



WORKING FOR CARERS 2019-2022 EVALUATION

REPORT 3: FINAL EVALUATION
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

FEBRUARY 2022

**CARERS
TRUST**



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 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 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 jointly funded by the European Social Fund and The National Lottery Community Fund, as part of the Building Better Opportunities programme. The project commenced in 2016 and was originally funded for three years. The project has been extended twice, and is now funded until June 2023.

The full report presents the final evaluation findings, exploring the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the delivery of the project and outlining a set of principles that those interested in carers employability can replicate. The key findings are summarised below.

Key Findings

Impact of Covid-19:

- Recent research has pointed to a large increase in the number of unpaid carers as a result of the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic. The pandemic has placed considerable pressure on carers who report to be 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 is 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. Whilst 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 (EPAs), and thus increasing their capacity to engage and support carers. The wider challenge associated with the switch to digital is in ensuring equity 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 carers.

- One of the consequences of the pandemic has been a reduction in the number of carers registering with the project. This is consistent with the wider Building Better Opportunities programme which experienced a significant reduction in referrals and engagement.
- Whilst key support needs of 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 carers. This is consistent with the evaluation findings of the wider Building Better Opportunities programme and the Government's Work and Health programme.

“It’s a very important project, to have dedicated money for carers, to support our employment, our health and mental health.”

(Carer)



Who is supported by Working for Carers?

- The most recent monitoring data continues to show that the majority of carers accessing Working for Carers are classed as economically inactive when they enter the project. When compared with the wider Building Better Opportunities programme, Working for Carers has targets to engage a significantly higher proportion of economically inactive participants. Such a high proportion of economically inactive participants is likely to require a greater focus on pre-employability support to enable participants to make an informed decision as to whether they wish to consider actively seeking employment.
- Of those 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.
- Whilst a change in caring responsibilities is commonly a trigger for a 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 carers who are having to balance their ongoing care responsibilities with potential future work or job searching commitments.
- All Hubs have experienced 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.

Barriers to employment:

- 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 carers, followed by low confidence, and having skills that are not up to date.

“ Everything is on me and it’s difficult - you feel devalued, and you just get lower. Doors are opening for me now.”

(Carer)



Project referrals and registrations:

- Most carers are referred into Working for Carers by a Carers Trust Network Partner (carers centre). Analysis of key referral sources by year of delivery suggests that the project has become more reliant on referrals from Network Partners between 2017 and 2021. Conversely, referrals from statutory partners and Voluntary & Community Sector (VCS) partners have declined over this period.
- Few carers came into contact with the project through social media or other online channels, or 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. However, the ability to actively manage referral networks across 33 London Boroughs, and a diverse range of potential referral partners, requires dedicated capacity beyond what has been available to the project. This provides a learning point with regards to the design of future support programmes.
- Working for Carers is unique as it focuses specifically on supporting unpaid carers. The approach is by design ‘carer friendly’ and is therefore likely to appeal to carers seeking to move back into employment when compared to programmes with broader eligibility criteria. However, the lack of coordination across employability programmes, and perceived competition to attract and retain participants, has meant that carers have not been signposted to Working for Carers by other providers.
- The process of onboarding participants is challenging and potentially counterproductive to the aims of the project. Feedback indicated that compliance takes up capacity which would be otherwise directed towards other aspects of project delivery such as networking with partners or frontline support to carers. Although the need to demonstrate eligibility of participants was understood, in practice the process presents a barrier for many carers and gives the impression of a service that is impersonal and funder-led, as opposed to focusing on the needs of the carer.

“The strengths are definitely the individual approach... the team understand carers and how that can impact on your ability to work and how flexible you need work to be.”

(Referral Partner)



Progress to date:

- Up to Quarter 4, 2021 (end of December 2021), the project has supported 85% of its revised minimum target of participants, which equates to 60% of the original overall target. Given the delivery trajectory of the project, it is projected that the funder targets will be broadly reached for most outputs, except for engaging men and engaging unemployed unpaid carers.
- 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 carers leave the project.
- The proportion of participants moving into employment reached its highest level in 2021 at 30%, perhaps indicating a rebound as the UK emerges from the pandemic. Overall, the progression into employment rate for the project of 27% is slightly under the Building Better Opportunities programme average of 35% but this is influenced by the higher proportion of economically inactive participants in the Working for Carers programme.
- As around one third of the of the carers who are supported by Working for Carers 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.

“I felt empowered, mentally stronger, more confident.”

(Carer)



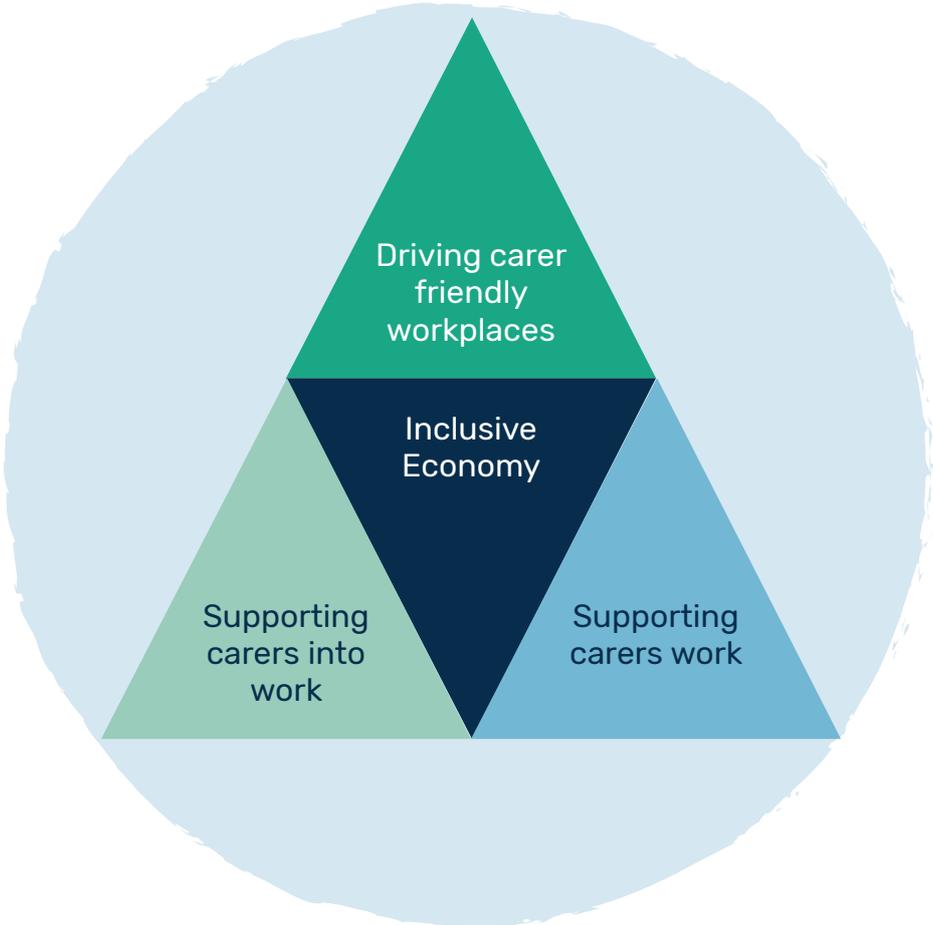
Recommendations for future support:

- The impact of Covid-19, allied to the learning from Working for Carers, demonstrates a need to consider a more holistic approach to supporting carers to move into and sustain employment. Broadly speaking the design of any future programme should consider addressing four main areas: encouraging economically active carers to transition into actively seeking work; supporting unemployed carers to progress into work; supporting working carers to stay in work; and encouraging employers to adopt carer friendly policies.

“I’ve been out of work a long time and wanted to see what my options were”.

(Carer)

Holistic model of supporting carers into work



“Wider work is needed around engaging employers and advocacy work around carer rights.”

(Carers Trust Network Partner)

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