



progress report!

We are working with other countries to support working carers and employers.

Our *Work Life Care!* initiative has grown into something bigger!

We began this section of *Family Care* a few years ago with Carers NZ, Business NZ (representing employers) and the NZ Council of Trade Unions.

Earlier this year we also began working with Accelerating Aotearoa, a non-profit that delivers 'big vision' projects drawing on digital tools such as the Internet.

Accelerating Aotearoa is leading a national initiative to improve New Zealanders' understanding and use of flexible work practices.

The first phase of the project, *Employment for Caring*, is underway now ... with a new working group that also includes the Ministry of Social Development and Bupa, a *Family Care* supporter from our first issue, and a major employer of more than 3000 staff nationally.

We are approaching other major employers through Business NZ to help make their workplaces 'carer friendly'.

Our overseas advisor is Caroline Waters, who received an OBE for her services to employers and working carers in last year's United Kingdom honours list. Caroline is the chair of Employers for Carers UK, and Director of People and Policy for global telco BT.

INTERNATIONAL PROGRESS

At a recent meeting with Caroline and Employers for Carers, it was agreed that our New Zealand working group will have close ties to the UK initiative.

We are adapting its helpful information and making our new resources available to carers, human resource managers, and employers.

Our working group has also formed an information partnership with the

Working Carers Gateway of New South Wales ... like *Employment for Caring* and Employers for Carers, it is one of few initiatives worldwide to focus on employment and caring.

We will keep you informed of these global partnerships and the progress we make together for carers and employers.

EMPLOYMENT FOR CARERS

Our working group is meeting regularly to plan information, events, and approaches to Government to ensure progress ... for working carers, those returning to paid employment, and carers who may need to retrain to find a more carer friendly job.

We are approaching a range of employers to join our working group. With their participation and leadership, we can help to shape employment practices for many New Zealand carers ... and help

FAMILY CARE FOR WORKPLACES! You can request copies of our magazine to distribute in your workplace, or use our new 'digital edition' so carers and colleagues can read *Family Care* online. All back issues of the magazine, including this one, can now be found at www.issue.com/familycareworld ... just click on the magazine you want to read! Employers can insert the link for the latest issue into an article at their organisation's intranet.



employers better understand how to support carers in their workforce.

NETWORK AT WORK!

In the UK, many workplaces now host regular carer meetings.

These events, held during working hours, allow carers to connect with one another, receive helpful information, and give feedback to managers responsible for decision-making that affects carers.

If you are an employer and would like to organise a carer information day, or a workplace-based support network, we can help!

We can offer advice, information, and copies of *Family Care* for your workplace meetings, and suggest topics for discussion to get these started. We can also put you in touch with other employers (here or in the UK) who have such networks.

To learn more, phone 0800 777 797, or email sara@carers.net.nz

Almost 90% of New Zealand's 420,000+ carers are of workforce age, and a majority work part or full-time in addition to their caring responsibilities.

Often employers do not realise that many of their workers are carers, who may be leading a stressful double life.

A survey carried out by Employers for Carers UK found that 75% of employer respondents did not know how many carers there were in their organisation.

Finding out is an important first step to raise awareness about caring issues. This can be done through surveys, audits, focus groups, promotion campaigns

using leaflets that go out with payslips, or posters that can be displayed in common areas. It is important not just to ask 'are you a carer?' but to describe what a carer is ... 'do you look after someone in need of your help because they are ill, frail, or have a disability; if so, you are a carer'.



Make a difference with a degree in human services

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Fact: New Zealand needs more qualified and skilled staff in social work, youth work and disability support areas.

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It's your right to ask your employer for a flexible work arrangement if you care for a friend or family member. But they can turn you down with good cause.

REAL LIFE STORY!

When John's* wife was diagnosed with a terminal illness and given months to live, he asked his employer if he could work flexibly.

Initially John's employer turned down his request, saying it would cause too much disruption and resentment in the workplace.

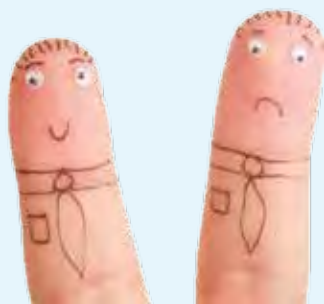
With help from friends and Carers NZ, John went back to his employer (a major manufacturer) with a thoughtful list of ways he could work flexibly, without major hassles for colleagues or the company.

"The boss could see that I had figured out how to make things as easy as possible and changed his mind," says John.

"I was able to take my wife to chemo and medical appointments, and be with her at every step while she was dying."

"I would not have missed that time with my wife of 30 years for anything. Had my boss turned me down again, I would have resigned. It would have been a sad end to my many years of service with the company, but my wife was far more important to me than my job."

See John's ideas for others who need to ask their employer for flexible work arrangements (*opposite*)!



make the case!

What does flexible work mean to you? Jot down or 'bullet point' your thoughts about how your schedule, activities, deadlines etc can be adapted so you can better combine work with caring. Flexible work could mean having reduced hours, working from home, making emails or phone calls at work, or being able to 'drop everything' if there is a family emergency.

Chat to colleagues to gauge their support for your request to work flexibly. Might your request for flexible work cause stress them and for your boss? Think of ways you can get the work arrangements you want, with minimal disruption for others.

How long will flexible work be needed? On a one-off basis for a few days? For several weeks or months? Ongoing?

If your request for flexible work is for a short period (while someone is recovering from surgery, or needs support at the end of life for example, make this clear to your employer.

If you belong to a union, talk to your representative about your flexible work rights, and ask for their advice about how best to make your request for flexible work. They could be involved in any discussions or meetings with your employer.

Propose a trial period for flexible work to see how it works for you and others who might be affected by your changes. Meet again after an agreed time to talk about how things are working.

Could you take your annual and/or sick leave all at once, or could you take a period of unpaid leave if your employer is unable to agree to your request for flexible work?



Often workers are juggling two roles ... family caring, and their 'day job'. Here are suggestions for those who supervise workers with caring responsibilities.



Carer networks in the workplace are a really positive step!

Carers can feel isolated and alone, and it helps to have a safe and confidential forum to talk to others in similar situations, to share experiences and information, and offer mutual support.

These networks may include an online forum and face to face meetings. They often work well when led by a member of staff who has caring responsibilities, with the support of a designated manager. Networks can also be used to gather information about what carers need, to monitor current policies and practices, and to develop new ones.











Particularly for large organisations, it is important to have formal policies which outline what support is available to carers, and the circumstances in which it is available. This will help to ensure that carers and their managers are aware of the options for support, and that they are accessed fairly.

In order for this to happen, it is important that there is top-down commitment and leadership, followed through with bottom-up training and support, including for line managers. For any policy to be effective, it must be followed not only in word, but in spirit.

Smaller organisations may find it easier to look at each case for support individually, creating a supportive and flexible workplace culture rather than adapting formal policies. Carers' issues could be championed by the owner or Managing Director.

IDEAS FOR EMPLOYERS

TOP 10 TIPS *for managing carers*

-  Be open and clear about the policies and practices within your office and encourage staff to use them.
-  Without being intrusive, get to know your staff and what their circumstances are.
-  Be as flexible as possible and be prepared to compromise.
-  Be approachable and consultative.
-  Encourage all your staff to be aware of and understand your organisation's policies on diversity and equal opportunities.
-  Ensure that all your staff have easy access to employee manuals, intranet, staff newsletters or any other information for employees.
-  Openly support and reinforce the messages of your organisation's policies and practices.
-  Lead by example. Remember, managers have demands on their time outside of work and need to achieve work life balance too!
-  Encourage staff with caring responsibilities to set up their own support group or join an existing network if you have one.
-  Above all, be fair and consistent in your approach to all your staff.

CREATE A CARING WORKPLACE

There may be carers in your workplace who have not had the confidence or felt able to come forward. As an organisation you should develop a culture which makes it possible for carers to bring into the workplace some of the highly sensitive issues they can face. Caring doesn't have positive milestones, or can have a stigma attached to it, which can make it difficult for people to disclose that they are carers and may need workplace support. Be proactive in creating a workplace that promotes the take-up of HR policies, information, and other support for carers, so they won't feel they might be treated less favourably if they take up any of the policies.