



# WORKING FOR CARERS 2019–2022 EVALUATION

Report 2: Interim Evaluation Findings  
Executive Summary  
February 2021



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## Published by

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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 unpaid carers get the extra help they need to live their own lives. With these locally based Network Partners we are able to support unpaid 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 unpaid 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.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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, unpaid carers can access free support, which includes provision such as 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 is led by Carers Trust and delivered across all London boroughs by four Carers Trust Network Partners (hubs): Camden Carers Service; Carers Lewisham; Harrow Carers; and Redbridge Carers Support Service. The project commenced in October 2016 and is funded to run until September 2022.

This report presents interim evaluation findings, exploring the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the delivery of the project, in particular its influence on recruitment and support activities. The key findings are summarised below. Read the full report on [Carers.org/resources/all-resources](https://www.carers.org/resources/all-resources).

## Key findings

- Recent research has pointed to a considerable increase in the number of unpaid carers as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has placed considerable pressure on unpaid carers who report that they are providing even more care than six months ago. Carers are struggling to continue caring and are reporting high levels of fatigue and stress. The ongoing pressures facing unpaid carers throughout the pandemic are likely to have influenced their ability or motivation to consider moving into employment.
- Delivery of the project has switched from face-to-face sessions to online support due to the pandemic. While this switch has presented some technical challenges, the ability to engage participants through online sessions has provided several logistical benefits, most notably reducing travel time for Employment Personal Advisors and thus increasing their capacity to engage and support unpaid carers. The wider challenge associated with the switch to digital is in ensuring equality of access. Given that a lack of digital skills is a key concern among many participants supported by the project, there is a risk that the switch to online delivery may exclude many unpaid carers.
- The most recent monitoring data continues to show that the majority of unpaid carers accessing Working for Carers are classed as economically inactive when they enter the project. Of those unpaid carers who were unemployed on entry, a large proportion are classed as long-term unemployed. The project's monitoring data demonstrates a gradual reduction in the number of participants stating that they were unemployed and a gradual year on year increase in the proportion stating that they were economically inactive since 2017.



- While a change in caring responsibilities is commonly a trigger for an unpaid carer to consider moving into employment, evidence from the participant survey indicates that 91% reported that they were a current carer when they first accessed Working for Carers. This highlights some of the complexities and challenges facing unpaid carers who are having to balance their ongoing care responsibilities with potential future work or job searching commitments.
- Finding job opportunities that fit around their caring role, such as flexible and part-time work, continues to be the most common barrier to accessing work, training or education reported by unpaid carers.
- A majority of unpaid carers are referred into Working for Carers by a Carers Trust Network Partner. Analysis of key referral sources by year of delivery suggests that the project has become more reliant on referral from Network Partners, rising from 69% in 2017 to 90% in 2020.
- Very few unpaid carers came into contact with Working for Carers through social media, online or had accessed the project having seen a leaflet, poster or article. This suggests that the most effective mechanism for promoting the project and generating referrals is through the development and management of strong referral networks.
- All hub partners continue to experience challenges recruiting male carers to the project. However, there are positive examples of efforts to identify and engage hidden carers and underrepresented groups such as male carers, including establishing links with Men's Sheds and parent groups.
- The process of onboarding participants is challenging and potentially counterproductive to the aims of the project. Feedback indicated that funders' compliance requirements take up capacity which would be otherwise directed towards other aspects of project delivery such as networking with partners or frontline support to unpaid carers. Although the need to demonstrate eligibility of participants was understood, in practice the process presents a barrier for many unpaid carers and gives the impression of a service that is impersonal and funder-led as opposed to focusing on the needs of the unpaid carer.
- While key support needs of unpaid carers around employability skills and building confidence remain, the impact of the pandemic has led to a need for greater emotional support and help in addressing some of the wider and immediate challenges facing unpaid carers. This is consistent with the findings of the most recent Building Better Opportunities programme evaluation report **(1)**.
- Around three in five carers who exit the project move into education, training, employment, or job searching. The remaining two in five exited for another reason and relatively little is known about why these unpaid carers leave the project.
- As around one third (27%) of the unpaid carers who are supported by the Working for Carers project exit into employment, the growing body of research around supporting working carers, such as working with the employer to ensure that they have carer friendly policies, highlights a potential gap in current support.

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**(1)** Ecorys (2020), *Building Better Opportunities Evaluation, Annual Report 2020* (Ecorys).



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