Virtual Voices

Exploring how technology can support carers at home and in the community.

December 2023

Contents

Introduction

Healthwatch Warrington runs an initiative known as 'Virtual Voices' which enables residents to have their voice heard and win vouchers to be used at local businesses.

Each month Virtual Voices ask its members and the Warrington public for their views on various subjects. In November 2023 we worked with St Rocco's Hospice who were successful in an application for funding from the Health Foundation, an independent organisation working to build a healthier UK, and to be part of its exciting new £2 million innovation programme that will explore how technology can enable new approaches to care at home and in the community.

> "*We are delighted to be working with the Health Foundation to explore ways in which we can support carers of palliative patients at home through a digital solution. Working alongside our mission statement, this project will help educate and empower our community to care well and live well.*"
>
> **Project Managers - Sara Black (Chief Operating Officer, St Rocco's Hospice) and Nicola Ryder (Grant Funding and Communications Writer, St Rocco's Hospice).**

Methodology

The survey was sent to our Virtual Voices mailing list of over **500** members, as well as being widely shared across our social media platforms and shared by St Rocco's, and the carers centre.

There were **88** responses to the survey.

Acknowledgements

Healthwatch Warrington would like to thank all members of our Virtual Voices and members of the public who took part, and St Rocco's and the Carers Centre.

Disclaimer

Please note that this report relates to findings of the results from our Virtual Voices survey and is not representative of all Warrington residents.
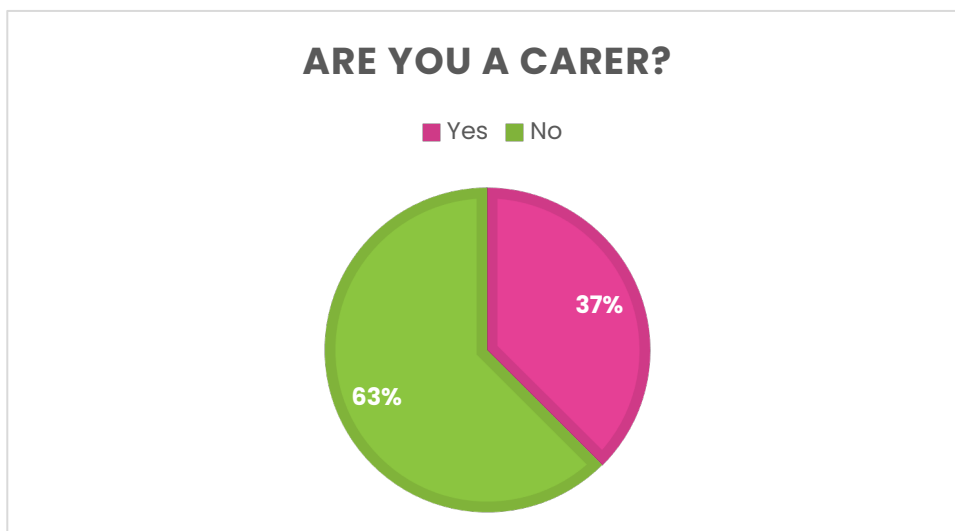
Findings

Age range of respondents

AGE OF RESPONDENTS

■ 16-24 ■ 25-34 ■ 35-44 ■ 45-54 ■ 55-64 ■ 65+

- 6%
- 5%
- 26%
- 12%
- 21%
- 30%
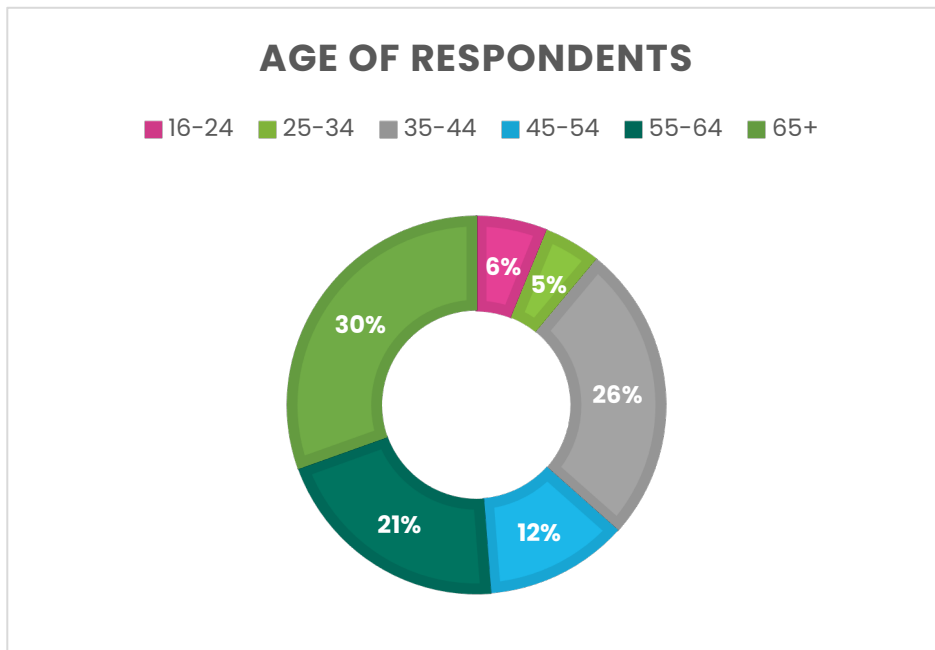
5 respondents didn't answer this question.

Are you a carer?
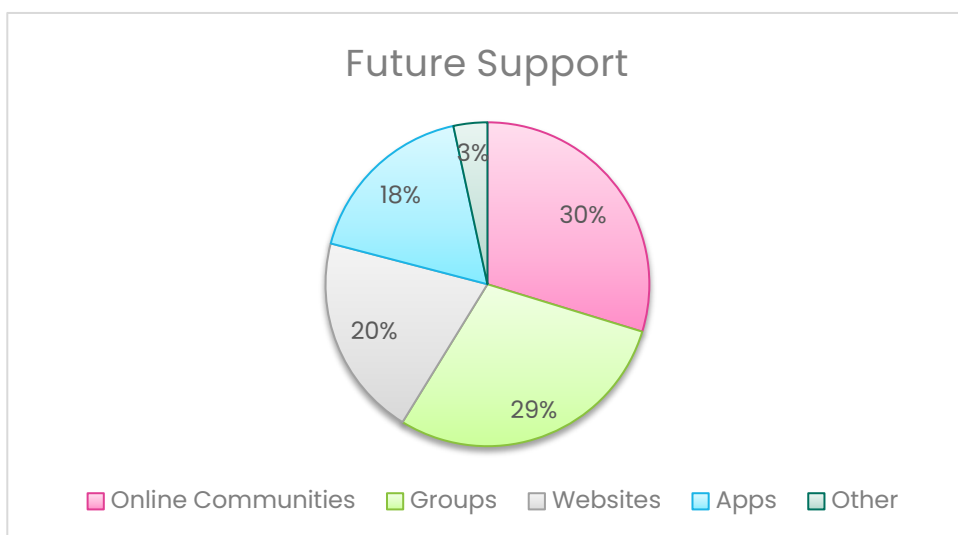
ARE YOU A CARER?

■ Yes ■ No

- 37%
- 63%

To get the most out of the survey, we asked separate questions depending on whether the respondent was a carer currently, or if they were to become a carer in the future, what additional support would they like?.

63% of those who stated they weren't a carer, may still have caring duties.

Non-carer responses

If you were to become a carer in the future, what additional support, if any, do you feel would help?

Future Support

Online Communities 30%, Groups 29%, Websites 20%, Apps 18%, Other 3%

Legend: Online Communities, Groups, Websites, Apps, Other

Other responses included:

- Local carers service support and drop-ins e.g. Warrington Carers Hub including counselling support, telephone befriending.

- Visits, telephone support - some contact with a real person rather than a machine or device.

- Telephone calls from wellbeing services, checkups.

- Help with housework. An excellent GP.

- A dedicated worker to support me navigate the system.

How likely are you to use technology for social support?
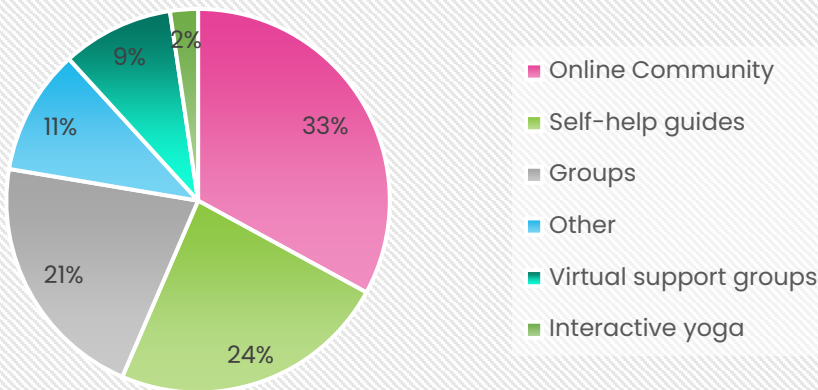
LIKELINESS TO USE TECHNOLOGY

■ Likely   ■ Very Likely   ■ Neither   ■ Very unlikely   ■ Unlikely

13% 0%

27%

60%
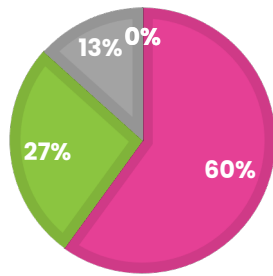
What do you currently access online?

When asked what other sources they access online the responses were:

Currently access online

33%

24%

21%

11%

9% 2%

■ Online Community
■ Self-help guides
■ Groups
■ Other
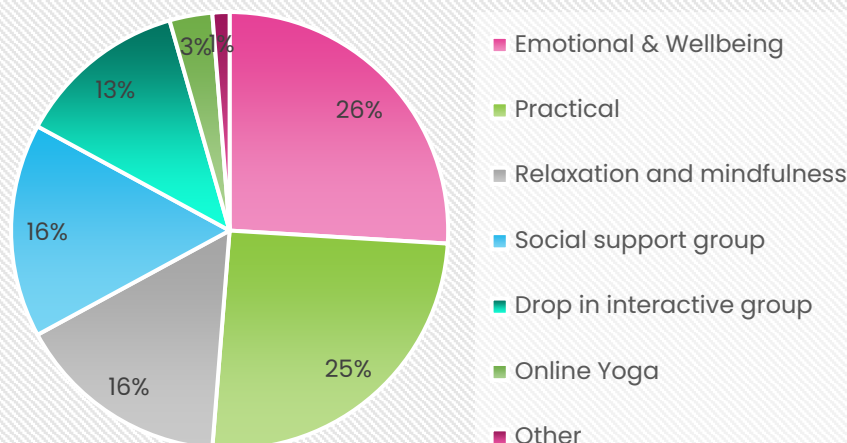■ Virtual support groups
■ Interactive yoga

- Practical Information and advice; engage with 'groups' for specific meetings and talks.

- NHSE - ICB - PCNs - Primary Care.

- Social media.

- An excellent GP.

- Other reading material and resources.

When considering support, what types of support do you prefer?

When asked to specify the other options for the answers were:

Preference of support

26%

25%

16%

16%

13%

3% 1%

■ Emotional & Wellbeing
■ Practical
■ Relaxation and mindfulness
■ Social support group
■ Drop in interactive group
■ Online Yoga
■ Other

- Music making - ukulele groups.

- Medical and help with lifting. Occupational therapy.

What type/ time do you prefer for activities?

We asked "what type of session would you prefer?" The overall consensus was **76%** online and live**(60%)** at night time **(40%).** Prerecorded sessions received **40%** of the votes and daytime sessions received **25%.**

One person suggested other things such as a live person visiting or via the telephone.

Carers responses

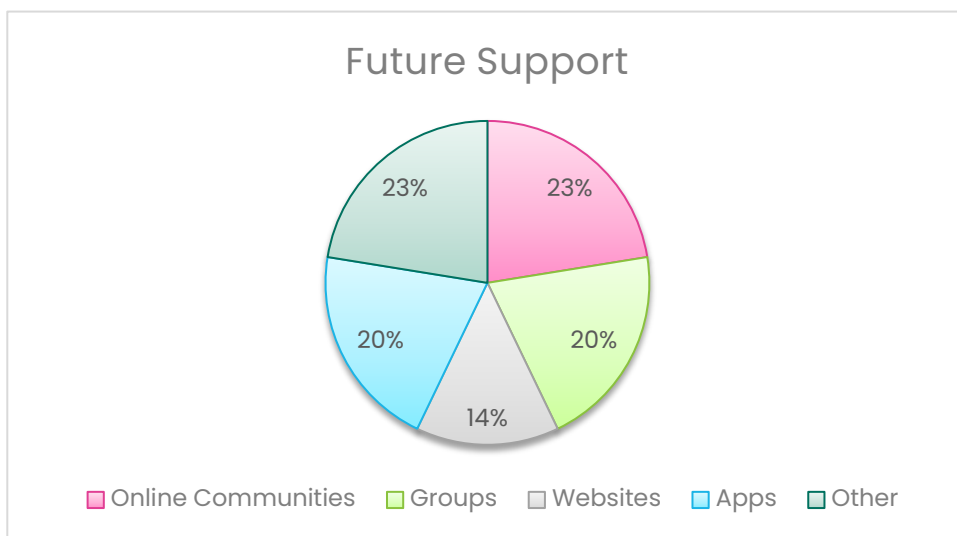**38%** of respondents identified themselves as a carer.

When asked what kind of digital support they currently received responses were varied, with the majority stating "none".

Other comments included "*We use Alexa-operated devices (lights, door camera and opening, curtains, etc) to communicate with friends and family*" and "*assistive technology*".

Carers Centre and information from Warrington Borough Council were mentioned several times as well as:

- Self-help and sleep hypnosis via the carers card app.

- NHS apps, eConsults and GP contact.

- Facebook/Google.

- Company's Client log.

- E-mail from Support worker.

What additional support, if any, do you feel would help?

Future Support

Pie chart segments: 23%, 23%, 20%, 14%, 20%

Legend: ■ Online Communities ■ Groups ■ Websites ■ Apps ■ Other

Online communities came on top with carers, as well as Other. When asked to specify what Other meant, one person mentioned *"Telephone advice, welfare check".*
The other respondents stated *"none or nothing"* and specifying *"I'm not digital, my friend is helping me"* and another expressing they *"Don't know what is available or what ii is for."*

How likely are you to use technology for social support?

40% of the carers who responded stated that they would be very unlikely to access technology for social support. **30%** stated they would be likely to use technology and the other **30%** selected either neither or very likely.
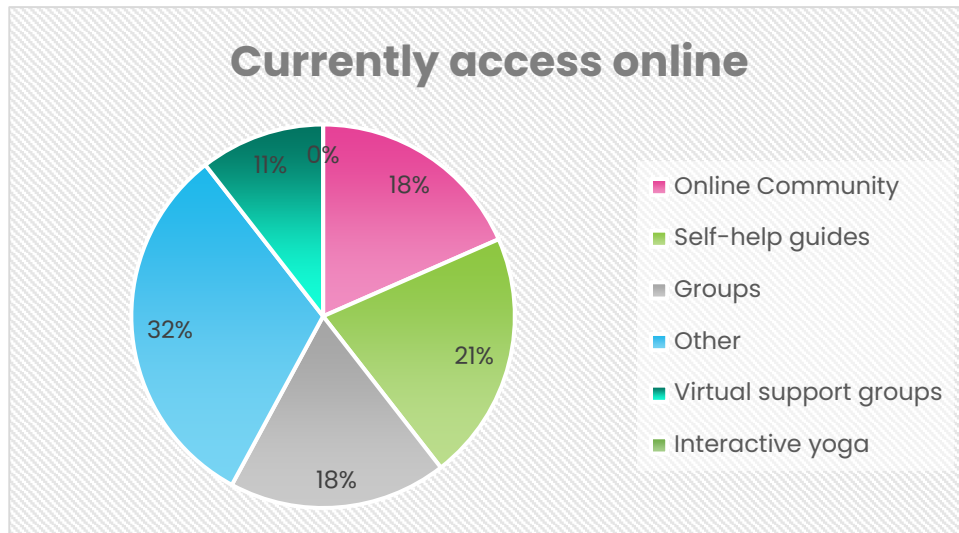
What do you currently access?

32% stated Other, when asked what other things they access all responses (bar one) stated "none/ nothing" with one mentioning "carers centre".

Self-help guides came out second with **21%** followed by Groups and Online communities with **18%.**

Currently access online

Pie chart:
- Online Community — 18%
- Self-help guides — 21%
- Groups — 18%
- Other — 32%
- Virtual support groups — 11%
- Interactive yoga — 0%

When considering support, what types of support do you prefer?

When carers were asked their preference for the type of support they received, it was clear that the front runners were emotional and well-being, practical and social support.
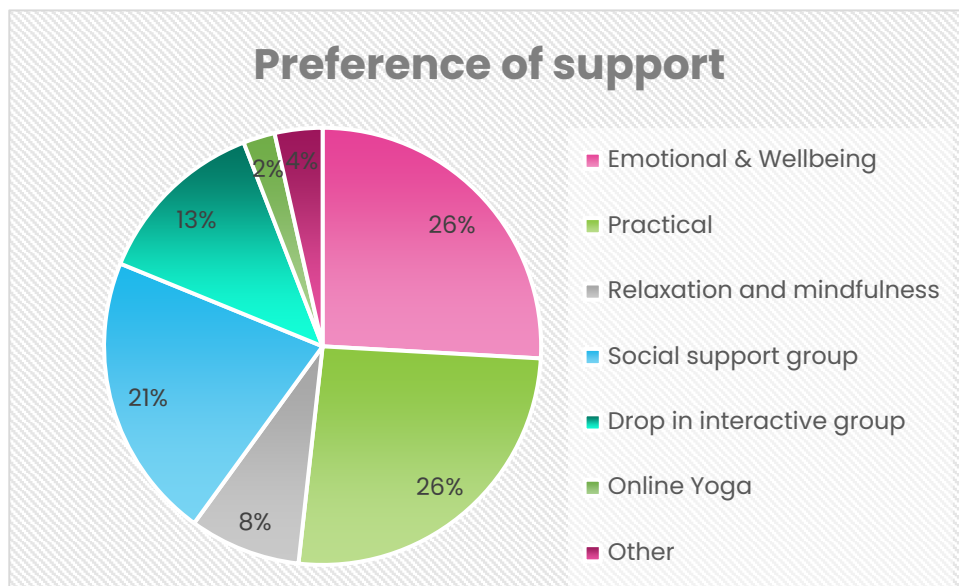
There was interest in more holistic approaches such as relaxation and mindfulness and yoga.

Other options people mentioned:

- Gentle exercise.
- Telephone contact.
- in person.

Preference of support

Pie chart:
- Emotional & Wellbeing — 26%
- Practical — 26%
- Relaxation and mindfulness — 8%
- Social support group — 21%
- Drop in interactive group — 13%
- Online Yoga — 2%
- Other — 4%

What type/ time do you prefer for activities?

We asked "what type of session would you prefer"? The overall consensus was **61%** daytime sessions online (**58%**)and live(**56%**) at night time (**39%**). Pre-recorded sessions received **24%** of the votes and daytime sessions received **25%**.

One person voted "Other" and stated *"I need a contact, someone who has time to listen and give suggestions about how to find or resolve a problem. Practical support to help with writing letters or complaints."*

Conclusion

It is clear from the response that carers who completed the survey do not currently access much online. **60%** of carers who responded stated they would likely, very likely or were unsure. **40%** of carers responded they would be unlikely to access technology for social support.

We wanted to ascertain what people would want if they were to become carers in the future which could help with future planning. There is much more willingness to access online and ideas on what would be useful.

The data has stated that 60% of Carers would prefer evening support. This may be due to other agencies being closed and unavailable after 5.00 pm. This highlights a real need for carers and a potential gap within the current provision.

Some carers have said that they would be unlikely to request digital support, this may be due to a lack of confidence and training in how to use some technology. Training and awareness sessions may be beneficial to support all Carers.

healthwatch