



LISTENING TO THE VOICES OF EMPLOYED HOME CARERS



“All things considered, it's a fantastic job. One of the few jobs where you very often start and end your working day by being given a heartfelt smile!”

March 2021



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1 Executive Summary

Whilst we heard from relatively few people who work as paid carers in people's homes there was a consistency of what we heard. **The message from this report is that homecare workers are proud of what they do, want to be valued both in monetary terms and by other professionals, and value more time to provide quality care.**

Time

Paid carers told us that paid time was needed to:

- provide person centered quality care.
- build a relationship with the person they cared for and their family.

“...the work-load is a lot and when you want to spend more time being a companion you know you won't get the work done”

Being valued and respected

Paid carers told us that they did not always feel valued by their employer or other professionals supporting their clients:

- A sense of not being valued by employer - low pay, not enough support, “*don't feel valued*”, isolation. Leadership and management of Homecare Agencies have a big impact on the employees' sense of being valued¹.
- Other professionals respecting care workers and valuing their input and knowledge of the person's needs - equality within the care circle of services.


“...love my job but it doesn't get enough recognition for the hard work and the pay doesn't reflect the job that is being carried out”

Pride and rewards

Paid carers told us that they have pride in what they do and that this is a rewarding job:

- Pride in what carers do and the impact their care has on the individual and family.
- How rewarding to the carer that caring for people is, even if others do not appear to value their work.

¹ Note that 7 out of 8 Homecare Agencies rated by the Care Quality Commission as Outstanding in Oxfordshire December 2020 are rated outstanding in the Well Led category.



“...Caring for someone how you would want someone to care for a member of your own family, look at each person as you would your own...Someone once told me not anyone can be a carer you have to love the job to do your job amazingly”

COVID-19

The coronavirus pandemic has undoubtedly caused additional pressures for carers.

We heard about:

- concern for the wellbeing and safety of their clients
- impact on clients regarding isolation, loneliness
- their responsibility to keep themselves and clients safe
- initial challenges around accessing PPE, and the cost
- additional workloads

2 Recommended actions

Commissioners and providers of homecare:

- Conduct an annual survey of paid homecare workers to understand the challenges and successes of this service from the worker perspective.
- We recommend that Oxfordshire County Council and any related Industry Body to commission third party research into what would be a fairer formula for working out visit times for both carers and their customers.
- Work together to promote the role and value of paid homecare workers to the public and within the health and care community.
- Set the pay rate for homecare workers at the National Living Wage and consider paying the Real Living Wage
- Ensure that all paid homecare workers have equality of access to PPE.

3 Background

Between July and October 2020 Healthwatch Oxfordshire carried out a survey aimed at listening to the experiences of people who are paid to care for someone in their home. We wanted to give a platform to people who are caring for some of the most vulnerable in our community, and to understand the challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic brought into their work: what it has been like keeping themselves and the people they care for safe, and how well supported they have been by the wider health and social care system.

Methodology

We circulated this survey through our newsletter, on social media, and to all home care agencies in Oxfordshire, following up by email and telephone call. Furthermore, we delivered paper copies to the Europa Welcome service in East Oxford and put posters up on community notice boards across Oxfordshire, as well as sharing with online community groups. We also circulated to many churches and faith groups in the county. We also published an article in the Oxford Mail, and publicised it on BBC Radio Oxford.

Despite all of this, we heard from just 39 people. This could itself be indicative of how difficult it is to reach employed home carers, particularly those who are self-employed; it could also be an indication of workload, or that maybe home carers don't see any purpose in taking part in something like this. Not every respondent replied to every question, the number of respondents to each question is shown in brackets e.g. (n38).

Who we heard from

Of the people who responded (n38) to our questionnaire:

- 60.5% said they worked for a home care agency or organisation
- 18.4% said they are self-employed.
- 18.4% described themselves as a personal assistant to an individual
- 10.4% saying they are a carer to a private individual
- 2.6% of respondents said they work for Oxfordshire County Council.

80% of the people we heard from (n37) identify as female, 17% male, and 2.9% stating that they preferred not to say.

Respondents (n35) were aged between 18 and 74 - with a broad span across age groups, but most people being aged between 35 and 64.

Care needs of people cared for

We heard from people (n38) who provide care to a wide range of needs. The respondents were able to select up to nine care needs and an analysis of this data shows that:

76.3% of respondents were providing care to a person with a disability

Over 60% of respondents were providing care to:

- an elderly person (63.2%)
- someone with a long-term illness (60.5%)
- someone with a mental health condition (60.5%)

Over 50% of respondents were providing care to:

- Someone with dementia (55.3%)
- Someone with problems seeing or hearing (52.6%)

Over 40% of respondents were also providing care to:

- Someone with a terminal illness (47.7%)
- Someone with a learning disability or difficulty (47.7%)

Note - some individuals receiving care could have more than one care need.

4 Providing good home care

What does good home care look like?

access authorities **care** cared carer carers caring centred clean client
clients clothes **comfortable** control deliver dignity elderly family fed feels **good**
happy helping individual input job keeping life limited lives local making
medical meeting patient **people person** plan **positive** preferences professional
professionals **providing** quality reliable **require safe** safely service spend **staff support**
supporting terrible trained training treat treatment watered

The overwhelming message we heard from carers is that a **person-centered approach is the most important value of good care**. Carers describing this as “*Holistic, gentle, patient focused, not time limited, lasting positive memories for the family*” and “*Good home care is a bespoke, person centered plan of support...*” while another explains:

“Caring for and supporting the individual in a person-centered way with their input into the care plan; keeping the individual safe whilst supporting them to do what they can; supporting the person to maintain their dignity and respect and build and protect their self-esteem.”

Underpinning this includes:

- meeting a person’s needs
- forming and maintaining good relationships with the client and remaining focused on their wellbeing
- offering an empathic approach
- and having enough time to spend with their client.

One respondent simply said good home care is “*making sure the person is happy...*”, with another outlining that “*Good home care is the ability to care and treat someone in a way that you would like to be cared for yourself, with dignity.*” Another highlighted “*Having the time to spend with client...*” as one of the most fundamental aspects of good care.

This comment summed up the overall sentiment:

“Happy clients. Attention to detail. Going above and beyond to make sure everything is done and doing anything you can to make the later years of life as



happy and comfortable as possible. Being aware and noticing when things are wrong and dealing with it. Caring for someone how you would want someone to care for a member of your own family, look at each person as you would your own. And loving what you do is an absolute must. Someone once told me not anyone can be a carer you have to love the job to do your job amazingly.”

Other similar comments include:

“Conscientious, happy, connection between carer and cared for”

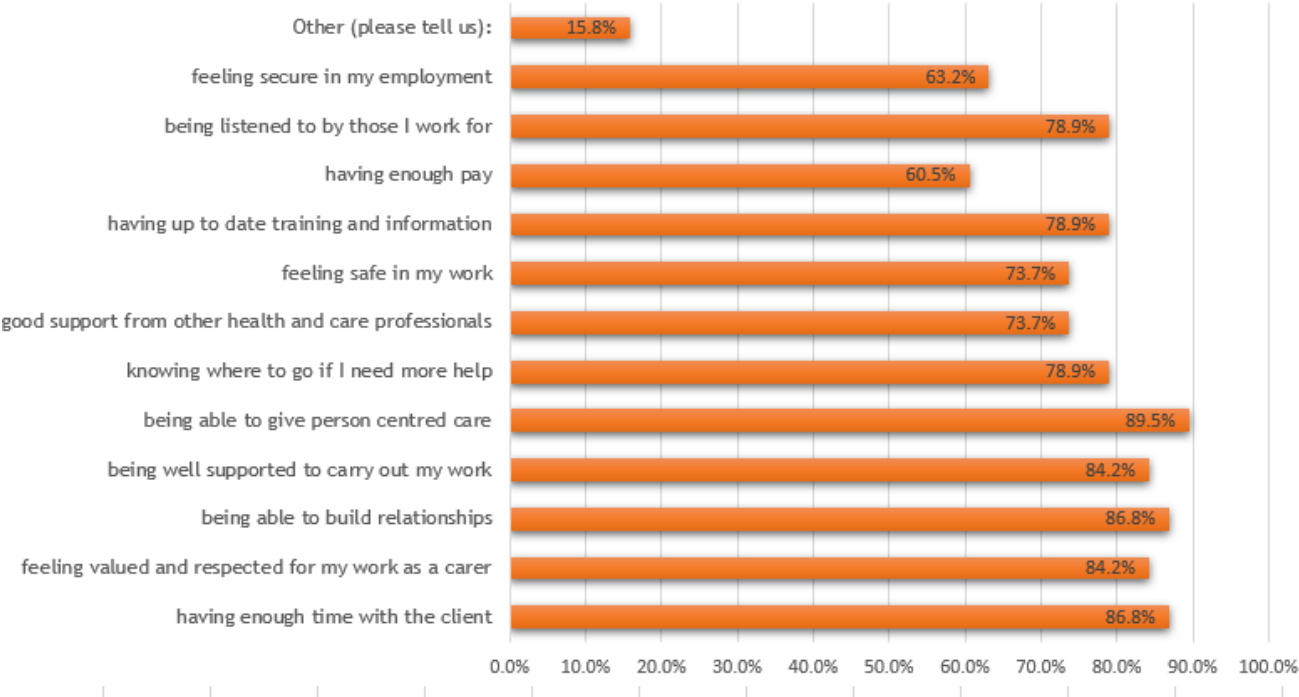
“Providing a safe, happy environment for my client; where they are well looked after, and all their personal and medical needs are met.”

Two further aspects that were highlighted were *“liaising with the family and other medical and support workers”* and having access to *“Better training, good information”*.

What support do home carers need?

We then asked about the support carers felt they needed to enable them to give good care (n38).

What support is important to help you to give good care?



Being able to form relationships, having enough time and being able to give person centered care featured highly, with feeling valued and respected in the role as a carer also frequently chosen.

'Other' support included "*Sick pay and payment for travel between visits*" and "*adequate equipment*".

We asked respondents to tell us what the most important aspect of support would be.

Two themes appear in the responses:

1. Support and communication from the employer and being given enough time with their clients was the most common answer
2. Training and support from families and the system.

Conversely when asking "What makes it difficult to give good care?" the top three of the options chosen were 'not enough time', 'not enough support' and 'don't feel valued in my work' together with 'low pay':

not enough time	56.8%
not enough support	43.2%
don't feel valued for my work	37.8%
low pay	35.1%
work stress	29.7%
feel isolated in my work	27.0%
not enough training	27.0%
negotiating with client's family members	24.3%
too much admin and paperwork	21.6%
not being able to make changes and suggestions about my work	21.6%
don't feel safe	18.9%
don't know where to turn when I need help	16.2%
abuse or racism	13.5%
worries about housing	8.1%
worries about immigration	5.4%

When exploring what has the most detrimental impact on the ability to give good care, time and workload were highlighted in the majority of responses, followed by lack of support from their employer, and lack of support from the client's families.

One respondent argues that "*Pay by the minute is not a person-centered way to deliver care*", while another stressed that there was "*too much intervention from family members, not enough support from the home care agency*". Another clearly stated, "*Time is always the issue*".

Similar comments include:

“The work-load is a lot and when you want to spend more time being a companion you know you won’t get the work done”

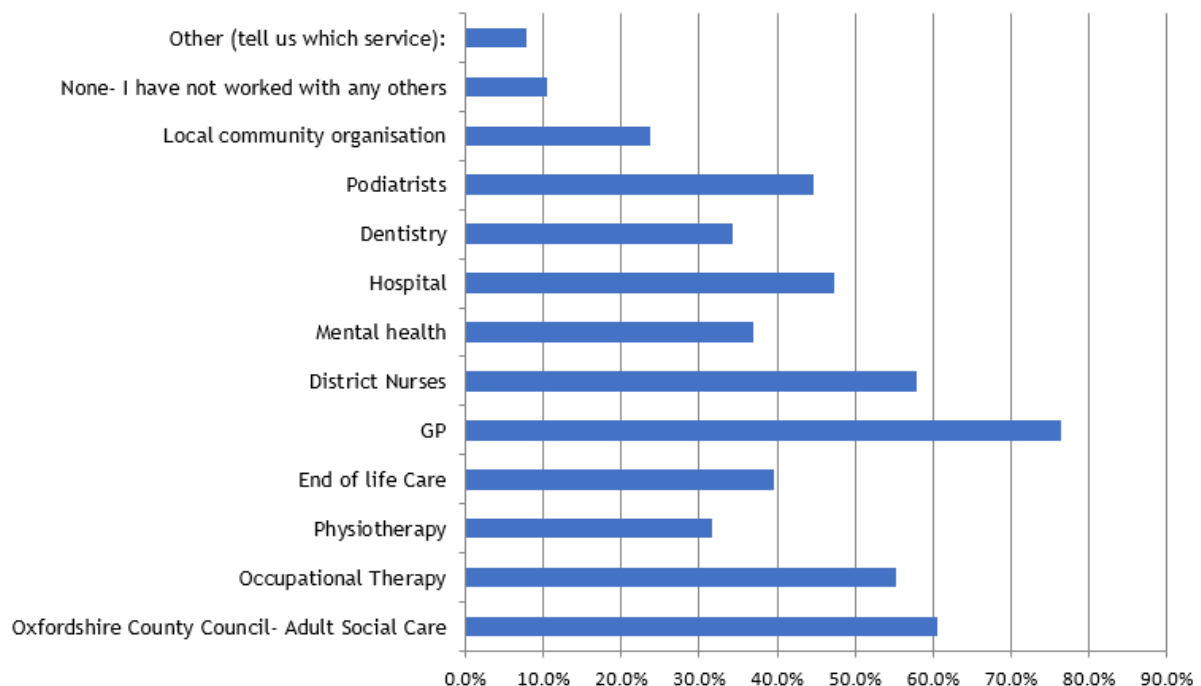
“Low pay, and low morale” and “...lack of respect and support to make me feel valued” also featured, as did *“having little use of necessary materials”*

“Exhausting rosters. Poor pay and conditions. The precariousness of the work”

5 Working with health and social care services


The next part of our survey (n38) focused on carers experience of working with other health and social care services when caring for their clients.

Which services (health and social care) you have worked with?



Additional services listed under ‘Other’ included *“speech and language therapist”* and *“private care”*.

We asked when they have linked with other services to support the people they care for, and what has worked well within that.



Good communication factored highly, with a third of respondents naming this as key for working well - underneath this were similar factors linked to teamwork, such as a supportive approach, being listened to, and sharing information.

“Agreed sharing of practices, ideas and knowledge.”

“The two-way relationship with the other services and their commitment to assisting the individual and me to find the best solution to the challenge.”

We asked what might need to be improved when linking with other services.

Many comments highlighted *“Communication”* and *“being kept in the loop properly”* as a factor for improvement. This was followed by comments lamenting a lack of joined up approach to care such as *“...overlapping visits...”* and *“disjointed care and overlapping of services...”*

The next most highlighted factor for improvement were comments around valuing the role of carer, equal to other health care professionals. One respondent specifically noted a *“Lack of respect for my knowledge of clients needs”* and a *“Judgmental and stand off-ish approach towards everyone else”*

“All services should be seen and recognized as important as one another to get positive outcomes. More work around ensuring that services are treated as equals in this way would help...”

“Other professionals respecting the input of care workers”

“The respect for our service and what we do.”

Just over 10% of respondents said that they did not feel anything needed to be improved, with a similar amount calling for improvement in both speed of assistance and understanding the client’s needs.

We then asked if there are any gaps in support for the people they care for.

Many respondents raised concerns about there being enough trained home carers to meet people’s needs. Comments mentioned a *“Lack of home care staff available in Oxford”* and that *“Some organisations are short-staffed in terms of carers”*, with one telling us *“...not all his hours are covered”*

Two respondents raised the issue of *“support for loneliness”* and *“Companionship”*

Two other carers raised specific issues around Oxfordshire County Council communications²: *“Quite often there is confusion around direct payments, personal budgets...”*; *“Council make their letters so hard to understand re funding applications”*

² See Healthwatch Oxfordshire Report on Oxfordshire County Council’s Financial Policy Review <https://healthwatchoxfordshire.co.uk/our-work/research-reports/>

6 The impact of COVID-19

We asked carers what issues and concerns had arisen during lockdown for them and the people they care for. The majority who left comments (n29) shared concern for the wellbeing and safety of their clients, expressing how *“Safety and maintaining good health are critical...”* and that it *“...has been really stressful and seen their anxiety levels increase...”*

We heard that *“Loneliness and isolation is huge issue for the clients”* and that *“just being confined to their house”* had had an impact, as well as *“The isolation and lack of social contact”*.

We also received feedback about anxiety regarding infection control, carers stating: *“I travel on public transport so concern over infecting clients”* and *“I was worried about myself possible getting the coronavirus and infecting my client”*; as well as the responsibility and impact of keeping themselves and their clients safe: *“It was challenging for the client and for me as a carer to be in shielding and unable to go out or see anyone.”*

Similarly, one carer described *“The paranoia of some of the visits,”* and another the pressure in regard to *“The risk of allowing someone into the home who could be carrying Covid without knowing”*

Some carers also spoke of the impact of both accessing and purchasing adequate PPE and testing. One person told us *“Self-employed carers have been excluded from all plans for testing and for PPE provision”* and that they needed *“Extra money needed to buy extra PPE”*

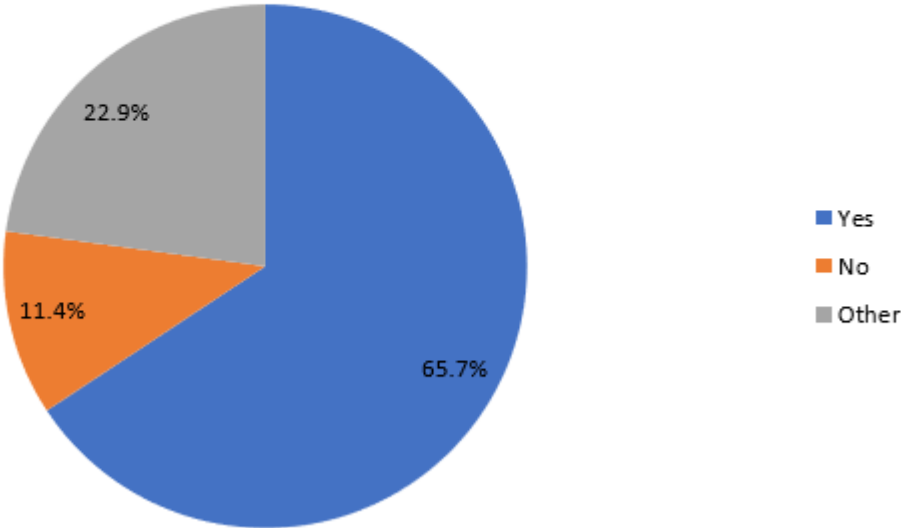
Conversely, one person responded: *“None, we were trained and provided with PPE”*.

Increased workload, exhaustion, and lack of access to other services were also mentioned in the responses.



We specifically asked carers about access to PPE:

Have you been provided with adequate protection (PPE equipment) to safely carry out your work during Covid-19?




Most respondents (n35) were satisfied that they had access to the PPE they needed, being *“Able to access it fairly quickly and have had enough supply”*, with one commenting that *“Our employer has done everything he can to make sure we always have the right PPE”*.

Two respondents lamented that it was hard at the beginning but observed that it had become easier over time, and three spoke about being able to get hold of PPE but finding other issues: *“Supply has been good although sizing and quality sometimes poor”*; *“sometimes we have had trouble sourcing specialist PPE”*. Another added that *“this was sourced privately by my organisation. Very little support from Local Authority or Central Government”*

Two respondents raised concerns about purchasing PPE through Oxfordshire County Council in that “...This turned out to be a very expensive exercise as they were charging 6 x higher in some cases...”

“It was hard back in March because we were asking for PPE for Oxfordshire local authority and we were being accused of overusing it. We had to pay a high price for it initially, but our boss made sure we had enough. She also made sure we had enough to change after each client as we can’t be expected to wear masks in between care calls when it was hot and we needed regular drinks. Those making the policies do not understand what it is like working in these conditions.”



Some carers told us that they had to obtain and fund PPE themselves and found additional barriers to this: *“being self-employed I purchase all my own work equipment and most places would only sell to agencies NHS and care homes. I found prices went up and things sold out and it was incredibly difficult. This was a very stressful time and at one point I almost felt like giving up”* and *“I was responsible for sourcing my own as for privately funded Clients. This was difficult as still requires professional healthcare standard but sellers were limiting to CQC registered practices”*

We then asked carers to tell us about their own health and wellbeing since the pandemic began.

Just over twenty percent (n32) reassured that there had been no detrimental impact to them personally, with comments like *“I’m fine”*, *“all is okay”* and *“it has not affected me personally”*.

However almost 45% talked about the stress and the impact of the increased workload, causing exhaustion and anxiety in some cases, reflecting in comments like *“I became tired, anxious and down”*, *“mentally tiring”* and simply *“exhausted”*

Concern for the health of themselves and others threaded through the responses to this question as well, with comments like *“I have been more aware of people around me and very concerned for the health of all my family and clients and “Obviously worried about transmitting it to the clients and family unwittingly.”*

One carer even spoke of *“Losing staff and family members as well as clients...”* and that it *“...takes its toll on all of us”* and another saying they had *“Contracted Covid-19”*

Isolation was named again as a factor.

One person stressed that working through lockdown had actually had a positive impact on them, by saying *“I think that being able to work really helped me. Being able to keep going and be ‘normal’!”*

Lastly, this comment summed up the general message beautifully:

“With all the stress of PPE worry when a client tested positive and the worry of my own family's safety it's been hard and a long few months. I have hit bottom and almost given up, but I have also seen how amazing the world has been at pulling together. How much my clients need me and, in a round-about way how much I need them too there's no better way of knowing you're doing something amazing until you look into the eyes of a sick or elderly person. And see just how much they appreciate you. And have come out of lockdown feeling very positive and lucky that we have as much as we do when it comes to health and care ❤️”



7 Carers' voices

Finally, we asked if there was anything else they would like to tell us about what it is like to be a carer. The lion's share of the responses to this question (n24) suggested that carers find their role incredibly rewarding, with comments like *"All things considered, it's a fantastic job. One of the few jobs where you very often start and end your working day by being given a heartfelt smile!"*

However, at the same time there is a sense of feeling undervalued, not respected, and underpaid for the level of skill and commitment required, and the positive impact carers have on the lives of the people they care for.

"I love my job but it doesn't get enough recognition for the hard work and the pay doesn't reflect the job that is being carried out."

"I love it and I am proud to do it. Not everyone can and it is a shame many people see it as low skilled and easy entry job"

"...The pay is not great and the hours can be unsociable but it's so rewarding"

"I am proud to be a home carer, I feel financially we are not recognised by the LA. We do not get paid a high enough hourly rate for the job we do."

"I would not change my job for anything but to be recognised with a decent wage above £9.50 an hour or £12 an hour at weekends would help"

We spoke to one carer in more depth about their experience, including some of their comments in an article which was published in The Oxford Mail on 20th October 2020. You can read an extract it below, or in full [online here](#).

An extract from The Oxford Mail article 20th October 2020

Healthwatch Oxfordshire is calling on employed home carers to share their views. By Tracey Rees, Chair Healthwatch Oxfordshire

Many of you, like my brother and I, will have a member of your family needing help to live at home. Home is where we all want to be and when we need extra help to do so we want to know that care will be good quality and really help us.

Recently, my brother and I have seen just how the carers for our mother have had to adapt the way they care for her. Both in respect of her limited mobility but also as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. We continue to be truly grateful for their care and compassion, which keeps mum where she wants to be.

We know there are hundreds of home carers in the county, doing an amazing job every day, but we rarely hear from them - and we want to change that!

We want to know what you think good home care looks like, and whether you are getting the help and support you need to deliver good care. We'd also like to hear what impact the coronavirus pandemic has had on how you do your job and on your own health and well-being.

Through our work we have already heard from **Alison** (whose name we have changed). Alison cares for the elderly as well as those with disabilities, dementia and long-term or terminal illnesses.

Alison says she loves helping people and describes what she does as the “*best job in the world*”, but she told us that a lack of support can make it harder for her to do that job.

She says it's difficult not knowing where to turn when she needs help, there are “*endless loops to jump through*” paperwork-wise, and that it's not always easy to get the help her clients need from other healthcare professionals.

The coronavirus pandemic has undoubtedly caused additional pressures for carers. Alison said keeping up with the ever-changing rules around PPE has been hard, and at times it has been difficult to source the PPE she needs. She also describes the huge issues of loneliness and isolation the pandemic has caused for the people she cares for.

What Alison has told us is echoed by many other carers who have so far completed our survey, and one of the real themes to emerge so far is how proud carers are to do their job.

“*Making a positive impact on the people we support*” and “*Making clients smile and feel safe*” are some of the comments we've had. Someone else told us: “*It's one of the few jobs where you often start and end your working day by being given a heart-felt smile.*”

Appendix one: Questionnaire

Employed carers in Oxfordshire- tell us your views

1. Your consent: This survey is ANONYMOUS. This means you don't have to say who you are, and you cannot be identified. Healthwatch Oxfordshire do make use of people's comments and stories in reports or on our website- We need to know if you are happy for your anonymous comments to be used in this way

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes, I am happy for my direct comments to be used in reports
<input type="checkbox"/>	No, I don't want my direct comments to be used in reports

2. Do you provide care for people in any the following?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Their home
<input type="checkbox"/>	A nursing or care home
<input type="checkbox"/>	Extra care housing or sheltered accommodation
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other (please specify): <input type="text"/>

3. Who do you work for? (tick all that apply)

<input type="checkbox"/>	Home care organisation
<input type="checkbox"/>	Home care agency
<input type="checkbox"/>	Carer to a private individual/ individuals
<input type="checkbox"/>	Personal Assistant (PA) to an individual
<input type="checkbox"/>	Self employed



<input type="checkbox"/>	Oxfordshire County Council
<input type="checkbox"/>	Casual/ informal paid care work
<input type="checkbox"/>	Bank caring role- multiple locations
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other (please tell us): <input type="text"/>

4. Tell us about the work do you do on a day to day basis

5. What makes you proud to be a carer?

6. Who do you provide care to? (tick all that apply)

<input type="checkbox"/>	A disabled person
<input type="checkbox"/>	Someone with a long term illness
<input type="checkbox"/>	Someone with dementia
<input type="checkbox"/>	An elderly person
<input type="checkbox"/>	Someone with problems seeing or hearing



<input type="checkbox"/>	Someone with a mental health condition
<input type="checkbox"/>	Someone with a learning disability or difficulty
<input type="checkbox"/>	Someone with a terminal illness
<input type="checkbox"/>	Someone with an alcohol or drug dependency
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other (please tell us):

7. Tell us what good care looks like to you?

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8. What support is important to help you to give good care? (tick any that apply)

<input type="checkbox"/>	having enough time with the client
<input type="checkbox"/>	feeling valued and respected for my work as a carer
<input type="checkbox"/>	being able to build relationships
<input type="checkbox"/>	being well supported to carry out my work
<input type="checkbox"/>	being able to give person centred care



<input type="checkbox"/>	knowing where to go if I need more help
<input type="checkbox"/>	good support from other health and care professionals
<input type="checkbox"/>	feeling safe in my work
<input type="checkbox"/>	having up to date training and information
<input type="checkbox"/>	having enough pay
<input type="checkbox"/>	being listened to by those I work for
<input type="checkbox"/>	feeling secure in my employment
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other (please tell us):

What is most important to you to support you to give good care?

--

9. What makes it difficult for you to give good care? (tick any that apply)

<input type="checkbox"/>	not enough time
<input type="checkbox"/>	not enough support
<input type="checkbox"/>	feel isolated in my work
<input type="checkbox"/>	don't know where to turn when I need help
<input type="checkbox"/>	too much admin and paperwork



<input type="checkbox"/>	don't feel safe
<input type="checkbox"/>	abuse or racism
<input type="checkbox"/>	not enough training
<input type="checkbox"/>	low pay
<input type="checkbox"/>	negotiating with client's family members
<input type="checkbox"/>	don't feel valued for my work
<input type="checkbox"/>	not being able to make changes and suggestions about my work
<input type="checkbox"/>	work stress
<input type="checkbox"/>	worries about housing
<input type="checkbox"/>	worries about immigration
<input type="checkbox"/>	Anything else? Please tell us <input type="text"/>

What do you feel makes it most difficult for you to give good care?

10. Which services (health and social care) you have worked with?

Oxfordshire County Council- Adult Social Care

Occupational Therapy

Physiotherapy

End of life Care



GP

District Nurses

Mental health

Hospital

Dentistry

Podiatrists

Local community organisation

None- I have not worked with any others

Other (tell us which service):

11. When you have linked with other services to support the people you care for, what has worked well? Feel free to give specific examples.

12. When you have linked with other services to support the people you care for, what could be improved? Feel free to give examples.



13. Are there any gaps in support for people who need care? If so, tell us about this.

14. What in your view would improve the care and support provided to people in Oxfordshire?

15. COVID-19 What issues and concerns have arisen during the Covid-19 lockdown for you and the people you care for?

16. Have you been provided with adequate protection (PPE equipment) to safely carry out your work during Covid-19?

- Yes
- No
- Other

What has been your experience of this?



17. How has working during Covid-19 has affected your own health and wellbeing?

18. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about being a carer?

19. About you. Are you?

- Male
- Female
- Non- Binary
- Prefer not to say

20. Please tell us the first part of your home postcode e.g. OX4



21. What is your age?

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65-74
- 75-84

22. Please tell us your ethnicity

- Indian
- Pakistani
- Bangladeshi
- Chinese
- Any other Asian background
- African
- Caribbean
- Any other Black/ African/ Caribbean background
- Arab
- White and Black Caribbean
- White and Black African
- White and Asian
- Any other mixed/ multiple ethnic background

- English/ Welsh/ Scottish/ Northern Irish/ British
- Irish
- Gypsy/ Irish Traveller
- Any other White Background
- Other

Or tell us your own definition

23. If you would like to speak to us in more depth, anonymously or in confidence, about your role as a paid carer please leave your details below, or email us direct at hello@healthwatchoxfordshire.co.uk. and we will contact you- or just phone us on 01865 520520 to speak to our friendly staff. We are also keen to hear from you if you would like to share detailed but anonymous 'Carer stories' or be part of a 'focus group' to help show what it is like to be a carer in Oxfordshire. Your voice is important.

- Yes, I would like to speak to you in more depth about my experience
- Yes, I would like to share 'my story' with you in more detail
- Yes, I would like to take part in a 'focus group' discussion with other carers to give my views

Please leave your contact details and name. We will not keep these, but will only use them to contact you for the reason you state above.

24. Where did you hear about this survey?

- Healthwatch Oxfordshire's website



- Facebook
- Twitter
- Agency
- Friend or family member
- Colleague
- Local press
- Other (please specify):



To find out more about Healthwatch Oxfordshire please see www.healthwatchoxfordshire.co.uk

If you would like a paper copy of this report or would like it in a different format or language, please get in touch with us:



01865 520520



hello@healthwatchoxfordshire.co.uk

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Oxfordshire
Your voice on health and care services