

IMPROVING SUPPORT FOR BLACK, ASIAN AND MINORITY ETHNIC (BAME) YOUNG ADULT CARERS

INTRODUCTION

Learning and Work Institute (L&W) is managing a programme of work to raise awareness of the challenges faced by young adult carers aged 16-25 in accessing learning and work and effective approaches to overcoming this. L&W is an independent policy and research organisation dedicated to promoting lifelong learning, full employment and inclusion. We strive for a fair society in which learning and work helps people realise their ambitions and potential throughout life.

A young adult carer, aged 16–25, typically has a caring responsibility for a member or members of their immediate family, a parent or sibling and in some cases a grandparent or member of their wider family. It is very common that this caring responsibility has a negative impact on their access to and engagement with learning, often resulting in lateness, absence and lack of concentration due to stress and anxiety. Many young adult carers tell us that they have experienced bullying and that there is a stigma attached to being a carer. However, the responsibility of caring also provides opportunities for young adult carers to mature early and gain a range of skills, such as budgeting, managing a household and good communication skills, that their peers of the same age might not have.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS BRIEFING PAPER?

Young adult carers have told L&W that being a young adult carer from a Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) background, can present additional challenges. The purpose of this briefing paper is to identify and raise awareness of the additional challenges faced by young adult carers in accessing and engaging with learning, as a result of being from a BAME background. Like the majority of young adult carers we have spoken to, BAME young adult carers are very proud of the work they do and the skills that they gain as carers, but are also aware of the unique challenges they encounter linked to their ethnicity and/or culture. The following case studies of Ahmad, Rav and Natalie¹, illustrate these challenges within the context of their caring responsibilities.

CASE STUDIES

Ahmad

Ahmad is 18 years old and studies Technology at college. The youngest of his siblings, Ahmad took responsibility for caring for his mum at the age of 15, when his brother and sister left home to go to university. At the time, Ahmad's family had recently moved to the UK and he could not speak much English.

Ahmad had a dedicated tutor at school who helped him to learn English. At one point, Ahmad spoke to his tutor about what was happening at home. With Ahmad's permission, his tutor passed this information on to the pastoral care team and they helped him to apply for Carer's Allowance. Ahmad's school supported him in his caring role by being flexible about his attendance and by giving him work to do at home if he could not attend a class: *"They always said that if there was anything urgent, I could miss a day or two."*

¹ All names have been changed to preserve anonymity.

Ahmad receives similar support at college. He has a student helper who is his main point of contact if there are difficulties at home. Ahmad's student helper also referred him to his local carers service for additional support. The carers service runs a peer support group which meets once a fortnight and enables young adult carers to have some respite from caring. However, initially Ahmad found it difficult to attend the group's sessions because they were held at the same time that he attended Mosque on a Saturday. When he raised this with the support worker at the service, the group session was moved to a different day to allow Ahmad and other BAME carers to attend.

On the whole, Ahmad is proud of his caring role as he feels it has given him valuable skills and experience which will help him in the future. However, his caring may act as a barrier to going to university, as he is not sure who will look after his mum if he moves away from home.

"The way I look at it, it's getting me ready for the next chapter of my life. If I wasn't a carer I probably wouldn't even know how to cook or do the dishes right now!"

Rav

Rav is 18 years old and started caring for his mum just as he started college at 16. Because his mum could not speak much English, Rav's role as a carer also involved translating for her in all sorts of situations. This meant that his caring responsibilities caused Rav to miss significant time at college.

"I used to feel a lot of responsibility on my behalf because I had to do everything for my mum: I had to phone up the hospital, read out letters to her, and just everything in general. The language was more of a problem... I was like going back and forth from education and home to look after her."

It took Rav a while to realise that he was a carer. He started to miss college because he had to go home to look after his mum or attend a hospital appointment to translate for her. Although Rav wanted some help, he didn't want people to know about his personal situation and so he lied about why he was missing college. It wasn't until one of the student helpers started talking to him about his own situation that Rav realised that he was a carer.

"I thought it was my duty as a son to look after my mum anyway, so I thought it was a natural thing to do. I didn't class myself as a carer, I was just someone that was there for my mum."

Rav's college has put lots of support in place for him, such as arranging his timetable so he only has to be in college three days a week. He can also let his student helper know if he won't be able to make it to college; she then arranges for teachers to send him work to do at home. Rav finds this support very helpful, but can still find it difficult to juggle both his caring and college work.

"They are really supportive and they know what I'm going through. What I need to do is just ask them if I want time out or I want to go home and they will let me do it for a reason. They know what situation I was in, but it is hard for me quite a lot."

Natalie

Natalie has been caring for her autistic brother since she was nine years old. However, she didn't identify herself as a young carer until she started going to Barnardo's at the age of 15. This meant that for six years Natalie didn't receive any support with her caring responsibilities. As a result, Natalie often found it hard to make it to school on time and focus on her schoolwork.

Natalie's caring responsibilities were made more difficult by the fact that her mum does not speak English. This meant that Natalie also had to act as a translator and received little encouragement from her mum in terms of accessing external support. Natalie feels that caring within ethnic minority families is often seen as a family duty. It can also be very daunting for a family to approach external support agencies and ask for help when they don't speak English. This means it can be difficult for young carers and young adult carers to access the support they need.

Natalie's circumstances didn't change until she joined Barnardo's young carers project. The project provided her with a mentor and she attended a group with carers of a similar age. Barnardo's also held career days for young adult carers, which helped Natalie to discover her interest and passion in teaching. Their support encouraged her to go on to university. Natalie is now working as a teaching assistant at a primary school and works with pupils who need individual support. *"Barnardo's providing me help and assistance gave me the time that was taken away from me, to think about what I want to achieve and to actually work towards achieving that."*

SPECIFIC CHALLENGES FACED BY YOUNG BAME CARERS

Although most young adult carers face difficulties in accessing education and work, BAME young adult carers often face specific challenges in getting the support they need to succeed in learning:

- In some BAME families, young people with caring responsibilities are often unlikely to realise that what they are doing is exceptional - they just see it as doing their duty for their family.

"I thought it was my duty as a son to look after my mum anyway, so I thought it was a natural thing to do. I didn't class myself as a carer, I was just someone that was there for my mum."

- The pressures of caring are often compounded by English not being the first language at home. This means that BAME young adult carers often have a dual role of caring and translating. Many BAME young adult carers accompany their parents to doctor or hospital appointments, or need to be present when social services visit the home, to translate some potentially complicated and upsetting things. This can impact on their attendance at college or work and their emotional wellbeing:

"I used to feel a lot of responsibility on my behalf because I had to do everything for my mum: I had to phone up the hospital, read out letters to her, and just everything in general. The language was more of a problem."

- Having English as an additional language can also mean it is difficult for families from BAME backgrounds to understand and therefore trust formal services. Sometimes

support workers are seen as intruders who scrutinise the home situation and want to make culturally insensitive changes. As a result, BAME families often rely heavily on family members to provide the care and support needed, meaning young BAME carers can find it difficult to access external support.

“You do kind of feel like you’re under investigation.”

- In general, there is less understanding of the caring role and awareness of the support available for carers in BAME communities, compared to society as a whole. Furthermore, due to language barriers and lack of understanding of the system, BAME families may find it difficult to understand the criteria which need to be met in order to receive support. This again means that they are unlikely to access external support, placing more pressure on young adult carers in these families.
- BAME young adult carers may have cultural or religious commitments which prevent them from accessing support at particular times. This can mean that they miss out on peer support group sessions or activities which can be a crucial part of the support they receive as a carer.

IMPROVING SUPPORT FOR BAME YOUNG ADULT CARERS

Learning providers and support services can improve the support available to young BAME carers by:

- Raising awareness of caring, and the impact of caring, amongst black and minority ethnic communities.
- Actively targeting their services at BAME communities by offering information in a variety of languages which highlight the tasks that carers undertake, identifies the challenges faced by BAME young adult carers and outlines the support they can provide.
- Forming partnerships with institutions that specifically serve BAME communities, e.g. local mosques, temples or community centres, to make communication more fluid.
- Helping BAME young adult carers to recognise that they have caring responsibilities and that support is available. This may involve speaking with the family member who is being cared for in order to raise their awareness of the demands and pressures on the young adult carer, its impact on their learning and the wider support available.
- Providing appropriate translation services that are culturally sensitive to BAME families, to reduce the burden on BAME young adult carers.
- Understanding cultural differences and working with families to change inappropriate situations, rather than immediately identifying them as a safeguarding issue.
- Providing support for BAME young adult carers which takes account of cultural and religious activities, such as times of worship, to avoid inadvertently excluding this group from accessing support.

L&W has produced a range of resources to support young adult carers in learning and work – please visit <http://www.learningandwork.org.uk/our-work/life-and-society/citizens-curriculum/young-adult-carers>

FURTHER INFORMATION AND CONTACT

If you have any comments or feedback on this briefing paper, please contact Nicola Aylward, Head of Learning for Young People, Learning and Work Institute.

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