

Redressing the balance: inclusion, competitiveness and choice

A report on barriers and bridges for carers in employment

Report summary

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Action for Carers and Employment (ACE National)

ACE National is a three year project funded by the ESF Equal programme from the European Commission. The project brings together, for the first time in a single partnership, key players with an interest in:

- * Employment;
- * Service provision;
- * Business;
- * The care sector;
- * Policy development and;
- * Trades unions.

The objective of the initiative is to promote carers' participation in the labour market by working with the partners nationally and locally in six sites including, Kirklees, London, Sunderland, Surrey, Anglesey in North Wales and Carmarthenshire in South Wales.

The four main areas being developed and tested by ACE nationally and locally include:

- * Pre-vocational training for carers developed by City and Guilds;
- * The development of targeted guidance and work-related advice for carers;
- * The development of flexible and good quality substitute care services;
- * The promotion of flexible working practices to support carers in employment.

In order to underpin the work of ACE National, this report was commissioned to provide a policy framework, on which the ACE partnership could build and evaluate its work.

The report looks at the current body of evidence on carers and work, examines the barriers to employment for carers and suggests ways in which bridges could be built to help carers back towards paid work.

The prevalence of caring and combining paid work with care

Around four million carers combine work and care, often part-time to allow them to combine paid work and caring.¹ Caring can result in reduced earnings, leading to a possible 'carer pay gap' of 12%.² Many carers may not be able to work as flexibly as they would like, or worry about combining both roles. As the caring becomes more substantial - more than 20 hours a week - it becomes more difficult to sustain work. Half of the carers of working age providing over 20 hours of care per week do not work; around 650,000 people.³ In one survey, around six out of ten carers had given up work in order to provide care.⁴ Even after caring has ceased, former carers encounter problems getting work.

Carers within other disadvantaged groups

Carers can be found within other disadvantaged groups including:

- * Women;
- * Ethnic minority communities;
- * People in poor health;
- * Older people;
- * People living on low incomes;
- * People living in rural or deprived areas.

They may not identify themselves as a 'carer' but simply providing help to a family member. As a result they are often hidden from mainstream agencies and may not come to the

attention of support services until they have already given up work.

Barriers to working

This study concentrates on three types of barriers to work, individual, systems and labour market barriers. One or all of these barriers can affect carers.

Individual barriers - Carers can often be affected by lack of skills and confidence, especially if they have spent years out work and have been isolated in the home. Others may have additional barriers like poor health or age.

Systems barriers - Carers can be disadvantaged by lack of information and may have problems getting alternative care from support services when they work. They face financial disincentives to work and training and uncertainty - particularly for part time work. Their needs may also not be recognised by employment services.

Labour market barriers - Employers do not always understand the needs of carer employees or offer appropriate flexible working practices. In some areas there may be few suitable jobs available, compounded by difficulty with transport.

How barriers could affect 'distance' from the labour market

The relative importance of each of these groups of barriers to work may also vary by how close a carer is to the labour market. The different stages are:

- * Economically inactive;
- * Desire for work;
- * Job search;
- * Securing employment.

Some economically inactive carers need assistance with basic skills, others at the job search stage may need help with the time and costs of finding a suitable job, including matching with an employer. Carers who have not worked for some time may have a long and complicated journey back into work. Carers tend to apply for jobs when they feel absolutely ready. Schemes need to avoid carers losing motivation and moving further away from work, and should consider developing a focus on

'distance travelled' rather than immediate job outcomes.

Building bridges to work

Depending on the particular barriers identified, building bridges may be a combination of tackling individual issues like skills and training, ensuring that employment and support systems develop services for carers, and focusing on the needs of local employers and transport. Partnerships between Carers UK and a variety of other organisations, including Government departments and employers, need to operate at a variety of levels, including at the strategic and operational levels, in order to address the range of barriers identified.

Barriers and bridges to recruiting and retaining carers

There are benefits to employers being more flexible, such as reduced costs of recruitment and turnover. There are also different issues for carers in recruitment and retention, and an emphasis on sustainability once in a job could also lead to career advancement.

A focus on recruitment needs to include carers who want to combine work and caring, as well as former carers. This includes:

- * Assistance for carers in developing their skills and compiling a CV;
- * Encouraging employers to adopt flexible recruitment practices;
- * Recognising caring skills as transferable to specific jobs.

Retention could be particularly important for older carers and needs to include those who are in work when caring begins, as well as those who return to work when they still have caring responsibilities. The latter group may need continuing support after the transition into work to cover emergency support in the event of problems with alternative care and transport, or mediation with the employer. The key to retention is employer awareness and flexibility.

Working carers and the national economy

The Government's emphasis on improving basic skills to help people get into and progress in jobs is relevant to carers, some of

whom have under-used skills that are scarce, such as teaching. Others need assistance to gain basic skills or qualifications. Enabling more carers to combine work and caring, or to return to work after a period of caring, could help the Government meet its targets for productivity and a skilled economy.

The Government's approach

Government policies have developed across a range of areas, such as raising employment levels, having a better work-life balance, making work pay, and tackling social exclusion. A focus on carers can help the Government meet its objectives.

Research gaps and the ACE project

Because carers have tended to be invisible to mainstream agencies, there is little information about what can trigger a return to work or moving further towards it. We also know little about the transitions and episodes of caring. The project aims to tackle both of these research gaps and to test out ways which help carers make sustained moves towards the labour market, as well as entering it.

References

- 1 Calculated on the basis of Labour Force Survey statistics from the Office of National Statistics, and proportions of carers in work from Maher J and Green H, 2002, 'Carers 2000', Office of National Statistics, The Stationery Office
- 2 Madden D and Walker I, 1999, 'Labour Supply, Health and Caring: evidence from the UK', University of Dublin
- 3 Maher and Green, *op cit*
- 4 Carers National Association, 2000, 'Caring on the Breadline: the financial implications of caring', Carers National Association (now Carers UK)



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Carers look after family, partners or friends in need of help because they are ill, frail or have a disability. The care they provide is unpaid

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