



## **Unpaid carers find mutual support through the challenges of lockdown with Virtual Cuppas**

*Research into online support for the UK's unpaid carers during lockdown has identified how online communities like Mobilise are equipping carers to come together in support of one another at an acutely difficult time.*

This year's lockdown restrictions have seen the numbers of unpaid carers in the UK surge from 9 million to 13.5 million<sup>1</sup>. Those caring for a family member, friend or neighbour, have seen their responsibilities increase dramatically as respite and support services have not been able to continue.

Many carers are therefore turning to online channels for support. Over the course of lockdown so far, Mobilise has hosted more than 200 virtual cuppas, facilitating carers to support each other with practical advice, emotional support and humour.

Researchers at the Centre for International Research on Care, Labour and Equalities (circle) at the University of Sheffield, and the Psychology Department at the University of Liverpool studied transcripts of Mobilise virtual cuppas held during the first phase of lockdown, between March and July 2020. The transcripts highlighted the changing challenges experienced by carers over the lockdown, resources carers found helpful, and the effectiveness of online support.

Speaking at the launch of the research, Mobilise CEO James Townsend said: "This research highlights the extraordinary ways in which carers across the country are supporting each other through the intense challenges of lockdown.

"The report's findings have shown that with the right type and level of facilitation, online channels can open up a significant opportunity to transform support for carers, and may be particularly relevant to local authorities."

### **Key Findings**

The research found that carers adapted quickly to the acute challenges of lockdown. They adapted their routines, and developed coping strategies together that focused on humour, uplift and self care.

Carers summoned the strength to both receive and provide support to those in need; not just their loved ones, but others in their local community and in the online community.

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<sup>1</sup> Carers Week, June 2020

(<https://www.carersweek.org/media-and-updates/item/493439-covid-19-pandemic-4-5-million-become-unpaid-carers-in-a-matter-of-weeks>)



The virtual cuppas enabled carers to share practical advice with each other, and create friendships with one another. They became a digital space where carers could share their challenges and triumphs in all aspects of their lives.

Over time, the Mobilise virtual cuppas exceeded their capacity as a resource-sharing community and became a resource in its own right for developing individual resilience.

The Mobilise approach was also found to improve the digital literacy of carers, with many coming 'online' for the first time.

The study team made the following recommendations for central government, local authorities, and other organisations supporting carers:

- Invest in additional support for carers during national crises
- Invest in innovations and infrastructure that can keep carers connected to each other
- Develop digital literacy programmes for carers
- Create future digital support that can bridge analogue and digital communities and support networks

The study team and Mobilise will be discussing the findings, and their implications for commissioning carer support services at an online event on Friday 13th November. Full details here: <https://hopin.to/events/caring-during-lockdown>

### **About the research**

The project was made possible by support from A Social Sciences Platform for Entrepreneurship, Commercialisation and Transformation (ASPECT), the Economic and Social Research Council, and the University of Sheffield.

### **About Mobilise**

Mobilise is the tech startup by carers and for carers. It was founded in March 2019, and is part of the Zinc Portfolio, supported by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and Innovate UK.

Over the course of lockdown, Mobilise has been working with four local authorities and their existing providers to boost capacity to support carers at a crucial time. Their support is free for carers to access, and includes:

- Information, advice and guidance
- Facilitated peer support (including daily virtual cuppas)
- One-to-one coaching
- Online training and webinars for carers and professionals.