

Derbyshire Community Health Services NHS Foundation Trust

Derbyshire Community Health Services NHS Foundation Trust (DCHS) provides a wide range of community-based health services across Derbyshire. With a large and diverse workforce, the organisation recognises the significant number of colleagues who balance their roles with unpaid caring responsibilities. During 2025, DCHS committed to strengthening its support for unpaid carers within its workforce by partnering with Derbyshire Carers Association (DCA) to work towards becoming a Carer Friendly Employer and embedding a consistent, proactive approach to identifying and supporting staff who are carers.

The Challenge

With 1 in 3 NHS employees estimated to be unpaid carers, DCHS recognised the importance of creating an environment where staff feel able to identify themselves as carers and access support without stigma or concern.

Key challenges identified included:

- Retention & recruitment
- Difficulty for staff self-registering as carers on ESR due to national system limitations.
- Lack of consistent prompts within induction and wellbeing conversations to encourage staff to disclose caring responsibilities.
- Need for a stronger, visible support network for colleagues with caring responsibilities.
- Ensuring organisational policies, recruitment processes and training reflect the needs of unpaid carers.
- Ensuring information about external support services was easy to access and regularly promoted.

The Solution

A comprehensive action plan for 2025–26 was developed and implemented in partnership with DCA, focusing on identification, awareness, policy development, communication and training.

Key Actions Taken:

Understanding & Identification

- Carers Pledge commitment signed during Carers Week 2025.
- Carers Network launched with supporting communications.
- Staff questionnaire confirming that 1 in 3 respondents were unpaid carers.
- Created a Guide to ESR self-registration, acknowledging national limitations and offering practical support.
- Added carer prompts to 1-2-1s and wellbeing check-ins, including questions such as:

“Do you look after someone?”

‘Does a caring role impact your ability to work?’

Policies & Procedures

- Carers Friendly Employer logo and wording added to recruitment pages.
- Consideration of flexible recruitment practices (times/days, hybrid/telephone options).
- Exploration of guaranteed interviews for unpaid carers.
- Review of Carers Leave Policy, integrating unpaid carer support into the Family Leave Policy.
- Introduction of the Carers Passport with written guidance for both staff and managers.
- Support, Training & Activities
- Creation of a Carers Network meeting every 4–6 weeks, offering:

1. Peer-to-peer support
2. Guest speakers
3. Updates on workplace and external support

- Establishment of a Carers Intranet hub containing:
 - 1.Details of support
 - 2.Network meeting dates
 - 3.Training opportunities
 - 4.Carers Passport + guidance
 - 5.Carers Leave Policy
 - 6.External support agencies across Derbyshire
 - 7.Carers Champions Training delivered by DCA, with dates scheduled across 2025/26.
 - 8.Manager Training also scheduled throughout the year.
 - 9.Champions' biographies shared on the intranet to highlight lived experience and visibility.
 - 10.Events during Carers Week and Carers Rights Day.

Communications

- Carers Champions to display: Biographies and DAACSS and care-support leaflets
- Ongoing internal communications via: DCHS internal Facebook, Noticeboards and Trust-wide updates and campaigns



The Carer Friendly Employer Quality Mark was presented in June 2026 during a special Carers Week celebration event, where DCA CEO, Helen Weston recognised the Trust's outstanding commitment to supporting colleagues with unpaid caring responsibilities. The award was received by Jemma Walker, Chair of the DCHS Carers Network.



Feedback

Early engagement has demonstrated increased awareness among staff and managers about the challenges unpaid carers face. The Carers Network has begun to establish itself as a trusted, safe space for colleagues, while Carers Champions are increasingly visible across services.

DCHS acknowledges the importance of continued partnership with Derbyshire Carers Association to maintain momentum and strengthen carer-friendly culture across the organisation.

Jemma Walker said,

"This award means so much to us. As someone who understands the realities of balancing work with caring, I know how important it is to feel seen, supported and understood at work."

Over the past year, with support and guidance from Derbyshire Carers Association, we've created a space where colleagues can be open about their caring roles and support each other, and I've been genuinely inspired by the courage and kindness people have shown."

I'm incredibly proud of what we've achieved together –from building our Carers Network to seeing Carers Champions making a real difference across the Trust. This is about people helping people, and we're committed to keeping that momentum going so every colleague who is also a carer feels they belong."

