



SHORT BREAKS GRANT
FEEDBACK REPORT

| STOCKTON PARENT CARER FORUM |

Introduction

Stockton Parent Carer Forum have worked in partnership with Stockton On Tees Borough Council in the monitoring and development of the short breaks grant. Children and young people with SEN (subject to criteria) are able to access a grant towards the cost of activities such as swimming lesson or respite services like Daisy Chain and MAIN.

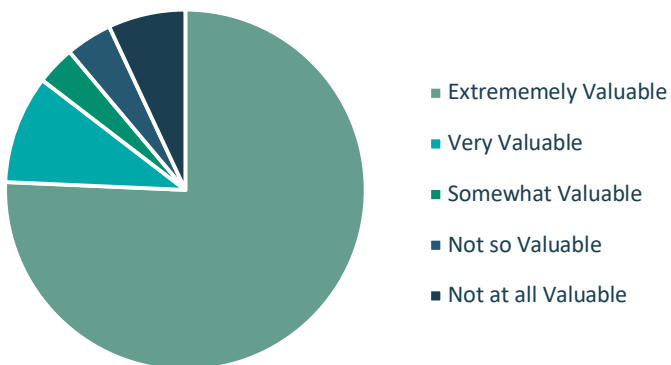
More recently due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, changes were made to the grant after discussions with services and recommendations from SPCF. Parents and carers were able to purchase equipment for their child/young person to access activities whilst in the restrictions of lockdown. As the challenges of lockdown are lifted, this report is an overview of the work that SPCF has been doing alongside the local authority and demonstrates the benefits of the changes that have been made to the grant. It also gives an overview of the views and wishes of parent carers and the proposed direction of the grant in the coming months.

Survey Demographics

The survey has been shared with members of SPCF via social media and email. It was open to responses for 1 week, due to the short time frames the grant is currently working in (3 month period). Within this time there have been 144 responses to the survey and of this population 87% had been able to access the grant.

Survey Analysis

How valuable has this period of the short breaks grant been to you and your family?



86%

Families feel that the grant has been very or extremely valuable

Families who reported using the grant only to pay for respite services, such as Daisy Chain and MAIN or those that were unable to access the grant due to not meeting the criteria felt that the grant was not valuable

Parents and carers were asked to provide further information on the impact that the grant has had on their child/young person and their family. Responses showed that having no accessing activities and social clubs had been impacting the mental health of children and young people and parents/carers were struggling with the added pressures of having no respite.

She has times when she is really upset missing family, friends, school and all her clubs. Keeping busy keeps her happy. The garden has become our favourite place so the opportunity for some money to help buy her a hot tub was amazing. She loves it and we are so grateful.

The introduction of purchasing equipment for the home has allowed families who have previously not used the grant due to their child/young person not being able to access suitable activities that the grant has previously been used for.

“Over the years we couldn’t use the short breaks grant because there was no suitable activity we could access.”

In the previous financial year, the grant fund was fully allocated and there had been some instances of families who committed to services prior to successfully applying for the grant. Whilst we were aware that this was stated on the grant application, we reiterated to the team the stresses and difficulties in time management that can come with being a parent carer. We asked for this to be made clearer and for more time to be given to families in letting them know about any changes that were potentially being made to the grant.

It was well publicised beforehand. It was also clearly communicated that funds were limited

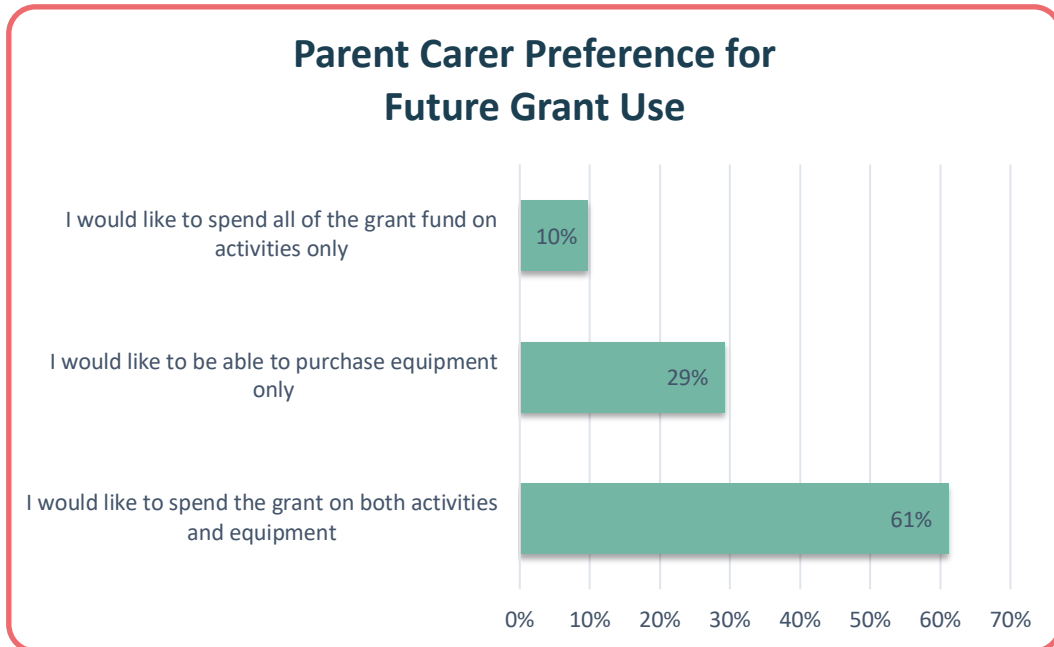
Stockton Parent Carer Forum has been working hard to ensure that as many families are aware of the grant as possible. Over 65% of families had heard about the grant through SPCF and the local authority reports that this year the grant has helped more families than last year. This is fantastic news; it does mean though, with all limited budgets, the grant did reach capacity and the application process closed early. We recognise the disappointment of families unable to access the grant and we have been talking to the local authority about how this can be avoided in the future. It has been recommended by families that there should be changes made to the grant and there were suggestions of how this can be done which we will explore in the future with the council.

It’s impressive how hard the ladies from SPCF have worked to help us get the support for our families

You may know that we are all volunteers and we do this work to ensure that services meet the needs of the children/young people and their families. We asked for feedback from families regarding the work that SPCF has put into publicising and providing information and support to families we were are pleased that such large number of families feel that we are providing them with information and support. Over 95% of the responses reported satisfaction and this lets us know that we are getting it right for the parents and carers of Stockton-On-Tees.

With the restrictions of lockdown relaxing, service providers are opening, and activities are becoming accessible. Through conversations with parents and carers, polls that we carry out on social media and school attendance data, it is clear that many families do not feel that it is

safe to be attending their regular activities and respite. However, as this continues to change alongside government guidance, there is the potential for these fears to be alleviated and potentially within the grant period, they would like to access some activities. The figure below demonstrates that over 60% of families would like the opportunity to spend the money on.



Recommendations

Stockton Parent Carer Forum is recommending that the grant be available to families with flexibility. This is an unprecedented time, and we recognise the lengths that Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council has gone too, to support families swiftly and in line with what was available.

As services are beginning to open, SPCF has been in regular contact with them to understand what they are doing to ensure the safety of children and young people accessing their services. Recognising that some families may not want to access these, but some families are heavily reliant on the service that they provide and when considering the potential damage to their child/young person's mental and physical health and that of their family members it is only fair that the grant is available to spend on activities.

For those unable to access activities for shielding purposes or limited access to activities it is vital that they remain in a position to support their child with equipment that enables them to remain physically active, mental engaged and have any sensory needs met.

We will be speaking with the short breaks grant to recommend that they offer the opportunity to spend the grant on both activities for those able to access them and equipment to meet the needs of those who are unable to do so. We are asking that this is looked at again when the next period of the grant ends, toward the end of September.

Regarding changes being made to the amount offered and the potential of commissioned services in the future, SPCF feel that at the current time, given the pandemic it would be unfair to make changes to the system when there are so many variables in play that we have little or no control of. We will in future be raising the issue regarding increased numbers of those eligible and applying and how the grant can meet the needs of many. We will of course keep all our members included in the conversation and we welcome the feedback that we have had regarding the grant and so thankful that such a high number of families are able to benefit from it.