Thank you to everyone who has contributed to the development of this strategy. To help shape our thinking, we engaged extensively with unpaid carers, local carer organisations and other stakeholders. We also worked collaboratively with our staff team and Trustee Board.

Particular thanks go to Oaks Consultancy for its support throughout the entirety of this process and to Professor Saul Becker, Carers Trust Ambassador, for his leadership in the strategy’s development.
INTRODUCTION

Our new strategy has been developed in the context of a global pandemic that has turned the world of unpaid carers upside down and an economic crisis which is threatening to push millions into financial peril.

The plight of unpaid carers is nothing new, however. There are an estimated seven million people in the UK today who fulfil an unpaid caring role, around one million of whom are thought to be under the age of 18. This caring relationship does not differentiate between young and old. It occurs in every community and within every cultural and socio-economic setting. Any one of us has a 65% probability of becoming a carer for family members or close friends at some point in our adult lives.

Despite this, the life of an unpaid carer is often hidden and can be hard. Indeed, for some, their caring relationship requires a life-changing commitment that diminishes the quality of their own lives, health, participation, and opportunities. Many carers do not identify as such, as they regard their role as an essential aspect of family life. However, their contribution is both a private matter and a key issue for social policy. Indeed, without the contribution of unpaid carers, our health and social care system would collapse.

Unpaid carers are supported by a rich and varied network of local carer organisations. Some have their roots in regulated domiciliary care; some run vital community-orientated carer centres; and others offer specialist support services. All play a vital role in our society. Despite this, many are struggling with a range of issues as part of the wider challenges facing social care.

Our vision at Carers Trust is that unpaid carers are heard, valued and have access to the support, advice and resources they need to live a fulfilling life alongside caring.

There is still a long way to go to achieve this goal. Our 2022-2025 strategy is aimed at transforming the landscape for unpaid carers and the local carer organisations that support them.

We have a busy three years ahead.
OUR CONTEXT

Our 2022-2025 strategy builds on nearly 50 years of experience of supporting unpaid carers.

It also comes ten years on from the merger of the Princess Royal Trust for Carers and Crossroads Care, two innovative and respected charities which had reach into the heart of local communities. We have a great well of knowledge on which to draw. Years of partnership working, evidence collection and analysis, influence and innovation have helped Carers Trust – alongside its network of local carer organisations – make a phenomenal difference to the lives of unpaid carers.
WE LAUNCHED MAKING CARERS COUNT
OUR DEDICATED PROGRAMME TO INCREASE TAKE UP OF SUPPORT BY UNDER-REPRESENTED GROUPS

SUPPORTING 858,286 REGISTERED UNPAID CARERS

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH 124 NETWORK PARTNERS
COVERING 81% OF THE UK
AROUND ONE MILLION UNPAID CARERS ARE UNDER THE AGE OF 18

AROUND SEVEN MILLION UNPAID CARERS SUPPORT FAMILY, FRIENDS OR OTHERS

48% OF CARERS HAD TO GIVE UP WORK OR STUDY

86% OF UNPAID CARERS BELIEVE THEIR NEEDS HAVE BEEN IGNORED BY GOVERNMENTS

31% CUT BACK ON FOOD DUE TO FINANCIAL PRESSURES

>50% OF YOUNG CARERS SAID THEY HAD LITTLE OR NO SUPPORT AT SCHOOL
CONTEXT FOR LOCAL CARER ORGANISATIONS

OUR PARTNERS EMPLOY
4000 STAFF
AND WORK WITH
4000 VOLUNTEERS

COVID RECOVERY
FUNDRAISING/SUSTAINABILITY
CITED AS TWO KEY CHALLENGES

LOCAL CARER ORGANISATIONS SUPPORTED A
13% INCREASE IN CARERS
FROM MINORITY ETHNIC COMMUNITIES

68% INCREASE IN YOUNG ADULT CARERS

INTEGRATION WITH HEALTH SERVICES
AND A MOVE TO DIGITAL ARE CITED
AS THEIR TWO KEY OPPORTUNITIES
OUR AMBITIONS

Carers Trust, along with its network of local carer organisations, works UK-wide to transform the lives of unpaid carers.

Our roots are deep and our ambitions are high.

We will not stop until:
- Every carer has access to a high-quality local carer organisation.
- No carer is pushed into poverty or is financially disadvantaged by their caring role.
- All carers, regardless of circumstances or age, are able to enjoy a fulfilling life alongside their caring relationship.

Our work, as we pursue this ambition, is multi-faceted.

Collectively, we:
- Provide support for the essentials, whether that is through grants, respite care, advice, or day-to-day support.
- Deliver evidence-based and evidence-generating programmes which support unpaid carers to have a fulfilling life outside their caring relationship.
- Campaign and influence policy, giving unpaid carers - and the organisations that support them - a voice.

On top of this, we are and will always be a value for money organisation, all of our income ultimately supports our beneficiaries.

Over the course of the next three years, we have ambitious goals.

We will:
- Increase the number of unpaid carers who receive quality support through us to at least 1.5 million, and increase the take up of support from under-represented groups.
- Extend our local network to ensure 100% coverage of all UK local authorities.
- Deliver measurable benefit to unpaid carers and local carer organisations through our policy and campaigning work.
Carers Trust works to transform the lives of unpaid carers.

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.

OUR VALUES

**WE ARE TRUSTED**
We work as a trusted partner, collaborating and building genuine relationships with unpaid carers, local carer organisations and supporters to deliver the services we say we will. We behave with integrity, transparency and value everyone’s contribution to our work.

**WE ARE INCLUSIVE**
We recognise and set a value on listening to the diverse experiences of unpaid carers, local carer organisations and supporters. This helps us to meet the needs of unpaid carers in new ways and provides an open approach to collaboration which helps shape truly inclusive services.

**WE ARE COURAGEOUS**
We speak up, challenge and act when we see an opportunity or when there is an injustice. Together with unpaid carers, local carer organisations and supporters, we are bold and collaborative in creating effective change and lead the way in driving innovative ideas for improvement.
We recognise that delivery of our ambitions depends on having great systems and amazing staff. To accompany this strategy, Carers Trust is developing an organisational plan aimed at ensuring the charity is an exemplary employer, which values and supports diversity in all its aspects. In addition, we are ensuring we have robust underpinning systems and processes, operate ethically in all respects and have a focus on quality in everything we do.

We also recognise that both the public sector spending and charitable fundraising environments are likely to be challenging over the next three years. This is reflected in our plans.
PARTNER FOR GROWTH

Our impact for unpaid carers can only be as great as the power of our network. Partnerships will continue to be at the heart of our approach, with the scale of our ambition necessitating an increase in their breadth and depth. Over the next three years, we will actively seek to collaborate with organisations that share our values to deliver the best possible support and to amplify the social change we seek.

In developing this strategy, we knew that:

- There is a rising demand for unpaid carer support, with the numbers of unpaid carers increasing. In addition, some demographic groups are under-represented among those accessing support.

- The complexity of individual circumstances is increasing, both in terms of the needs of those being cared for and the situation facing unpaid carers themselves.

- Local carer organisations are facing a challenging financial backdrop, with many commissioners demanding more for less and with more competition for non-statutory funding.

- Unpaid carers are still being forced to navigate a bewilderingly fragmented national and local landscape of services, with local carer organisations playing an essential role in trying to join up services.

“We need to bring unity and collaboration to our collective efforts; we need a public facing show of unity.”

“Carers Trust provides an informal network that we value – we can call each other up and check things, see what other local carer organisations are doing, seek advice, etc. It would be a lonely existence without them.”

“Greater collaboration with local third sector organisations is needed to develop a coherent offer for people as they emerge from the pandemic.”
We will respond to this landscape by increasing the strength and reach of our network of local carer organisations so that:

ALL UNPAID CARERS WHO NEED SUPPORT CAN ACCESS HIGH QUALITY LOCAL SERVICES REGARDLESS OF WHERE THEY LIVE IN THE UK

THE DIVERSE NEEDS OF UNPAID CARERS CAN BE FULFILLED AT THE RIGHT TIMES AND IN THE RIGHT WAYS

To achieve this, we will:

• Extend our network of local carer organisations to cover all local authority areas in the UK.

• Continue our focus on strengthening the quality of our network to help local carer organisations deliver consistent, relevant and accessible services.

• Work to ensure that all our local carer organisation partners rate our support as ‘good’ or ‘excellent’.

• Review and evolve our broader partnerships approach to create a recognised movement of organisations that complements and amplifies our vision.

Our approach to working in partnership will involve:

• Helping local carer organisations actively collaborate and learn from each other.

• Developing more UK-wide products and services which will support more unpaid carers and augment the services of local carer organisations.

• Raising our brand profile and awareness across the sector through collaboration with organisations with shared values.
The knowledge and experience of our network of local carer organisations gives us an important and compelling source of insight into the day-to-day lives and concerns of unpaid carers across the UK. We work alongside local carer organisations across a wide range of services and programmes aimed at alleviating hardship and supporting positive social, educational and economic outcomes. Our programmes support unpaid carers of all ages and stages, including carers from under-represented groups. Our experience gives us a rich body of evidence from which to identify practices most likely to mitigate and reduce lifetime inequalities arising from caregiving.

In developing this strategy, we knew that:

- There are still crucial gaps in the knowledge landscape. Evidence and learning needs to be available for every stage of the unpaid carer journey. This should involve a greater level of best practice sharing across all four UK nations.
- The data collectively held by Carers Trust and its local partners has the potential to be the most comprehensive source of data on unpaid carers outside the Census.
- There is an eagerness shared by policymakers, public sector partners and local carer organisations for a more robust body of evidence about the caring experience and how this can be improved.
- Demonstrating positive carer outcomes and social return on investment is a crucial component of local carer organisations’ business cases to commissioners and funders.

“Carers Trust is great for sharing best practice and connecting regional and national conversations.”

“There is real value in being heard, both as an unpaid carer and a local carer organisation, so continuing these strategic conversations to develop the very best evidence available will be key for future success.”

“When we apply for funding, it helps that we are part of a big network – funders know who we are and trust what we are saying with regards to evidencing our need.”
In response to this landscape, we will:

**USE OUR PROGRAMMES, INSIGHTS AND COLLECTIVE IMPACT TO PROVIDE A SOURCE OF CONTEXTUALLY RICH EVIDENCE TO BE USED IN THE DESIGN AND DELIVERY OF OUR PROGRAMMES AND IN OUR INFLUENCING WORK**

**CONTINUALLY STRIVE FOR AMBITION AND DYNAMISM IN OUR ACTIONS, ENSURING OUR WORK MAKES A POSITIVE DIFFERENCE**

**To achieve this, we will:**

- Become a centre of expertise, showcasing programmatic evaluation, insights, and research on carers’ experiences, highlighting what makes the difference for unpaid carers and sharing this with others.

- Design and implement a UK programmes portfolio that delivers positive outcomes for unpaid carers at different ages and stages of their caring relationship.

- Develop and promote a shared approach to impact measurement to ensure a common understanding of our work and collective impact.

**Our approach to evidence and impact will involve:**

- A stronger evaluation and learning focus in all our partnerships and programmes.

- The continuous improvement of Carers Trust’s Impact Framework, and an Impact Champions pilot project to strengthen our impact measurement capability.

- New initiatives within our Young Carers Futures and Adult Carers in Focus programmes portfolio, including the relaunch of Triangle of Care.

- An updated Social Return on Investment Study of the Carers Trust network.

- Strategic evidence and learning partnerships with academia, health institutions, the wider social sector and beyond.
INFLUENCE FOR CHANGE

Unpaid carers in the UK have told us that they feel ignored by successive governments. Moreover, local carer organisations are too often working in highly challenging operating environments. That is why we are committed to speaking truth to power, engaging with key decision-makers and influencers across the UK to bring about the changes needed to transform the lives of unpaid carers.

We will proactively set out the challenges faced by unpaid carers and press for the policy changes and system improvements which will make a real difference. At all times, we will work to ensure the voices of unpaid carers are heard loud and clear, and that both unpaid carers and our network of local carer organisations are directly involved in our influencing work.

In developing this strategy, we knew that:

- Shaping UK-wide policy and devolved national policy across the UK is key to providing the foundations for long-term and sustainable developments in unpaid carer support.
- Even before the global pandemic and cost of living crisis, unpaid carers were struggling.
- The local operating environment for carer organisations is particularly challenging, whether in terms of the commissioning environment, increasing operating costs or engaging with evolving NHS and social care structures.
- We are in a unique position to make a difference, working alongside our network of local carer organisations and unpaid carers themselves.

“Carers Trust should be stronger in providing a connected national voice, for England, Scotland and Wales respectively, particularly with the local insight and engagement it possesses.”

“As a carer centre, it’s important that we can collectively network and provide ammunition to a national body who can use it to influence the key decision makers.”

“With their national awareness, Carers Trust should be the national voice that is made up of all local voices.”
In response to this landscape, we will:

**CONSOLIDATE CARERS TRUST AS THE ‘GO TO’ ORGANISATION ON POLICY RELATED TO UNPAID CARERS AND THE LOCAL CARER SUPPORT INFRASTRUCTURE ACROSS THE UK**

**SEEK SHORT-TERM IMPROVEMENTS AND LONG-TERM CHANGE AIMED AT TRANSFORMING OUTCOMES FOR UNPAID CARERS**

To achieve this, we will:

- Use the insight of local carer organisations and unpaid carers themselves to provide a clear national, regional and local voice on unpaid carers’ needs, always taking a solution-focused approach.

- Work collaboratively to influence policy decisions relating to the operating environment for local carer organisations to help ensure these are conducive to the delivery of quality services for unpaid carers.

Our approach to our influencing work will involve:

- Harnessing the experiences and relationships of our network of local carer organisations to increase our collective impact.

- Direct engagement with unpaid carers, helping them to speak truth to those with power.

- Collaborations with other organisations and third parties to make a more effective case for change.
Unpaid carers can be of all ages, demographics, and economic circumstances. However, over time, we have learnt that certain core needs remain constant – the need for financial support, short breaks, information and guidance, help with their own mental and physical health and social connectivity. What has changed over time, however, is the pace of technology – the shift to online living and support, with the consequent demands around skills and resources. This rapid pace of change poses a challenge and an opportunity, not only for unpaid carers but also for local carer organisations.

In developing this strategy, we knew that:

• The pandemic catalysed a move to online and blended delivery models for local carer organisations, supporting all ages and stages of caring. The rise of digital support will now be a permanent part of the support landscape.

• The emergence of online opportunities was a lifeline for many unpaid carers during lockdowns. However, many have not been able to access sufficient support to maximise the opportunities the digital age has to offer.

• The rapid pace of technological change is generating new opportunities all the time. It is more effective to harness these opportunities collectively, rather than as individual organisations.

“Innovation can come at a cost, so the risk with the limited resources we already have needs to be calculated appropriately.”

“The future of carer support is more digital. We had a meeting which highlighted that we are not in that world currently. We need strategic input and direction from Carers Trust on this.”

“Covid has opened up a great amount of opportunity for carers to access more things. Yet we still operate as though borough boundaries are virtual walls. We need to be better now at sharing resources and taking activities online.”
In response to this landscape, we will:

**DRIVE THE ACCESSIBILITY AND AVAILABILITY OF UNPAID CARER SERVICES THROUGH A DEDICATED FOCUS ON DIGITAL SOLUTIONS**

**POSITION AND PROMOTE THE CARERS TRUST NETWORK AS A KNOWN HUB OF INNOVATION**

To achieve this, we will:

- Utilise the insight and appetite for transformation across our network of local carer organisations to identify needs and test ideas.
- Share workable solutions across partners to embed sector-wide transformations.
- Maintain a focus on innovation partnerships to shape and drive local solutions at a UK-wide scale.

Our approach to our innovation work will involve:

- Engaging with unpaid carers and local carer organisations in trialling and testing our new ideas, especially for digital services which complement the work of local carer organisations in our network.
- Supporting all partners to adapt to new ways of working.
- Supporting unpaid carers’ digital skills development, particularly groups identified at greater risk of ‘digital exclusion’.
- Sharing innovation where appropriate with policymakers to drive longer term transformations.
"AS A CARER, YOU SACRIFICE YOUR CAREER, AS WELL AS YOUR OPPORTUNITIES, TO EARN A GOOD LIVING AND PROVIDE SECURITY FOR YOUR FAMILY. IT SHOULDN’T BE LIKE THIS."

Unpaid carers are the backbone of our caring society. Without their work supporting family members and friends, our health and social care services would not be able to function.

However, unpaid carers are under strain, as are the local carer organisations that support them.

HELP US HELP THEM.

To learn more contact: info@carers.org