

Taking this on board can help staff retention, reduce absenteeism and increase morale and productivity; not to mention the fact that the time and cost needed to recruit new staff is huge compared to that of a couple of days emergency leave.

SO HOW MIGHT WE HELP?

If you are a carer, then we may be able to support you in meetings with your employer or to offer advice around your rights; benefits; and training.

If you are an employer, then don't think that you necessarily need to take on all the implications of supporting carers on your own. We could maybe run a support group or advice and information session in your workplace, or support individual carers whose problems may not be work related but nonetheless are impacting on their ability to work to their full potential.

USEFUL WEBSITES

A number of possible useful websites are listed below but we believe that whether you are a carer or employer the individual needs are specific to each case and would welcome the opportunity to discuss matters in more detail on a one-to-one basis.

www.carersuk.org/Newsandcampaigns/makeWORKwork

www.carersuk.org/Employersforcarers/Thebusinesscase

www.direct.gov.uk/en/CaringForSomeone/CarersAndEmployment/index.htm

www.carers.org/carers-and-employment,100,TP.html

www.helpthehospices.org.uk/our-services/developing-practice/carers/publications/flexible-working/



Helping Carers Care

JUGGLING WORK AND CARE

Information for carers who are working or wanting to return to work, and for employers

Trying to combine employment with caring responsibilities for a sick, elderly or disabled relative is not just extremely difficult, but for many carers it is an impossibility.

Nevertheless it should be every carer's right to the option to choose to work, yet despite recent government legislation and policy, in so many cases there is such a long way to go before that might ever become a reality.

As the local carer support organisation we aim to work with employers, the local authority and other statutory bodies, training providers and carers themselves, to develop local support and services for working carers: both collectively and on an individual case basis.

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BACKGROUND

Working carers represent 1 in every 7 employees in the UK workforce, and research has also shown that many of the 1.5 million carers of working age who are not in employment would like to consider returning to work.

For some time now legislation has provided carers the right to a carer's assessment from the local authority which should consider the carer's work situation and preferences, when looking at their support needs. The Work and Families Act 2006 offered carers the right to request flexible working arrangements from their employer, whilst the National Carers Strategy published in June 2008 allocated considerable funding for the creation of Care Partnership Managers within Jobcentre Plus to assist carers back into the employment market.

CARERS

Already working?

You have possibly already decided in your own mind whether to tell your employer and colleagues about your caring responsibilities.

Each situation is different, and you are the person best-placed to make that decision, but employers cannot try and make adjustments, and are quite likely to come to the wrong conclusion if you have to repeatedly make excuses and take time off. Similarly workmates can be very supportive if they are aware, but may feel let down if your unexplained absence affects the team.

A responsible employer should investigate how they may help, and carers now have the legal right to submit a request for flexible working. However there is no right to that request being approved, and carers should appreciate that it could represent a permanent change to their contract of employment.

Thinking of giving up work?

If you are at such a point that you can see no alternative but to give up work, then talking to your employer is perhaps even more important. It is vital that you investigate all avenues before getting to the point of no return. Whilst you may anticipate the likely reaction from your employer if you speak about your dilemma, you will never know unless you do so. The company may be more flexible than you imagine or there may be developments in the pipeline which could offer other options that you cannot see.

Flexible hours, part-time working or maybe a short break to help sort things out could all be possibilities to investigate before you hand in your notice.

Returning to Work?

You may be considering this because of a change in your caring situation or simply because of financial necessity. Whatever the scenario it's possible that having been out of the job market, you are unsure how to go about things or how it might affect any benefits you currently receive. We can advise on the implications as regards Carers Allowance and may be able to direct you to different training opportunities which could help and even highlight the skills you've gained as a carer that you just take for granted.

Government proposals for dedicated staff within Jobcentre Plus to help carers have yet to materialise but hopefully this will happen in the near future and we will then be able to find support to help you in your job search.

EMPLOYERS

We have already forged links with some of the larger public sector employers in the area to investigate the development of workplace carer networks. Whilst we realise that the nature of your business and size of your workforce will affect how flexible you are able to be, we do believe that all employers can provide a supportive environment for carers in one way or another.