



Older Workers

An Advice Guide
for Usdaw Reps



Older Workers

Usdaw wants to ensure that older workers get the right support at work. Older workers in Usdaw may be having a hard time at work.

Older women can face particular problems. Two thirds of older women in Usdaw are juggling their jobs with looking after family members and often don't get the support they need at work to do this.

Over half of all older women in Usdaw are regularly caring for their grandchildren.

Because of discrimination at work, older women are more likely to be low-paid and this means women's pensions are usually far lower than men's. A recent Usdaw survey found that nearly 8 out of 10 women were planning to work beyond State Pension age because they couldn't afford to retire any earlier.

There is a lot that Usdaw reps can do to support and help older members at work. This leaflet has some practical tips from other reps about what steps they have taken to do this.



A good way to find out what problems older workers in your workplace are having is to use the Usdaw *Older Workers at Work Survey* at: www.usdaw.org.uk/OlderWorkersSurvey This can be used to let management know that there are issues that need to be addressed. You can also discuss the results at your rep team meetings.

Performance

"Our workplace introduced a new IT system that meant instead of working from one screen our advisors had to work from several at the same time. All new starters and the younger members of staff sailed through the change and enjoyed the variety this change brought to the role, others took a little longer but still picked it up within the 13 week transitional period agreed with Usdaw. However, one older woman was on the brink of being performance managed out due to errors she was continually making.

The member approached the Union and we explained to the business how our member was struggling due to not being able to navigate around the new system.

Our member had worked for the company for a long time and had only ever worked from the one screen. We believed that with extra coaching on a one-to-one basis the member would reach the standard expected.

The business agreed to extend the 13 weeks by a further eight weeks to allow for this, their decision took the pressure off and our member eventually picked it up within the agreed extra time."

Linda, Usdaw rep



The Menopause

"I wanted women to know that they can talk to the Union about the menopause, particularly if it is causing them problems at work. The workplace can make the symptoms of the menopause worse.

I see women struggling with things like not getting proper rest breaks, so-called jokes about hot flushes and pressure to meet targets. This can make women feel stressed and even more tired at what can be a really difficult time in a woman's life, so I made sure women in my store knew this is an Usdaw issue and spoke to managers so they would understand what women going through the menopause might need.

Some steps are fairly easy to put in place but can make a big difference. Things like letting women step outside for fresh air and allowing more frequent breaks in work to go to the toilet.

Often the menopause can really mess up your sleep and so reps can also ask for members to have a temporary adjustment to their shift pattern to help with this. I wanted to get across the message that the menopause is an occupational health issue and not something that should stay invisible and never be talked about."

Debra, Usdaw rep

Pensions

"I've organised Pensions Awareness Days to help members feel better informed about their options. There's lots of information out there but ours is different – coming from the Union, members feel they can trust what we say and we make it easy to understand. I'd say to other reps "just go for it" – the Usdaw Pensions Section will send you everything you need and give you lots of support. The Usdaw Pensions Survey is a great ice breaker to get the conversation going.

Women have definitely had a raw deal when it comes to pensions but at least we can say "look, you do have options". I think members feel less worried and confused after the Usdaw Pensions Days."

Trevor, Usdaw rep

Slowing Down

Many Usdaw members work in jobs that are physically demanding and this can become more difficult with age. There are practical steps reps can take to address this problem and to try and ensure that older workers feel safe and supported at work.

The Usdaw leaflet *Checking Out Health and Safety in Shops (Lft 254)* has a checklist for reps which can be used to help older workers working in shops. It covers workplace temperature, seating, lifting and carrying, slips and trips, checkout design and more. View and download at: www.usdaw.org.uk/254



More Information

Usdaw Nationwide

Wherever you work, an Usdaw rep or official (Area Organiser) is not far away. For further information or assistance, contact your Usdaw rep or local Usdaw office. Alternatively you can phone our Freephone Helpline **0800 030 80 30** to connect you to your regional office or visit our website: www.usdaw.org.uk

You can also write to the Union's Head Office. Just write **FREEPOST USDAW** on the envelope and put it in the post.

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You can join online at:
www.usdaw.org.uk/join



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What Happens Next

Once we process your application, you will receive a membership card with our Helpline telephone number and a New Member's Pack giving details of all the benefits and professional services available to you.

