



Appendix

The following case studies should give you some insight into the experiences, both positive and negative, of people who have tried to combine work with caring. These studies are based on actual interviews with carers although some names, and other details, have been changed in order to preserve the anonymity of the participants.

Case Study (1)

- **Background**

Mrs S cares for her son Michael who is 19 years old and has severe learning disabilities. Michael has two personal assistants who work with him for five hours a week on alternate weeks. Both are employed under the Direct Payments scheme.

Mrs S and her husband moved to Wigan from the south of England 8 years ago because the area offered better facilities and opportunities for their son.

As a child Michael attended various specialist schools. More recently he has been going to a centre for adults with learning disabilities in Hindley.

Both Mr and Mrs S have jobs at a major supermarket. Mr S works full-time 6am to 12 noon. Mrs S works 13 hours a week – Tuesday and Wednesday afternoon and Sunday morning. These arrangements mean that one or other of Michael's parents are always available to keep an eye on him and deal with any emergencies that may arise.

- **Why did want to combine work with caring?**

For financial reasons and to maintain a sense of personal identity.

- **How did you go about looking for a job?**

Mrs S has been employed at the supermarket for seven years. She worked in the retail sector prior to this and preferred the personal approach when it came to looking for jobs. She picked up an application form in store, filled it in and was subsequently invited to attend a group interview.

- **Did you disclose the fact that you were a carer when you applied for your present job?**

Mrs S revealed that she was a carer at the group interview. She was hesitant at first but needn't have worried as her employers have since proved very sympathetic.

- **What *kind* of jobs did you look for (part-time, full-time etc) and why?**

Mrs S wanted a part-time job so that she could work and still attend to

Michael's needs. She preferred the retail sector because of her previous experience but would have considered other types of jobs had they fitted around her caring responsibilities.

- **What attitude do your current employers take towards your caring role?**

Mrs S's employers have been very understanding towards her situation. They have always allowed her time off work to deal with any issues that may arise and regularly check with her to make sure that things are going ok. Mrs S feels that people are likely to be more sympathetic if they know that your circumstances are genuine.

- **What do you think are the main benefits – and drawbacks – of combining paid work with caring?
What could be done to make it easier for carers to work?**

- Benefits: as well as the financial benefits, working has allowed Mrs S to maintain a healthy social life and meet lots of people who she would not otherwise have come into contact with. Many of these have serious issues of their own and talking to them has helped Mrs S to keep a 'sense of perspective' regarding her own situation and role as a carer.
- Drawbacks: Your duties as an employee can come into conflict with your responsibilities as a carer and some people may feel 'torn'.

A greater understanding of what carers do would make it easier for them to find paid work. Carers have many skills that would be useful in the workplace but a lot of employees fail to recognize this.

- **Have you got any tips for other carers who might be thinking about returning to work?**

Be completely honest about your caring situation. Be completely honest with yourself. Know your own limits and be realistic about how much you can do while still managing to care. Look at voluntary work as a stepping stone to a paid job. As a volunteer you are unlikely to feel the same sense of guilt for not meeting commitments, as you would do if you were a paid member of staff.

Case Study (2)

- **Background**

Mr E is in his fifties and has been a carer for his wife, Rose, for a number of years. Rose has severe mental health problems and is also a diabetic. Before she became ill Mr E worked for a branch of the emergency services in a full-time, senior role.

- **Why did you want to combine work with caring?**

Although the progression of his wife's illness made life increasingly difficult for Mr E he continued working, mainly for financial reasons. It was only when Mr E developed serious health problems of his own and felt that his employers were putting pressure on him that he decided to resign.

- **Did you disclose your caring status to your employers? What attitude did they take?**

Mr E worked for several years before deciding to tell his employers that he was a carer. When he eventually did so, he found the attitude of the particular management unit within which he worked very unsympathetic. Although there were policies and procedures designed to support carers and even a 'carer coordinator' that he could refer to, Mr E was given little in the way of practical assistance. He was allowed time off work to deal with emergency situations but was required to take annual leave for the numerous medical appointments that his wife had to attend.

In Mr E's view his employers did no more than the minimum necessary to discharge their responsibilities. He considered reducing his hours and even looked into the possibility of job sharing but both of these options would have entailed a significant drop in income which Mr E did not think he could sustain. He **did** manage to negotiate a change in his working pattern but this had more to do with his own health problems than the fact that he was a carer.

- **Did you think about alternative care arrangements?**

Mr E felt that it was his 'duty' to care for his wife when she became ill and did not pursue the help that might have been available from the council's social services department. His alternative care options were further restricted because neither Mr E nor his wife had any family living in the area.

- **What do you think are the main benefits – and drawbacks – of combining paid work with caring?
What could be done to make it easier for carers to work**

Benefits: although Mr E's experience has been far from positive there are some aspects of work and caring which he still regards as beneficial. These include the opportunity to be financially independent and to enjoy a more relaxed and varied social life. For Mr E work also acted as something of a 'release valve', allowing him to take time off from the tension and stress that sometimes developed at home.

- Drawbacks: Mr E believes that revealing his carer status made his employment situation more difficult. He came under a lot more pressure at work and had to use all of his paid leave attending appointments with his wife. Eventually Mr E's situation became untenable and he felt compelled to resign.

If carers are to take up, or continue in, paid work there needs to be a change in management attitude with more help given to people trying to attain a genuine work / life balance.

- **Have you got any other tips for carers who might be thinking about returning to work?**

Approach employers with the aim of achieving this important balance. You can find out a lot from other people who have experience of work and caring, so seek their advice.