

The Caring Economy Manifesto from Women's Commission



What is it?

- An economy with childcare and social care at its heart.
- Investment in well-being, life chances, reducing poverty, improving health, increasing healthy life expectancy.
- Investment in people of all ages, including early years development.
- Investment in levelling up through focus on disadvantaged areas, reducing poverty and improving public services.
- Growth policies which benefit all people including those working in care, whether paid or unpaid, and those they care for - children, sick, disabled, or elderly.
- Creation of more high-quality jobs in local care Businesses to stimulate local economies and avoid dominance of extractive private equity finance.
- Growth policies which enable more women to take up more and better-paid hours of employment, through better provision of care support, transport, skills development, and flexible working.

What are we calling for?

Government, Regional Mayor, Local Authority Leaders, and all employers to recognise that investment in care is essential for a thriving, more inclusive economy, by:

- Improving working conditions in employment charters and commissioning contracts, including at least the real living wage and time to do unpaid caring.
- Improving support for participants in training and skills programmes – childcare and other caregiving provided for trainees; innovative models of delivery for under-represented communities; affordable for all ages including adults; maintaining appropriate qualifications (such as the BTech in adult social care).
- Ensuring that investment in training and skills focuses on adult social care and childcare and leads to improved career progression and pay.

See full report:

https://www.fairplaysouthwest.org.uk/images/Caring_Economy_for_Bristol_31_Jan_23_copy.pdf

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Why do we need it?

Women need it because more women than men live in poverty, mainly because of unequal access to well-paid jobs. The reasons include:

- The childcare system is broken because of Government under-investment in this essential public infrastructure – leading to under-paid staff, people leaving the profession, poor quality inflexible provision, poor availability particularly in disadvantaged areas, fees and fee-top-ups which parents can't afford. Women in general, and lone mothers in particular, simply can't afford to work more hours in paid employment.
- The adult social care system is broken because local authorities are underfunded to provide enough care to meet the needs of the sick, disabled and elderly in their communities. A growing number of people (mostly women) are having to retire early, reduce their hours.
- Careers advice and recruitment into skills and training steer women stereotypically into low paid sectors of the economy.
- The social security system no longer provides an adequate safety net, affecting women more than men because they provide more of the unpaid care necessary to plug the gaps left by inadequate publicly funded services. The inadequacy of the level of payments is compounded by draconian measures such as the benefits cap and the sanctioning regime.

The economy needs it because growth and productivity are being held back by rising so-called 'economic inactivity' levels caused by:

- women being unable to take up more employment; and
- poverty and the stress of providing unpaid care cause increasing levels of long-term sickness; and
- young people entering the work force with health problems, particularly mental health, due to poverty or caring for adults or both; and
- raising of the State Pension age leading to a cohort of women counted as 'working age' who are caring for others or themselves long term sick.

Society needs it because caring is undervalued and underpaid, and we are increasingly reliant on the unpaid contribution of volunteers and family members to provide the services which underpin its fabric. This contribution should be recognised in calculating the cost benefit of investing in care.

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