M E D I A R E L E A S E

WORK-CARE BALANCE SET TO DELIVER BIG RETURNS, WITH LIBRARY STAFF TO TRIAL INNOVATIVE WORKPLACE PROGRAM FOR UNPAID CARERS

A new workplace program where unpaid carers can balance their additional caring responsibilities with work duties is being trialled by State Library Victoria.

The CARE@WORK program developed by Different Journeys, a not-for-profit organisation that aims to create more inclusive, flexible and supportive workplaces for carers through their social enterprise program, is commencing at the Library this month.

Latest statistics from the ABS (2022) Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers show one in eight Australians currently has carer duties for a family member or friend with additional care needs.

According to Different Journeys CEO Mel Spencer OAM, balancing work and care can be challenging for carers.

“Without adequate support in the workplace, carers report higher stress that impacts their health and wellbeing and thus their productivity at work,” she said.

“As a result, carers are often forced to reduce their work hours, pass up on work opportunities or quit work altogether. Carers lose income and professional engagement and organisations lose talent and experience.

“Basically, it’s a lose/lose situation. So, the Library is to be congratulated for its breakthrough approach to improving workplace outcomes,” said Ms Spencer.

State Library Victoria CEO Paul Duldig said Different Journeys had helped the Library team build a deeper understanding of the challenges facing its carer employees.

“We developed practical ways to better support carers in our workforce, reinforcing our commitment to an inclusive, compassionate workplace. We expect this will not only boost productivity but also improve employee retention,” he said.

“Findings from the pilot phase of the State Library Victoria CARE@WORK program have shown carers in the workplace are highly passionate, highly skilled and love their place of work. Through balancing work and care, our employee carers have been shown to be resilient, flexible and adaptable problem solvers,” said Mr Duldig.

“Many employees struggle to balance the demands of work and caring,” said Ms Spencer.

“This struggle ultimately impacts an organisation’s bottom line by reducing workplace productivity and organisational knowledge when carers quit or are unable to perform at their best due to caring duties.

“Through the CARE@WORK program, the Library retains highly skilled staff, reduces absenteeism, increases workplace flexibility and gains a reputation as an employer of choice,” said Ms Spencer.

“We have been able to identify carers in the Library workforce and provide tools and supports to improve a carer’s ability to care for themselves, as well as the person they care for. We have worked alongside State Library Victoria to examine their workplace policies and practices and redesign roles and systems which enhance employee productivity and flexibility,” she said.

Further information: Adele Richards, Operations Assistant, Different Journeys
adele@differentjourneysautism.com

Further information about State Library Victoria: Jacqueline Wilson, Communications Manager, State Library Victoria, jwilson@slv.vic.gov.au

BACKGROUNDER

Impact of caring duties on paid work
2022 National Carer Survey:

- 1 in 3 carers had been forced to retire, left their paid job or stopped looking for work to care
- More than 1 in 4 carers had reduced their working hours at some stage
- Many carers made other trade-offs to focus on caring i.e. changing industry or occupation, taking a job below their skillset or turning down a new job or promotion
- 74 per cent of respondents said paid work provides important social connections outside their caring role
- 82 per cent of respondents reported paid work gives them a sense of purpose

What the research says: carer-friendly businesses are better businesses
Carer-flexible workplaces are better workplaces – they improve employer/employee relations and the bottom line:

- Improved staff retention
- Reduced recruitment and training costs
- Reduced stress, sick leave and absenteeism
- Improved staff morale and engagement
- Increased productivity

Future workforce management
Creating a carer-friendly workplace helps organisations better resource and future proof their business. As a company's workforce ages, employees will be increasingly taking on caring responsibilities:

- People with disability live longer due to advances in medical technology
- Australians are retiring later
- More and more Australians are choosing to age at home

Staff retention and cost savings
Most working carers are aged between 45-64 years with substantial skills, experience and corporate knowledge
Replacing a competent staff member can cost around a third of the employee's annual salary

Retaining skilled workers, rather than recruiting and training new staff, brings substantial savings for employers

Annual cost of turnover = (Hiring + Onboarding + Training) x (Number of Employees x Annual Turnover Percentage) + Lost Productivity

Attracting Talent
Conflicting demands: "career v carer" responsibilities often prevent carers applying for full time roles
Promoting a carer-positive environment with appropriate flexible conditions:

- Significantly expands an employer's recruitment pool – 40 per cent of employers are currently reporting difficulties in recruiting
- Contributes to an organisation's Employee Value Proposition
- Adds a strong competitive advantage where labour markets are competitive and/or niche skills hard to source

How the CARE@WORK program works
The CARE@WORK program strengthens a workforce by:

- Creating systems which acknowledge and support carers in the workplace
- Raising awareness of carers in the workplace through information sessions
- Educating managers about the needs of carers in their teams
- Building managerial capacity and capability to support carer employees
- Advising on embedding carer friendly policies and procedures into business practice
- Listening to what carers say, and propose practical, informed solutions
- Recognising and acknowledging skills carers bring to the workplace from their 'lived experiences', such as time management, negotiation skills, empathy and decision making
- Building a safe environment for carers to share their experiences, free from stigma and disparity.

The development of the CARE@WORK program was funded by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, Victorian Government.

0490 774 068
welcome@differentjourneysautism.com
www.differentjourneysautism.com