

INNOVATIVE CARER PRACTICES

IMPACTING CARERS* AROUND THE WORLD



TAIWAN



CARER CAFÉ

Recognising and connecting carers through a grassroots approach

Knowledge is a powerful medicine. No matter what stage an individual is at in the caregiving journey, having access to the right information can help carers better understand their role, find appropriate supports and maintain their sense of self and well-being. **This Innovative Carer Practice showcases a community-centric initiative in Taiwan that is supporting and empowering individuals along their caring journey and beyond.**

CONTEXT

In today's world, individuals are living longer with a greater possibility of experiencing an illness or disability that will require care and support.¹ Given this reality, it is likely that most of us will be called upon to take on a caring role to support someone with a diminishing physical ability, a debilitating cognitive condition or a chronic life-limiting illness. In what can seem like overnight, a carer becomes a physical caretaker, emotional supporter, care coordinator and/or financial navigator for their family member, loved-one or friend. Across the course of caring, carers face an evolution of changing needs, required knowledge and skills, health and social systems to navigate and changing relationships with the individual they are caring for.² Although a carer's effort, understanding and compassion are essential to the health and well-being of a care recipient, many individuals do not identify as being a carer and therefore do not access available support.³ When asked, carers often say they are fulfilling their familial duty or simply doing the right thing.

There are 760,000 carers (also known as family caregivers) in Taiwan who provide care for an average of 9.9 years.⁴ Under Taiwan's Ten-Year Long Term Care Plan 2.0 family members and other unpaid caregivers can apply for case management, respite services, support groups, counseling, care skills development classes and financial subsidies. However, only 15% of carers use the government-funded resources, while 55% provide care without any additional supports and 30% employ foreign caregivers.⁵

Often, carers are not aware of available supports and do not know what to ask for or who to turn to for help.

East Asian culture highly values a Confucian philosophy of filial piety where unpaid caring is believed to be a natural extension of one's commitment to parents and sense of honour.⁶ This family-centred construct can influence a carer's comfort in seeking external support, especially when caring is regarded as a private "family matter". Notwithstanding important norms, carer's need access to information and relevant support services to sustain their important caring role and maintain their own health and well-being.

The Taiwan Association of Family Caregivers is building awareness and empowering local communities to become actively involved in recognising, supporting and connecting carers. Carer Cafés are community-centric, locally operated and supported initiatives across Taiwan that aim to:

1. improve identification of carers and help carers recognise their own needs;
2. increase awareness of and referral to long-term care resources and support services in the community;
3. offer carers a space to take a short "break";
4. help carers to re-enter the workforce after the caring journey; and
5. cultivate social responsibility in supporting carers among the community

* A carer, caregiver or family carer is an unpaid individual, such as a family member, neighbour, friend or other significant individual, who takes on a caring role to support someone with a diminishing physical ability, a debilitating cognitive condition or a chronic life-limiting illness. The terms caregiver, family carer and carer are used interchangeably by IACO members.



Embracing Carers is an initiative led by Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, in collaboration with leading caregiver organisations around the world, to increase awareness and action about the often-overlooked needs of caregivers. Learn more at www.embracingcarers.com.



The International Alliance of Carer Organizations (IACO) is a global coalition of 15 member nations committed to building a global understanding of and respect for the vital role of family carers. Recognised as an official NGO by the United Nations, IACO works to improve the quality of life and support the needs of carers, through international partnerships and advocacy. Learn more at www.internationalcarers.org.

DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

Building on the concept of a sharing economy, the Taiwan Association of Family Caregivers (T AFC) adapted this strategy to address unique carers' needs—identification and support. Through mutually beneficial partnerships with local coffee shops, T AFC uses a variety of tactics to reach out to and guide carers and encourage them to seek information and supports that can improve their health and well-being. The partnerships with the community coffee shops are sustained in part by T AFC, which actively sources funding through corporate sponsors, such as the Taiwan Cooperative Bank.

BUILDING A CARER-FRIENDLY BUSINESS

Community businesses play a key role in helping carers to self-identify and subsequently seek supports and information. Increasing understanding of caregiving among the broader community and making small changes in the way businesses act can reduce stigma, raise awareness and foster an inclusive community spirit. Since its inception in 2017, T AFC has recruited eight community coffee shops (small and medium-sized) to become "Carer Café" partners. Once a shop has made a commitment to this innovative programme, T AFC staff provide specific training for employees to help them identify caregivers, make referrals and create a carer-friendly environment. A 90-minute training session includes information about:

- caregiver statistics;
- issues that caregivers face;
- how to identify high-risk caregivers; and
- available resources for caregivers.

Role playing is included in the training session so that employees apply their learning and practise on how to engage caregivers by using appropriate verbal and non-verbal communications. Trained employees proudly wear an "Ask me about Long Term Care" button to encourage individuals to speak up and begin a conversation about caring.

PROMOTING A CARER SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

An important part of the welcoming and supportive atmosphere in each coffee shop is the creation of a designated space where carers can meet and learn. Each Carer Café creates a caregiver corner to increase awareness of available supports. Using a variety of methods, each local business facilitates opportunities for carers to become aware of and connect to available supports, regardless of the carers' receptiveness in seeking supports.

Innovative ideas include designating unique spaces as "Spiritual Corners" or "Alleyway Information Centres" to prominently display T AFC's caregiver resources that include caregiver books, practical guides and service brochures. Free postcards and stamps are provided in some locations to encourage caregivers to take a break and touch base with their friends and loved ones. Posters or employee badges stating, "Ask me about caregiving" further encourage casual conversations. Using a grassroots and flexible community approach with each Care Café ensures a welcoming and positive environment is created where carers feel comfortable and confident to ask questions.

ENCOURAGING CARERS TO TAKE A RESPITE BREAK

One of the most important but often ignored things a carer can do is to care for themselves. Respite allows carers to temporarily step away from their caring duties and focus on their own health and well-being. In a culture that views caring as a mandatory familial obligation, carers may find it difficult to take a break from their caring role. Although carers may recognise the need to look after themselves, many struggle to achieve a balance.

Recognizing that caregiver respite and taking a break from caring often includes reconnecting and spending time with friends, Carer Café partners provide free cups of coffee for caregivers and friends. A media campaign, "Free coffee for two", encourages friends and family members to take a caregiver out for a "respite coffee". To access this unique respite approach (limited to ten cups of coffee per year), individuals identify themselves as a carer and complete a simple information form. The T AFC can then reach out and connect carers to appropriate resources and services, including the Family Caregiver Care Line.

Depending on available resources, activities are also organised at some of the Care Cafés to support respite for individuals. T AFC organises weekly or monthly activities in collaboration with other non-profit organisations that provide caregiver respite programmes under Taiwan's universal long-term care programme. Instead of hosting at the home care agencies or adult daycare centres, the service providers can choose a Carer Café as a welcoming location. Events and activities promote a caregiver's right to take time off and provides them with a moment to "catch their breath" through relaxing activities such as aromatherapy, art therapy and gardening.

FACILITATING EMPLOYABILITY OF CARERS

Employment is not only important for financial well-being, it also informs and shapes a person's social identity. The competing demands of caregiving affect many aspects of a carer's life, including the ability to participate in the workforce. Carers who must take time off, seek part-time or intermittent employment, or leave the workforce often face significant difficulties and lack self-confidence when seeking re-employment once their caring role is done. The desire and need to return to work is a common experience for carers as they begin to refocus on their own life plans.

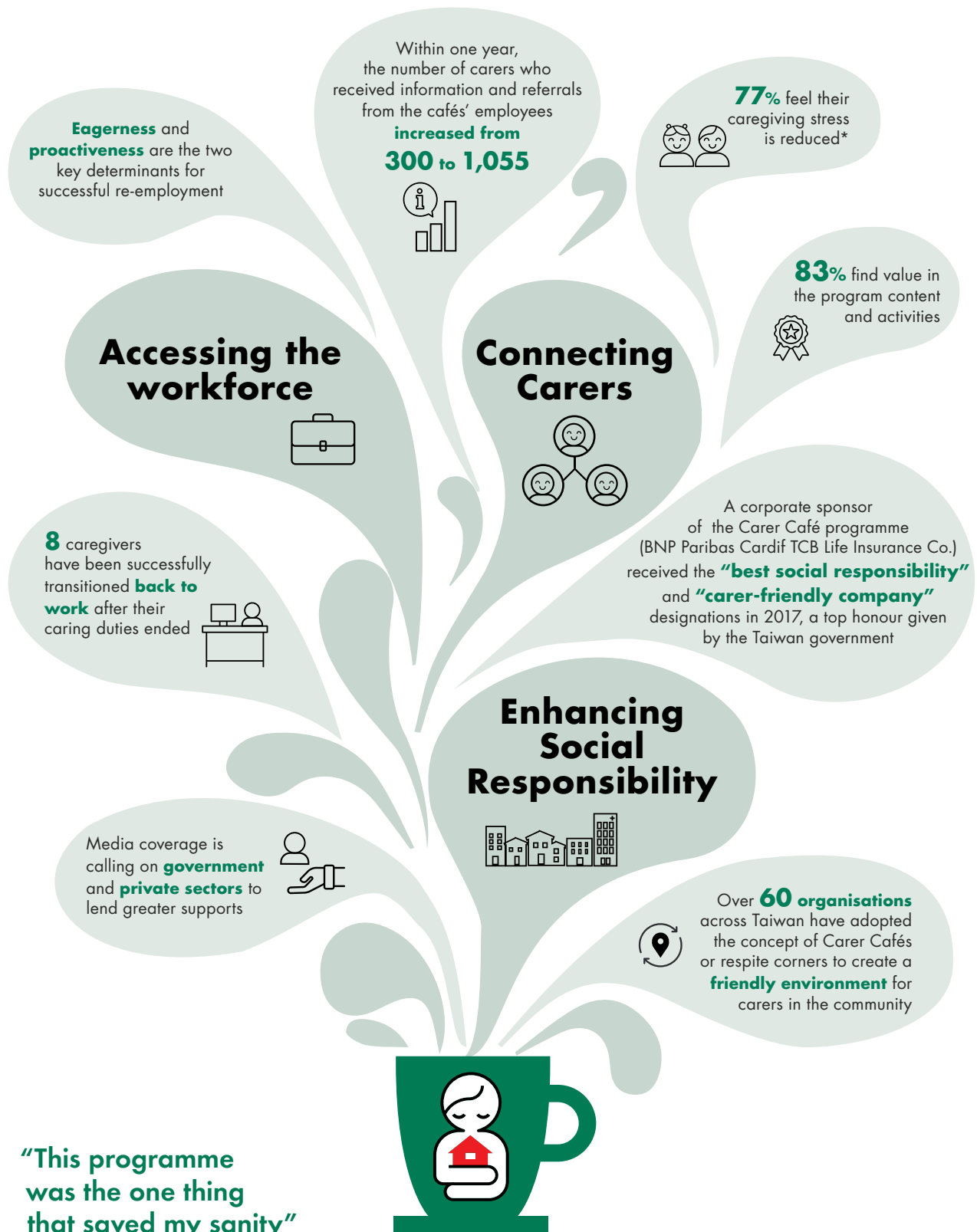
Currently on a trial basis, T AFC is providing a three-month paid internship with a designated Carer Café partner, offering up to 80 hours of work per month. Carers who participate in the programme are required to enroll in T AFC's three-month preparatory course for employment, which includes:

- sessions with a counsellor in the first month;
- capacity and strengths assessment in the second month to identify career paths; and
- exploring employment opportunities in the third month.

With support from a career expert, carers are given a career analysis, helped to understand themselves and trained to enhance their existing skills. In addition, T AFC encourages caregivers to take time out of their schedules to do part-time work because "work is also a form of respite".

DISSEMINATION AND IMPACT

By strengthening community relationships, the Carer Café programme helps carers to feel valued, understood and part of family, community and civic life. It raises awareness of the valuable role carers play and provides them with the support they need and deserve.



*Survey done at the end of the two year programme, n=375

ELEMENTS FOR SUCCESS

The following elements have contributed to the successful implementation and spreading of Carer Cafés in Taiwan:

- Partner with local communities to leverage existing resources and build mutual benefits. Rate of expansion is greater by relying on existing cafés, setting up “a shop within a shop”.
- Reframe respite as “talking over a cup of coffee” rather than a “formal service” to help identify new carers within communities, build trust and create greater access to Long Term Care resources.
- Have business owners participate on their own initiative to reflect commitment, ideals and passion in supporting carers.
- Build a well-trained staff to establish a respectful and responsive programme where carers are actively engaged and comfortable in reaching out for help.
- Use a variety of formats, active and passive, to guide carers to the information and resources.
- Empower local businesses with ready-to-use information and resources so they can refer carers for more information.
- Use media to increase exposure of the program, encourage businesses to join the movement and reach isolated carers.

“I attend the respite activities as a reminder for me to take care of myself.”

“The staff gave me continuous support and encouragement. So many times I want to give up, but they were the ones cheering for me.”

FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

Care Cafés promote a more compassionate society where caring for the caregivers becomes a shared responsibility to build healthy and strong communities.

The Taiwan Association of Family Caregivers (T AFC) continues to expand the Carer Café programme across Taiwan, and engage local businesses to provide respite-focused products/services and potential job opportunities for carer interns. Experiences from the internship program will inform the government’s long-term care human resource development projects and co-op programmes with private sectors.

Given the Taiwan government’s recognition and support of the Care Café programme in specific locations across Taiwan, the T AFC is advocating for the designation of Care Cafés as a tier-two support service for carers. A tier-two support service includes multiple locations in counties and cities, organised activities and classes, and increased ability to identify carers and refer them to resource centres.

References:

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- 5 Taiwan Association of Family Caregiver. 2016. Family Carers Situation and Support Services.
- 6 Chen, YJ. 2008. Strength Perspective: An Analysis of Ageing in Place Care Model in Taiwan Based on Traditional Filial Piety. Ageing International, 32:183.

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中華民國
家庭照顧者關懷總會

Established in 1996, Taiwan Association of Family Caregivers (T AFC) is the first non-profit organization dedicated to advocate for the rights of family caregivers in Taiwan. T AFC has achieved many milestones, including passing the government-funded respite services in the 2000’s and a sole chapter for caregivers in the National Long-term Care Service Act in 2015. T AFC supervises a national network of services including education, support groups, counseling and case management. Our memberships, consisted of individuals and organizations from multiple disciplines, hope to continue advocating for public policies to provide economic security, work/life balance and health management for family caregivers in the future.

For more information on the programme, contact: www.familycare.org.tw/aboutus