

Monday 8 June 2009

Carers at breaking point

Almost **three-quarters (72%)** of people in the South East who provide unpaid care for a loved one who is ill, frail or disabled have reached breaking point due to the pressures of their caring role, according to new research issued to launch Carers Week 2009 (8-14 June).

The results show that the strain of caring is causing carers such extreme levels of stress and depression that they are suffering breakdowns and, in some cases, even attempting suicide.

Michelle cares for her 19-year-old son who has autism, epilepsy and learning difficulties. She has struggled for years to receive basic support from her local social services and housing department. She says: "The stress and difficulty of caring with no support has made me feel suicidal and only knowing no-one would care for my son made me not carry this through."

The most common cause of carers reaching breaking point, cited by **well over a third (44%)** of respondents, is 'frustration with bureaucracy'. This frustration is often caused by the complex and lengthy procedures for welfare benefits, healthcare and social services – systems which are actually intended to support carers and those they care for. Other factors causing carers to reach breaking point are the deterioration of the person being cared for, lack of sleep and juggling other commitments.

When asked what factors would have or did help them when they were at breaking point, the most important for carers was 'practical support', with 'the chance to take a break' and 'someone to talk to' coming second.

Almost **a third (29%)** of carers say that more money would make a difference - the main benefit for carers, Carers Allowance, is the lowest of its kind at just £53.10 per week. New independent research by YouGov has revealed that almost **three-quarters (73%)** of the public in the South East believe that this is an unreasonable amount to support carers who are unable to work because of their caring responsibilities.

The importance of carers being able to take a break is also highlighted. **Two-thirds (66%)** have not had a break for over a year and, of these, over a third have never had a break since they started

caring. Almost half of all carers who took part in the survey state that having a break would have or did help when they were at breaking point.

Carers Week is a partnership of 10 national charities that campaigns for greater recognition and support for the UK's six million carers, and celebrates the contribution they make to society, which saves the economy £87 billion a year. Carers Week 2009 has over 6,000 events and activities taking place across the country to ensure that all carers know that they are not alone, and that help and services are available.

Sir Geoff Hurst, England footballer and World Cup hero, has cared for his wife and is lending his support to Carers Week. Sir Geoff says:

"Those who care for family and friends mostly do so under the radar, without pay or acknowledgement, and deserve to be recognised for their dedication to the people they care for, not just during Carers Week but for all the weeks of the year.

"Carers face physical and mental challenges every day and should be more visibly supported and appreciated for the generous and loving hard work that they do."

Other celebrities supporting this campaign, all of whom have had experience of caring, include: Fiona Phillips, Jonathan Dimbleby, Arlene Phillips, Tony Robinson, Paul O'Grady, Gloria Hunniford, Sir David Jason, Pam Ferris, Phyllida Law and Miriam Margolyes.

For more information, a full breakdown of survey results, or to obtain images or an interview with a case study, Carers Week spokesperson or celebrity supporter, please contact:

Sushila Snell

Carers Week Media Officer

020 7378 4958 or 07900 605770

sushila.snell@carersuk.org

Notes to editors:

1. 1,941 carers took part in the national survey of carers, both online and by post, which was carried out by Carers Week between 22 January – 25 March 2009. The statistics in this release are from the 407 survey respondents from the South East. A breakdown of national and regional survey results is available.
2. Figure from survey of the public is from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 2106 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 5th - 7th May 2009. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+). The statistics in this release are from the 288 survey respondents from the South East. A breakdown of national and regional survey results is available.
3. All celebrity quotes are available at: www.carersweek.org/newsroom_page.asp?id=28
4. Carers needing support and advice can find out about local organisations and learn what is happening in their area during Carers Week by visiting www.carersweek.org or calling 0845 241 2582.
5. Carers Week takes place from 8-14 June and is organised by: Carers UK, Counsel and Care, Crossroads Caring for Carers, Help the Hospices, Macmillan Cancer Support, MS Society, Parkinson's Disease Society, The Princess Royal Trust for Carers, Vitalise and WRVS.