

THE STORIES OF CAREERS (unpaid)

Evaluation



REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- **Beneficiary Comments**
- **About Invisible Army**
- **About this National Lottery Funded, 'Stories of carers' project**
- **Outcomes**
- **Statistics Around Why This Project was Important**
- **Abstracts from carer stories**
- **Learning**
- **Next Steps**
- **Acknowledgements**



“Hannah describes her family as precious: her first born, Harry, is now starting secondary school and her little girl, Bella, is turning 10. When the children were very young, Stu began to show symptoms of Huntington's disease. The disease that had impacted his grandfather and father was now affecting his coordination, memory and mood. Huntington's is degenerative, so Hannah, Harry and Bella are watching their father lose more and more capacity. This also means that they have had to learn how to care for their husband and father.” - Hannah's Story

ABOUT INVISIBLE ARMY:



Invisible Army is an arts for social good organisation founded in 2019 and registered as a CIC in February 2023. Our goal is to use the arts to shine a light on carers (unpaid). We want to make the challenges and joys carers cope with every day visible. We do this through photojournalism exhibitions - both in person and online - where raw and beautiful images are coupled with a story, all of which are made in collaboration with carers and their families within their homes. In this way we are uniquely able to amplify the voices of carers and those they care for.

Invisible Army is run by Tina Gue, a photographer, and Carina Andrews, a writer and carer. Carina was a young carer supporting her disabled parents, a role which has continued into adulthood. Invisible Army has now collected 65 carer stories, including Carina's own, and shared them through many exhibitions viewed by the general public, professionals, local and national politicians and carers. Invisible Army is currently exhibiting some of the new carer stories at Bristol Royal Infirmary Hospital.

FEEDBACK:



“What an absolute privilege to have my story displayed in Weston Hospital alongside some incredible carers. I cried the minute I walked in. It’s just so overwhelming seeing all these carer stories. The truly lovely Carina and Tina are waving that flag to get more visibility for carers. Huge thanks to Invisible Army for sharing my story and taking some lovely photos of me and my girl.” - **Carer who shared their story with us**

“I’ve been blessed to have felt the incredible impact of our voices being heard! Strangers approached me. “Were you on TV last night?” “You’re an amazing woman” “it’s incredible what you do” WOW!! I honestly don’t feel amazing, I’m just doing what I do, caring for my husband and my children with every piece of my heart without question. It’s just been so refreshing to feel heard, validated and seen by the exposure you’ve given all the incredible carers in the exhibition. Thank you, truly from the bottom of my heart Carina and Tina you are true heroes.” - **Carer who shared their story with us**



“What you do looks amazing and I’m really glad I found you! I’ve never really thought about my role as a carer or even described myself as one, until finding you. I’ve never even seen myself caring for my daughters as anything more than being the role of a mother so don’t tend to really speak much about it (I guess I never really felt it was justified or worthy) but now I feel so seen, heard and validated by visiting your social media and hearing other’s stories. Thank you so much for allowing me to feel this way.” - **Viewer of our work**

THE STORIES OF CARERS FUNDED BY NATIONAL LOTTERY COMMUNITY FUND

We collected 20 new carer stories in photographs and words, which we exhibited at Weston General Hospital and Bristol Royal Infirmary Hospital (BRI). Additionally we were invited to exhibit at Royal West of England Academy (RWA), Circular Artspace, Bristol Women's Voice events and Carers Support Bristol events. All of these were in high-footfall areas. We increased public awareness and understanding of the challenges faced by carers in Bristol and North Somerset, fostering greater empathy and support within the community. We also helped empower the carers we met by giving them a platform to share their stories, ensuring their voices were heard and valued. Invisible Army spent between a couple of hours and a full day with each carer in their home. We listened, laughed, photographed and were moved as carers and their families shared what caring means to them. Tina Gue (photographer) edited the photos and Carina Andrews (writer) wrote a short piece from their visit. Carina went back to each carer and their families in their homes to collaboratively edit the story and photographs together, creating a final piece everyone was proud of. Consent forms were signed.

We continued long standing partnerships and created new ones. We worked with three new art organisations and nine carer organisations. Our Weston General Hospital exhibition was featured on BBC local and national news.

We have shared our stories with Carers Support Bristol and South Gloucestershire who have used many of our photographs across their new website; Jessie May who have featured our stories in their recent campaigns; Bristol Black Carers, who have shared our stories on social media; and Bristol City Council, who have used our photographs in their Young Adult Carers campaign. Through these partnerships, we have been able to extend the reach of our work through their established online platforms.

The new carer stories created through this project will become part of the Bristol Archive and will continue to shine a light on carers, helping to grow a true and diverse picture of unpaid care.

Additionally, we hosted three workshops. We employed an artist - formerly a young carer - to facilitate groups of carers in creating placards featuring what they would say if they were to go on strike from their caring role. To ensure accessibility, those unable to attend the workshops were offered the option of sending us their placards or sharing their words so that we could create placards on their behalf. At Circular Artspace we created an installation with over 100 placards and some of the new carer stories. We then joined a procession hosted by Bristol Women's Voice who were raising awareness of the caring economy.

In conjunction with University Hospitals Bristol and Weston Arts Department, we hosted an opening of our exhibition, filling Weston General Hospital's large corridor and their cafe with carer stories, inviting the featured carers, their families and the BBC. This reached local and national televised news.

“Ikhlaq and Ayesha have had to learn so much, from how to change and clean Aqsa’s trachea to how to use a ventilator (which Ikhlaq explained excitedly that Aqsa no longer needs 24/7). Ikhlaq and Ayesha also have to give their baby three injections per week. They have seen how much these injections are helping Aqsa, but putting a needle into their little girl's thigh as she screams is “agonising”. Alisha and Maria help their parents care for Aqsa as much as they can. “They say that Aqsa is precious to them and they play with her, distract her when she is having her injections and get all her equipment ready.”

- Ikhlaq’s Story



THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS PROJECT:

1.7 million people in the UK are providing 50 or more hours of care per week (Carers UK, 2025). Carers are the invisible backbone of our healthcare system, providing 80% of homecare in the UK and saving the public purse £162bn a year (equivalent to the entire NHS budget). There are 34,000 registered carers in Bristol and 21,000 in North Somerset.

Without proper visibility and recognition carers risk becoming increasingly isolated, overwhelmed, and burnt out. In previous surveys, eight out of 10 carers said they had felt lonely, with nearly one third feeling lonely for all or most of the time. The Census 2021 in England and Wales found that about one in four carers reported 'not good health', compared with fewer than one in five non-carers.

Invisible Army uses the power of storytelling to illuminate the experiences of carers, allowing them to feel seen and understood while raising awareness of their complex and vital role. It also helps viewers of our exhibitions to identify themselves as carers, which leads to them learning about their rights and what support is available to them.

Unsurprisingly, given the rise in the cost of living, a significant proportion of carers are worried about their ability to manage in the future. Even more carers are cutting back compared to previous years, with 58% of carers sharing they had cut back on hobbies/leisure activities (Carers UK, 2023). 68% of unpaid carers are unable to get a break from their caring role when needed (Carers Trust, 2023). This means that meeting carers where they are, in their own homes – as Invisible Army does - is a necessary way to provide them the care and attention they deserve.

OUTCOMES:



- Individuals identified themselves as carers for the first time
- Carers learned about local support available to them
- Carers felt their story was seen and heard
- Carers felt empowered to continue to share their caring story
- Friends and families of the carers involved, and the general public, gained a better understanding of a carer's needs
- Many carers felt a closer relationship was formed with the person they care for
- Carers were able to connect with other carers reducing feelings of isolation
- Reached many seldom heard carers including, but not limited to, global majority carers, LGBTQIA+ carers, young carers and carers who care for someone with a mental health condition
- Making visible this invisible army

“He’s a saint, our Jacob,” Paul says, giving his son a squeeze on his shoulder. Jacob is a carer to his dad, whilst also having a family of his own. For a while, he’d been a young carer for his dad too. This is one of the first conversations they’ve had about that time. Jacob smiles. “I’ve learned so much from my father,” he says. “I wouldn’t want to relive our journey together, but I wouldn’t change it either.” Paul’s experience with his mental health has impacted his relationship with Jacob, his youngest son. Jacob felt he had to grow up quickly as he both needed and wanted to be there for his dad, reminding him to take his medication and attend appointments as well as listening and reassuring him.” - Jacob’s Story



RESEARCH FINDINGS:

During this project, we received a Participation Grant from the University of Bath to complete a small research project. We interviewed 10 of the carers who shared their story with us to look at what worked well and where we could improve.

Key findings:

- They were pleased with the honest and non-sensationalised narrative
- They realised caring was a real job, and realised how much they do
- They felt they had a better relationship with the person they care for
- They felt hopeful their stories could raise awareness and effect change
- They had some treasured family photos that would have been difficult to capture otherwise.
- Carers felt less guilt and more pride in their role
- They felt emotional to see their story
- They felt a community connection and belonging
- They felt pleased that they were able to have some tricky conversations with people, especially the person they care for
- They experienced increased self-confidence
- They experienced increased satisfaction through caring
- Carers felt empowered, special and important

Our full report will soon be available on our website.



LEARNING:

- **What we offer** works well; not only do we meet our aims, but we can also be flexible to meet the aims of the organisations we collaborate with
- **We saw firsthand** some of the incredible support our partners provide to carers and the people they care for, which gave us valuable new information to help **signpost** future carers to relevant services
- **Flexibility** in the way we work is important for carers and their families to be able to engage. Ways we were flexible included: being comfortable re-arranging; having an initial online meeting; meeting in the carers' homes (as many are unable to leave the person they care for); leaving when new people in the home had become too much then arranging a second visit; and not getting in the way of carers' usual routine while we were there
- The degree to which many carers appreciated having someone spend time with them, listen to them and give them space to think about themselves
- The stories became longer and more detailed as carers felt more comfortable sharing their experiences and Carina's writing skills developed
- There was real power in carers seeing their stories exhibited. Many became very emotional, feeling proud of their caring role. It also helped carers relate to one another's experiences; as one carer shared, "I honestly thought that it was only me who experienced these overwhelming thoughts, I am so grateful to hear that I am not alone."
- Carina has gone on to use both her lived experience as a carer and the learning gathered through Invisible Army's growing community to contribute to work with local councils and researchers. For example, she is helping to shape Bristol City Council's All Age Carers Strategy action plan.
- The rising cost of living meant our salaries no longer fully reflected the time and care this work required, but we remained committed to reaching the 20 carers we had planned to work with through this funding
- We needed to allow extra time for recruitment of carers; for them to build trust with us; and in some cases to work with them on identifying themselves as carers
- At times, we needed to manage carers' support needs while being clear we are not an ongoing support service, so we ensured that carers knew where they could access appropriate help
- The photographic exhibition boards we print on have proved easy to adapt to different venues, making the exhibition straightforward to tour
- This project is both unique and in demand. Because our funded capacity is limited, we have had to turn down some carers and organisations who wanted to work with us. There is a need for new images and stories as carers' needs change, and because different services want to hear from carers in their own area
- We have been inspired by opportunities to work alongside other organisations in ways that strengthen both projects. For example, the RWA invited us to share stories of carers supporting someone with dementia alongside their exhibition of artwork by people living with dementia. The two exhibitions complemented each other powerfully.

WE GAINED THIS INFORMATION FROM:

- Feedback from participants and partners: Using questionnaires and structured discussions
- Documenting activities and reflections: We maintained a blog that documents our activities, challenges, and achievements. This served as a reflective tool for our team and a transparent record for our stakeholders
- Regular feedback sessions: We hosted regular feedback meetings with our partners to discuss progress, gather insights, and refine our approach.
- Exhibition Feedback: At all public exhibitions, we signposted visitors to our website, so everyone had an opportunity to share their thoughts and reflections on the exhibition
- Keeping Carers Connected: We used our social media platforms to share updates about what we and our partners are doing for carers, alongside some of the carer stories we have collected. Traffic to our website has increased, as has engagement across all our social media platforms
- Stakeholder consultations: We attend regular discussions with carer organisations and local councils, gaining professional insights and staying informed about the evolving needs of carers
- We have been working with a researcher from the University of Bath to complete a co-produced piece of research on the impact of this project. The report is due to be completed soon and will be shared on our website

PARTNER FEEDBACK:

- “Working with Invisible Army has been hugely valuable for us at Carers Support. Their resources have helped us raise awareness of carers and caring in a powerful, authentic way, giving us new tools to communicate with carers and highlight their experiences. The stories we’ve shared through the project have supported our wider engagement work and strengthened the way we represent carers’ voices across our organisation.” - Communications Manager, Carers Support (Bristol & South Gloucestershire)
- “We are delighted to have been working in collaboration with the Invisible Army for years and increasingly collaborating in the context of the Caring Economy Campaign since Autumn 2023. Their work of telling the stories of the invisible army of carers is impressive and invaluable. The quality of their work such as photos and presentation is impeccable. They have a gift to tenderly capture realities that are often unseen, unheard, raw and right at the heart of the human experience. The collaboration of Invisible Army has been hugely important to the progress and success of the campaign.” - Community Organiser, Bristol Women’s Voice’



BRISTOL
WOMEN'S
VOICE

CHANGES WE HAVE MADE:

- We recognise that, while we have collected 65 carers stories, more needs to be done to reflect the diversity of seldom-heard carer groups. We will continue to connect with our existing partners, seek to create new partnerships, and connect more closely with disabled people's organisations to reach carers whose voices are less often heard
- We have increased the staff-time contingency in funding applications to 15%, so carers have enough time and support to create their stories without feeling rushed, whilst also giving staff enough capacity to manage the ongoing work of running the CIC
- We have increased staff salaries in future funding applications, to reflect both their experience and the cost of living.
- We are considering how to include everything carers have shared with us, whilst considering how much the audience can comfortably read and digest. As such, we are starting to look into different ways to share this information, such as through audio, posters, or online text that people can read after the exhibition
- We are looking for funding to introduce a work mobile phone to help protect staff's time outside working hours
- We now include time to research local support services for the carers we work with into our funding applications, so that we can provide timely and relevant information. We have also started creating an information pack of useful local services, particularly for people who are newly identifying as carers
- We now explore alternative care arrangements, so all carers can visit the exhibition where their story is being shown
- We have started to think about a way that carers can provide feedback anonymously



NEXT STEPS:

Touring Exhibition

We are and will continue to contact: health and social care organisations, hospitals, shopping centres, libraries, art galleries and other locations in the hope we can continue hosting exhibitions.

Art at the Heart at Royal United Hospitals Bath NHS Foundation Trust

Art at the Heart at Royal United Hospitals Bath NHS Foundation Trust has offered us their main corridor exhibition space. This in-kind support would include the exhibition space, someone to install and take down the exhibition, and publicity. However, Art at the Heart would like the exhibition to consist of carers within their catchment area. With one in 15 people becoming a carer every year (Carers UK, 2025), and the hospital serving a catchment area of approx. 500,000, we are sure there are many carers who could benefit from sharing their stories. Other organisations have also approached us with similar offers. Of course, to achieve this project with Art at the Heart and with the other organisations, we would need funding, so we will continue to fundraise.

Outdoor Exhibition

We also want to host an outdoor exhibition/site takeover in partnership with Out of Hand. All billboards have been carefully selected to reach large and relevant audiences and are managed and maintained exclusively by Out of Hand. This exhibition would increase public awareness and understanding of the challenges faced by carers, fostering greater empathy and support within the community. It would also help carers become more aware of the support services available to them and of their rights. We are currently completing funding applications.

1%

We would like to collect at least 1% of the stories of carers in the South West - which would be around 1480 stories.

PARTNER FEEDBACK:

“We’ve built a strong, mutually beneficial partnership that supports both charities while giving families a powerful platform to share their voices. We’d also like to recognise that our families and nursing teams have consistently had very positive experiences working with their team.” - Marketing & Communications Officer, Jessie May

“Lots of happy tears at work today! It was such a privilege to meet the incredible carers who are the stars of a new photo exhibition by Invisible Army telling the world about the unseen jobs they do 24/7. It was quite an emotionally draining job, but one that was really worth telling.” - BBC Journalist

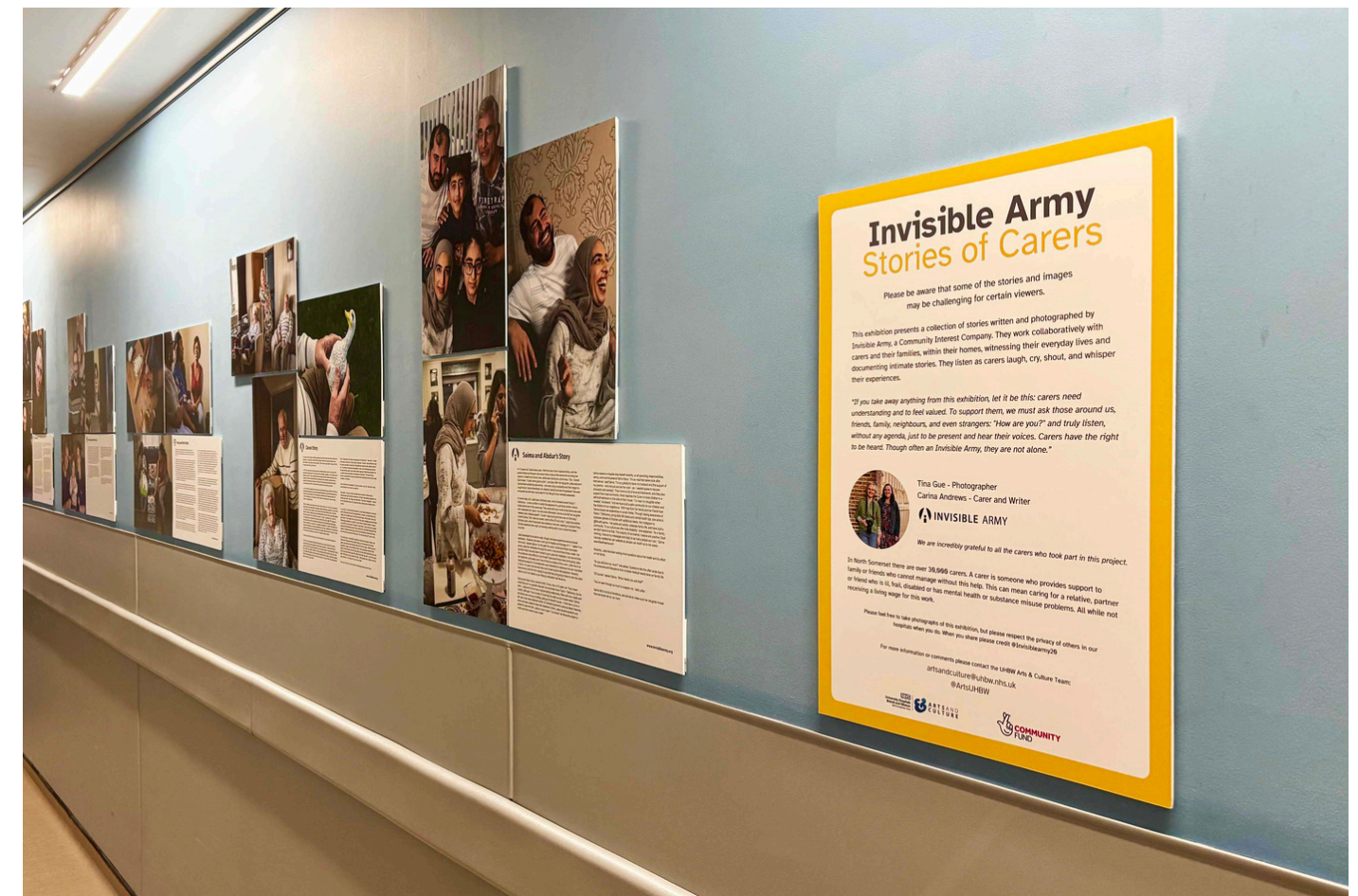


ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

Invisible Army would like to give a huge thank you to the National Lottery Community Fund whose funding made this all possible. We are deeply grateful for your generosity and trust.

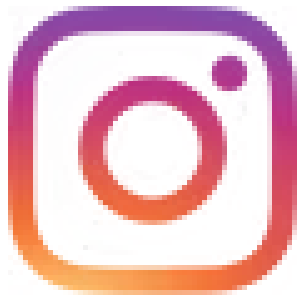
To each of the carers and families who allowed us into their homes and lives, THANK YOU. Each moment we spent with each of you was a privilege, and we will be forever grateful for your honesty and kindness.

Our thanks also go to all our partners. It has been a true honour to work with each one of you, and we are very grateful for the ways you have helped carers to be seen and heard.



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