

## FINDING A JOB

### Introduction

The point at which an individual carer feels ready to start looking for a job is likely to depend upon their personal circumstances. Some carers are ready very quickly, others will want to take their time and proceed more slowly and cautiously. Whether it takes months, or even years, the most important thing is that you do not feel rushed or pressurised.

This section covers the practicalities of looking for and finding a job. It includes a brief description of the main job search options, together with information and tips on how to complete an application form or CV. There is also some advice on how to handle job interviews and the pros and cons of disclosing your status as a carer.

We begin, however, by describing some of the barriers that carers have said they face when seeking work.

### Barriers to finding work and support that can help

- Lack of confidence
- Lack of work skills – especially for carers who have been out of work for a long time
- Not knowing where to start and a lack of appropriate information, advice guidance and support
- Lack of job search and interview skills (including CV and job application skills)
- Benefits ‘trap’ and the inflexibility of the benefits system
- Lack of alternative / substitute care options that are also reliable, flexible, accessible, trustworthy and affordable
- Difficulties faced by carers with school-aged children during school holidays
- Being able to find suitable work that will fit around caring responsibilities

- Concern about being able to cope with work **and** caring
- Discrimination because of carer status
- Discrimination that may be additionally compounded by age, gender and / or other factors

Recent government legislation has been designed to remove some of the barriers to work and caring. Since April 2007 for example many carers have had the right to request 'flexible working' arrangements (such as working part-time and working from home). But whilst an employer must consider such a request they are not obliged to agree to it, as long as they give their reasons in writing.

### **Where to go for help and advice**

Bearing in mind all the obstacles faced by carers who want to get back into employment it is important to know where you can go for further help and advice.

Wigan Council's Learning and Employment Service (LES) provides free, impartial help with careers advice, job search skills and employment opportunities for adults. They also have extensive experience of supporting people with a range of needs, many of whom have multiple barriers to overcome.

LES centres, known as Skills Shops, are located throughout the borough (see the section on 'Learning and Training Opportunities' for contact details). You do not need an appointment to use the service, just telephone or drop in.

You can find out more about the Learning and Employment Service by visiting the Wigan Council website: [www.wigan.gov.uk](http://www.wigan.gov.uk) The website also has links to other community organisations that work in partnership with the LES. These include:

- Bedford High School
- Lowton High School
- Orrell Community Education Centre at Abraham Guest High School
- Shevington High School
- Tyldesley Community Education Centre
- Westleigh High School
- Wigan and Leigh College Family Learning Team

If you feel that it would be helpful to talk to someone, don't be put off by the (all too common) view that careers advice is only for younger people, or those looking for 'career' type jobs. The services offered by the LES and its partner organisations are for **all** adults, whatever their circumstances.

## Job Search Options

It is important to be aware of the many different ways in which you can go about looking for work as this may significantly increase your chances of finding and getting a job.

### Newspapers

Newspapers are often the first place people look for information about job vacancies. As well as the local newspapers which are distributed free or for sale within Wigan and Leigh, you may want to take a look at those of neighbouring boroughs (such as the Manchester Evening News). Most national newspapers also have job vacancy sections, with some advertising specific sector jobs on different days. For example, the Guardian newspaper advertises computer and IT related vacancies on Mondays, teaching and education posts on Tuesdays, social care, voluntary and community posts on Wednesdays and so on. Don't forget to also check out local newsletters and magazines such as the 'Big Issue' which often carry advertisements for both paid and voluntary work. Finally, there are a large number of trade and specific sector publications where you can search for jobs. Many social work and social care related vacancies are advertised in 'Community Care' magazine, for example.

### Jobs Bulletins

Jobs bulletins listing current vacancies are produced on a regular basis by local authorities and health trusts. Copies of local job bulletins are available at Jobcentres, but if you have access to the internet you can also view and download your own copy. To find out about current vacancies available in the Ashton, Leigh and Wigan Primary Care Trust, go to [www.alwpct.nhs.uk](http://www.alwpct.nhs.uk) and click on the 'Your PCT' tab, then follow the link for 'Jobs'. For the latest Wigan Council Jobs Bulletin go to the Wigan Council website at [www.wigan.gov.uk](http://www.wigan.gov.uk) and click on 'Jobs and Careers'.

### Jobcentre Plus

Your local Jobcentre Plus office is the best place to go to find out about the latest job opportunities. If this is the first time you've been there for a while for you may be surprised to see that the old style display boards have been replaced by touch screen terminals, called 'jobpoints', which show the jobs available anywhere in the country. Jobcentre Plus is part of the Department of Work and Pensions and staff are always on hand to provide information and help you through the stages of your job hunt.

There are four Jobcentre Plus offices in the borough:

Ashton-in-Makerfield Jobcentre Plus, 17-19 Gerrard Street, Ashton-in-Makerfield, Wigan WN4 9AB ☎ 01942 755600

Atherton Jobcentre Plus, 129 Market Street, Atherton, Manchester M46 0DF  
☎01942 755900

Leigh Jobcentre Plus, 2-10 Windermere Road, Leigh WN7 1UT ☎01942 263700

Wigan Jobcentre Plus, Brocol House, 71 King Street, Wigan WN1 1EA ☎01942 752100

If you have difficulty getting to a Jobcentre, there is a telephone job-matching service called Jobseeker Direct that is designed to help you find full or part-time employment. Advisers can give you details of any jobs that you may be interested in, tell you how to apply and even ring the employer to arrange an interview. The Jobseeker Direct service is available weekdays 8am to 6pm and Saturdays 9am to 1pm on ☎ 0845 6060 234 (textphone 0845 6044 022). If you have access to the internet you can also browse all of the jobs currently available through Jobcentre Plus by going to: [www.jobseekers.direct.gov.uk](http://www.jobseekers.direct.gov.uk).

Unfortunately not every carer finds their involvement with Jobcentre Plus a helpful or positive experience. Some have expressed doubts, particularly about the ability of Jobcentre staff to understand their situation and offer appropriate help and advice. Jobcentre Plus and the Department of Work and Pensions have said that they are committed to providing equal opportunities to everyone which means that, whatever your circumstances, you should be treated equally and fairly. If you do have any comments or complaints about the service you receive, then you should let a member of staff know about it or complain in writing. A complaint's form is attached to the leaflet 'Our Service Standards' which you can get from your local Jobcentre Plus office or download from the website: [www.dwp.gov.uk](http://www.dwp.gov.uk). The leaflet explains all about your rights and responsibilities as a customer of Jobcentre Plus and what you should do if things go wrong.

Other leaflets published by Jobcentre Plus that you may find useful include:

- Finding a job
- Help with job interviews
- Jobseeker's Allowance
- New Deal – Extra support to find work
- The Benefits of Working – Going back to work doesn't mean giving up all your benefits
- WorkPath – Help finding work if you have a disability or health condition

## **New Deal**

New Deal offers individuals an intensive period of help – during which you will have access to your own personal adviser – in order to get back into work.

Everyone who receives Jobseekers Allowance *must* take part in New Deal after a certain length of time out of work. This is 6 months for people aged 18 to 24 and 18 months for those aged 25 or over. However, there are also a number of 'voluntary' programmes – including New Deal 50 plus, New Deal for Partners and

New Deal for Lone Parents – that are generally more suited to people with caring responsibilities.

New Deal 50 Plus: This is a programme for people aged 50 or over. To join you must be aged 50 or over and have been in receipt of Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance, Incapacity Benefit, Employment and Support Allowance or Pension Credit for a period of at least 6 months. You may also be eligible if you have been getting Carers Allowance.

New Deal for Partners: If your partner is claiming JSA, Employment and Support Allowance, Income Support, Incapacity Benefit, Carer's Allowance, Severe Disablement Benefit or Pension Credit you can join the New Deal for Partners Programme. The type of help that you are likely to be offered includes advice and guidance on training, finding work and childcare and you may also get the opportunity to take part in other government schemes.

New Deal for Lone Parents: You can join New Deal for Lone Parents if you are bringing up children as a lone parent, if your youngest child is under 16 years old and you are not working, or working less than 16 hours per week. It does not matter which benefits (if any) you are receiving.

### **Pathways to work**

Pathways to Work is another programme run by Jobcentre Plus that some carers may be able to access. However it is only available to those receiving certain health-related benefits such as Employment and Support Allowance, Incapacity Benefit, Income Support on the grounds of incapacity and Severe Disablement Allowance.

The programme consists of three main elements:

- A series of up to six 'work focused' interviews.
- A 'Condition Management Programme' designed to make it easier for participants to understand and manage their condition / disability.
- A payment credit of £40 per week for those who are successful in getting back into employment as long as they work more than 16 hours per week and earn a maximum of £15,000 per year before tax.

Pathways to Work is designed to provide a tailor made package of support for people who might otherwise be considered unfit for work. In some areas the programme is delivered by Jobcentre Plus, in others by designated 'providers' from the private or voluntary sectors.

### **Work focused support for carers**

If you are a carer aged 18 or over who does not work (or who works less than 16 hours per week) and you are not eligible for any of the employment support programmes mentioned above you may still be able to get help through the Work Focused Support for Carers (WFSC) scheme run by Jobcentre Plus.

Participation in WFSC is entirely voluntary which means that you can join or drop out whenever you like and it will not affect any benefits that you receive. Carers taking part in the scheme have their own personal adviser whose role is to help with issues such as training, finding a job and obtaining suitable replacement care. They can also check entitlement to in-work benefits and tax credits and (where appropriate) assist with making applications.

If you are interested in the WFSC scheme and would like to make an appointment with a personal adviser, contact your nearest Jobcentre Plus office (see above). Depending on your circumstances Jobcentre Plus may be able to help pay for things like replacement care while you attend appointments with the adviser, take part in a training course or attend job interviews.

### **Internet job sites**

Using the internet to search for jobs is an increasingly popular way of finding work. There are a number of websites you can use and some sites also include information on producing CVs and interview techniques and tips.

If you have access to the internet just type 'jobs' into a search engine such as [www.google.com](http://www.google.com) and you are bound to find plenty of matches. These include sites such as: [www.fish4.co.uk/jobs](http://www.fish4.co.uk/jobs), [www.jobsite.co.uk](http://www.jobsite.co.uk), [www.monster.co.uk](http://www.monster.co.uk), [www.gisajob.co.uk](http://www.gisajob.co.uk), [www.reed.co.uk](http://www.reed.co.uk), [www.netjobs.co.uk](http://www.netjobs.co.uk), [www.totaljobs.com](http://www.totaljobs.com), [www.jobs.co.uk](http://www.jobs.co.uk), [www.jobserve.co.uk](http://www.jobserve.co.uk). If you want to keep your search local you could also try [www.wigantoday.net](http://www.wigantoday.net), [www.thisislancashire.co.uk](http://www.thisislancashire.co.uk) or [www.manchesteronline.co.uk](http://www.manchesteronline.co.uk). As well as providing a job search facility many of these sites allow you to upload your personal CV so that it can be viewed by prospective employers.

### **Informal contacts, friends and family**

'Word of mouth' can be a very successful way of finding jobs as you often get to hear about possible vacancies in advance of them being advertised. Your circle of contacts may also be able to tell you about any jobs they have seen advertised but you may have missed.

### **Shop Windows**

Shop notice boards are not only a good place to look for jobs, they can also be a way of advertising your own availability for employment. For example, if you are offering yourself as a childminder, cleaner, window cleaner, caterer, party entertainer or something similar, putting an advert in a shop window or notice board could be a cost effective way of finding yourself a job locally.

### **Temping and employment agencies**

For many carers registering with an employment agency is not a very realistic (or desirable) option. However there can be certain advantages, such as increased flexibility and not having to worry about undergoing a formal job interview. Doing

work placements with an agency can also provide you with valuable job experience and a relatively 'easy' way back into the workplace. Against this has to be weighed the lack of secure, regular employment and generally low rates of pay.

Listed below are a few locally based employment and recruitment agencies. A fuller list can be found in the Yellow Pages or online at [www.yell.com](http://www.yell.com)

- Secretarial / Accounts / Office Staff:

Forrest Recruitment, 25 Wallgate, Wigan, WN1 1LD  
☎ 01942 365129

Hays Accountancy and Finance, 1 Hindley Walk, The Galleries, Wigan, WN1 1AY  
☎ 01942 829704

- Nursing and Home Care:

A1 Nursing and Homecare Ltd, 55a Park Road, Wigan, WN6 7AA  
☎ 01942 496352

- Drivers:

Top Gear Recruitment Ltd, 55-57, Mesnes Street, Wigan WN1 1QX  
☎ 01942 365443

- Industrial, production, Warehousing:

Bond Personnel, Unit 13/16, Observer Building, Rowbottom Square, Wallgate, Wigan, WN1 1LN  
☎ 01942 367019

Top Gear Recruitment Ltd, 55-57, Mesnes Street, Wigan WN1 1QX  
☎ 01942 365443

- General:

Adecco Recruitment Solutions, 32, Market Street, Wigan, WN1 1HX  
☎ 01942 610500

People who get direct payments (the section on Alternative Care Options) often employ personal assistants, or PAs, to help with things like housework, shopping and accessing community facilities. The Wigan and Leigh Personal Assistant Support Service (PASS) maintains a database of people who are interested in working as PAs. To find out more, or to request an application form contact:

Wigan and Leigh Personal Assistant Support Service, Leigh Stadium, Sale Way,  
Leigh Sports Village, Leigh WN7 4JY

☎ 01942 487860

Email: [pass@wigan.gov.uk](mailto:pass@wigan.gov.uk)

### **Approaching employers directly**

A final option is to approach potential employers directly. A letter is usually better than a telephone call unless you know exactly who to speak to and what you want to say. Even if there are no jobs vacant when you approach an employer, they may well decide to keep your details on file and invite you to apply when something does become available.

### **Applying for a job: Application forms, CVs and Interviews**

When you apply for a job you will usually have to complete a form containing details about yourself, or send a copy of your CV (Curriculum Vitae). If you are shortlisted for the position it is also likely that you will have to attend an interview. For many carers who haven't worked for a while, the thought of completing an application form or a CV or going for an interview can be a daunting prospect. We hope the tips and suggestions provided here will give you some direction.

### **Recognising skills you have as a carer**

As a carer you will have acquired experience and skills that are of value to prospective employers. You should think about these when you look through the job description and job specification of any job that you apply for and remember to mention them when completing an application form or compiling your CV. The following are just a few of the skills that carers may have to offer:

Personal:

Perseverance

Loyalty

Dependability and reliability

Patience

Tolerance

Sensitivity and understanding

Self-motivation and initiative

Diplomacy and assertiveness

Good listener

Practical:

Physical handling skills

Personal care skills

Domestic management

First aid knowledge

Writing skills

Management:

Financial management  
Negotiation and communication skills  
Advocacy  
Staff management and co-ordination  
Information gathering  
Dealing with difficult behaviour  
Organisational and planning skills  
Time management  
Problem solving skills

### **Compiling a CV**

A CV (curriculum vitae) is a concise statement about you and your achievements and a record of your work history, including unpaid work and voluntary activities. It is a useful personal document to have and can help you when you need to complete an application form. Some employers will ask for a copy of your CV as well as an application form, when you apply for a job. If you are sending a letter to a prospective employer enquiring about possible job vacancies, a brief CV listing the skills that you have, is also worth including.

There is a lot of excellent advice available on how to compile a CV, in books and on job search sites. You can also get help in writing and producing your CV from Wigan Council's Learning and Employment Service. Contact the Skills Shop in Wigan ☎ ( 01942 827826) or Leigh ☎ ( 01942 404456).

Listed below are some pointers that you may wish to bear in mind:

- A CV should be concise, clear and relevant. Aim to keep it to 2 pages or less.
- Make sure your CV is up to date and appropriate to the job you are applying for.
- Limit personal details to your name, address, email address (if you have one) and your telephone / mobile phone numbers. Ideally your personal details should not take up more than half a page.
- Pay attention to presentation – you want your CV to make a good impression so make sure that it is neat and tidy.
- Your CV should be complete and accurate and easy to understand. Check spelling, grammar and punctuation thoroughly and ensure that all dates are correct.
- Keep education details as brief as possible, but include qualifications.
- List all your work experience, including any part-time, casual or voluntary work that you have undertaken. Remember to include dates and information about your duties and responsibilities.

- Towards the end of the CV, state any achievements and relevant skills or information that an employer would be interested in, such as having a driving licence, computer skills, ability to speak a second language etc.
- Include two references. One of these will usually be your current or most recent employer but if, as a carer, you have not been in employment for some time, ask someone who knows a lot about you and your skills.
- To produce your CV, use a PC, a decent printer and good quality white paper.

Your completed CV should include the following information:

- 1) Personal details – your full name (first name(s) and surname), address, post code, email address and telephone / mobile phone number is sufficient.
- 2) Personal profile – this is optional but you can include a few lines about yourself at the beginning indicating positive characteristics (e.g. reliable, enthusiastic) and job strengths.
- 3) Education and qualifications – you might also want to include details of any short courses you have attended if they are relevant to the kind of job you are applying for.
- 4) Employment – summarise your role / key tasks and remember to cover any employment ‘gaps’. If you have done any voluntary work, give details of this and the responsibilities that you had (or still have), with dates.
- 5) Interests – listing these can be helpful and may strengthen your application.
- 6) Membership of organisations or professional bodies – if you belong to an organisation like Carers UK, Scope, the MS Society or other group, particularly if you play an active role, perhaps as the Secretary or Treasurer, you may want to state this in your CV.
- 7) Additional information – give here any other relevant information or personal details that you want to include, such as your date of birth and driving licence (if you have one).
- 8) Referees – remember to check beforehand that the person you want to act as your referee is willing to do so and think carefully about who would be appropriate. Do they know you well enough? Do they know about your strengths and what you have done? Referees should not be members of your immediate family.

Your CV is an important document. Like an application form, its purpose is to impress prospective employers so that they will invite you for an interview. A good CV will repay the time and effort that you spend putting it together so it is

worthwhile getting some honest, constructive feedback from people that you trust. The sort of things that you will want to know include:

“Is my CV an interesting document to read? Would someone scanning it quickly want to finish reading it?”

“Is my CV clear, well laid out and logically presented?”

“Have I included everything that I should? Or, is there anything I have included that could be left out?”

“Have I made any spelling mistakes? Are there any errors or inaccuracies?”

“Are there any suggestions for improving the layout or content of my CV?”

The next two pages show what a CV might look like.

**Lesley Jackson  
25 Watson Road  
Leigh  
Lancashire  
WN7 9XX**

**Tel: 01942 123456 Mobile: 07912345678  
Email: (include if you have one)**

**Personal Profile**

A conscientious and reliable person who has worked in retail and an office environment. Has cared for son / daughter / partner / elderly relative for the past 10 years. Enjoys working with people, has good communication skills and is honest and trustworthy. Hard working, with the ability to remain calm under pressure.

**Education and qualifications**

19XX – 19XX St Josephs RC School, Hindley  
6 'O' Levels including Maths and English

19XX – 19XX Wigan and Leigh College  
City and Guilds Retailing  
CLAIT for IT / Computing Skills

**Employment history**

19XX – present Full-time carer looking after.....

19XX – 19XX Wilson and Bloggs Ltd., Manchester  
Office supervisor (briefly list key responsibilities)

19XX – 19XX Johnson and Morgan Associates, Manchester  
Sales and Despatch Officer (briefly list key responsibilities)

19XX – 19XX Lockson & Smith Stores, Wigan  
Senior Sales Assistant (briefly list key responsibilities)

19XX – 19XX Wetherfield Garden Centre, Aspull  
Sales Assistant (briefly list key responsibilities)

19XX – 19XX The Grassmore Centre, Coppull  
Sales Assistant (briefly list key responsibilities)

### **Interests and other experience**

- Swimming and walking
- Member and Treasurer of local MS Society
- Conversational German
- Certificate in First Aid

### **Additional information**

Date of Birth      4<sup>th</sup> June 1955

Driving Licence      Full, clean driving licence

### **References**

You can either give the name and address of two referees here or put 'references available on request'.

## Completing an application form

When you apply for a job, you will usually be sent a 'job description' and a 'person specification'. The job description lists the main duties of the job – the things that the successful applicant will be expected to do. The person specification contains the qualifications, experience, skills and knowledge / understanding and other personal attributes that they will need. Some of these may be described as 'essential', others only 'desirable'. Looking at the job description and person specification will help you decide whether or not you want to continue with your application.

You will be asked to complete and return your CV / application form by a certain date. If you have to fill in an application form there may be guidance notes or instructions to follow. Make sure that you read these carefully before completing the form. If there are no guidance notes, you may find the following tips helpful:

- Take a photocopy of your application form before you start. Use the photocopy as a draft and fill this in first. It will not matter then if you have to make any alterations or additions. When you are satisfied with the draft, you can carefully complete the original and send it off, keeping the draft as your copy. If you are not able to take a photocopy, you can either complete the form lightly with a soft pencil and ink over it in black pen afterwards (rubbing out any pencil marks with an eraser), or copy the questions onto a blank sheet of paper and use this as your draft copy.
- Take your time in completing the application form so that it is neat and legible. Unfortunately it is not usually possible to type directly onto an application form. Some organisations may allow you to complete the forms on the computer and print them off, but in most cases handwriting is the only option.
- Use a non-blotchy black pen to fill the form in. If your application is short-listed it will probably have to be photocopied and black ink is much better for this purpose than blue.
- On the application form, there will usually be a section for 'other relevant information' or a 'personal statement' where you can talk about the experience, skills and personal qualities which you can bring to the job. If you are sent a job description and person specification with the application form read these carefully and try to include evidence of the skills they are looking for within your personal statement. Take your time in deciding what you want to say in your personal statement and try to give examples that demonstrate the skills you have.
- Read through your completed application form carefully and send it off with a short covering letter.

- Allow yourself enough time to complete the application form so that it can be posted and received before the deadline date. You do not want to have to rush your application.

Whether you are completing an application form or writing a CV, bear in mind that you are selling yourself and the language you use should be positive and upbeat. The following are the sorts of positive words that can help to make your CV or job application stand out and make a good impression.

Able	Flexible	Qualified
Accurate	Friendly	Quick-thinking
Adaptable	Helpful	Reliable
Calm	Hardworking	Resourceful
Capable	Honest	Responsible
Competent	Imaginative	Self-motivated
Confident	Independent	Self-reliant
Cooperative	Informed	Sensitive
Creative	Innovative	Skilled
Dedicated	Knowledgeable	Stable
Dependable	Loyal	Strong
Diligent	Mature	Supportive
Diplomatic	Methodical	Tactful
Efficient	Motivated	Thorough
Effective	Organised	Thoughtful
Energetic	Patient	Trained
Enthusiastic	Positive	Trustworthy
Experienced	Punctual	Versatile
Expert	Proficient	Willing

It might be said that caring requires all of the attributes listed above so make good use of them on your CV and/or application form. Although many people find it difficult to sell themselves, to get a job you must try to tell prospective employers as much as you can about your skills and abilities. If you need guidance and support in putting together your CV or application form, some of the organisations listed earlier in this section should be able to help.

### **Preparing for an interview**

Many people find going for a job interview extremely daunting. However with the right preparation and attitude of mind it can become something to look forward to. If you have done everything you can to prepare yourself for the interview it will help you feel much more self-assured and confident. Here are some tips that you may find useful.

Before the interview:

- Check the time, date and place of interview and confirm your attendance if you are asked to do this. Make sure you know where the interview is going

to be held and how you are going to get there, including how long the journey will take.

- Try to find out as much as possible about the organisation and the job advertised.
- Read the job description and person specification thoroughly to ensure you are clear about what the job involves. Think about some of the likely questions you may be asked and how you will answer them. If possible, practise answering them out loud. Although you will have to answer questions on the spot at the interview, practising helps you to think carefully beforehand about some key points and how you can respond.
- Think about some questions you would like to ask at the interview and jot these down on a piece of paper to take with you. Don't rely on remembering them when you get there because you probably won't!
- Decide what to wear for the interview and make sure it is washed and ironed, ready for the day. You do not need to buy new clothes for an interview, but looking smart and tidy always creates a good impression. Wearing something comfortable is also important.
- Make sure you know what will be expected of you at the interview. Your interview letter should give details of who will be interviewing you and whether you will be expected to take some kind of test (such as aptitude or typing). Depending on the type of job, you may be asked to deliver a short presentation which you will need to think about and prepare beforehand.
- Your interviewers will have a copy of your letter, CV or application form in front of them and may refer to it. Read this through carefully before the interview to familiarise yourself with what you have said, especially about how your skills match the job description and person specification.
- Search out and have ready to take with you to the interview any documents or certificates that have been requested.
- Think positive! Remember, you would not have been short-listed and invited to go along for an interview if the people short-listing did not think you could do the job.

At the interview:

- Arrive on time, preferably at least 10 minutes early. This will allow you to gather your thoughts before the interview starts. Feeling rushed or arriving late will make you feel stressed and add unnecessary pressure. It also gives the interviewers a bad impression of your punctuality.

- Try to stay calm and relaxed. Breathe deeply. Smile at your interviewers. Shake hands firmly and confidently and maintain good eye contact throughout. A certain amount of nervousness will be expected, and is perfectly normal!
- Speak clearly and confidently. Ask for a question to be repeated if you did not hear or understand it properly. Do not rush your answers. Remember it is all right to pause briefly and gather your thoughts before answering.
- Keep your replies concise but avoid giving 'yes' or 'no' answers. Try to provide as much **relevant** information as possible. Do not waffle or give irrelevant information.
- Show enthusiasm for the job you are applying for and the organisation.
- Avoid trying to be too clever or over-confident and do not lie, pretend or give evasive answers. If you don't know something you have been asked, be honest.
- Be confident in yourself and do not be afraid of making your interviewers aware of your strengths and abilities. Always bear in mind the skills and responsibilities that you have acquired as a carer.
- At the end of the interview, when you are invited to, ask any questions you would like answered, but try to avoid asking too many.
- Make sure you know how you will be notified of the result of your interview. Will you receive a telephone call or a letter? And how long will it be before you hear?

Although it is impossible to predict exactly what questions you will be asked, there are some that crop up at most interviews. These include asking about your previous work experience and its relevance to the job you are applying for; your reasons for applying; what you feel you can bring to the post; what you have done if you have not been in paid employment recently. This is a good opportunity for you to mention the many skills and abilities you have acquired as a carer.

### **Disclosing your status as a carer when applying for a job**

A dilemma which a lot of carers face is whether or not to tell a prospective employer that they have caring responsibilities. There is a widely held belief that revealing this fact could prejudice their chances either at the short-listing or the interview stage. The decision as to whether to disclose your caring status is entirely yours. In an ideal world it should not make any difference, but in reality many carers feel there is a strong possibility that they could be viewed more negatively than other applicants. However, if you are able to highlight the positive aspects of your caring role and the skills that you have acquired as a result,

saying that you are a carer should not adversely affect your chances of getting a job.

Most employers have equal opportunities policies that are designed to prevent prejudice or discrimination in the recruitment process. An increasing number have also adopted family friendly working policies that may refer specifically to carers. Finding out about any such policies beforehand could help you decide whether (and how) to disclose your carer status. Remember that you will usually be asked to explain any gaps in your employment history when you fill in the application form so some reference to your caring responsibilities may be necessary at this stage.

If you decide to tell a prospective employer at interview, it is a good idea to do this in a positive way, for example by emphasising the skills and experience you have gained as a carer and the relevance of these to the job that you have applied for. Do not apologise for being a carer or dwell on the negative aspects – such as the need to attend hospital appointments with the person you care for. If you do, they might start to wonder how much time you will have to take off work because of your caring responsibilities. Show that you are in control and that you have thought about the kind of alternative care arrangements that would be needed in order to minimise disruption to your job. If the person you care for has regular, unavoidable appointments, you may want to explain how you would organise your work around these, or utilise your annual leave entitlement, so that you can go with them. You could also mention any help that may be available from family or friends.

You are likely to get more respect, understanding and sympathy from prospective employers if you are open with them about your caring responsibilities from the start. Remember, some employers are carers themselves! If you get the job but decide not to tell and the truth later emerges it could lead to much more serious problems. Your employer, and the people you work with, may feel that you have withheld information from them or that they cannot trust you.

## **Getting a job: work-life balance practices that can help**

Some employers operate working practices – such as flexi-time - that can help you manage your caring/working responsibilities more effectively. Otherwise known as 'work-life balance' or 'flexible' working practices, these have received a great deal of official encouragement over the past few years and have even been the subject of legislation.

The following is a brief description of some of the more common flexible working arrangements. If they are not available where you work, it might be worthwhile asking whether one or other of them could be introduced.

**Flexi-time** gives people choice about their actual working hours, usually outside certain agreed core times. This means staff can vary their starting and finishing times each day at work and sometimes also their break times.

**Time off in lieu** means that employees can agree with managers to take time off at a mutually convenient time to make up for extra hours worked. It is often used as a way of compensating employees who have to attend meetings in the evening.

**Compressed working hours** allows people to work their total number of agreed hours over a shorter number of working days. For example you may work full-time hours but over a period of four days a week instead of the usual five – or nine days a fortnight.

**Shift swapping** means employees can negotiate working times to suit their needs and re-arrange shifts amongst themselves or within teams – provided the needs of the business or service are met.

**Self rostering** has been introduced in some hospitals and other care settings. It looks at the number of staff - and the skill mix - required during each working day, and allows the individual to choose the times they would like to work. Shift patterns are then compiled which match as closely as possible the individual preferences of staff to the agreed staffing levels.

**Job sharing** involves two people carrying out the duties of a post that would normally only require one. Each person is employed part time but together they cover a full-time post and divide the pay, holidays and other benefits between them.

**Term time working** means a person can remain on a permanent contract, either on a full or part time basis, but can have unpaid leave of absence during the school holidays.

**Working at or from home** is possible in all kinds of ways – from people doing assembly work or sewing, or providing a personal service to paid consultants working with new technology.

**Teleworking** involves working at home (either full or part time) and using a telephone and a computer to keep in touch with work.

**Breaks from work** in addition to maternity, parental and paternity leave, some employers offer unpaid career or unemployment breaks and sabbaticals. As a carer, it might be possible for you to negotiate an unpaid break from work for a few weeks, or months, to cover a specific period of time as your caring needs dictate.

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.

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**

Many carers worry about having to take time off work to cope with an emergency, for example if their care arrangements are unexpectedly disrupted or if the person they care for falls ill and needs them at home. Legislation was introduced in 1999 giving all employees the right to take 'reasonable' time off work to deal with an emergency involving a dependant and not to be dismissed or victimised as a result. A dependant may be a partner, child or parent, or someone who lives with you as part of your family. Examples of the kinds of circumstance in which an employee could take time off, include:

- To care for a dependant who has fallen ill or been injured. The legislation applies even if they have not been physically hurt but need someone to help or comfort them.
- To make longer term care arrangements for a dependant who is ill;
- To deal with the death of a dependant - for example to make funeral arrangements or to attend a funeral;
- To deal with an unexpected disruption or breakdown in care arrangements for a dependant;
- To deal with an unexpected incident involving a child during school hours.

There is no set limit to the amount of time off which can be taken. In most cases, only one or two days will be required, but this depends very much on individual circumstances. An employee may be able to take a longer period of leave under other arrangements with their employer. It should also be noted that there is no statutory right to be paid for time off taken to deal with an emergency. This is left to the employer's discretion or to the contract of employment.

More information about employment rights, flexible working and work-life balance issues may be obtained from the following organisations:

Trades Union Congress

☎ 020 7636 4030

Website: [www.tuc.org.uk](http://www.tuc.org.uk)

Address: Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1B 3LS

The TUC maintains a website that provides information about flexible working called 'Changing Times'. Also available are a series of free leaflets on employment rights which you can either download from the main TUC site or read online at [www.worksmart.org.uk](http://www.worksmart.org.uk) .

## Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS)

☎ 08457 47 47 47 (8am to 8pm Mon – Fri, 9am to 1pm Sat)

Website: [www.acas.org.uk](http://www.acas.org.uk)

Anyone who is involved in an employment dispute or needs information about rights in the workplace can call the ACAS Helpline for advice. ACAS also publishes a range of leaflets and advisory booklets that you may find useful. These include titles such as: 'The Right to Apply for Flexible Working' and 'Flexible Working and Work-Life Balance'. There is a small charge for the booklets, if you order them online from the website, but all of the leaflets are free.

## Working Families

☎ 020 7253 7243

Website: [www.workingfamilies.org.uk](http://www.workingfamilies.org.uk)

Address: 1-3 Berry Street, London EC1V 0AA

Working families provides information and advice to low income families on issues such as employment rights and benefit entitlement. It has produced several very good factsheets, covering areas such as flexible working and the right to time off, all of which can be downloaded free of charge from the organisation's website.

Working Families 'Waving not Drowning' project is aimed specifically at parents of disabled children who either work or wish to work. It provides a network, a newsletter and a dedicated helpline ☎ 020 7017 0072. The helpline is open on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays from 9.30 am – 1.00 pm and 2.00 pm – 4.30 pm. Parents can also ☎ 0800 013 0313 for free advice on Tax Credits, flexible working and employment rights.

## Directgov

Website: [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk)

The Directgov website is a good source of online information for employment rights and rules. Look for the section on 'Carers and Employment'.

## Greater Manchester Pay and Employment Rights Service

☎ 0161 839 3888

Website: [www.gmemploymentrights.org.uk](http://www.gmemploymentrights.org.uk)

The Greater Manchester Pay and Employment Rights Service provides free, confidential advice, information and support to anyone who lives, or works, within the Greater Manchester area. It has also produced a number of leaflets and factsheets dealing with a range of employment issues.

## Community Legal Advice

☎ 0845 345 4 345 (9am to 8pm Mon – Fri, 9am to 12.30pm Sat)

Website: [www.communitylegaladvice.co.uk](http://www.communitylegaladvice.co.uk)

Community Legal Advice is a free and confidential advice service paid for by legal aid. If you want to know more about your rights at work either browse the website or call the number given above and speak to one of the CLA advisers.

## **Conclusion: Continuing to overcome the barriers**

We end this section with some advice about overcoming the barriers you are likely to face when you start to look for work or try to access learning and training opportunities.

- Think positive! It is possible to combine working or learning with your caring responsibilities and with the right support you can do it.
- Think carefully about what you want to do and start planning how you are going to achieve it.
- Get as much help and advice as possible (use the contact details given in this guide)
- Tell as many people as you can – including your family and friends – about what you want to do and enlist their support.
- Contact Adult Services or your social worker to see how they can help. Find out about the different kinds of alternative care that are available.
- Request a carers assessment. Remember that this must take into account your wish to work, learn and pursue leisure activities.
- Contact Wigan Council's Learning and Employment Service or one of its partner organisations. The aim of the LES is to provide free information, advice and guidance on issues relating to learning and work.
- Find some other carers with whom to share information and experiences.
- Take action and do something! Don't allow yourself to keep putting things off – nothing will happen unless you make it!