

Invisible and overwhelmed:

A survey of UK carers balancing work
and elderly care responsibilities

Carents[®]



ABOUT CARENTS®

Carents® is a free to use digital platform (a one stop shop) for the growing numbers of UK adults who provide help and care for their ageing parents. Launched in 2020, the Carents® mission is to recognise and help meet their needs in order to help them keep themselves and their elderly loved ones safe and well. Visit: carents.co.uk

Carents®

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Contents

Executive Summary	3
Context and background	4
The working carents survey 2025	6
Section 1: Life as a carent	8
Section 2: Balancing work and parenting	11
Section 3: Experience of workplace support for carents	12
Section 4: Creating a better future for working carents	18
Supporting working carents now and in future: key messages	21
Employer checklist: Pleas from working carents	24
Stakeholder checklist: Pleas from working carents	25
Appendix	26



Executive Summary

Carents® – the one stop shop for those looking after elderly parents - has undertaken a survey to explore themes raised in earlier focus group conversations with carers balancing work and care.

In this report adults who support their elderly relatives by helping them to stay safe and well are defined as carers. Carers are increasingly filling the gaps in care for older adults but their role is largely unrecognised and their needs are poorly met.

Over 1000 UK carers, predominantly women in their 50s and 60s, completed an online Carents® survey which revealed their experiences of balancing work and care.

Their responses revealed the stark realities of unpaid elderly care dominated by feelings of overwhelm, stress and exhaustion.

More than half were providing more than 20 hours of care each week, **and 70% , as a result of their carer role, said they were left with no option but to reduce their working hours, change roles to something less demanding or leave work altogether.** These choices, have profound and

enduring consequences for their **financial security, career progression, and personal wellbeing.** More than a third (37%) revised their retirement plans choosing to exit early often under financial and emotional strain.

Positive workplaces were evident and characterised by being understanding, flexible and supportive in contrast to others which were rigid and discriminatory. The majority of carers praised their employers and many expressed a preference to stay in work but eventually, the pressures of caring made this untenable.



Our survey responses highlight that workplace support is valued but working carers also need help to manage the practical and emotional demands of care in order to maintain their income and their wellbeing.

Retaining staff in midlife is important for employers, who risk losing some of the most valued and experienced staff. It is also an economic imperative for the UK, increasingly so as its population ages. Our survey identified the importance of recognising carers and affording them parity with other forms of care such as parenting as well as providing more high quality, empowering health & care services, respite opportunities and emotional support.

Carents® provides vital help by giving carers recognition, practical and emotional support but wider workplace, service and societal reform is also needed. In this survey, carers provided their ideas and pleas and we synthesised those messages into checklists for employers and wider stakeholders.

The impact of our ageing demographic affects us all. We encourage you to consider these checklists and proactively implement wider support to retain and protect working carers.

Context and background

THE CARENTING GENERATION

More of us are living longer than ever before but older people with poor health can struggle and are increasingly relying on friends and relatives to help them live independently at home.

In this report, adults who help and support their elderly relatives helping them to stay safe and well are defined as carents. There are an estimated 4 million carents in the UK, often women juggling elderly care with other midlife pressures, representing the majority (57%) of UK carers. Experts predict that over the next 15 years, the number of older adults will increase significantly with a doubling in the number of adults aged over 85 years. Consequently, larger numbers will need family support and the number of carents will grow. However, carents are a largely unrecognised group whose needs are largely unmet.



THE ECONOMICS OF WORK AND CARE

Although many do not identify as such, carents are unpaid carers. They are the largest group in the UK, accounting for at least 57% of all unpaid carers¹ and more likely to be female, aged in their 50s and 60s.^{2,3} Many carents combine work and care, playing a significant role in the UK workforce whilst providing unpaid care worth billions of pounds annually.⁴

“I am one of a huge army of working carents. We are balancing our paid work whilst caring for our elderly parents. It’s tougher than you can ever imagine until you get to this place. CHRISTINE

Unfortunately, the struggle to maintain their own wellbeing whilst combining work and care is often so great that many carents reduce their paid working hours or leave employment altogether. Few return to work after their caregiving responsibilities end.⁵

It is thought that around 400,000 carers leave their jobs each year to provide family care for relatives costing the UK economy around £6 billion in lost taxes

and additional benefits. One study found that more UK carers exit employment than elsewhere in Europe.⁵

Businesses also face challenges - they lose talented people often in their 50s and 60s - in whom they have invested significant time and money.⁵ All occupational groups are affected – one analysis found that the proportion of women providing care in management or professional roles was increasing.⁶ The cumulative

costs to employers of a carer leaving the workplace can amount to 50-150% of their salary⁷ which would equate to £20 -60K per employee based on current average earnings.⁸

The recent white paper “Get Britain Working”⁹ emphasises work as a central economic pillar. It acknowledges the challenges facing carers and their need for more support to stay in work.

HOW CAN WE SUPPORT WORKING CARENTS?

Employment is one of the greatest challenges facing members of the Carents® community. It’s important that we understand their support needs and ensure their voices can be heard.

In Spring 2025, we conducted focus groups with working carents. These detailed conversations laid bare the scale of the challenges they face and emphasised a pressing need for businesses and policymakers to help them stay economically active whilst continuing to provide essential support for the older generation.

Building on these insights, we have undertaken a quantitative survey to measure the challenges facing working carents and identify the support they need.



¹Kings Fund (2023) Caring in a complex world https://assets.kingsfund.org.uk/f/256914/x/1f6607287b/caring_in_a_complex_world_unpaid_carers_2023.pdf

²Public Health England (2021) Caring as a social determinant of health: review of evidence <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/caring-as-a-social-determinant-of-health-review-of-evidence>

³Health Foundation (2023) Only 2% of carers receive financial support from local authorities <https://www.health.org.uk/press-office/press-releases/only-2-of-carers-receive-financial-support-from-local-authorities>

⁴Centre for Care (2024) Valuing Carers 2021/22 https://centreforcare.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/valuing_carers_uk_v3_web.pdf

⁵Department for Work and Pensions (2019) Informal carers and employment : summary report of a systematic review <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/informal-carers-and-employment-summary-report-of-a-systematic-review>

⁶Social Market Foundation (2018) Caring for carers <https://www.smf.co.uk/publications/caring-for-carers>

⁷DHSC (2013) Supporting working carers. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supporting-working-carers-the-benefits-to-families-business-and-the-economy>

⁸ONS (2024) Employee earnings in the UK [https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/bulletins/annualsurveyofhoursandearnings/2024#:~:text=Median%20weekly%20earnings%20for%20full,%20housing%20costs%20\(CPIH\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/bulletins/annualsurveyofhoursandearnings/2024#:~:text=Median%20weekly%20earnings%20for%20full,%20housing%20costs%20(CPIH))

⁹DWP, HM Treasury, DoE (2024) Get Britain Working White Paper <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/get-britain-working-white-paper>

Working carents survey 2025

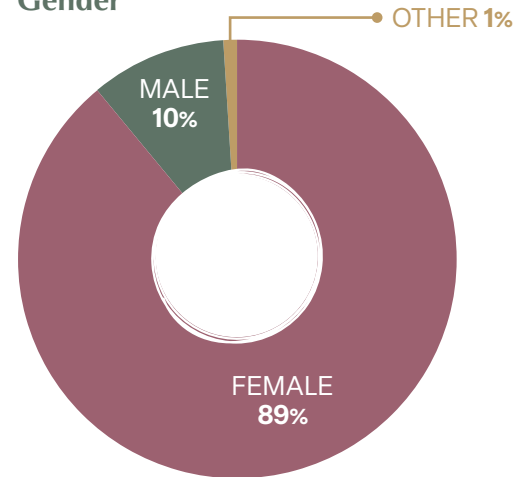
Over a **three-week period** beginning on 25th February 2025, we invited our members to complete an online survey for working carents. Participants were not offered any incentives; their involvement was purely voluntary, providing an opportunity to share their insights.

We limited our analysis to the responses from **1074** adults who reported that they had direct experience of carenting - caring for an ageing parent.

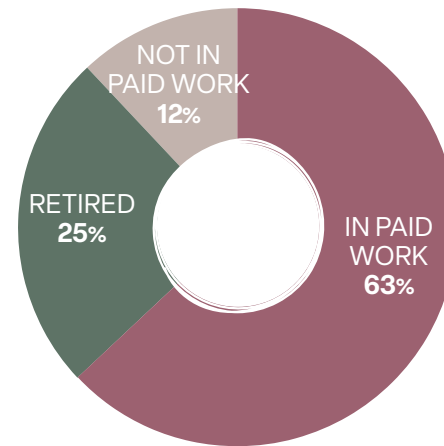
Further details of the survey questions are provided at the end of the report, [see page 26](#).

About the carents who participated in the survey

Gender



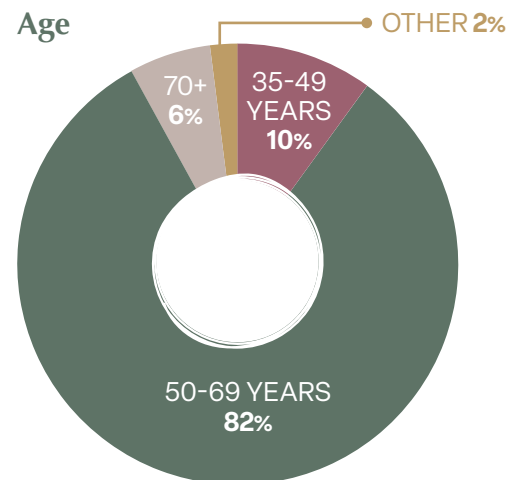
Employment status



- Almost **TWO THIRDS** (63%) of the carents surveyed were currently in paid working roles
- **ONE QUARTER** (25%) were retired
- **12%** were not in work because they were either working as unpaid carers, looking for work, or unable to work due to health problems

Work status	Count	% of total
In paid work	680	63
Retired	269	25
Not in work	125	12
Total	1074	100

Age



- Of those 680 in paid work, the majority were employed either **FULL TIME** or **PART TIME** (83%)
- Although 17% were **SELF EMPLOYED**

Role	Count	% of total
Self employed	115	17
Employed FT	293	43
Employed PT	272	40
Total	680	100

- 55 respondents, **44%** of those not in work, were **FULL TIME UNPAID CARERS** for their ageing parents.

SECTION 1

Life as a parent

We asked parents to sum up their feelings about their parenting responsibilities including the amount of time they spent providing care or travelling to do so. These responses, supplemented with comments about their situation, revealed key insights into the daily realities of their lives and the personal costs of parenting.

More than half of those responding to the survey reported spending over 20 hours caring each week and one fifth spent over 50 hours.

The majority of parents spent less than 5 hours travelling to provide care each week although this was in excess of 10 hours for a minority (3%).

Although some parents reported positive feelings such as **privilege** and **compassion**, the majority of those surveyed reported negative feelings about their role, painting a picture of overwhelm, stress, and exhaustion.

Their comments reveal responsibilities which are **life changing** and **challenging** with **daily unpredictable struggles** generating far ranging consequences on their finances, wellbeing, autonomy and relationships.

Parenting responsibilities are...

Life changing

“It’s turned our world upside down.

“It’s not the retirement I’d planned.

Challenging

“It’s the hardest thing I’ve ever done.

“It is relentless and draining, the pressure and stress is relentless. I am fortunate to have a supportive employer and I count my blessings.

Long-term

“I honestly don’t know where to begin. I’ve been doing it for 13 years. And it gets worse not better.

24/7

“My mum has Parkinsons, my parents are both 80. Dad has terminal prostate cancer. I cook meals for them every night and take them round. I sleep round on a Friday night to give my dad a break. He wants me to sleep round during the week as well but I work full time and wouldn’t function with only a few hours sleep. I also have a husband and 2 kids 23 & 21.

Unpredictable

“I struggle with my father with vascular dementia contacting me on average 20 times a day whilst I am working. He is incredibly needy and only lives round the corner so turns up at the house several times a day while I’m working as well.

“I have struggled to manage working full time (in a job I enjoy) and providing care. I am fortunate that I can work from home however despite having carers here during the day I have constant distractions with unplanned visits from district nurses, GP, paramedic, etc.

Daily battles

“Not only dealing with their care but dealing with councils and hospitals. We are on the border of 2 counties and have real problems getting which council to deal with finance and care, each passing the buck to the other. Also so many different people to talk to and different departments. e.g. Occupational Health team, physio team, incontinence team, finance, carers etc.

“I care for both parents, both have dementia. One has Parkinson's and the other has severe osteoporosis which significantly impacts on mobility. I have frequent phone calls as I have to chase everything. For example Mum had an x ray on Monday, results should have been through that evening. I rang to today to follow up, the GP practice can't locate them. This type of thing happens more or less daily.

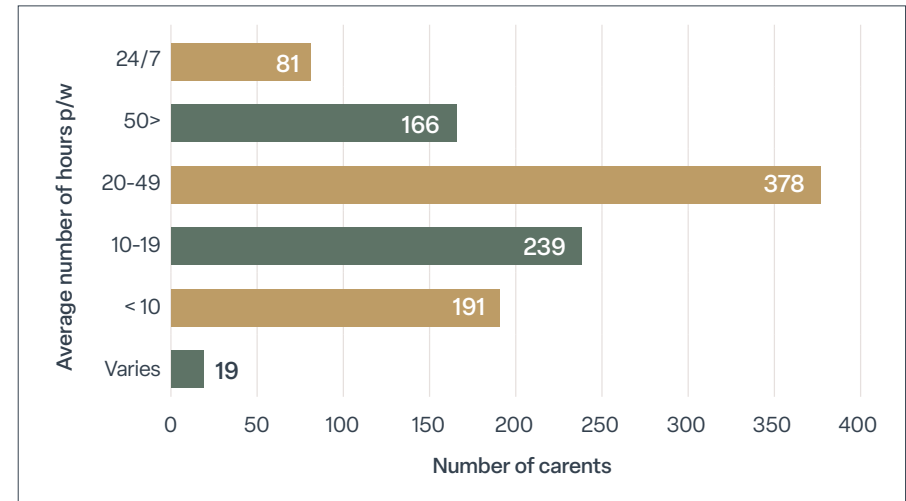


Time spent on **care** each week

Over **10** hours
80% of carers

Over **20** hours
58% of carers

Over **50** hours
20% of carers



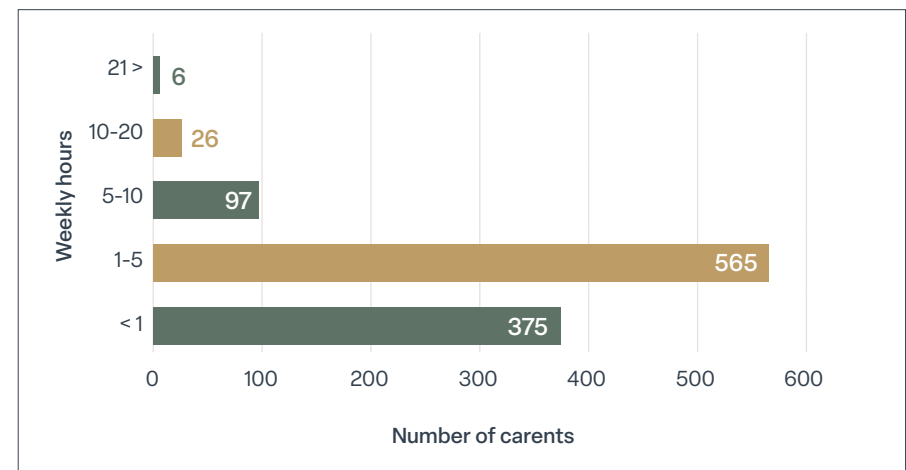
Time spent **travelling** to provide care each week

Under **an hour**
35% of carers

1-5 hours
53% of carers

5-10 hours
9% of carers

Over **10** hours
3% of carers



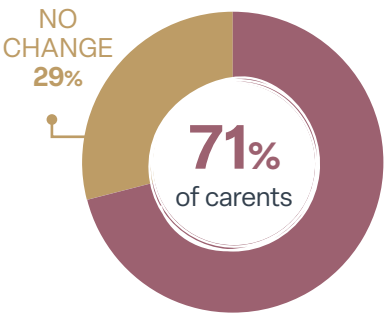
SECTION 2

Balancing work and carenting



Impact on **work** and **career**

“Have you made changes to your work or career because of carenting responsibilities (e.g. reduced hours, changed roles, left work)?” This question was applicable to 961 of the respondents.



reported that they had **MADE CHANGES** to their **work** or **career** because of **carenting responsibilities**.

Impact on work and career	Number of carents	%
No, I haven't changed my work due to carenting	283	29
Yes, I left work earlier than planned (e.g. took early retirement)	204	21
Yes, I've changed roles (more flexible /different working days/different hours)	26	3
Other		
Yes, I've changed roles (to something more flexible/less demanding)	184	19
Yes, I've reduced my working hours	264	27
Total	961	100

Of the **678** (71%) carents who had made changes to their work >>

30% had left work **earlier** than planned

31% had changed roles to something **more flexible** or **less demanding**

39% had **reduced** their working hours

Impact on **retirement**

All of the carents surveyed (1074) answered the question: *“Has caring for a parent made you consider changing your retirement plans?”*

Changed retirement plans	Unsure about retirement plans	Unchanged
37%	33%	31%

SECTION 3

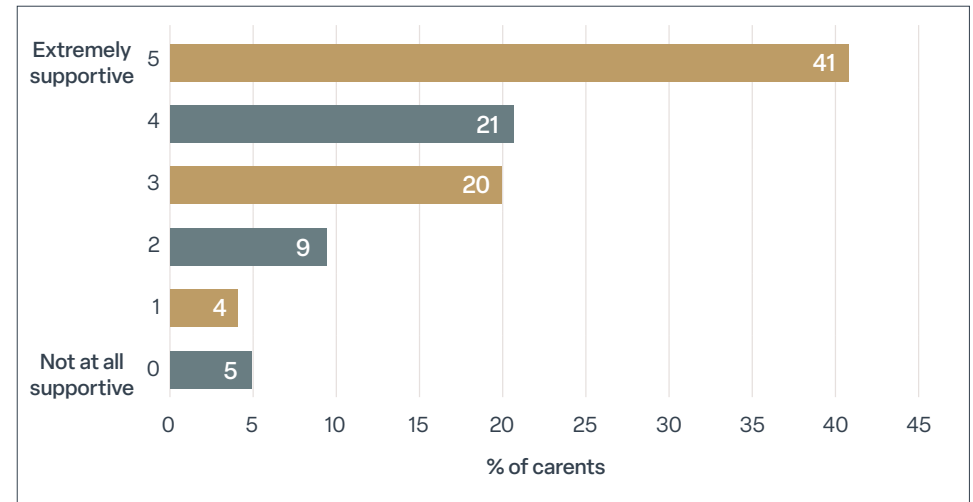
Experience of workplace support for carents



Level of support

The survey asked carents to:

“Score the level of support that they had received from their employer on a 6 point scale from 0 (not at all supportive) to 5 (very supportive).”

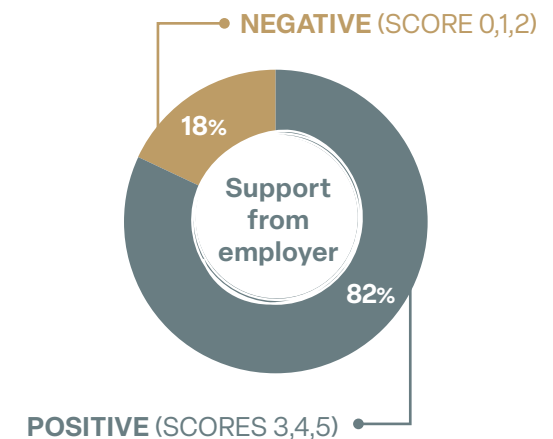


Positive workplace experiences

82% of carents scored their employer **POSITIVELY** and

41% of all carents indicated that their employer had been **VERY SUPPORTIVE**

They described how their employers had been **understanding** and provided plenty of extra **support and flexibility** including **additional resources specifically for carers**.



Flexible Working Arrangements

Flexibility around hours, shifts, working from home, and compressed hours, was the most frequently cited type of support.

“They have been flexible to accommodate mum’s health related appointments and to work from home... allowed me to flex my hours throughout the week.

“My employer is happy for me to work my hours around any appointments.

“Agreed to flexible compressed hours.

“Literally all meetings are scheduled around my Dad’s care needs. I get asked first on Doodle poll for meeting times and dates.

Understanding and Empathy from Managers and Teams

Supportive line managers were also recognised as being an invaluable source of support.

“My manager regularly checks in with me regarding my situation – and my wellbeing.

“My employer has been extremely understanding and supportive.

“I ended up being signed off long term sick due to stress and depression as a result of trying to balance work and caring. My employer arranged counselling for me and regular contact with occupational therapy.

Support for Emergencies or Short-Notice Leave

Many carers recorded examples of being allowed to leave work abruptly or take time off when emergencies arose.

“They have been tolerant of me leaving work whenever I have needed to.

“Allowed me to rearrange hours to take my dad to appointments or if he has had a bad night.

“Happy for me to take unpaid leave for appointments and to take leave at short notice.

“It’s ok for me to nip out of work to take father to appointments or when he has a problem and needs me.

Workplace Resources for Carers

Some carers noted the value of being able to access formal support through carers’ policies, forums, or counselling services.

“Policy on care leave, flexible working hours, carers hub for support and a supportive team.

“Supported time off, been good listeners, offered counselling services if required.

“I am also a member of my employer’s ‘Carers Forum’.

Remote and Hybrid Work Options

There were frequent comments about the way remote working (especially working from the care recipient’s home) could help carers balance their responsibilities.

“Allowed me to work from my parent’s home which is 250 miles away.

“My employer has allowed me to work fully at home for ten months.

“I now work from home and my line management understand.

Reduction or Adaptation of Workload and Hours

Several carents celebrated the opportunity to reduce their hours or take career breaks with management support.

“Allowed me the career break at short notice.

“They have been flexible to accommodate mum’s health related appointments and to work from home. Recently they have allowed me to flex my hours throughout the week as needed as long as I do the contracted hours.

“They have allowed me to drop to 4 days a week.



Negative workplace experiences

Almost

1/5 of carents reported **NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES**

and a small number

5% reported that their employer had **NOT BEEN AT ALL SUPPORTIVE** (score 0)

The low scores reflected concerns around **lack of recognition and support**, **inflexible** working and experiences of **discrimination** and **burnout** leading to **forced career sacrifices**.

Inflexible

“I had to give up my job as my employer would not allow flexibility on working hours.

“Couldn’t get flexible hours and the usual work comes first excuse.

“Would not give time off for appointments – this is a huge issue in the education sector.

Unsupportive

“Didn’t understand the sense of overwhelm and how you can’t just switch off caring.

“My employer was not supportive, so I had to give up my job and become self employed to get the flexibility I needed.

“When my mum was ill, I moved in with her for 10 weeks to provide care to her. I asked if i could wfh to help me with this. My manager at the time was utterly awful to me so much so that I left a job which I loved in the nhs.

Discrimination and Stigma

“Employer would sack me if they knew.

“Initially supportive but now they roll their eyes or smirk.

“Never involved them fear of getting rid of me.

Stress and burnout

“I used to have panic attacks... ended up voluntarily leaving education.

“ I’m currently off work with stress & have been questioned extensively.

Lack of recognition

“ They don’t know about carers leave or anything that could help me.

“ No acknowledgement of caring responsibilities.

“ Had to beg & eventually threaten legal action to reduce hours.

“ Told not to tell HR, told by employer I’m not sure your mother is your dependent so you don’t count.

Forced career sacrifices

“ Could not continue full time, had to leave.

“ I was made redundant because I could not commit to my work.

Self employment - a mixed blessing

Some self employed carers told us that being their own boss **MADE IT EASIER** for them to manage the conflicting demands of work and carenting but this **WASN’T A UNIVERSAL EXPERIENCE** and others found it difficult to reconcile the **CONFLICTING DEMANDS** on their time.

Self employment: Advantages

“ I work part time and freelance so I choose my hours to enable me to look after my mum.

“ I am self-employed and my clients have been supportive of my needing to be away from work on some week days.

“ I can work from home/parents home and work flexibly to cover appointments.

Self employment: Disadvantages

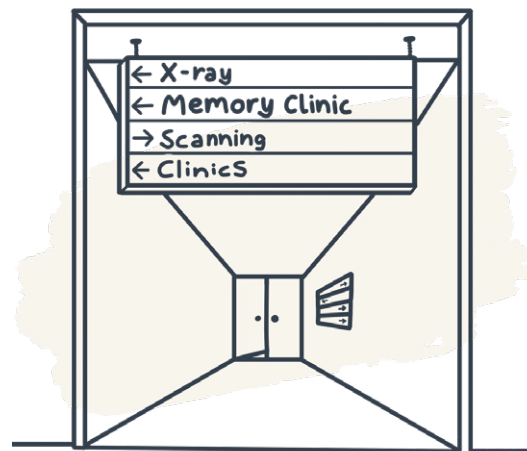
“ Self employed so customers are not often supportive sadly.

“ I’m self employed so having to make difficult choices between work and carenting.

“ I’m self employed so I am my employer.

“ I have had to drastically reduce my work commitments to look after my father. I don’t earn what I was previously and still earn more than the allowed amount to get a carers benefit.

“ I’m lucky that I’m a self-employed jeweller. I’ve dropped down to only the commissions I have on at the moment and am working 3 days per week but I am often receiving calls regarding Mum from GPs, DN, Hospice at home team etc so often it’s hard to concentrate on work even when I’m in the workshop.



Working carents: compelled to **reduce** their hours or **leave** the workplace

Despite the reported high levels of support from their employers, many carents felt they had no option but to change their hours or leave work in order to **MEET THE NEEDS OF THEIR LOVED ONES** or to **PROTECT THEIR OWN WELLBEING** in the face of the **INCREASED PRESSURES**.

Some were concerned about how carenting was impacting on the quality of their work or how it affected their colleagues.

Needs of loved ones

“ I have had to relocate to my mum during the week to ensure that she has the care and support she needs. I had to give up my career to ensure she had the support she needed. I would like more time as I there is never enough. Support would be nice as carenting is very lonely.

“ I had to give my job up as I couldn't leave mother-in-law alone.

“ I reduced from FT work to working 4 days a week, 1 at home and did this for a year before realising I needed to be more available for Mum.

“ They were very understanding and allowed a slight reduction in hours but unfortunately it wasn't enough due to not knowing my fathers needs daily.

“ One of the reasons I have taken the much lower paid job is they allow me a lot of flexibility for caring responsibilities including appointments.

Protecting their own wellbeing

“ I had to leave my well paid job due to juggling parent care plus menopause.

“ Working condensed part time hours makes it difficult... increases stress and burnout.

“ They were great but I couldn't care for mum and work a demanding job full time.

“ I had to give up my job to care for my mother in Nov 2024. I found the previous 12 months working full time as well as providing care for my mother totally exhausting.

“ My employer was very helpful but I felt guilty as I couldn't cope as my health was suffering, physical and mental and something had to give.

Impact on colleagues

“ Employer has good policies in place, but it feels unfair to impact my colleagues.

“ I struggled to work 1 day per week as I'm not much use to the team.

Impact on quality of work

“ I am exhausted all of the time which impacts on the quality of my work. I am lucky that I get good support from my colleagues however I constantly feel I am letting people down.

“ My employer is very understanding but I feel guilty taking time off because it impacts my clients who miss out on their respite if my shift can't be covered.

From one working parent to another

In our survey, we asked parents to offer advice to anyone juggling work and parenting for a parent. Many parents advised others to either **GIVE UP WORK OR FIND A FLEXIBLE SOLUTION**. Many of those advocated for **PART TIME WORKING** explaining that they **REGRETTED LEAVING WORK** because they had found that their caring commitment increased or they **MISSED THE “LIFELINE” THAT REWARDING WORK CAN OFFER**.



Give up work

“If you can afford to, give up work, don’t work and care for parents. It’s exhausting and it’s hard to do both.

“It’s really hard working, caring and living your own life.

“Caring is hard enough without thinking about work.

“If you are in a position to not work then make that change. Although my life is still hard and stressful it is a lot less than when trying to juggle both.

“Retire if you can to look after your loved one. Ignore anybody who implies that your role is not a job even if unpaid. My mother has carers four times per day. They are good but they are in and out due to having many clients. Washing, shopping, taking Mum to appointments, maintaining her social life and taking care of her house and garden are all down to me on top of still providing support for my husband and in theory adult children. That is all enough without a job.

“It’s hard, even if you have good employers and kind colleagues.

Find a flexible solution

“Don’t give up work. The parent will increase their demands of you.

“Work can be a lifeline if you enjoy your job - not just financially. So although the juggling can feel overwhelming, in many cases it’s probably worth hanging in there even in a very challenging work environment. I did so for a couple of years (before my parents’ and sister’s care needs escalated) and I found my busy job a really refreshing change from care, even if stressful at times.

“Don’t give up your job lightly. I don’t regret it in my own case but my sense of loss is greater than I imagined.

“Continuing to work part time while caring can give balance and welcome distraction.

“If possible get a part time job which gets you out of the house for an hour or more.

“Try to work part time with flexible hours.

“Don’t work full time it’s impossible.

SECTION 4

Creating a better future for working carents

We asked carents to identify actions which either employers or government could implement to make life easier for working carents. The wide ranging responses were dominated by ideas relating to **more financial support, better employment policies to help them stay in work, and wider system reform offering them greater recognition, more respite opportunities and better, more streamlined health & social care services.**

More **financial** assistance for carents

This was the most frequent priority for respondents who laid bare their frustration about the financial penalties of carenting and the limitations of carers allowance.

“*Pay dividends for carers moving parents in with them. We save the NHS and social care thousands and thousands of pounds and get nothing in return because we’re hard working and earn a good wage.*”

“*Financial security. I have had to give up work to do 'the right thing' for my remaining parent. It shouldn't have to be a hardship.*”

“*Ability to have financial security. I am paying for travel to my parents and losing income by missing work.*”

“*Real financial support so that I could reduce my working hours to spend more time caring for mum.*”

“*Make carers allowance a more realistic amount to enable people to reduce hours or take a career break.*”

Employment **policies** for carents

There were frequent demands to simplify, expand & legalise workplace support for carents.

“*Recognition of what a carent does and responsibility change in HR policy where you are given automatic WFH or flexibility and benefits policy that contribute to social care costs.*”

“*Able to take paid time off like maternity leave to be able to support parents and recognition of hospital and doctors appointments.*”

“*More government funding allowing people to take carents leave in much the same way as maternity/paternity leave. Not all of us have or want children of our own and that allowance is made to care for a child but not to care (often in the same way) for an elderly and unwell parent.*”

“Something like maternity rights, if a member of my team is pregnant, they can go to appointments be off on pregnancy related sick and it doesn’t affect their sickness or working rights. There should be some kind of form the person who is being cared for’s health professional can sign which could be given to a sole carer for them to hand up to their employer, which the government would then support the work place.

Wider system reform

There were also frequent references to the ways in which our communities alongside the wider health & social care system (H&SC) could improve support for carents and their ageing parents. Key themes concerned the quality and affordability of social care services, the need for more respite & emotional care, streamlining health & care services and recognising and supporting carents.

Streamlining services

“My father has medical needs as well as Alzheimer’s. Agencies run by council and NHS do not communicate between each other... I am in the middle of these services liaising, which some days is a full-time job.

“If services were actually joined up. Everything is so hard.

“NHS divisions talking to one another and sharing information and arranging appointments that coincide rather than having to make 4 appointments in one month when it could be done for 2..... better communication with all parties.”

“Easier access to doctors... better communication with dementia services.

Social care reforms

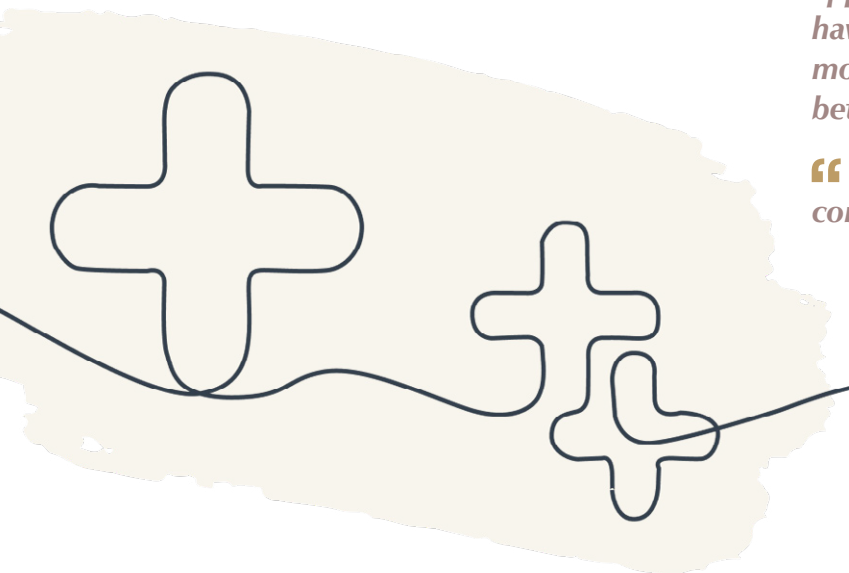
“Greater social care. More support at home.

“More help with carers coming to the home...”

“Proper state-run care homes again.

Recognising & supporting carents

“Not all care is medical or personal care, a lot of it is company, household chores, shopping tasks, pet care - this is not classed as caring responsibilities in the eyes of the NHS or the government and having this type of support and funding for this I believe would help so many unpaid carers.



“ More support, and ease of access to that support. I am a sole carer and I often feel overwhelmed and trapped as there is no back up for me, if for example I was ill and unable to care for my LO for any length of time, and lack of respite for me to have a break and recharge.

“ To provide a service to enable me to have my own life back.

“ Actual understanding what is meant by carenting and how that person needs support both financially and mentally in order to be able to cope with care of elderly parents.

More respite care

“ If I had a regular, guaranteed period of respite to look forward to, it would change my life.

“ More respite support as I feel quite trapped...



SUPPORTING WORKING CARENTS NOW AND IN FUTURE:

Key messages

In this survey, over 1,000 carents, predominantly UK women in their 50s and 60s, shared the realities of balancing employment with the demands of elderly care in 2025.

Their individual testimonies highlight shared generational challenges and provide critical insights for employers and policymakers. As the UK's population continues to age and formal care systems face increasing pressure, the number of working adults providing unpaid care for older relatives will rise sharply. Our findings can help shape proactive workplace and system reform to reduce the risks of workforce attrition and related economic downturn, whilst improving support for older adults and their family carers.

CARENTING CHARACTERISED AS OVERWHELMING, STRESSFUL AND EXHAUSTING.

Caring for ageing relatives is generally hidden and rarely discussed. In this survey, over 1000 carents shared their experiences and the personal costs of providing elderly care whilst juggling work and accessing fragmented services in need of reform. In their own words, carents disclosed the daily emotional, physical and financial struggles they face and the associated feelings of overwhelm, stress and exhaustion.

This lived reality needs addressing in order to prevent long term health & wellbeing consequences leading to more demands on front line services and undermining healthy ageing strategies.

PROACTIVE WORKPLACE REFORM

The survey revealed the financial and career limiting nature of carenting. 70% of respondents reported reducing their hours, changing roles, or leaving the workforce entirely as a direct result of their caring responsibilities. These choices, often made under duress, have had profound and enduring consequences for their financial security, career progression, and personal wellbeing. More than a third (37%) have revised their retirement plans choosing to exit early under financial and emotional strain.

Their employer experiences reflected two clear patterns. While a number of carents described difficult or unsupportive workplace experiences, the majority praised their employers, offering numerous examples of compassionate and practical workplace adjustments that had been helpful whilst juggling work and care. Ultimately however, this support was often insufficient and carents felt they had no choice but to give up their job.

Key themes reflecting current support are provided in the table below and carents' pleas for further workplace reform are presented in a more comprehensive "caring employer checklist" below.

✓ POSITIVE workplace themes	✗ NEGATIVE workplace themes
Flexible workplace arrangements eg hours shifts, work from home	Rigid hours and refusal to allow adjustments
Understanding and empathetic managers and colleagues	No recognition or understanding of the caring role
Support for emergencies and last minute leave	Stigma and discouragement from disclosing carer status
Access to carers' policies, forums and counselling	Forced to resign or retire early due to lack of support
Remote hybrid work permitted, even across locations	Mental health strain from lack of flexibility
Permission for reduced hours, job changes or career breaks	Token flexibility or policies applied unfairly



WIDER SOCIETAL REFORM

Although our findings show that good workplace support made a meaningful difference to the daily lives of carers, they also indicate that employers cannot provide a complete solution.

Even the most supportive employers could not offset the daily pressures carers face meaning that 70% of carers had no other choice than to reduce their work commitment or leave work earlier than planned. These pressures related to long hours spent caring, fragmented and uncoordinated support services, lack of respite care, financial strains, emotional drains and general lack of public recognition for unpaid elderly care.

It was evident from our survey that carers would prefer to stay in work. They valued the purpose, the pay, the stability, and the social contact it brings but sadly they felt forced to step away because working full time whilst providing care carries significant risks to them and their ageing parents. Although many forward-thinking employers made genuine efforts to help it was not enough and wider societal reform is needed to enable adults to work and care for ageing friends and relatives.

Until these needs are addressed, full-time work will remain unsustainable for many carers, regardless of their commitment or professional capability. Further exploration across sectors and job types may be warranted but our research indicates that, without broader systemic reform, we risk losing even more experienced, skilled workers—at a time when we can least afford to.

We have synthesised the pleas from carers for societal reforms which would make work and caring more feasible in an ageing society into a list below. We urge you to consider these pleas and act to create an ageing society fit to work and care.

Help at **Carents.co.uk**

Carents.co.uk exists to give carents the recognition and support they need to keep themselves and their ageing parents safe and well. It is a free open access digital platform for anyone in the UK, co-created with carents to provide information, advice, and community whilst signposting to practical solutions.

We work with carents, businesses, researchers and policymakers, helping to make life easier for everyone concerned with improving care in an ageing society.

If you'd like to explore how your organisation can better support working carents, we'd love to hear from you. Get in touch at bd@carents.co.uk to discuss your unique challenges and the solutions that could make a real difference.

Find out more at carents.co.uk

SUPPORT FOR CARENTS

Carents® is the one stop shop for those looking after elderly parents – find information, advice and community at carents.co.uk

BUSINESS & EMPLOYER SUPPORT

See our caring employer checklist on [page 24](#)

INSPIRING POLICY REFORM

See [pages 24](#) and [25](#) for suggestions from working carents

Employer Checklist:

Pleas from working carents

Empathy and Managerial Understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train line managers in carent awareness and empathetic leadership. • Encourage proactive and regular wellbeing check-ins. • Foster open dialogue about caring responsibilities and needed accommodations. • Avoid assumptions about availability or commitment.
Flexible Working Arrangements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer flexible hours, including staggered start/finish times. • Permit compressed workweeks (e.g., four longer days). • Allow working from home or hybrid work where possible. • Support ad hoc schedule adjustments around care needs and appointments.
Emergency and Short-Notice Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enable short-notice or emergency leave without penalty. • Be flexible with unpaid or rearranged hours during crises. • Accept compassionate or emergency absence for health-related issues of the care recipient. • Recognise and accommodate hospital or doctor's appointments for care recipients.
Formal Carent Support Structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a clear carental leave policy – mirroring maternity/paternity leave. • Offer paid time off for carents to care for elderly or unwell dependents. • Allow carental sick leave or appointment-related leave without affecting general sick leave balance. • Enable the use of health care professional certification forms to validate care needs. • Share information on how employers and employees can apply for government-backed carental support. • Provide access to counselling, carents' forums, and occupational therapy.
Remote and Location-Flexible Working	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permit working from a care recipient's home if needed. • Support remote or long-distance work as an ongoing option. • Ensure access to digital tools that make location-flexible work viable.
Adapted Workload and Career Planning incl career breaks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer reduced hours or part-time options for active carents. • Provide the opportunity for career breaks or phased return to work. • Develop job-sharing options and adjusted performance goals for carers. • Collaborate with carents to develop sustainable long-term employment plans.
Equity and Recognition in Employment Rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treat carents with parity to parents in terms of paid leave, rights to attend appointments, and care-related absences. • Advocate for government funding to support carental leave as a protected employment right. • Acknowledge that caring for an elderly or ill adult is equally valid as childcare. • Promote policy changes and internal advocacy to normalise carental entitlements.
Inclusive Culture and DEI Integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include carents' voices in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion efforts. • Create visible and supportive networks for carents. • Publicly celebrate contributions of working carents. • Discourage stigma, isolation, or exclusion of those with caring responsibilities.

Stakeholder Checklist:

Pleas from working carents

1. Financial Support and Recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a living wage or statutory pay for carents, regardless of hours worked. • Introduce non-means-tested carent payments and financial top-ups to offset income loss. • Offer financial support for elderly individuals to access care services without depleting assets. • Fund carent-related expenses such as travel, household utilities, and medical-related costs. • Support attendance and carers allowance reform to simplify access and increase value. • Permit allowances per dependent cared for, not per carent.
2. Carental Leave and Employment Rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement statutory carental leave similar to maternity/paternity leave. • Permit time off for carents to attend health-related appointments without penalty. • Create workplace protections and anti-discrimination policies for carents. • Encourage employers to offer flexible working arrangements, remote options, and compressed hours without income loss. • Reimburse businesses for carental leave-related absences to reduce financial burden.
3. Quality Social and Health Care Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve access to in-home social care and community-based health services. • Increase investment in care home availability, affordability, and quality. • Develop a joined-up national care service with integrated health and social care systems. • Ensure fair access to care regardless of financial status or savings thresholds.
4. Age-Related and Dementia Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand training in dementia awareness for healthcare and community service providers. • Fund dementia-specific care homes and day programs. • Support assistive technologies and home adaptations to aid older adults in living independently. • Subsidize tools like digital telephones, online service access, and home safety improvements.
5. Mental Health and Respite Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide affordable or free respite care to prevent carent burnout. • Fund access to counselling and emotional support services for carents and care recipients. • Develop befriending services and peer support networks to combat isolation. • Implement wellness check-ins and proactive support systems for vulnerable elderly people.
6. Housing, Infrastructure, and Accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop sheltered and supported housing schemes with on-site social and health services. • Prevent the forced sale of family homes for care costs by implementing a care fee cap. • Subsidize home modifications to support safe aging in place (e.g., stair lifts, grab bars). • Establish a national Elder-Helper scheme for volunteer and school-engaged support.
7. Policy, Governance, and Cultural Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reform carers' financial support systems and streamline benefit applications. • Include carers and elderly voices in policymaking and service design. • Promote public campaigns to recognise the value of unpaid carers. • Encourage cross-departmental collaboration to simplify support for carers and elderly individuals.

Appendix

THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The survey comprised 16 core questions, with additional comments and expanded responses bringing the total to 24, as outlined below.

First Name

Last Name

Email

Postal Code

1. Employment Status
As you selected Other, please specify below
2. Employment Sector
As you selected 'other' please specify
3. Are you currently providing support for an elderly loved one(s)?
4. How many hours per week do you spend looking after your loved one?
5. How many hours per week do you spend travelling to look after them?
6. Have you made changes to your work or career because of carenting responsibilities (e.g. reduced hours, changed roles, left work)?
As you selected 'Other', please specify
7. Has caring for a parent made you consider changing your retirement plans?
8. Could you share a bit more about your thinking on retirement and carenting?
9. What single word best sums up how you feel about your carenting responsibilities right now?
10. How supportive or flexible has your employer(s) been regarding your carenting responsibilities?
11. Please comment on how your employer has or hasn't supported you
12. What one change (by an employer or in the wider community) would most improve your ability to manage both work and carenting responsibilities?
13. What one change could the government introduce that would be most valuable in helping you manage your carenting responsibilities?
14. Please share any personal experiences, challenges, or advice you'd give to someone juggling work and carenting for a parent.
15. Please select your age range
16. What gender do you identify as?
As you selected Other, please specify

Carents.co.uk

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