

Support Choices
Evaluation



**Qualitative review of the impact
of Support Choices
for people and unpaid carers**

May 2021



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Introduction

About Support Choices

Support Choices is a free community based independent service helping people organise social care and self- directed support across Perth and Kinross. It aims to give people and unpaid carers the information they need to make informed choices. It was established in 2018 and funded by the Scottish Government through the Support in the Right Direction Programme. There are four staff members, with one project worker providing practical support to the organisation and staff members. There are three community workers working in the community with individuals, families and partner organisations.

The services Support Choices offers includes working with communities, individuals, and families to:

- provide information about care and support options including self-directed support
- request and prepare for an assessment for care and support
- identify what is important for them for care and support
- explore other ways to fund and find care and support options
- connect with community supports and useful organisations.

About the evaluation

Over the last few months, Outside the Box has been carrying out a qualitative review of the impact of Support Choices for people and unpaid carers.

We have done this by listening to people and unpaid carers who have used the service, and by collecting the stories and experiences around the difference it has made to their lives.

We also conducted informal interviews with Support Choices staff and people from partner organisations.

To capture and record the experiences of people, we used an inclusive evaluation feedback model called magic moments.

We have also reviewed key materials, such as funding reports, progress reports information and booklets, Support Choices website and social media.

The evaluation focussed on these four outcomes for people and unpaid carers:

- are more informed, listened to and less stressed
- have easy access to information and advice that helps them plan and access social care service
- know how social care and community supports can help them achieve the quality of life and service they want
- are able to manage social care packages and make changes

Magic Moments

The collection of Magic Moments have been collected from conversations with people, families and unpaid carers who have used Support Choices. They are also from informal interviews with Support Choices staff and organisational partners. They are a snapshot of individual experiences that collectively show the positive impact in people's lives that Support Choices has made in accessing and using social care and supports in rural Perthshire. The Magic Moments highlight small but significant changes in people's lives.

The themes in the Magic Moments are linked to the Support Choices Outcomes.

Collection of Magic Moments	
People and carers are more informed, listened to and less stressed	
Family member	"The help and advice we have got from Support Choices has been a godsend. I don't think we would have got very far without them. Its mind blowing the difference it has made to our lives. We are less stressed because we know mum is being well looked after so we can relax for a bit."
Unpaid Carer	"I just explained what was going on and some areas where I felt we needed help. It was so good to talk to someone who understood the system and what help and support we could get. And then helped us to get it."
Unpaid Carer	"If and when things change, I know I can go back to Support Choices for help. I'm less fearful about the future now."
Family member	"Talking with Support Choices staff was like talking to a really well-informed friend, who understood what packages and support were available. They helped me work out what we wanted for my dad and what things would make our lives easier."
Family member	"It felt like we had a bit more space and time to think about what would work for us as a family. Support Choices has the knowledge of people and services and how to make it happen. We couldn't have asked for more."
Person getting support	"After my first meeting with my designated worker, I immediately began to feel supported and less anxious. There was a glimmer of hope."
Support Choices staff member	"I think it is very clear to us that there is a need for people to be better informed and better supported and a lot of the time people accept what they are told or given because they do not know there is an alternative or they are scared to rock the boat for fear of losing

	the support they already have. The people that come to us pretty much find that it is beneficial to have the information and support that they need.”
Person getting support	“With more visits and it became clear that my Support Choices Worker was knowledgeable, determined and a reliable strong advocate who gave me confidence and as a result calmed my fears.
Support Choices Staff member	“One family I went to see had been given option 3 and it wasn’t working and they hadn’t been told about other options for managing their support. Option 3 is where the local authority manages the support and the organisation giving support. I told them about the different options they could have within Self-directed support. After working with us they choose to have more control and went for option one where they manage the payments and organise who gives them support. It was a much better fit for their needs.”
Support Choices staff member	“I have examples of people who are more informed. I am not convinced they feel listened to or less stressed. I do have one example of a lady who we managed to help get a better self-directed support deal for her respite care which has made a massive difference to her and her husband.”
Partner organisation	“One family got a new bit of equipment to help them. They had been managing for ages on their own. They are definitely better informed now and feel listened to and are probably less stressed too. I think now they are better informed they will be quicker to ask next time.”
Partner Organisation	“We have been involved with individuals and families, with Support Choices, where we have given information that has helped produce positive feedback from the carers and carers outcomes were achieved.”
People and unpaid carers have easy access to information and advice that helps them plan and access social care services	
Unpaid Carer	“Getting these carers in has been a great success... I feel better, and if I feel better, he feels better...now I can take a big sigh and get on with the easy bit.”
Unpaid Carer	“Working with Support Choices was the first time I thought someone is going to do something practical that will make a difference for us both and it did.”
Family member	“Before your visit, supports were in place but it wasn’t the right supports. It didn’t work for me or my sister. It’s there at last and its really working now and I think mostly because you listened and helped me think about what I needed.”

Unpaid Carer	“Overall - things started to move and the plan worked for me.”
Person getting support	“We sit down and have a cup a tea and talk through what I want and what I want to do and then Support Choices contacts all the right people and organisations and that just makes things so much easier.”
Support Choices staff member	“The support people want is often a mixture of things that helps with different aspects of their lives, like personal care - help with washing and getting dressed and social supports like having a chat with friends and going out to places, but also practical things like equipment such as recliner chair or a particular type of bed.”
Family member	“The kind of support a family needs takes quite a bit of thinking about and organising and often involves a range of organisations to make it work. This is where Support Choices really makes a difference - they have the information and know who can help.”
Partner organisation	“Support Choices is a great organisation and I have heard they have helped lots of people. Just getting the message out that help with social care and self-directed support is there. It should be accessible to everyone and also trying to get local authority to push it a little bit more. It’s all about trying to increase choices for people who don’t live in cities and towns. People rurally have less ability to access the level of provision that people in the likes of Perth can get.”
Support Choices staff member	“There is a lady who we have given lots of info and support to. Not just about self-directed support but about the independent living fund and she now employs a PA 40 hours a week to care for her son. Whenever she has a question about anything, whether SDS related or not, she comes to me and if I don’t know the answer I can find out for her.”
Partner organisation	“We have had a few situations where I have worked with Support Choices staff. Support Choices have provided the initial information and options for people and that has led to other supports being put in place that has help improved people’s lives.”
Partner organisation	“My approach is always to tell people about self-directed support when I go and see them and how they can access help with Support Choices. I know from hearing through other people that Support Choices does a great job assisting people to access the help they need.”
Partner organisation	“I always ask the people I work with the people I have work with about the care and help that they have. Some people already have self-directed support and understand how it works and others are not sure. But when given that information and a chance to talk it

	through, then yes, they are more aware. Support Choices also helps me with this.”
Partner organisation	“Yes, this has happened over the last two years. There have been a couple of families where Support Choices gave people the initial information and advice and this led other supports being put in place for people.”
People and unpaid carers know how social care and community supports can help them achieve the quality of life and service they want	
Unpaid Carer	“The supports we planned and organised with Support Choices have been in place a while now and people are saying to me you look so much better, and this is simply because Peter gets an hour of personal care every morning. And that means I get some time and space every day and the difference that makes to me is night and day. It means I can cope with the rest of the day and everything else that might happen.”
Unpaid Carer	“It’s so good, I can hear him laughing while he is being helped to shower and get dressed and he is in such a better mood. It makes my day and it’s a simple thing really.”
Person getting support	“I found the ongoing visits with Support Choices were not only a source of practical help but also provided a much needed friendly, approachable connection whilst remaining professional. What an excellent and effective service. May it go from strength to strength.”
Family member	“What we wanted, was for our mum to have someone to sit and chat with her and perhaps watch some TV with her for one afternoon a week. She already had carers coming in help with her personal care but this didn’t involve much time for chatting. And the rest of us don’t live very close by – it’s quite a drive to visit her. By having a carer sit with her for one afternoon a week has meant such a difference to mum - she tells us about the things they have watched on the telly. It also means no driving for me and I know my mums happy and that means I can relax and enjoy my day too.”
Support Choices staff member	“I supported a lady with severe mental health issues and she and her husband have managed to use SDS option 1 to employ 3 carers to support her and to enable him to work. Also, to reskill her because she lost a lot of skills with hospitalisation and institutionalisation. They are one family I supported to get extra hours and some mental health support which has been quite difficult, and remains difficult.”
Support choices staff members	“People really need help with this, because so much information is hidden or you need to ask the right questions to the right people at the right time.”

Partner organisation	“Support Choices are really thinking about quality of life. They think about the whole community and what’s going on for people. Like what community supports and assets are available, and what additional services there are and how these can fit together to work well for people.”
Partner organisation	“Quality of live is so important. I can think of at least two families where Support Choices helped families think about and plan what kind of services and activities were important to the family. And then referrals for additional services were made resulting a far better quality of life and service.”
Partner organisation	“People are definitely more aware of the options they have and have more confidence about these as a result of support choices becoming involved.”
People and carers are able to manage social care packages and make changes	
Unpaid carer	“I know where to go for help now to make changes for the supports my husband needs. Before Support Choices it was always a worry when I thought his supports needed updating.”
Unpaid carer	“Support Choices helped me when my dad died to change the supports my mum needed. They helped me think about what my mum would like for her personal care, and also for herself and for us around her mental health and wellbeing. When we change her supports in the future I feel better able to manage them now. I also know I can go back and ask Support Choices to help me too.”
Support Choices staff member	“I supported a family who were trying to manage a care package for their elderly relative. I gave the family information, so they knew about different care options and this helped them. When things need to change they are better placed to manage it well for their relative and for themselves.”
Support Choices staff member	“We have helped lots of people ask for more or more flexible hours.”
Partner organisation	“I can think of at least one person who is now accessing a service to manage their SDS budget and is now in a better place to manage changes and support their fluctuating health better.”
Partner organisation	“This is still a hard one for people, I pass information on to people to contact Support Choices to help them with this.”
Partner organisation	Yes, I think most of the people Support Choices deal with are looking to change or swap their options.”

Interpretation and analysis

The evidence gathered in this qualitative review shows that Support Choices is making a positive impact on the lives of individuals, families and unpaid carers who use the service.

It also shows that Support Choices is having a positive impact with partner organisations and the wider community in rural Perthshire.

The focus of the analysis was based upon four key outcomes for the project. These are:

People and unpaid carers

- are more informed, listened to and less stressed
- have easy access to information and advice that helps them plan and access social care service
- know how social care and community supports can help them achieve the quality of life and service they want
- are able to manage social care packages and make changes.

What people like about Support Choices

One of the key things that individuals and families and unpaid carers said about Support Choices was that they no longer felt alone. They knew where to go for help and support and that this was important because support for care need adjusting and reviewing over time and for many this is a worrying time. Also, the care system is difficult to navigate, with its own set of terms and language, and processes. They talked about the Support choices staff being friendly, approachable and knowledgeable.

“I know where to go for help now. This gives me peace of mind for the next time I need to make changes and adjustments for my husband’s care.”

“I immediately began to feel supported and less anxious. There was a glimmer of hope. It was clear that my Support Choices worker was knowledgeable, determined and a reliable strong advocate who gave me confidence and calmed my fears.”

“They were just so supportive and knowledgeable. They really help us come up with some different ideas and ways to think about care and supports that looked after all of us.”

These are some of the comments from Support Choices staff about the highlights in their work.

“It’s a privilege to work with people and help them live the life they want.”

“The end result is the best bit - supporting people to live the life they want to live. It’s very rewarding. It’s also good to meet new people.”

“The best bits are when we manage to make things better for people. If we manage to help makes things better for people.”

“I guess also just the breadth of people that we meet. We meet lots of different people in different circumstances. And it is always interesting even if it is frustrating and difficult.”

People and unpaid carers are more informed, listened to and less stressed

Getting hold of simple, relevant and timely information about social care and supports, and self-directed support is a major difficulty for most people. Most ordinary people have very little knowledge or understanding of how to access social care and supports for themselves or their family. In most communities this is not shared collective information, people only find out about these things as and when they need to. This makes the whole process more stressful for people and for unpaid carers.

People and families who have used Support Choices said that it has helped them be more informed, listened to, and less stressed.

“The help and advice we have got from Support Choices has been a godsend. I don’t think we would have got very far without them. Its mind blowing the difference it has made to our lives. We are less stressed because we know mum is being well looked after so we can relax for a bit.”

“I just explained what was going on and some areas where I felt we needed help. It was so good to talk to someone who understood the system and what help and support we could get. And then helped us to get it.”

“If and when things change, I know I can go back to Support Choices for help. I’m less fearful about the future now.”

“Talking with Support Choices staff was like talking to a really well-informed friend, who understood what packages and support were available. They helped me work out what we wanted for my dad and what things would make our lives easier.”

“It felt like we had a bit more space and time to think about what would work for us as a family. Support Choices has the knowledge of people and services and how to make it happen. We couldn’t have asked for more.”

This area is still a concern for Support Choices staff who think that people they work with are more informed but due to the nature of the care system are not necessarily less stressed or feel listened to

“I have examples of people who are more informed. I am not convinced they feel listened to or less stressed. One example is a lady who we managed to help get a

better self-directed support deal for her respite care which made a massive difference to her and her husband.”

People and unpaid carers have easy access to information and advice that helps them plan and access social care service

This outcome is linked to the one above. Having easy access to information and advice that helps people to think about and plan social care services for what they need now and also in the future is really important. It's the kind of information we often don't think about until we need it and then it can be very hard to know where to start and who to ask.

Planning how social care services fit together can also be complicated such as making it work to support different aspects of a person's life and the things they would like to do whilst also making sure it fits into the carer's life too.

Support Choices is helping people to have easier access to information and advice that helps them plan and access social care services. These are some of the things people have said.

“Getting these carers in has been a great success... I feel better, and if I feel better, he feels better...now I can take a big sigh and get on with the easy bit.”

“Working with Support Choices was the first time I thought someone is going to do something practical that will make a difference for us both and it did.”

“Before your visit supports were in place, but it wasn't the right place. It didn't work for me or my sister. It's there at last and its really working now and I think mostly because you listened and helped me think about what I needed.”

“Overall - things started to move and the plan worked for me.”

“We sit down and have a cup a tea and talk through what I want and what I want to do and then Support Choices contacts all the right people and organisations and that just makes things so much easier.”

“The support people want is often a mixture of things that helps with different aspects of their lives, like personal care - help with washing and getting dressed and social supports like having a chat with friends and going out to places, but also practical things like equipment such as recliner chair or a particular type of bed.”

“The kind of support a family needs takes quite a bit of thinking about and organising and often involves a range of organisations to make it work. This is where Support Choices really makes a difference - they have the information and know who can help.”

This outcome is important to Support Choices staff members and partner organisations too. These are some of their comments:

“There is a lady who we have given lots of info and support to. Not just about self-directed support but about the independent living fund and she now employs a PA

40 hours a week to care for her son. Whenever she has a question about anything, whether SDS related or not, she comes to me and if I don't know the answer I can find out for her." SC staff member

"We have had a few situations where I have worked with Support Choices staff. Support Choices have provided the initial information and options for people and that has led to other supports being put in place that has help improved people's lives."
Partner Organisation

"My approach is always to tell people about self-directed support when I go and see them and how they can access help with Support Choices. I know from hearing through other people that Support Choices does a great job assisting people to access the help they need." Partner Organisation

People and unpaid carers know how social care and community supports can help them achieve the quality of life they want

The evidence shows that Support Choices is helping people and unpaid carers to achieve the quality of life and service they want. It also acknowledges that this is a very difficult outcome to achieve due to the complexity of the social care system.

These are some of things people and unpaid carers said about the service.

"The supports we planned and organised with Support Choices have been in place a while now and people are saying to me you look so much better and this is simply because John gets an hour of personal care every morning. And that means I get some time and space every day and the difference that makes to me is night and day. It means I can cope with the rest of the day and everything else that might happen."

"It's so good, I can hear him laughing while he is being helped to shower and get dressed and he is in such a better mood. It makes my day and it's a simple thing really."

"I found the ongoing visits with Support Choices were not only a source of practical help but also provided a much needed friendly, approachable connection whilst remaining professional. What an excellent and effective service. May it go from strength to strength."

"What we wanted, was for our mum to have someone to sit and chat with her and perhaps watch some TV with her for one afternoon a week. She already had carers coming in help with her personal care but this didn't involve much time for chatting. And the rest of us don't live very close by – it's quite a drive to visit her. By having a carer sit with her for one afternoon a week has meant such a difference to mum - she tells us about the things they have watched on the telly. It also means no driving for me and I know my mums happy and that means I can relax and enjoy my day too."

Improving quality of life an example from Support Choices Staff

“With self-directed support there are four options available for people to use to manage their care and support. Option 1 is where the council gives you the money to sort out and pay for your own care. It is also called a direct payment.

There is one lady I supported who lives with severe mental health issues. She wanted to develop her skills again and take part in everyday activities after spending time in hospital. And her husband wanted to be able to go out to work knowing that she was looked after and also could do the things she wanted to do during the day. I worked with the couple to use the self-directed option 1 to employ 3 carers to support and encourage her to enable her husband to go to work. The quality of life for both the husband and wife and for them as a couple was improved considerably by having flexible care and support options. But this is still very difficult for many people to be able to do.”

Improving quality of life an example from Support Choices Staff

“Option 3 with self-directed support is where the council chooses and arranges the care and supports it thinks you need. The council also manages the money.

I worked with one family where the husband had brain injuries and need care and supports but these were delivered through option 3 of self-directed support. The council chooses and arranges the support it thinks you need. But this option was not delivering a consistency of carers and carers who understood the husband. They were having a very difficult time and had been labelled ‘troublemakers’ because they weren’t just accepting the situation. I worked with the family and we managed to move them to option 1 where they managed the money and the carers they needed. Using this option meant that the family could work out what they needed and wanted, and the things that were important to them. It was really important that they were able to establish a relationship with the carers and that the carers came regularly. This situation worked so much better for the family and has improved their quality of life.

People and unpaid carers are able to manage social care packages and make changes

Managing social care packages and making changes to them is an integral part of having care and support. Changes in circumstances, or changes in health often mean that the kind of care and supports a person or family needs will also change to support them better.

Partner organisations for Support choices noted that this was a key part of Support Choices work but was still very difficult for individuals and families to actually do. Some of their comments are below

“Yes, I think most of the people Support Choices deal with are looking to change or swap their options.”

“I can think of at least one person who is now accessing a service to manage their SDS budget and is now in a better place to manage changes and support their fluctuating health better.”

“This is still a hard one for people, I pass information on to people to contact Support Choices to help them with this.”

The work of Support Choices has made it easier and what is clear from the comments from two unpaid carers is that they now have the security of knowing that Support Choices can also help them in the future too.

“I know where to go for help now to make changes for the supports my husband needs. Before Support Choices it was always a worry when I thought his supports needed updating.”

“Support Choices helped me when my dad died to change the supports my mum needed. They helped me think about what my mum would like for her personal care, and also for herself and for us around her mental health and wellbeing. When we change her supports in the future I feel better able to manage them now. I also know I can go back and ask Support Choices to help me too.”

Support Choice staff clearly see this as a key part of their work too.

“I supported a family who were trying to manage a care package for their elderly relative. I gave the family information, so they knew about different care options and this helped them. When things need to change they are better placed to manage it well for their relative and for themselves.”

“We have helped lots of people ask for more or more flexible hours.”

Managing social care packages an example from Support Choices staff

“Option 1 with self-directed support is where the council gives you the money to sort out and pay for your own care. It is also called a direct payment.

I supported one family who were trying to manage a social care package for their aunt. They no longer lived anywhere near her. The family were expected to travel from Aberdeen to Perth each week to manage the paperwork to organise and pay the carers. I worked with the local social work office to change this. It was agreed that a payroll provider would manage the package and pay the carers. This was on a cost that would normally be paid by the local authority. I was hoping that it would set a precedent that would change things for more families but so far it hasn't.”

Partnership working

Working in partnership with other organisations has been a key area of success for Support Choices. It has resulted in good outcomes for people, families and carers and also for staff too.

Partner organisations described supporting each other, working as a team and sharing information and knowledge. These are some of their comments

“I have always learned something from working with Support Choices, both at workshop and events and from talking to staff. People are open and honest and that really helps. We share information too, there is always something new to learn.”

“Its definitely about sharing knowledge between us and also giving joint support to people so that things work better for them.”

“A highlight for me is seeing a difference that working together makes for families and individuals. Its about working as a team even though we are often employed by different organisations. We can still all work together and we work well together.”

“For me as an individual running a project, the support I get from support choices has been essential.”

Partnership working example

“We work well together because we have different skills and knowledge. If one of the Support Choices staff sees a family with a need for equipment, then they will get me involved. My role is to write the specialist report. Quite often if the item is specialised and expensive it is out with the remit of the local authority provision. But between us we have knowledge of places to go for grant applications and so far we have been successful with one and we are in middle of sorting another application out. It works so much better with us working in partnership as a team. Its better for us and for the families and people we work with.”

OVERALL ASSESSMENT AND CONCLUSIONS

The assessment of the impact of the Support Choices is based on how well the four outcomes are being achieved. Support Choices as a new project is working very well towards achieving the four key outcomes.

People and unpaid carers:

- are more informed, listened to and less stressed
- have easy access to information and advice that helps them plan and access social care service
- know how social care and community supports can help them achieve the quality of life and service they want
- are able to manage social care packages and make changes.

All the feedback in this report points to a service that is high quality, well respected and valued by the people and families that use it and by partner organisations in Perthshire.

The comments from people, family members and unpaid carers show that the work of Support Choices is making a positive impact on the lives of the people and families they work with and also partner organisations.

Social care and support is a complex system and people who need supports to go about their daily lives often have complicated lives and may live in difficult circumstances. Home and life circumstances also change over time as do health and support needs. Support Choices is a model and approach that gives people and families the information and support they need to make decisions and choices about what is important to them. It also helps with the options around how they manage their social care package and make changes.

The need for Support Choices work continues because access to information isn't straightforward and the information provided is not always clear and people are often fearful of losing the supports they have. A Support Choices staff member sums up this situation.

“I think it is very clear to us that there is a need for people to be better informed and better supported and a lot of the time people accept what they are told or given because they do not know there is an alternative or they are scared to rock the boat for fear of losing the support they already have. The people that come to us pretty much find that it is beneficial to have the information and support that they need.”

The three areas where Support choices is having the biggest impact are:

1. Offering independent information, advice and support for people, families and unpaid carers that has positive impacts for everyone involved

2. Well respected, knowledgeable and caring staff who are looking to achieve the best outcomes for the people and families they work with
3. Working in partnership with staff from other organisations and professions, to support each other and also to deliver creative solutions for people and families

As Support Choices continues into its next stage of development, it has the potential to benefit and reach more people, families and communities. To support this work future plans should include

- Building upon existing relationship and partnerships and seeking to build new partnerships
- A systematic approach to:
 - capturing feedback around the impact of the service for families and people
 - sharing the impact and feedback using a wide range of approaches, such as participating in events, producing leaflets and social media