



Women and Caring

“It is not alone the fact that women have generally had to spend most of their strength in caring for others that has handicapped them in individual effort; but also that they have almost universally had to care wholly for themselves.”

Anna Garlin Spencer

Caring is unarguably the most important role of human beings in society. Ranging from intimate care to emotional support, every human being requires care for at least one period of time in their lives, during childhood.

Not only do carers provide physical support, but they are also sources of emotional support, information, guidance and learning. Hugely influential in our constantly changing society.

Women provide the vast majority of this care;

- 90% of single parents are women,
- 1 in 4 women aged 50 – 64 has caring responsibilities,
- 72% of those receiving Carers Benefits are women.

Furthermore as the population ages women are more and more likely to be caring for both grandchildren and parents at the same time, often known as “sandwich caring”, requiring a range of skills and knowledge and bucket loads of compassion.

This situation creates a complex set of circumstances requiring women to deal with a variety of services, such as social work, schools, elderly care service, hospitals etc. All of this alongside providing direct care, organising budgets and general tasks such as housework, often three times over as they maintain their own needs.

For women with so many responsibilities, employment is near impossible; physically, emotionally and mentally. If they are working, women may find themselves underemployed as they try to accommodate the needs of their dependents. Carers are therefore more likely to be living in poverty. In the UK, 1.2 million carers live in poverty, despite saving the UK Government an estimate 132 billion per annum.

Often caring is a temporary role, although not in all cases. This requires carers to maintain current skills and develop new ones for when they re-enter the job market. Furthermore, lifelong learning opportunities support carers in their task of caring for dependents and benefits their overall emotional health and wellbeing.

Access to flexible support and activity that supports carers can also reduce isolation, maximise income, as well as provide relief and respite. It is vital to support carers to continue in their essential role with dependants and their continuing vital role in society.

EVENT RESULTS

THEME: Globally, women provide the vast majority of informal / formal, paid / unpaid caregiving to partners, children, grandchildren, parents, friends, colleagues, neighbours, those we provide services for and more.

This Summary looks at the issues surrounding women in this role, encouraging discussion and debate on what it means to care for others, ourselves and society's expectations and dependency on women as caregivers.

PARTICIPANTS: Total of 37 women from local communities, representing a wide range of backgrounds, convened 9 break-out groups on issues with 27 proposed actions. **(Nov 2013)**

Top 6 PRIORITIES VOTED BY PARTICIPANTS (NUMBER OF VOTES)

- Challenge socialisation of women as carers. **26 votes**
- Government recognition – financial loss to grandparents and care lost in financial and emotional terms. **21 votes**
- Equality and diversity education from early years. **19 votes**
- Ask for help without guilt. **18 votes**
- Try to take 5 mins for yourself each day to do something nurturing for yourself. **16 votes**
- Try not to feel guilty about putting yourself first. **16 votes**

GENERAL OVERVIEW OF RESULTS

- Individual action/mindset change. **109 votes**
- Campaigning/Lobbying. **71 votes**
- Education/Awareness raising. **39 votes**
- Communication/making connections. **28 votes**

DETAILED RESULTS FROM THE WORKING GROUPS

- Challenge socialisation of women as carers. **26 votes**
- Government recognition – financial loss to grandparents and care lost in financial and emotional terms. **21 votes**
- Equality and diversity education from early years. **19 votes**
- Ask for help without guilt. **18 votes**
- Try not to feel guilty about putting yourself first. **16 votes**
- Try to take 5 mins for yourself each day to do something nurturing for yourself. **16 votes**
- We will find a way to put ourselves first. **14 votes**
- Create/find support network. **12 votes**
- Challenge media perceptions. **11 votes**
- Organise a wellness day for women to attend. **11 votes**