

Work and caring

Juggling the responsibilities of work and caring can be both difficult and stressful. In the past, there has been little help available for carers who want to work but also need to spend time with the person they look after.

This situation has been made easier because of recent government legislation allowing employees to take reasonable time off work to deal with emergencies and to request more flexible working patterns.

Flexible working

Since April 2007 it has been possible to make a request for 'flexible working' if you have worked for your employer for at least 26 weeks and either:

- You are caring for an adult who is a spouse, partner, civil partner or relative; or who although not related to you, lives at the same address as you, **or**
- You are the parent of a disabled child under the age of 18.

Flexible working can include arrangements such as working part-time, working from home, staggering or compressing your hours. Although your employer does not have to agree to the request, they must give their reasons in writing if they turn you down and you have the right to appeal (within certain time limits).

Time off work

Most employees have the right to take 'reasonable' time off work to deal with emergencies involving a dependent. This might include situations where the person that you care for is taken ill or where there is a disruption or breakdown in their care arrangements. You must let your employer know as soon as possible after the emergency has arisen and they can choose whether or not to pay you for the period that you are not at work.

Finding out more

If you have an employment related problem or just want to know more about your rights and entitlements, organisations such as the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (**ACAS**) and the Greater Manchester Pay and Employment Rights Advice Service provide free, confidential help and advice.

Greater Manchester Pay and Employment Rights Advice Service 4th Floor, Swan Buildings, 20 Swan Street, Manchester M4 5JW ☎ 0161 839 3888 web link: www.gmemploymentrights.org.uk

Carers UK has also produced a number of useful booklets, including 'Supporting Working Carers – a Carer's Guide' and 'Carers and Employment a Guide to the Right to Request Flexible Working', which you can order or download free of charge from their website.

Carers UK 20 Great Dover Street, London SE1 4LX ☎ 0845 241 0963
(publication Ordering) www.carersuk.org

Returning to work

Skills Shop

If you have been unemployed for a long period of time due to your caring responsibilities, returning to work can seem very daunting. You may be unclear about the type of work that you want to do or feel that your skills are no longer adequate. Wigan Council's '**Skills Shop**' initiative brings together a number of different organisations and services that can provide you with the support you need. There are Skills Shops located in both Wigan and Leigh. As well as offering tailored advice on jobs and job hunting they can help you access training opportunities, gain qualifications and even check benefit entitlement.

Jobcentre Plus

Jobcentre Plus provides a range of assistance for people looking for employment, including specific training programmes for those who have been out of work for a long time, and support making job applications. If you receive Carer's Allowance (or Income Support on the grounds of being a carer), you can request an interview with a Jobcentre Plus Advisor at any time to discuss the type of help that you need and the options available. This is called a 'work focused' interview.

You can also call Jobcentre Plus, or search the website, for details of jobs that you may wish to apply for.

Jobcentre Plus ☎ 0845 6060 234 web link: www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk

Work and benefits

You may cease to be entitled to some of the benefits which you received as a full-time carer when you start work. However, if you earn less than a certain amount and continue to provide at least 35 hours per week care for a person getting Attendance Allowance or the middle or higher rate care component of DLA, your Carer's Allowance should not be affected. Remember that organisations like the Citizens Advice Service and Wigan Independent Advice Centre can check your income and benefit situation to see whether you would be better off taking a job (or, conversely, tell you what you might be entitled to if you decide to give up work, or reduce your hours, in order to spend more time caring).

Career Development Loans

Where your employment opportunities are likely to be improved by a course of learning or training but you cannot afford to pay for it, a 'Career Development Loan' (CDL) may be the answer. CDLs are commercial bank loans which you begin to repay only when the course has finished. However they can also affect your entitlement to some benefits so make sure that you seek advice. To find out more or to order an application pack contact the Career Development Loan information line.

Career Development Loan information line ☎ 0800 585 505 (Mon – Sun 8am to 10pm)

Other sources of help and advice:

Careers Advice Service ☎ 0800 100 900 web link:
<http://careersadvice.direct.gov.uk/>

Working Families ☎ 0800 013 0313 (Helpline) ♿
advice@workingfamilies.org.uk web link: www.workingfamilies.org.uk

Working Families provides advice to low income families on employment rights, Tax Credits and benefits. The organisation also has a dedicated helpline for parents of disabled children (020 7017 0072) and has produced several very good guides. These include a booklet entitled 'Getting into Work' which is packed with information for carers of both children and adults on how to find and apply for jobs.

Acas Helpline

Helpline Telephone: **08457 47 47 47** (08:00 to 20:00 Mon – Fri;
09:00 to 13:00 Sat)

Helpline Minicom : **08456 06 16 00** (08:00 to 20:00 Mon – Fri)

Web: www.acas.org.uk

Who is the service for: **Employers and employees.**

Service details: The Acas Helpline is the place to go for both employers and employees who are involved in an employment dispute or are seeking information on employment rights and rules. The Helpline provides, clear, confidential, independent and impartial advice to assist the caller in resolving issues in the workplace.

Charges / membership: **None.**

Skills Shop

Wigan Skills Shop
Unit 30
Grand Arcade Shopping Centre
Millgate
Wigan
WN1 1BH

Leigh Skills Shop
8 Market Street
Leigh
WN7 1DS

Marsh Green Skills Shop
Marsh Green Library
Harrow Road
Marsh Green
Wigan
WN5 0QL

Family Employment Initiative
1-3 Westwell Street
Leigh
WN7 5ND

Telephone : **01942 827826 (Wigan); 01942 404456 (Leigh); 01942 705067 / 705066 (Marsh Green); 01942 487343 (Family Employment Initiative)**

Web: www.wiganlife.com

Who is the service for: **Anyone aged 18 or over.**

Service details: The service is free, impartial and confidential. Whether you want to improve your career prospects, get a qualification or just make the most of your job, the service can help you.

We can:

- **Give advice on ways to search for and apply for jobs, e.g. writing a CV, interview skills;**
- **Help link your personal interests and skills to your job or career;**
- **Give advice on ways to progress in a career;**
- **Identify the skills you may need and refer you to other support (if necessary) to help you to improve your reading, writing and maths skills;**
- **Refer you to other support available;**
- **Help you understand the job market;**
- **Give advice about financial support available;**

- **Give advice about services available during redundancy, including how to access services;**
- **Give advice about what is not available, and discuss alternatives.**

The service is free, impartial and confidential.

Charges / membership: **None.**

Referral method: **Any.**