

**Carers in your  
Workforce Matter**

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3. Why is supporting  
working carers  
so important?



Those involved in the world of social care are very aware of the growing numbers of older people, the declining number of working age people and the impact that this will have on services. This cannot be separated from the impact that this will have on families whose members work within social care and their working lives; as the numbers of older people rise and the number of people in the working population falls, the proportion of workers having to take up caring responsibilities will grow. Families may be geographically 'spread out', involve re-marriages and multiple generations. With later state pension ages, working lives are also likely to be longer. All of this means that many more of us will be combining work and care, and for longer, and often in challenging circumstances.

"The anxiety and stress caused by caring is having a negative effect on my ability to work. I am at present under the GP. If only the rest of the family would pull together there would be so much less pressure. Any problems, they are always passed onto me to sort out".<sup>16</sup>

### **Female carer, working full-time and caring at a distance**



“I have recently decided to give up my London based job as I found it too much to care for my relative, run my own home and cover a demanding role in London. Employers seem to be compassionate with employees in respect of childcare needs but not with employees who have responsibility for an elderly parent”.<sup>17</sup>

### **Female carer, working part-time**

Already 90% of working carers are aged 30 plus.<sup>18</sup> At this stage of their working career, many workers have had over 15 years of training, numerous years of experience and gained many skills. The peak age for unpaid caring is 45-64, arguably the time when many employees will have gained vital skills and knowledge and be a valuable asset to their workplace.

A survey by the Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development (CIPD) found that the median recruitment cost of filling a vacancy was £7,500 for senior managers/directors and £2,500 for other employees with maximum costs as much as £55,000 for senior appointments.<sup>19</sup> Turnover costs, which include vacancy cover, and training and induction costs were found to be on average just over £6,000.<sup>20</sup>

Therefore to retain carers' skills in the workplace by supporting them well, is to avoid this cost, both in terms of money and the loss of skills.

<sup>17</sup>Caring at a Distance: bridging the gap, Employers for Carers, Carers UK and Nomura, 2011.

<sup>18</sup>Reproduced from NIACE 'Who Cares? Supporting Young Adult Carers to Learn' 2011.

<sup>19</sup>CIPD Annual survey report 2011 Resourcing and talent planning.

<sup>20</sup>CIPD Annual survey report 2009 Recruitment, retention and turnover.

Further benefits of supporting working carers in your workforce include:

- **Attracting and retaining staff**

The Hyde Group, one of the UK's leading providers of affordable housing, have recognised the need to attract and retain carers in their workforce and the value of enabling them to stay at work. They have extended the option of requesting flexible working to all employees and also offer 'dependants leave' (five days a year) and special/carers leave (five days a year). Similarly, The Sefton Equalities Partnership, which involves the Council and a range of local public and voluntary sector organisations, has implemented a multi agency flexible working policy 'which takes into account the needs of carers and the benefits that flexible working can offer to employers in terms of recruitment and retention of skilled staff.'<sup>21</sup>

Taking on caring responsibilities can happen very suddenly. As a result of an accident or a sudden illness, employees can be faced with pressures at work at a time when they are under great emotional and physical stress. It is at this time, that a supportive employer can offer the time, space and practical guidance that can make the difference between retaining an employee and the person leaving employment altogether.

"Without the flexibility I would definitely be under a lot more stress and would probably have to be considering reducing or stopping work which I can't really afford to do – or possibly Dad would have to move into residential care".

**Programme Manager, working full-time<sup>21</sup>**

- **Reducing stress and thus sickness, and thereby increasing productivity**

Stress is a well documented cause of sickness within social care and therefore introducing measure to lessen the stress for working carers may well reduce sickness.

“I know that work will allow me time off for something important or immovable that dad needs me for, so I’m happy to make that time up and be flexible in return when work needs me to travel or work out of my usual hours. Without this flexibility I suppose I would have to consider calling in sick when an appointment like the one today comes up which can only happen on a Thursday between 10 and 2”.

**Project Manager, working full-time<sup>22</sup>**

“I’m a believer in give and take. If you are flexible with your employees, they’ll be flexible with you, for example, when extra cover is needed”.

**Owner, SME<sup>23</sup>**

<sup>22</sup>Skills for Care 2012.

<sup>23</sup>Employers for Carers, 2012.

## ■ Increasing staff morale and motivation

Recognition and support of working carers can improve an employees commitment and motivation to give 'their best'. In an effort to do this, Newcastle City Council, a member of the Employers for Carers forum, offers a wide range of flexible working arrangements to its employees and up to five days per year paid emergency leave. The Council also actively seeks information about employees' caring responsibilities and how it can support them; 22% of its workforce have declared their caring role. Lancashire County Council's Working Carers Scheme (see Section 5 'How can I retain the skills of my staff who are carers?') has also proved this point;

"My employer has provided me with flexible working options and are supportive to my needs which allow me to work around my mother".

**Working carer, Lancashire County Council**

## ■ Ensuring an empathetic and experienced workforce

Those who have caring responsibilities bring experience, empathy and many skills to the work place. Those who have had personal experience of caring are rarely left untouched by this experience and often add great value to social care organisations that are looking for those who show a commitment to the social care values of respect, choice and dignity. With personal insight often comes commitment and ideas on how to 'make things better' and this is a real asset to social care organisations.



## ■ Building a resilient workforce

As we have seen, it is increasingly likely that employees will combine caring with work. Therefore, it makes business sense to build the resilience of the workforce to deal with the changes ahead of it, as well as current ones. Sunderland City Council, a longstanding member of the Employers for Carers forum, has a number of established policies to support carers in its workforce. These include a flexible working hours scheme, paid carers leave and access to in-house counselling services. The Council is also continuing to develop, and raise awareness of, the support available for carers in its workforce, including looking at ways of creating an environment where people feel confident to come forward for support.

For social care employers, it is important to ‘walk the talk’ and embody the values that we hold for our services for our employees as well. Are staff who are being asked to support carers in their working life, not being supported themselves if they care for others in their private lives? For example, does your organisation need to consider whether managers and leaders are modelling the kinds of attitudes and behaviours towards members of staff who are also carers that match those that are expected of their own staff? Does the culture of your organisation (‘how things are done around here’) foster and support your own staff who are carers? Are your employees being expected to plan or deliver care with dignity and compassion when they themselves are not treated this way as carers by their own employers?

‘In the light of the current economic climate and demographic changes it is vitally important that we place a priority on retaining the skills and experience of valued employees within the workforce so that both businesses and the wider economy can benefit’.

**Recognised, Valued and Supported:  
Next steps for the Carers Strategy, HM Government, 2010.**

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