

Support Choices – Test of Change Evaluation Report

March 2022



About Support Choices and the Test for Change brokerage project

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 who need care and unpaid carers the information they need to make informed choices. It was established in 2018, initially funded by the Scottish Government through the Support in the Right Direction Programme.

Social care and support is a complex system and people who need support 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.

There are four permanent staff members and 3 sessional staff members on the Support Choices team. 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.

In November 2021 we began to deliver a Test of Change project, offering Community Brokerage to adults across Perth and Kinross. **Community Brokerage** supports people to identify the social care support which is right for them and assists them to put that support in place. Trained and accredited Community Brokers help prepare people for assessments, support the development of agreed support plans and understanding budgets, as well as helping people to access local support and activities in the community.

About the evaluation process:

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Over the last five months, we have gathered qualitative feedback on the impact of Support Choices for people. We have done this by listening to service users and unpaid carers who have used the service, collecting their 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, including those working in the Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP).

We asked people to share the story of their journey, asking them to compare how they felt before connecting with Support Choices to how they are feeling following the support they have had.

The evaluation focussed on four outcomes for people who need care and unpaid carers:

- *People feel better informed and have access to information*
- *People feel valued and listened to*
- *People know what their 'social care outcomes' are*
- *People feel I have been helped to achieve my outcomes*

The evaluation process also assessed whether people's support from overall services works more smoothly, with benefits for the services as well as for the person.

Feedback on the overall service

What's working well about a brokerage approach?

Feedback gathered from people using the service was extremely positive and highlighted the value of a brokerage approach, with the following areas being emphasised:

"100% difference...To have this amazing support and service along with someone who has a wealth of knowledge is an amazing support. I know I couldn't have done this without them."

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- the empathy, efficiency and reliability of Community Workers came up again and again, helping people to feel they were “not alone” in trying to resolve challenges
- individuals highlighted good communication from Brokers throughout their experience
- staff were well placed to make things happen to ensure good support was put in place relatively quickly
- the ability of brokers to support individuals in identifying their needs and potential solutions in meaningful ways at a pace that suited them
- Community Workers were often able to find solutions to problems which local authorities (LA) were aware of but did not have capacity to resolve
- the availability and responsiveness of brokers to answer questions and keep things moving, often resolving issues that had got ‘stuck’ at Local Authority level
- the value of local networks which brokers are connected into, particularly in terms of recruitment and community opportunities

“[the SC broker] has been so proactive in looking at different transport options, and finding out is there anything in the local area that we won’t necessarily know about, but she can find out about”

“Excellent resource, would highly recommend. [They were] always there when I needed them, good communication, very knowledgeable.”

“The use of someone like [our broker] who actually steered us towards people and knows all the providers was tremendously helpful.”

“I just felt like I could connect, I could relate, she understood me. She told me how we’d go about it and she set up a plan.”

“[our broker] has been fantastic. Chris has kept on top of things, figuring out how to best resolve things. She’s provided better advocacy for me than doing it myself.”

“The support from [our broker] has been really first rate. She provided great info on our options, got adverts out and we got 3 candidates – good quality candidates.”

“Yes, it’s all been positive. And everybody I have dealt with on the phone or face to face, just can’t do enough to help. And because I’ve never had experience of having to deal with a caring service, it’s been a bit of a shock, that all of this help was available to start with, but that everyone was so helpful.”

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Where Support Choices can improve in the future

Service users – communication

The only feedback we've had around things that could be done differently from service users were suggestions on how we use email, with one feeling email was not a good system whilst another person felt email could have been used more and earlier in the process. This feedback highlights the importance of finding out people's communication preferences early on and using these where possible in a way that feels comfortable.

"there's been one technical hitch-up – I feel that's more the constraint of technical problems rather than human intervention. I feel like email's very limited."

Partner orgs - getting clarity on what we do and don't do

Feedback from teams and other organisations Support Choices work with has been very positive overall: they are seeing the benefits of relationship building efforts and would like to see these continued so that professionals in both teams can understand each other's roles and continue working alongside each other effectively.

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Feedback against outcomes

Outcome: Increasing awareness/information

Feedback highlighted the following experiences in relation to people's increased awareness and access to information:

- It was helpful to get information how social care could help them and how they could maintain choice and control throughout that process in a manageable way which they could easily understand and related to their situation
- people with no knowledge of SDS have been introduced to it and helped to understand how it could make a difference to their lives
- those with some understanding have been helped to develop their knowledge, particularly around more complex elements like managing an option 1 and have had direct access to someone who can answer questions in a timely manner (this support has also had an impact on wider services)
- People feel they know they can come to Support Choices if they need further information on an issue relating to social care

"In terms of information provided it was really good, we felt we had choice and control."

"I felt quite relaxed. I was able to understand most of the forms. I've never found forms easy – they're very confusing. But [my broker] helped with this and I was able to feel more confident."

"There's been so much of a minefield of stuff out there, and it's not easy getting information back and response back from the people you need it from the most is not easy, so having somebody else who knows the ins and outs of it has been a real help."

"I never knew SDS existed, and I would never of had the time or the knowledge to know where to begin with applying. Our broker highlighted that [SDS] is about your son and his disability and what he needs to make his life easier."

"I wouldn't have known where to start and [my broker] was really, really good at telling me and helping me figure out how and what the best method of self-directed support was going to work for us and how to access the funds and what have you."

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Outcome: Feeling valued & listened to

Feedback highlights a range of ways in which Community Workers made people feel heard, that they were 'not alone' and that getting their social care experiences right mattered, including:

- a community brokerage approach which prioritises relationship-building and working at a pace that suits individuals and families
- clear and efficient communication – being available to answer calls and keeping in touch regularly
- an empathetic and solutions-focused approach which put's individuals and families at the centre of planning

Benefits for the ways in which people felt more listened to by statutory services with broker's involvement were also shared by social work teams

"She was really great to talk to on the phone. She could empathise, really and she did tell me what was available, and a bit about her own life, she was very easy to chat to."

"I just felt like I could connect, I could relate, she understood me. She told me how we'd go about it and she set up a plan."

"In terms of information provided it was really good, we felt we had choice and control."

"I didn't know where to go and there wasn't a lot of support. I'm getting more concrete answers from [my broker]."

"Yes, definitely, and to talk, to have someone respond, and to come up with solutions that would alleviate some of the problems, so yes, definitely felt valued, all round very – great experience."

"The fact that she would keep in touch and drop a wee email to find out if I'd heard anything yet and so on and we were grateful that she was able to come and support us (once we had the results) to explore

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more face to face with the social worker lady which resulted in us being able to get a little extra.”

“What worked well was probably just having direct contact to somebody – you know, a human being – it felt really personable. Heather pretty much always answered the phone straight away, anytime I phoned...she was really dedicated to helping me find a resolution.”

“It’s been very positive indeed – I just feel cared for, literally – I feel cared for as well as being confident that F is being cared for.”

Outcome: People know their social care outcomes

People don’t often use the language of ‘outcomes’ when talking about their experiences – answers to this question tend to relate more broadly to wider knowledge and understanding of systems and processes. We hear that people are being supported to identify what will work for them and how they can achieve that through statutory and community options:

“Having someone to speak through what kind of things are available was very helpful.”

“The way [our broker] was able to take everything we said and populate this into the paperwork was pretty impressive. She has a tremendous knowledge and excellent at taking what we talked about and taking that accurately conveying that to PKC.”

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Outcome: People are helped to achieve their social care outcomes

Feedback from people who had involvement of Support Choices brokers highlighted the important role brokers played in:

- helping to identify what they wanted to do or achieve to live a good life
- working with individuals and with other people and agencies to get support in place efficiently
- having capacity to spend more time with people working out 'what was important' as well as "keeping things moving" were highlighted as important benefits of brokers being involved
- problem-solving challenges and 'sticking points' using local knowledge, networks and creativity, particularly in very rural contexts

"I think [my broker] is great because she's got lots of balls in her court that she can access, that somebody like me hasn't got a clue – no idea what's available – what's not available. And she's the person I would ring I think if I needed anything"

"Having that morning help has made all the difference in the world. It isn't as if life can't exist without them, it just makes it 99% better. I'd no idea, I never thought that I would feel such a sense of relief I think, knowing that someone was coming in the morning and I didn't have all that to deal with...And the company too. And they're always very easy to chat to the carers."

"Just making me feel welcome, and like I'm just a normal person in the world, not with a disability, just like an average person, which is what I want, so. I just want to be treated like a normal person – all equal, and usually its only with the animals that I felt like that. But I'm actually feeling like that with my Support Workers and with the support I'm given."

"My confidence has increased. I used to be very shy and put walls up, but I don't have any walls anymore [...]. I don't feel anxious as much."

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"It was kind of a relief to have someone who was steering the ship. I didn't know where to go and there wasn't a lot of support. I'm getting more concrete answers from [our broker]. She's been really professional and will help where she can."

"It's quite a relief, that somethings actually coming into play now and grateful for the support in order to achieve that."

"It enabled me to recruit staff for my son's SDS, guided me through the process of how to manage SDS and what was required of me"

"We feel absolutely elated, thrilled that all the hard work that [our broker] put in with gathering all the information has helped us reach the end goal and although it's not a huge amount financially it will help pay for puppy training lessons."

"We wouldn't have known who to go to. I was simply going to ask around and see if I could find people, but it was so much easier when I found [our broker] to be steered towards people and that's working really well. The first person she suggested came and we're still using her and it's really good."

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Outcome: People’s support from overall services works more smoothly, with benefits for the services as well as for the person.

Feedback from social work teams has highlighted that brokers involvement is beneficial for services and meeting people’s outcomes in the following ways:

- The ability to spend more time with individuals sharing information, identifying their needs and exploring the right way forward allows for comprehensive support plans
- The ability to collaborate on more complex cases where a range of issues need solved and time is required to build trust ensures good outcomes on these cases
- brokers are able to connect into networks that are different from those a statutory service has access to and have strong knowledge of what’s happening at community level and of how to source PA’s locally. This is particularly useful in a rural context allows people’s support to get put in place more efficiently and more affordably for the local authority: *“You’ve got your ear to the ground.”*
- Brokers bringing a creative approach and encouraging more innovative solutions allows for new ways of working: *“Thinking outside the box – that’s what you do.”*
- Freeing up capacity of Social Workers by supporting activities which they don’t always have the resource for allows social workers to focus on the tasks their best-placed to do

“I definitely think that the clients have felt supported and have been given opportunities that they probably wouldn’t have had”

“I think it’s really important having an understanding of each other’s roles and the demands and constraints that we’re faced with, and that’s something [The Support Choices broker] has been really good at. She has been coming along to the transition meetings and the locality meetings...that’s really going to help in understanding the context – we want to work together and I think that’s made the real difference. She’s been a real asset.”

“If it wasn’t for your team, I don’t know where we’d be”

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- brokers are helping to '*re-instil more trust and re-assurance*' to individuals and family members '*that they are being listened to and that different avenues are being tried*' by providing independent verification of what is being done by social work teams and the realities of the care landscape in the area.
- Team leads and social workers spoken to reported that communication was working well, with a social worker sharing that brokers are "*friendly and accessible*"
- Involvement of brokers has created savings for the local authority in terms of how social care is delivered as well as in other areas – see Stories of Support below for examples

Stories of Support

Stories of support 1: a full and active life

What was the demand:

Zarieta lives in a small village in Perthshire with her family. Zarieta is passionate about animals, especially her dog Poppy and she loves getting outdoors as well as creative writing & drawing. However, a number of difficult experiences and anxiety meant Zarieta wasn't able to get out and do the things she enjoyed and meet people so she was spending all of her time at home: "*I felt anxious about going out, and it could actually escalate to stress level, so I wasn't very much for talking [...] It's quite isolating.*"

How did we respond?

Over a number of walks as well as meeting in the local cafe, the broker & Zarieta worked together to identify what kind of things Zarieta would like to do and what kind of support would help to access opportunities and activities: "*we made a plan of everything.*"

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As well as help with support planning, the broker helped Zarieta with filling out forms, meeting with her Social Worker and recruiting Support Workers. Throughout this process Zarieta felt included and was able to participate actively in things she would have found difficult before: *“I felt quite relaxed. I was able to understand most of the forms. I’ve never found forms easy – they’re very confusing. But [my broker] helped with this and I was able to feel more confident.”*

Zarieta now has a support worker and is beginning to attend a range of activities. The impact of Support Choices’ support is evident: *“My confidence has increased. I used to be very shy and put walls up, but I don’t have any walls anymore[...]. I don’t feel anxious as much.”* She is beginning to make new relationships and is excited about all the different things she’s going to be doing and about making new friends.

How a brokerage approach worked well?

- A Support Choices Community Worker worked with Zarieta in a way that suited her and was at her pace to build trust and help her plan what she’d like her life to look like and what support would be needed to make this happen. *“I just felt like I could connect, I could relate, she understood me.”*
- The broker was drawn on support from a range of places and connected with local networks to identify activities and find support workers – despite being based in a very rural area Zarieta has gone from having very few opportunities to get out and about, to having a busy schedule.
- There were a range of barriers to Zarieta getting out and about easily, including things like transport – Support Choices were able to support Zarieta in a holistic way to identify and overcome these barriers

How did brokerage create savings?

By identifying a range of local community activities that Zarieta could attend independently the time Zarieta might spend with a PA or with a more traditional care model – at a day centre – has been reduced:

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Activity	Time	Cost	Cost of PA time for comparison	Weekly saving	Annual saving
stride for life	4 hours	0	£61.40	£61.40	£3,192.80
horse riding	3 hours	25	£46.05	£21.05	£1,094.60
Total saving				£82.45	£4,287.40

For the activities where Zarieta did need the support of a Personal Assistant the involvement of Support Choices allowed an option 1 to be considered, with involvement of a book-keeper meaning this option was available although Zarieta would not have been able to manage the financial side of things independently

	Cost of Option 1 PA @£15.35 p/h	Cost of Option 2/3 provider @£19 p/h	Saving
Weekly (@8 hours)	£122.80	£152	£29.2
Annually	£6,385.60	£7904	£1518.4

Support from community transport options has also significantly reduced costs for the local authority:

Approx. cost of taxi	Cost of Upper Tay community transport	Saving
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Weekly	£76	£18.64	£57.36
Annual	£3,952	£969	£2,982.72

Overall annual savings identified: **£8,788.52***

This figure is based on the best available figures and doesn't take into account the savings to the local authority in comparison to a much more traditional care package such as day centres in Perth and Kinross for an adult with a learning disability living in a rural area as we were not able to access these figures.

The above figure also doesn't account for the costs to the Local Authority if significant in depth and person-centred support had not been available to Zarieta to ensure they could continue living together independently (all of Zarieta's family are learning disabled). A brokerage approach has gone a long way towards achieving Zarieta's outcomes whilst also reducing costs for the Health and Social Care Partnership.

Story of Support: Getting good care in place to return home

What was the demand?

David was unable to return home after a stay in hospital because the HART team didn't have capacity to reinstate the package of care for himself and his wife (both receive care to live independently): he was becoming increasingly distressed and worried about the welfare of his wife who was at home alone. David's grand-daughter said: *"His mental health was deteriorating because he'd been away from home for so long, and he was more worried about his wife who was at home, yeah it was really not a great situation at all."* The situation was also costing the health authority in terms of bed-availability and adding strain on the HART team.

How did Support Choices respond?

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Support Choices worked with the family to understand their needs and shared information with them about their SDS options – particularly the pros and cons of moving to an option 1 for care and support. The broker worked with social work and the family to get a care plan in place which would allow David to leave hospital and to get the financial elements in place. The family were then supported by the broker to recruit of a self-employed carer for them both.

How did a brokerage approach work well?

- *“What worked well was probably just having direct contact to somebody – you know, a human being – it felt really personable. Heather pretty much always answered the phone straight away, anytime I phoned... she was really dedicated to helping me find a resolution.”*
- The broker had time to connect and carefully go through the different options and how the situation could be resolved in a way that was helpful for the family: *“[I felt] reassured, less stressed a bit more understanding of what needed to happen and relieved that I had someone to lean on and who was a bit more experienced in what needed to be done.”*
- The broker was able to use networks in the local area to recruit a suitable self-employed PA quickly, reducing pressure on the HART team as a result. *“H is still the carer, they’re getting on great, they’re more than happy and comfortable with the package that’s been put in place and it’s a far superior situation to when they were relying on the Hart team”*
- In terms of outcomes, the family of David felt better informed with *“more understanding”*, they felt valued and listened to and shared that their interactions with their broker *“felt really personable”* and they are having their outcomes met with a package of care that they are *“more than happy with”*.
- A brokerage approach, using creativity and flexibility allowed the situation to be resolved quickly in a way that has had positive ongoing outcomes for the family and for the local authority and health service.

How did brokerage create savings?

By allowing the individual to return home from hospital the broker’s involvement reduced costs to the Local Authority health board as well as easing pressure on a very limited resource. Whilst we don’t know the exact savings for this, we can imagine it will be significant.

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The broker's support also allowed the couple to move from Health And Re-enablement Team provision (which is both more expensive for the Local Authority and is very stretched) to an option 1:

	option 1	HART Team	saving
hourly	£15.35	£19	£3.65
weekly (15 hours)	£230.25	£285	£54.75
annual	£11,973.00	£14,820	£2,847.00

Overall annual saving of for this care package: **£2,847.00**

**These figures are approximate and may be based on slightly older provider rates*

Story of Support: transitioning to independent living

What was the demand?

A family are exploring options for their 2 sons to live independently as they transition to adulthood: *"We're basically looking for future care options for our adult son. He's looking to live independently from us in his own home, but with 24-hour care."* This will require the family to find an appropriate property as well as exploring alternative care provision that suits their needs and will fit with their move to independent living. *"Initially, I thought there was a lot more care that could be provided, but I'm beginning to realise now...that there are a lot less people working in the care industry than we'd initially thought, that's why we came to yourselves, to find out what other options are out there and what other providers there are."*

How did we respond?

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Our broker has so far had a number of in-depth conversations with the family about what they would like for their sons and what the different options might be: *“The first conversation was very useful, and the second conversation I had with [our broker] was also useful, where we talked about maybe different options we could look at. With her experience of being a carer she could give me some insight into that side of things, so it was very useful.”* The broker has also shared more in-depth information about SDS Option 1 as well as different care provision options with the family via email, helping the family to feel well informed about their options and they are now exploring different possibilities together with their broker. They are now following up with different care providers to explore what might be possible.

How a brokerage approach worked well?

- Helping to navigate a challenging landscape in terms availability of care provision, with brokers able to explore a range of options that might not otherwise have been available
- Broker is able to draw on wide networks as well as first-hand experience of delivering care provision and managing complex care packages
- Though still working to achieve outcomes, the broker’s involvement has freed up Social Work time by allowing them to close the case. The team lead shared: *“Collaboration with Support Choices has been beneficial as they have been client-led and responsive to the client’s needs. This has been beneficial as the client wishes to take time to consider their options. This input supports them to prepare between social work reviews, promoting person-centred and effective practice for all.”*

How did brokerage create savings?

Though at an early-stage savings have already been made:

Using approx. figures for salaries of a social worker (£32,720 @28.8 hours a week) vs a community broker (£17,150 @28.8 hours a week) we have calculated that the social worker being able to hand this case over to the broker would create a saving of approx. **£300** (on the basis of the case requiring approximately 30 hours of input overall/annually). This does not include savings once outcomes are identified and solutions put in place, but they are likely to involve significant savings.

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We anticipate that we will be creating this saving across a range of cases where Brokers are able to lead on supporting individuals, freeing up some social worker capacity.

Story of Support: getting out and about

What was the demand?

Brian had lots of interests but due to a spinal injury he had to move back in with his mum. Due to the rural location of the family Brian struggled to access the activities he enjoyed including education, spending time with friends and activities like chess. In order to do things, he needed a lot of support from a PA or to use taxis which he couldn't afford. He also found it hard getting outdoors, especially in bad weather because he found using his wheelchair very tiring.

How did we respond?

A Support Choices broker worked with Brian to help identify what would make a difference in terms of his independence and quality of life. Brian identified that bike equipment would make a real difference as it would allow him to travel to the things, he enjoys in Perth on his own without relying on his PA or taxis. It would also allow him to get outdoors more easily. Our broker worked with the social worker, including carrying out research into the equipment required, supporting the assessment process and helping with sourcing the equipment.

How a brokerage approach worked well?

- The broker was able to bring a creative approach and work with the individual to come up with solutions which would make a real difference and would increase independence for the individual
- The broker was able to draw on wide networks as well as first-hand experience of creative uses of SDS

How did brokerage create savings?

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By covering a one-off cost, Brian was able to achieve independence, despite his rural location which meant he did not need a personal assistant to get out and about to different activities:

Timescale	Option 1 Personal Assistant (14 hours @15.35 = previous package)	One off cost – bike equipment	Saving
5 years	£55,874.00	£15,802	£40,072.00

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 using Support Choice's service:

- feel more informed, listened to and less stressed
- have easy access to information and advice that helps them plan and access social care services
- 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 when they need to

The 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. A team of well-respected, knowledgeable and caring staff who are looking to achieve the best outcomes for the people and families they work with

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3. Good partnership-working with staff from other organisations and professions, which recognises the importance of relationship building and collaboration to deliver creative solutions for people and families

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 and Social Work teams in the areas of Perth & Kinross where the Test of Change pilot is being delivered. 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. As Support Choices continues into its next stage of development, it has the potential to continue making an impact on people's lives, benefiting and reaching more people, families and communities as they develop their brokerage service.