

Flexibility on the frontline

In March 2021, Employers for Carers hosted a frontline networking session for members who have a significant number of employees in frontline roles. The session provided updates from members about the challenges of supporting frontline working carers in their organisation and some of the ways they have been responding to them.

Key themes arising from the session included finding different ways to communicate with employees on the frontline, engaging line managers and thinking creatively about how to offer flexible working arrangements. EFC members have adapted to provide new flexible ways of working for frontline staff and have found alternative ways to communicate with frontline staff to ensure that they are aware of the support that is being provided by the organisation.

We have gathered some case studies from EFC members who have a substantial number of employees in front line roles.

Case studies

Network Rail

1. How have you communicated with carers on the frontline? Have there been any challenges with communication with carers on the frontline?

We communicate with carers on the frontline who are members of our network through our newsletters. We created a SharePoint site for our network which we update regularly and encouraged use of it alongside the promotion of the events we held during Carers Week which were promoted on our intranet site. Carers Week and our events were featured on the intranet homepage along with a video from our CEO encouraging all to be involved. Being featured on the intranet homepage allowed us to reach all staff members and non-members of the network. One of the challenges we have faced when communicating with frontline staff is reaching staff who work shifts or may not have email addresses. To address this, we have started to join some of the frontline staff team meetings and speak about the network and the support available. We have also encouraged managers to invite us to join their teams' mental health and wellbeing sessions. We also create content and presentations and ask managers to share these with their teams.

2. How have you engaged line managers on the frontline? Were there any challenges with this and what were they?

Similar to the frontline staff, at times we join their team meetings and engage with managers there, we also use the sessions to ask managers to continually communicate with their staff and encourage them to contact us and the network for support where necessary. Our main challenge is also reaching managers who work night shifts; to overcome this we are now planning on reaching out to them through

their management emails and updates. We will be working with the communication teams and HR as well to ensure that we reach all frontline management staff through the updates for managers that they send out.

3. What have you had to do differently to support staff, including carers, on the frontline? (eg. To support flexible working)

Our annual leave policy has recently been updated to allow all staff who are carers to be able to use their volunteer leave days for their caring responsibilities. In addition to that our flexible working arrangements are not limited to part time working, compressed hours and remote working but we encourage the carers to think about the work pattern that is best suited to their job role and caring responsibilities. In some instances, we encourage carers to trial the different types of flexible working to best find one that suits their needs. As part of our HR systems, we have also asked all staff to declare whether they are a carer or not regardless of whether they are a member of the network. This helps us to keep track of how many carers are in the company (without any personal data such as names) and track whether the number of carers is increasing or decreasing.

4. Do you have any further plans to support working carers on the frontline?

We are working on introducing the carers passport and a new carers policy which might also introduce more flexibility for carers.

HSBC

1. How have you communicated with carers on the frontline? Have there been any challenges with communication with carers on the frontline?

During Carers Week 2021, HSBC launched a Carers Charter. The Carers Charter allowed us to have all our information in one place and includes details of our policies, Employee Assistance Programme, external support and much more.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, HSBC have been hosting virtual coffee with a carer sessions and frontline employees began attending as it was more accessible for them.

Our branch networks are really starting to engage, and we have ensured we are engaging the right leaders at the right time, working from the top down.

We have used the Employers for Carers e-learning to communicate with working carers on the frontline and encourage them to take a look and complete the short e-learning that are available.

One of our biggest challenges when communicating with working carers on the frontline is that they are not on their computers as much as employees in an office, therefore they are less likely to come across information.

2. How have you engaged line managers on the frontline? Were there any challenges with this and what were they?

The Carers' Network provides presentations and holds discussions with line managers on the frontline. We provide information to cascade down to employees, which can sometimes pose challenges as we are reliant on messages being passed on about our support for colleagues.

When HSBC launched the Carers Charter in Carers Week, we communicated that information on the intranet so that it was accessible for line managers alongside information about policies.

3. What have you had to do differently to support staff, including carers, on the frontline? (eg. To support flexible working)

We have had to change the way we present our information which is why we created the Carers Charter. It means that all of the information about the support carers can access is in one place and easily accessible. When we looked at how much HSBC are doing to support working carers, we wanted to ensure that people know the support is there for them, and the Carers Charter was the best way to do this.

We also include information about what Carers UK can provide as a charity and also other external charities that would be useful to carers.

4. Do you have any further plans to support working carers on the frontline?

HSBC will continue to keep coffee with a carer virtual so carers on the frontline can continue to attend. We will also be looking at times during the working day that are better suited to frontline staff to be able to attend coffee with a carer.

We will continue to use raising awareness activities such as Carers Week to promote the support we have in place for carers on the frontline.

London Fire Brigade

1. How have you communicated with carers on the frontline? Have there been any challenges with communication with carers on the frontline?

We are fortunate that the Brigade has some good communication structures in place that have assisted in our communication with staff who are carers. All staff when logging into the Brigade IT system are first taken to the home page of our intranet 'Hotwire' where we have been able to run appropriate news stories. We also have a full section of content for carers. We invite members of staff who are carers to join our carers mailing list group where we provide updates by email about the latest LFB developments and events.

Over the past year we have run several online events for carers including about LFB support and carers networks with brilliant support from Employers for Carers (EFC).

Using Microsoft Teams has been hugely beneficial in allowing our operational staff to attend meetings online when otherwise they might not be able to attend in person.

A big part of our communication with carers is through our own website for staff with caring responsibilities LFB Carers Connect. This was developed in partnership with Carers UK and one of the objectives was to give our frontline staff easy access to relevant information 24/7 whether on or off duty. The website is a one stop shop for information about caring both related to the Brigade and wider support. The challenge has been to reach frontline operational staff including firefighters, some with limited daily access to IT at work, and also with some staff not necessarily wanting to come forward or perhaps not recognising themselves as carers. Some of the above innovations have assisted, including providing more discrete support which is easily accessible. We have found that ongoing communication is key to reaching all LFB staff.

2. How have you engaged line managers on the frontline? Were there any challenges with this and what were they?

We have run online information events in relation to caring and to encourage managers' attendance. We also have promoted the excellent EfC resources for managers on our intranet and in manager communications. We particularly advocate use of the toolkits. Our HR Advisors who work in the local areas and HR helpdesk are regularly briefed on developments and events for carers in relation to management support so they can engage with managers both generally and in relation to specific cases. We are looking to further develop intranet content for managers in conjunction with our Parents and Carers Support Group and hold more specific manager engagement events including plans for workshops. The challenge is again reaching all frontline managers and promoting understanding of carer issues and how managers can support their staff. Proactive communication on an ongoing basis greatly assists with this and the use of the intranet is a key part of the strategy along with continued discussion.

3. What have you had to do differently to support staff, including carers, on the frontline? (eg. To support flexible working)

Our operational staff work shifts and we need to ensure full ridership of fire appliances at any time and management cover. Therefore, our senior managers who approve flexible working requests need to be creative in working with local managers to see how flexible working requests can be accommodated. This might include certain standardisation of hours or alternative shift patterns. This is not necessarily different to other staff group requests in that detailed consideration is given, but sometimes this requires more thinking outside of the box. The advance of using video messaging systems like Microsoft Teams has meant that we have looked at ways to engage with

staff differently and it has been effective in reaching staff working at Fire Stations with regular all staff briefings and other online meetings and events.

4. Do you have any further plans to support working carers on the frontline?

We have recently established a Parents and Carers Support Group. A key objective of the group will be to establish further membership of frontline staff and we are looking at ways that it might be possible to generate interest and enable attendance at meetings and events. The group will provide support and network opportunities but also we hope to be able to develop specific staff support initiatives working with the group. All Brigade support groups have allies to champion the group, usually who are senior managers, We have senior operational staff as allies to the group and this should help tremendously to raise the profile with managers who are responsible for frontline staff.

We are also looking at ways all local managers can be provided with further advice and guidance in supporting their staff who are carers. A carer register as part of a welfare type passport is also currently under policy development. Our remote staff wellbeing portal LFB wellworks is currently being redeveloped and includes access to a wide range of health and wellbeing content which may assist staff who are carers such as information on mental health and resilience. This is supported by access to our dedicated Counselling and Trauma Service and trained mental health first aiders available across the organisation.

Royal Mail

1. How have you communicated with carers on the frontline? Have there been any challenges with communication with carers on the frontline?

RM has the new 'Workplace' platform supplied by Facebook. All frontline employees can join up. We have 140k employees and only 35k have signed up so far, but this will be used to keep in contact with all employees as the Parents & Carers Network/Support Group have their own page on here. We also have a dedicated e-mail for support which we advertise through our many comms streams which include WhatsApp, a monthly paper to all employees and RMTV, Royal Mail's very own TV programme that goes out weekly on screens in each unit. The problem we have is actually getting people to join/approach the group, they tend to do this as a last resort if they have a problem or an issue where we can help but contact is low.

2. How have you engaged line managers on the frontline? Were there any challenges with this and what were they?

Our approach is the same for all managers at Royal Mail, including on the frontline

3. What have you had to do differently to support staff, including carers, on the frontline? (eg. To support flexible working)

We have a comprehensive list of policies easily accessible to all staff and direct individuals to that. We also have a dedicated HR helpline and this can be used for advice on complex issues. Finally, all staff have access to 'FeelingFirstClass', a free wellbeing site that offers support

4. Do you have any further plans to support working carers on the frontline?

Yes, we currently have a coffee morning planned for individuals returning from maternity leave, we want to continue this with different topics/speakers. We are considering a lunch and learn with EfC(tbc) and we are going to have a push on efc digital membership again. We also offer daily e-mail support for anyone wishing to contact us.