

We're finding out what helps carers to stay in their job or get a new one

Employment can mean greater emotional well-being, improved social life, financial benefits and a break from caring responsibilities. Our study aims to show what support services are doing and what works best.

Jill (not her real name) looks after her disabled son. He is at school during the day, but she still needs to be available at a moment's notice because a health problem or other crisis might mean she is called to the school suddenly.

Nevertheless, Jill has a job, in a veterinary practice for several hours a week. It is a chance to be independent and briefly let go of her role as a carer. Jill's needs are typical of many carers – they often need an employer to be understanding and local. They may also need alternative care arrangements available so they can work – either paid care or support from family and friends. Additionally carers need to know their employment rights – some, for example, do not know about their right to request flexible working – as well as their entitlements to benefits.

These issues have emerged in a study undertaken by the Institute for Employment Studies as part of the SSCR's research programme. It's looking into good social care practice to improve job prospects for carers. 'The issues are diverse', explains Alice Sinclair, a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute. 'Sometimes, it might be as basic as someone actually identifying themselves

'Just having someone who is willing to spend time with me looking at the issues is a massive help.'

Former university lecturer and full-time carer

as a carer. They might not use that label, which can make it difficult to have a conversation about rights and how to seek support.'

Circumstances vary, explains Ms Sinclair. 'A carer may have left a job because they are caring, for example, for an elderly parent with early dementia. Or, maybe, they are caring for their spouse and struggling to combine that with working. Or they may have left work some time ago because of caring responsibilities. Being out of work can be difficult – as well as the financial benefits, there are social benefits of work, from being with colleagues and having a break from caring responsibilities.'

The research aimed to look at six projects from the local authority and voluntary sectors in different regions that support carers' employment, to collate learning and interview carers about their experiences. However, local authority



cutbacks made it difficult to survey council provision, so the projects are largely in the voluntary sector.

'All these organisations are working with carers who are in and out of work,' explains Ms Sinclair. 'Some support is to keep people in work, while some is getting carers "job ready", building self-esteem and confidence. In some cases, a positive outcome might be for someone to start doing voluntary work. Sometimes it's too big a leap to go from not being employed at all to straight into a job.'

The team has found diverse interventions. Some are well-funded, offering a range of help, including one-to-one support for carers. Sometimes, an organisation will case-manage a carer and source support elsewhere. One programme had a fund for vocational training. It paid, for example, for a chiropody course for one client. But money might also go on driving

lessons. As well as identifying good practice, the team is comparing the case studies to assess their impact and, where evidence allows, cost effectiveness.

Sometimes, says Ms Sinclair, the support really helps, even if it does not lead to a job: 'A carer explained that just having someone willing to spend time looking at these issues is a massive help. Even if he does not get a job, it's big boost. This man had been a university lecturer and his father was ill so he had become a fulltime carer. He had a good professional career but could not carry on. For someone like him – when a caring situation changes – it can be hard to get back into work.'

The team will produce a good practice guide for carers' centres, providing information on what other carers have found effective as well as how to implement support programmes.

Project: [Improving employment opportunities for carers: identifying and sharing good practice](#)

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