

**“I find it
so liberating”**



**Carers: Access to
education and training
Information for managers and
practitioners working in the
post-16 education and training sector**

The purpose of this leaflet is to raise awareness among managers and practitioners in the FE system of the importance of access to learning for carers. It also highlights some of the barriers faced by carers from minority groups, such as carers from black and minority ethnic communities, carers who are disabled, young adult carers (16–25) and those who live in rural areas. The words of carers are quoted throughout.

There are estimated to be over six million carers in the UK. 1.5 million carers are in full-time employment and approximately 700,000 work part-time (2001 Census). Education and training have a key role to play in many carers' lives. However, research has shown that there is a lack of awareness about the needs of adult learners who have caring responsibilities, and examples of good practice in the post-16 education and training system are few and far between.

Who is a 'carer'?

A carer is a person who looks after a partner, family member or friend who has a mental or physical illness, is disabled or is elderly. The care they provide is unpaid and the person looked after relies on their help to manage on a day-to-day basis. Carers are also referred to in many services as family carers.

Carers' right to learn

The 2004 Carers Equal Opportunities Act gave carers new rights. Social services have to consider what a carer wants to do in terms of work, study and leisure when carrying out carers' assessments. *Care Matters* is a practical guide for local authorities and the voluntary sector to the implementation of the Carers Equal Opportunities Act. As many carers look after disabled people and some carers may be disabled themselves, the guide stresses the importance of looking at carers' learning requirements within the context of organisations' Disability Equality Schemes. The requirements of adult learners who have caring responsibilities are similar to those of disabled learners. This guide is available from the Nuffield Foundation website www.nuffieldfoundation.org

Why is access to learning and training for carers important?

Access to learning for carers has many practical benefits. It provides carers with the opportunity to develop knowledge and skills, whether they are in employment or want to return to work. It gives people a break from caring and a chance to socialise. It offers the chance to step out of role and to be seen as an individual. It gives carers a way to develop interests and hobbies which can provide a welcome change from the focus on caring responsibilities.

“The more you learn, the more you can apply knowledge for your self-betterment. If things change then it can help you go back to work.”

“I’ve become more aware of myself and more self-confident. I see myself as an individual, not just as a carer, a person having to give up, making a sacrifice.”

Stress and the pressure associated with caring responsibilities frequently affect carers’ mental, physical and emotional well-being. The benefits of learning for good mental health are well-known and recognised. As one carer who looks after his disabled partner explained:

“When I worked in law enforcement and diplomatic protection, I was under 50 per cent of the mental, emotional and physical stress I am feeling now. Until I started mixing with other carers I didn’t realise the stress I was under. By learning new skills you can learn how to live your life again.”

Access to learning and training

Carers face particular barriers to accessing learning and training. Many are on a low income or are unwaged because of their caring responsibilities and will therefore have limited resources to spend on education. It can be difficult for carers to find the time to study and to predict when that time will be available. Carers may require the provision of respite care for the person they care for, and

help with transport to get to courses. There is no formal process for education and training providers to identify carers.

Some education and training providers are making efforts to connect with carers:

- through their work with disabled learners;
- through family learning programmes;
- by working with carers' organisations;
- through Learning Disability Partnership Boards;
- one rural county supports carers through a telephone-based team and advises on educational and training opportunities on offer locally; and
- some providers ask the question "Are you a carer?" on their enrolment forms.

Carers and learning

Carers who do access learning and training use a variety of settings. Some learn on courses run by carer organisations at carers' centres. This can be a good way back into learning, as learning is taken to them, where they are at ease and know people:

"I like this environment, there is a sense of unity and a common bond with other carers. It enhances your learning."

"I get support here. I can socialise and share my problems with other carers."

Other carers find that distance-learning courses fit better around their caring responsibilities:

"I had always wanted to do Creative Writing and at the right time the opportunity came up. I had retired and was at home due to caring and my disabilities. The National Extension College course is home based. I use my PC."

Carers also access education and training in mainstream settings such as colleges, adult and community education services, training organisations and at work:

"I attend college three times a week to do my BTEC National Diploma in Applied Science. I want to be a forensic scientist."

FE colleges can access 12 per cent uplift in their LSC funding for adult students who are family carers. This can then be used to provide additional support and help make services more flexible.

How can carers be supported to learn?

Information, Advice and Guidance

Carers often speak of feeling isolated or "knocked out of the mainstream and disconnected" due to the amount of time and energy they have to spend on their caring responsibilities. Therefore ease of access to information, advice and guidance is vital for carers so they can choose learning opportunities best suited to their needs and personal circumstances. Information on financial support needed for course fees and materials can be crucial.

The publication *A guide to support for adult learners caring for disabled children or other family members* provides information on courses, funding to pay for childcare or family support and information on sources of childcare and family support. This publication is available from the Nuffield Foundation: see www.nuffieldfoundation.org

Curriculum and choice

A wide range of learning opportunities should be offered. People may not want to be typecast as learning only about care-related subjects. Taster sessions are an effective way of allowing carers to make an informed choice. Short courses are often more manageable, particularly if the level of caring responsibilities is unpredictable:

“Carers’ learning will not be as consistent as learning expected of you in a mainstream college course.”

Carers, like other adult learners, learn for a wide variety of purposes:

- to gain work-related skills

“I want to go back to work but I don’t feel confident because of my skills. It’s great here I can learn at my own pace.”

“You have to know how to use computers now days. It is very important to keep up and it will help me going back to work.”

- to learn for pleasure and self development
“I did the course for the joy of learning that was a big thing for me...”
“It’s something to look forward to, a chance for me to be with other adults. It is very important for carers to have outside interests.”

City & Guilds – Learning for Living

Learning for Living is an online learning programme and a qualification designed specifically for unpaid carers. It is designed to build up carers’ confidence and provide them with the opportunity to think about using their existing skills or getting new ones. As one carer commented:

“We look at different scenarios, for example how to sort out your benefits. You get an awareness of what you are really entitled to. We looked at equipment and I realised that my husband needed it and we received it in the end.”

www.learning-for-living.co.uk

- to develop skills relevant to caring, such as stress management or safe lifting

“There is no book saying what will happen to you as a carer. I have learnt how to deal with different organisations and people like health professionals and social workers. I am much more assertive.”

- to work towards academic qualifications
- to improve basic skills

“Our son is learning computers and this way we can keep up with him. He helps us and we help him. It brings the family together.”

“I feel that I need learning for myself. I did it to learn English.”

- to regain confidence

“It is hard to accept that you have no life outside of caring. It is easy to get dragged down and stressed. Take the opportunity to learn, it is a step in the right direction. The course helped me regain my self-esteem.”

Multi-agency working

Joint working between education and training providers – Social Services, Health Services and carers’ organisations – is key to supporting adult learners with caring responsibilities. Joint working can help identify where carers are and, when required, co-ordinate transport and respite care arrangements.

Brigg Carer's Support Centre

This is a Lifelong Learning Centre, attached to a Carer's Support Centre in Lincolnshire, which raises awareness of lifelong learning provision on offer through community outreach work and via referrals from Social Services and from Health Services staff. The Lifelong Learning Centre offers one-to-one introductory sessions for carers to discuss what they want to learn. Then a suitable course is found at a local college or adult education centre. If a carer requires a sitting service for the person they care for or support with transport to get to their class, this is provided and paid for by the Carer's Support Centre.

Flexible provision

In order to support carers, education and training provision has to be flexible:

- to allow for carers who have to take time off unexpectedly;
- to provide time and support for carers to catch up on work missed;
- to extend deadlines for assignments or make alternative arrangements if necessary; and
- to provide access to a personal tutor if required – carers say having someone to talk to about their situation can be very helpful.

Carers from black and minority ethnic groups

Carers from black and minority ethnic groups face additional barriers to accessing services. Due to a lack of information translated into community languages and contact with staff who have access to and the trust of the community, carers from black and minority ethnic groups can have a limited understanding of what services are available. This leads to poor support for carers and those they care for.

Ehsas Carers

The Ehsas Carers group provides information, support, social activities and training opportunities for carers of people with learning difficulties from the Pakistani community in Dudley. Support workers interpret for the group members. The group is supported by a social worker who organised five days of information/learning workshops. One of the trainers explained why the course is so important:

A family caring for their daughter who has epilepsy wanted to stop her medication, as her seizures had ceased. There was a lack of accessible information advising them that the medication would control rather than cure. Through the group the family were put in contact with an Epilepsy nurse.

Young adult carers

Young adults with caring responsibilities in the 16-25 age group are not included in any current working definitions of young carers. For young adult carers, missing out on education and training comes at a crucial and formative time in their lives. Their peers will be studying to develop and consolidate skills and knowledge that will lay the foundations for their future careers. Young adult carers may:

- already have missed out in their school education or dropped out of school due to the pressure of their caring responsibilities;
- be stuck in a gap between young carers' groups and groups for adult carers and not feel entirely comfortable or supported in either. This makes it very difficult to identify young adult carers in order to offer support;
- have a sense of guilt when going to college and leaving the caring role; and
- have difficulties paying for their learning unless they qualify for benefits that trigger fee remission and cover the costs.

Disabled carers

Older carers may have impairments and health conditions. There is a growing number of people with learning difficulties who are caring for elderly parents, partners and friends who are disabled. As learners, disabled carers will be covered by the Disability Discrimination Act but they will be particularly at risk of marginalisation. Distance learning can be one way for carers who have limited mobility or who live in isolated rural areas to access learning. The development of e-learning in education and training has a key role to play here.

Carers into Education

This is a joint initiative between the National Extension College and the Princess Royal Trust which provides distance learning courses for carers in the East of England and the Midlands. The courses range from Creative Writing and Book-Keeping to A Level courses and counselling courses. Students have support from a subject tutor and a personal mentor, and pay reduced fees.

www.nec.ac.uk www.carers.org

Top Tips for managers and practitioners to improve provision for adult learners who have caring responsibilities

Carers involved in learning gave the following tips to education and training providers who want to encourage carers into learning.

- Courses to help carers, subjects that will benefit them, life skills or recreation
- There need to be staff who know our language, there must be interpreters
- If a person is struggling you must give them support
- There must be flexibility with course starting and finishing times
- Low cost and funding for sitters
- Listen to carers, try and be understanding, carers' moods might change because of the circumstances at home
- Go to where the carers are and take information
- Make it local, there is so little time you don't want to spend a lot of time travelling to your course

Useful addresses

NIACE

Renaissance House, 20 Princess Road West, Leicester LE1 6TP, UK

T: +44 (0)116 204 4200 F: +44 (0)116 485 4504

www.niace.org.uk

CARERS UK

20-25 Glasshouse Yard, London EC1A 4JT

T: 020 7590 8818 F: 020 7490 8824

CarersLine: 0808 808 777

www.carersuk.org

www.acecarers.org.uk

The Princess Royal Trust for Carers

Unit 14, Bourne Court, Southend Road, Woodford Green

Essex IG8 8HD

T: 0844 800 4361 F: 0844 800 4362

www.carers.org

National Extension College (NEC)

The Michael Young Centre, Purbeck Road, Cambridge CB2 2HN

www.nec.ac.uk

The Nuffield Foundation

28 Bedford Square, London WC1B 3JS

T: 020 7631 0566 F: 020 7323 4877

www.nuffieldfoundation.org

Skill: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities

Head Office, Chapter House, 18-20 Crucifix Lane, London SE1 3JW

T/ Minicom: 020 7450 0620 F: 020 7450 0650

Email: skill@skill.org.uk

Information Service

Tel: 0800 328 5050

Minicom: 0800 068 2422

Email: info@skill.org.uk

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European Union
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Sign Up Now is the sister campaign to Adult Learners' Week, promoting demand for adult learning and celebrating the achievements of adult learners. Visit www.alw.org.uk for more information.



For further information about access to learning and training for carers, visit www.niace.org.uk