

## VALUING CARERS

**ACE National**  
action for carers and employment

led by

**CARERS UK**

There are six million carers in the United Kingdom looking after partners, relatives or friends in need of help who are ill, frail or have a disability. According to an EQUAL Development Partnership (DP) called Action for Carers and Employment (ACE National), these carers save the UK economy a staggering £57 billion each year in care costs – the equivalent of a second National Health Service. However, carers can be seriously disadvantaged in the labour market, with many having to change the way they work or give up work altogether when the juggling of their paid employment and their care responsibilities becomes too difficult. Such a situation can create more problems – many carers see their incomes plummet, they become socially isolated, their work skills become out of date and all this can lead to low self-esteem. With over 300 thousand people becoming carers every year, most people in the UK will have to take on some type of care responsibilities at some stage in their lives.

Dr Hywel Francis is a Member of Parliament in the UK and he had been a carer for his son during the boy's lifetime. This experience inspired Dr Francis to introduce a Private Member's Bill providing more recognition and equality of opportunities to carers. He feels that the successful passage of his Bill would not have been possible without the help of the DP, and believes that *"ACE National's innovative partnership saw the Carers (Equal Opportunities) Act through all its stages in Parliament, giving it support from a whole range of key stakeholders, from individual carers to major employers."*

### LOCAL PILOTING AND NATIONAL PROMOTION

ACE National is an exciting approach to raising awareness of the barriers facing carers who want to work and of testing and promoting new ways of assisting them.



**Lord Pendry, Dr Hywel Francis MP and Malcolm Wicks MP, Minister of State for Energy, who all successfully took Carers Acts through Parliament**

Apart from success of Dr Francis' Bill, ACE has made other important advances. Its local and national activities have received regular media coverage because of the investment of this EQUAL DP in its PR activities and the fact that the BBC is one of its active partners. Other partners are government departments and companies that are well-known names and they have established and funded a website to help other employers implement carer support. Also representatives from ACE have recently been to No. 10 to bend the ear of the Tony Blair, as part of a consultation on what can make a difference to people's working lives. And finally, the DP's activities have even been featured in Brussels through 'advertorials' in the Parliament

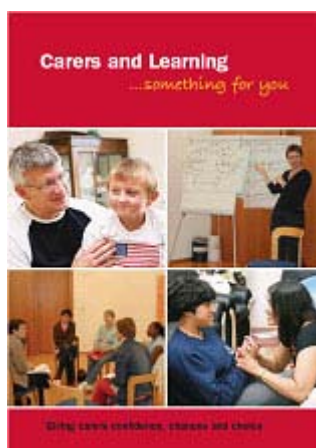
Magazine, which reaches all MEPs and EU Commissioners, and also latterly through the [EU-Politix website](#).

### LOCAL DEVELOPMENTS

Five local partners and a national accrediting body have helped the DP to break down the barriers facing carers through the development and promotion of lifelong learning within six contrasting areas in England and Wales. City & Guilds is the UK's leading provider of those

vocational qualifications that assess skills that are of practical value in the work place. As a key partner in ACE, this body has developed the first ever qualification designed to help carers build confidence, recognise their considerable skills, and take the next steps towards new opportunities, including employment. Learning for Living is [an online resource](#) which carers can use anywhere they have access to the internet. It also leads to the 'Certificate in Personal Development and Learning for Unpaid Carers' that is eligible for funding under the UK Government's proposed New Deal for Skills - a programme designed to help people move from low to higher skilled work. The course has been of real benefit to individuals in terms of building their self-confidence and restoring their self-esteem. For example, Janet Myers is a lone parent of three children and a carer for her son Alex who has disabilities. She now says to herself *"Dare to imagine Jan, and just see what you can come up with!"* Through the course, she has found out *"It's OK to have a dream. Not just that, but dreams can come true. Who knows what I may be capable of?"* Then, there is Sharon who gave up her job, home and life style in Scotland to return to the north of England to care for her brother, who has learning difficulties. Sharon says, *"Attending courses and gaining relevant qualifications such as Health and Safety and Basic Food Hygiene has given me more confidence and the Learning for Living course made me realise that I have a lot to offer."*

## INFLUENCING OTHERS



**Material to support carers in their continuing learning**

Allied to this local work, ACE has been raising the awareness of carers' needs amongst those working in the health, social care, education, local authority and voluntary sectors. The project has made special efforts to influence the gatekeepers on the road towards employment. These include Jobcentre Plus which is the UK's public employment service, the Learning and Skills Councils which fund the local delivery of vocational training and Connexions which is the successor to the Careers Service. A Carer Awareness Training Programme has been adapted from a course trialed by Action For Carers in Surrey that was one of the DP's local partners. Also in Surrey, the development of the Connexions Service provided an opportunity to offer guidance to a range of professionals working with young people. This led, in turn, to the production of a Training Pack on 'Young Carers and the Connexions Service.' The trainers' notes, overhead projector slides and handouts for both of these programmes are available from the [ACE National Web site](#). It also worth having a look at two summaries of some of the research that the DP undertook to support its policy development activities. These are 'Redressing the Balance,' a report on barriers and bridges for carers in employment and 'Without Us' which is an attempt to calculate the value of carers' support.

## EMPLOYERS: THE MOST EFFECTIVE ADVOCATES AT NATIONAL LEVEL

Crucial to the overall success of the programme has been the direct involvement of public and private employers such as government departments and major companies and the social partners represented by the Confederation of British Industry and three trade unions. Becky Mason from BT, which is the UK's biggest telecommunications provider, explained that *"BT is looking now to find additional sources of talent and to retain the talent we have got. It makes absolute sense to reap the benefits of the skills and resources of carers."* In a similar vein, Emma Appleby from PricewaterhouseCoopers believes that *"What we want to attract is the widest pool of talent and to cut out a whole section of the market would be totally foolish."* These and other employers including the government departments have acted as the best possible advocates for the DP's core messages. With secretarial and administrative support from ACE, these influential employers have created and now operate the Employers for Carers interest group. The main working tool of this group is its [web site](#), which shows employers that providing support for employees with caring responsibilities makes good business sense and then provides them with the advice and materials that they need to enable the carers in their employment to continue to work, and to attract additional carers into their companies. This site has been well used by employers many of whom have applied its self-assessment tool to their own organisations.

## FLEXIBLE SOLUTIONS

From the experiences of carers documented on this employers' web site, flexibility appears to be the key that can open the door to a more satisfying life. Wendy is 36 years old and has worked for the HSBC bank for 19 years and for most of these she has also been the joint carer of her 65 year old disabled Mum. To Wendy it is crucial *"that I am able to take time off to take my Mum for her regular hospital appointments and I feel confident that if there were an emergency I would be allowed to leave immediately."* Sometimes an effective solution requires a bit of flexibility on both sides, as Brian a project manager for the Department for Constitutional Affairs discovered. He has an elderly mother who is virtually confined to the house and Brian's caring role is to pick up the pieces when the social services cannot provide cover. This included an intense period when she was very ill. Brian discussed the situation with his manager and agreed on a pattern of working from home for short periods. However, when his mother 'recovered' she expected the same level of attention from Brian who explains, *"that is why it's important for me to continue working. She now appreciates that I have a life as well and has become, on the surface anyway, more receptive to change on a limited basis."*

## MAINSTREAMING FROM THE START



**Dr Hywel Francis, MP for Aberavon, at Westminster with carers supporting the Carers (Equal Opportunities) Act**

Carers UK, the lead partner in the DP, had managed an Integra project during the previous generation of Community Initiatives and this experience had pointed up the need to focus on mainstreaming throughout the whole lifetime of the project. This strategy has paid off in many different ways, not least in terms of its influence on policies. ACE was able to support Dr Francis in steering his Private Members Bill through parliament and the Carers (Equal Opportunities) Act received Royal Assent in July 2004. This Act places new duties on local authorities to ensure that carers have access to employment, education and leisure opportunities – the first time that these key issues for carers have been addressed in the context of equal opportunities and diversity. Now, following the UK Government's announcement of its commitment to extending the right to request flexible working to carers, Carers UK, ACE and its national partners are working with the government to look at how its commitment can be translated into action. Madeleine Starr who has been involved in all of these activities believes that *"Without EQUAL and the attention and resources that it devotes to effective partnership and mainstreaming activities, we would never have been in a position to push, or to help other people push, for these very positive changes in the UK Government's policies!"*

Other important mainstreaming outcomes that have already been mentioned are the 'Learning for Living' qualification that will continue to be offered by the City and Guilds and the Employers for Carers web site that will be maintained within the context of the DP's own web site but still managed by employers. Another interesting development has been the Carers Award category in the Employer of the Year Awards. Run by Working Families, a leading charity in the field of work-life balance, these awards promote innovative employment policies which support people to manage work and external responsibilities. In 2004, the award was won by a member of the Employers for Carers group, the Department for Constitutional Affairs, which acknowledged at the time that *"we would not have achieved this success without the support of ACE."*

## MAINSTREAMING - FACTORS OF SUCCESS

The DP has attempted to analyse its mainstreaming activities in order to assist other EQUAL projects in the UK and has identified a number of Factors for Success. The first of these has to do with the nature of Carers UK, the lead partner. This organisation has a track record in lobbying and campaigning, strong parliamentary links, a wide membership and a dedicated training unit. It also had the sense and the capacity to undertake a research review that built the evidence base

for the changes targeted by the DP's mainstreaming activities. The second factor was the composition of the partnerships – the local partners that helped to make the ammunition and the influential national partners that fired the gun. These partners were also helpful in flagging up any available opportunities for dissemination and these included both existing and new campaigns. Everything from a Work-life Balance Week to the recent UK General Election was exploited and this use of all such opportunities was identified as the third success factor. Imelda Redmond, Chief Executive of Carers UK has highlighted *"the critical importance to the success of ACE of strong partners sold into a shared vision,"* and then *"add to that an organisation, Carers UK, which can play to all its strengths in giving leadership, and you have a real team of key players working to achieve a common goal."*

Another vital factor was the work that the DP invested in raising its public profile. Every event that it staged was held in interesting or prestigious surroundings such as the Houses of Parliament or the very top storey of the BT Tower in London. The project also used Government Ministers, who had portfolios related to carers' issues, to sponsor and chair these events. In addition, a great deal of effort was put into media work at European, national and local level, including TV, radio and press and some of this national and local activity was supported by new UK census data that had identified carers for the very first time. Last but not least, all of these PR activities have been supported by a series of very attractive and lively web sites. These are [ACE](#), [Employers for Carers](#), [Carers UK](#), [Equal Opportunities Commission](#), [Working Families](#) and [F&M Power](#). These sites are well worth a visit and together they represent the fifth and final factor of success.

This experience of designing and implementing a detailed mainstreaming strategy will be put to good use in a new EQUAL project 'ACE 2' which has the very ambitious objective of working towards the establishment of a National Care Strategy and you never know, this second ACE might just be the winner!

## Contact

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[Link to EQUAL database description](#)

A short version of this "Success story" and other "Success stories" are available on the [EQUAL website](#)