



# UNPAID CARERS & EMPLOYMENT

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AUGUST 2022

Research for Carers Trust exploring the support needs of unpaid carers when searching for work, or balancing their caring role with paid work



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## **About Carers Trust**

Carers Trust works to transform the lives of unpaid carers. It partners with its network of local carer organisations to provide funding and support, deliver innovative and evidence-based programmes and raise awareness and influence policy. Carers Trust's vision is that unpaid carers are heard and valued, with access to support, advice and resources to enable them to live fulfilled lives.

We partner with our network of local carer organisations to provide funding and support, deliver innovative and evidence-based programmes, raise awareness and influence policy.

We are positioned centrally to support local carer organisations to deliver localised action, whilst also influencing the environment for unpaid carers UK-wide.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



**Wavehill undertook research on behalf of Carers Trust and the Working for Carers partnership to understand more about the support needs of unpaid carers when searching for work or balancing unpaid caring responsibilities alongside paid work. A carer is anyone who cares, unpaid, for a friend or family member who due to illness, disability, a mental health problem or an addiction cannot cope without their support.**

Working for Carers supports carers and former carers in London to move closer to employment. The project is delivered by Carers Trust in partnership with four Network Partners (local carers centres), and is jointly funded by the European Social Fund and The National Lottery Community Fund until June 2023.

This report was informed by a mixed-methods research approach. All fieldwork was conducted between April and June 2022, including online surveys and follow-up interviews and focus groups with carers and staff from carers centres.

The research identifies a range of barriers and challenges that need to be overcome in order to improve the support for carers who are looking to enter work or extend their hours, or who are already balancing paid work alongside their unpaid caring role. The findings in this report are of relevance to a wide range of stakeholders involved in provision of support for working carers, including carers organisations, government and policy makers and employers.

## Key Findings

**1. Most carers who are currently looking for work say concerns about household finances and the cost of living are a major reason why they want to find work.**

73% reported this as one of the key motivators for looking for work now.

**2. Carers seeking work have specific support needs.**

Over and above the need for general employability provision, such as job-searching skills, there is a high level of demand for support that is specific to carers. For example, 43% of carers who were seeking employment reported that they wanted advice on balancing work with their caring role, and 48% reported that they wanted help identifying employers with carer-friendly policies.

### **3. A lack of access to alternative care support is one of the key barriers to carers progressing into employment or balancing existing roles with their caring responsibilities.**

29% of carers say this barrier has made it difficult for them to access employment, education and training. Carers report a range of barriers to accessing alternative care, including the high cost of external care, reliability issues and local skills shortages.

### **4. Carers are concerned about stigma in the workplace.**

Many carers were worried about disclosing their caring responsibilities due to concerns that they would miss out on employment opportunities, and both carers and staff from carers centres gave examples of where carers had been rejected from jobs as employers did not believe they would prioritise their job role.

### **5. Financial challenges are a barrier to carers looking to enter work or looking to increase their hours.**

23% of carers report that financial concerns, such as the loss of Carer's Allowance or other benefits, are a barrier to entering employment, education or training.

### **6. The current Carer's Allowance provision appears to be restricting carers' choices when it comes to employment.**

Many carers were concerned about the working hours threshold and low level of entitlement provided by Carer's Allowance. The risk of losing Carer's Allowance was deterring some carers from increasing their hours, due to difficulties offsetting the loss of this benefit against an increase in work. A worker on the minimum wage would need to work an additional seven hours per week to match the corresponding loss in Carer's Allowance.

### **7. Access to flexible working is very important to carers looking to enter or sustain employment.**

85% of carers report that access to flexible working is very important to them when considering a potential employer. However, 61% of carers reported that finding work flexible enough to fit around their caring role had been a barrier to accessing the workplace.

### **8. Working carers are in need of more support, with more than 1 in 3 reporting that they are struggling to balance their caring role with their employment.**

Indeed, 30% of respondents reported that they 'feel overwhelmed by the situation and are struggling to balance the two', and 5% report that they are 'really struggling to cope'.

### **9. Carer's Leave appears to be well supported among carers, and may help carers to balance their caring responsibilities with employment.**

68% of carers said that access to Carer's Leave is 'very important' to them when they consider a potential employer.

## Recommendations

The barriers faced by carers when looking to enter or sustain employment highlight that more support is needed from carers organisations, government and policy makers, and employers.

This requires a more joined up approach which recognises that without improvements in employment, social care and welfare provision, carers' involvement in the workplace will remain limited. In this research there were a number of instances where carers highlighted a lack of join-up between employability support and social care support, resulting in carers "hitting a brick wall", for example where employment advisors were trying to help them move towards employment but were unable to resolve the key barrier to them accessing work: an absence of alternative care support.

Below we have set out a series of recommendations for carers organisations, employers and government that we think have the potential to turn the tide.

### Carers Organisations

- Collaborative conversations are needed between local carers centres, employability providers and employers to agree on an approach to ensure that carers' needs are being met by current provision. Examples like the Working for Carers programme could be used to provide an illustration of possible approaches that could be adopted by other areas. This needs to be backed by additional funding to ensure that carers' employability needs are supported as European funding is withdrawn.
- National organisations like Carers Trust could develop awareness campaigns that support employers to become more carer-friendly and help them to understand and address the barriers that carers face when balancing work and care.

**“It’s hard when you’ve been away from work for so long, I’ve lost all my confidence... It needs to be a slow and steady transition back into the workplace, some kind of mentoring, some kind of coaching for carers.”**  
**(Carer, Interviewee)**



## Employers

- Employers should seek to become accredited, e.g. as Carer Friendly <sup>(1)</sup> organisations, and put the necessary policies and processes in place to support carers in the workplace. Accreditation can help carers to identify carer-friendly employers.
- Employers should be clearer about the extent of flexibility within a role, so carers can avoid having to disclose their caring responsibilities or ask for adjustments at application where they may not want to do so.
- Employers should proactively offer roles that can be accessed on a flexible or job-sharing basis.
- Where possible, employers should offer roles that can be performed on an output basis rather than on a set working hours pattern to enable carers to participate in the workplace.
- Employers should provide carers with access to flexible working arrangements wherever possible.
- Employers should help carers to balance their roles by implementing flexible paid leave that enables carers to respond to ad-hoc or emergency caring needs, and they should ensure that carers are aware of the support available to them.
- Employers should ensure carers have access to support in the workplace that enables them to share challenges around balancing their roles, and ensures adjustments can be made that better support carers to stay in work.
- Employers should ensure these opportunities remain available to support continued access to work amongst carers.

**“There will be a multitude of skills... sat on the shelf because people like myself can't go to work because the job opportunity doesn't exist, because employers go no you can't do this, you don't fit with our hours.”**  
**(Carer, Interviewee)**



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(1) Carer Friendly is an organisation that aims to provide information to carers. Their accreditation helps to celebrate employers who support carers in the workplace. <https://carerfriendly.co.uk/accreditation/employers>

## Government and Policy Makers

- The Government should extend Carer's Allowance. At a minimum we would suggest the Government provides an uplift in Carer's Allowance, which would create parity in the level of entitlement received by carers in England with those in Scotland and Wales who currently receive around an additional £500 per year. In addition to this, provision across the UK should be uplifted to respond to the additional cost pressures carers are facing in the context of the increased cost of living, and increased costs that have emerged as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The Government should increase the working hours threshold to ensure that carers are not deterred from increasing their hours due to concerns over losing their entitlement. The Government should also consider removing the threshold, recognising that working carers are still providing care support alongside their employment, and this could play a key part in ensuring they are able to access respite and stay in work.
- The Government should review local care provision to ensure that local skills shortages are filled.
- The Government should review the funding provision for care to ensure that carers are not prevented from accessing employment due to affordability issues.
- The Government should bring forward the proposals to implement Carer's Leave which have currently been delayed.
- The Government should expand its current Carer's Leave proposal to ensure carers have access to paid leave, to prevent low take-up caused by financial concerns.
- The Government should implement a more joined up service that would enable employability advisors to work with carers to access care support when they are looking to move into employment.

Please visit [carers.org/workingforcarers](https://carers.org/workingforcarers) to download the full 'Unpaid Carers & Employment' report, and find out more about the Working for Carers project.

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