

Carers and Employment

Introduction

Do you look after someone who could not manage at home without you because they are ill, frail, disabled or has mental health or substance misuse problems?

Do you do this without being paid?

If yes, then you are a carer.

There are over 39,000 carers in Wiltshire. As a carer, you may be juggling caring with paid work. You may be considering giving up work so that you continue to care, or you may find you cannot work because of the time you spend caring. Your role as a carer may have recently ended and you may now be looking for work. No two carers are the same and caring can be unpredictable.

This factsheet provides advice for carers in employment, support for those who wish to return to work and information on learning opportunities.

Caring and working

Problems you may face as a carer when working include:

- stress and anxiety from constantly juggling work and care
- tiredness and having to cope with little or broken sleep
- isolation because you have no time to go out and socialise
- feeling that your colleagues think you are not committed to your paid work
- organising care for the person you look after whilst you are at work.

However, the benefits of being able to work may include:

- improved finances now and in the future
- increased self-esteem
- better social networks.

Carers' rights at work

You may find the best or only way to manage your work and caring responsibilities is to change your work arrangements. You may also need to take leave for emergencies at short notice.

Carers now have more statutory rights at work that help to meet these needs. Employers may also be able to offer additional flexibility through their own policies and procedures.

The Work and Families Act 2006 and the Employment Rights Act 1996 give working carers rights to help them manage work and caring, including the right to request flexible work and leave entitlement. These rights apply to employees, although your employment status can affect your entitlement to statutory rights. If, for example, you are self employed, on a short-term contract, or employed through an agency, you may not be covered by these rights. If this applies to you it is important to seek advice from the Arbitration and Conciliation Service (ACAS) – details can be found at the back of the booklet.

What support may be available to help you?

Time off for emergencies

As a carer, you may take 'reasonable' time off to deal with an emergency relating to a dependent who could be a relative such as a parent, a partner, or a child, or someone who lives with you who is solely dependent on you. An emergency could be:

- an unexpected illness
- an accident
- a breakdown in care arrangements
- a need to make longer term arrangements for someone who is ill or injured, but not to provide long term care yourself.

You can take off only the time you need to deal with the emergency or to make other care arrangements. You have to take the time off as unpaid leave unless your contract of employment allows for paid dependency leave.

Flexible working

Flexible working arrangements are sometimes called 'work-life balance'. The government encourages employers to offer flexible working to all their staff. This can involve working from home or reducing hours temporarily or permanently. Since April 2007, you have the right as a carer to request changes in your working patterns to manage your caring responsibilities.

Information on flexible working should be available from your manager, personnel or welfare officer, union or staff representative.

Other support to help you in your work

Carer assessments

If you ask social care services for help, they must assess the person you care for through a community care assessment. If you are providing, or are intending to provide, regular and substantial amounts of care you are also entitled to your own carer's assessment. A carer's assessment gives you the opportunity to tell social care services about any difficulties you have and the things that could make caring easier for you, including support to remain in employment, or return to work, as well as training and education. It is not a test and does not include a financial assessment. A carer's assessment may have a variety of outcomes including a change in the care provided to enable you to have a break, services that will support you in your caring role, or information about your local carer support services.

To ask for a carer's assessment call the Department of Community Services (DCS) customer advisors on 0300 456 0111.

Carer support organisations

There are four local carer support agencies in Wiltshire which can offer you information, support and advice. They produce carer information packs and a newsletter and offer you the opportunity to join local carer support groups. They can also signpost you to other helpful resources.

Contact details can be found at the end of this booklet for the carer support agencies and other voluntary organisations which can provide support to you as a carer.

Carers' benefits

As a carer, you may be entitled to some benefits, whether you do paid work or not. The welfare benefits system is complicated and if you plan to claim benefits it is important to speak to an advice service first as your claim for benefits may affect the benefits for the person you care for.

Benefits you may be entitled to include:

- carer's allowance
- carer's premium
- income support
- housing benefit and council tax benefit
- working tax credit and child tax credit.

For more information, see the directgov website or contact your local JobCentre Plus or Citizen's Advice Bureau; details are at the end of this booklet. If you are unsure of your entitlements and you feel that you require assistance in accessing the benefits system, you can ask the customer advisors at Wiltshire Council for a benefits check: call 0300 456 0111.

Are you thinking of leaving paid work?

Many carers make the hard decision to leave work and concentrate on caring. Before deciding to do this, you may find it useful to think about:

- how you would manage financially
- what support you might get from family or friends to help you keep working
- if it would be difficult to get back into work if your caring situation changed
- if you would be able to continue work with more help from services such as care in the home for the person you care for
- what difference it might make to your relationship with the person you care for
- what support is available from social care services so that you can take breaks from caring, or keep up contact with friends
- what welfare benefits you will be entitled to
- what would happen to your retirement pension, occupational pension and National Insurance (NI) contributions.
- what local support there is for carers, such as support groups and activities.

You may find it helpful to talk through some of these issues with a colleague or with a carers' support agency. Contact details can be found at the end of this booklet.

Staying in work

If you decide you want to keep working or are thinking about going back to work or study, you may be able to:

- have flexible working arrangements, such as working from home, cutting the hours you work, or taking a career break
- get support from social care services for the person you care for while you are at work
- get support and advice from carers' organisations and support groups
- get some benefits, especially if you are in lower-paid employment.

Going back to work

Some carers, especially if they have been caring for a few years, may feel that they no longer have the right skills, or they may lack confidence to apply for jobs. Other carers learn valuable skills while they are caring and some of these skills can be transferred to work.

However, if you have been out of work for some time, it can be very difficult to think about returning to work and hard to know where to start. By thinking about your skills now and in the past, and linking into employment projects, you could make the first steps back into training or employment.

Can I get support for training and work?

Whether you are a former carer or still caring, you may need support in returning to work or training after a period out of the workplace.

JobCentre Plus

JobCentre Plus combines the functions of JobCentres and social security offices and provides benefit and employment services to people of working age. They can tell you about the range of help they offer, both to find work and to help you out when you start work. This could include:

- training programmes, such as New Deal programmes, to learn new skills or refresh existing skills
- support to make applications, write your CV and prepare for interviews
- financial help when you move into work.

Extra employment support has recently been made available to you as a carer from JobCentre Plus. It offers you the choice to combine paid work with your caring responsibilities and aims to reduce financial hardship.

This work -focused support for carers will:

- help you prepare for work and find suitable training
- offer funding for replacement care when you wish to participate in training and appointments, as agreed with JobCentre Plus, as well as job interviews
- introduce specialist training for advisors who work with carers.

Information about JobCentre can be found at www.direct.gov.uk/en/Employment or you can phone 0845 606 0234. Details of the local offices can be found at the end of this booklet.

Carers and learning

The demands of caring can limit your opportunity to study, but many carers undertake a variety of courses; they find they enjoy learning and the relief it gives from the caring role. Support is available to help you.

City and Guilds 'Learning for Living'

This online learning course for carers builds on your skills as a carer. It helps you develop knowledge and skills relevant to your needs, find opportunities and develop realistic plans for further education, training, employment and leisure.

Website: www.learning-for-living.co.uk

National Extension College

The National Extension College (NEC) provides home study courses and you may be able to get reduced fees if you are a carer.

Website: www.nec.ac.uk

Tel: 0800 389 2839

Caring with Confidence

Caring with Confidence is a free programme for carers. It can help and support you to make a positive difference to your life and that of the person you care for. It offers learning and development opportunities to help you build on your skills and knowledge. Access is through using workbooks at home or the Internet.

Website: www.caringwithconfidence.net

Tel: 0800 849 2349

Local colleges

Some colleges run courses specifically for carers. The environments are often informal and friendly where you are encouraged to find a study programme to suit your learning styles, caring duties and personal aims. Some colleges give reductions to carers on benefits and some provide help with transport costs and course fees.

Website: www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/AdultLearning

Telephone: 0800 100 900

Helpful contacts for carers

Arbitration and Conciliation Service (ACAS) carries an A-Z of information on all aspects of employment, including dependency leave and flexible working. The helpline provides clear, confidential, independent and impartial advice to assist the caller in resolving issues in the workplace.

Website: www.acas.org.uk

Helpline: 08457 47 47 47

Carers Direct is a national website for carers with lots of information on working and employment. They have a helpline that is open from 8am until 9pm weekdays and from 11am until 4pm at weekends.

Website: www.nhs.uk/carersdirect

Helpline: 0808 802 0202

Carers UK is a national voluntary organisation campaigning to improve services and support to carers. They produce a wide range of fact sheets and leaflets including the 'Employees guide to work and caring' and the 'Supporting Working Carers Guide'.

Website: www.carersuk.org

Carers line: 0808 808 7777

Contact a Family provides support and information to families with disabled children.

Website: www.cafamily.org.uk

Helpline: 0808 808 3555

Directgov is a large website with a wide range of public services and government information. It has many informative sections on employment for carers and people with disabilities, together with links to many other sites.

Website: www.direct.gov.uk/en/CaringForSomeone

Working Families provides information for working parents and carers.

Website: www.workingfamilies.org.uk

Tel: 0800 013 0313

Multikulti website has useful information available in 13 languages on a range of employment issues and other rights and benefits

Website: www.multikulti.org.uk

Princess Royal Trust for Carers is a national voluntary organisation providing information, advice and support to carers.

Website: www.carers.org

Tel: 0844 800 4361

Local information about support for carers in Wiltshire

Carers' support agencies

Carers Support North Wilts

41 New Road

Chippenham SN15 1JQ

Tel: 01249 444110

Email: office@carersnw.co.uk

Carers Support West Wilts

Independent Living Centre

St Georges Road

Semington

Trowbridge BA14 6JQ

Tel: 01380 871690

Email: admin@csww.co.uk

Carers Support Kennet

Old School House

23 High Street

Pewsey SN9 4NF

Tel: 01672 564265

Email: office@kennetcarers.org.uk

Carers Support South Wilts

15 New Street

Salisbury SP1 2PH

Tel: 01722 322746

Email: admin@salisburycarers.co.uk

Alzheimer support organisations

Alzheimer's Society West Wiltshire and Kennet

Station Approach

Stallard Street

Trowbridge BA14 8HW

Tel: 01225 776481

Email: office@alzheimerswiltshire.org.uk

Alzheimer's Society, North Wilts
Unit 3, The Works
The Butts
Chippenham SN15 3JT
Tel: 01249 443469
Email: alznilts@lineone.net

Alzheimer's Society, Salisbury
29A Brown Street
Salisbury SP1 2AS
Tel: 01722 326236
Email: info@Alzheimer.org.uk

Young carers

Youth Action Wiltshire
Wyndhams
St Josephs Place
Devizes SN10 1DD
Tel: 01380 729813
Email: enquiries@youthactionwiltshire.org

JobCentre Plus

JobCentre Plus
Cyppa Court
Avenue La Fleche
Chippenham SN15 3LH
Tel: 01249 425800

JobCentre Plus
Bythesea Road
Trowbridge BA14 8XR
Tel: 01225 496300

JobCentre Plus
Maryport Street
Devizes SN10 1AH
Tel: 01380 304800

JobCentre Plus
Sumerlock House
Sumerlock Approach
Salisbury SP2 7RW
Tel: 01722 315200

Citizens' advice

Wiltshire Citizens' Advice Bureau
Website: www.cabwiltshire.org.uk
Tel: 0844 375 2775