

## Carers Staff Network

Working Carers play a vital role in supporting the most vulnerable people in our city, and even more so since the pandemic. We know that in Leeds we have at least 74,000 residents who look after a family member or friend due to illness, disability, frailty, mental health or a substance misuse issue. People who otherwise cannot manage without the help of their carer giver.

Carers undertake the same and often more care giving tasks as paid staff in the health and social care setting. With many being unpaid carers balancing caring responsibilities with employment. It's often these unpaid carers that can feel isolated, a sense of not being respected or valued, and can feel their huge contributions disregard or taken for granted. It is recognised and accepted that this can impact the carers in many ways such as their physical, mental and economic health and wellbeing. To put into context Carers in Leeds provide around 1.5 million hours of unpaid care each week, every week. Research published by the University of Leeds and Carers UK estimates the financial contribution of carers in Leeds to be around £1.4billion per year. Without unpaid carers, we know that our health and social care system would collapse.

We know the coronavirus outbreak has put additional pressure on carers as a result of challenges presented by constant changes, social distancing and the restrictions on normal daily life. Working carers across Leeds have done excellent work in supporting those who have has to clinically shield, which in turn has continued to make a significant contribution to efforts to manage the outbreak in Leeds and protect the most vulnerable in our communities.

### **Leeds City Council Working Carers**

Leeds city council employs around 14126 staff (Nov 2021) of which 9% (1272) have declared being a carer. In the peak of the pandemic in 2020 declaration was at 10%. We are aware that in many cases carers do not recognise themselves as a 'carer' and therefore feel these figures under-represent carers within the workforce.

As one of the city's largest employers, Leeds city council values to the contribution of their working carers both in their work and caring roles.

### **Existing Support/Provisions available within Leeds City Council for working Carers**

- During the pandemic managers have kept in touch with staff to ensure their health and wellbeing in addition to-
- Employment policies such as flexible working options, special leave provisions for paid/unpaid time off for dependant/personal and domestic situations
- Manager guides/toolkits
- Access to Carers UK training and Carers Digital App 'Jointly'
- Various wellbeing provisions e.g. Counselling support through LCC HELP contract

- Supporting staff at Work Charter
- Carers Leeds Working Carers Employers Forum Membership - LCC/ NHS Leeds CCG commission for Carers Leeds to work with Leeds employers to consider and address working carers issues in businesses, the third sector and statutory organisations.

### **Carers Staff Network**

The Carers Staff Network is primarily a virtual network with a small core group and no formal membership. The network's focus is to support carers work life balance and to assist manager have a quality conversation and explore options to help their staff achieve this.

The CSN is mainly an information page on INSITE with support, guidance and signposting to council polices, services and external organisations that may be of support to staff also caring for someone. Through the pandemic the network has reached out to carers in a number of ways in order to share and stay connected.

This has been:

- Throughout 2020, Care, Share and Chat sessions. Informal monthly sessions providing a safe space online for carers to meet others and discuss concerns and share experiences and tips. Sessions have been a mix of general wellbeing and more focused topics such as the impact of covid on caring, coming out of shielding, Dementia support, support for parents/carers of children with special/complex needs transitioning back to school. Due to limited resources in 2021 these have been the limited.
- Facebook group - launched in lockdown to communicate and link with carers providing provide a platform for carers to connect and share with each other. A mechanism to also reach staff with no direct work-based IT access.
- CSN Plan B- carer care plan
- Carer awareness briefings for services/teams as required
- A Carer awareness slide show launched in 2020.
- Annual information day in June during Carer's Week. Since the pandemic this has been run as a virtual marketplace with information stalls and briefing sessions
- CSN proposed and drafted the carer's passport – This was launched in June 2021 as part of the Supporting staff at Work Charter and disability passport.
- 2021 subgroup formed called Super Families, support group specifically for parents/carers of children with special and complex needs. Monthly information and support sessions.
- In partnership with Carers Leeds – continued provision of confidential 121 support sessions facilitated by a Carers Leeds Support worker covering a wide range of carer related matters such as respite care, carer assessments, guidance on social care provisions and the wellbeing of carers. Originally on a face to face basis, these moved to a telephone call basis.
- Raising awareness within the organisation through leaflets/information events and delivery of joint network sessions such as with Healthy Minds

and Dawn (disability staff network). e.g. through Inclusion Week, Carers Rights Day, Young Carers Day.

### **Carers staff Network – future challenges and Development**

- Re- establishing the monthly general Care, Share and Chat sessions.
- Raise carer awareness
- Following the outcome of the last two LCC pulse survey's, continue to collaborate with HR and the Disability Network to formalise an action plan to improve the employment experience of carers in the workplace.
- Support the council and bring about improvements in the understanding/utilisation of flexible working options by both staff and managers with a focus on more accessibility for frontline staff.
- Support the role out and briefings of the Supporting Employee at Work Charter- A holistic staff centred/owned document capturing individual support needs e.g. (personal circumstances, agreed arrangements, reasonable adjustment, flexible working, carer responsibility etc. specifically with regards to the Carers passport.)
- Recruit support to assist the CSN deliver its objectives
- Wider involvement in Equality impact assessments
- Involvement in improving the recruitment and selection process for carers and associated training.
- Improve communication with carers, introduce a newsletter and link in with other localised communication channels to reach those not using the Carers staff network Facebook page.