
Millions of people provide unpaid care for a friend or family member who due to illness, disability, a mental health problem or an addiction cannot cope without their support. These carers’ lives can be unpredictable, with many missing out on the benefits that digital can bring. This handbook outlines common challenges, and provides tips and resources for helping carers gain digital skills in the community, to support their caring responsibilities and their own wellbeing.

Key stats:

- **6.5 million in the UK people provide unpaid care**¹.
- **8 out of 10 carers have felt lonely or isolated as a result of their caring responsibilities.**
- **61% don’t have time to participate in social activities and 45% can’t afford to participate in social activities.**
- **54% of carers struggle to pay household bills**².
- **Carers have lower health and wellbeing compared to the national average**³.
- **Age, disability and socio-economic status are big contributing factors to the likelihood of someone being digitally excluded. Many carers fall into these disadvantaged categories.**
- **97% of carers don’t currently receive support with computers and the internet, yet 19% feel they would benefit from some support**⁴.
- **39% of the UK online centres network support unpaid carers**⁵.

All the tips, suggestions and examples of best practice in this document have been provided by UK online centres, as part of Tinder Foundation’s research on the health and wellbeing of unpaid carers.

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¹. Carers UK (2015) Facts about carers
³. 18.9 vs. 23.6 using the Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS)
⁵. Taken from UK online centres Q3 Quarterly survey 2014-15
Access:

- **Cost:** Carers can face additional costs, such as childcare and care equipment. Over 2 million people have given up work at some point to care for someone, and over 3 million have reduced their working hours. The financial difficulties facing carers mean that many can't afford to be online at home.

- **Caring restrictions:** Due to the full time and unpredictable nature of caring, many carers aren't benefitting from internet on the go (26% of carers don't go online anywhere other than their home). Many have little time for themselves - 55% report they are not able to get out of the house much, so find it hard to attend digital skills classes. Where available, trusted and appropriate respite makes this more possible but can be hard to come by.

- **Lack of awareness of support:** Many carers - especially those new to caring - describe finding the right support as ‘trial and error’. Not feeling entitled, worries about cost and feeling unsupported make it harder for carers to access support.

- **Accessibility:** Some carers will want to stay with those they care for but can feel excluded from public places that aren't easily accessible for people of all abilities. In rural areas, poor transport links and remoteness are additional barriers.

Motivation and skills:

- **Online concerns:** Concerns about online security, lack of anonymity, the perceived impersonal nature of the internet or worrying about things going wrong makes 33% of carers reluctant to do more online.

- **Lack of digital confidence:** Carers who say they lack digital confidence are less likely to shop online, keep in touch with friends and family, bank online and find health information than the digitally confident.

- **Other priorities:** The pressures of caring mean that digital is often not high on the list of priorities for carers, leaving some unaware of its potential benefits. While online shopping and online communication is common, only 15% of carers use the internet to claim benefits, 31% to save money and 11% to manage their own health and wellbeing. Carers’ biggest priority is the health and wellbeing of those they care for, rather than their own.

- **Pride:** Not feeling entitled and not wanting to admit they can’t cope, are barriers to seeking support especially amongst older carers. Young adult carers (16-25) often feel they don't deserve support as they feel their caring situation isn’t that bad, and can face confidence and self-esteem issues, making it harder for them to seek support.

The Challenges:

- **Carers’ unpredictable lives** mean they can’t always attend digital skills sessions or may cancel at the last minute as they need to stay at home or take the person they care for to appointments.

- **Lack of awareness of caring responsibilities and its impacts:** People who are not carers can find it hard to understand the impacts of caring on someone’s everyday life, their health and wellbeing, and the emotional impact, making it more difficult to provide support and solutions.

- **Carers are hard to reach and identify:** Those looking after a friend or family member often don’t see themselves as carers. In addition, worrying about the stigma attached to caring, pride and feeling guilty for asking for help can stop carers identifying with messages of support.

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6. The cost of raising a disabled child can be up to three times as much as raising other children (Reference taken from Contact A Family 2012 blog ‘Counting the costs’)
How To Engage and Recruit Learners

1. Identify carers
Use the words ‘carer, family member and supporter’ in your marketing materials and in conversations. Listen to your learners - if they regularly mention they take someone to a GP appointment, have a friend or family member with a health condition, they may be a carer.

2. Embed digital into your existing offer and social events
Think about the interests and hobbies of the people you’re trying to reach and base activities around ways of engaging with these interests online, for example sharing memories with digital photography or online games using tablets. If possible, provide free internet access for carers outside of learning sessions.

3. Consider outreach or home support
Deliver in outreach locations near to people’s homes or go to where carers are likely to be such as Carers Centres or GP surgeries. Where possible, offer options to support carers with digital skills in their own homes, in particular computer maintenance and internet security.

4. Sell the benefits of digital
Many carers may not be aware of how much the internet could help them with:

   - **Research**: Carers can find both general information online, and information specific to their caring duties.
   - **Saving time**: By accessing government services and online banking online, individuals can save an average of 30 minutes per transaction.¹⁰
   - **Saving money**: Carers can receive discounts for paying for things online, and save money by using price comparison sites.
   - **Making life more convenient**: For carers who find it hard to leave the house, online activities such as shopping⁵, banking and booking appointments online mean they can get things done without leaving the house.
   - **Entertainment**: Carers can find entertainment online, for themselves and those they care for through games, film, music, eBooks and more.
   - **Managing health**: The internet provides easy access to health and fitness websites, apps and tools, such as NHS Choices.
   - **Social contact**: Carers can keep in touch with friends and family through social networking sites and Skype.
   - **Peer support**: Carers can communicate with people in a similar situation to themselves so introduce them to Facebook groups and online forums. Provide support for carers to set up their own online support groups.

5. Offer skill development
Not maintaining skills, knowledge and experience make returning to work extremely challenging if caring responsibilities end. To keep carers motivated and ready for work, provide flexible and distance learning opportunities - such as www.learnmyway.com.

6. Work in partnership to raise awareness:
Tell GP surgeries, pharmacies, Carers Centres and local authorities about how digital can benefit carers. Consider holding an event in [Carers Week](#) which takes place every June.

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¹⁰ The economic impact of Basic Digital Skills and inclusion in the UK. A report for Tinder Foundation and GO ON UK November 2011.

¹³ Evidence shows that shopping online saves individuals an average 13% compared to if they were to shop in-store, equivalent to £143 per person per year (The economic impact of Basic Digital Skills and inclusion in the UK: A report for Tinder Foundation and GO ON UK November 2015).

¹⁵ Taken from Carers Trust (2011), How the web can help carers?
Things to Consider Before You Deliver

1. Provide peer support with Digital Champions
Connect carers for confidence building, encouragement, self-esteem support and intergenerational learning. In particular younger carers can support older carers with digital and young carers can learn from the experiences of older carers. Train carers and care professionals to become Digital Champions so they have the confidence and skills to support other carers to get the most out of digital technology.

2. Give carers the support they need
Carers need practical, financial and emotional support the most. Learn My Way features lots of information for people looking after a friend or family member. Show carers how to get the most out of:

- **Online information** about how to look after the health, safety and affairs of someone else, such as trusted websites and blogs relating to specific health conditions and carers rights, e.g. GOV.UK, National Autistic Society website and Google for researching and help with decision making.
- **Carer entitlements**: Carers Trust and Carers UK provide the most up to date information on Carers Allowance and other benefits available to carers. Some grant funding is also available from Family Fund.
- **Online emotional support**: There are plenty of forums for carers to chat to like-minded people. Facebook forums, online communities such as Babble, Matter, Carers Space and Carers UK forum. Supporting carers to stay safe online and get used to sharing is an important part of this.

3. Provide holistic support
Combine digital skills with other support like benefits advice and informal learning sessions. Consider sessions in locations where support services are already offered, like financial management workshops and support groups for people with specific conditions and their carers.

4. Make the most of mobile technology:
Tablets are an easy way for carers and those they care for to benefit from online entertainment like games and sharing photos. Communicate the benefits of mobile technology, such as access to information and entertainment when out and about e.g. while waiting for a GP appointment.

5. Provide informal, flexible support
Carers may need to reorganise appointments or cancel at the last minute, so try offering drop-in digital sessions. Group sessions also give carers the chance to socialise. Offer tea and biscuits and encourage carers to swap stories and share what they’re learning.

6. Support skills development and employability

- Offer carers flexible volunteering opportunities (including as Digital Champions) to build up their confidence, give them experience, develop their skills and give them a sense of achievement.
- Be aware of flexible employment options you can signpost carers to, including working from home (20% of online carers say that using the internet to work from home has had a positive impact on their caring role). Sign-post to guidance on self-employment and how to run a digital business.
- Provide career advice, planning and skill development and support, including valuing and harnessing skills developed through caring such as organisational and administrative skills.

“**The Trinity Centre in Louth was chosen as a good location for computer classes because of good broadband and the fact that other support services such as Alzheimer’s Society, and housing, credit, dementia and money management groups are already there. We also work with Lincolnshire Carers Partnership and gets referrals from the Local Authority housing team for support with money management and online health information.**”

Rich Avison, Lincs Training, Lincolnshire

Tinder Foundation supports digital inclusion for unpaid carers through our Specialist Carers Network. See [www.ukonlinecentres.com/carers](http://www.ukonlinecentres.com/carers) for more information about our commitment to digital inclusion delivery and to find out how you can join the network.