

CASE STUDY: LEICESTERSHIRE YOUNG ADULT CARERS NETWORK

The Leicester and Leicestershire Young Adult Carers Network was established in 2013. It brings together a range of learning providers, services and agencies from across the city and county to improve the transitions within education and from education to work for young people with caring responsibilities.

The Leicestershire Young Adult Carers Network is convened and chaired by Barnardo's CareFree Young Carers' Service. Established in 1996, CareFree provides a range of support services to over 500 young and young adult carers aged 19 or under in Leicester and Leicestershire every year. The service also works with a range of organisations to improve the identification of young (adult) carers by raising awareness of this group, the support they need and the impact this role can have for children as young as five years old.

How it started

In 2013, CareFree went through a process of reviewing and amending their service policies and procedures so that they could better identify and support young adult carers across Leicestershire. As part of this process, they identified a need to develop better partnership working across the city and county in order to support young adult carers to make successful transitions in education and work.

Building on their already well-established partnerships across the county, CareFree wrote to key contacts in both local authorities, all of the colleges, sixth forms and universities in Leicestershire, the two careers advice services in the city and county, and the local adult carers' centre to invite them to the first meeting of the Leicestershire Young Adult Carers Network.

Initially, the Network was successful in engaging both local authorities, two of the local universities and both of the careers advice services in their meetings. These organisations managed to achieve some impressive outcomes very quickly, but it was clear that there was a gap in attendance from local sixth forms and colleges. To address this, CareFree supported a young adult carer to write to the principal of each provider and ask that they send a representative to the meeting. This generated a strong momentum and the Network soon had representation from a range of local learning providers. To cement this commitment, the Network began to hold meetings on the sites of colleges and sixth forms to encourage them to attend.

The Network now has regular attendance at its bi-monthly meetings from all three local universities; a range of sixth forms and colleges, both local authorities' adult and children's services, and both careers advice services. In addition, they engage specialist support as and when required, such as representatives from the DWP, Voluntary Action Leicestershire, the Leicestershire Local Enterprise Partnership (LLEP), and specialist young adult carer workers from other counties.

Alongside the Network, CareFree also supports a Young Adult Carer Reference Group. This group of 12 young adult carers, aged 16 to 22, both feeds into the Network meetings and provides a route for actions from the meetings to be taken forward. This steering group ensures that the work of the Network is driven by young adult carers' needs and helps members to prioritise actions and issues.

Impact

The Network has resulted in some impressive outcomes for young adult carers in Leicester and Leicestershire. Foremost among these are the improved partnership working between universities, colleges, careers advice services and local authorities in relation to this group. For example, the local universities are working together to roll out a series of engagement sessions for the 14 over 12's young carers' groups that meet across the city and county to enable young carers to explore the various options open to them and ask questions of staff from different institutions. Feedback from the providers involved in the Network also suggests that improved partnership working is easing the transition between school and further education for young adult carers, as there are better data sharing arrangements in place between institutions.

All of the organisations involved in the Network have improved their support for young adult carers internally. Many of the universities, sixth forms and colleges now have policies and leads for young adult carers in place, and there are now named young or young adult carer champions in almost all of Leicestershire's secondary schools and colleges, due to the efforts of the Leicestershire Young Carers' Project Officer who is a member of the Network. Many of the members have put on training for their staff about the challenges and support needs of young adult carers, and CareFree has delivered training to over 200 local staff on young adult carer issues. In addition, the universities have included caring responsibilities as a tick box on their enrolment and induction forms, and the careers advice services have successfully requested that UCAS Progress, the organisation which manages applications to colleges and sixth forms in Leicester and Leicestershire, include the same box in their online forms. This will be included from September 2017.

The Network has also worked together to raise awareness amongst local organisations of the issues young adult carers face in relation to work or learning. For example, the Young Adult Carer Reference Group shared their experiences of accessing support from Jobcentre Plus and worked with CareFree to develop an 'ask' for DWP staff. The Network then took this forward to DWP, and CareFree worked in partnership with them to deliver training on young adult carers to all local DWP staff in Leicester. This is due to be rolled out to Leicestershire in 2017. The universities involved in the Network have also accessed funding to deliver training on young adult carer issues to staff from schools and colleges across Leicester and Leicestershire. This was hosted by the universities and delivered by a specialist trainer in collaboration with a young adult carer. In addition, there are now four young adult carers on the Leicester City Youth Council, ensuring that these young people's views are heard in decisions about services across the city.

Sustainability

The Network is continuing to meet on a bi-monthly basis to identify and rectify the challenges young adult carers face in making smooth transitions in education and work. The Network has prioritised ensuring a smooth transition into and out of sixth forms and colleges for young adult carers, which should ensure a sustainable legacy from their work. They are currently encouraging all local colleges and sixth forms to complete a self-assessment checklist of their support for young adult carers, and will then work with each provider to address any gaps identified through this process. More generally, the Leicestershire Young Adult Carer Network continues to engage with new staff and organisations in order to raise awareness of the challenges and support needs of young adult carers in education and work.