



An employer's guide to the benefits of developing a carer friendly workplace



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Introduction

Carers Leeds has been supporting carers across Leeds since 1996. After identifying a trend that many of these carers are balancing their caring role alongside paid work, we established a dedicated working carers service, supporting working carers in their place of employment. As part of that we have now established a successful working carers employers forum, where businesses come together to identify ways to support this growing area of need.

Who is a working carer?

A carer is anyone who cares, unpaid, for a friend or family member who due to illness, disability, mental health problems or substance misuse cannot cope without their support. A working carer is someone who has caring responsibilities, but is also in paid employment.

Around **1 in 9**¹ employees in the UK has caring responsibilities and research from 2019 suggests that this may be close to **1 in 7**.² This figure may still be an under representation of how many working carers there are, as many people do not identify as a carer.

Caring will impact all of us. **3 in 5** people will be carers at some point in their lives³ and **1 in 5** carers will give up employment to care.⁴



1 in 5 carers
will give up
work to care.

The reality of juggling work and care

“It’s really difficult being a carer and working, there is no spare time.”

For many carers, the workplace provides a sense of identity, independence and a break from their caring role, in addition to financial security. However, having caring responsibilities can make work difficult. Based on Carers Leeds experience working with carers at their workplace, the main issues working carers face include:

- * **Lack of time and flexibility** – Carers have to organise and attend appointments, many of which happen during working hours which makes them hard to attend.
- * **Lack of availability** - During working hours carers are ‘on call’ and need to be reachable for emergencies or contact from health and social care professionals.
- * **Priorities** – What are the carer’s priorities? Who or what comes first, the team, work, the person with care needs? How do carers juggle these roles?
- * **Distance** – There may be a significant distance between the carer’s home, work and the home of the person with care needs. Travelling and traffic can add another significant pressure.
- * **Guilt** – feeling guilty about making priority decisions in favour of work rather than the person with care needs and feeling guilty about needing flexibility.
- * **Conflict** – between the needs of the cared for person and the needs of the job.
- * **Stress** – tiredness and stress impact carers at work and employees are often reluctant to talk to managers about their caring responsibilities.



¹ UK Census in 2011

² Carers UK (2019) Juggling work and care

³ Carers UK (2001) It Could Be You –A report on the chances of becoming a carer; Carers UK (2019) Facts about carers

⁴ <https://carers.org/key-facts-about-carers-and-people-they-care>

Carers juggling work and care have reported having to miss out on promotions or job opportunities. Almost **1 in 4** (23%) say they have changed their working pattern to care.

The following case studies show the reality for working carers who are not working with an employer who has a carer friendly culture.

David, 52



David has a senior role in a law firm. He cares for his wife who has Parkinson's disease. Increasingly he is being called home to deal with unexpected difficulties and does not feel comfortable discussing his caring role with his manager or work colleagues.

He balances the situation through careful use of annual leave and flexi time. David's sole income supports his family so he is unable to consider leaving the company or reducing his hours. The stress of this arrangement is impacting on David's health and he has started to develop physical and mental symptoms of stress and his sickness absence from work has increased significantly.

His GP tells him that he needs to take sick leave from work to have a complete rest, but he does not have anyone who can help look after for his wife. So he continues to try and work as normal.

Sasha works full time in a Leeds call centre. She looks after her grandmother who has dementia and lives on her own around 40 miles from Sasha. A home care service visit her grandmother 3 times a day to provide meals and medication.

Sasha's grandmother is prone to leaving her house and wandering off, ending up lost and confused. To counter this Sasha has installed an alarm that contacts her whenever the front door opens unexpectedly. When the alarm is activated Sasha travels across from Leeds to find her grandmother.

Sasha has made her work aware of the situation and told them she may have to leave occasionally at short notice. Over the last 6 months there have been 3 occasions when the alarm has gone off and she has had to leave work immediately. Each time she explained the situation to her manager, but felt that her manager didn't believe her responsibilities or what caring involved.

On the third occasion Sasha was told that her absences were unauthorised and that any further absence would invoke the disciplinary procedure. Feeling that she had little choice and that she had to choose between her grandmother and her job, Sasha resigned.

Sasha, 30



Why support working carers?

Supporting working carers makes business sense. Research from Carers UK has highlighted how the loss of experienced employees results in expensive recruitment and retraining costs as well as a loss of expertise and knowledge.⁵

The following business, ethical and legal reasons show why it's important that employers recognise and understand the needs of working carers:

Business

Without considering the impact of an employee's personal circumstances, the employer risks losing talent and experience, and additional costs of staff replacement.

Working carers who are not supported are likely to be more stressed and less productive, with higher levels of absence.

Greater flexibility and support for employees with non work related issues raises engagement and commitment of the workforce.

Working carers gain knowledge and transferrable skills through their caring role such as time management, resilience, negotiation skills and emotional intelligence which benefit their workplace.

By being seen as a caring and flexible employer, the reputation of the company as an employer of choice is enhanced, therefore attracting new employees.

Ethical

Employers have a moral obligation to support their employees with challenges and difficulties outside of work which affect their wellbeing. This is usually reflected in the values and culture of the organisation.

Legal

Employers have a legal obligation to consider flexible working requests.⁶ Flexible working applies to all employees but is particularly relevant for carers.

There are obligations under the equality legislation relating to disability which can apply to carers.⁷

In summary, losing good employees unnecessarily is wasteful and costly.

1 in 3 working carers are anxious that caring might stop them working.⁵



"It can be difficult to get help and advice outside my working hours. And being a carer can be quite lonely."

⁵ Employers for Carers (2011) Caring at a Distance: Bridging the Gap

⁶ Flexible Working Regulations 2014

⁷ Equality Act 2010

The most effective ways of supporting working carers

When asked about what workplace support employees would see as most important if they had caring responsibilities they said: a supportive line manager/understanding employer, flexible working and the right to additional paid time off work to care.⁸

The following suggestions could provide meaningful support to working carers:

Supportive line manager/understanding employer

- Increase the understanding of working carer issues across your organisation. Offer training to increase awareness for managers and team members about working carers and the impact this role has on individuals at work.
- Provide an open opportunity for working carers to approach their line manager about their caring role and what they need from work. Some companies use a Carers Passport to facilitate this.
- Recognise transferrable skills working carers gain from their caring role. This will build confidence in both the line manager and the working carer that caring can have a positive impact on work.
- Consider making adjustments for working carers where appropriate. For example offer flexibility on rules about not using mobile phones during work time.

Flexible working

- 75% of employers report that flexible working has a positive impact on staff retention.⁹ Flexible working is becoming more common in workplaces and is linked to increasing engagement, raising productivity, improving moral, reducing turnover and creating equality.¹⁰
- Flexible working can often make the difference between carers being able to stay in work or not and can ensure they are able to access appointments without using all their annual leave.

Carers leave

- Many employers have a carers policy where they outline what extra flexibility or support a working carer can access, including carers leave. Carers leave is paid time off work for an agreed period.
- Most working carers say that they are using up their annual leave for caring and that has a negative effect on their wellbeing. Having extra paid time off for caring avoids this and can increase employee loyalty and productivity.
- The short term cost of carers leave should be balanced out with the long term benefits of supporting working carers.
- It is nationally recognised that a more carer friendly workplace is important and Carers UK are campaigning for the government to implement 5-10 days paid statutory care leave.¹¹

Providing a carer friendly workplace has a direct impact on employees being able to stay in work. For example changes to leave policies provide a positive outcome for both the employee and the employer. As one carer told us:

"This new carer policy has created an instant change for me. I was considering reducing my hours to help with my caring role and this new policy has stopped the need for this. There is now more flexibility for me to visit my dad in hospital and it stops the guilt it created in needing time off."

⁸ Carers UK (2019) Juggling work and care

⁹ CIPD: flexible working provision and update; Working Families (2018) Outstanding workplaces require exceptional thinking

¹⁰ Working Families (2018) Outstanding workplaces require exceptional thinking

¹¹ Carers UK tweet from 10/10/2019

What Carers Leeds offers to Leeds employers

Carers Leeds is working with over 20 employers across Leeds to develop the following exciting initiatives:



The working carers toolkit.

This is a reference source for employers containing advice and information, a self assessment, facts and figures, templates, examples of good practice and more.



Bespoke training and coaching

Training on carer related issues, tailored to your organisation. This includes managers training and working with you on ways to support your working carers.



1-2-1 workplace support for working carers

We provide confidential support, information and advice for working carers in your workplace. Our experienced carer support worker will give emotional support, help with benefits and access to carers assessments.



The Working Carer Employers Forum

This group of employers meet to exchange best practice and improve working carer practices across Leeds.

Feedback following 1-2-1 advice from a carer support worker:

“It worked well for me that I was able to make an appointment which suited my shift pattern and it was held in the office which made it very convenient. It is often difficult to work around agencies which work office hours.”

“Some days coming to work is a difficult balance between caring responsibilities at home and managing a full day at work. The advice I was given was about the support needed to allow me to stay at work and turned it all on its head!”

For further information or to access support for working carers in your workplace please contact Madlen Sayar on 0113 246 8338 or e-mail madlen.sayar@carersleeds.org.uk.



**Carers
Leeds**

Working together to support carers



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