WORKING FOR CARERS 2019–2022 EVALUATION
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Report 1: The Carers Cycle and Impact of Outreach, September 2020
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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About Carers Trust

Carers Trust is a major charity for, with and about carers. We work to improve support, services and recognition for anyone living with the challenges of caring, unpaid, for a family member or friend who is ill, frail, disabled or has mental health or addiction problems.

We do this with a UK wide network of quality assured independent partners and through the provision of grants to help carers get the extra help they need to live their own lives. With these locally based Network Partners we are able to support carers in their homes through the provision of replacement care, and in the community with information, advice, emotional support, hands on practical help and access to much needed breaks. We offer specialist services for carers of people of all ages and conditions and a range of individually tailored support and group activities.

Our vision is that unpaid carers count and can access the help they need to live their lives.
Working for Carers supports unpaid carers and former carers in London, who are aged 25 or over, to move closer to employment.

Through the project, carers can access free support, which includes one-to-one meetings with a dedicated advisor, access to workshops, and help with job searching and CVs.

Working for Carers is funded by the European Social Fund and The National Lottery Community Fund. The project commenced in 2016 and was extended in March 2019 to run until September 2022.

This Executive Summary provides an overview of the key findings from Working for Carers 2019–2022 Evaluation: Report 1: The Carers Cycle and Impact of Outreach, September 2020. That report provides an overview of carers’ journeys through the project, exploring their circumstances when they first enter the project, and what happens after they exit Working for Carers. It also provides an overview and evaluation of current outreach processes for recruiting carers to the project.

Who is Working for Carers supporting?

- The research findings suggest that most participants (87% of those completing a survey) are currently caring for someone. Most are looking after a child (46%) or an older relative (40%).
- At registration, 61% (of survey respondents) were caring for more than 31 hours per week and 28% more than 61 hours; 71% were caring for one person, and 27% were caring for two people.
- 46% were aged 51 or over at registration, and 8% were aged 61 or over.
- Most of the carers supported by Working for Carers had been out of the workplace for a long time when they first accessed support. More than half of survey respondents had been out of work for over five years, and 18% had been out of work for more than ten years.
- The majority (82%) were economically inactive (not actively job-searching) when they registered with the project; of those who were unemployed (actively job-searching), most (64%) were long-term unemployed (12 months or more).

What support do carers need?

The research identified the main support needs that carers present when they access Working for Carers:

- Difficulty accessing flexible work opportunities that fit around the caring role.
- Low confidence, especially for those out of the workplace for long periods of time.
- Poor mental health and wellbeing. Project delivery staff reported that it was often difficult for carers to access mental health support through local NHS and community services.
- Support with employability skills, including how to develop CVs and apply for jobs.
- Financial difficulties, including issues related to benefit entitlements.
How did Working for Carers support participants?

- A survey conducted with former participants (77 respondents) found that Working for Carers provided:
  - Positive contribution to their personal/mental health.
  - Improved confidence.
  - Improved management of their own wellbeing.
  - Improved social skills.
  - Help to build positive relationships.
  - Opportunities for time to themselves.

- All survey respondents who exited into employment or education/training, and 84% who exited for another reason, said Working for Carers prepared them to job-search independently.

- 69% said they had sustained employment for 26 out of 32 weeks since exiting the project.

Emerging themes

- Carers need support with the process of finding employment.

- Lack of digital skills is a barrier to finding work/accessing support from Working for Carers. Participants felt that they could not compete with more experienced applicants, as time out of the workplace meant they had lost out on opportunities to develop and hone digital skills.

- Mental health and emotional support needs are common.

- Referrals are mostly made within local carer centres, but participants are also signposted to external support, for example counselling, benefits advice and housing issues.

- Working for Carers may have more of a niche supporting older carers to return to the workplace.

Emerging recommendations

The evaluation has identified areas to consider for future delivery of employability support for carers:

- Develop a strategy to reach those outside the ‘carer bubble’ (not already in touch with carer support services). This may involve seeking specialist advice on how to market the project.

- Engage with schools, organisations providing end of life care/support, and organisations providing benefits advice, to reach carers and former carers who may benefit from the project.

- Work with male carers to test the Working for Carers brand and increase engagement. Male carers are underrepresented among participants in Working for Carers, accounting for less than one in five participants.
• Consider opportunities to embed more immediate mental health support within Working for Carers, for example the involvement of trained mental health practitioners or partnership with local NHS and community services.

• In-work support may help carers sustain outcomes. This could be provided by Working for Carers or other agencies.

• Consideration is needed on how to improve referrals to specialist support when there is variability of support offered by carer services and externally, for example mental health provision.

**Recommendations for further research**

The evaluation also identified some gaps in data collected by the project:

• The referral source is unknown for almost one third of carers who register with the project.

• What happens after participants exit the project:
  
  • Wavehill has recommended that the project reviews its existing monitoring forms to add additional questions to ascertain what happens to carers who don’t stay in employment, and to increase response rates.
  
  • One in three carers who exit the project do not enter education, training, employment or job searching. At the moment, relatively little is known about why these carers leave the project, and as such we would encourage Working for Carers to explore opportunities to close this knowledge gap.