



CARER POSITIVE
Employer in Scotland

Best practice in supporting carers



Essential information for employers

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Introduction

There are a range of measures employers can take to provide a supportive working environment for carers in their workforce.

These don't necessarily need to represent a major change in how an organisation operates, and can sometimes be a small and simple adjustment, but one which makes a significant difference to how well supported carers feel at work.

More than anything, a strong culture of support within an organisation will be key in ensuring that carers feel secure and comfortable in the workplace.



Identification of carers



Having awareness and understanding of the 'carer population' in a workforce is a key starting point for employers and an important part of how support is developed in an organisation.

There are a number of ways that employers can learn which of their employees are also carers. Depending on the size and structure of their organisation this might be through the establishment of a 'carers register', or via staff induction, appraisals, employee surveys etc.

Having a clear definition of what it means to be a 'carer' is important in whatever approach is taken – many people do not identify themselves as carers and may not think to raise the issue with their line manager in the first place. More commonly, people might describe their situation as 'looking after' or 'supporting' a family member.

A workplace should have a supportive and comfortable environment where there is no stigma attached to carers identifying themselves. However, the choice of carers to identify themselves should still be respected, understanding that some people may not want to disclose their situation.



Voluntary Action Shetland

Staff email and insert in staff induction pack

Example

"Are you a carer? A carer is anyone who cares, unpaid, for a family member or someone in their household who, due to illness, disability, a mental health problem or an addiction cannot cope without their support.

Carers are welcome to identify themselves to the Executive Officer and/or Team Leader if they wish to, but are under no obligation to do so".

Methods for identifying carers vary greatly across organisations, some with formal systems in place, but many depending on more informal ways of encouraging carers to feel comfortable about identifying themselves.

Identification should ideally happen 'pro-actively', when employees are invited to say whether they have caring responsibilities – whether on joining an organisation, via a staff survey or consultation exercise, in review meetings, or via some other system.

Encouraging and enabling employees to identify themselves as carers in these ways is a more positive approach than identification as a result of investigating a period of absence or difficulty at work.

Reassuring carers that the organization understands the challenges that face them and wants to support them manage their work life balance helps avoid potential concerns around why employers are seeking this information.

NHS Tayside

Introduction to Carers Policy

Example

"Many people who look after someone don't think of themselves as a carer or realise that they could be getting help with their caring role... people often don't tell their employer...however if your line manager knows you have a significant caring role outside of work then they will be in a better position to help you. NHS Tayside encourages you to discuss with your line manager how they may support you."

One example of a more formalised system of identification is having a 'Carers Register'. Employees who have identified themselves as carers are listed on this register, enabling access to carers leave and other benefits. Similarly, some organisations operate a voluntary 'Carers Passport' scheme where employees hold a record detailing their individual needs and working arrangements.

These arrangements have the advantage of providing automatic entitlement to carer's supports and stay with the employee if their role changes, if they move departments, or if their line manager changes. Systems such as these do however need to incorporate flexibility, to reflect individual changing situations and monitored to ensure that information is accurate and kept up to date.

Systems like these enable the employer to be aware of the scale and nature of caring responsibilities across the organisation and its workplaces.



The Scottish Courts and Tribunal Service

Example

Carers Register

The carers register is open to any member of staff on SCS terms and conditions who has significant caring responsibilities. That is, they look after a partner, child, relative or friend who cannot manage without help because they are physically or mentally ill, frail or disabled.

Carers who apply for the register have an appointment with a welfare officer from the Employee Assistance Programme, who assesses each individual's caring responsibilities before making a recommendation as to whether they should or should not be placed on the register. While staff are encouraged to discuss their application with their line manager, there is no requirement for individuals to disclose the nature of their caring responsibilities with their manager. Placement on the Carers Register provides entitlement to a range of supports and benefits.

Scottish Government

Example

Carers Passport

This is an initiative to help current civil servants with specific caring responsibilities. It is a communication tool, enabling people to be supported at work. The Passport provides carers, and their line managers, with information about how the individual's responsibilities impact their work. It includes any solutions agreed between the carer and his or her line manager, for example, compressed hours.

The Carer's Passport will ideally stay with the employee should he or she be transferred within their department or across the Civil Service. It is available to any new line manager so they are aware of the employee's caring role and any solutions agreed.

Using existing staff surveys, or monitoring systems are also a useful way of capturing information about the scale and nature of caring responsibilities across the organisation and its workforce.



NHS Education Scotland

Example

Workforce online

A new question was added to the existing online staff record system 'Workforce Online' to enable all employees to identify whether or not they are a carer. An organisation wide email, alerting them to this, and including a clear definition of what it means to be a carer was circulated, requesting employees to update their profile.

Moving forward, data will be captured at the recruitment stage as all new members of staff will be required to populate their staff record. This includes permanent and fixed term members of staff and part time workers. The system is fully anonymous and remains open for staff to update at any time. It is not mandatory for staff to provide information which they do not wish/would rather not declare.

More informally, including questions during employee inductions or staff appraisals can help encourage employees to recognise they may be carers and to identify themselves as such.

Before deciding on what system of identification would be appropriate, employers might want to discuss with

employees what they think could work most effectively, and what they would feel most comfortable with. This could be introduced with some general awareness raising, explaining why the organisation is wanting to gather information, and inviting employees with caring responsibilities to attend a discussion session or focus group.

Systems such as these need to incorporate flexibility, to reflect individual changing situations.



Identification checklist



- Include a definition of what it means to be a carer
– use terms such as ‘looking after’ or ‘supporting’ ☐
- Explain that the organisation understands the challenges of
working and caring and wants to support staff to manage this role ☐
- Explain why you want carers to identify themselves ☐
- Look at existing systems to see if they can be adapted ☐
- Consider asking carers what they think might work best. ☐



Workplace policies



It is important that carers are recognised as a distinct group within an organisation's policies and procedures.

Whether an organisation has a distinct 'carers policy' or there is provision within more general HR policies, it is helpful to include a statement or section which outlines the support to employees with caring responsibilities.

In the absence of a separate carers policy, rather than amend a suite of existing policies to include reference to carers within each one (this can take time and be complicated), some organisations have found it easier to develop a separate 'statement of support' or 'guidance' for carers to accompany existing policies. This also helps draw attention to the range of support provided, whether through flexible working, planned or unplanned leave, career breaks etc.

Including a definition of what is meant by the term 'carer' helps raise awareness within people who might not identify themselves in this way.

Again, including a definition of what is meant by the term 'carer' also helps raise awareness within people who might not otherwise identify themselves in this way, as well as amongst their colleagues.

West Dunbartonshire Council

Carers Leave scheme

The Council recognises that from time to time employees will need to try to balance work and caring responsibilities and seeks to provide this support for employees. The provision of Carers' Leave, means that some employees may be able remain in employment, where they would otherwise have needed to resign to provide care to a dependent. The Council benefits from the application of the Scheme by retaining skills, knowledge and experience and improving staff wellbeing, resulting in improved engagement, loyalty and retention

Example

Scottish Gas

Example

Introduction to Carers Policy

“At a glance... We recognise some of you may have caring responsibilities for seriously sick, elderly, or disabled relatives, partners, family or close friends. We realise these responsibilities may place extra demands on you, and could affect your performance at work – and we want to do what we can to support you in balancing your work and your caring commitments. This policy supports this aim”.

A policy would state the range of support provided to carers within an organisation and the procedures for accessing this provision.

These could include the provisions for special leave, flexible working options and/or other forms of workplace support.

Leave arrangements

Types and terminology of options for taking leave vary across organisations – some with very rigid rules for accessing leave under specific policy headings, and some more flexible in the application of how these can be ‘mixed and matched’ to suit individual needs.

Ideally, having a Policy which includes ‘Carers Leave’ immediately allows carers to identify the support they can access. If not specified in such a way, it is vital that there is provision within other ‘Special

Leave’ type policies for carers and that this is clearly specified in the scope of the policies – having to ‘dig through’ a range of policies to find where caring responsibilities might or might not be mentioned can be time consuming and demoralising.

Examples of the types of leave that might be available for carers to access in the event of planned or unplanned caring situations include:



CARERS LEAVE

this is specifically for carers to use to cover (planned and/or unplanned) periods of care such as pre-arranged hospital appointments or unforeseen periods of difficulty. The number of days provided can vary, and often starts with a period of paid leave (up to 5 days is commonly provided and sometimes as much as 10 or more days), with unpaid leave then provided for more extensive periods. In some cases, carers leave is wholly unpaid, but we would encourage employers, where possible, to provide a minimum number of paid days, especially if there is no provision of paid emergency leave. If an extended period of leave is unpaid, it can be very helpful to enable the cost of this to be spread over time to lessen the financial impact on the employee.

EMERGENCY / DEPENDANT'S LEAVE

all employees have the statutory right to 'reasonable' time off to deal with emergency situations involving a dependant. This can be paid or unpaid at the discretion of the employer and tends to cover one or two days (or more in some cases). It can be used when for example caring arrangements fall through or if a sudden critical situation arises.

The key point is to ensure that carers can easily see reference to where their situation fits and how to access the support provided in these policies.

ADJUSTMENT LEAVE

to enable an employee to adjust to a new caring situation

COMPASSIONATE LEAVE

generally given in situations of serious illness, death or to attend a funeral, but can be used to cover other situations too and again, can be paid or unpaid.

MATCHED LEAVE

where an employer matches the number of days (up to a maximum) of leave that a carer needs to take off to deal with a carer related situation.

BORROWING/BUYING LEAVE

giving carers the option to borrow or buy additional leave they might require.

CAREER BREAKS

these can be used when a longer term period of care is required and has the advantage of allowing the employee to return to work at a later time, giving security and peace of mind.

Workplaces might have some or (less likely) all of these arrangements (or similar) to potentially support carers when they might need to take some time off. They don't need to be mutually exclusive and are often used in conjunction with one and other.

Sometimes they are included within 'Work-life balance' policies or 'Family and caring' policies. The key point is to ensure that carers can easily see reference to where their situation fits and how to access the support provided in these policies.

Flexible working

Also important for carers is having the flexibility, without necessarily needing to take time off, to balance the demands of their work and caring roles. Flexible working arrangements can make a real difference in this regard – enabling carers to tailor working hours to fit a range of caring circumstances.

Flexible working can take a number of forms, some of which include:

Flexible working arrangements can enable carers to tailor working hours to fit a range of caring circumstances.

FLEXI-TIME

Employees might work within essential set times (eg 10am till 4pm), often known as 'core hours', but have some flexibility in how they work outside these hours, allowing them to adapt their starting and/or leaving times to suit their individual circumstances.

PART-TIME WORKING

Employees might work fewer days in a week or shorter days, starting work later and/or finishing early.

JOB-SHARING

A typical pattern for this might be two employees sharing the work normally done by one person – either working 2.5 days a week, or each alternating between 2 and 3 days a week.

WORKING FROM HOME/ TELEWORKING

An employee might work from home, or an alternative location for some or part of the working week, using technology (remote PC access, telephone, email etc) to work and communicate with colleagues and customers.



STAGGERED HOURS

Employees have different start, finish and break times, enabling a workplace to cover longer (often beyond traditional) working hours.

ANNUAL HOURS

An employee's working hours are calculated over a whole year and are then split into 'fixed' or 'set' shifts and 'reserved' shifts which are worked in response to demand needs and can be agreed on a more flexible basis to suit the varying needs of employees.

COMPRESSED HOURS

Employees might 'compress' their total agreed working hours over a fewer number of working days - for example, working a five-day week in four days.

TERM-TIME WORKING

this enables employees to take paid or unpaid leave during school holidays (salary can be calculated pro-rata over the entire year).

SHIFT-SWAPPING OR SELF-ROSTERING

particularly in industries which must remain operational over 24 hours (eg emergency services, hospitals and utilities) - employees negotiate and agree shifts amongst themselves to suit their individual circumstances or when they need time off.



Shift-swapping allows employees to negotiate and agree shifts amongst themselves to suit their individual circumstances.

Key points to bear in mind when establishing which approach is most appropriate to an employee's and employer's circumstances are, where possible:

DISCUSS REQUIREMENTS

Sit down and fully discuss requirements from both sides – there may be a number of options not immediately obvious.

INCLUDE COLLEAGUES

Where part of a larger team, it is important to tell colleagues as soon as possible and where appropriate, to include them in the considerations around what will work best for everyone – 'buy-in' and understanding is important for good team relations.

BE FLEXIBLE

If a new arrangement isn't working, raise the issue as soon as possible, and try to then identify an alternative solution - sometimes a compromise may have to be reached.

EXPLORE SOLUTIONS

Depending on the organisation's policy, a mix of solutions can be used to respond to a particular situation – flexible working in conjunction with some paid/unpaid time off/special leave etc.

FAIRNESS & CO-OPERATION

Flexibility, fairness, communication and co-operation are important on all sides, between carers, their colleagues, and their managers.

Policy checklist



Ensure that carers are clearly reflected in workplace policies – either in a stand-alone carers policy, in other HR policies, or in an accompanying statement ☐

Where possible, involve carers in the development and review of relevant policies ☐

Ensure there is clarity around what support is available to carers, including options for leave and flexible working. ☐

Sample policies and carers guidance statements are provided in separate Carer Positive information resources.

Practical support



Supporting carers in the workplace is not always about changing working hours. There are practical, and often very small changes that can make a difference too.

These changes can include:

TELEPHONE ACCESS

Providing (private) access to a telephone when carers might need to use one, or allowing an employee to keep their mobile phone on in case they need to respond to an emergency.

PARKING ACCESS

If the organisation has a car park, providing access to a space near the office can make a difference in saving valuable time when arriving in the morning or having to leave in an emergency situation.

HEALTH & WELLBEING SUPPORT

Offer carers the access to health and wellbeing support initiatives or employee assistance programmes if these are available through the workplace. Employee Assistance Programmes typically include support for employees on a wide range of issues, including work, health, debt, emotional, personal, family and legal. Free telephone support is available 24 hours a day all year round, with additional online and face to face counselling also often part of

an EAP package. EAP assistance can provide access to health and wellbeing programmes, stress management, healthy eating and weight management as well as general information and advice on a range of issues.

EXTERNAL SOURCES

If the opportunities for workplace support are limited, or if a carer needs support or information unrelated to their work situation, signposting to external sources of support, such as local carers centres or helplines may provide a route to valuable help and advice – this can be as simple as displaying leaflets/posters etc in prominent areas.

Wheatley Group

Example

Carers Library

Wheatley has a carers library which enables staff to borrow books to help find out more about how to support loved ones and look after themselves at the same time. They have a general book on caring, as well as more specific books on caring for an elderly parent, caring for somebody with dementia, and caring for somebody with cancer. They will also order in other books which might be suggested as helpful.

Fife Council

Example

Signposting

Signpost carers to appropriate colleagues in social work services and allow web access to research forms of support. If an employee wishes to access the confidential employee counselling service during work time, they can use a private telephone.

External sources of support, such as local carers centres or helplines may provide a route to valuable help and advice.



Practical support checklist



Think about what might be feasible and appropriate within your organisation – no matter how small

☐

Link to existing health and wellbeing support or initiatives such as Healthy Working Lives

☐
☐

Make contact with a local carers centre to find out what support they may be able to offer

Communication, awareness raising and training



Organisations can have very good policies and practical support on paper, but if these are not known throughout the workplace, or inconsistently applied by line managers, then they can sometimes be of little benefit to carers.

Good communication of carer policies and procedures is essential to getting this right.

This can be achieved on a number of levels, from the provision of basic information via staff induction processes, payslip messages, organisation intranet, staff message boards etc, to wider workplace awareness raising sessions involving colleagues and managers.



Carers of West Dunbartonshire

Information for Employees

Example

CoWD have a 'Career Vs Carer – Getting the Balance Right' booklet which raises awareness as well as providing information on taking time off to care; tips to help at work; and stress relieving examples.

Wheatley Group

Example

People like me portal

The People Like Me portal was developed in May 2014 and after carrying out roadshows at 52 local offices to raise awareness of the content and support it provides, it is promoted and signposted in emails, blogs, staff newsletters and any visits to local offices/teams. The portal has a dedicated Carers page and is regularly updated with information and dates of carers' support group meetings to actively encourage carers to participate. Wheatley is able to access monthly statistics for hits on the Carers page, to check that this resource is being used.

Wheatley also has a senior level Ambassador for the carers support group, helping to promote the work to support carers throughout the business and to raise awareness of the issues that working carers face.

Supporting managers in their role is important in ensuring that an organisation is treating carers fairly across all departments or sections, and providing a consistent approach.

Training is helpful for managers to understand the challenges faced by carers and raise awareness of the range of policies and supports in place.

Dumfries & Galloway Council

Example

Carer Awareness Training

All staff within the Council's HR Service have received carer awareness training carried out by Dumfries and Galloway Carers Centre to assist in raising awareness and to provide valuable insight and information to support the policy development process.

All Elected Members have signed up to be Carers Champions and agreed to undertake Carer Awareness Training

An HR Officer and Service Manager within HR attended Module 3 training on Working In Partnership to develop strategies to involve carers in planning services, support staff to reflect working in a person centered way and contribute to a change in culture.

Open University

Example

E-learning resource for line managers

'Caring Counts in the Workplace' is an on-line course (also freely accessible externally) to help managers and staff develop a clearer understanding of the issues faced by carers as they juggle their caring role with their working life.

West Dunbartonshire Council

Example

Input from local Carers Centre

The Carers of West Dunbartonshire Manager delivered a presentation to the Council's Human Resources team, on the supports available to those with caring responsibilities – this is to ensure that the Human Resources team are aware of the support available and can offer this to carers identified in the course of their Employee Relations activities and to raise awareness of Carers' issues with line managers.

Many Carer Positive employers also use Carers Week in June and Carers Rights Day in November as opportunities to raise awareness of carers issues and to engage with employees and the wider community.

Typical activities could be having an information stand in a common area, organizing a guest speaker, or highlighting carers issues on the intranet or notice boards.

NHS Lothian

Example

Carers Week 2016

Funding was awarded from the Chief Executive's Fund for a series of coffee mornings for NHS Lothian staff who juggle paid and unpaid caring responsibilities. It provided them with an informal opportunity to meet HR and Partnership staff for information, advice and signpost to external organisations, and develop a supportive network with other carers in their place of work.

As part of Carers Week there were a range of awareness raising activities to make staff aware of these sessions. These included:

- posters and fliers featuring images of staff who have contributed to a new digital resource;
- a series of digital stories featuring the perspective of carers as well as managers of the importance of supporting staff who are carers. The CEO provides endorsement at the start of the DVD.
- a series of roadshows in hospital and community settings
- Facebook & twitter feeds, workplace magazine articles, and a payslip message

Intrelate Ltd**Example****Carers Week 2016**

Intrelate supported Carers Week by the promotion of the “Care Footprint” – implemented many years ago to gift time to staff to care.

During Carers Week a “Thunderclap” was set up – a tool which lets a message be shared simultaneously over social media - a kind of “online flash mob”. This allowed Thunderclap to share a single message around supporting carers on behalf of the organization, linking support for the campaign with Twitter, FB or Tumblr.

Communication, awareness raising and training checklist



Use existing channels of communication to spread awareness of carers issues ☐

Senior level buy-in and endorsement will help raise the profile and embed a strong culture of support ☐

Consider having a Carers Champion or Ambassador ☐

Ensure line managers are supported to understand the range of policies and practical support available ☐

Peer support



Supporting carers to access peer support can help combat the social isolation many feel, and provide the opportunity to share advice and guidance with others in similar situations.

Knowing that they are 'not alone' and that others understand the demands and challenges is an important element of support. Even just having the chance for a chat over a cup of tea can bring real comfort and help relieve stress.

Forms of peer support vary across organisations, from existing and well established workplace carers groups which meet regularly, to less structured forms of support.

At the least, where it is not feasible to set

up carers groups or forums, or if this isn't the type of peer support that employees who are carers want, signposting carers or enabling access to external support groups or online forums is helpful in breaking the isolation carers can experience.

A good starting point is to ask employees themselves what would work best for them. A focus group or informal discussion session with carers could explore the various options.

A good starting point is to ask employees themselves what would work best for them.



Dumfries & Galloway Council

Carers Support Network

Example

Carers are entitled to attend bi-monthly meetings (although the frequency is determined by the group) to get together and network, access information, specialist advice services and short training courses, and provide feedback and input to current policy and future development.

West Dunbartonshire Council

Employee Support Carer Network

Example

The authority launched a new Employee Support Carer Network in May 2015. This is a well publicised monthly meeting which is supported by Carers of West Dunbartonshire, McMillan Cancer Support and the Money and Welfare Advice Service. The network provides employees who have caring responsibilities with the opportunity to meet and share experiences, obtain peer support, as well as directly accessing support organisations.

More than anything, establishing and embedding a culture of support within an organisation will be key in ensuring that carers feel comfortable in the workplace

and able to raise with their line managers any issues they might be experiencing with managing their work and caring responsibilities.



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The Scottish Courts and Tribunal Service

Example

Carers Contact Team

The carer contact team gives carers in the SCTS the opportunity to speak to someone outwith their line management chain or HR about their caring responsibilities. Each member of the carer contact team has or had experience of caring, so brings that knowledge and experience to the conversation. The Carer Contact team organises a conference every two years, which all carers in the SCTS are invited to (and the person they care for). A dinner for delegates is arranged on the night before the conference, which provides a networking opportunity, as does the day of the conference itself. In recent years, in addition to introducing the conference, the Chief Executive has attended the dinner, further demonstrating support for carers in the SCTS.

South Lanarkshire Council

Example

'Caring Matters' Group

"We are a care and share group, sharing our experiences and knowledge of useful services for parents and employees who are caring for children, spouses and other family members in various differing circumstances. We try to meet in an informal manner and encourage lots of supportive discussions every three months. We often chat over our lunch, which we bring along with us".

Scottish Courts and Tribunal Service

Example

Carer Case Study

"I was a carer for my father, my mother and at one point for my sister. I must take this opportunity to say what a wonderful help it was to have been placed on the Carers Register during those difficult and often demanding times. The main advantage for me was being able to use Carers leave as opposed to exhausting all of my annual leave as I still had two children and like us all a demanding family life. It was entirely down to the Carers policies that I was able to strike that work life balance and maintain my sanity. I think it is an area that SCTS has excelled in and should be commended for".

Wheatley Group

Example

Carer Case Study

"Being able to attend the carers meeting here at Wheatley has helped me know that I am not the only one with caring responsibilities and works full-time. It also allows us to share ideas, concerns and offer solutions. Although the carers group is relatively new, I feel already it has helped me, by being more informed on what help is out there for carers and by being able to share my concerns about my loved one".

Standard Life

Example

Carer Case study

"From my experience I am now delighted to be part of our start up team on the Carer's network. I think this is a great support system and information/networking option for colleagues who really need help and support as carers who are also holding down full/part time jobs. I'm very excited to be involved in this as well as sharing my stories, hints and tips, and advocating the great work that VOCAL (Voices of Carers Across Lothian) provides to carers. We have a great 'Share-point' social networking site, and use this to share information on Power of Attorneys/ Wills, links to VOCAL and other advice. We are really starting to build up a great site as well as looking at what other companies offer and how we want to shape our Carers network going forward.

From a support view I have been extremely lucky with the support of my Line Managers. When I've had a really bad day that has been recognised and support or just a chat offered. Sometimes it ended up with me just having a cry but I never felt silly as I was in a safe environment. I think being really open and honest with my manager helped us both understand what I needed and how they could help support me".

Peer support checklist



Ask staff who are carers what they think might work best

☐

Explore a few different options if a group or network isn't feasible

☐

Think about how this will be managed and operated

☐

Signpost to external support if it is not possible to set up workplace based peer support

☐

Further information and sources of support



Visit the Carer Positive website for other employer resources including sample policies and case study videos: carerpositive.org/resources/

General information for carers:

Carers Scotland carersuk.org/scotland

Care Info Scotland careinfoscotland.scot

Local support

Carers UK carersuk.org/help-and-advice/get-support/local-support

Online peer support

Carers UK carersuk.org/forum

Awareness raising and training

Carers Week carersweek.org

Caring Counts in the Workplace open.edu/openlearnworks/caringcounts1

Equal Partners in Care knowledge.scot.nhs.uk/equalpartnersincare

Further useful resources for employers:

Employers for Carers employersforcarers.org

Working Families: workingfamilies.org.uk

Family Friendly Working Scotland: familyfriendlyworkingscotland.org.uk

ACAS acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=4528

acas.org.uk/media/pdf/j/m/Flexible-working-and-work-life-balance.pdf



CARER POSITIVE
Employer in Scotland

Carer Positive employers support working carers in their workplace.

They benefit by retaining experienced workers, reducing staff absences and making huge savings on recruitment costs.

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Carer Positive is operated by Carers Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Government.

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