

### Informal Carer: who cares for son who has cerebral palsy

This carer is an informal carer and provides all the care needs for her son Josh who has cerebral palsy. She provides personal care (e.g. getting him dressed, cutting up his food, making him drink, getting him shaved and showered etc.), issues medication and provides transport to medical facilities via his wheelchair. This level of care work is not only mentally tiring but also physically demanding to the carer.

The carer has received no formal training with regards to caring for her son and has had very little support from external agencies. Essentially she has developed her caring skills through experience 'on the job'. She feels valued by Josh and the family but she also feels that informal carers are undervalued by the state compared to other workers in the care sector.

*'My husband and my parents value what I do, but not the wider sector. The social workers and professionals don't really understand all I do for my son'.*

As a result of looking after her son, she was inspired to move into the caring profession as her existing source of employment. She therefore feels that she now has an appreciation for both aspects of care both formal and informal and the challenges that are associated with each type of carer.

The carer receives very little support from social services. Guidance is limited and help is not always available when she needs it. She has found it very difficult to balance caring for her son and also having to work. She originally had to give up work to look after her son. This carer's income is essential to the family and she had no choice but to start work again as soon as her son was old enough to cope with less support. This has been very stressful to the carer over the years and leaves her very little time for her own life.

*'When you start caring for somebody your whole life changes. I had a career which I had to give up to look after my son; that is a massive change. Also your social life changes. I did not get a social worker until I got ill myself when my son was in his teens.'*

The carer has had some positive experiences from acting as an informal carer. She has developed new skills and also, as stated earlier, she has been inspired to move into working in the care sector as a result of caring for her son. Because of the nature of personal care provided and close contact, she has developed a very good relationship and understanding with her son.

*'My son and I have a very close relationship. Most teens are not that close to their parents'.*

The carer identifies specific, essential training needs relevant to informal care such as moving and handling training and understanding how to handle and issue medication properly. She also indicates the importance of soft skills such as patience, the ability to listen to the patient and the need to stay calm and not get overly stressed under challenging circumstances. The lack of support she receives from social services implores her to try to remain fit and healthy so that she is able to cope physically with the demands of caring for her son.