

Carers and COVID-19

Evaluation Report – Summer 2020

Introduction

Carers have found the impact of COVID-19 restrictions and associated stresses extremely difficult, with an average increase of ten hours per week of caring as a result¹ and many needing to shield themselves or look after someone who is shielding because of a pre-existing health condition. In Torbay we sought to understand the impact on Carers locally and to explore Carers' interest in accessing replacement care or IT as a means of providing support and time out from caring.

Key findings

1. 13 out of 115 Carers (11%) told us they were struggling a lot at the time. A further 36 told us they were struggling a little (31%).
2. For those who were struggling a lot, the health condition of the person Carers were supporting were mostly Learning Disability (5), Mental Health (4) and dementia (3).
3. Carers felt that the most helpful thing to get through the COVID pandemic has been family support (19 responses), community/friends/neighbours (11), just carrying on (9), home deliveries (7), telephone calls from Carers Services (6) and calls from Carer Support Workers (6).
4. Asking Carers if they were interested in trying out technology or improving IT skills / confidence, 33% were interested in this, 44% were not interested in the offer with a further 20% not interested in using technology at all.

Method

Torbay Carers Service sent out a link to an online survey to all Torbay's Carers who shared their email address with the Carers Register. 57 Carers completed the survey themselves through the link. Carer Evaluators also undertook 58 evaluations with Carers over the phone.

Findings

Coping with caring

From the group who completed the questionnaire the largest number (46) were caring for someone with a physical health issue. 24 cared for someone with dementia / Alzheimer's, 21 for someone with a Learning Disability and 20 for someone with a mental health issue.

Respondents were asked how they were managing at the moment. 17 said they were coping very well, 47 replied they were coping OK, 36 were struggling a little and 13 said they were struggling a lot. We asked if they needed help now on this question, but no respondents ticked this box. Cross-referencing this response with the health condition of the person they care for we can see the

¹ "Caring Behind Closed Doors", https://www.carersuk.org/images/News_and_campaigns/Behind_Closed_Doors_2020/Caring_behind_closed_doors_April20_pages_web_final.pdf (page 7)

conditions that Carers were struggling with most were Learning Disability (5), Dementia / Alzheimer's (4) and Mental Health (3). People were most commonly struggling a little with caring for someone with dementia / memory issues (11), mental health (6) and physical disabilities (6).

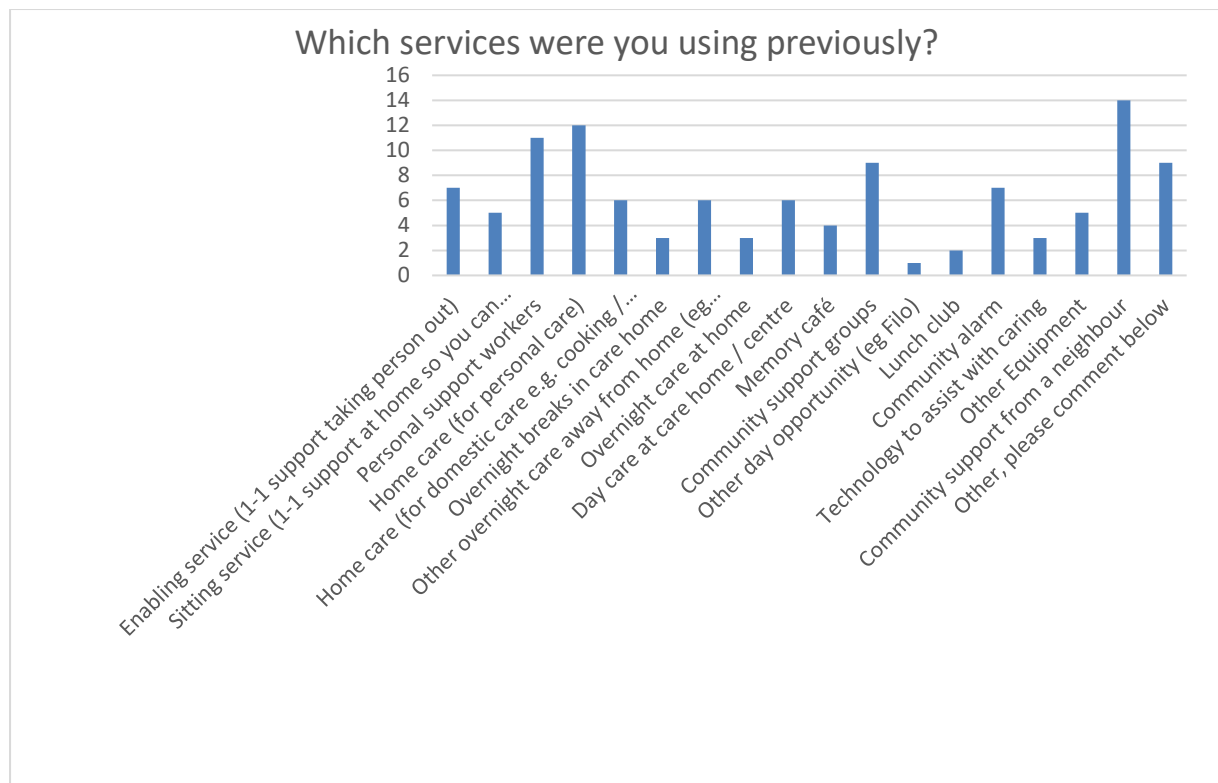
Change to caring role

We asked Carers if their caring role was likely to change in the following few months (e.g. return to work / lockdown changes) and 30% of the respondents answered yes. Of this number the largest group said this would be due to more help being available (7), with six saying this is due to return to work, four due to the deteriorating health of the person they care for, three because the cared for person is moving and three people who will be needing more help.

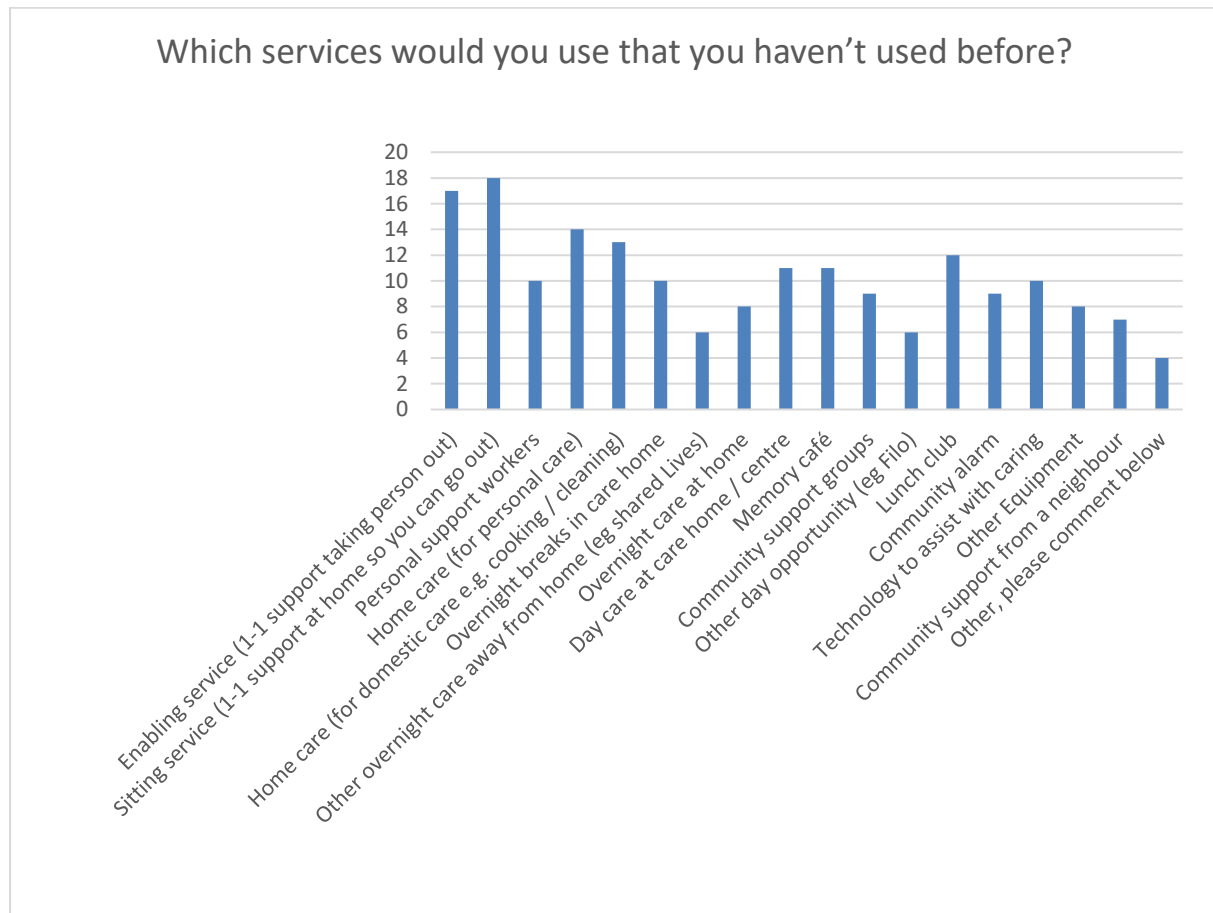
To those who replied 'yes' to the question about whether their role was likely to change in the next few months we asked what they would need to help them address these changes. The greatest number of people who knew what would help felt paid help coming in (6 responses), flexibility at work (3), more getting out and about (2), replacement care (2) and residential care (2) would be most helpful.

Services to help with the caring role

Carers were asked which services they had used previously to support their caring role, and which they would like to use in future. Much can be drawn from the graph in Appendix 1 (Question 5), but the key findings are that community support from a neighbour (14 responses), home care (personal care) (12 responses), personal support workers (11) and community support groups (9) were the most used services.



Carers were then asked which of the available services they would like to use that they hadn't before, and from this the most popular services were a sitting service (18 responses), enabling service (1-1 support taking person out) (17 responses), home care (for personal care) (14 responses) and home care (for domestic care e.g. cooking/cleaning) (13 responses). There were several other popular responses, meaning many Carers are interested in exploring additional support in future.



When asked about how comfortable Carers and the people they care for felt about the re-opening of services listed above, and found that 22% of respondents were 'very' comfortable with this happening, 42% were 'fairly' comfortable and 29% were not comfortable. We then asked what would help them to feel reassured that all measures had been taken to minimise the risk of COVID-19 spreading. Staff wearing PPE was seen as the most important factor (46%), with effective social distancing measures the next most popular (40%). 16% would not feel comfortable about their safety currently.

Replacement Care

Torbay Carers Service is working on a project to improve replacement care in Torbay and is piloting a hospitality offer whereby Carers can take a break with or without the person they care for, with or without domiciliary care coming in as support. We explored the popularity of the various options and found that the Carer going with the person they care for without domiciliary care was the most popular option, with ten people saying they were interested and a further ten saying 'maybe' (26% either 'yes' or 'maybe'). See the table below for a full list of responses and the graph in Appendix 1 for graphical representation.

	Yes	Maybe	No
The person I care for (without domiciliary care)	8 (10%)	3 (4%)	67 (86%)
The person I care for (with domiciliary care)	6 (8%)	7 (10%)	58 (82%)
Both the person I care for and myself (without domiciliary care)	10 (13%)	10 (13%)	59 (75%)
Both the person I care for and myself (with domiciliary care)	7 (9%)	8 (11%)	59 (75%)
Myself on my own, with replacement care at home for the person I care for	6 (8%)	13 (18%)	55 (74%)

The type of replacement care preferred / required by Carers and the people they care for depends on the caring situation. We found that the largest group of Carers who were interested were caring for someone with dementia and of these most wanted to go away with the person they care with (either with or without domiciliary care). People who care for someone with a physical health or mobility issue are happier to go away on their own without the person they care for than other groups, but are also happy to go away with the person they care for or allow them to go on a break on their own if domiciliary care can be accessed.

Use of technology

During the COVID-19 restrictions technology has provided welcome access to the outside world and to friends and family in particular. We asked Carers if they were interested in trying out technology or improving IT skills / confidence and found that 33% were interested in this, with 44% saying they weren't and a further 20% saying they weren't interested in using technology at all. Of those who were interested, seven people stated that they would like to develop their skills. Two weren't keen at the moment but open to doing so in time.

Meeting Carers' needs in light of COVID-19

We asked Carers if they had any ideas about how services should develop to meet the needs of Carers and the people they care for in light of the pandemic. Suggestions focused on the need for telephone contact (nine people referred to this), with the need for replacement care / respite by four people. Online provision such as video support groups (two people suggested this), video calls, online mindfulness and therapeutic art were also mentioned. The importance of timely and clear communication, particularly about developments in service provision was pointed out.

Further to suggestions to improve services, we asked what has worked well for people personally to share with others. Family support was the most important factor, with 19 people referring to this. Eleven people referred to the community, friends and neighbours. Nine people referred to 'just carrying on' and seven felt home deliveries worked well for them. Telephone calls from Carers Services (6) and calls from Carer Support Workers (6) also helped.

We asked Carers what form of communication they prefer and found that face-to-face is the most popular, followed by phone calls and then video calls. 58% of respondents like 'really like' face-to-face, 45% really like phone calls and 14% really like video calls. While video calls are less popular, enough people are keen on using them to pursue the development of this as part of what is offered to Carers, and while people don't tend to like them too much 21% don't mind about using them and a further 22% 'slightly dislike' this form of communication.

When asked Carers what type of video calls they use, and WhatsApp was the most popular with 21 people using the platform, followed by Zoom (18) and Skype (12).

The questionnaire asked Carers how they feel about on-line courses or activities, and 18% were positive about them, with a further 28% answering 'OK'. The remainder were either not interested (41%), did not have enough time (7%) or did not wish to do it at the moment (2%).

To understand what stops people from using on-line support services we asked Carers what it was that stood in their way. Many (43%) said they don't want to use it, but 14% said this was due to a lack of knowledge or confidence, a further 14% said they didn't have time to do it, 10% had issues with access or equipment and 6% said this was due to their age.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that many Carers have struggled during the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions to freedom. Carers who seemed to struggle the most are those who support people with a learning disability, mental health issue or dementia.

Many Carers were anticipating seeing a change in their caring role over the weeks ahead, with many needing to return to work, or taking up other commitments. Many anticipated the services they had been using prior to COVID-19 returning, and they felt the most valuable developments to enable them to cope would be paid help coming in and flexibility at work.

Carers were keen to explore services they hadn't been using before, particularly sitting services, enabling services and home care services. Many Carers were concerned about the safety issues surrounding the re-opening of services and would need to see measures taken to assure them that they are safe to access.

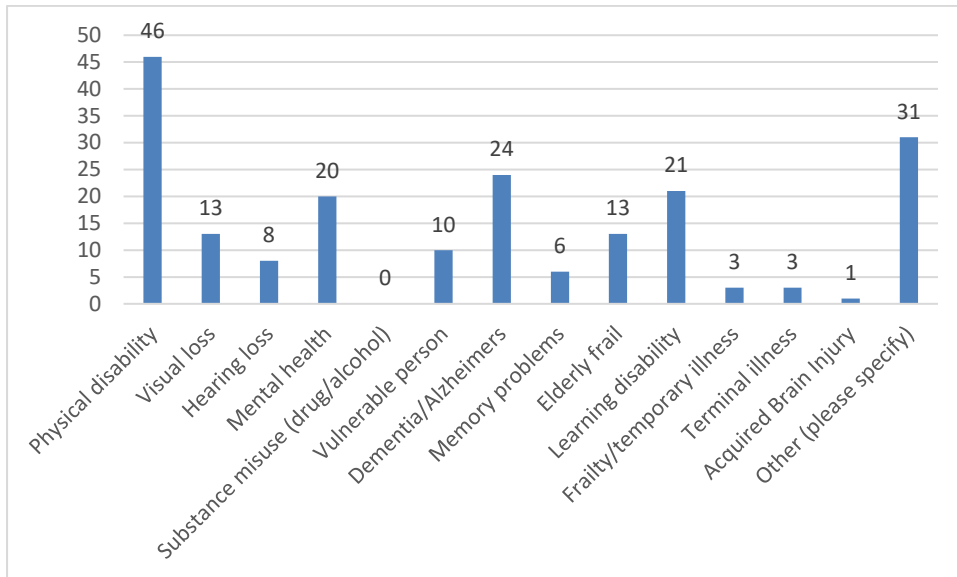
Carers let us know how they felt about accessing replacement care services in hotels and while a high percentage were not interested in this, a good number of people showed an interest in the pilot. Given a choice of whether to attend alone, with the person they care for or for the person they care for to attend alone there was a good spread of responses. The most popular option was for the Carer and the person they care for to go together, without domiciliary care.

In light of COVID-19 technology has been used to play a role in bringing people together more meaningfully. There was a divide between people who are keen to use technology such as video calls to engage with others, with the majority of people questioned stating their preference for face-to-face interaction and phone calls over video calls. One in three respondents were keen to improve their IT skills and confidence.

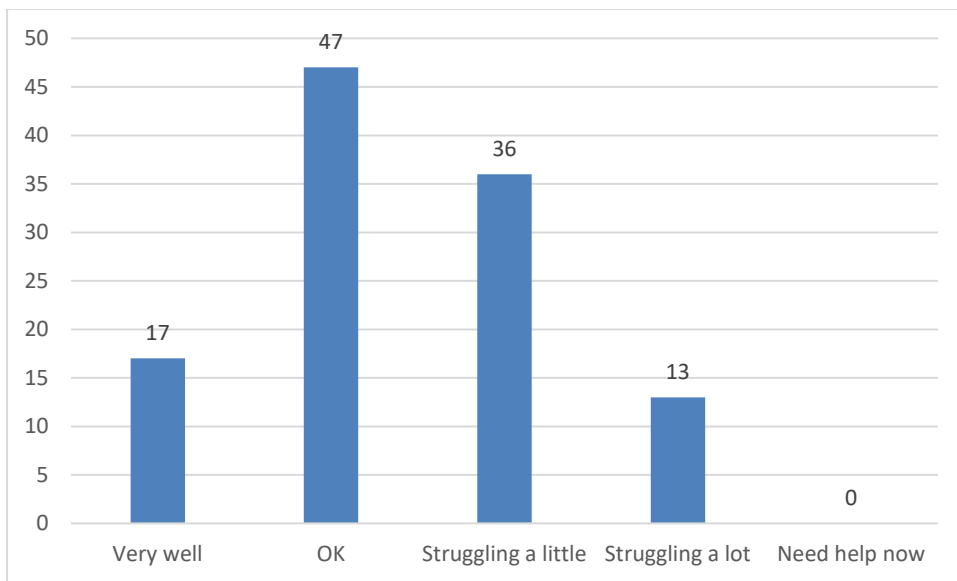
In summary, during this unprecedented and challenging time, Carers are evolving to cope as well as possible. They are keen to explore new options in support of their caring role, but many are hesitant for the person they care for to access services and groups until they are confident attendance doesn't bring a greatly increased risk of contracting COVID-19. While using technology can improve the quality of interaction with others, it is not popular with many Carers. Carers Services will continue to offer the opportunity for Carers to develop their IT skills and confidence to reduce isolation as the COVID pandemic goes on.

Appendix 1: Selected data presented in graphical form

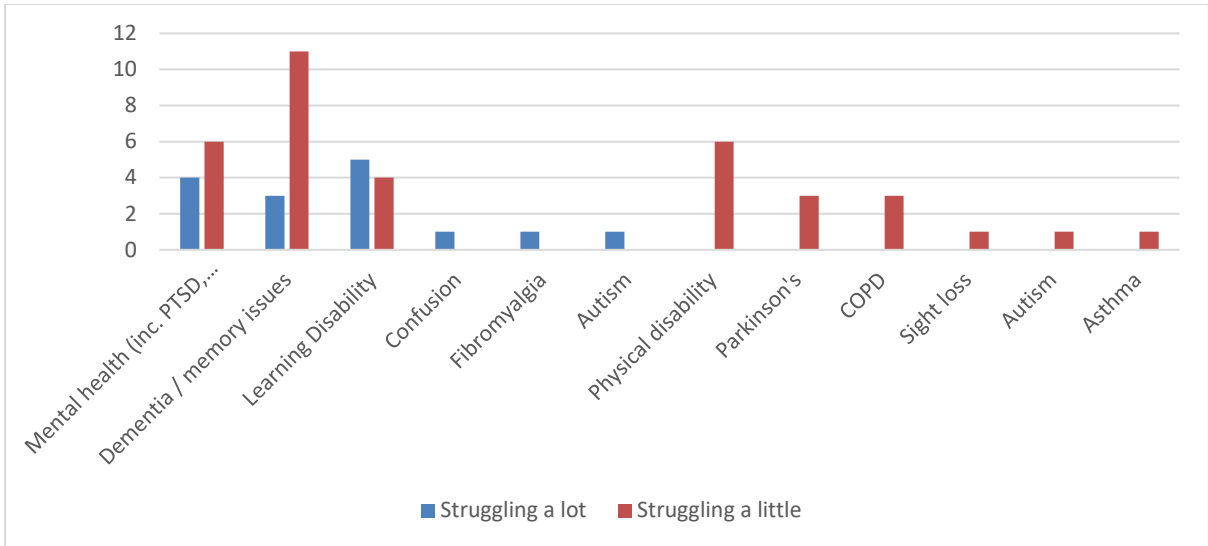
Question 1: What difficulties / disabilities does the person you care for have (tick all boxes that apply)



Question 2: How do you feel you are managing at the moment?

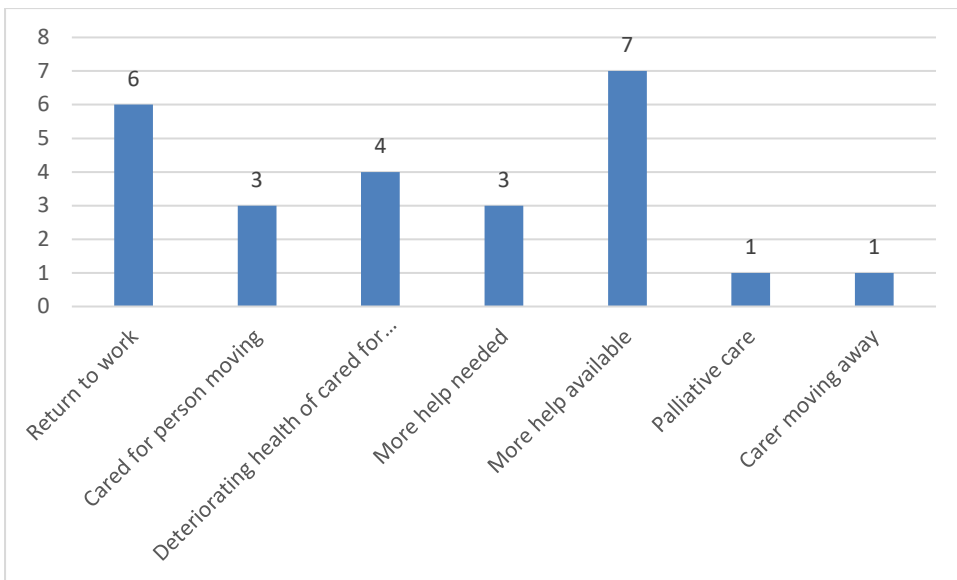


From the above the figures were cross-referenced with health conditions as below

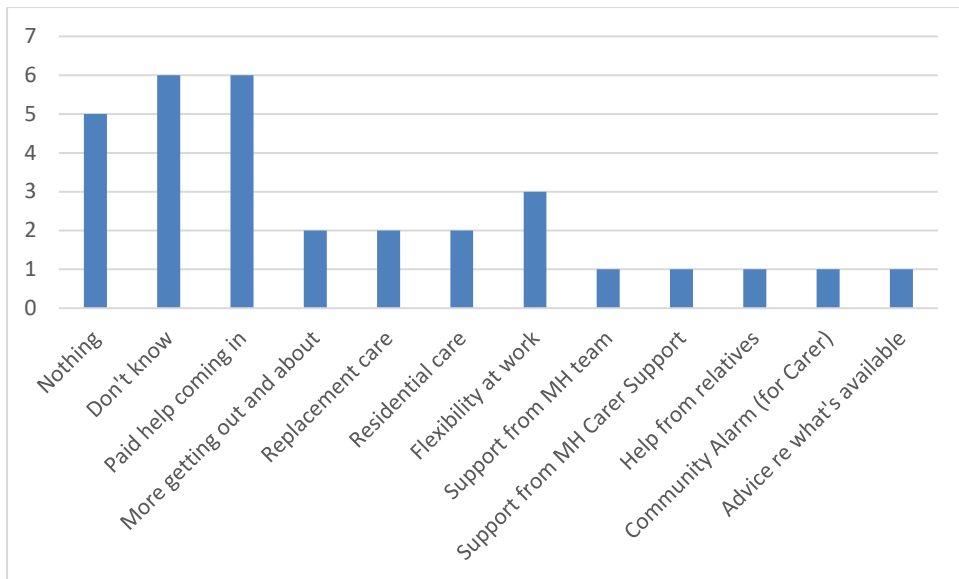


Question 3: Is your role likely to change in the next three months?

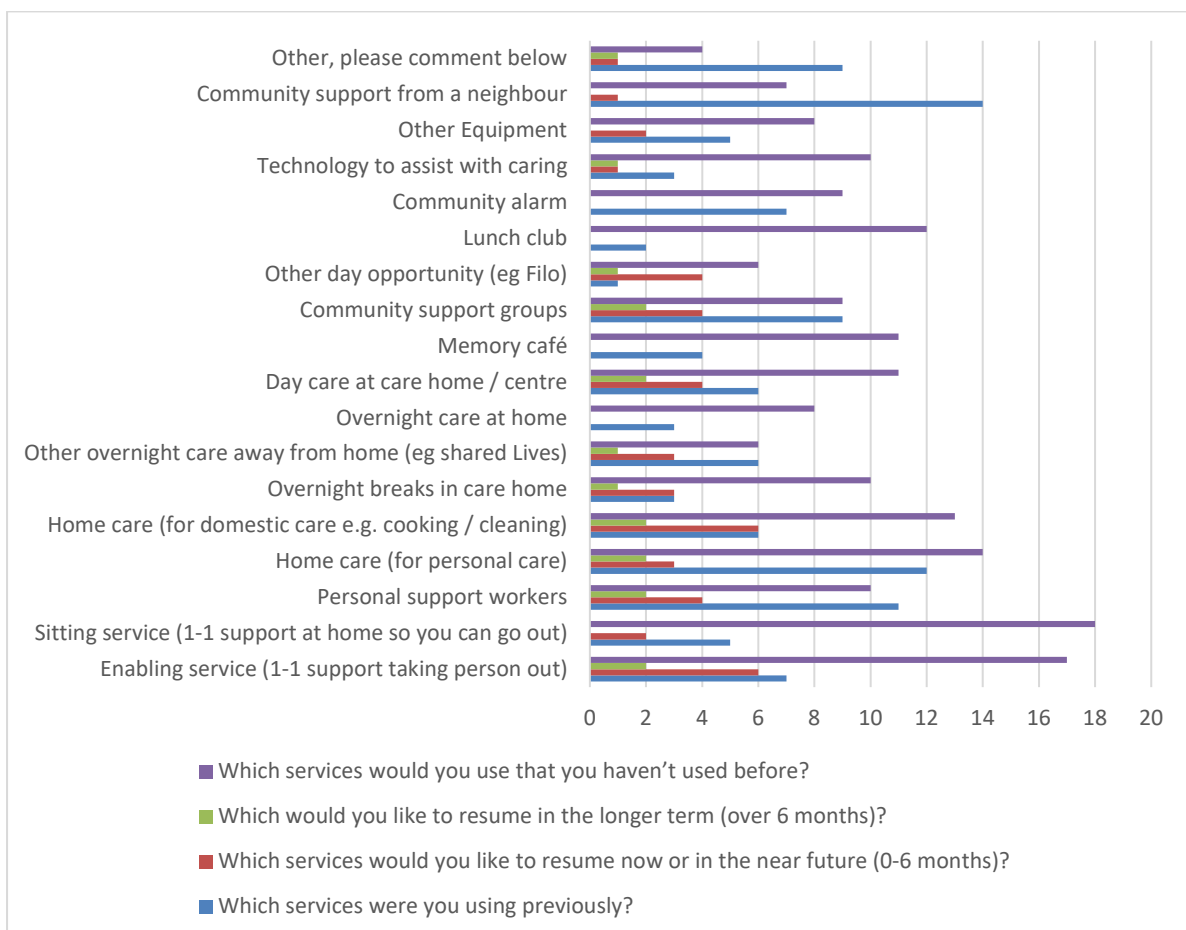
For those who replied “yes” we asked them how – see below.



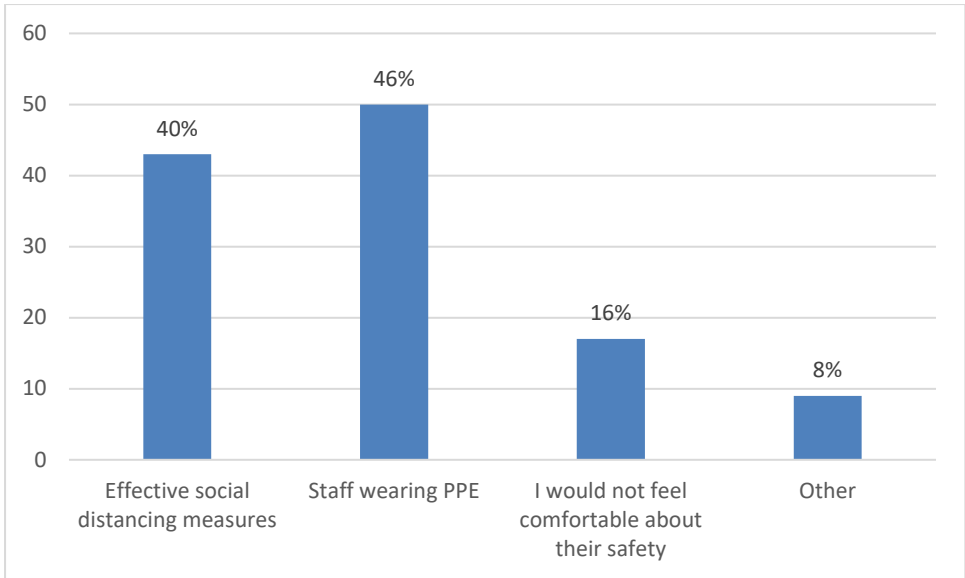
Question 4: If yes to Question 3 above, what will you need to help you address these changes?



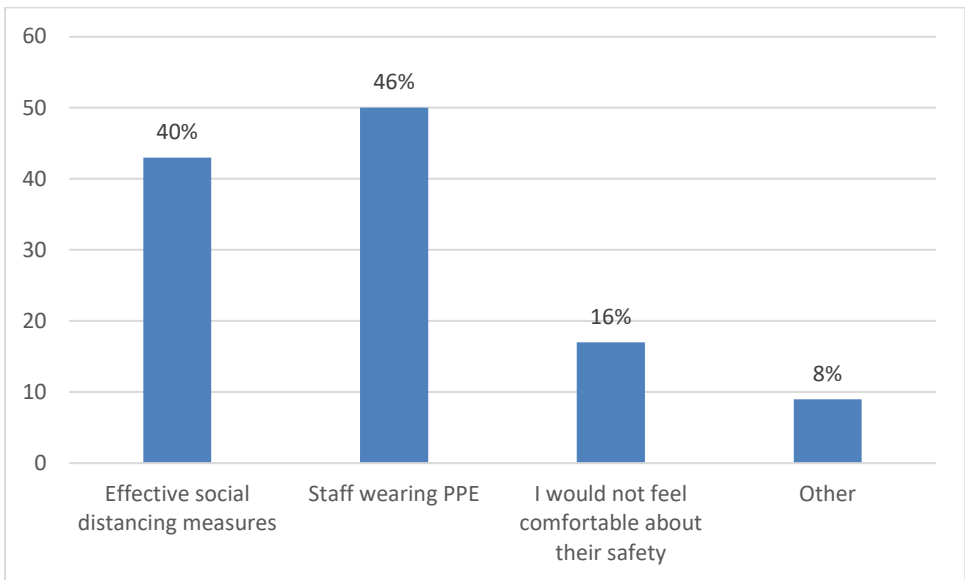
Question 5: Please tell us about the services that you have used or may use in future to help with your caring role



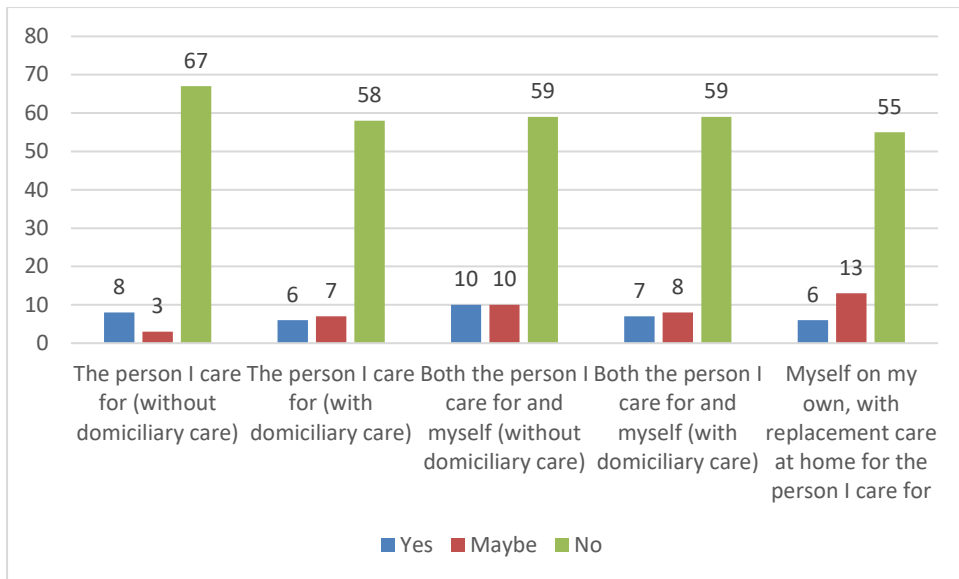
Question 6: How comfortable would you and the person you care for currently feel about them re-starting / starting and of the services that you ticked in Question 5 above?



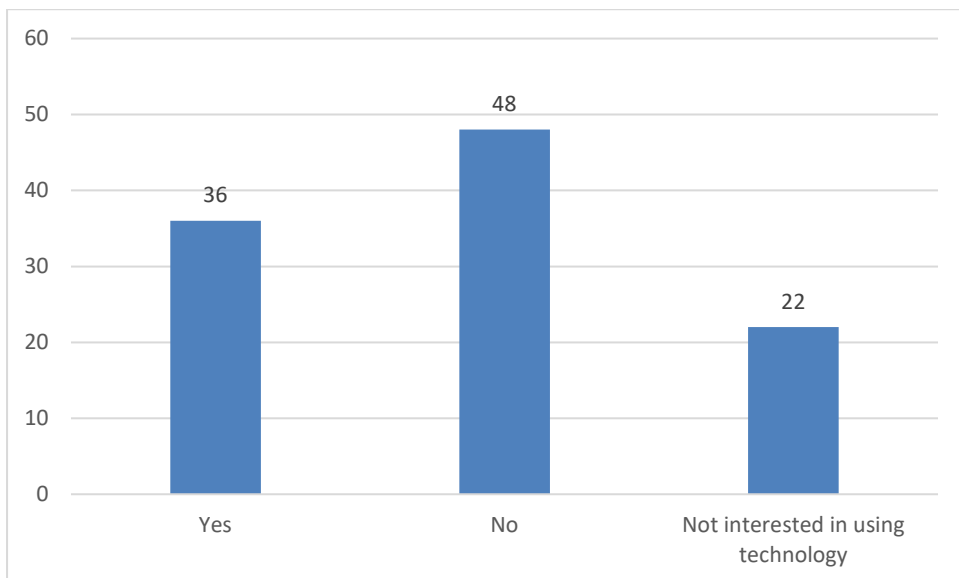
Question 7: If the person you care for was to use any of the services above, what would help you to be reassured that all measures had been taken to minimise the risk of COVID-19 spreading?



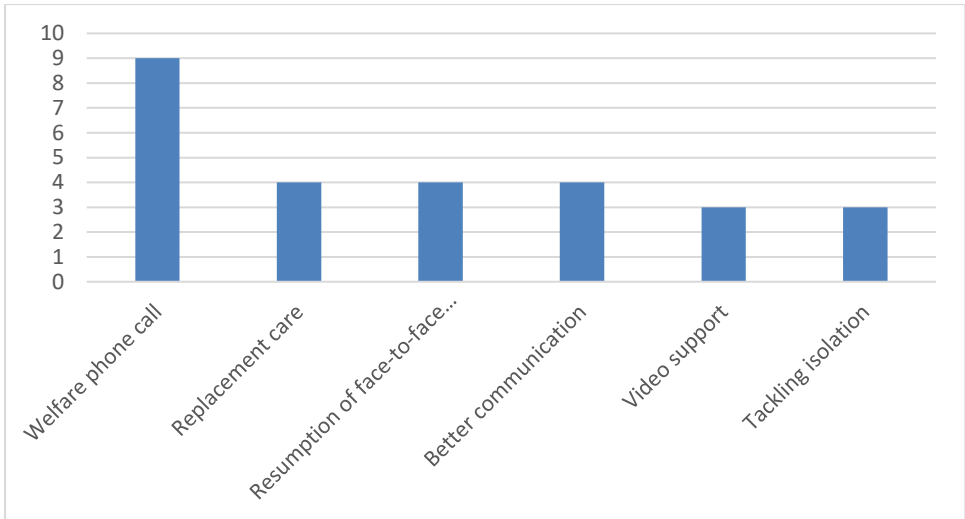
Question 8: Would you be interested in using hospitality providers (hotels and guest houses) for replacement care when we are able to do so?



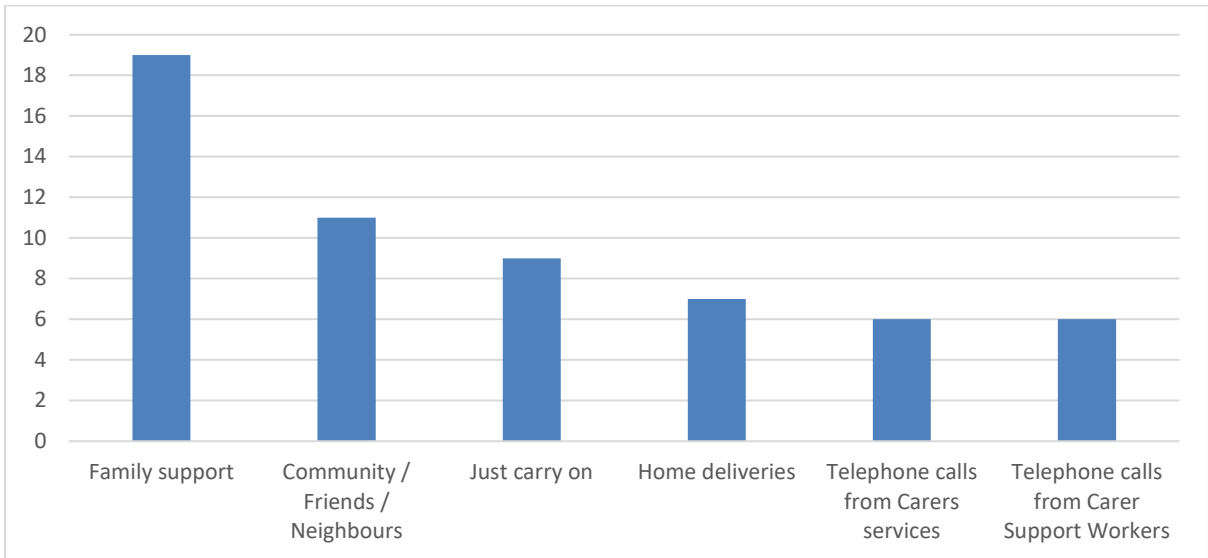
Question 9: Are you interested in trying out technology or improving IT skills / confidence?



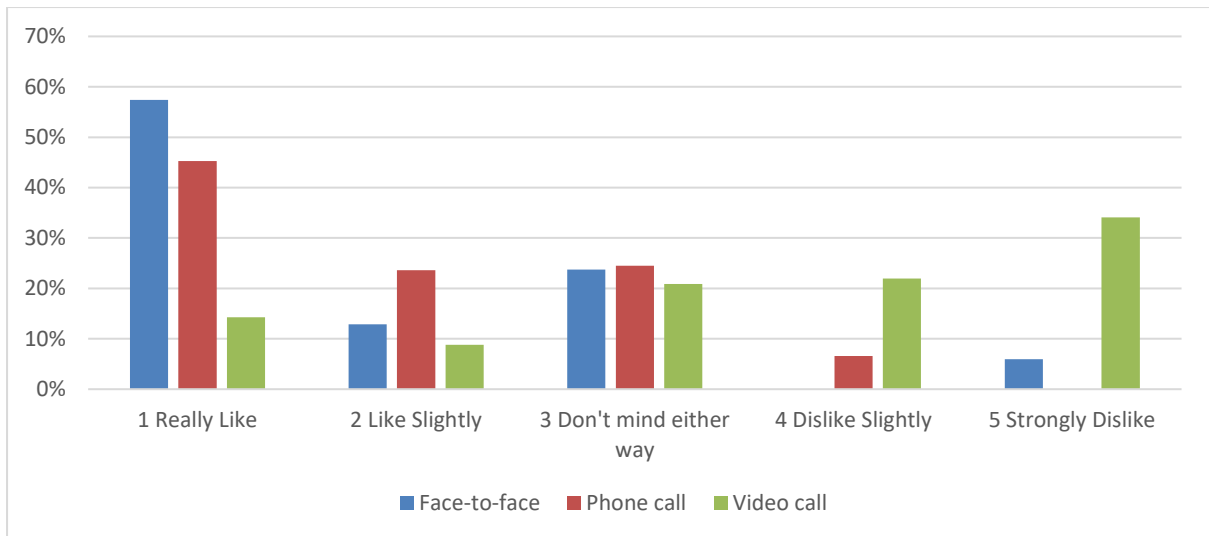
Question 10: Do you have any ideas about how services should develop to meet the needs of Carers and the people they care for in light of the pandemic?



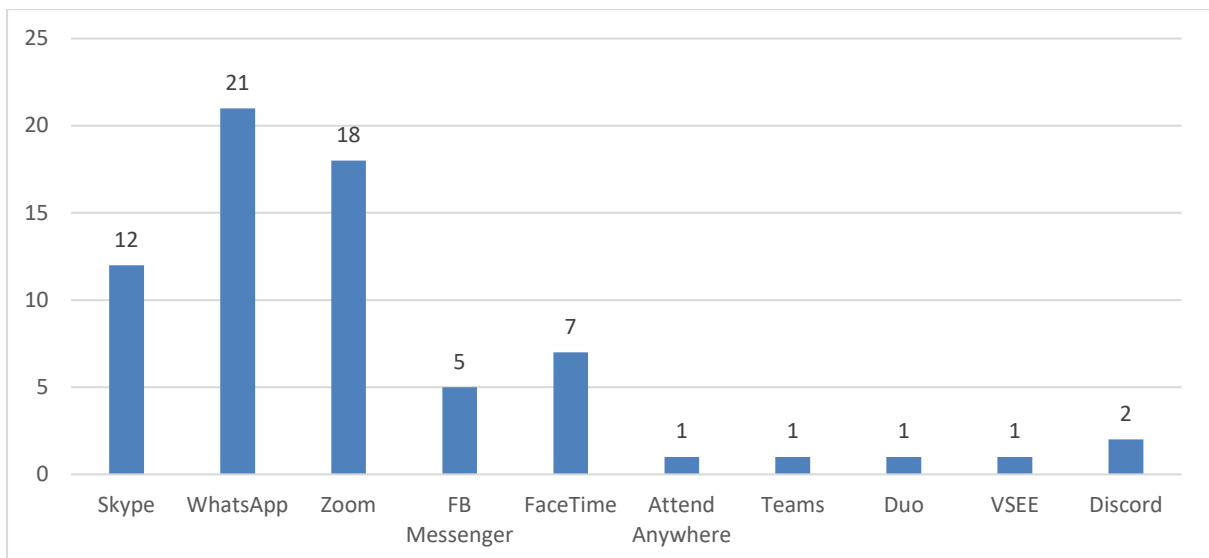
Question 11: What has worked well for you personally during the COVID situation that we could share with others?



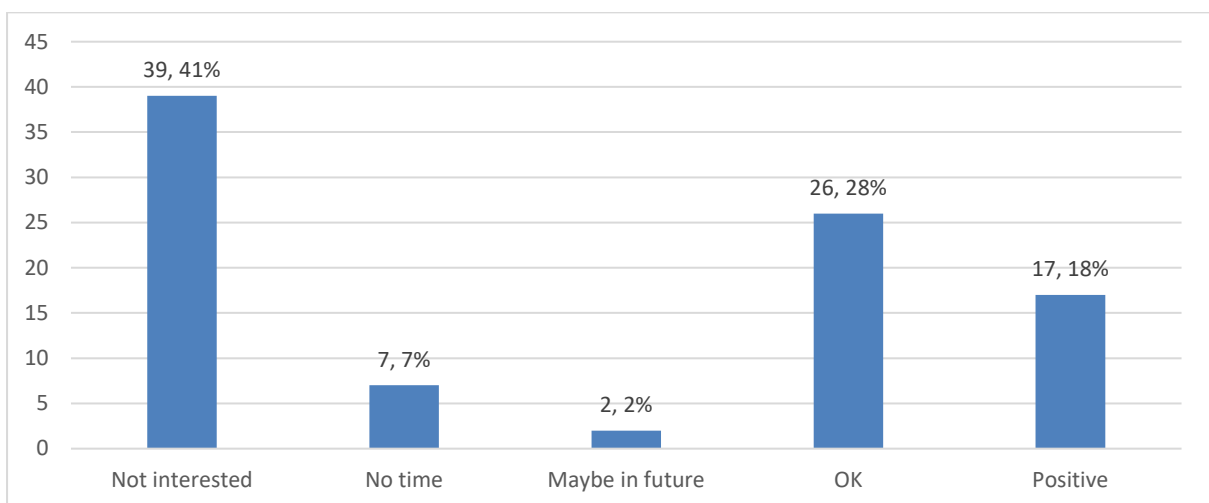
Question 12: Much of the one-to-one support we usually provide is face-to-face. We are now having to do it another way. Please rate how much you prefer various means of communication.



Question 13: If you use video calls, what types do you use (e.g. Skype, WhatsApp, Zoom etc.)?



Question 14: How do you feel about on-line courses or activities?



Question 15: What stops you from using on-line support / services?

