

Response ID ANON-MQG4-FJ51-F

Submitted to **Returning to work after time out for caring**

Submitted on **2017-10-19 20:49:36**

About you

Which of the following best describes you?

Organisation or individual with knowledge of returners

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Please give a short description of the capacity in which you have experience or knowledge of this group.

Experience of returners' challenges:

The National Network of Parent Carer Forums (NNPCF) is made up of local Parent Carer Forums from across the 152 Local Authority Areas of England, and has a steering group which consists of 10 Parent Carer Representatives from each of the nine regions in England, and the Co-chairs of the Network. Our current membership is in excess of 85,000 parent carers. These parent carers representatives link into the regional Parent Carer Forum Networks.

The NNPCF Steering Group has where possible worked within their regions to gather evidence to support our response to this consultation. We believe that our response helps to identify the most common experiences and views of Parent Carers of children and young people SEND (birth-25) including their experience of returning to work after/whilst caring for their disabled child.

In your experience, what are the key barriers or difficulties faced by this group?

Key barriers to returners:

It is really important to recognise the change in the parent carer's standing in wider society, e.g. friends and acquaintances not knowing how to react when a person has a disabled child, the financial impact of a parent having to have time off work to care for a child and attend appointments.

Parent Carers are not recognised as carers, because they are seen as parents, or they have to fight hard to be part of Carers Groups who, often commissioned by CCGs, tend to recognise only carers of adults as carers. The overall sense is that a local focus on the Care Act leaves Parent Carers out as they are seen as parents and the legal rights in the CFA and other legislation are either not being shared or are not understood by commissioners and others in local areas. Sometimes Parent Carers are told their assessment is part of that for their children and young person's social care assessment. Most Parent Carers do not know about the legal frameworks and what they mean.

Families with disabled children often find it difficult to access childcare. There are many reasons for this: they may not be able to find a childcare provider to suit their child's specific needs, many childcare settings are not inclusive and many don't offer childcare at times that are suitable. In May 2014, Contact A Family carried out research with families of disabled children. This research showed that 92% of families reported that finding childcare for their disabled child is more difficult compared to their non-disabled children.

Parents of children with special educational needs or disabilities struggle to access universal childcare for their son or daughter, due to lack of quality and affordable childcare. In addition, often childcare is required up to the age of 18 when the young person will be assessed for adult social care support.

The threshold for adult social care is extremely high and the 'offer' of support/activities for young people below this threshold is variable at best and at worst non-existent. Parent carers are often given incorrect or mixed messages regarding their rights under the Care Act and this is a key barrier to returning to work.

Furthermore, many parents are unable to return to work because of their caring responsibilities and/or the numerous appointments that they have to attend with their child.

SEN Transport may also become a barrier when Local Authority policies state that parent carers work commitments can not be taken in consideration when arranging travel assistance for their disabled child to get to school or college.

Some parent carers are not able to return to work when their child with SEND is of statutory school age due to insufficient specialist placements (child is out of school) or the threat to exclusion. The NNPCF are extremely concerned that forums are reporting an increase in 'soft' exclusions and that often these are going unrecorded. Many parents of children with SEND accept what they are told by schools and parents are being given incorrect and unlawful messages; in some cases parents accept to a reduced timetable as an alternative to a threat to permanently exclude.

Parent Carers must be identified and supported much better through all the necessary policy and law relating to their caring needs, with their own assessments, recognising their right to an ordinary life and their right to work separate from those of their CYP and their eligibility criteria.

What support or information are you aware of to help this group to return to work? This could be from employers or other organisations (including your own).

Available support for returners:

There are many national and local voluntary sector organisations e.g. Working Families which provide helpful information and advice to parent carers in terms of their right to request flexible working.

Local Authorities 'Local Offer' websites should have information relating to childcare in their area.

How useful do you feel the current support or information available to this group is?

Helpfulness of support for returners:

The Local Offer is a good start but there are gaps and parents don't all know about it.

What do you feel works well, and what could be improved?

What support works well or could be better?:

NNPCF sees the need to better understand the context of the lives of Parent Carers and how they come into contact with systems to support their CYP: "The development of the Local Offer under the Children and Families Act and the information provision required under the Care Act is a step in the right direction but the self-service approach does not recognise the need for support in interpreting information or the challenge in understanding how best to use information, that many Parent Carers face when they are often overwhelmed by their caring role....Parent carers in most cases have regular contact with the education system. Nurseries, schools and colleges play a major role in the lives of disabled children and in the case where a young disabled person does not have significant health needs, the child care and education system is possibly the main services that Parent Carers interact with. There are significant opportunities for nurseries, schools and colleges to take a more holistic approach to family support. Parent carers of children and young people who are in the SEND system already should be meeting with the school for a minimum of three times a year to discuss the progress of their child. These meetings could be extended to consider other areas such as parent carer support and information provision. The opportunity for Parent Carers to access specialist carer advisors through their child's nursery, school or college would be beneficial."

What other support or information do you feel would be useful in helping this group to return to work, and why? In responding, please consider specific interventions focused on this group as opposed to more widespread policy reforms.

What further support would be helpful?:

A guide for Parent carers to the complex array of legislation and parent carer rights is needed for local areas, including adult and children's commissioners of all services. This should appear on every Local Offer and be used to inform Joint Commissioning and Carers Strategy development.

A renewed focus is needed on short breaks and their importance to Parent Carers, with new national funding if possible, so as to invest in carer resilience and ordinary lives.

A renewed focus is needed on Parent Carers' physical and mental health to ensure that they are able to return to work.

We would like a national focus on supporting employers to be more flexible around Parent Carers in employment, reviewing the legislation as necessary.

The NNPCF would also like to see a funded approach and framework for Parent Carers reflecting their own rights to an ordinary life reflecting:

- 1) opportunities to take a break from their caring role, to protect their own emotional and physical health and to engage in other activities, such as work, education, leisure or social events, that others take for granted.
- 2) training and opportunities to develop skills that will support their ability to return to work.
- 3) emotional support to enable carers as they seek to return to work.

Is there anything further you would like to tell us about your experience or knowledge of the challenges faced by this group in returning to work?

Further information:

Parent Carer Forums have provided parent carers with the opportunity to develop skills and confidence that will support their ability to find employment after or alongside their caring role.

Many parents are engaged on a voluntary basis whilst for others involvement in forums has led to paid employment either within the forum itself or through becoming Independent Supporters, working with local voluntary sector organisations or Local Authorities.

We may undertake future research on this topic. If you would be interested in participating, please supply your organisation's contact information below.

Contact details:

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