



Introduction

Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations make a vital contribution to society.

Through our work as a sector, we are able to support and advocate for the most vulnerable, marginalised and disadvantaged in our local communities. But we mustn't overlook our role as employers.

This briefing provides practical information for use by VCSE organisations on how to support older carers as employees or potential employees.

Whilst it is acknowledged that dwindling funding can limit our options to a certain extent, there are some quick and cost-effective things we can do as a sector to improve workplace support for carers. In fact, by examining our own employment practices we could lead by example in this area, which we will explore within this briefing.

Who are carers?

People of any age who look after/support, a family member, friend or neighbour in need of help because of long-term physical or mental ill-health, disability or problems related to old age and are unpaid. This includes parents caring for a disabled child.

What is Working Potential?

Working Potential is one of Ambition for Ageing's scaled programmes. It's a research project that aims to gather as much information as possible about the best ways to support people, who are currently **carers** and **over 50**, to explore **job opportunities** in preparation for returning to work.

To ensure we get the best results for our carers, we are **working with the Centre for Ageing Better and employers** to understand the barriers employers face recruiting and retaining older employees with caring responsibilities in the workplace and to identify and promote best practice.

Ambition for Ageing is a £10.2 million Greater Manchester level programme aimed at creating more age-friendly places and empowering people to live fulfilling lives as they age.

We do this by providing small investments to help develop more age-friendly neighbourhoods in Greater Manchester in addition to funding larger scale work across the city-region.

As a research project, we are committed to sharing the learning we gain from the programme to help influence local, regional and national policy.

Older Carers in Greater Manchester

“ To better capitalise on the talents of older residents, and combat poverty later in life, we need to increase economic participation amongst the over 50s. ”

– Greater Manchester Strategy

With almost 1 in 3 of the population aged 50 or over, about a third of 50-64 year olds unemployed, an increasing state pensionable age, widely encountered age discrimination in the workplace and inflexible recruitment and working practices, it is getting progressively harder for older people to find or remain in work.

In addition, with an ageing population, cuts to social care funding and high levels of health inequalities in the North West, the demand for informal care provision is set to rise, as we live longer but in poorer health. With the peak age for caring being 50-64, these caring responsibilities can compound the barriers older people have remaining in and finding new employment as they face the challenge of balancing work with care.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, the workforce aged 16-49 is set to significantly reduce over the next few years resulting in a recruitment black hole of 7.5 million jobs unfulfilled. In the current political climate, international recruitment looks an increasingly improbable solution to plugging this gap.

We need to put things in place now to retain older, experienced talent and also to attract new, older talent in order to bridge this skills gap. Increasing the employment rate of the over 50s in Greater Manchester to meet the average employment rate of other ages could add almost £1bn to the economy each year.

Greater Manchester is leading the way with the introduction of its historic **Carers Charter** which aims to transform the way **Greater Manchester's estimated 280,000 carers** are supported in their invaluable role. Their efforts save the UK economy an estimated £132 billion pounds per year. Key elements of the Charter are to support carers in employment and for staff to be trained to be **#CarerAware**.

Through the delivery of the Working Potential programme, Ambition for Ageing and our lead partner, GMCVO have started to reconsider our own working practices to see if we are doing what we can to support those employees, in our organisation, who are balancing work and care.



As a carer you can expect:

- To be identified as a carer as early as possible.
- Better access to annual health checks and improved access to GP appointments.
- Access to services and activities to help stay fit and healthy.
- To be supported in employment.
- To be involved with employers in developing carers policies and for staff to be trained to be “carer aware”.
- If you are a young carer or young adult carer, you are able to thrive and develop educationally.

(from The Carers Charter)

In the next section of this briefing, we outline what we can do as VCSE employers to support older carers both during recruitment and throughout their employment.



What can we do?

1. Be flexible

- Consider if current employees may benefit from flexible working arrangements to suit their needs. Flexibility doesn't necessarily mean reduced hours. Offering the option to work back time out for a hospital appointment can be invaluable to carers.
- Consider the viability of allowing homeworking where feasible, measuring outputs rather than time spent working.
- Ensure all line-managers understand how to manage and support the use of flexible working.
- Promote good practice and the benefits of flexibility in the workplace.

2. Check your recruitment processes

- Ask an older person to review your recruitment processes to assess if your advertising is likely to attract older talent.
- Consider if the role you're recruiting for needs to be full-time, what qualifications or experience are essential and what can be learned in role.
- Advertise that you are open to talking about flexibility at the point of recruitment. This will attract applications from a wider talent pool.
- Consider developing a "returner" programme: an initiative aiming to support people back to work.

3. Adopt a carers policy

- A carers policy enables carers to know where they stand, and what their options are, thus reducing stress and increasing productivity.
- Signpost carers to local support organisations and help them understand their entitlements.
- Ensure all line managers are briefed on the policy, promote an age and carer-friendly culture and have a consistent approach to resolving issues.
- Encourage an open environment where all employees feel safe to discuss new and existing caring responsibilities. This will help reduce the number of carers reaching crisis point and aid staff retention.

4. Regularly review your employee's needs

- Have frequent informal conversations about health and well-being, including support needs as carers are more likely to suffer from ill-health than non-carers.
- Ask your employees what they need (evidence shows this is rarely abused and often results in a more productive and loyal workforce).
- Communicate regularly how employees can raise issues if they have them.
- Ensure that any support required is accessible and reviewed in line with employees' changing needs.



Conclusion

Leading by example doesn't have to be expensive. Simple adaptations can make recruitment and working practices flexible for all, widening the pool from which you recruit and improving staff loyalty and morale.

Identifying current employees that could benefit from flexible working arrangements will aid staff retention. Promoting the flexibility on offer will raise an organisation's profile to one of an employer of choice.

Considering whether a role needs to be full or part-time, what skills are essential and whether there is scope for homeworking, means you can advertise flexibility at the point of hire, ensuring inclusive recruitment takes place.

Adopting and promoting a carers policy consistently across the organisation means staff know their entitlements and feel confident discussing their needs with an understanding employer, thus reducing sick leave and improving staff resilience and productivity.

Being flexible about flexibility will ensure more of your employees' needs are met. In order to ensure the policy isn't tokenistic it must be regularly reviewed alongside any implemented reasonable adjustments. The resultant carer and age-friendly workplace would clearly demonstrate VCSE principles in action.

Benefits of flexible working

- Improvement in attraction and retention of staff
- Reduction in employee stress
- Reduction in recruitment and training costs
- Increase in resilience and productivity
- Reduction in sick leave
- Cost savings
- Improvement in people management
- Increase in staff morale

Guidance and further reading

For digital copies of this document and more information on developing age-friendly and carer-friendly workplaces, please visit www.ambitionforageing.org.uk/VCSEcarers.

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