

Carers
First

Impact report

2024–25

Introduction

From our Chief Executive and Chair of Trustees

More than 5.8 million people across the UK are providing unpaid care.

57,300

carers registered with Carers First for support

44%

of carers registered had been caring for less than three years and are still adjusting to their new role

At Carers First, we believe that carers deserve recognition, respect and support. More than 5.8 million people across the UK are providing unpaid care, and two in three of us will become a carer at some point in our lives. Caring can be rewarding, but it can also bring significant challenges, including financial pressures, social isolation and impacts on mental and physical health.

This year has been one of growth and progress. Against a backdrop of economic uncertainty and pressures on social care, we launched our 2024–27 strategy and made real strides towards our ambition: to enable carers to thrive in their role and achieve balance in their lives. We have strengthened our foundations, expanded our reach and worked alongside carers to co-design services that meet their needs.

Thanks to the dedication of our staff, volunteers, trustees, partners and funders, we have continued to deliver impact. From securing new contracts and developing innovative programmes, to embedding equality, diversity and inclusion in everything we do, this year demonstrates how we are changing more lives than ever.

Alison Taylor
Chief Executive



Peter Davies
Chair of Trustees



Introduction

Our impact at a glance

In 2024–25, Carers First made a tangible difference in the lives of unpaid carers:

283,800

carers and professionals reached with information and awareness campaigns

57,300

carers registered with Carers First for support

13,500

carers supported through personalised one-to-one and community services

44%

of carers registered had been caring for less than three years

92%

of carers felt more confident and informed

90%

of carers improved or sustained their wellbeing

95%

of carers said they would recommend Carers First

18,000

carers connected via our Helpline

1,700+

members active in our Carers Online Community

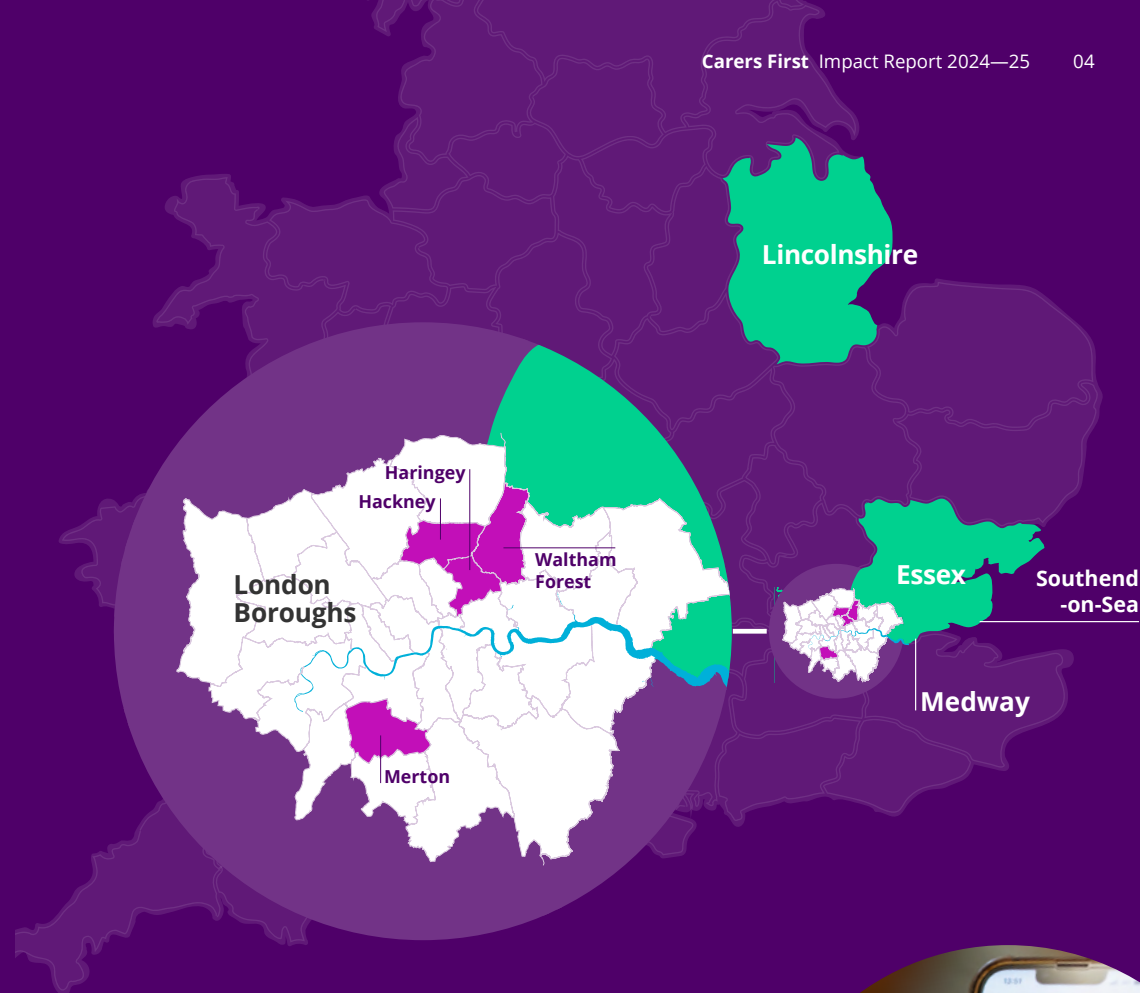
Our impact at a glance *continued*

Where we work

Our service model is based on early identification and prevention, increasing carers' wellbeing and reducing the impact of caring. We provide high-quality, personalised information, advice and support to carers of all ages.

We deliver commissioned carers' services in Essex, Lincolnshire, Medway, Southend-on-Sea, Waltham Forest, Haringey, Hackney (contract concluded in March 2025) and Merton, a new service which started in April 2024. In April 2025, we will launch a major new contract in Croydon.

Alongside this, we continue to expand our digital offer, ensuring all carers can access information and support, wherever they live.



Introduction

Our impact at a glance *continued*

How we support carers

We provide a range of flexible and accessible support, co-designed with carers to meet their needs. Our support includes:

Face-to-face advice and community support groups

Counselling, coaching and wellbeing programmes

Online peer support and digital resources

A dedicated Helpline providing information and guidance

Carers Assessments and Support Plans

Specialist Programmes of Support on complex caring situations

Advocacy, financial and employment advice

Opportunities for respite, social activities and peer connection

Lucy's story



A young carer who supports her mum.

Lucy is a young carer who supports her mum, who experienced two serious bleeds on the brain which have led to long-term health complications, including seizures, memory loss, reduced mobility and challenges with her mental health. As an only child, Lucy is the only person at home able to respond when her mum suddenly becomes unwell, meaning she carries a significant emotional and practical responsibility despite her young age.

While Lucy's caring role does not involve extensive daily household tasks, it becomes intense and urgent when her mum's health deteriorates. Lucy has learned how to make quick decisions under pressure, including calling ambulances, placing her mum in the recovery position and helping to feed and comfort her afterwards.

On several occasions, she has faced extremely distressing situations, including being told by paramedics to prepare to say goodbye to her mum. These experiences have had a profound impact on her confidence, mental wellbeing and sense of stability at school and home.

Lucy was referred to Carers First by her mum's physiotherapist, who recognised the level of pressure she was under. After carrying out a detailed assessment, we worked with Lucy to create a personalised emergency care plan, helping her feel more prepared and less alone during medical incidents. She also received one-to-one support aimed at building resilience, processing trauma and increasing her emotional safety.

To ensure her education was not negatively affected, we liaised with her school so that staff understood her caring responsibilities and could provide flexibility where needed.

Lucy also took part in local groups and activities, giving her vital opportunities to meet other young carers, build friendships and learn coping strategies. We referred her to Honeypot for respite breaks and to Off The Record for specialist counselling support.

Additionally, through the Merton Household Support Grant, Lucy received a £200 voucher to help alleviate financial strain at home.

Despite the challenges she faces, Lucy has shown incredible bravery, maturity and compassion. With the right support in place, she is beginning to feel more confident, connected and hopeful about her future.

Lucy received one-to-one support aimed at building resilience, processing trauma and increasing her emotional safety.

How we have delivered on our strategy

In 2024, we launched our new three-year strategy, building on the strong foundations of our previous strategy, which was developed in co-production with carers. This new plan sets out five ambitious objectives — and in 2024–25, we delivered tangible progress in every area:

1

Reach and engage more carers early in their caring role



2

Develop innovative models of collaboration and scalable programmes



3

Achieve the highest quality of support possible



4

Champion talent and diversity



5

Grow and diversify our income



1

Reach and engage more carers early

Reaching carers early helps prevent crisis and supports wellbeing, resilience and stability from the outset.

In 2024–25, we strengthened our approach to early identification by deepening community partnerships, expanding targeted outreach, and applying data-driven insight to understand who we are reaching — and who remains unseen.

By mapping demographic trends against local census data, we are now able to identify where additional engagement is needed and tailor our local campaigns, service models and partnerships accordingly. As a result, 44% of carers registering with us had been caring for less than three years.

Increased

early identification supported by demographic and census data analysis

57,300

carers registered, with 44% new to caring

Co-produced

male-carer peer programme in Lincolnshire

Extended

local outreach through culturally relevant and gender-sensitive partnerships

New

young carers service and funded male-carer activities in Southend

National

media and influencer engagement, including coverage by Kate Garraway and carers Norma (who sadly died in 2025) and her granddaughter Jess

Our Strategic Objectives

Objective 1: Reach and engage more carers early

Strong relationships with local communities and organisations continue to be central to our approach.

Across our areas, we worked with sports clubs, Men's Sheds, cultural and faith groups, schools, and grassroots leaders to reach carers who may not identify as carers or who experience barriers linked to gender, culture, identity, or stigma.

In Southend, 400 carers were newly identified this year, 100% of whom would recommend Carers First. We also launched a new Young Carers service, group activities and funded male-carer sessions. In Lincolnshire, our co-produced *Men Care 2* programme offered a safe, social and confidence-building space for male carers, with several members now shaping and leading activities themselves. These examples illustrate how evidence, collaboration and lived experience continue to increase reach, equity and impact.

We worked in co-production with carers and Medway Foodbank, which is part of Trussell Trust, to highlight that 1 in 7 carers are having to access food banks.

The campaign featured carers' stories, was promoted on local billboards and an Arriva bus and got picked up by the local TV station.



Our Strategic Objectives

Spotlight: Supporting male carers through connection, confidence and wellbeing

Many male carers tell us they struggle to ask for help, prioritise their own wellbeing or find social spaces where they feel understood. Through our Men Care 2 programme in Lincolnshire, we have developed a tailored, co-designed offer that gives male carers the chance to connect, relax and take time for themselves through shared, informal activities.

Recent sessions have included indoor curling, a wellbeing morning, and a campfire 'chill and chat' — each designed to reduce isolation, build peer support and encourage self-care.

Activities are chosen by carers themselves and range from quizzes and breakfasts to outdoor experiences and exercise-based sessions. Attendance continues to grow, with many carers forming lasting friendships and some progressing into volunteering and co-leading events.

“
Getting together
and having a chat
with the guys is
always a joy.”

“
If it was left to
me, I wouldn't
arrange time out
— this gives me
something to look
forward to.”

“
The group helps
me remember
I'm not alone.”

The programme has helped men feel more confident seeking support, improved social connections, and strengthened wellbeing, demonstrating the value of gender-specific, strength-based approaches that reflect carers' lived experience.





Develop innovative collaborations

We achieve more for carers through collaboration, and we're always looking for ways to work with partners, stakeholders and commissioners to find new ways to drive impact and deepen our roots in communities.

Our partnership with Legal & General developed a mentoring programme for young carers, while our Hospital to Home project supported carers during hospital discharge.

Our partnership with Carefree, a charity that provides breaks for unpaid carers, has proved invaluable. Carefree helps to provide much needed short breaks for carers by working with accommodation providers by making use of their empty rooms. In the last financial year, we were able to deliver 213 free short breaks for carers with an average value of £275 per break or £58,575 overall.

Our Strategic Objectives

Objective 2: Develop innovative collaborations

Highlights

Mentor programme for young carers

- Our partnership with Legal & General has seen the development of a mentoring programme for young carers

Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) Survey

- We took part in the first national Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) Survey for charities.

Hospital to Home Project

- This project trialled new virtual wards support and delivered Significant Care Tool training, helping carers communicate effectively with health and care staff, and to identify, monitor and act on early signs of deterioration in the person they care for.

The Medway Carer Wellbeing Programme

- We saw some very positive outcomes from this programme with 97% of participants reporting reduced stress and 89% reporting improved confidence.

Respite for Carers

- Through our partnership with Carefree we were able to deliver 213 carefree breaks for carers worth £58,575.



Shwetal's story



Full-time carer

For an impressive 37 years, Shwetal excelled as a Construction Project Manager in London—an occupation she really enjoyed. However, when her father-in-law, Navinchandra, who is now in his mid-nineties, started needing full-time care due to the challenges of heart disease, arthritis, and dementia, Shwetal made the difficult choice to step back from her career.

“**Leaving my career felt like closing a chapter of my life, she shares. I loved my job, but my family needed me.**”

Shwetal's days now revolve around caring for Navinchandra, which involves managing his diet, attending to his personal needs, and providing emotional support as he navigates the challenges of dementia. *“I don't have much time for myself,”* Shwetal notes. *“I always need someone to be with him because he can't be left alone.”* Even planning a simple family meal requires careful consideration.

Caring for Navinchandra also means adjusting finances, making it hard for Shwetal to prioritise her health. *“The strain from caring has made it difficult for me to take care of my health,”* she explains, mentioning a rare medical condition. Yet she remains resilient, *“It's all added to the stress, but I'm learning to navigate it.”*

Shwetal discovered Carers First while volunteering as a management committee member for her local Asian carers group. Keen to learn coping strategies, she participated in Carers First's activities and accessed valuable resources that transformed her caring experience, notably the Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) sessions, which blend cognitive therapy with acupressure.

“The EFT training has been a game-changer,” Shwetal emphasises. “It helps me stay positive, even on the hardest days!”

Incorporating yoga into her self-care routine has also brought her peace and energy. *“Taking care of myself empowers me to provide even better care for Navinchandra,”* she says. The online wellbeing sessions have made a big difference, saving time and money while offering essential support. She also enjoys connecting with others at the monthly meet-ups.

“**I recently enjoyed a group visit to the Horniman Museum. It was such a fun day, and we even enjoyed a complimentary lunch!**”

The local community team has been instrumental in supporting Shwetal. *“From arranging Navinchandra's Powers of Attorney to advising on financial matters, the team has been a consistent source of help.”*

In December 2024, Shwetal joined our Chief Executive, Alison Taylor, at the Parliamentary Drop-In organised by Carers UK for their Carers Poverty Coalition's campaign. She spoke passionately about the challenges faced by unpaid carers, representing those who often go unheard. *“Advocating for carers' rights was an emotional and pivotal moment for me,”* she reflected.

Shwetal navigates the many challenges of becoming a carer by finding the right support, highlighting the importance of seeking guidance and prioritising selfcare.

Shwetal's unwavering spirit shines through: *“It's tough, but with my family's support and the help of Carers First, I know I can keep going,”* she says with confidence. *“From financial guidance to emotional support, the charity has been there for me every step of the way.”*



Deliver the highest quality support



We remain committed to delivering consistently high-quality, evidence-based services that improve outcomes for carers across all our localities.

In 2024-25, we strengthened our practice framework, deepened reflective learning, and further embedded co-production to ensure our support remained relevant, person-centred and aligned with both local need and contractual expectations.

We introduced shared quality measures and aligned reporting processes to drive continuous improvement, maintain strong commissioner confidence, and support equitable delivery across our services. By focusing on listening, learning, and adapting, we continued to evolve our offer so carers receive the right support, at the right time, and in the right way.

Our Strategic Objectives

Objective 3: Deliver the highest quality support**Highlights:**

We strengthened consistency and quality across localities by implementing shared reporting frameworks and collective learning processes.

Maintained ISO 9001 certification

We enhanced reflective practice and feedback mechanisms, enabling services to adapt based on what carers told us they needed.

We increased delegated authority to deliver Statutory Carers Assessments on behalf of local authorities, reflecting trust in our expertise and delivery.

We strengthened hospital discharge pathways through new partnerships, improving communication and continuity of care for carers.

We increased volunteer involvement in peer support and group activities, extending reach and sustainability beyond contracted delivery.

We demonstrated continued innovation through evolving respite, mentoring and targeted support offers, informed by need and evidence.

We expanded co-production with carers, embedding lived experience within programme design, review and improvement activities.

We also took part in the national ESG survey for charities to benchmark our environmental and social performance, helping us better understand our performance.



4

Champion talent and diversity

At Carers First, we know that lived experience strengthens everything we do.

Forty percent of our staff have personal experience of caring, bringing empathy, understanding and authenticity to their work.

We are proud to be a carer-friendly employer, modelling the same flexibility and respect we advocate for in our services — through flexible working, paid carers leave, Carers Passports, and an active staff carers network.

Our fifth annual staff survey showed continued year-on-year improvement and exceptionally high levels of engagement:

93%

enjoy their work

92%

feel respected

90%

feel treated fairly

88%

feel supported

94%

understand their contribution to the strategy

86%

feel they have the right training and development

These results reflect a strong, supportive internal culture where people feel valued and empowered to do their best work.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion remain at the heart of our governance, recruitment and leadership approach — ensuring that our team reflects the communities we serve.

Objective 4: Champion talent and diversity

Feedback from Carers First employees

Megan's Story

"I joined Carers First in 2023 to work on a project and have been promoted to a Team Lead. I have felt welcomed, valued, and heard. My opinions matter, and I receive helpful guidance that enhances my work experience. Carers First creates a friendly and supportive environment that makes each day enjoyable."

As an adult with autism and ADHD, finding employment that fits can be challenging, but Carers First invests in my success. They provide the support I need for fulfilling work, and my managers encourage me to seek growth and progression within the organisation."



Megan Williams
Team Lead

Daniel's Story

"My experience at the charity has been exceptional. Starting as an apprentice, I've received incredible support from my manager and the Finance Team, which has been vital for my growth. Thanks to their guidance, I've completed AAT Level 3 and am progressing through Level 4."

The charity's commitment to my studies has built my knowledge and confidence. It's truly a great environment to learn and grow."



Daniel Stevenson
Finance Team

Our people are supported by a thriving volunteer community, many of whom are former carers or professionals from our partner organisations. In 2024–25, 136 volunteers gave their time to Carers First initiatives, each contributing many hours of time throughout the year. Their involvement in group activities, befriending, mentoring and fundraising extends our reach, strengthens peer connections, and helps us deliver even more for carers. We are grateful for all that they do.



5

Grow and diversify our income

We secured new contracts in Essex, Merton and Croydon, further strengthening our financial sustainability and reinforcing commissioners' confidence in our delivery.

These contracts expand our reach, introduce new forms of support such as counselling, and embed innovative outreach models, helping drive a 27% increase in carers registered in Merton within the first year.

The new seven-year contract in Croydon marks a significant step forward in our drive to provide more in person services. Alongside these successes, we re-secured our Haringey contract and continued to attract support from major funders including the National Lottery, Garfield Weston Foundation and Peter Harrison Foundation. Despite a challenging fundraising environment, with many trusts spending out or changing funding criteria, we have built greater financial resilience by diversifying income streams and clearly demonstrating our impact to funders and partners.

Our Strategic Objectives

Objective 5: Grow and diversify our income

Financial Overview 2024–25

Income

£5,289,243

2024/25 £5,289,243

2023/24 £4,931,362

Income up £357,881 from the previous year

Expenditure

£5,114,805

Net surplus

£144,645

Our reserves policy range remains £1.3m - £1.8m. We maintained key quality and compliance accreditations, including Cyber Essentials Plus and NHS Data Security.



Highlights

Future funding

- Secured new funding from the National Lottery, Garfield Weston Foundation and Peter Harrison Foundation

Haringey victory

- Re-secured the London Borough of Haringey contract

Merton launch

- Launched Merton contract, with a 27% increase in registered carers during the first year

Mid and South Essex win

- Won a new contract in Mid and South Essex, introducing counselling support for carers

Croydon triumph

- We won a new contract in Croydon which begins in April 2025

Hackney success

- Concluded our contract in Hackney, ensuring a well-managed and professional handover process.

What our commissioners say

“One of the main priorities for Essex County Council is to enhance services for unpaid carers. Carers First are a key partner organisation in helping us to achieve our aims to support more carers with higher quality services, and have shown collaboration, dedication and adaptability in responding to the challenges faced by carers and in doing so are making a significant impact.”

Ben Negus,
Essex County Council



Thank you

We want to thank every member of staff, volunteer, trustee, commissioner, funder and partner who makes our work possible. Together, we are creating a society in which carers are supported, empowered and never overlooked.

Thank you to all of our local authority and health sector partners, including:



Thank you to all our supporters and funders, including:



Five ways you can help us.

Together we can enable carers to thrive. Here's how you can help make a life-changing difference:



1 Partner with us to deliver more support

We want to work with like-minded individuals and organisations. If you share our passion and commitment to support carers, we would love to work with you.

2 Make a donation or fundraise for us

Whether you want to make a one-off donation, give on a regular basis or undertake a fundraising challenge, your support is vital in helping us support more carers.

3 Spread the word and help us reach hidden carers

We rely on word of mouth and people (and partners) talking about Carers First and the great support that we provide. The more we talk about carers, the greater chance we have of reaching those who are hidden.

4 Share your story to raise awareness

By talking about your experience as a carer, you can help us tell powerful stories that raise awareness of the needs of carers, help more people identify themselves as carers and help carers to feel less isolated.

5 Volunteer with us to make a difference

Volunteers are vitally important to enrich our work with carers. If you have a few hours to give a week, or would like to support specific short-term projects, we would love to hear from you.

Carers First

If you're a carer you can get in touch by emailing hello@carersfirst.org.uk or by calling our Helpline: 0300 303 1555

If you're interested in working with us you can get in touch by emailing: partners@carersfirst.org.uk

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