

Supporting carers' employment

Outline of a research project
funded by the NIHR School
for Social Care Research



Improving the evidence base for
adult social care practice

What social care interventions are most effective in supporting carers to remain in paid employment

Carers often find it difficult to combine work with caring and many are forced to leave the workplace to look after the person they care for. Recent research has found around one in five carers have given up work to care, with many more reducing their hours or passing up promotion opportunities. Yet although most carers are people of working age, relatively little support has developed for this group's need to remain active in the labour market.

The local authority-led or supported projects that do exist usually focus on equipping carers with work skills and encouraging employers to recruit and support carers. Evaluations exist but tend to be about local, small-scale short-term studies and are of limited use for setting the agenda for social care interventions at a national level. Knowledge therefore remains limited about how best to support carers to remain in employment, and policy-makers would benefit from an improved evidence base.

This project

- will collect, assess and synthesise evidence of what works in supporting carers' employment, with the aim of producing guidance suitable for use in social care across England.

It aims to

- identify organisations in six locations in England which have projects in place to support carers who wish to stay in or return to paid work
- evaluate these services and explore the relative effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of different models and what works well and for whom, taking into account the views of providers, participants and employers
- consider how well different agencies co-operate, how different initiatives interlink, and the impact of emerging agendas, such as the revised National Carers Strategy, individual budgets and telecare
- synthesise the findings into a report which highlights good practice in adult social care for supporting carers to stay in or return to paid employment.

Research project outline

WHAT IS THE CONTEXT?

The importance of supporting unpaid carers is now widely recognised. Yet relatively few interventions have developed specifically to meet this group's need to remain active in the labour market, even though three-quarters of all carers are of working age. Studies consistently show that giving up work to care often has damaging consequences for carers and their families, and is a decision commonly taken in the absence of adequate support.

Currently, local provision for carers who want to return to or remain in work varies substantially, despite a number of policy developments in recent years. These include the Carers (Equal Opportunities) Act 2004 and the Work and Families Act 2006, which extended the right to request flexible working to many more carers. In 1999, the first National Carers Strategy mentioned the importance of employment support for carers, and introduced the Carers Grant to local authorities. New Jobcentre Plus Care Partnership Manager posts started in 2009, with funds from 2010 to cover the costs of replacement care for carers retraining for work. The present government's 'refreshed' Carers Strategy includes 'enabling those with caring responsibilities to fulfill their educational and employment potential'.

Nevertheless, most support for carers continues to focus on carer breaks and respite care, rather than employment. Relatively few local authorities use their Carers Grant funding to provide support for working carers, although those that have done so believe an integrated approach to service delivery, where they work with other providers of return to work support, has been important. Where good practice models do exist (see box), there is often only limited knowledge and understanding elsewhere about these approaches.

It remains a key challenge for government to find effective ways to support carers to continue working alongside their caring roles. Barriers to work include a lack of affordable alternative care and inflexible employers. Many carers lack awareness of their employment

Keeping carers in work

Some local authorities and carer groups have devised innovative approaches for supporting the employment of carers

- In London, Islington Council's 'Care 2 Work' course provides support, advice and training to help carers/recent carers aged 50+ to develop skills, gain qualifications, and move towards employment
- Harrogate Carers Resource offers carers support to combine work and care and works with local employers to raise awareness
- Sunderland's 'People into Employment' project has worked with the local authority to help carers move into the labour market and with employers to raise awareness.

rights, including the right to time off for dependents in an emergency, while some are reluctant to disclose their caring responsibilities to their employer. Carers in work can also end up in a 'benefits trap'; Carers Allowance is available only to those earning up to £100 a week, which restricts the hours that can be worked without losing the benefit.

To support carers effectively, it is recognised that co-ordinated action is required by a network of agencies, including Jobcentre Plus, voluntary organisations, adult social care services, the private sector and employers. What remains unclear is what works well, and for whom, in both supporting carers and in co-ordinating and delivering that support. This project will compare different schemes and help inform the adult social care system England-wide about workable, cost-effective good practice.

HOW WILL THE PROJECT WORK?

This study will engage with support staff and carers to evaluate services and identify what worked well, whether carers' needs were met, and who was involved (and how) in making support effective.

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STAGE 1: Initial scoping phase

A literature and policy review will draw on a wide range of sources relating to carers' employment including: past evaluations and reports on projects funded by the European Social Fund, by a number of Learning and Skills Councils and by the Skills Fund; reports produced for the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Jobcentre Plus; and international evidence published by academics and voluntary agencies.

Telephone interviews with experts and stakeholders will then be used to gain their perspectives on carer support. Interviewees will be drawn from the Employers for Carers Forum, Jobcentre Plus, Association of Directors of Adult Social Services and staff in top-performing local authorities. These interviews will assist in identifying local services that are providing relevant support to carers.

Separately, Carer UK, who led the international Action for Carers and Employment (ACE) partnership in 2002–07, will re-contact the partners involved (in Austria, Italy, Holland, Estonia, Latvia and the Eurocarers network) to explore approaches across Europe where learning may be transferable to the English social care system.

STAGE 2: Case studies

The project will conduct in-depth case studies of six selected local services that support the employment of carers, assessing the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of the schemes and any evidence of good practice. All projects will be ongoing or only recently completed, and the six will be chosen to provide a variety of geographical regions and local labour markets. They will include some services not funded by the local authority in order to identify whether specialist services are better-suited to the role.

The evaluations will review data collected from those involved in running the projects (on participants, interventions, support, costs and outcomes) and from the participating carers (including their opinions and perspectives on what works/does not work, and why). This will facilitate comparisons across services, including examining the proportion of participants who had a positive outcome and the costs involved

in both setting up and delivering the service. For this study it will not be feasible to conduct a full impact assessment or to include a control group, so assessment of the effects and impact of the services will be based on the judgments of professionals, managers and carers.

Each case study will be set in its local context in terms of the labour market in the area (in general and for carers, the types of carers, the kinds of issues they face, the demand for social services, and how these are projected to change in the future).

Data and information will be collected through a range of activities:

- Interviews with service staff
- Interviews with other practitioners
- A survey of carers
- Interviews with carers
- Assessing existing 'in-house' case study evaluation data and reports.

In addition, six telephone interviews will take place with senior personnel at some of the leading private companies on the DWP preferred supplier list (e.g. A4e, G4s, SERCO) to clarify their experience, intentions and plans with regard to supporting carers.

Finally, the project will review all the information gathered about supporting carers to stay in or return to paid employment and use these findings to highlight good practice in adult social care.

Project publications

An accessible findings document will outline the key messages from the project, with at least three papers in academic journals. In addition, a summary of key learning points will be provided for distribution by each of the six organisations involved in the project. A report setting out full details of the approach and findings will be aimed at policy makers at national and local levels to encourage others to adopt elements of the study.

A series of events and conferences will be held to disseminate the research, including regional workshops with social care practitioners and policymakers, voluntary groups and the private sector.

Research project outline

HOW DOES THE PROJECT FIT THE AIMS OF THE SCHOOL FOR SOCIAL CARE RESEARCH?

The project's findings will build on the existing evidence of how adult social care can most effectively contribute to creating and sustaining employment opportunities for carers in an environment where local authorities are already grappling with challenging policies on personalisation, direct payments and individual budgets – all of which require supportive engagement with carers.

The research findings will draw together workable approaches to meeting the goal of supporting carers' employment and the lessons already learnt. This will promote a better understanding of how partnerships can work cost-effectively across the social care, voluntary, employment and health sectors and in doing so clarify the role of adult social care departments in this area.

The study will provide an opportunity for adult social care commissioners and practitioners to learn from each other so that they can more quickly and cost-effectively put measures in place that enable them to support the crucial objective of helping carers to remain or return to paid work.

The Research Team

The research will be conducted by the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) and the Centre for International Research on Care Labour and Equalities (CIRCLE) at the University of Leeds, with specialist support from Carers UK.

The IES is an independent, apolitical, international centre of research and consultancy in employment policy, including the experience of disadvantaged groups.

Rachel Marangozov, an IES senior research fellow will manage the project and carry out some of the expert interviews, case studies, the literature review and dissemination, assisted by *Alice Sinclair*, another senior research fellow.

Jim Hillage will have responsibility for ensuring the running of the project, assisting in the research design and quality assuring all research outputs.

Dr Andrea Wigfield, Deputy Director of CIRCLE, is an expert on the support needed by carers of working age and will provide input into project design, reporting and dissemination.

CIRCLE's social statistician, *Dr Lisa Buckner*, will conduct and report the contextual secondary data analysis for the research.

Project title:
Improving employment opportunities for carers: identifying and sharing good practice

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