

Learning for Carers Grants

Summary of Evaluation Survey results May 2013

Background

In September 2012, knowing that carers learning needs are often unnoticed and unmet, Skills for Care (Skills for Care) launched a programme of 'Learning for Carers' (LfC) grants. The intention of this was to work with organisations that support carers to enable them to identify and provide learning opportunities that would be of benefit to carers.

Within some Carers Centres and through a network of carers services (both voluntary sector and Local Authority led), there are existing opportunities for carers to access information and learning. This learning can be both practical (i.e. first aid, benefits) or focus on the carers own needs (i.e. coping with stress, getting a balance between caring and your own life). It is recognised that such learning can increase a carer's ability to care well or have wider benefits to carers' lives. Skills for Care's one off programme of LfC grants aimed to contribute to the provision of this sort of learning.

This programme demonstrated a new approach by Skills for Care: instead of the usual tendering and contract system, we offered financial assistance of no more than £5000 per applicant in the form of a one-off grant. This was to be utilised between December 2012 and April 2013.

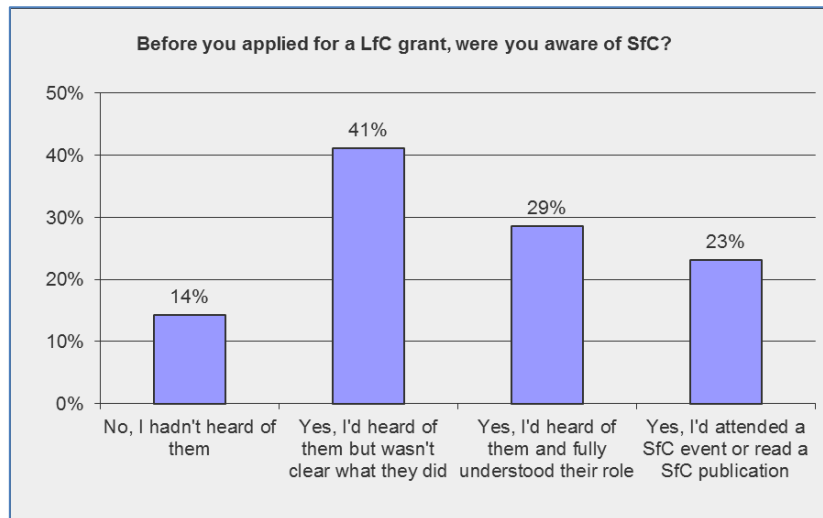
About the survey

This short paper outlines the findings of an online survey issued by Skills for Care to all successful LfC sites. The survey was emailed to the group on 28th March 2013 and officially closed on April 26th 2013. In total, 43 organisations responded to the survey.¹

¹ The total numbers of sites funded was 48. Total respondent figures may be above this due to some multiple responses from one organisation.

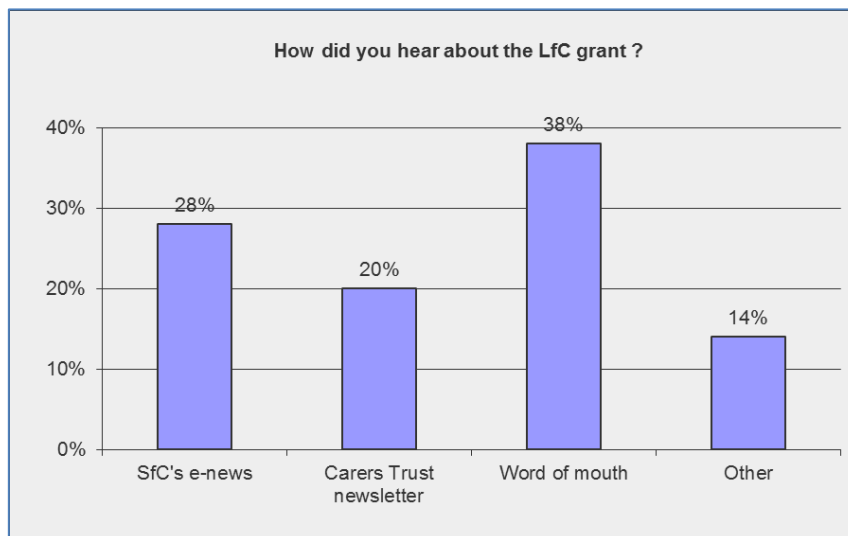
The respondents

Over half of the respondents either hadn't heard of Skills for Care or had, but weren't really sure what Skills for Care did. The programme has therefore had the additional benefit of increasing general awareness of Skills for Care amongst 31 organisations. These organisations were a mix of charities, voluntary groups or statutory services, with the majority being voluntary organisations in the charitable sector.



Base: 56 respondents

Two-fifths of the respondents had heard about the LfC grants via colleagues or associates ('word of mouth'). Just over a quarter heard about them via Skills for Care's electronic newsletter and a fifth via the Carers Trust newsletter. Other sources mentioned included alerts from other carers' organisations.



Base: 50 respondents

The grant application process

As was mentioned previously, this programme was run through a grants system. The paperwork was deliberately minimal, with one application form and a swift turnaround time for decisions. The application process was a resounding success:

- All of the respondents were happy with the length of time it took to complete the application process (56 answered the question);
- All felt that the process was clear and straight forward (55 answered the question);
- All felt that they were informed of decisions in a professional and timely fashion (55 answered the question);
- All but one respondent was happy with the speed at which the grant letter and monies were received (55 answered the question);
- All (including the one respondent who was unhappy with the timing) felt the process for receiving the grant letter and monies was clear and straight-forward (55 answered the question)

Main aims of the projects were to:

- Encourage applicants to work with carers to define what learning they viewed as relevant and needed
- Encourage a wide definition of what learning might mean (as defined by carers)
- Enable this learning to happen within the given timeframe
- Highlight the impact and role of learning for this group

Organisations were asked to name the three main aims of their projects. We summarised these as follows:

General (or unspecified) advice / support / information / training	26
Awareness raising / Conveying information about something specific (i.e. Dementia; Mental Capacity Act; Substance misuse; Visual impairment; End of life care; Mental health; children's disabilities / resources)	21
Practical help / support / advice / information (i.e. how to access healthcare/social care; how to access online forums / information; returning to work; available resources)	18
Emotional help / support / advice (i.e. Stress management; Confidence building; Assertiveness; Life planning)	18
Providing the opportunity to meet other carers / Reducing feelings of isolation / Peer learning / Peer support / Co-production	12
Health / Well-being / Fitness advice for carers	12

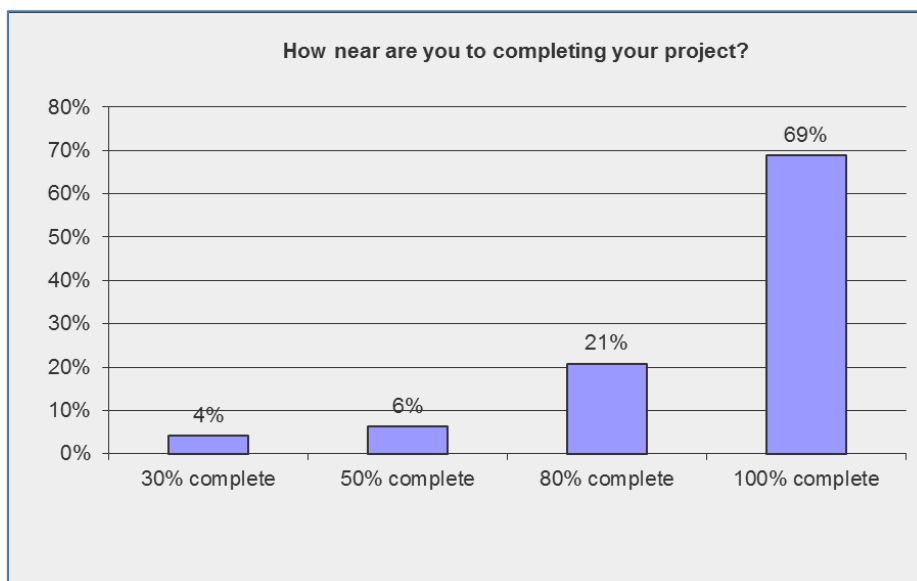
Specific skills / training (i.e. First Aid; Moving & handling; Confidence building; Assertiveness; Life planning; Internet use)	6
Building on existing initiatives (i.e. Coaching for Carers; Pathways to Wellness; Better lives Suffolk; CARING)	4
Identifying / reaching carers	2
Giving carers a voice	1

Base: 48 respondents

NB: Overall, 24 responses were categorised as ‘Miscellaneous’, either because they did not fall into any of the categories listed above or because they did not provide sufficient detail for a decision to be made as to how best to categorise them.

The running/delivery of the projects

At the time of the survey (end March-end April 2013), seven in ten respondents had already completed their projects. A further fifth were 80% through their projects. The remaining respondents were between 30-50% through their projects (see graph overleaf). It is acknowledged that timescales were a challenge for some organisations given they effectively had 5 months in which to design and deliver their projects.



Base: 48 respondents

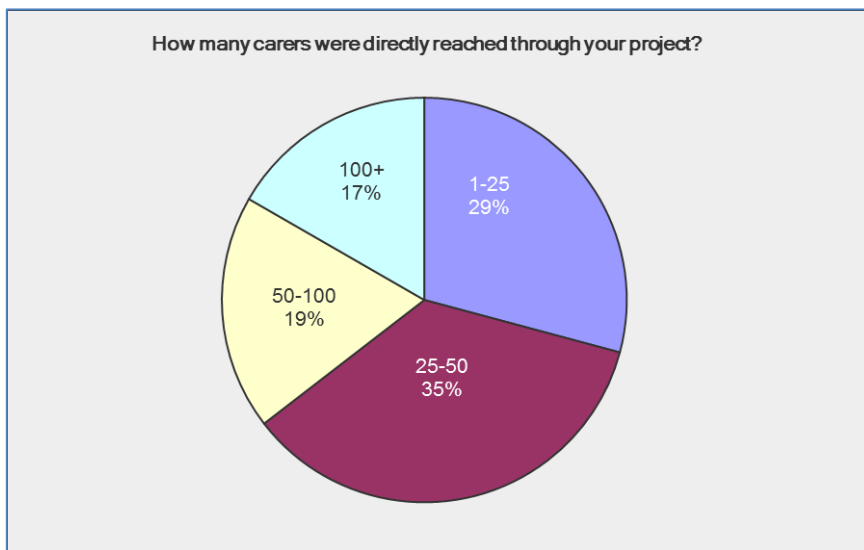
Two fifths of the projects were delivered in partnership with another organisation. The types of organisations cited included:

- National charities (including Age Concern, Alzheimer’s Society, Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities, National Autistic Society, NDTi, Speak Up Self-advocacy, Red Cross, Rethink, SEQOL)
- Local charities
- Local carers forums

- Local disability partnership boards
- Local training providers
- Local GP practices
- Local hospices
- Local authorities
- Local CAB

The impact of the projects

The respondents were asked how many carers their projects had reached. Three in ten had reached 1-25 carers, a third had reached 25-50 carers, a fifth had reached 50-100 carers and the remainder had reached more than 100 carers (see graph overleaf).



Base: 48 respondents

Organisations were given a range of options for the type of carers reached by their project and were able to select all that were applicable. The types of carers reached via the projects is detailed in the table below:

Carers of those with physical disabilities	79%
Dementia carers	70%
Carers of those with a learning disability	68%
Stroke carers	47%
BME carers	45%
End of life carers	43%
Substance misuse carers	26%
Carers of those with sight loss	21%
Young carers	9%

Base: 47 respondents

NB: The 'Other' answers predominantly related to people caring for those with mental illnesses.

Feedback from the carers who participated in the various courses was overwhelmingly positive. A range of benefits for carers were identified by the organisations, these have been collated into a number of themes, many of which cut across a number of different organisations:

- Raised awareness about specific conditions/illnesses
- Increased peer support/informal carer support networks

"As a result of the workshops carers will think about themselves more and support each other to develop further."

"I enjoyed meeting other people who have similar experiences to me."

"It is heart-warming to share information that is useful and can be amusing with people in similar situations."

"It's been so good to be with people in the same position as me."

"People do not realise how lonely carers get."

"I made new friends and whilst chatting found out it's not just myself facing problems... It made us feel easier knowing that others were in the same position and that we were not alone."

- Knowledge of techniques for combatting stress / dealing with difficult situations

"I learned how to respond and remain calm in difficult situations."

"I feel more confident and relaxed – more me."

"I benefitted from looking at reactions to dealing with stress and how to remove stress where we can."

"I used to shout when I got stressed, but now I get up and leave the room and take a deep breath."

- Increased skills in assertiveness/confidence and knowledge of carers rights (also described as 'empowerment')

"I feel more confident in dealing with situations."

"I learnt to feel comfortable in my own opinions."

"I now feel strong enough to deal with professionals who think they know more than I do about my husband."

"I know have more confidence to talk to doctors and consultants."

I have realised that I am the professional in my caring role, not them."

- Skills needed to be a better carer (i.e. first aid, moving and handling)

"As a result of the workshops carers know how to deal with an emergency or non-emergency situation safely both for themselves and the person requiring intervention...carers will stop putting their own body or the person they care for at risk from poor techniques."

"An excellent day. Everything explained in an easy to understand format. I

now feel confident to be able to assist in an emergency."

- Increased awareness of where to seek help/advice/services/equipment

"I feel more confident now - good tips and advice when dealing with services."

"Makes you realise there is help out there...you are not unique or isolated."

"I feel more confident knowing there is advice and support out there."

- Ability to establish greater control over their lives

"I've been able to make and stick to boundaries."

“There is less drama in my life.”

- Ability to consider life beyond caring responsibilities and the confidence to try new things (i.e. considering paid employment or training, thinking about moving home, etc)
- Knowledge about the impact of caring on their own health and vice versa / the need to take time out / to consider themselves as an individual and not just as an extension of the carer for person

“I understand how important it is to look after my own health as well as the person I am caring for – a little walk does me the world of good.”
“I have discovered that I am a person in my own right and for the first time have actually requested time for myself which I used to visit the Ideal Home exhibition.”

- Consideration of ‘alternative’ forms of support (i.e. a reading group)

“An avenue to explore feelings and ideas...a space and an opportunity to reflect on our life experiences...a story/poem shows us we are not alone in our problem.”

There was a general reported benefit of carers being able to take time out from their caring role and that the mix of practical information/training and ‘softer’ sessions (including pampering) was a bonus:

“My favourite day – fun and creative ‘me time’ – not focussed on being a carer.”
“I came away feeling optimistic and energised.”

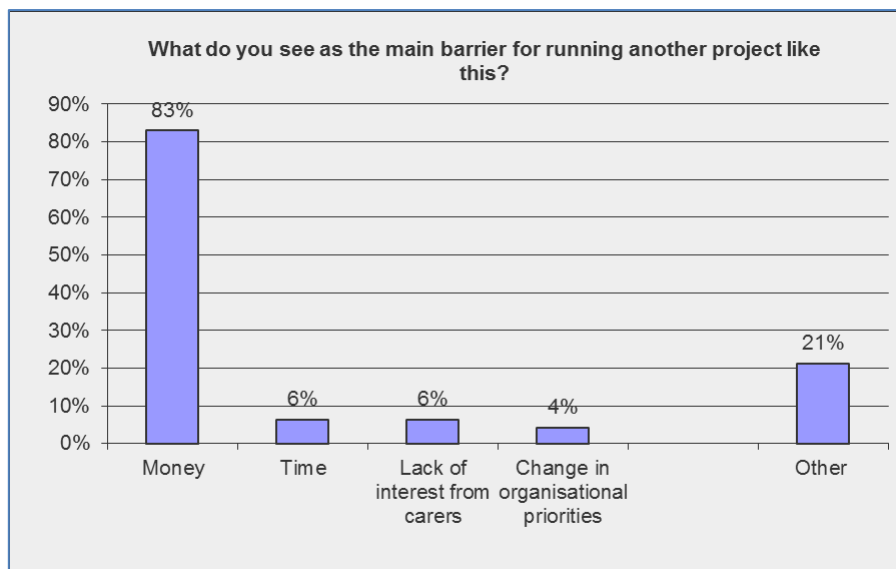
Some carers reported that although they found the relaxation/holistic/pampering sessions useful, they wouldn’t have the time or financial resources to continue with these in everyday life. However, others were so enthusiastic about the benefits that they were planning to look at ways of coming together with other carers to continue with them on a regular basis.

There was a recognition that courses for carers need to be flexible to reflect their responsibilities. Not everyone was able to attend every day or to arrive/leave at the specified times. Being flexible actually increased attendance as otherwise some carers would have ruled themselves out of the training.

Looking to the future

To be able to consider whether the programme should be run again, we asked the sites a number of questions about future work.

The majority (96%) of respondents said that they would run a similar project again (47 answered the question). The remainder were unsure. The main perceived barrier which could prevent respondents from running similar projects again was (lack of) money. Like many organisations, the current financial climate and the related insecurity of job roles featured highly amongst the ‘other’ answers given. Also mentioned was the need to provide more than one off events/training sessions, particularly for people with learning disabilities.



Base: 47 respondents

The one thing that Skills for Care could do to help organisations to support the learning of carers

Organisations were asked to name the one thing that Skills for Care could do to help them to support learning among carers. We summarised these as follows:

Secure more funding to train carers	30
Provide training resources / marketing materials / promotion of existing activities	4
Keep spreading the message about the value of carers & their untapped skills / knowledge	2
Keep carers organisations informed about other training opportunities / good practice	2
Convene a regular forum for carers organisations to share experiences / ideas / etc	2
Compile a record of the projects, their evaluation and learning to share with other (prospective) providers.	2
Provide accredited training for carers / ensure training providers offer high quality courses / involve carers in designing courses	2

Base: 46 respondents

NB: Overall, 4 responses were categorised as 'Miscellaneous', either because they did not fall into any of the categories listed above or because they did not provide sufficient detail for a decision to be made as to how best to categorise them. One organisation made three suggestions, which is why the total number of responses equals 48.

Respondents and Skills for Care

As many of the organisations were 'new' to Skills for Care, we also asked them about their existing engagement with us and tried to gauge willingness to become more involved in the future.

National Minimum Dataset for Social Care (NMDS-SC)

A third of the respondents are already registered with the NMDS-SC (47 respondents answered the question). For some of these organisations the NMDS-SC is not applicable to them, but two-fifths hadn't heard of it and roughly the same proportion would need more information about it. Some of those not currently registered are in the process of registering now.

Skills for Care's e-News

Just over a third of respondents currently receive copies of Skills for Care's e-News bulletins (46 respondents answered the question). All of those not currently receiving it indicated that they would like to be added to the mailing list.

Other comments

Organisations were given a final opportunity to share their thoughts with Skills for Care. Once again the feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Respondents praised Skills for Care for disseminating the grant money efficiently and effectively and for creating positive partnership working. There is a desire for this type of opportunity to be repeated in the future.

"This grant has been extremely valuable to the carers we work with and has enabled us to provide essential training that carers were requesting but there wasn't the funding available to deliver."

"Thank you for your valuable support – it has enabled us to make a difference and to continue the work we aim to do to support, empower and work with carers."

"Many of the carers who took part in the...course experienced a marked improvement in their confidence and self-esteem and felt motivated to continue their learning beyond this course, so it would be helpful to know that there was a fun that can be applied to for new courses."

"The funding has allowed us to create a lasting legacy within our project, which will benefit Carers for many years to come. Thank you for agreeing to fund the project, as without it, our online course could not have been developed."

There is no doubt that the carers involved in the various projects have found the experience beneficial. It has enabled some organisations to make contact with carers who were previous unknown to them or who had previously had little engagement with them. Having a reason to come together and meet people in similar circumstances was as important for some participants as the actual course content itself.

"It has been most gratifying to see the difference that our project has made to the lives of the carers, especially in regard to the way that many of them are now considering joining the workforce in both paid and voluntary capacities. They feel that their struggles as carers have placed them in the unique position of being able to advise and help other people grappling with similar challenges,

*and their newfound self-confidence and assertiveness
have surpassed even our expectations.”*

A small number of critical observations were made:

- Several organisations noted that the turnaround time for the project was too tight, especially for small organisations with limited resources
- One organisation was confused about the role of the mentor and felt that this required clarification
- A couple of organisations reiterated the difficulty in engaging with ‘hard to reach’ carers (i.e. young carers, carers looking after disabled children, etc), whilst others felt it was necessary to find additional funding to pay for carers transport costs, respite care, etc.

The success of the projects can clearly be seen in the overwhelmingly positive feedback demonstrated throughout this report. In addition, based on the projects who supplied details of the carers they reached, we estimate that almost 1850 carers directly participated in the projects at an average cost per head of £87. This is remarkably good value given the range of activities and learning provided by the projects which will benefits the carers and those they care for in the short, medium and long term.