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Understanding the needs of caring experienced students

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BACKGROUND

1. Long standing interest in carer research and using this to improve outcomes for carers
2. Care and Caring Network@OU (<http://intranet6.open.ac.uk/staff/ou-caring-network>)
 - **Student support and widening participation:** supporting OU students who are carers and reduce barriers to carers becoming successful OU students.
 - **Staff who care:** supporting OU staff who are also carers.
 - **Carer research:** OU academics interested in care-related research to share ideas and collaborate on research projects.
 - **Curriculum development:** supporting OU curriculum, free learning and resources for carers
3. Aims today :
 - the needs of students currently caring and those who have been caring
 - their learning and support needs in order for them to reach their potential and fulfil their ambitions.

DEFINITION OF A CARER

A carer is anyone who cares, unpaid, for a friend or family member who due to illness, disability, a mental health problem or an addiction cannot cope without their support (Carers Trust, 2017)

CARERS AND CARING

Changing demographics means that:

- 12% of the UK population are currently caring (6.4 million people)
- 3 in 5 of us will be a carer at some point in our lives
- rapidly increasing :
 - 10% higher than in 2001
 - by 2037 there will be 9 million carers in the UK
- more and more people are likely to care more than once in their lifetime and / be a sandwich carer



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FACTS ABOUT CARERS

- 26% care for a spouse or a partner, 52% care for their parents or parents-in-law and 13% care for a son or daughter
- carers are predominately female and aged 50+, a third are aged 65+ and around 2% are young people
- 48% of all carers provide care for 20+ hours per week and 21% care for 50+ per week
- 14% of carers look after two people
- 70% of the cared-for population are 65+ and many have an age-related physical disability or chronic health condition
- key tasks that carers perform include preparing meals, shopping, cleaning, doing the laundry, administering medication, personal care tasks (such as bathing and dressing), social and emotional support, keeping an eye on the person they care for, taking them out and organising professional care
- many carers do not self-identify

IMPACT OF CARING



I have neglected my own health problems, putting off sorting them out, for fear that I would be hospitalised and therefore not able to care

health and wellbeing

I have suffered physical problems because of my caring role, mainly back and hands due to pushing a wheelchair, lifting and supporting my wife

We just try our best to live on what we have but it is very hard as we are always in arrears

finances

I would love to be in paid work, even part time. I gave up a well paid career to look after my son. I'd love more support to enable me to work

education and employment

I cannot afford hobbies or leisure activities and rarely see family or friends

loneliness and isolation

The needs are increasing, the help is decreasing

inadequate support

FORMER CARERS

- **health and wellbeing**
- **financial legacy**
- **social isolation**
- **post-caring and more caring**
- **limited support**

IMPLICATIONS FOR CARING EXPERIENCED LEARNERS?



- physical and mental health problems
- socially isolated
- lack confidence
- missed out on educational and /employment opportunities
- lost skills
- need to retrain / change employment
- lack financial resources
- don't realise they are carers /have been carers and therefore do not realise that they are entitled to support
- not used to support because haven't had it

CARING EXPERIENCED LEARNERS AND WIDENING PARTICIPATION

1. Care and caring network@OU activities:
 - study to identify students who are carers and improving services to support students who are carers
 - identified free courses on OpenLearn and links to non OU resources that may be of interest to carers
2. Caring experienced learners are now a significant issue for widening participation

QUESTIONS and SUGGESTIONS?

