

Caring 2006

Are you an unpaid carer?

Have you ever been an unpaid carer?

Do you know what it means to be a carer in such circumstances?

Some points to consider

- 1 Carers are people first!
- 2 All people have needs.
- 3 Carers have a range of needs as people and as carers!
- 4 Some of their caring needs can be met as people, some need specific expertise and support in caring.
- 5 Carers can be any age and ability.
- 6 Everyone becomes a carer at sometime in his or her life, although many do not recognise the role. This may be because the person they care for has:
 - A physical disability
 - A mental disability
 - A sensory disability
 - A terminal illness
 - A chronic health condition.
 - A frailty because of old age
- 7 Everyone at some time becomes a dependent, although many do not recognise it.
- 8 Caring and dependency are interchangeable at different times of a person's life. An individual can be both at the same time or can move backward and forward between the roles depending on their situation.
- 9 The way someone cares depends on a range of factors including:
 - the person they care for and their disability
 - the person and their personality
 - the support they receive
 - the family they have
 - the friends who understand
 - the professionals linked to them
 - their GP network
 - the hospital nearest to them
 - the area in which they live
- 10 How people care is as different as the number of different people in the world and there is no right or wrong way of caring.
- 11 The computations and variations in caring are ever changing and endless
- 12 Carers are individuals with individual needs.

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- 13 There is no typical carer with average needs and wishes.
- 14 It is impossible to create a single simple description of a typical carer because there is no average carer to fit the mould.
- 15 Simply – all carers are different – caring for and about different people who themselves are all individual.
- 16 A carer can come from anywhere and may become a carer because of duty, compassion, kindness, love, friendship or neighbourliness, often, a combination of different reasons.
- 17 A carer is not someone different, who suddenly becomes incapable or unprofessional or loses their intelligence because they are in a caring role.
- 18 Carers come from every walk of life, from any career, and bring with them a wide range of skills and experience.
- 19 Carers do not lose their skills or intrinsic values when they become carers.
- 20 Carers may be stressed, tired, depressed, overburdened, in need of help and support.
- 21 Real Carers often do not choose to be a carer.
- 22 Many carers do not recognise that they are carers.
- 23 Some carers become lonely or feel cut off.
- 24 Many carers are consumed by guilt.
- 25 Some carers need advocacy; others are capable of self-advocacy.
- 26 Some carers are hands on in their own home, some do their caring in the home of the person they care for; some are carers to people in residential care; some care at long distance. An example is a carer who lives in London and comes to stay in Hampshire two nights every week to look after her father and help him.
- 27 Some may only have a single experience of caring and it may not have a profound effect on their lives, some become committed carers helping others throughout their life.
- 28 Maybe the caring role is a lifetime's obligation, particularly with a disabled son or daughter, or perhaps just a short-term commitment as with a terminal illness.
- 29 Some care for a spouse, some a child or adult, son or daughter, some a parent some a neighbour or friend. Some give a lot of time, some much less.
- 30 Some believe they cease to be carers once the person they care for moves into hospital or residential care, but the role simply changes as there is still a responsibility to look after finances, do washing, visit regularly, take them out, act as their advocate and so on.
- 31 Most individual carers can recognise in another carer a similarity of responsibility or need, and all can find someone who is in a worse position than themselves.

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- 32 The differences in caring roles create the need for mutual support and help.
- 33 These differences in caring make it difficult, if not impossible, to create a carers support service as a single separate individual service that meets the needs of all carers.
- 34 Real Carers are not free to do what they want when they want; often don't feel appreciated by the person they are caring for; very often are not recognised as capable by some social, health or voluntary workers, or respected and treated well by statutory organisations
- 35 There are times during the caring period when carers swing between love and almost hatred of the person they care for. Sometimes they desperately wish that the person were no longer there to need help; sometimes tempers rise and patience goes out the window; sometimes the temptation to lash out physically or verbally is almost too much to control. Unlike professionals, they can't just walk away, so they have to develop coping mechanisms.
- 36 Sometimes, the ability to cope is helped by talking to another carer, who can appreciate how it may feel and because of his/her own experience is less judgemental.
- 37 The need to speak to others might not necessarily mean in a group setting. Many people are uncomfortable with sharing their feelings in a group and prefer to talk one to one, either in person or over the phone or even by email.
- 38 One of the benefits of a group is in introducing people together so they can form smaller more intimate inter-relationships with another carer, sometime in threes and fours. These friendships allow for flexible meetings and arrangement times
- 39 In many of the documents that have been issued in recent years the need for Carers Support has figured quite largely and with some emphasis.
- 40 What no one can explain in words of one syllable is what we mean by Carers Support.
- 41 If the phrase is mentioned everyone gives a description of what they think it means but if you actually ask a carer to tell you what they want, it seldom bears any resemblance to the official description.
- 42 The description of Carers Support has to be vague and nebulous as it is impossible to give a single overarching description that has real meaning for the people in a caring role
- 43 Carers support needs to be flexible, responsive and reliable. There is always a need for help, support, advocacy, counselling and friendship and most of all understanding.
- 44 Some carers need financial support, some need physical support, others need emotional support, and some a combination of all three.
- 45 Because they are all different, carers need a range of flexible support to help them to manage their own time effectively and enable them to take a break from caring when, how and where needed.

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- 46 Most need some time off from their caring role and the opportunity to live a 'normal' life i.e. usually whatever is normal for them, not an artificial 'carers' environment.
- 47 Some carers need to be totally supported; some get their support by helping other people.
- 48 There is always a need for help, support, advocacy, counselling and friendship and most of all understanding.
- 49 Some are fortunate to access the right support at the right time and to feel liberated by this experience. Many feel patronised by professionals who think they know better what is needed, and some feel totally under supported by those whose role is to help them.
- 50 Carers support will continue to be unsatisfactory and authorities may continue to fail to meet their duty to give appropriate individual carers support if they continue to only provide services into which carers must fit, rather than an individual response to meet the needs of each individual carer.