

# Who Cares Wins:

The Social and Business Benefits  
of Supporting Working Carers

## Executive Summary



**The UK has over 3 million working carers**

Their employers can provide

**effective support for carers at work**

and achieve

**significant business benefits**

by using

**a flexible working approach**

This approach

- attracts and retains staff
- reduces stress
- increases productivity
- reduces sick leave
- improves service delivery
- produces cost savings
- improves people management



## Who Cares Wins – about the study:

This study has explored how three very different employers have created a supportive environment at work for carers. Carers look after family, partners or friends in need of help because they are ill, frail or disabled. The care they provide is unpaid.

All three were members of *Employers for Carers*, a special interest group brought together by the ACE National partnership led by Carers UK. In each organisation, we surveyed employees about their caring responsibilities, interviewed staff who were carers, reviewed documentary evidence, and spoke with managers in senior, strategic positions and line managerial roles. These case studies enabled us to assess what it is like to be employees, supervisors and managers in these organisations, and to gain insight into their organisational cultures and processes.

The study also involved new statistical work on the 2001 Census, using specially commissioned data. This confirmed how ubiquitous caring is – over 3 million people were combining work and care on Census day 2001. At some time in life, caring is a normal and everyday thing to do for most of us – both men and women, and people of all ethnicities and ages. Across the lifecourse, caring for others is likely to happen, at some point, to most of us.

Our research shows that employers can deliver effective support for carers, and that far from compromising their business objectives, providing the flexible approach which carers need brings impressive business gains.

## Key findings from our statistical analysis:

- Carers are found across all sectors of society and in all sections of the workforce
- Combining work and care is most likely to occur in people's 40s and 50s, but can increasingly arise at any age
- There is some clustering of working carers in lower level jobs
- Working carers are less well qualified than other employees, and may need extra support through education and skills policies
- Some carers pay a 'poor health' penalty for combining work and care. Over time this may compromise both their caring and their employment roles
- High levels of caring among some ethnic minority groups, especially at younger ages, suggest these carers face additional barriers in accessing paid employment and career opportunities



## Key findings from our employer case studies:

- All employers, large and small, public and private, can provide a supportive environment for carers
- Many carers want to combine paid work and care
- Flexible working benefits carers by addressing their individual situation, rather than stereotyping them as problem employees. Flexible working, open to all, reduces resentment about 'preferential treatment'
- Paid leave (for emergency or scheduled caring) can reduce staff turnover and absence, cutting employment costs. It is rarely abused and increases individuals' loyalty and commitment
- Implementation of flexible working and carers' policies depends on the culture of the organisation; managers play a key role in upholding organisational commitments to diversity and inclusion, and need training and support in responding to carers
- In large organisations, creating a supportive environment for carers requires the endorsement of top-level management, input from human resources professionals, and some specialist support structures
- In small firms/teams, multi-skilling, good communication and team working provide effective cover if carers have unexpected emergencies
- Irrespective of organisational size, success depends on trust and on all employees taking responsibility for managing their workloads, individually and in teams

## Key learning relevant to other employers seeking to support carers:

- **Link carers' needs to a wider diversity agenda.** Make an organisational commitment to accommodate and welcome a diversity of employees' circumstances
- **Train and support your managers.** They are the key to equitable and effective implementation of your policies and practices in support of carers
- **Develop networks within your organisation, including using modern technology.** This builds organisational expertise about carers; self-help and co-worker support can be encouraged by creating networks and on-line communities



## A win-win for employers:

'Stress related absence has been reduced by 26% through flexible working alone'

'The average increase in productivity for flexible workers is 21% – worth at least £5-6 million on the company bottom line'

'Retaining carers through support or special leave arrangements represents a saving to the company of about £1 million a year'

'The cost of recruiting is incomparable to the cost of 2-3 days emergency leave'

## A win-win for working carers:

'I personally go that extra mile for them because I appreciate what they are doing for me'

'I think management realise that they are getting better production from us... we all work better when we are here'

'It makes for a happier workforce and... people can come to work with an easy mind'

'I worked in a section where only one person worked a conventional five day week... the advice line was manned from 6am – 10pm and [customers] were amazed that they got a real person'

In May 2005, Carers UK and the ACE National partnership commenced a two-year programme of work funded by the ESF Equal Community Initiative Programme. This work focuses on improving social care services which enable carers to work. With the active engagement of statutory, voluntary and private sector agencies, this partnership is developing new ways of meeting carers' needs, and exploring what carers themselves want to help them in combining caring and employment. Research activities will be carried out by Professor Sue Yeandle's team at Leeds University and Peter Mathias and his colleagues at Bridge Research and Development.

### Finding out more

To obtain the report or for more information on ACE National contact:

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