



# Take a Break

*Scotland's short breaks fund for carers of disabled children and young people*



## Outcome Report 2024/25

Administered by:



**Family Fund**

Helping disabled children

## Introduction

Being there for families is central to Family Fund's 2023-2028 strategy. For over 50 years we have strived to do just that. We are the UK's largest charity providing grants to families raising disabled and seriously ill children and young people. Several of the grant programmes we deliver support families of disabled and seriously ill children and young people in Scotland, including Take a Break.

The Take a Break grant programme is one of four grant programmes funded by Scottish Government's Voluntary Sector Short Breaks Fund. The Short Breaks Fund was established in 2011, with the aim of supporting more carers to take a break from their caring role, by increasing the range and availability of short breaks throughout Scotland. Family Fund developed and have administered Take a Break Scotland on behalf of Scottish Government since 2011/12. Three other Short Break Fund programmes are managed by Shared Care Scotland. These are: Better Breaks, Creative Breaks and Time to Live.

Up to and including in 2024/25, the Take a Break grant programme provided grants for unpaid carers of disabled children and young people aged under 21 years who have complex additional needs, to access a short break in a way of their choosing.

This report provides a review and analysis of the Take a Break programme for 2024/25. It presents the performance of the programme against its aims in relation to promoting the health and wellbeing of unpaid carers. Additionally, it evidences how the programme contributes to promoting children and young people's wellbeing, as understood utilising the Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) approach. The report covers:

- Aims, outcomes and indicators
- Outcomes for carers
- Family-wide outcomes
- Children and young people's wellbeing outcomes
- 2024/25 grant statistics
- Added value
- Summary of 2024/25
- Carers' stories





## Aims, outcomes and indicators

In 2024/25 Take a Break supported carers of disabled children and young people aged under 21 years, who have complex additional support needs, to take a short break, through the provision of a cash grant.

All carers applying to the programme had access to information which encouraged them to think creatively when planning their short break, and to apply for funding to do something in line with their individual interests, circumstances and preferred outcomes.

The programme supports the achievement of Scottish Government's strategic Health & Wellbeing outcome:

*"People who provide care are supported to look after their own health and wellbeing."*

It seeks to ensure that carers are more able to sustain their caring role for as long as they are able and willing to do so, and that all carers are more able to have a life alongside their caring role.

In 2024/25 funding for the programme remained at £1.5 million.



The agreed outcomes and indicators for Take a Break in 2024/25, and the results achieved, were:

## Outcomes for carers

Outcome	Indicator/s	Result	Related Carer Quotes
All carers are more able to sustain their caring role for as long as they are able and willing to do so	Percentage of carers reporting that the break has been beneficial for their health and wellbeing. Target – 85% plus	<b>96%</b> of Carers reported that the break had been beneficial for their health & wellbeing.	<p><i>“I was so pleased to be awarded and get a break away done myself and mental health the break that was needed.”</i> <b>Carer, Moray</b></p> <p><i>“A family member came along on the trip separately and allowed me to get some time to myself whilst still having me close by if help for the children was required. I feel this massively benefitted my mental health as I was able to take a small amount of time for myself but also not have the stress weighing on me of being too far if I was needed.”</i> <b>Carer, North Lanarkshire</b></p>
	Percentage of carers who could not have afforded the break without a grant from Take a Break Scotland Target – 85% plus	<b>83%</b> of Carers reported that they could not have afforded the break without a grant from Take a Break Scotland. A further 14% were unsure if they could have afforded the break.	<p><i>“It gave us a well-deserved family break together we wouldn’t normally be able to afford. It also took us away from the stress of everyday life.”</i> <b>Carer, North Lanarkshire</b></p> <p><i>“We were able to have 2 days out together during the summer, as a family of 6 with my parents as well, and were able to afford it without having to struggle. A really good time all round.”</i> <b>Carer, Scottish Borders</b></p>



Outcome	Indicator/s	Result	Related Carer Quotes
<p><b>All Carers are more able to have a life alongside their caring role</b></p>	<p>Percentage of carers reporting that they were able to do activities with their children that they wouldn't normally do together. Target - 80% plus</p>	<p><b>92%</b> of carers reported that the grant provided opportunities for them to do activities with their children that they wouldn't normally be able to do together.</p>	<p><i>"We were able to have a fantastic day out. A train ride, visited attractions and, had lunch and tea eating out. All of which we would never normally do."</i> <b>Carer, Dundee</b></p> <p><i>"It allowed us to enjoy family time with a lot less stress and the fact that it was funded meant the kids could enjoy some more activities that they wouldn't normally be able to."</i> <b>Carer, West Lothian</b></p>
	<p>Percentage of carers reporting that they feel better able to balance their caring responsibilities with their other responsibilities. Target – 30% plus</p>	<p><b>83%</b> of carers reported that, following their break they felt better able to explore and do the things they wanted to do alongside their caring role.</p>	<p><i>"I used the grant to buy a bike and trailer which has allowed me to get out and about more with my baby who requires oxygen. As I don't drive this has made a huge impact on just getting out of the house, taking my baby (and 4-year-old) to different activities and having a life more similar to the one I'd expected when I was pregnant."</i> <b>Carer, East Lothian</b></p>
		<p><b>87%</b> of carers reported that following their break, they were better able to balance their caring responsibilities with their other responsibilities.</p>	<p><i>"We used the grant on family days out and activities for my disabled son. This was so my husband and I could spend some time with our other son. We feel like a weight was lifted, we had things to look forward to and memories were made. Our boys were happy and that made us happy as parents."</i> <b>Carer, Perth and Kinross</b></p>

## Carer outcomes

96% of 575 carers said that the grant had benefitted them. 83% of carers said that, following their break, they felt better able to explore and do the things they wanted to do alongside their caring role.

*“The grant helped us get a short break away, but close enough to travel to without a lot of transitions to keep our son calm. The grant meant family members could join us which created positive experiences and memories for both of our kids but also allowed myself and my husband to relax more with our support network assisting.”*

*Carer, North Lanarkshire*

*“The Take a Break grant has benefitted us by going out and spending family time together which has helped all of our mental health and has been nice to have family bonding time together out for meals and activities.”*

*Carer, Falkirk*

## Family-wide outcomes

We asked carers to tell us what the biggest difference the Take a Break grant made to their family. Carers told us it was important to have something to look forward to as a break from the normal routine and spend time together as a family.

*“Gave me respite from day-to-day stresses of being a carer. My child loved being away on a trip where she could spend time with mummy and daddy and do lots of fun things. Her anxiety reduced greatly as did mine. Gave us something to look forward to and brought great joy”*

*Carer, South Lanarkshire*

Carers felt that Take a Break grants provide a valuable opportunity to do activities with their disabled children that would otherwise be inaccessible.

*“It allowed us to go on our first family holiday and let my disabled son do activities he wouldn't normally get the chance to be included in.”*

*Carer, Edinburgh*

Take a Break grants helped carers to feel like they were able to care better for their child and offer opportunities that they could not normally offer.



*"The Take a Break grant gave us the opportunity to take our two neurodivergent children away to a lodge on the coast over the summer break. We all had a brilliant time and made special memories. The summer break can be an unsettling time for the boys as they do not have their normal structure and routine. Having the chance to get away as a family helped us all to navigate what can be a trickier time for us and have new experiences like going to Diggerland and the aquarium."*

*Carer, South Lanarkshire*

*"Everyone in my household has benefits (even the dogs). Taking the kids out on family day trips has given them the opportunity to run about & burn off energy in safe spaces. We have been able to sit back and enjoy watching them play together & join in too. Our older daughter gets a break from all of us being in the house all on top of each other and even the dogs got some relief from being chased around the house all day. We made some happy memories & it really goes a long way with our mental & emotional health. Week after week if summer holidays may be good for some families but when you have dynamics like ours it's a complete disruption that can be quite negative."*

*Carer, Scottish Borders*

*"Myself, my husband, my 2 disabled children, my 2 none disabled children and my mother and father-in-law went on a weekend break away where we took it in turns to care for the children and get a break. All 4 children got to relax and have fun and experience new things we otherwise would never have been able to afford to do."*

*Carer, North Ayrshire*

Take a Break grants also enabled families to do things together that were financially otherwise out of reach.

*"It gave us an opportunity to have a short break as it was more affordable, gave us something to look forward to which helped our wellbeing. We made lovely memories as a family. It gave us the opportunity to switch off from day-to-day care needs. It helped my mental health and wellbeing as a carer."*

*Carer, Midlothian.*

*"Time away together. Time spent having fun and enjoying ourselves. A week with no hospital appointments, a week with no disruptions, a week we all had fun together. A week just to be a family and feel normal like any others. It was also a break we would never have splurged on without having the grant. Ribby Hall has always been well out of budget, even on the cheap weeks but we found a Christmas break, we barley added anything to, and it was perfect!"*

*Carer, South Lanarkshire*

## Children and young people's wellbeing outcomes

### Included

Carers reported that as a result of their Take a Break funded break, their disabled child was more included.

*"We are all excited to be given the family fund grant which we are using towards a week's break in the UK for all 3 of us. My older son will benefit from being able to participate in the break as it's in the UK which he prefers. It allows him to feel included and able to switch off to the stresses of home life. My younger son who is the disabled child, will benefit as we can go on a family trip that he has been on before which helps as he struggles with change. This allows him to know where he is going, what to expect and reduce the level of anxiety that comes with change. This will be a fun family break with lots of fun experiences he can enjoy which will hopefully outweigh the challenges that we inevitably will encounter."*

*Carer, Midlothian*

*"Due to having ASD as well as a few other disorders my son finds it difficult in the outside world. This grant enabled the whole family to have a couple of days out where he felt calm and included also providing me with some rest while developing more of a bond with other siblings."*

*Carer, Highland*

*"We have benefited from this funding as allowed as to spend time resting. As well as my disabled son being able to be included in activities that he likes to do."*

*Carer, North Lanarkshire*

### Active

Carers reported that as a result of their Take a Break funded break, their disabled child was more active.

*"It helps by days out and doing stuff together keeping my children regulated. My boy likes being active and busy."*

*Carer, Falkirk*

*"My disabled child having 1-1 swimming lessons with another adults keeps him active and happy (he has a great relationship with his swimming instructor). It gives me space to take 30 minutes to myself or give another one of my children 1-1 time with me. It's amazing to have this funding, thank you."*

*Carer, Edinburgh*





*"We used the grant to buy a treadmill. Both myself and my wife can use it for exercise at home. We don't need to squeeze time to exercise in gym. My daughter can also make use it for exercising. My son, who has disabilities made great use of it. He walked on treadmill 30 mins almost every day. It greatly enhances his endurance and walking ability."*

*Carer, East Dunbartonshire*

## Nurtured

Carers indicated that, as a result of their Take a Break funded break, their disabled child was feeling more nurtured.

*"We all got well-deserved breaks away from our home and enjoyed some well needed family time. By going on days out, we were able to bond more with each other and then go home to our own house and beds at night, which is what my disabled children prefer."*

*Carer, Aberdeenshire*

*"My family had an amazing bonding holiday, and my disabled child had an amazing time and had quality time with his siblings all was adapted for him thanks to take a break giving us the chance to have a family holiday away from the chaos life back home thank you."*

*Carer, Fife*

## Achieving

Carers indicated that as a result of their Take a Break funded break, their disabled child was achieving more.

*"We had something to look forward to. We had something to plan and focus on. We had enough to support a break and actually do things when there. We are a family of autistics with other individual needs. I actually managed a full night sleep... that's unheard of! our lass who has multiple health issues managed to learn how to tie her shoe laces at 12... you've no idea how proud we were of her and how chuffed she was that she managed that. It was a different environment where we could just relax enough. Thank you."*

*Carer, Perth and Kinross*

*"We got an iPad for my non-verbal daughter and got an AAC app to try get her to communicate with us better. She's still learning to use it."*

*Carer, South Ayrshire*

## Healthy

Carers indicated that, as a result of their Take a Break funded break, their disabled child was healthier.

*"This health club is good for all our mental health, for structure for Alfie\* and also for everyone to stay fit and healthy."*

*Carer, Aberdeenshire \*name changed*

*"We used our take a break grant for 2 separate water sports activities for our whole family of 5, kayaking and stand up paddleboarding. This provided us all with new skills (something we hadn't done before), an opportunity for family time, building resilience and perseverance and rather a lot of laughs."*

*Carer, Dumfries and Galloway*

*"My son got a trampoline for the back garden which he uses every day and one that is big enough for his height and weight."*

*Carer, Highland*

## Safe

Carers indicated that, as a result of their Take a Break funded break, their disabled child was safer.

*"Being able to take a break that was suitable for my disabled child - secure measures and to pay for another adult too that could support him to get enjoyment and safety from the experience was fantastic."*

*Carer, Aberdeenshire*

*"We used the money to build a playhouse. It has created a safe space for play, and we can relax while our son is in there. He loves to sit in his own wee house and watch his iPad, we can watch him safely from the kitchen and allows us to have conversations or even just a coffee in peace. Our daughter can do her homework in peace but also enjoys sitting in the playhouse with her brother."*

*Carer, Scottish Borders*

*"My son has been out in garden playing safely with his new toys, swing ball, tennis, volleyball, frisbee, catch ball, scooter just a few to mention and he's happy and content with receiving the money to get these for him, and I'm very grateful for receiving the grant to help my son be a little more happier and getting outside more thank you so much for what you do."*

*Carer, East Dunbartonshire*

## Respected

Carers indicated that, as a result of their Take a Break funded break, their disabled child was feeling more respected.



*“Boys benefit from being in a new area, nice lodge, they felt safe to walk down to local on-site cafe/shop/bar area. And I try to help them remember it’s my break too, so they are a bit more ‘independent’ in some ways too. It helped us all to just get away.”*

Carer, Fife

### Responsible

Carers indicated that, as a result of their Take a Break funded break, their disabled child was more responsible.

*“It has provided our daughter with a degree of independence, it has given her the opportunity to be with her friend & carers in a safe environment. It lets her have fun & experience life - as you’d expect for any young person.”*

Carer, Edinburgh.

## 2024/25 Grant statistics -

A total of 4,223 grants were provided to support unpaid carers of disabled children and young people with complex needs to access a short break.

### Applications received

Total Applications	6,524
First time applications	2,491
Repeat applications	4,033

### Grants made to carers

Total grants	4,223
First time grants	1,875
Average grant value	£319.99
Total grant spend	£1,351,990

### Age of child

Age at application	No of children
0 to 5	1,052
6 to 10	2,117
11 to 15	1,866
16	286
17	249
18+	195

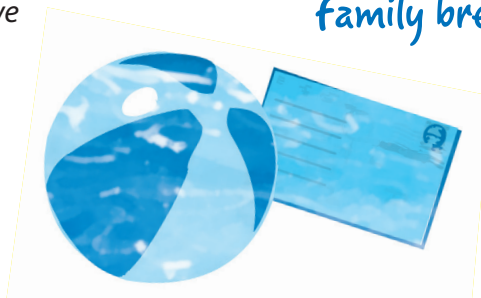


## What did carers need the most?

*"The take a break grant has been a lifeline for us, we used it for a centre park holiday for a weekend for us as a family, the kids got so much from it, my son travelled home in the evenings to use the bathroom as it was an hour away and they are his needs but we felt like a real family, even did some normal things and we were so grateful I didn't know what we would have done without."*

**Carer, Dumfries and Galloway**

1. **3,457**  
family breaks



2. **443**  
Day trips

*"Everyone in my household has benefits (even the dogs). Taking the kids out on family day trips has given them the opportunity to run about & burn off energy in safe spaces. We have been able to sit back and enjoy watching them play together & join in too. Our older daughter gets a break from all of us being in the house all on top of each other and even the dogs got some relief from being chased around the house all day."*

**Carer, Scottish borders**

*"[We were] lucky enough to be awarded funding, which we used to purchase garden games and activity equipment. This encouraged my daughter and other family members to spend time in the garden, relaxing and participating in activities as they wanted. We found this benefitted our mental health, being away from screens and getting some natural sunlight."*

**Carer, Falkirk**

3. **46** Outdoor play equipment

*"I used the grant to buy a bike and trailer which has allowed me to get out and about more with my baby who requires oxygen. As I don't drive this has made a huge impact on just getting out of the house, taking my baby (and 4 year old) to different activities and having a life more similar to the one I'd expected when I was pregnant."*

**Carer, East Lothian**

4. **27**  
Bikes/trikes





5.

## 26 Garden equipment



*"We used the grant to buy a shed for the garden this summer. It took a while to get a dry day, but we managed to build it with no problems. We are now in the middle of panelling the inside and have used insulating lining material to make it warmer, so we are able to enjoy the craft shed all year round. One wall will be a magnetic whiteboard to use for activities and planning, we have four sets of shelves and a desk to install, and the children have much enjoyed the whole planning and building experience. We look forward to painting the inside soon and moving our craft items into it. This type of grant benefits our family so much, we wouldn't have anything like this without it."*

**Carer, Edinburgh**

## Reaching carers

Family Fund connects with thousands of parent carers across Scotland, some of whom may not be accessing local support services. Our network of relationships across Scotland's local and national voluntary and statutory sectors also supports our ability to ensure that the opportunity to apply for a Take a Break grant is well promoted to unpaid carers throughout Scotland. Nevertheless, in 2024/25, we continued to seek to increase awareness of the purpose of the programme and information to support access to the support it provides.

Our highly successful communications campaign resulted in dozens of relevant national and local organisations sharing information about Take a Break on social media, in bulletins and via other communications. These included organisations which we also partnered with on face to face or online events and presentations. We effectively utilise social media before, during and after the programme application window to promote the availability of grants, share key information, provide updates, and respond to enquiries and comments. Press coverage was secured, including in the Scottish Sun, Edinburgh Live and Falkirk Herald.

Subsequently, of the 4,223 grants awarded in 2024/25, 1,875 grants were awarded to carers who had not previously been supported with a Take a Break grant.

### Percentage of grants awarded by Local Authority 2024/25

Scotland	% of grants awarded in 2023/24	% of grants awarded in 2024/25
Aberdeen City	2.2%	2.4%
Aberdeenshire	3.6%	3.5%
Angus	2.5%	1.7%
Argyll and Bute	1.0%	0.8%
City of Edinburgh	6.1%	5.5%
Clackmannanshire	0.8%	1.0%
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar	0.2%	- %
Dumfries and Galloway	2.1%	2.7%
Dundee City	2.7%	2.9%
East Ayrshire	3.1%	3.0%
East Dunbartonshire	1.7%	1.8%
East Lothian	1.7%	2.1%
East Renfrewshire	1.5%	1.3%
Falkirk	3.3%	3.8%
Fife	6.0%	6.8%
Glasgow City	14.5%	16.6%
Highland	4.7%	3.7%
Inverclyde	1.6%	1.9%
Midlothian	2.5%	2.3%
Moray	1.6%	1.3%
North Ayrshire	2.9%	3.2%
North Lanarkshire	10.0%	8.8%
Orkney Islands	0.2%	0.2%
Perth and Kinross	2.1%	2.6%
Renfrewshire	2.7%	2.9%
Scottish Borders	1.5%	1.3%
Shetland Islands	0.2%	0.2%
South Ayrshire	2.2%	1.7%
South Lanarkshire	8.8%	7.7%
Stirling	1.0%	1.1%
West Dunbartonshire	1.8%	1.6%
West Lothian	3.5%	3.6%
Total	100.0%	100.0%



## Percentage of grants awarded by Local Authority 2024/25

See the table opposite for the % of grants awarded in each local authority.



## Added Value

We always look for opportunities to expand the help provided to those supported by Take a Break and aim to provide wider support to carers raising disabled or seriously ill children and young people across Scotland. Additional support provided via our wider charitable activity in 2024/25 included:

- Family Fund's First Contact Team (FCT) answered approximately 5,485 calls from carers in Scotland.
- Family Fund's FCT provided 357 instances of information and support to carers in Scotland.
- 6,454 grants with 8,011 grant items via Family Fund's main Scotland grant programme.
- 18 grants in Scotland have been provided with Family Fund Mobility Support (Funded car leases, in conjunction with Motability).
- 751 grants in Scotland were provided via the Children in Need Emergency Essentials Programme.







## Summary of 2024/25

We are extremely grateful to the carers who shared their experiences of accessing and utilising a Take a Break grant in 2024/25, and to those who have provided feedback in previous years.

From listening to and learning from parent carers' experiences, we are able to develop a deeper understanding in a number of areas, including; the challenges parent carers face to nurturing their own health and wellbeing by taking a short break, the variety of factors which families of disabled and seriously ill children and young people need to consider in short breaks planning; the effectiveness of the programme and adequacy of the grant in enabling parent carers to access a break that best works for them, the benefits of accessing a short break for parent carers and their family members (which may include pets!). Feedback also supports us to identify any areas for improvement in the service we provide.

This insight also enables Family Fund to effectively advocate for improvements in the support available to unpaid carers, including access to short breaks support. In late 2024 Scottish Government made the welcome announcement that the 2025/26 budget would include increased investment in the Voluntary Sector Short Breaks Fund from £8 million to £13 million. This and previous reports clearly speak to why this additional investment was so essential.

As previously indicated, this year 83% of Carers reported that they could not have afforded their break without a Take a Break grant. An additional 14% were unsure if they could have afforded their break without a grant. With funding for the programme remaining static at £1.5m, our communications reflected the continued need to prioritise awards to eligible carers who had not previously received support via Take a Break. Nevertheless, application numbers rose from 5,686 in 2023/24 to 6,524 in 2024/25. The average value of grants awarded was £319. However, in response to our survey, 22% of respondents indicated that the grant had not been sufficient to cover the cost of their chosen break, indicating that an increase in the average grant award value would be preferable in 2025/26.

Finally, whilst we continue to strive to make improvements wherever we can, Family Fund's 2024/25 Take a Break Impact and Evaluation survey received 575 responses, with high- levels of satisfaction being reported:

- 99% of respondents indicated that they were very satisfied or satisfied with the application process
- 98% of respondents indicated that they would advise other parent carers with similar caring responsibilities to apply for a Take a Break grant via Family Fund.
- 84% of respondents indicated that they strongly agreed or agreed that Take a Break Scotland had helped them to better access information and support regarding the short breaks available to carers in Scotland.

# Amanda's story

**11-year-old Connor lives in Edinburgh with his mum, Amanda and his dad, Neil. We spoke to Connor's mum, Amanda to learn more about their family unit.**

*"As we speak, Connor is currently in his postman era (which means he won't wear anything except shorts, even though it's not quite Summer yet!) Connor is a very loving child who loves the water, loves colouring, playing and chips! Connor has learning disabilities, autism, and sensory issues. He is non-verbal and attends a special school in Edinburgh with a highly adapted timetable.*

*"Though Connor is nearly 12, he can sometimes get upset very easily, like a much younger child could do. Neil and I try to manage that as best we can, and we know what works (such as wearing ear defenders in public), but this is becoming more difficult as he grows older. Connor is at the age where he knows exactly what he wants, but can't understand why he can't have them. Like many families, we don't get much respite, and we've realised in recent years just how sensitive and in tune Connor is with our feelings."*

*"After lockdown lifted, which was difficult for Connor, being out of routine and getting him back to school, our struggle continued. Neil fell ill and had to spend weeks in hospital. Connor was incredibly distressed and didn't understand why we kept leaving his dad in hospital. It disrupted our whole lives for months. The things Connor had grown to trust were constant, suddenly had been taken from him and he lost his sense of security. This period was challenging for all of us. Nothing we did would comfort Connor. I was trying to care for everybody, whilst struggling myself and trying to work full time. I was getting poorly, my patience was at an all-time low and I didn't have the energy to keep him engaged and happy. We needed a break, and just wanted to pick our family unit up and drop it somewhere else, away from the stress."*

## Take a Break Scotland

*"I heard about Family Fund and Take a Break Scotland from another family. I assumed we wouldn't be eligible, but it was such a pleasant surprise that we were. The thought of us spending quality family time together at the seaside in Connors favourite place felt really far away. After filling out a very simple application form, we heard we were successful! We are so used to fighting, pleading and begging for what our family needs. We stared at the email in disbelief."*

*"If I asked Connor to draw his favourite holiday, he would've drawn a beach, a swimming pool and the three of us all together. And that's exactly what we did! We went to the seaside and stayed at a caravan resort with a swimming pool. Connor sat in the show bar, watching performances with a fruit shoot and a packet of quavers, and he had a little dance. He swam and splashed to his heart's content. We had chips on the beach, where Connor even went to the counter to order them himself. Our life can look and feel small sometimes.*



*There aren't many things we can do that Connor will enjoy outside of school, so this was more than a break for our family. Take a Break Scotland and Family Fund wrapped their arms around us and hugged us. It was a reset and refresh, when our family needed it most. Connor became brave on that holiday. And we watched on with pride."*

## Louise's story

**Six-year-old Ruairidh lives in Edinburgh with his mum, Louise, dad, Alfie and 3-year-old little sister Eilidh. We spoke to Ruairidh's mum, Louise, to get to know their family better.**

*"Ruairidh's favourite things are going on adventures, seeing new places and he has a few special interests, like planes and clocks. He's chatty, loves being outdoors, singing and dancing to music.*

*"Family life for us can be quite chaotic. Ruairidh has autism, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and sensory issues. This means he needs a lot of attention and support, especially when we're out and about. Ruairidh can run away in a split second because he doesn't understand danger, and doesn't worry about losing us – he just sees something he likes the look of and he goes. He did it once in the airport, one second he was there and the next he had disappeared. It is so stressful and frightening, so there's a lot of planning before we go anywhere to make sure he's safe."*

*"Behaviourally and emotionally, Ruairidh is two to three years behind what you'd expect. Often Ruairidh doesn't want to go to school because he gets so worked up, anxious and worried. Because of this, sometimes I'm unable to work. Our family's earning potential is less because of Ruairidh's needs. There are often times I have to cancel clients, and we often feel burnt out, exhausted from constantly advocating for Ruairidh, filling in forms and talking to professionals. That can feel like a full-time job in itself."*

### Take a Break Scotland

*"We discovered that Ruairidh loves light shows after seeing one in Edinburgh. We told him about the Enchanted Forest and he was really excited, so we went to the Enchanted Forest in October for an overnight stay for their light show. He really enjoyed it and so did Eilidh, and it was so nice for us to get away from our four walls. He still talks about it regularly! It was magical to see him enjoying himself. He spends a lot of his time anxious and dysregulated. It felt amazing seeing him experience joy, being free, exploring and running. As his parents, we felt good afterwards because it met our needs too. It was nice to do something as a family together, and it gave us a huge boost."*

*Because it took me a long time to accept the support that was available to our family, from charities like Family Fund. It took a long time to realise that we needed to accept the support, and to get over the feelings of guilt. That financial support to do something fun means everything to us. By offering us support, grants or a break, Family Fund are saying to families like ours, 'We see you, and we know how hard it is.'"*

# Marion's story

17-year-old Kirsten lives in Edinburgh with her dad, Iain, and her mum, Marion, who shares their family's experiences with us today.

*"Kirsten is like human sunshine. She wakes up happy and loves life every day. Kirsten has severe learning disability and autism, is non-verbal and is very affectionate. She enjoys school, going to music gigs, the beach, music and singing.*

*"When Kirsten was a toddler, she was late to walk and late to interact with people. I'd constantly sing to her, and eventually she realised that she really liked interacting, music, singing and dancing, especially after she went to school. Kirsten has ankle splints and special boots. She is hypermobile, so we have to slow and calm her down sometimes, especially on the stairs. We've been told in the past that Kirsten's developmental age is around two-years old. Kirsten only sleeps around four hours each night, needs to be supervised constantly, bathed, and so on, so Iain and I don't get much respite. Sometimes I overhear people saying they woke up really early in the morning, and I think to myself, 'I've been awake since 2am for the past 15 years!'*

*"As Kirsten is 17-years-old, we're currently transitioning her out of school in the next few weeks and trying to find a placement for her. It's taking up a lot of our time and energy, and we're worried about how she'll react to that change in her social life and her routine, because she loves school so much."*

*"Iain works full time, and I work part time, which gives us time to be individuals. We have just become legal guardians (guardianship) for Kirsten so we can act on her behalf, and we had to complete a detailed financial assessment of everything we spend. We realised just how much we spend on giving Kirsten a good life, and how much higher our costs are than other families."*

## Take a Break Scotland

*"Take a Break Scotland and Family Fund give our family grants to enable us to go on holiday together. One year, we purchased an annual pass to Blair Drummond's Safari Park, and we'd go together almost every week! We use our break to travel around Scotland and Northern Ireland. To keep Kirsten safe, we have to be quite specific with our needs for a holiday home as it needs to be child-proof and needs to have an enclosed garden for her, which is more expensive. The grant from Family Fund really helps.*

*"As soon as we set off, Kirsten says, 'Away, away!' The breaks keep our sanity. I worry about Kirsten's future more than I've worried about anything, and it takes a lot of energy to fight for her future. The breaks give us chance to recharge, so when we return home, we can continue fighting for the best for Kirsten."*





# Pronita's story

**Aaryan is eighteen and he lives in Dundee with his mother, Pronita and father, Subhayu. Aaryan's brother, Agnijo, lives at university in Cambridge most of the time but visits when he can. Pronita shares her son's journey with us.**

*"Aaryan has Down's syndrome, which he was diagnosed with as a baby, learning difficulties, and autism which he was diagnosed with around age three. Aaryan loves music, is funny and cheeky. He's a real charmer, and brings a lot of joy into our lives!"*

*"We care for Aaryan 24/7. Aaryan needs to be bathed and cleaned, he can eat by himself but I would need to cook for him. Even when Aaryan has carers around, we need to be here in case he reacts negatively to something. I care for Aaryan during the day, and my husband takes over at night because Aaryan has sleep apnea. It's challenging. Up until COVID, Aaryan attended a Special Educational Needs (SEN) school, but after COVID, he struggled to go back to school. He found it very hard to cope with."*

*"Aaryan used to enjoy school and had lots of friends, but after COVID, he struggled to cope. When his brother, Agnijo, moved to University, Aaryan's mental health suffered even more, and he struggled to have other people in the house, even familiar family and friends. It was hard for us as parents to see him like this, and we just wanted the old Aaryan back. We decided it was best to take Aaryan out of school, and by this time he was able to access adult services. Now he is at home 24/7 with carers a couple of hours per day. We have built an annexe for him, with more space. Aaryan is becoming himself again now. He has also started doing adapted cycling which he enjoys! I'm now able to leave long enough during the day to walk the dog, which is nice."*

## Take a Break Scotland

*"After COVID, we knew Aaryan's grandparents were going to visit from India. We had missed them so much, but as a family, we were really down at this point, because of Aaryan's mental health. Caring for a loved one with such high needs can be very isolating and frustrating. You feel overlooked. We don't often get to do the same things many other families do, so when we received money towards a break from Family Fund, we were so happy. Without their help, we probably would never have done it. Their help gave us that push."*

*"We decided to go to the Highlands together. It allowed us all to travel as a family together, and spend time with Aaryan's grandparents who we hadn't seen in so long. We had the best time, and all talk about it often. When Aaryan is happy, we're all happy. Aaryan has made us all better human beings. We are all more caring, understanding and tolerant thanks to him. Family Fund acknowledged us and supported us when we needed it, allowing us to create lots of happy family memories. If our story helps Family Fund help other families, we are happy."*



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