Carers First



Impact report

2025–26

Introduction

From our Chief Executive and Co-Chair of Trustees

Every day, millions of people across the UK provide unpaid care for a family member, friend or neighbour. Yet too often, carers are juggling enormous responsibilities without the recognition, information or support they need.

14,778

carers supported during 2025—26

95%

of carers told us they would recommend Carers First to others

At Carers First, we believe no one should have to care alone.

This year, demand for our support has continued to grow. More people are taking on caring responsibilities, often with little preparation and against a backdrop of increasing pressure on health and social care services. Yet too many carers still go unrecognised until they are struggling to cope.

That's why everything we do is focused on helping carers find support sooner, build resilience and feel recognised, valued and supported throughout their caring journey.

During 2025–26, we supported 14,778 carers, welcomed 5,837 people to Carers First for the first time and worked with partners across health, education, local government and the voluntary sector to reach carers earlier than ever before. Together, we helped improve or maintain wellbeing for 89% of the carers we supported, while 95% told us they would recommend Carers First to others.

As Co-Chair and Chief Executive, we both stepped into our current roles at the very end of the period covered by this report. While the achievements highlighted here belong to the people who led and delivered this work throughout the year, we have seen first-hand the expertise, commitment and ambition that make this impact possible.

Behind every one of these numbers is a person. A young carer who found friendship with others who understand. A parent navigating the uncertainty of a rare diagnosis. A husband caring for his wife through dementia. A volunteer using their own lived experience to support someone taking their first steps as a carer.



Introduction

From our Chief Executive and Co-Chair of Trustees

These stories remind us that our impact is measured not simply by the services we deliver, but by what that support makes possible: helping carers feel more confident, connected and able to balance caring with the other parts of their lives.



This report celebrates what we have achieved together over the past year. It also reflects the dedication of our staff, volunteers, trustees, commissioners, funders and partners, whose commitment enables us to reach thousands of carers every year.

This has also been a year of significant change for Carers First. We were delighted to welcome five new trustees, bringing fresh perspectives and expertise to help guide the organisation into its next chapter. We also said goodbye to former Chief Executive Alison Taylor and former Chair Semantha Neal, and thank them for their leadership and contribution to Carers First. Alison retired during the year after six years as Chief Executive, and the impact highlighted throughout this report reflects the leadership they provided, alongside the dedication of our staff, volunteers and partners, during most of the period covered.

As we enter the final year of our current strategy, we are also looking ahead. Alongside delivering our ambitions for today, we will be listening closely to carers, colleagues, volunteers, partners and supporters as we shape the next chapter for Carers First.

Carers' voices and experiences will be at the heart of that work, helping us build on what works, respond to changing needs and increase our impact in the years ahead.

But most importantly, this report is a celebration of carers themselves. Thank you to every carer who has trusted us, shared their experiences and allowed us to be part of their journey. Your experiences continue to shape our work and ambitions for the future.

Together, we are building a future where every carer is recognised, respected and supported.

Kelly Rust
Chief Executive

Vicki Wells
Co-Chair of Trustees



Introduction

Our impact at a glance

In 2025–26, Carers First made a tangible difference in the lives of unpaid carers:

275,000+

Carers and professionals reached

89%

Improved or maintained their wellbeing

92%

Feel more resilient in their caring role

67,151

Registered carers

2,700+

Carers supported by our volunteers

1,610

Young carers supported

Introduction

Our impact at a glance *continued*

Every statistic in this report represents someone whose life has been changed by being recognised as a carer and receiving the right support at the right time.

This year we reached more carers than ever before, strengthened partnerships with health services and communities, invested in new ways of connecting with carers and continued developing services shaped by lived experience.

The pages that follow tell the stories behind these numbers—stories of resilience, compassion and hope—and show how, together with our partners, supporters and volunteers, we're helping carers not just to cope, but to thrive. As good care is supported care.



By numbers

Provided
12,024
carers with 1-2-1 support

Worked alongside
136
volunteers

Welcomed
2,388
to groups and wellbeing activities

Shared
15
carers' stories

Supported
6,613
carers through our helpline

Secured
64
media stories

Built an online community of
1,949
carers

Delivered
200+
email campaigns

Introduction

Our impact at a glance *continued*

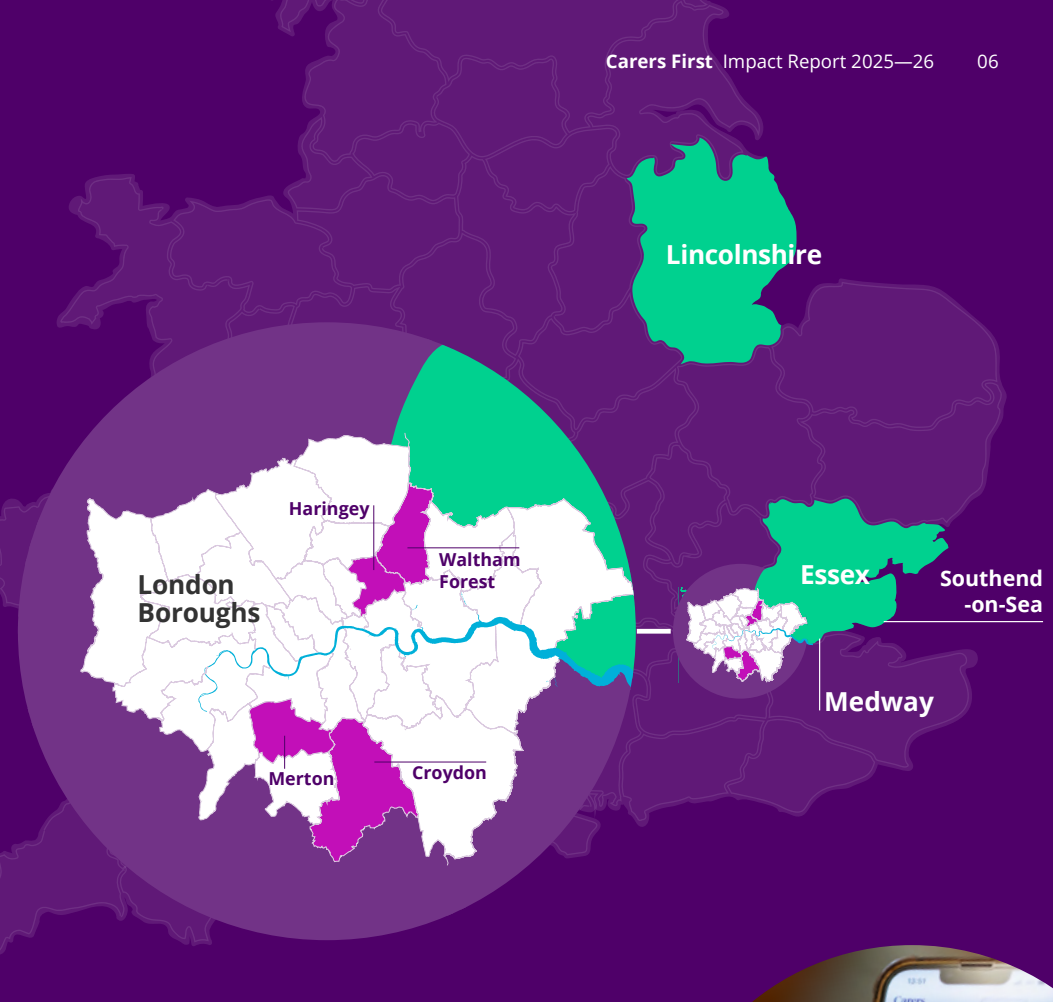
Where we work

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 locally commissioned services in the following areas:

- **Essex**
- **Lincolnshire**
- **London Borough of Croydon**
- **London Borough of Haringey**
- **London Borough of Merton**
- **London Borough of Waltham Forest**
- **Medway**
- **Southend-on-Sea**

We also continue to build our online digital offer, within and beyond the regions where we operate, so that we can offer all carers the information and support they need.







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, digital resources, and a new AI webchat function
- 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

Our Strategic Objectives

How we have delivered on our strategy

1

Helping carers find support sooner



2

Developing innovative partnerships and programmes that increase our impact



3

Delivering the highest quality support to help carers thrive



4

Championing talent, diversity and lived experience



5

Grow and diversify our income to enable us to achieve more for carers



Our Strategic Objectives



1

Helping carers find support sooner

The earlier someone recognises themselves as a carer, the sooner they can access the advice, reassurance and practical support that can make a lasting difference.

Too often, carers don't realise they are carers until they are already overwhelmed. They simply see themselves as a husband helping his wife, a daughter supporting an ageing parent or a child looking after a sibling. By the time they ask for help, many are already experiencing stress, poor mental health or financial pressure.

Everyone needs help to care. The right support can help us balance caring and work or education commitments, stay physically and mentally healthy, have space to recharge and a financial safety net that gives us peace of mind – so we can care well. Helping carers find support earlier remains one of the most important things we do.

This year we:

Supported
14,778 carers

Supported
10% of carers
who came to Carers First within their first year of caring

Supported
5,837 people
who came to Carers First for the first time

Reached
33%
within 1-3 years of their caring role

Our Strategic Objectives

Objective 1: Helping carers find support sooner

Finding carers where they already are

Carers First works with hospitals, schools, GP practices, councils and community organisations to identify carers earlier and connect them with support before they reach crisis.

Our Hospital in Reach service in Lincolnshire continued to demonstrate the value of supporting carers at key moments in the healthcare journey. By working alongside hospital teams during admissions and discharge planning, we were able to identify carers sooner and help them access ongoing support once they returned home.

At the same time, our communications campaigns continued encouraging carers to recognise themselves as carers and seek help. Young Carers Action Day reached thousands of people through schools, partners, media and digital channels (including 91,000 website visits), shining a spotlight on the experiences of young carers and encouraging families and professionals to identify children who may need support.

Together, these partnerships mean carers are finding us sooner, and receiving support before challenges become crises.



Ivy's story



"Carers First has helped me meet other young carers who understand what my life is like."

Nine-year-old Ivy helps care for her younger brother, who has autism and additional needs. Like many young carers, she often puts someone else's needs before her own. Sometimes she misses out on spending time with friends or worries that classmates don't understand why life at home is different.

Through Carers First, Ivy discovered something every young person deserves, a place where she could simply be herself. Young Carers groups gave her the opportunity to make friends, build confidence and spend time with other young people who understood her experiences.

For Ivy, support wasn't just about activities. It was about feeling recognised, understood and less alone. For us, her story is a reminder that identifying young carers early helps protect childhood as well as supporting families.

> "I love getting to know other people that are in the same situation as me."



Looking ahead

Next year we'll continue strengthening partnerships with GPs, hospitals, schools, employers and community organisations so that more carers recognise themselves sooner and receive support before they reach crisis.

Our Strategic Objectives



2

Developing innovative partnerships and programmes that increase our impact

Supporting carers has never been something one organisation can do alone.

Every carer's journey touches many different services, from hospitals and GP practices to schools, employers, community groups and local charities. By working together, we can identify carers earlier, provide more joined-up support and create opportunities that improve wellbeing and reduce isolation.

This year, partnership working enabled us to reach more carers, develop innovative services and respond to carers' changing needs in new and creative ways.

This year we:

- Developed innovative wellbeing programmes with trusted partners
- Introduced an AI-powered digital assistant to improve access to support
- Expanded Men's Breakfast Clubs to engage more male carers
- Strengthened partnerships with NHS organisations, councils and community groups
- Secured new funding to help us reach underrepresented communities.



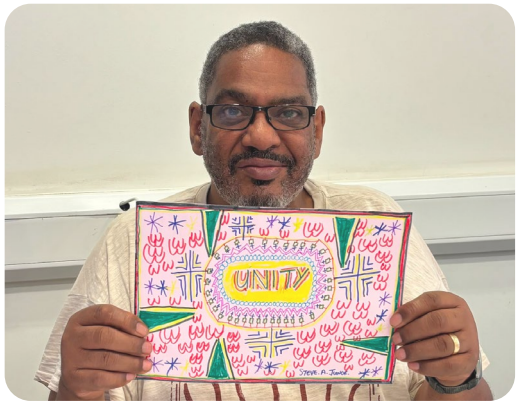
Objective 2: Developing innovative partnerships and programmes that increase our impact

Creativity that supports wellbeing

One of the year's most successful collaborations was our work with CREATE, the UK's leading charity empowering lives, reducing isolation and enhancing wellbeing through the creative arts.

Together, we delivered a programme of creative workshops in Croydon, giving carers the opportunity to step away from their caring responsibilities, learn new skills and reconnect with themselves through creativity.

Whether experimenting with pottery, collage or printmaking, carers found space to relax, express themselves and connect with others who understood their experiences.



One participant described the sessions as:

"Inspiring, interesting and therapeutic."

The partnership also demonstrated the value of learning together. By combining CREATE's expertise in creative arts with Carers First's understanding of carers' lived experiences, we developed an approach that delivered lasting benefits for participants while creating a model that can inform future collaborations.

Financial advice that alleviates pressure

In Waltham Forest, London, our Benefits Advisor played a significant role in strengthening carers' financial stability and alleviating pressure on families. A total of 142 carers were supported, resulting in 482 individual advice interactions across a broad range of benefit entitlements. Through this targeted and specialist support, carers and their households achieved a combined income gain of £225,754.

Our Strategic Objectives

Objective 2: Developing innovative partnerships and programmes that increase our impact

Innovation that reaches more carers

Innovation is helping us make support more accessible than ever before. This year we introduced an AI-powered assistant to our website, enabling carers to find trusted information and guidance quickly, whenever they need it. Launched in March 2026, we had 157 live webchats in that first month.

While digital tools will never replace personal support, they are helping more carers access advice, navigate services and take the first step towards getting the help they need.

Alongside this, our Men's Breakfast Clubs continued to grow, providing welcoming spaces where male carers can meet others who understand their experiences. For many men, these informal groups offer an easier way to connect, share challenges and build supportive friendships while reducing loneliness and isolation.

Together, these initiatives show how Carers First continues to adapt its services to meet carers where they are—whether that's online, in their local community or through shared interests.

Stronger together

The strongest partnerships don't simply deliver services; they create lasting change.

One inspiring partnership during the year was with Training2Care. Building on the success of immersive dementia training previously delivered in Lincolnshire through National Lottery funding, Training2Care generously donated a session to Medway, with a dementia bus experience.

Nearly 30 people attended the virtual dementia tour, which uses technology inside a specially adapted van to create the disorientating conditions those with dementia may experience.

Attendees dealt with sensory equipment, such as coloured lights, loud sounds through headphones, glasses, gloves and spiked insoles.

Those who attended shared how the training gave them a deeper understanding of dementia, learning that dementia is far more than memory loss or behaviour changes. The experience also received high satisfaction scores (average 8.16/10, with 68% rating 9 or 10).

"It was really amazing to understand what it is to be inside the shoes of somebody with dementia. It's a real good eye-opener….it was not what I expected at all."



Looking ahead

Next year we'll continue building partnerships that help us reach more carers, strengthen communities and develop innovative services shaped by carers' experiences. Our new volunteer community link and carer champion roles will work closely in local communities alongside community groups and organisations. We will expand our work with employers offering specialist employment advice and support, and structured employer engagement.



3

Delivering the highest quality support to help carers thrive

Being a carer can be rewarding, but it can also be exhausting.

Many carers put the needs of others before their own, often sacrificing time with friends and family, opportunities at work or school, and even their own health and wellbeing.

Without the right support, caring can become isolating and overwhelming. Being a carer is a constant juggle – balancing work, medical appointments, food shopping, paying bills, picking up medication, cleaning, and providing emotional and physical support.

At Carers First, we believe every carer deserves the opportunity not just to cope, but to thrive.

Whether through practical advice, emotional support, counselling, wellbeing activities or simply connecting with others who understand, our services help carers feel more confident, more resilient and better equipped to navigate the challenges of caring.

This year we:

Provided
12,024
carers with 1-2-1 support

Welcomed
2,388 carers
to groups and wellbeing activities

Helped
90% of carers
feel more confident and informed in their caring role

Helped
92% of carers
feel more resilient in their caring role

Achieved
Excellence for Carers
accreditation from Carers Trust

Our Strategic Objectives

Objective 3: Delivering the highest quality support to help carers thrive

Time to breathe

Sometimes the greatest gift we can give a carer is permission to focus on themselves.

Throughout the year we created opportunities for carers to step away from their caring responsibilities, connect with others and enjoy experiences that improve wellbeing and reduce isolation.

In Merton, organised visits to Kew Gardens gave carers the chance to spend time outdoors, meet new people and enjoy a day without the constant demands of caring.

Every detail was carefully planned, from accessible transport to refreshments, removing the practical barriers that often prevent carers from taking part. One participant told us:

> *"It was lovely to go out and not have to think about anything because everything was so well planned."*

Another simply said: *"Walking around Kew Gardens, I felt so relaxed."*

For many carers, these weren't simply days out. They were opportunities to recharge, build confidence and remember that their own wellbeing matters too.

The power of shared experience



One of the things carers tell us they value most is meeting people who truly understand. Across our services, carers came together through coffee mornings, peer support groups, wellbeing sessions and community activities that reduced loneliness and created lasting friendships.

Through the year, 1,132 events, community activities and support groups took place across our services; welcoming over 2,300 carers who attended, with many going to regular weekly and monthly sessions.

Our Strategic Objectives

Objective 3: Delivering the highest quality support to help carers thrive

These events and groups provide much more than information. They offer reassurance, practical advice and a sense of belonging—reminding carers that they are never alone.

In Essex, we offer a counselling service to carers who need support with their mental health. The service has proven invaluable to many carers across Essex, with our measurement tool CORE-10, which equates a numerical figure to someone's psychological wellbeing where the higher the score the greater the distress, consistently showing a reduction in score between the first and last meeting with our counsellors.

In the year, the highest average decrease in carers' CORE-10 score was 7.6 points, whilst the industry standard is 6.3 points, meaning we are consistently performing better than the industry standard to reduce carers' distress.

One parent carer caring for their 19-year-old child who has an ASD diagnosis, mental health difficulties and substance (mis)use says;

> *"Having the counselling has been a big reminder that being in a caring role is incredibly isolating and mentally draining. This kind of support is something that should be available to all carers as an ongoing service, regardless of their financial situation."*

And a partner carer caring for her husband with complex mental health needs says; **"Since the counselling sessions, I have felt stronger and more resilient. I have regained back my control and where I want to be. My anxieties have eased and I have found the enjoyment back in my life again. Thank you so much... I felt so lost and vulnerable in my first session. My counsellor has helped me to feel like 'me' again. Thank you!"**



By creating welcoming, inclusive spaces where carers can share experiences, we are helping people build resilience and confidence long after individual sessions have ended.

Steve and John's stories





Full-time carers

No two caring journeys are the same, but many carers share the same feelings of uncertainty, loneliness and exhaustion.

Steve became the main carer for his mother after she was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. As her condition progressed, caring became increasingly demanding and he struggled to find people who understood what he was experiencing.

> "I meet other carers at the carers' centre; I find it really helpful. Even if they're caring for someone different, we can all find something to relate to."

Through Carers First, Steve found practical support, opportunities to take a break and, perhaps most importantly, a community of carers who understood.

John's journey began when he cared full-time for his wife after she was diagnosed with early-onset Alzheimer's disease.

He was introduced to Carers First during a hospital discharge and describes that moment as life-changing.

> "Carers First have been a lifeline for me."

Even after his wife's death, John continues to attend a Carers First male support group, offering encouragement, understanding and lived experience to other men on their caring journeys.

Their stories remind us that high-quality support isn't defined by a single conversation or service. It is about being there throughout every stage of the caring journey—helping carers feel recognised, connected and supported whenever they need us.

Looking ahead

Next year we'll continue expanding opportunities for carers to connect, improve their wellbeing and access personalised support that fits around their lives. We will implement our new Quality Standards and What Matters to Carers, following consultation with carers and staff about what good support looks like. We will focus on improving engagement and co-production with carers, with one opportunity being carers helping to shape the future of our charity and services for our next three-year organisational strategy.



4

Championing talent, diversity and lived experience

Everything we achieve starts with people.

Every conversation, every support group, every piece of advice and every moment of reassurance begins with colleagues, volunteers and carers who are committed to making a difference.

Many of them also have personal experience of caring.

It means carers are often speaking to someone who genuinely understands the challenges they are facing and can offer support with compassion as well as expertise

This year we continued improving the accessibility of our services, developing more inclusive communications and strengthening our reach into underrepresented communities.

By investing in our people and creating an inclusive organisation where everyone feels valued, we're strengthening the support we provide to every carer who turns to us.

This year we:

Worked alongside
136
registered volunteers

Volunteers contributed more than
2,000 hours
of their time

Volunteers helped support more than
2,700 carers

Championed
8%
of colleagues to enrol on Level 3 and Level 5 courses to support their development

Enabled
86%
of staff to feel proud to work for Carers First

Achieved
94%
of staff saying they enjoy the work they do

Our Strategic Objectives

Objective 4: Championing talent, diversity and lived experience

Lived experience makes a difference

One of Carers First's greatest strengths is the number of colleagues and volunteers who have caring experience of their own. Almost half (43%) of our staff have personal experience of caring.

Their first-hand understanding of the emotions, challenges and uncertainty of caring helps build trust from the very first conversation. Carers tell us they feel listened to, understood and reassured that they are not facing their journey alone.

Lived experience also shapes how we design and improve our services, ensuring the voices of carers remain at the heart of everything we do.



Nicky's story



When Nicky's daughter, Carly, was diagnosed with the rare genetic condition WARS2 after years of uncertainty, her family's life changed forever.

Like many parent carers, she became an expert overnight—navigating appointments, therapies and assessments while balancing the emotional impact of caring for a child with complex needs.

Finding Carers First gave her more than advice. It gave her a community of people who understood. Today, Nicky has come full circle.

She now works as a Carer Support Adviser, using her own experiences to support other parent carers beginning similar journeys.

> "Working for Carers First has been really good for my emotional wellbeing. I've got a really good team around me."



She knows that sometimes the most important thing she can offer isn't an answer—it's understanding.

> *"When you speak to carers, I feel like I understand. With that, the whole demeanour of that carer changes and they open up."*

Her story demonstrates the power of lived experience. By turning personal experience into professional support, she is helping other carers feel recognised, heard and hopeful.

Our Strategic Objectives

Objective 4: Championing talent, diversity and lived experience

Building an organisation where everyone belongs to make life better for carers

In October 2025 we won the Workplace Champion award at Carers UK's first-ever awards ceremony, a celebration of remarkable individuals and organisations across the UK who make life better for unpaid carers.

The Workplace Champion Award was presented to Sheena Goodey, Service Manager for Lincolnshire Carers Service, where Carers First is a key partner.

She received her award at a glittering awards ceremony held at Plaisterer's Hall, in London, hosted by actor and comedian Stephen Mangan.

On receiving the award, Sheena said:

> *Being awarded the Carers UK Workplace Champion means more to me than I can put into words. Supporting working carers is something I've been passionate about for many years - not just because of my role, but because I also juggle work and caring responsibilities.*

> *To be recognised for the work I do supporting colleagues within Carers First and organisations across Lincolnshire makes me proud to be in a role where I feel that I can truly make a difference.*

According to Carers UK, the award is presented to an employee who, at any level in their organisation, can show that they have gone above and beyond to raise awareness and tackle stigma of carers and caring issues in their workplace.

Sheena was nominated by Carers First for supporting carers, raising awareness, and driving positive change to ensure carers are valued.



Looking ahead

Next year we'll continue investing in our people, strengthening opportunities for carers to shape our services and expanding volunteering so that even more people can share their skills, experience and compassion.

Next year is the last year of funding from National Lottery Awards for All to recruit volunteers from diverse, under-represented communities to champion and raise awareness of Carers First in their communities. This will help us build stronger relationships with communities and carers who may have faced barriers to accessing support.

Because when we invest in the people behind Carers First, we strengthen the support available to every carer.

5

Grow and diversify our income to enable us to achieve more for carers

The need for unpaid carers has never been greater.

Across every community we serve, more people are taking on caring responsibilities, often with increasingly complex needs and against a backdrop of growing pressure on health and social care services.

Two in three of us will care for someone important to us at some point in our lives and there's a 50:50 chance that any one of us will become a carer by the time we reach our 50s. Two children in every classroom already have to take on caring responsibilities.

Meeting that challenge means more than delivering excellent support today. It means building an organisation that is resilient, innovative and ready to support even more carers in the years ahead.

Throughout 2025–26, we continued to diversify our income base and to respond to increasing demand, complexity and change in the external environment. We built positive relationships with commissioners, secured major new contracts, and adapted quickly to challenges in voluntary income. While we are financially resilient, there is always pressure on fundraising and funding, and we continue to identify new sources of income and strategic partnerships.

In the year we also strengthened the foundations that will enable Carers First to continue growing its impact—investing in partnerships, digital technology, organisational resilience and balancing innovation with sustainable growth so we can be there for more carers, whenever they need us.

Our Strategic Objectives

Objective 5: Grow and diversify our income to enable us to achieve more for carers

Our financial performance

Income

£5,234,299

2025/26	**£5,234,299**
2024/25	**£5,289,243**

Expenditure

£5,116,750

Net surplus

£175,525

We maintained key external quality and compliance standards, including reaccreditation for ISO 9001 Quality Management, Cyber Essentials Plus and NHS Data Security and Protection Toolkit.

Together, these achievements reflect our relentless focus on quality, continuous improvement, and delivering the best possible outcomes for the carers we support.



This year we:

Sought essential backing

- Applied to the National Lottery to expand our work supporting carers into employment and improve digital access to services

Retained and developed

- Successfully retained, after a competitive process, our Southend contract to provide services for Adults and Young Carers; and mobilised a new carers service in Croydon to provide increased face-to-face and localised support to carers within the London Borough

Acquired vital assistance

- Received support from Legal & General to strengthen services for young carers across our communities

Welcomed support from the community

- From cheering on runners at the Lincoln Half Marathon and Lincoln 10k, to fundraising with local Tesco and Co-Op branches, to receiving funds from cream teas; these and more all help strengthen our local presence and support for carers in the community

Strengthened planning for the future

- Received a generous legacy gift, which will contribute to the charity's long-term financial sustainability, and demonstrating how gifts in wills help us to plan for the future

Brought new understanding

- Migrated to email platform HubSpot, giving us better insight into carers' needs and helping us deliver more personalised communications.



Objective 5: Grow and diversify our income to enable us to achieve more for carers

Investing in lasting impact

Every successful funding bid, every new partnership and every contract renewal helps us do one thing—support more carers.

This year brought significant investment in our future. It saw the final year of our three-year National Lottery funded Helping Carers to Thrive Project, where we co-produced nine targeted Programmes of Support tailored to the unique needs of unpaid carers in certain caring situations; such as dementia, addiction, mental health, end-of-life and autism. The project achieved its outcome targets of reaching more carers and more consistent offer of support with;

- **110 web pages and resources, toolkits, training materials and structured learning opportunities**
- **112,000 views of Programme of Support webpages showing strong engagement with information and learning**
- **5,538 carers subscribed to our Caring Confidently email learning, and 8.57 out of 10 attendees to the course reported an increased awareness of support networks**
- **The hospital discharge email series reached 357 carers in its early stages**

Building on this success, this year we applied for further National Lottery funding to run a two-year Helping Carers Thrive – Employment & Digital Inclusion Project. These two new 'super' programmes of support will address the persistent challenges experienced by carers of juggling employment with caring, and/or lack of digital access. The Employment Programme will focus on helping carers stay in work, raising carers' awareness of workplace rights, reducing risk of lost income. It will also provide support for those returning to work. The Digital Inclusion Programme will help carers gain digital confidence to navigate online services, access online savings, stay connected and manage care using technology.

Together, these programmes will enable us to significantly expand our current offer and to deliver scalable, innovative support, strengthening long-term organisational resilience.

Whilst in Southend, significant progress was made in the year in building relationships and engaging with over 100 local organisations to develop partnerships offering discounts, wellbeing activities, mental health support, and increased awareness of carers in the workplace. Together, these initiatives are strengthening community connections, raising the visibility of carers, and valuing the vital role carers play.

Our Strategic Objectives

Objective 5: Grow and diversify our income to enable us to achieve more for carers

Building stronger connections

Strong services rely on strong organisations, relationships and connections.

We have a number of individual donors who are regular supporters and we remain committed to building and strengthening these relationships.

Through the year we ran fundraising appeals, such as our annual Christmas Appeal, providing an opportunity to engage with supporters and demonstrate the impact of supporter's gifts to our work.

Building connections in our communities is extremely important and we are grateful to supporters and volunteers who genuinely go the extra mile for carers. For example, on a very cold Tuesday in January, the Southend team, supported by a group of fantastic volunteers, attended a Southend United home fixture to fundraise and raise awareness of Carers First within the local community. This opportunity builds on the strong and supportive partnership developed with Southend United FC over the past year and reflects the club's continued commitment to championing unpaid carers across the community.

Whilst in Haringey, the team helped a single parent caring for her daughter with Type 1 diabetes while managing her own health needs, to access a Carers Trust grant. The carer was struggling financially and unaware of the support available to her. Our Haringey team helped her through the application process and secured £300 towards a laptop for her daughter. The funding will enhance her daughter's education and independence, while also allowing the carer to regain access to her own phone for managing appointments, bills and social connections.

Reflecting on the support received, she said;

> "I wish I'd found Carers First much sooner. The support, patience and communication made a real difference, and something I didn't think was possible became a reality."



Looking ahead

Our ambition is simple: to enable carers to thrive in their role and achieve the balance in their lives they wish to achieve.

Over the coming year, we will advance this ambition by diversifying and growing our voluntary income, strengthening the infrastructure that underpins long-term stability, and expanding the partnerships and services, such as employability initiatives, that carers rely on. None of this would be possible without our supporters. Their generosity enables us to be there for carers when they need us and to help more people thrive.

Looking to the future

Every year, more people take on caring responsibilities—often unexpectedly and with little preparation.

As demand for support continues to grow, so does our determination to ensure no carer has to face that journey alone.

The year ahead will bring new opportunities to reach carers earlier, strengthen partnerships and develop innovative ways of delivering support. We will continue investing in our people, embracing technology where it enhances carers' experience and listening closely to those with lived experience to shape the services of the future.



Our key priorities for the year ahead include:

- Continuing to strengthen partnerships with GPs, hospitals, schools, employers and community groups so more carers recognise themselves sooner and receive support before they reach crisis
- Growing our new volunteer community link and carer champion roles so we can work more closely in local communities alongside community groups and organisations
- Strengthening our strategic partnerships with employers as part of our new Programmes of Support Funding from the National Lottery
- Implementing the new Quality Standards and What Matters to Carers and focus on improving engagement and co-production with carers
- Growing and diversifying our voluntary income to enhance our services and support to carers
- Delivering the final year of our strategy whilst developing our new three-year strategy 2027-2030, involving carers, staff and stakeholders to help shape the future of the charity and our services



We look to the future with confidence, knowing that by working together with carers, volunteers, staff, partners and supporters, we can continue building a society where every carer has the opportunity to thrive.

Thank you

Behind every achievement in this report is a remarkable community of people.

To every unpaid carer who trusted us this year: thank you.

Thank you for allowing us to be part of your journey, for sharing your experiences so openly and for reminding us every day why this work matters. Your resilience, compassion and determination inspire everything we do.

To our staff and volunteers, thank you for the kindness, professionalism and commitment you bring to every conversation, every visit and every act of support. Whether working directly with carers or behind the scenes, your dedication changes lives every single day.

To our trustees, thank you for your leadership, guidance and unwavering commitment to our mission.

To our commissioners, funders, donors and partners, thank you for believing in the importance of supporting unpaid carers.

Your investment allows us to reach more people, develop new services and respond to the changing needs of carers across our communities.

And to the health professionals, schools, employers, local authorities, community organisations and charities who work alongside us, thank you for helping us identify carers earlier and ensuring they receive the support they deserve.

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

Essex County Council
CROYDON www.croydon.gov.uk
Haringey LONDON
Lincolnshire COUNTY COUNCIL
Medway COUNCIL
NHS Kent and Medway
Southend-on-Sea City Council
Waltham Forest
LONDON BOROUGH OF MERTON



Thank you to all our supporters and funders, including:

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W Garfield Weston FOUNDATION
JOHN SWIRE & SONS
THE NATIONAL LOTTERY
PETER HARRISON FOUNDATION
THE MERCERS' COMPANY

Carers First

Get involved

Good care is supported care.

By working together, we create a society where carers can thrive in their role and achieve the balance in their lives they wish to achieve.

Every action taken, every pound donated, every hour volunteered, every resource shared, every carer reached – it all helps to be there for more carers, earlier and throughout their caring journey.

Scan the QR code to get involved

Get in touch

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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