



Supporting carers in your workforce

A manager's handbook

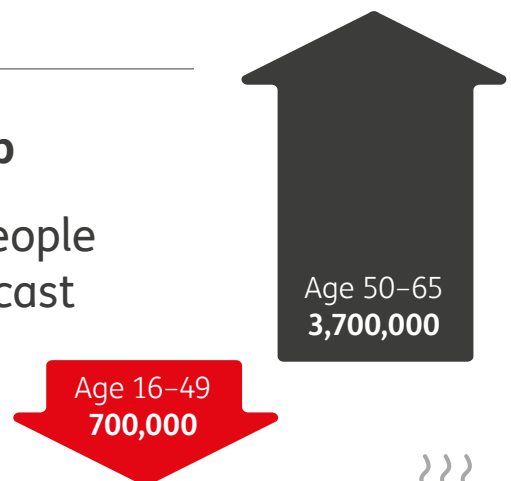
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A major issue which can't be ignored

The UK is facing a significant skills gap

Over the next decade, the number of people in the labour market aged 16-49 is forecast to drop while the number of people aged 50-65 rises sharply.



Meanwhile more and more people will be combining work and care

The number of carers in the UK is nearly 9 million and growing fast. As a result, more people are likely to be combining work and caring.



This will include many of your most experienced employees

People are most likely to be caring when aged 45-64, when many will have gained valuable skills and experience.



Good businesses need good people

There has never been a more important time to focus on the benefits of retaining skilled workers rather than incurring the costs of recruiting and retraining new staff.

At the heart of Employers for Carers is a forward looking group of employers, large and small, who are already rising to the challenge of supporting carers in their workforce and have a wealth of good practice and experience to share.



1. Introduction

Caring is an issue which faces everyone and changing demographics – an ageing population, smaller families and different family structures – mean that it could be any one of us! The number of carers in the UK is nearly 9 million and growing fast.

Given the stresses and strains that can result from balancing multiple responsibilities inside and outside the workplace, it is unsurprising that 1 in 6 carers give up work to care full time. And many of these employees will be your most valuable staff, the 45-64 year-olds at the peak of their careers. With fewer young people entering the labour market, you need to retain your existing staff. By recognising the needs of carers, you can hold on to your experienced staff and reap the rewards of creating a supportive working environment for carers.

Although balancing work and caring is hard, the importance of paid work is reflected in the number of people who do just that: half of all carers – nearly five million people in the UK according to 2019 research – are in paid employment. This means that 1 in 7 people in the workforce will be a carer, with higher numbers being reported by employers since the outbreak of COVID-19.

Employers for Carers is Carers UK's membership forum for employers. It evolved from a group of employers committed to working carers and is informed by business. Our key purpose is to ensure that employers and managers have the support to retain employees with caring responsibilities.

Knowing that managers are busy people we have designed this handbook to be a reference point for basic information and advice on supporting and managing carers within your team. Your own organisations will have, or might be developing, their own specific policies and practices. As managers, you are the gatekeepers to these policies and practices.

2. Who are carers?

Most of us will look after older, ill or disabled family members or friends at some point. Caring is part of life but without the right support the personal costs of caring can be high.

Caring is different from mainstream childcare responsibilities and needs a separate response from employers and managers. For example:

- caring can happen overnight
- caring can be hard to plan and to cope with emotionally
- caring has different ‘milestones’.

Every year in the UK, 152,000 people have a stroke, an estimated 80,000 people are seriously injured in a road accident and 30,000 children are born or diagnosed with a serious disability or rare syndrome. Caring milestones are different too – for example, the birth of a child is a cause for celebration, the onset of Alzheimer’s Disease is not; a child starting school is seen as positive, unlike some situations where a disabled child moves to a residential special school placement; a teenager leaving home to go to university is a cause for congratulation, unlike an adult moving into residential care. Caring often ends with bereavement, bringing its own complicated mix of emotions such as sadness, relief and guilt.

As an organisation you might find it helpful to have your own definition for carers. This is particularly useful if you are looking to develop a specific carers policy. It can also help when distinguishing between the needs of those with caring responsibilities and those with childcare issues, as described above. Employers for Carers have developed the following definition as a best practice example. It is used by many of the group’s member organisations.

‘Carers are employees with caring responsibilities that have an impact on their working lives. These employees are responsible for the care and support of relatives or friends who are older, disabled or seriously ill and who are unable to care for themselves.’

You could adopt this definition or adapt it to suit the needs of our particular organisation.

3. Why support carers?

The business case

Far from compromising business objectives, research shows that providing a supportive working environment using a flexible working approach achieves impressive business results. This flexible approach:

- attracts and retains staff
- reduces stress
- reduces recruitment and training costs
- increases resilience and productivity
- reduces sick leave
- improves service delivery
- produces cost savings
- improves people management
- increases staff morale.

Organisations that have introduced flexible working and special leave arrangements for carers have judged them a success.

The message is – it makes business sense to care for carers.

The benefits for managers

By creating an open and supportive culture for team members where they feel able to take up carer support you can:

- plan and assign work more effectively
- enjoy a motivated staff and instil a good team spirit to achieve results
- alleviate the stress which carers may be feeling, and so help them to do their work better
- reduce time and budget spent on recruiting, inducting and training new staff
- capitalise on the many and varied skills that a diverse workforce brings to your team
- experience loyalty, trust and flexibility from all members of the team.

The Law

Not only is there a compelling business case for supporting carers in your workforce but there is also legislation to make sure that it happens. The Employment Rights Act 1996, as amended by the Employment Relations Act 1999, gives carers rights to help them manage work and their caring responsibilities, including a right to time off in emergencies and parental leave.

(These laws are called the Employment Rights (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 and the Employment Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1999 in Northern Ireland).

A right to time off in emergencies

All employees have the right to take “reasonable time off” to deal with unexpected situations involving a dependant. At the discretion of you, the employer, this time off can be paid. To use this right to time off, employees must inform you as soon as possible after the emergency has happened.

A dependant includes a husband, wife or partner, child or parent, or someone living with the employee as part of their family. Others who rely on the employee for help in an emergency may also qualify.

The situations where leave might be taken are:

- a disruption or breakdown in care arrangements
- when a dependant falls ill, has been assaulted or in an accident (including when the person is hurt or upset rather than physically injured)
- to make longer term arrangements for a dependant who is ill or injured (but not to provide long term care themselves)
- to deal with an incident involving a child during school hours
- to deal with the death of a dependant.

Parental leave/shared parental leave

Employees who have at least one year’s continuous service and are responsible for a child aged under 18, are entitled to 18 weeks (unpaid) parental leave per child to look after their child.

Leave can be taken in blocks of one week up to a maximum of four weeks leave in a year (for each child); or in one day, or multiples of a day if the leave is to care for a disabled child, again to a maximum of four weeks in a year.

Collective or workforce agreements may allow employees to take leave in smaller blocks and/or may allow employees to take more than four weeks off in a year.

Employees must give at least 21 days notice in order to take parental leave and this can be postponed if taking leave at the time requested would cause particular disruption to the organisation, e.g. during a seasonal peak in work or if multiple requests for parental leave are made at the same time. Parental leave cannot be postponed if it has been requested for the time immediately after the birth of a child or the start of an adoption placement.

Employees may also be entitled to Shared Parental Leave. This must be taken between the baby's birth and first birthday (or within one year of adoption). For further information on Shared Parental Leave, please refer to www.gov.uk/shared-parental-leave-and-pay

The right to request flexible working

All employees who have worked for their employer for 26 weeks at the date an application is made can request flexible working. This could include changing working hours or working from home.

Only one request is allowed in a year and any request granted will mean a permanent change to terms and conditions unless a trial period is agreed. Employers can refuse a request, but must give good business reasons from a specific list which is set out in the law. Employees can appeal against this decision.

EfC has a booklet on requesting flexible working which covers this in detail.

Protection from discrimination

Although up until relatively recently carers have not been directly (or explicitly) protected from discrimination in the workplace, this situation has now changed. If an employee is looking after someone who is elderly or disabled, the law – under the Equality Act 2010 – will protect them against direct discrimination or harassment because of their caring responsibilities.

This is because they are counted as being 'associated' with someone who is protected by the law because of their age or disability. You will need to ensure that you do not treat carers less favourably than other employees. This could include:

- refusing to offer someone a job because of their caring responsibilities
- not offering an employee a promotion because of their caring responsibilities.

4. Managing carers – good practice

Empowering people to perform at their best is a key part of the managerial role. It therefore makes sense to explore working options that are in tune with the current needs of your team, both in terms of meeting operational objectives and individual carers' requirements.

Small adaptations are often all that is necessary to keep on track. Bridging a short-term need could be accommodated through a temporary change in working arrangements; sometimes a more permanent change may be the answer.

The three main principles

1. Plan ahead... but be prepared for unpredictability

Planning leave

People with caring responsibilities can't always plan ahead – accidents or illnesses can occur without warning, and care arrangements can break down unexpectedly. However, in some instances it is possible to plan ahead. As a manager, you are entitled to expect carers in your team to discuss with you, in advance, any leave which they can reasonably expect to need for their caring commitments, so that you and the other members of the team can plan work, meetings and other leave around those dates.

Some types of medical appointments can be booked in advance and carers can be expected to book these at the start or end of the working day, to minimise disruption at work. With prior approval, time off for planned appointments can normally be made up later, taken as flexi or annual leave. Sometimes, however, the need to accompany a dependant to a doctor or hospital comes without prior notice, in which case you may want to consider allowing the carer to take paid or unpaid carers/special leave.

It is worth bearing in mind that there is often less control over timing of appointments to see consultants or specialists, or to undergo regular treatment, as they are determined by the consultant's availability and patient list. It would be unreasonable to expect the carer to change a long awaited appointment.

Granting all carers their preferred annual leave or flexible working options can create difficulties in maintaining services and distributing workloads if several members of your team want to take time off at the same time. It can also lead to resentment among non-carers as there is sometimes a perception that carers

expect their leave preferences to be granted irrespective of other requirements within the team.

Managers report that the most successful teams are the ones who work together to find solutions – there needs to be give and take on all sides and willingness to compromise.

Here are some tips:

- Ask everyone at the start of the year to give you their preferred holiday dates for the forthcoming year and any dates they know they will need to take off.
- Note who has to take certain dates due to their caring responsibilities.
- Ask if anyone can change their own proposed dates to help the team.
- Ask whether part time staff might be prepared to increase or alter their hours temporarily.
- If you think the office may be under-staffed at any time, alert your line manager and agree how best to resolve the difficulty, or example, by agreeing on amended targets for this period, getting approval for staff to work overtime, or by arranging temporary cover from an agency.
- Let your team know that you value co-operation and flexibility by recognising and rewarding staff who put in extra effort in these circumstances.

Case Study

Margaret works part time, three days a week, and cares for her elderly dad. He has an appointment at the hospital which he won't attend unless Margaret goes with him. Unfortunately the appointment is on one of the days Margaret works so she asks her manager if she can swap her working days that particular week. Her manager dismisses the request and suggests she takes annual leave as that is what it's for.

Margaret felt that this was unreasonable and resented taking annual leave which she felt she should be able to use for a break for herself. A few weeks later a colleague was ill and Margaret was asked to work extra days. She said no and an agency had to be called in.

Carer friendly alternative outcome

If the manager had agreed to the request, or even suggested that she take special leave, Margaret would have felt very differently towards her employer and would have been happy to work extra days to help out. This would have improved staff morale and meant that no extra agency costs were incurred – a win-win for all.

Planning meetings

It is advisable that anyone setting up meetings should try to ensure that they are held at a time when carers who are involved can attend. This may be down to the time of day or day of the week. Think about using teleconference or video conference facilities so that all meetings don't have to be face to face.

Here are some tips:

- If you have several people who work part time on your team, try to rotate the day of the week on which regular meetings are held. Even if there is no day of the week when all team members can attend, changing the day should at least enable everyone to attend every other meeting.
- If it is impossible to fit in with the carer's schedule, perhaps because of an urgent deadline, acknowledge their caring responsibilities and explain why it wasn't possible to take these into consideration when arranging the meeting on this occasion. This will let the carer know that they have not just been ignored or forgotten about.
- Make sure that those who are unable to attend the meeting can contribute to the agenda in advance. Remember to let them know what happened at the meeting afterwards, particularly any decisions taken or action points agreed.

Planning training

The same principles apply to arranging training courses or 'away days' for the team. In addition, bear in mind that many carers will find it difficult or impossible to attend residential courses which involve days or nights away from home. If they have to opt out because of their caring responsibilities, they may feel their career development will be hampered as a result.

See if you can arrange for the same training to be delivered more locally or online, or discuss with carers alternative development opportunities. Some organisations have a budget to cover the cost of providing additional care whilst carers attend training courses.

Multi-skilling

As part of long-term planning, developing a team which is multi-skilled brings several advantages. It encourages good team working and helps to ensure that the team can maintain services and meet business targets even if someone is away for any reason.

It is important to make sure that your staff see the value of multi-skilling and feel ownership for it. It should not be seen purely as a way of handling crises or understaffing but as a benefit to everyone by adding to their skills and expertise and so enhancing their career development.

Case Study

Anne has two young children and cares for her mum who has dementia and lives in a town 50 miles away. Anne is spending an increasing amount of time managing her mum's care from a distance, and is also using annual leave to make regular visits. She now also has to respond to emergency calls when her mother places herself in unsafe situations.

Anne needs some time off to arrange a care package for her mother but has run out of annual leave. She is considering ringing in sick but is worried about the impact on her colleagues who will have to cover her work.

Carer friendly alternative outcome

Anne explains the situation to her manager who offers Anne a period of paid carers leave. In order to ensure that Anne can still visit her mum they work out a system of matched leave – giving an amount of paid leave to Anne equal to the annual leave she takes – to ensure that she has annual leave available to get real time off.

They involve the whole team and develop a 'buddy' system, enabling colleagues to optimise their own individual opportunities for flexible working in order to cover shifts and minimise potential resentment. Her manager also tells Anne that she is entitled to take unpaid parental leave before her children reach the age of 18.

2. Be flexible and supportive

As a manager you will know your staff best and will know if a request for leave or a change of working pattern can be accommodated, or if you need to negotiate a compromise arrangement. Assess each request on its own merits and consider what may happen if you don't agree to the request. There are many reasons why an employee might want to work flexibly and these will not necessarily be about caring. Now that all employees are entitled to request flexible working you need to treat all requests equally regardless of the reason for the request. However, it is important to remember that carers are protected from discrimination under the Equality Act and you should ensure that carers are not treated less favourably than other employees.

Flexible working allows many carers to juggle their job and their caring role but this policy does not account for crisis situations or the unpredictability of care. Carers might need flexible leave arrangements as well as flexible working arrangements in order to manage all aspects of their caring role.

What is important to remember is that when a response cannot be made to a caring crisis, the carer is placed under additional pressure with regard to continuing work. If an employee's request for flexibility is turned down, meaning they cannot leave work early on a Friday to go to the gym, the chances are they will choose work over the gym! However, if a carer cannot be offered flexibility to manage their situation, the chances are they will choose care over work.

Case Study

Farahnaz cares for her 23 year old son who has a learning disability and attends a day centre. A change in the pick-up route for the day centre bus means that Farahnaz has to set off 15 minutes later to work each day which means that she arrives just out of core hours. Farahnaz is unsure of how supportive her employer will be and hasn't mentioned to her manager that she cares for her son. However, she is worried that she will be seen as a poor time-keeper.

Carer friendly alternative outcome

If her manager and her organisation were more open about their policies and practices Farahnaz might have felt more able to approach her manager and explain her circumstances. She might have been able to negotiate a later start and finishing time. This could prevent her having a poor timekeeping record and avoid her colleagues and manager seeing her as less able to do her job.

Under the Care Act 2014, all carers are entitled to an assessment of their own needs by social services or an appropriate authority. As Farahnaz's employer, you could signpost her to Carers UK for advice on how to obtain a carers assessment.

Often, caring can be a highly stressful and emotionally draining experience. People may be faced with traumatic, life-changing crises, sometimes overnight – if a loved one is suddenly taken ill or has a bad accident, for example. Or, they may be looking after someone with a terminal illness for many months or caring for an elderly parent.

In these circumstances, you need to act with sensitivity as well as flexibility. For example, recognise that carers may sometimes need to make or receive private phone calls relating to their dependant. As most offices are now open plan, this can

be awkward – wherever possible, provide them with a private space or office.

Carers may be going through a particularly distressing time and need a block of time off. Try not to trouble carers about details which could wait until they return to work. However, it is good to keep in some form of contact with someone who is away from the workplace for a period of time to ensure that the employee doesn't begin to feel isolated and also to make the return to work easier. As a manager you will have discretion to grant paid or unpaid leave depending on your organisation's policy. Special paid leave will not be unlimited but you could possibly consider a combination of paid and unpaid leave and/or flexible working. It is important to consider each case sympathetically, realistically and creatively so that everyone concerned gets the best deal out of the situation.

Case Study

Tom's partner has recently had a serious head injury. On returning to work, Tom would like to phone his partner in the morning and again in the afternoon to check that she is OK. However, his employer has recently issued a memo which states that no personal calls are to be made during office hours. Tom is very worried about this and is considering taking long term leave.

Carer friendly alternative outcome

Tom's colleague knew that their employer has a carers policy and suggested that Tom talk to his manager and explain the situation. Tom's manager agrees that he can use his office to make the calls whenever he wants. Tom was able to focus on his work and also feel that he was supporting his partner.

3. Involve your team

Often a carer's request to take leave or change their working pattern will have implications for other team members. This can cause resentment and stress for the people affected, which is not good for the individuals concerned, the team as a whole and subsequently the business.

It is good practice to involve the people who will be affected – or indeed the whole team. Let them know what is happening (while respecting matters of confidentiality) and work out with them how best to deal with the situation. They may have suggestions that you don't. A system of self-rostering may be appropriate where team members agree working hours amongst themselves and negotiate with colleagues when they need time off with the process being overseen by you.

Finally, make sure you acknowledge and reward any additional effort put in by those who show good team spirit and are willing to take on extra work or responsibilities.

A manager's responsibilities

Managers can be expected to:

- be aware of and adhere to relevant legislation and their organisational policies
- be aware of and understand the range of leave and working hours options available
- know where to get further information or guidance
- understand the pressures that juggling work and care can bring
- accept reasonable requests for flexible working
- be cooperative to requests for leave
- be open minded and constructive to new ways of working
- be approachable
- be fair and consistent in how they treat all their staff.

An employee's responsibilities

In return, employees can be expected to:

- appreciate that they are working as part of a team and that their actions may well have implications for their colleagues and their work
- where possible give their managers advance notice of when they would like to take leave
- accept that they may have to compromise if their request for leave or a change of working pattern cannot reasonably be accommodated
- be as open with their managers as they feel able about their caring responsibilities to enable them to provide appropriate support
- communicate with colleagues and involve them where possible in decisions which may have an impact on their work.

Summary of flexible working and special / dependants leave options

Good practice employers offer a range of flexible working and leave options. Your organisation may offer a number of these and as a manager you could 'mix and match' from these to meet the needs of your team.

Flexible working practices can include:

Flexi-time Employees may be required to work within set times but outside of these 'core hours' have some flexibility in how they work their hours.

Homeworking Homeworking is where employees spend part or all of their working week working from home. Some employees request this through a flexible working request, but some may request this on a temporary or informal basis.

Job sharing Usually two employees share the work normally done by one person.

Part-time working Employees might work shorter days or fewer days in a week.

Term-time working Employees don't work during school holidays and either take paid or unpaid leave or their salary is calculated pro-rata over the whole year.

Shift swapping or self rostering Employees agree shifts among themselves and negotiate with colleagues when they need time off with the process being overseen by managers.

Staggered hours Employees have various starting and finishing times meaning that goods and services are available outside traditional working hours.

Compressed hours Employees work their total hours over fewer working days e.g. a ten day fortnight is compressed into a nine day fortnight.

Annualised hours Employees' hours are calculated over a whole year and then split into 'fixed shifts' and 'reserve shifts' which can be agreed on a more flexible basis.

Special/dependants leave arrangements can include:

- paid emergency leave
- compassionate leave (paid/unpaid)
- carers leave (paid/unpaid)
- matched leave
- borrowing/buying leave
- career breaks.

Changing the culture

An organisational culture which allows carers to be open about their situation is crucial if carer friendly policies and practices are to be used by the very people they are intended for and managers – especially line managers – play a key role in implementing them.

However, creating a workplace culture that is supportive to carers also requires the endorsement of top-level management.

Here are some tips:

- Identify carers and ask them what they need. Be sensitive to issues of confidentiality and give employees the option of providing information anonymously.
- Decide how the whole organisation can respond – find a champion to lead the work and sell it in at all levels to ensure understanding and commitment.
- Be proactive in creating a workplace which promotes the take-up of carer support to avoid carers feeling that they will be treated less favourably if they take up any of the policies.
- Monitor the take-up of support and determine the benefits to employees and to your organisation.

5. How can I get more support?

Policies and procedures

Your organisation may have a range of policies to support carers such as a specific carers policy, a flexible working policy and policies covering enhanced or special leave. These policies should explain your organisation's position on supporting carers and provide you with a framework for managing issues which arise within your team.

Networks

Some organisations have equality and diversity networks or might have a dedicated carers network. Networks can help carers to feel less isolated and provide a safe and confidential forum for carers to talk to people in similar situations. They also demonstrate that as an employer you recognise the difficulties that carers face and demonstrate your commitment to offering them support. As a manager, networks can be useful to offer advice and guidance and practical examples on implementing carers' support, to monitor take up of current policies and practices and to develop new ones.

Carers champions

Having a dedicated carers champion, or an individual with specific responsibility for this role, provides a central point of contact for carers and managers and a clear message that carers' needs are recognised. This could be someone within your human resources or health and well-being team or someone with caring responsibilities themselves.

Employee assistance programmes / workplace health & wellbeing services

Some organisations offer in-house support to carers providing them with advice and information on how to get help with their caring role.

Member organisations of Employers for Carers have access to EfC Digital. This members' platform provides a range of dedicated resources and practical advice for staff with employee wellbeing responsibilities, such as HR teams and line managers. Carers UK also offers carers a dedicated Helpline as well as providing a vibrant online forum and comprehensive information about all aspects of caring.

Employers for Carers

As this handbook shows, the range of concerns and responsibilities that carers may face can be wide ranging and demanding. These issues may present you with completely new management challenges. As a manager, you should not be expected to try and sort out personal problems or to counsel your staff.

The Employers for Carers members' platform, EfC Digital, contains a range of resources including case studies, model policies, FAQs, toolkits and e-Learning modules. Latest information about legal and employment policy is communicated through e-bulletins and briefings

Employers for Carers believes that an organisation should support and train its managers at all levels to be aware of carers' issues and to be confident in implementing effective carer support. We offer in-house training, online training and lunch and learn sessions as well as a consultancy service.

Contact us for more details at client.services@carersuk.org

6. Summary – top ten tips for managing carers

- 1 Be open and clear about the policies and practices within your office and encourage staff to use them.
- 2 Without being intrusive, get to know your staff and what their circumstances are.
- 3 Be as flexible as possible and be prepared to compromise.
- 4 Be approachable and consultative.
- 5 Encourage all your staff to be aware of and understand your organisation's policies on diversity and equal opportunities.
- 6 Ensure that all your staff have easy access to employee manuals, intranet, staff newsletters or any other information for employees.
- 7 Openly support and reinforce the messages of your organisation's policies and practices.
- 8 Lead by example. Remember, managers have demands on their time outside of work and need to achieve work life balance too!
- 9 Encourage staff with caring responsibilities to set up their own support group or join an existing network if you have one.
- 10 Above all, be fair and consistent in your approach to all your staff.

About Carers UK

Carers UK is the national membership charity for the millions of people who look after older, ill or disabled family members and friends in the UK.

Our vision is of a society that recognises, values and supports carers for the huge contribution they make to families and communities. Our mission is quite simple: we want to make life better for carers.

With your help, we're building a forward looking network of employers who understand the importance of supporting carers, and are helping to spread the message that supporting carers makes complete sense for businesses as well as families.

However caring affects you, we're here.

Contact Carers UK

Helpline 0808 808 7777

E info@carersuk.org

T 020 7378 4999

carersuk.org



About Employers for Carers

Employers for Carers is Carers UK's membership forum for employers who want to support the people in their workforce who are carers.

Its purpose is to:

- provide practical advice and support for employers seeking to develop carer friendly policy and practice and retain skilled workers
- identify and promote the business benefits of supporting carers in the workplace
- influence employment policy and practice to create a culture which supports carers in and into work.

Member organisations of Employers for Carers and their employees get free access to guides and resources specifically designed to help make working and caring easier.

You can also choose to join Carers UK, and become part of our supportive community and movement for change. Here you'll find expert information about every aspect of caring and a world of support from other carers who know what it can feel like to look after loved ones and live your own life too.

Contact Employers for Carers

E client.services@carersuk.org

T 020 7378 4956

employersforcarers.org



Enabling carers to
combine work with care
is better for business
and better for everyone.

We are building a
network of carer
positive employers to
lead the way.



Employers for Carers

Carers UK, 20 Great Dover Street, London SE1 4LX

T 020 7378 4956 E client.services@carersuk.org

employersforcarers.org

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