home.

My daughter has also been awarded funding through the Health and Wellbeing grant at VSA to allow her to learn the guitar, something she has always wanted to do. This allows her some "me time" for herself as I always never lose sight of the fact that she is only twelve and her childhood is important.



**Did you know, as an unpaid carer, you can access a Scottish Vocational Qualification in Health & Social Care, Level 2, for free?**

Aberdeenshire Council offer 2 qualifications, depending if you care for a child/young person, or if you care for an adult.

Unpaid Carers who have already undertaken this qualification have done so for a variety of reasons – ie. Increased confidence in their caring abilities, sense of personal achievement, greater understanding of health & social care standards and the ability to access further learning and training while undertaking the SVQ.

Some have also used their qualification to gain paid employment, or aim to use it in the future to pursue a career in the health and social care sector.

This opportunity is also available for young carers in S3 upwards who may be interested in gaining a vocational qualification based on their caring role at home.

If you would like to find out more, contact the SVQ Assessors for Unpaid Carers, who will be happy to discuss further with you, and answer any questions you may have.

**They can be contacted at:**  
**carersvq@aberdeenshire.gov.uk**

## *Binky Sensory Bus*

**SensationALL are now running free sessions on the Binky Sensory Bus**

**(Autism & Neurodiversity North Scotland) on:**

- Wednesdays  
@Peterhead Fire Station
- Thursdays  
@ Fraserburgh Leisure Centre
- During term time  
10.30am, 12 noon, 2:00pm

For kids aged 0-12yrs, with additional support needs, siblings, parent and carers, free of charge.

**To book,**  
**visit [info@sensationall.org.uk](mailto:info@sensationall.org.uk)**





Confidence to Cook



# Free 6 - Week Cookery Program

**Port Elphinstone Community House**

Commencing

**5th February**

**11-1pm.**

**join this Free fun learning cookery program**

- Increase your knowledge and cooking skills while gaining confidence
- Have fun trying new recipes, while meeting new people.
- Our focus is on healthy affordable low cost meals
- cooking on a budget
- all ingredients and tuition are Free

Please contact our email address below  
to book your free place  
**[gram.centralpublichealth@nhs.scot](mailto:gram.centralpublichealth@nhs.scot)**



# **NEW SENSORY SOFT PLAY IN FRASERBURGH**

**IDEAL FOR CHILDREN WITH ADDITIONAL SUPPORT NEEDS  
OPEN TO ALL**



**Open Monday,  
Tuesday, Wednesday  
and Saturday**

**24 Robertson Road  
AB439BF**



**<http://calmcove.simplybook.it>**

**Find us on Facebook : CalmCoveFraserburgh**

# What's on



**Alzheimer Scotland**  
Action on Dementia

## January 2025 – Aberdeenshire

Our Community Groups are there to be enjoyed by anyone living with dementia or experiencing difficulties with their memory, including their families and friends. All are welcome; people who can attend independently and/or, for those unable to do so should come with a companion who can provide any support for them. We are unable to provide transport for these groups and therefore it is your responsibility to get to and from this community activity, safely. Please speak to us, so we can support you to explore other transport options.

If you are unsure, or have questions about any of the groups, or have an idea for a new group, please let us know. All contact details are below.. **Please contact your Activity Organiser in advance of attending any of the groups. – see contact details below.**

In Person Group		What's On In North Aberdeenshire	
		<b>Happy New Year everyone!</b>	
<b>Tuesday 21st</b>	<b>Turriff Hae a News</b> <b>Turriff Library, Grange Villa, The Square, Turriff</b> For people living with dementia and their carers to meet others, gain social stimulation in a dementia friendly environment.		11.00am-12.30pm
<b>Tuesday 28th</b>	<b>Fraserburgh Hae A News</b> <b>Fraserburgh Library, King Edward St Fraserburgh</b> For people living with dementia and their carers to meet others, gain social stimulation in a dementia friendly environment.		11.00am-12.30pm
<b>Wednesday 8th</b>	<b>Peterhead Hae A News (to be confirmed)</b> <b>(Venue to be confirmed) Peterhead</b> For people living with dementia and their carers to meet others, gain social stimulation in a dementia friendly environment.		11.00am-12.30pm
<b>Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> &amp; 29<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>Walk &amp; Talk @ Aden</b> <b>Aden Country Park, Station Road, Mintlaw</b> Meet in the car park beside carers garden		11.00am-12.30pm
<b>Thursday 9th</b>	<b>Pop Up Dementia Cafe @ The Vinery</b> <b>Grow @ The Vinery, Duff House Gardens, Low Street, Banff</b> For people living with dementia and their carers to meet others, gain social stimulation in a dementia friendly environment		11.00am-12.30pm
<b>Thursday 16th</b>	<b>Mintlaw Hae a News</b> <b>Mintlaw Library, MACBI Community Hub, Newlands Rd, Mintlaw</b> For people living with dementia and their carers to meet others, gain social stimulation in a dementia friendly environment.		11.00am-12.30pm

Thursday 23rd	<b>Banff Hae A News &amp; Carer Support Group</b> <b>Banff Library, High Street, Banff</b> For people living with dementia and their carers. Both groups to run alongside each other within The Library. <b>CARER SUPPORT</b> is a safe space for carers to gain peer support and get advice from their local Dementia Advisor <b>SOCIAL GROUP</b> is for the person living with dementia and their carer to meet others and gain social stimulation in a dementia friendly environment <b>From Jan – April will meet every 4<sup>th</sup> Thurs of the month.</b>	11.00am-12.30pm
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## In Person Group What's On In Central Aberdeenshire

Monday 6th	<b>Inverurie Carers Support Group</b> <b>Port Elphinstone Community House, Flat 1, Pinewood House, Elphinstone Road, Inverurie.</b> For people who support someone with dementia, to get together for a chat with others in the same situation, share information and experiences	2.00-3.00pm
Tuesday 7th	<b>Insch Social Group</b> <b>Bennachie Leisure Centre, Largie Rd, Insch</b> A social group for people living with dementia and their carers.	10.45-11.45 am
Tuesday 14th	<b>KEMNAY Pop-up Café</b> <b>Kemnay Library, Kendal Rd, Kemnay AB51 5RN</b> A social group for people living with dementia and their carers. Come along for some coffee, chat and fun.	1.30-2.30pm
Tuesday 21st	<b>Port Elphinstone Social Group</b> <b>Port Elphinstone Community House, Flat 1, Pinewood House, Elphinstone Road, Inverurie.</b> A social group for people living with dementia and their carers to have a blether, a cuppa and some fun.	11.00 –12.00pm
Wednesday 15 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Westhill Carers Support Group</b> <b>Westhill Library, Westhill Primary, Westhill Drive</b> For people who support someone with dementia, to get together for a chat with others in the same situation, share information and experiences <b>*PLEASE NOTE CHANGE OF DAY – NOW ON THE 3<sup>rd</sup> THURSDAY OF THE MONTH *</b>	2.00 -3.00 pm
Wednesday NO GROUP THIS MONTH	<b>Westhill Social Group</b> <b>Westhill Library, Westhill Primary, Westhill Drive</b> A social group for people living with dementia and their carers to have a blether, a cuppa and some activities. <b>NO GROUP THIS MONTH</b>	2.00 -3.00 pm

Alzheimer Scotland – Action on Dementia is a company limited by guarantee.  
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To view the full list of events,  
visit [usa.org.uk/carers](http://usa.org.uk/carers) or  
scan the QR code!

