

# **WE Care! Improving Work and Education for Young Adult Carers**

Case studies of effective practice in supporting young adult carers to make positive transitions in learning and work

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**April 2014**

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## Introduction

These case studies have been produced by the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) as part of the WE Care project. NIACE is an independent charity which promotes adult learning across England and Wales. Through its research, development, publications, events, outreach and advocacy activity, NIACE works to improve the quality and breadth of opportunities available for all adults so they can benefit from learning throughout their lives.

The WE Care project - improving Work and Education for young adult carers – is funded through the Department of Health's Voluntary Sector Investment Programme. Through the project NIACE is undertaking a range of development work to improve access to work and education for young adult carers.

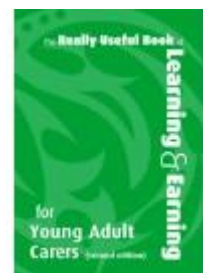
## About these Case Studies

Young adult carers are young people, aged 16-25, who provide unpaid care for someone, usually within their family. Being a carer whilst growing up - particularly during key transition stages - has a significant impact upon a young person's life chances, their experience of school and their opportunities to go to college, university, get a job or an apprenticeship.

The aim of these case studies is to provide insight into ways in which learning providers and support agencies are developing effective practice that has a positive impact upon young adult carers' lives, particularly upon their transitions to education training and employment.

Alongside these resources NIACE has also published a range of other resources, including:

- The Really Useful Book of Learning and Earning for Young Adult Carers – aimed at young adults (aged 16–25) who are looking after somebody else. The first edition of the book was printed in 2011. This second edition is full of new and up-to-date useful information about looking after your health and wellbeing, job hunting, housing, health services, learning, working and volunteering, and money management. As well as information and advice, the book has activities to help readers think positively, identify skills and skills gaps, and action plan. It is also a 'one stop resource' which signposts readers to a range of websites and help lines for more information.  
<http://shop.niace.org.uk/ruble-yac-2014.html>
- WE Care – Financial Capability Resources – a set of eight resources, accompanied by notes for tutors, designed to help professionals who work with young adult carers to start conversations and begin discussing and learning



some of the basics of everyday finance. <http://www.niace.org.uk/current-work/young-adult-carers>

Each of these resources can be downloaded free of charge from NIACE's website (links shown above). To request free hard copies of the RUBLE please e-mail [nicola.aylward@niace.org.uk](mailto:nicola.aylward@niace.org.uk)

Nicola Aylward

Project Officer, NIACE

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## **Case Study One – Blackpool Carers’ Centre – Young Adult Carers Service**

### **Background**

Blackpool Carers’ Centre is an independent local charity that provides a range of services and support to enhance the lives of carers of all ages throughout Blackpool. The service receives funding from a range of sources including Blackpool Council, Blackpool Clinical Commissioning Group, Carers Trust, Comic Relief and a number of charitable trusts and foundations.

In 2009/10 management information indicated that at around the age of 16, many young people who had previously accessed the Centre’s young carers’ services became disengaged. In response, the Centre commissioned a small research study to investigate the needs of young adult carers, between the ages of 16-25, in the local area. The findings of the research highlighted the need for an age specific service, managed by a dedicated worker providing a range of 1:1 support, signposting and group activities focussed around the needs and interests of 16-25 year old young adult carers.

### **Provision and Engagement**

Three years on, Blackpool Carers Centre’s Young Adult Carers’ Service supports approximately 60 young adult carers at any one time. The model for support is based on the principle of a personalised and holistic approach; each young adult carer in contact with the service is individually assessed and offered tiered support based on individual need. Engagement with the service is wide ranging; some young adult carers access discrete support focussed around particular needs, often when they are experiencing difficulties in their caring role; others engage on a regular basis and play a central role in shaping the service’s priorities, management and implementation.

Consultation and involvement of young adult carers in decision making processes are values which underpin the service. Internally, the Centre has a Young Trustees Board; young adult carers plan and run fundraising events and manage the selection process for allocating grants to young carers. Externally, young adult carers are supported and encouraged to share their experiences, advocate and campaign; they regularly contribute to the work of national charities; two young adult carers are members of the Carers Trust’s national steering group and are actively involved in decision making around allocation of funding to services.

Active involvement of young adult carers in decision making processes and shaping priorities, both internally and externally, enables the service to be responsive to real needs. It enables individual young adult carers to develop skills and confidence in a range of areas, including communication, negotiation, teamwork, planning and

management. This, in turn, has a positive impact upon young adult carer's advocacy skills, leads to improved employability and empowers them as carers and expert service users.

## **Learning and Employment**

Staff at the young adult carers' service have access to the local authority education management system, which records data about learners in the local area. This enables the service to identify learners as carers, share information with learning providers and track a range of data about the young adult carers that they support. Evidence from the system has highlighted that within the local authority, young adult carers, on average, have 10% lower attendance rates than their peers and 12% lower attainment levels. To address these inequalities, and in response to the needs of young adult carers, the service now offers a range of support, including:

- Working with individual young adult carers to consider a range of pathways, learning and employment options, and to develop individual plans.
- Directly supporting young adult carers to visit local learning providers, apply for course places, access additional support and discretionary funding.
- Group visits to universities, as a way of raising awareness of higher education as a real option for young adult carers.

Staff at the service have excellent partnership arrangements in place with a range of local learning providers. An example of this are links with the two main local colleges – Blackpool Sixth Form College and Blackpool and Fylde College. Dawn Maher, the Centre's Young Adult Carers' Worker, has regular meetings with local providers to share information about learners with caring responsibilities, develop individual packages of support and to facilitate referrals to wider services, as required by individual young adult carers. Throughout the local area, Dawn supports young adult carers to access the 16-19 Bursary. In light of high levels of poverty and deprivation in the Blackpool area, this funding is crucial in enabling many young adult carers to participate in learning, particularly given restrictions around participation in learning and entitlement to Carers Allowance.

## **Young Carers Champion**

In addition to the active involvement of young adult carers in shaping services and contributing to external agendas, Blackpool Carers Service employs a Young Carers' Champion as a paid member of staff. Each year the Service recruits a young adult carer to undertake the role for a 12-month period. Alongside directly working with and supporting young carers and young adult carers, Amy, the current post holder, is studying for a Diploma in 'Helping, Mentoring, Community Learning and Youth Work'. As a young person with experience of being a carer, Amy is uniquely well placed to empathise and understand the needs and experiences of other young adult

carers and to offer the support they need to effectively engage in learning and work. Employing Amy in this role enables the Service to derive maximum impact from its work and offer an effective service to local young adult carers.

Caring responsibilities place practical and emotional pressures upon young adults, as a result the transition to employment can often seem like a daunting and insurmountable next step in the progression to adulthood. Through offering young adult carers paid, structured and supervised employment, with training and accreditation, Blackpool Carers Service is enabling young adult carers, such as Amy, to embark on a pathway to employment and a potentially rewarding career.

### **Conclusion and Critical Success Factors**

Blackpool Carers Centre has developed a targeted and strategic approach to enabling and supporting young adult carers to address the difficulties they face and make positive transitions into learning and work. The approach is based on listening to young adult carers and directly responding to their needs. The Centre has developed a range of opportunities and levels of support; young adult carers are empowered to engage in ways that are personalised and appropriate to them, as individuals.

Dawn Maher identifies a number of factors that are critical to the success of the Centre in enabling young adult carers to make effective transitions in learning and work:

- Holistic approach that supports young adult carers across all areas of their lives, rather than focussing exclusively upon their caring responsibilities.
- Effective partnerships and strong links with local learning providers and support agencies.
- Employment of a Young Adult Carers' Champion, who plays a crucial role in enabling the service to develop a positive relationship with young adult carers, based on trust and understanding.

**For further information about Blackpool Carers' Centre Young Adult Carers Service, please contact Dawn Maher, Young Adult Carers' Worker on 01253 393748 or e-mail [dawn@blackpoolcarers.org](mailto:dawn@blackpoolcarers.org)**

## **Case Study Two - Action for Carers Surrey**

### **Background**

Action for Carers Surrey (ACS) is a well-established county-wide organisation in Surrey which works with carers of all ages. The organisation is comprised of a number of different strands, the largest of which is Surrey Young Carers (SYC) which works with carers up to the age of 18. Another strand supports carers of all ages into Learning and Work. ACS is almost exclusively funded through Surrey County Council's adult social care commissioning.

National researchers estimate that one in twelve secondary school pupils are carers; Surrey Young Carers are in contact with well over a thousand young people aged under 18. However, this service tends to find that there is a fall off in young carers' engagement at around the age of 14 as they become less interested in the social activities offered. Similarly, the carers who engage with the Learning and Work Service are carers of all ages who wish to explore learning options or find work. Some may need to change jobs or require support to approach their employer to enable them to juggle work and care. Until recently the service has had limited engagement with young adult carers leaving compulsory education.

In 2011, ACS commissioned a piece of research into the needs of young adult carers and how the organisation could best support them. One of the recommendations of the resulting report was the appointment of a specific worker for young adult carers aged 16 to 24. A new part-time post was created in the Learning and Work team of ACS. The 16-24 Development Officer has since supported the learning and work aspirations of about 35 young adult carers.

### **Engagement and provision**

Prior to appointing a dedicated learning and work adviser for young adults, ACS started to offer social activities for 16-18 year olds in four areas of the county. The groups that were set up are known as Youth That Care (YTC). Surrey Young Carers also run a young carers forum which allows some of their older young adult carers to have significant input into issues linked to local policy and to get advice from the worker supporting the forum.

The 16-24 Development Officer receives referrals from a number of different routes, including the young carers forum worker, SYC Education Advisers and from staff delivering the social activities aimed at 16 to 18 year olds. However, the majority of young adult carers are referred into the organisation by Surrey County Council's adult services.

Once a carer has been referred to the 16-24 Development Officer, they work with them through intensive one-to-one casework with regular contact. This means that



they can quickly develop a good understanding of the carer's family situation, barriers, motivations and aspirations. The Development Officer is experienced and qualified at a high level in guidance work, which means they are aware of the map of opportunities and so can quickly direct young adult carers and provide the support they need to understand their options. This is fundamental in supporting young adult carers to overcome some of the common barriers they face in relation to learning and work.

### **Advocacy and partnership work**

As well as offering direct support to young adult carers, ACS carries out advocacy work with statutory services across Surrey. The organisation has found that the primary aim of social care teams is to ensure the sustainability of care, this means that they may not always pick up the fact that young people who are caring may want to get back into education or work. Much of the work of ACS therefore involves supporting young adult carers to communicate and define their aspirations in relation to education and employment and reinforcing that they have the right to participate in learning and work. They also work with social care teams to raise awareness of the impact that caring can have on the carer's ability to learn or work and the implications for their long term future or life chances.

SYC also has a team of three Education Advisers. They have been working closely with schools to develop awareness of the needs of young carers for the last ten years. In the last couple of years they have started to expand this work into sixth forms and FE colleges to reflect the developments in work with carers aged 16-24 nationally. They act as advisers to learning providers and promote young (adult) carers issues to staff through briefings and CPD training. They also develop resources, either in the form of good practice manuals or PSHE materials for use in teaching.

The Education Advisers make five key recommendations to local schools and colleges:

1. Every school and college should have a member of staff who is a carer lead. Carers' experience and issues should be promoted amongst staff, students and parents. This is crucial not just in terms of support but also in identifying further carers.
2. Schools and colleges should provide regular CPD on young (adult) carer issues for all staff. It is crucial that as many staff can be involved in sessions as possible, as young (adult) carers may disclose their situation to anyone.
3. Schools and colleges should have very clear, strong communication channels between all teams and staff. This will ensure that teachers and tutors are aware

of students' situations and can provide the additional support and flexibility carers need.

4. Schools and colleges should have support plans in place for carers. The key part of any support plan is having good awareness, good communication and good flexibility to meet carers' needs.
5. Colleges should include a statement on their application form for carers to identify themselves. A question about whether a student has caring responsibilities should also be included in a school handover meeting or between schools and colleges.

### **Future developments**

ACS is not only keen to develop its offer for young adult carers but also to involve carers in deciding how to take its work forward. They have recently created two new full-time posts to develop issue-based peer support and provide opportunities for carers to add their voices to county and national issues. The new 18-24 Development Officer and Worker will hold focus groups and contact over 600 young people who have previously engaged with the service in order to facilitate their connection with adult services.

The organisation is also keen to develop more peer support for young adult carers. They will be working closely with Surrey's ten Carer Support organisations and four YTC groups in the hope of creating new models of self-supporting groups, in keeping with the independence needs of this age group. They are also planning to set up college groups to link in with the education advisers' work. At each stage of the process young adult carers will be consulted about what kind of support group model they would find most useful.

The Development Officer believes it is important for ACS to retain the careers guidance element of their service, particularly in light of the cutbacks in this provision across the county.

*"The key for this age group, as opposed to other age groups, is about identity and career development and career learning in a broad sense, so they can develop their aspirations and decide their directions in learning prior to employment or alongside short-term employment and caring."* 18-24  
Development Officer

### **Critical success factors**

Through a culture of listening to the young people they support, ACS has developed an effective programme of intensive one-to-one support into learning and employment for young adult carers. Their work with statutory services and learning

providers across Surrey has resulted in county-wide improvements in the awareness of the needs of young adult carers and how they can best be supported.

The 18-24 Development Officer identified three factors which are critical to the success of the organisation's work with young adult carers:

- Intensive one-to-one casework and regular contact with young adult carers.
- Career guidance and providing a map of opportunities.
- Joint working with statutory services and learning providers.

**For further information about Action for Carers, please contact Lisa Walmsley, 18-24 Development Officer, on 01483 563573 or email [lisa.walmsley@actionforcarers.org.uk](mailto:lisa.walmsley@actionforcarers.org.uk)**

## **Case Study Three - York College**

### **Background**

York College is a Further Education College based in the City of York and serves the needs of students from both the city and surrounding rural areas. The College offers a wide range of provision, from GCSEs up to Higher Education; the majority of their work is with young people aged 16 to 18. York College is mostly funded by Government, however there is some income from student contributions through their Higher Education provision where a number of learners now pay their own fees.

York College has been developing its targeted work with young adult carers incrementally over the last five or six years. However, due to a growing interest and awareness amongst staff of the difficulties young adult carers face, this work has become an increasing priority for the College over the last three years. The College currently works with around 100 young adult carers, 83 of whom are under the age of 21.

### **Definition of caring**

York College has a very broad and flexible attitude to what they mean by caring. For example, a young person does not have to be caring for an immediate family member to qualify for additional support; they may be looking after a member of their extended family or a close friend. This broad definition of caring means the College can be very flexible in their support offer. In the past they have offered support to young people who are caring temporarily, such as one student whose mother was diagnosed with a terminal illness and, as their father struggled to come to terms with this, the student temporarily became a carer to both parents. When the student's father gave up work to care for their mother in the latter stages of her illness, the College could offer the financial and emotional support this student needed to continue with their learning.

### **Engagement and provision**

York College has introduced a number of routes through which young adult carers can be identified or disclose their caring responsibilities. The College's application form includes an option about disclosing caring responsibilities; this allows the College to identify any young people who may need additional support right from the beginning of their engagement. Carers are also identified through the pastoral system. The College has found that sometimes a young person may not disclose their caring responsibilities during the application process but may do so once a tutor or other staff member has developed a relationship with them. This member of staff can then act as a link between the young adult carer and Student Services, making them aware of the additional support which they can access. The College also has publicity on notice boards and plasma screens around campus, as well as on the

Intranet, to help students self-refer to Student Services. Students also have the opportunity to disclose their caring responsibilities when applying for the College's discretionary funds; by doing so they may qualify for an enhanced level of financial support.

The College's work with young adult carers is centred on supporting them to achieve their potential in education. Once a young adult carer has been identified, they can access a wide and varied support offer at the College. Much of this comes in the form of pastoral support from tutors and other staff, including one-to-one sessions and access to a free confidential counselling service.

One of the key elements of support which the College has introduced is the Young Carer's Card. This is a City of York initiative which was instigated by the Youth Council. Once a young adult carer has been identified at the College they are given a card which they can show to their tutors or other support staff. This allows staff to recognise that this young person may require additional support and flexibility around deadlines, without the carer having to explain their story over and over again. One of the course co-ordinators believes that this is crucial to the development of the College's support for young adult carers:

*"It's about becoming, in a genuine and meaningful way, person-centred: not seeing all young adult carers as young adult carers but actually seeing them for what they are; as individual young people who are linked by the fact they have a caring responsibility... Their caring role doesn't define them. You actually see their needs and them as a person and you tailor your support and your help to them in a way that works for them."* Course co-ordinator

Through its work with young adult carers, the College has identified social isolation as an important issue for this group, as they often cannot attend social events outside of College. The College currently offers a monthly drop-in session run by the York Carers Centre and they have a Young Adult Carers group which includes social activities and the opportunity to access peer support.

Another key difficulty that young adult carers commonly face is tight family finances. One of the staff members in the College's Student Services team works closely with York Carers Trust and is very experienced at working with young adult carers to ensure they receive the financial support they are entitled to. The College also uses its discretionary fund to support their young adult carers financially, offering an enhanced funding package.

In terms of specific support around employment, the College has a careers advice service on campus which is free to access for all students. Young adult carers can also use the College's Jobshop, which supports students in finding part-time work to fit in with their studies, or meet with the College's voluntary work placement advisers if they are interested in volunteering.

In December 2013 York College was inspected by Ofsted who rated the College as being 'Outstanding'. Ofsted praised the College for the support it gives to its students:

*“Outstanding support arrangements help all groups of students to achieve, especially the most vulnerable and those with significant barriers to learning. As a consequence, students stay on programme, achieve their goals and progress well.”* Ofsted

### **Partnership work**

York College recognises that caring affects all areas of a young person's life. The teams within the College therefore work closely together to create a comprehensive package of support for young adult carers, from finances and employment through to emotional and pastoral care. In addition, the College also works with a range of partner organisations in order to raise awareness of young adult carers' situations and their support needs. These partners include local councils, housing support and emergency housing organisations, mental health organisations and hospital trusts.

### **Critical success factors**

Through its broad definition of caring and its flexible approach, York College has developed an effective and person-centred system that supports young adult carers and enables them to stay engaged and progress in education.

One of the course co-ordinators at York College identified three factors which are critical to the success of their work with young adult carers:

- The College has a support system in place that does not define young adult carers by their caring responsibilities. This means that the young person is treated as a person rather than a label and gets the individual support they need to make successful transitions.
- The Young Carer's Card saves carers from the potential embarrassment of telling their story over and over again but ensures recognition from tutors that these students might need additional support.
- The variety and flexibility of their support offer means the College can tailor support to the specific needs and situation of each carer.

**For further information about this case study on York College, please contact Pat Robinson, Course Co-ordinator at York College, on 01904 770245 or email [PRobinson@yorkcollege.ac.uk](mailto:PRobinson@yorkcollege.ac.uk).**

**For further information about specific support issues, please contact Glen Miller, Head of Student Services at York College, on 01904 770200 or email [gmilller@yorkcollege.ac.uk](mailto:gmilller@yorkcollege.ac.uk)**

## Case Study Four - Barnardo's CareFree Project

### Background

Barnardo's CareFree Project provides a range of support services to young carers and young adult carers aged 18 or under in Leicester and Leicestershire. Established in 1996, CareFree works with young people who are the primary carer for a relative with an illness or disability and whose caring role has a significant impact on their lives. The project can also work with young people who have shared caring responsibilities, for example with a parent or their siblings. CareFree receives funding through a variety of streams, including from the county and city councils, Department of Health, the county youth service and voluntary contributions to Barnardo's.

Across the City and County, CareFree supports around 334 young (adult) carers aged between six and 18 years old. The project continues to improve the identification of young (adult) carers and offers support to other agencies working with this group, including raising awareness of young (adult) carers, the support they need and the impact this role can have for children as young as five years old.

### Engagement and provision

CareFree provides a range of practical and emotional support to young carers and their families on both a one-to-one and group basis. Referrals to the project can come from families themselves or from other services such as adult social care, schools, health and Children's support services.

The project has county and city project workers who work with families for up to six months. Initially, project workers carry out assessments with the family and the young adult carer to explore their needs and then draw up a plan of support together.

*"In essence we're looking at reducing the caring role and then looking at what the wider issues and impacts for that young carer or parent is, like poverty, parental illness or education support needs."* Deputy Children's Services Manager

CareFree's work with young people can range from support around parental ill health and its impact on the family, to support with issues around anger, self-esteem, confidence and access to learning. They also have young carers' groups across the city and the county which provide young carers with regular respite and a 'check-in' with the same support worker and peer group.

Finances are one of the main issues young carers face in relation to learning and work. In order to overcome this, CareFree accesses grants on behalf of young carers which can supply them with IT equipment, study resources or materials related to hobbies. The project also encourages young people to identify themselves as carers

at their college so they can access the funds they set aside for vulnerable young people, such as the 16-19 Bursary.

Alongside its support for young (adult) carers, CareFree also offers support to the parent or relative they care for. This can involve helping them to access appropriate adult support or mental health services, as well as providing parenting support to improve their independence and retain their role as the parent in the home via a Community Care Assessment.

### **Work with young adult carers**

Like many other services, CareFree has found that there is a tail-off in young carers' engagement with the project between the ages of 16 and 18. To counteract this, workers have started tracking older young carers and following up those who miss more than three group meetings. If these carers are finding it difficult to attend due to other commitments, or are no longer finding the groups helpful, group workers can arrange for them to access a different form of support, such as generic youth support. This flexibility of support enables young adult carers to continue engaging with wider support services.

If young adult carers show an interest in wanting to stay with their group past the age of 18 then CareFree can offer them volunteering opportunities with other young carers groups. This not only helps the service but also provides young adult carers with the opportunity to develop their skills and gain valuable references and experience towards employment.

CareFree has opened up discussions with some of their older young carers to discuss whether they would find it useful to have a separate young adult carers group. This would allow them to talk about their options and issues around learning and work, including accessing bursaries, attending open days and their anxieties around leaving home. The feedback suggests that young adult carers would find this useful and so the project is intending to establish this as an additional source of support for this age group.

### **Work with black and minority ethnic young adult carers**

CareFree works with many young carers from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. The project has found that there is a fear amongst many black and minority ethnic families about services not understanding their family situation because they have a Eurocentric focus. Therefore, some of CareFree's work with this group involves liaising with other services to ensure they understand cultural differences and work with families to change inappropriate situations, rather than immediately identifying them as a safeguarding issue.

CareFree's support offer for young adult carers and their families is flexible and can therefore be sensitive to cultural differences. For example, the project used to run a



young carers group at a certain time which meant that some young people had to be taken out of Mosque to attend. It soon became clear that this had the potential to create barriers and stigma for these young people as it was identifying them as being different to their peer group. Consequently, the time of the group was changed and transport is provided to ensure the young (adult) carers could get to the group and still attend their mosque.

### **Securing sustainable support**

Because project workers support young carers for a six month period, a core part of CareFree's work involves securing sustainable support for families and enabling them to access this by the end of their involvement. This involves advocacy work with schools and colleges to ensure that sufficient support is in place for carers in education and training.

CareFree also supports young carers to make transitions into further learning and work on an individual basis. For example, the project has recently supported a young adult carer by facilitating a meeting between her mentors at secondary school and a representative from the college she was moving to. This meeting enabled the college to put in place both the financial and emotional support this young adult carer needed to make the transition from school to further education.

The main concern that young adult carers have is for the wellbeing of the person they care for. CareFree therefore works closely with adult services to ensure that an adult care package and, where appropriate, a Carers Assessment is in place in the home. Without this support carers may find it difficult to commit to learning or work which requires them to be out of the house for long periods of time.

*"They have drive, they have passion, they have all the things they want to do in their lives and they have their dreams and aspirations, but they've prioritised their parents for so long that that won't just switch off."* Deputy Children's Services Manager

### **Critical success factors**

By providing a flexible and tailored intensive support programme, Barnardo's CareFree project has enabled many young adult carers to make successful transitions into learning and work. Their advocacy work with learning providers and other support services has also been hugely successful in raising awareness of the support needs of young adult carers.

The Deputy Children's Services Manager identified three factors which are critical to the success of CareFree's work with young adult carers:

- Flexible and tailored support plans for young adult carers and their families.

- Working with schools and colleges to raise awareness of the support needs of young adult carers and facilitating a dialogue between providers and carers.
- Advocacy work with youth and adult services to ensure an adult support package is in place and transition to adult life is a key priority in the support they provide.

**For further information about Barnardo's CareFree Project, please contact Helena Mitchell, Deputy Children's Service Manager, on 0116 286 7182 or email [helena.mitchell@barnardos.org.uk](mailto:helena.mitchell@barnardos.org.uk)**

## **Case Study Five- Central College Nottingham**

### **Background**

Central College Nottingham is the biggest college in Nottinghamshire and offers a wide range of provision, including FE, HE and Apprenticeships. Although most of their work is with learners aged 16 to 18, they also work with pre-16 learners and those aged 19 plus.

The College has been offering support to learners identified as being at risk of dropping out of their course for a number of years. In 2006 Castle College introduced Personal and Professional Development Coaches (PPDs) who offered one-to-one welfare and tutorial support to at risk learners. In 2010 Central College merged with South Nottingham College and Castle College and the funding for PPDs was moved from the Curriculum to Additional Learning Support. PPDs were renamed as Learner Achievement Coaches (LACs) and became a centralised team, resulting in more consistent support across the College.

Through their work with at risk learners, the College identified young adult carers as a group which needed additional support. Central College Nottingham has recently been awarded the Quality Standard in Carer Support by the Carers Federation. This is an Accredited Standard of Good Practice gained by organisations which can evidence a culture of understanding and a commitment to the inclusion and support of carers within their organisations.

In the 2012/13 academic year, the Learner Achievement Coach (LAC) Team worked with 69 young adult carers. In the current academic year (Dec 2013/14), the team have so far identified 51 of the 500 at risk learners they are working with as carers. The LAC team's impact measurement is retention rates and they have found that retention has gone up year on year since the service has been brought in. In one school it rose by 10% last year. This evidence of impact shows the need for the team and continuation of their funding.

### **Engagement**

The main aim of the LAC team is to engage young adult carers and other at risk learners into their service as soon as possible, in order to minimise the risk of them dropping out. They achieve this through a number of engagement activities and referral routes in order to provide carers with as many opportunities as possible for them to disclose.

In 2010, the LAC team introduced an induction questionnaire which asks all learners about their activities in the last 12 months, their living arrangements and their motivations for coming to college. Learners are talked through the questionnaire so that the role of a carer can be explained, and those who may not identify themselves

as a carer can recognise their responsibilities. The team also carry out a 'settling in' questionnaire at week five to check how learners are getting on and whether they need any additional support.

The LAC team also engage carers through self-referrals. One of the sections of the student intranet is about support and includes an online referral form for those who are not confident to go and speak to the team directly in the first instance. Carers may also disclose their responsibilities to a staff member who can then contact the Carer Designate in the LAC team and refer them through to their service.

Some of the young adult carers supported by the team are returners and they often encourage their peers to access the support available through the LAC team. Some carers can be concerned about the College contacting social services if they disclose their responsibilities and need to be reassured that this will not happen.

The LAC's work with local partners and agencies means that they can identify some young adult carers before they even apply to the College. Initially, the College used their links with external partners to get support for their learners but this has evolved into a two way process of referrals, with other services referring their carers into the College. The LAC team can arrange transition visits with these young adult carers to ensure they have a face and a place that they know before they start their course.

The LAC team also works closely with the other services available in the College. A key service through which they receive referrals is student finance. This team now have a question on their application form about whether the applicant has caring responsibilities. This can be the first place that carers disclose their role so the finance team emails through any new applicants who have disclosed to the welfare team each week.

## **Provision**

The main aim of the support that the LAC team provide for young adult carers is to ensure that they have the skills and confidence they need to address issues themselves, successfully complete their course and move on to further learning or work after college. A large part of this is helping carers to recognise that they have often already developed important and valuable skills through their caring responsibilities.

*"[It's] about getting the carers to recognise all the skills and qualities they have as a carer, so about time management, money management, negotiation, all of these things that they can transfer into work. They're using their caring experience as a real positive to help them get into employment."* Carer Designate

Once a young adult carer has been identified they are offered a one-to-one session with a Learner Achievement Coach (LAC). During this meeting the LAC will work

with the learner to develop a support plan which incorporates the interventions and support they want. They recognise that not all carers are the same and so the support the team offer is individualised and can be as “full on” or “hands off” as it needs to be.

A key element of a carer’s support is putting a crisis plan in place so that if the person they care for takes a turn for the worse, they know what to do. This plan means that carers are aware that if they need to take time off, they can contact their LAC who will get their work sent home to them, liaise with their teachers and put arrangements in place to make it easier for them to return. They can also defend their attendance levels to management and stop them from being excluded:

*“By putting in these crisis plans so they know what to do if they’re going to be off... we can keep them as engaged and it’s paid off in their retention.”* Carer Designate

Outside of times of crisis, LACs offer young adult carers one-to-one support, the level of which is reviewed regularly, and can work with teachers to put reasonable adjustments in place, such as later start times or earlier finish times. LACs can also liaise with the student finance team to ensure that the carers they have on their database are accessing the financial support they are entitled to through the College. Financial support is often linked to attendance, which can be an issue for carers, so LACs liaise with the student finance team to make them aware of carers’ situations and ensure continuing support.

The College is in the process of setting up a peer group for young adult carers. Returning carers will be undertaking mentoring training with the Carers Federation so they can become peer mentors. As it would be difficult for the team to get all of their carers together in one place, they will be facilitating the group through Facebook. Mentors will provide online counselling and support which carers can access in their own time as and when they need it. The Carer Lead for the College is hoping that young adult carers will take ownership of this and start managing the group themselves.

One of the carers taking on the mentoring role engaged heavily with the LAC team last year. This carer is studying Health and Social Care, works part-time at Greggs and is also a class representative. Both his mum and her partner have MS:

*“There were a few times last year I attended college late as my mum had been admitted into hospital four times. [My LAC] understood the problems I had during my time at college, made me feel more relaxed so I could enjoy college, take my mind off my caring role and meet new friends. She was also there if you just wanted to talk and get things off your chest, as being a young adult carer it is really hard for us to keep it in and keep acting like we’re not stressed.”* Young adult carer

Inevitably there are some young adult carers for whom their responsibilities become too much and they have to leave their course. The team's aim for these learners is to provide them with as positive an experience as they can, so that they are not permanently put off from returning to education. The team's strong partnerships with external services are crucial in this situation. If carers stop engaging with the College then they can no longer access its support, so it is important that the help they receive outside of college is as consistent and comprehensive as possible. This external support is also available when the College is shut at Christmas and over the summer holidays.

### **Training for staff**

The welfare team conducts regular training with staff across the College, including support staff, teaching staff, student finance staff, frontline staff and progression advisers. Training involves recognising issues carers might present, what barriers these learners have, what support services are available within the College and what staff can do to support these learners. External agencies such as the Carers Federation and the local drug and alcohol awareness group also come in and run training sessions on staff development days. This training means that all staff are aware of what a carer is and where to refer them on to. It can also help with early referrals as tutors often interview potential learners and they might disclose their caring role at this point.

### **Critical success factors**

Through listening to the needs of their learners, providing training for all staff across the College and building strong relationships with partners, Central College Nottingham have developed a comprehensive programme of support which engages young adult carers as early in their course as possible. The focus on teaching learners how to address issues themselves and linking them with external support agencies means that carers are equipped with the skills and ongoing support they need to make effective transitions into further learning or work.

The Care Designate at Central College Nottingham identified three factors which are critical to the success of their work with young adult carers:

- Holistic training for all staff which ensures comprehensive support and multiple opportunities for disclosure.
- An individualised and learner-centred approach means that support is appropriate and tailored to each young adult carer's needs.
- Strong work with partners means that the College has developed a proactive, involved approach to supporting carers with referrals in and out to other agencies.

**For further information about Central College Nottingham, please contact  
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