

The Role of Carer Champions in the Workplace

Employer survey report



About us

As the UK's only national membership charity for carers, Carers UK is both a supportive community and a movement for change.

At some point in our lives every one of us will be involved in looking after an older, ill or disabled relative, partner or friend.

Over six and a half million people in the UK are caring now but while caring is part and parcel of life, without the right support the personal costs can be high. Carers UK supports carers, provides information and advice about caring, delivers training and consultancy services and campaigns to make life better for carers.

To find out more visit carersuk.org



Employers for Carers is an innovative and growing service for employers.

Informed by business and supported by the specialist knowledge of Carers UK, its key purpose is to provide practical, 'hands-on' help to employers to support the carers in their workforce.

Launched in 2009 as an employers' membership forum, Employers for Carers (EfC) now has over 250 member organisations representing around 4 million employees across the public, private and not for profit sectors. Member services include a dedicated web platform with a range of practical resources including e-learning, toolkits, model policies and case studies, access to expert training and consultancy and employer networking events. EfC's UK-wide employer benchmarking scheme, Carer Confident, launched in 2019, now has 55 accredited employers who are building a supportive and inclusive workplace for staff who are or will become carers.

To find out more visit employersforcarers.org



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Foreword

from Helen Walker

“

COVID-19 and the current cost of living crisis have shone a spotlight on caring in the workplace. As we have moved to post pandemic recovery and return, many working carers have been facing pressures not only due to reduced care services but also from rising energy prices and cost of living bills.



Over the past year, we know that our Employers for Carers members have been striving to support their staff in this difficult environment, especially the growing number with caring responsibilities in their workforce.

This report highlights the challenges that employers have faced and some examples of how they have been recognising the specific needs of carers in their workforce, including through identifying and promoting the role of workplace carer champions in raising awareness and visibility.

We are delighted that our member organisations have continued to rise to the occasion to support carers during these challenging times – and to reap the benefits of retaining valued staff. We hope that other employers will be inspired by the good practice highlighted in this research to enhance support for their own working carers and identify champions within their own organisations.

”

Helen Walker, Chief Executive, Carers UK

Introduction

Even before COVID-19, one in seven employees were caring for an older, disabled or seriously ill family member or friend.¹ However, since the pandemic many employers have reported that one in four or one in five of their employees are carers, and the NHS Staff Survey 2021 has identified around one in three in its workforce.² Strikingly, the number of unpaid carers overall has remained higher than pre COVID-19, with recent research in June 2022³ showing an estimated 10.58 million across the UK, one in five adults.



Research published for Carers Rights Day in November 2021⁴ shows how tough continuing to juggle work and care can be. Almost three quarters (72%) of working carers were worrying about continuing to juggle work and care and 77% felt tired at work because of the demands of their unpaid caring role, while six out of ten had given up opportunities at work because of their caring responsibilities.

In these circumstances, it has never been more important for employers to recognise and support

carers in their workforce in order to retain and support healthy, productive staff.

However, the Carers Rights Day report shows that levels of awareness and support remain patchy. Whilst some employers were more supportive of carers within their workplace, a significant proportion of carers were at risk of reducing their working hours or giving up work altogether if they did not get the right support measures in place.

¹ Carers UK and YouGov, Juggling work and unpaid care: A growing issue (2019)

² NHS England 2021 www.england.nhs.uk/supporting-our-nhs-people/how-to-guides/supporting-our-working-carers

⁴ Carers UK, Supporting carers at work: opportunity and imperative (Carers Rights Day, November 2021)

⁵ Carers UK, State of Caring report 2021

Last year our research survey of Efc member organisations, Supporting working carers in COVID-19: recovery and return,⁶ revealed some of the continuing challenges that employers have faced in supporting and retaining valued employees, including carers who have been particularly impacted by COVID-19. It also highlighted some key areas of good practice in carer support. Interestingly, as well as a high proportion of employers reporting providing additional flexible working, leave and health and wellbeing provision for carers, over seven in ten said they were now offering a carers network or support group, an increase from 44% the previous year.

To follow up on this study, Carers UK conducted a research survey of Efc member organisations this year to help us identify further examples of good practice in promoting support for carers at work, including specifically to understand the role of carer champions in raising awareness and visibility.

Whilst the impacts of the pandemic, and the current cost of living crisis, have combined to present major challenges to both carers and employers, we also note that excellent support and innovative responses have been developed by some organisations and managers to address this situation. The purpose of this survey was therefore to gather further evidence about how Efc members have been supporting carers in their workforce as we steer a course out of the pandemic and through current economic challenges.

We recognise that employers have had to deal with an extended, ongoing period of change and uncertainty in extremely testing circumstances. We are therefore very grateful to those Efc members who took the time to participate and share their insights and experience in this study.

The Efc survey was conducted online during July – September 2022. In total, 70 member organisations took part, from the public, private, voluntary and community sectors.

Sectors represented include healthcare (38%), public services and administration (30%), and smaller numbers from a wide range of areas including accountancy, banking and finance, transport and logistics, business, consulting and management, engineering and manufacturing, environment, law, training and education.

Since the pandemic, Efc member organisations have seen an increase in requests for flexible working arrangements and leave to accommodate caring responsibilities, along with higher take-up of health and wellbeing support.

We also know that employers can play a critical role in encouraging employees to identify themselves as carers and access support, including through initiatives like workplace carer champions. We hope therefore that, following this research, further examples of support for working carers will be identified and shared over the coming months, including the good work of individual carer champions, advocates and sponsors.

Over
7 in 10
employers said they were now offering a carers network or support group to further promote carer support



⁶ Employers for Carers and Carers UK, Supporting working carers in COVID-19: Recovery and return (Nov 2021)

Key findings

Identification and characteristics of workplace carer champions

Almost three quarters (73%) of employers have a carer champion in their workplace.



Almost half (46%) of respondents have one carer champion in their workplace (while a further 21% have two and 33% three or more)

Around a third (35%) of employers have a carer champion who is currently caring



The top three skills employers thought were required/desirable from a carer champion are:



communication



empathy



listening skills



Excellent communication skills and passion and determination and be able to draw on lived experience as a carer.



Promoting carer support in the workplace

86% of employers say that their carer support, or other workplace support relevant to carers, is promoted by a carer champion.



The top three types of support promoted by a carer champion are:



A carers network
(73%)



Health and wellbeing scheme
(70%)



Carers leave
(55%)

Promoting carer support in the workplace (continued)

Carer champions use the following to promote their organisation’s carer support:



carer awareness raising activities
(85%)



emails to staff
(57%)



diversity and inclusion/wellbeing awareness raising
(57%)



workshop sessions for managers
(43%)

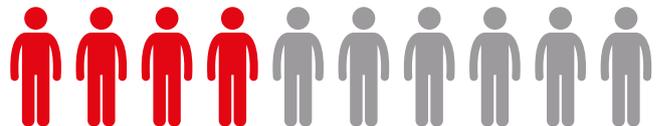
Support for carer champions

Almost half of employers (45%) said that when a carer champion begins their role they don’t receive any form of training (while around a quarter said they did and a further quarter were unsure)



Just over half (53%) of respondents said that carer champions are not given specific time allotments during their working week/month to spend on their duties (30% said they were and 17% were unsure)

38% of employers say that they are not currently providing explicit support for carer champions in their role



Benefits of a carer champion

Employers saw many benefits to having a carer champion in place, including



more carers identifying themselves



more discussion of carers' needs



more understanding of carers in the workplace



more carers accessing support



“ More carers have felt comfortable in coming forward and people are having more open conversations across the organisation. ”

Good practice points



Here are some ways in which EfC member organisations, large and smaller, have been developing and using the role of carer champions to help raise awareness of caring in the workplace and promote carer support.

- Incorporating carer awareness training when a carer champion begins their role so that they are equipped to fulfil it. This training could include information about the roles and responsibilities of a carer and carers' statutory rights.
- Providing carer champions with a resource pack to help them in their role.
- “ *What the role is. How to promote the role/ undertake the additional responsibilities. Resources available. What support is offered. What to do if they are concerned about a carer.* ”
- Offering regular catch-up meetings with carer champions to discuss any challenges or new initiatives to encourage carers to identify themselves or join the workplace carers network or support group.
- Encouraging a senior representative to become an executive sponsor to increase exposure and gain support.
- “ *All of our staff networks have an executive sponsor as this enables the networks to raise concerns and awareness at senior level. This also helps to bring about positive change.* ”
- Using the workplace carers network or support group to promote the carer champion role.
- Actively promoting the carer champion role through the organisation's intranet.
- “ *Can bring an active contribution to the shaping of our approach; critical thinker, well networked on the topic; respected by peers as a 'go-to-person'; actively keeps topic in discussion and can access other networks; good communicator/listener; ideally is a carer themselves and can empathise through their own experiences.* ”

Accenture Case Study

Accenture has seven carer champions who cover different employment levels, and we ensure that they have a basic understanding of the impacts of caring, a passion to help carers succeed within our organisation, and a time to commit to our network to support network admin, communications, and events.

Our Executive Leadership sponsor was an existing member of our Carers Network and is a current carer. Therefore, he is fully equipped to take on the role and is very active within the group.

Our network committee works to help promote the impact of caring and ongoing support available to carers. This allows more carers to self-identify and to be aware of the benefits available within the organisation. We have also been able to link in with one of our clients to help them develop their own carer support group. Our Executive Sponsor allows us to communicate directly at a UKI leadership level which has helped us to get more support from Management and HR, which has really accelerated our objectives and achievements.

“

Our network committee works to help promote the impact of caring and ongoing support available to carers.

”

All of Accenture's policies that carers can take advantage of depending on their specific situation are supported and promoted by our carer champions. We also have a framework in place to help carers escalate any situation where they don't feel they are getting the best support from their manager or HR when asking for help. This is promoted on our intranet page and at our events.



Our advice to other networks is to get an Executive Sponsor who is, or has experience of being, a carer. This allows you to significantly increase your exposure and gain more support where you may need funding or support to improve policies or publicise events.

The Carers Network at Accenture has worked hard for years and it wasn't until our Executive Sponsor was appointed that we felt the support and publicity from outside the group matched the effort put in by the committee.

Recommendations

This survey of EfC member organisations shows that much work has been done by employers as they seek to understand and address the specific needs of carers in their workforce.

It highlights some excellent examples of creative and proactive initiatives taken by organisations to identify carer champions and promote their role within the workplace. However, as recent research by Carers UK has shown, more broadly among employers (beyond EfC member organisations) levels of awareness and support for carers remain variable and inconsistent.

It is crucial, therefore, that the good practice highlighted in this survey report continues to be shared with and by employers both internally (within their own organisation), and externally so that carers are supported in workplaces more widely. To facilitate this, we make the following recommendations:

For organisations:

- Employers, if they have not already done so, should introduce and implement carer-friendly employment practices, building on the experience in this report. As a key first step they should look specifically to identify and support a carer champion(s) in their workplace to help raise awareness and visibility of caring.
- Support for a carer champion both at the beginning and during their role is helpful, so employers should consider providing carer awareness training (including EfC resources where applicable) and information on carers' rights. It is also helpful to provide such information more broadly in the workplace (eg within staff induction and manager training) to help raise awareness of caring more widely.
- If a carer champion is taking on the role in addition to their day job, employers should think about whether they will offer a specific time allotment for this during the working week/month. While this may need to be adjusted in the future, it can provide an initial guide on how much time should be spent on the role and help to manage expectations so that employees do not struggle with workload.
- For bigger organisations, employers may wish to have more than one carer champion so that different departments or areas of the organisation are covered, and more employees are reached and supported.
- For organisations with more than one carer champion, having champions not only in different areas of the business but also at different employment levels may be beneficial.
- To reap a key benefit of having a carer champion in the workplace, employers should shape the objectives of this role around increasing the identification of carers and carers' needs.

For Government:

- Government to help lead by example by promoting its support for carer champions in the Civil Service, both internally and externally.
- Government departments that are members of the Employers for Carers forum and have Carer Confident accreditation could also promote more widely the measures they have in place to support carers in their workforce, including through carer champions.
- The earlier Government pledge to introduce five days Carer's Leave is welcome and should be brought forward at the earliest opportunity. Employers should also consider, as good practice, offering five to ten days paid leave to support working carers.
- The Government should consider a refresh of work around carer returner programmes, skills recognition and later life apprenticeships to help enable current or former carers to combine work and caring.

Detailed findings

In general, EfC member organisations who responded to this survey have embraced the carer champion role in their workplaces. They have used this role to benefit their organisations in many ways but primarily to help identify more carers and communicate support that is available.



Following our research last year⁷ showing that EfC members have incorporated additional flexible working and leave arrangements, and that these have become more embedded since the start of the pandemic, it seems fitting that this study highlights the vital role that carer champions can play in promoting such support.

As can be seen from the findings from this survey, some employers have really seized the opportunity to identify and work with carer champions to promote the carer support that they have available, and in different and creative ways.

⁷ Employers for Carers and Carers UK, Supporting working carers in COVID-19: Recovery and return (Nov 2021)

Identification and characteristics of workplace carer champions

- Almost three quarters (73%) of employers have a carer champion in place at their organisation, 16% of members responded that they didn't have a carer champion in place and 11% were unsure.
- Almost half (46%) of employers have one carer champion in their workplace (while a further 21% have two and 33% have three or more). Of those that have one carer champion in place, 38% are on CEO/Director/Board Member level. Of those members who have two or more carer champions, just over four out of five (82%) cover different employment levels. Only organisations with 25,000 employees or more had three or more carer champions.
- 35% of employers have a carer champion who is currently caring and 19% have a champion who has previously been a carer. 22% of employers have a carer champion who is not currently caring but interested in the issue and 24% were unsure of the carer champion's status.
- When employers were asked if they had any similar roles to a carer champion, 68% said they had a mental health first aider, 55% had a disability champion, and 18% had an agile working champion. Other roles mentioned were a wellbeing champion, champion for LGBTQ, and senior champions for protected characteristics.
- The top three skills employers reported that are required/desirable from a carer champion were communication, empathy and good listening skills. They also mentioned willingness to assist promotion of support, understanding both on a level of being a carer and the rights of a carer, ability to influence and openness to share own experience.
- 64% of employers say they actively promote their carer champion role, 16% don't actively promote the role and 20% were unsure. Those who actively promote the role said that they do this through their intranet (73%), using communications such as e-bulletins and emails (58%), workplace awareness raising events (55%), other external events (22%), and social media (18%).

“Carer champions need to have increased knowledge on carers and what support is available, so listening and effective communicator essential, advocacy and negotiating/ influencing skills, also problem solving and ability to signpost to appropriate support services.”

“Empathy and understanding that carers are a very diverse group of people facing many different challenges.”

“An understanding and knowledge of the rights of carers, empathy, organisational skills, able to influence decisions relating to carers at exec level, a willingness to assist with promotion of the Carers Staff Network.”



73%

of employers have a carer champion in place at their organisation



64%

of employers say they actively promote their carer champion role

Promoting carer support in the workplace

- 80% of employers have policies specifically tailored for carers, 11% don't and 9% were unsure.
- 86% of employers said that their carer support, or other workplace support relevant to carers, was promoted by a carer champion and 14% said they were unsure. No respondents said that their carer/ workplace support was not promoted by a carer champion. This demonstrates the key role that carer champions have in the workplace.
- The top three types of support promoted by a carer champion is a carers network (73%), health and wellbeing scheme (70%) and Carers Leave (55%).
- The top ways that members are using carer champions to promote the different types of carer support are through carer awareness raising activities (85%), diversity and inclusion/wellbeing awareness raising activities (58%), emails to staff (58%), and workshop sessions for managers (43%).



80%

of employers have policies specifically tailored for carers



Support for the carer champion

- Almost half of employers (45%) said that carer champions don't receive any form of training when they begin their role. However, the remaining responses were split evenly between members saying carer champions do receive training and those that were unsure.

Those who receive some form of training say that it includes:

- “Regular catch up meetings, cross network events, Teams channel.”
- “Information on carers rights, key issues for carers, support available and the system to access it, Care Act key notes, info on assessments, etc.”
- 38% of employers are not currently providing support for carer champions during their role. However, of those who are providing support, they are doing this by workshops (18%), mentoring (25%), and specific educational training (8%). Other forms of support include meetings and catch ups and support from HR, D&I and wellbeing teams. Of those who responded that they were providing support to their carer champions, this was done by HR/D&I (48%), the carers network (64%) and a learning development team (20%).
- Just over half (53%) of employers said that carer champions are not given specific time allotments during their week/month. 29% of respondents said that carer champions are given a specific time allotment to do their role and 18% were unsure.

Some employers gave examples of how much time is allocated:

- “15 hours a month.”
- “Generally works out around 2 hours per month (more around Carers Week/Carers Rights Day) but management are flexible about this.”
- “An hour or so each month.”



45%

of employers said that carer champions don't receive any form of training when they begin their role



Benefits of a carer champion

- Employers saw a lot of benefits to having a carer champion in place, including more carers identifying themselves, more discussion about carers' needs and more understanding about carers in the workplace.
- “The Carer Champions are able to flag themes arising from the needs of carers or where our systems and processes need to change to be more supportive.”





Employers for Carers

Carers UK runs Employers for Carers, providing practical advice and resources to help employers support carers in their workforce.

 /showcase/efc-employers-for-carers



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