### What is the initiative?

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<th>Family CAF (fCAF) pilot: A partnership between Birmingham Young Carers and Birmingham City Council</th>
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### Who runs it?

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<th>Action for Children Birmingham Young Carers in partnership with the CAF Team at Birmingham City Council</th>
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### Who does it benefit?

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<th>Young carers aged 8–17 who live in Birmingham, who, acting as the primary carer of a parent with a disability or chronic or long-term illness, provide regular and substantial care to their parent or siblings.</th>
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### What does it do?

Birmingham City Council is pioneering a holistic fCAF process that has been modeled on the standard Common Assessment Framework (CAF). The fCAF assesses the needs of both children and adults in a family. It then provides the basis of a co-ordinated approach and tailored support plan from a range of agencies, to meet the needs of the whole family.

As a result of children’s and adult agencies working together to assess need and develop Integrated Support Plans to meet the needs of the whole family, far better outcomes for children can be achieved.

### When did it start?

2012.

### Why was it started?

Birmingham has some of the most deprived areas in the country and is home to a very diverse population. Recently, there have been many changes and cut-
backs within Birmingham City Council, which have had a significant impact on vulnerable families.

Young carers are recognised to be a particularly vulnerable group whose needs are often not fully recognised by services, especially adult services working with parents.

Furthermore, the existing CAF team in Birmingham found that the needs of the child are often not fully met unless the needs of the whole family are also considered. A holistic family approach therefore was felt to be needed to help improve the lives of young carers. The fCAF pilot was developed to address the needs of the whole family, reduce excessive levels of caring and social deprivation and streamline assessment in order to reduce duplication of work and resources and to maximise the engagement of agencies.

What are the aims and objectives?

Aims:

• To identify and reduce young carers’ excessive, inappropriate or harmful caring roles.

• To address the family’s multiple difficulties and needs through a multi-agency fCAF process.

• To address the needs of the whole family through a multi-agency fCAF process.

• To streamline the assessment process and improve multi-agency working.

Objectives:

• To target vulnerable young carers with a high level of caring responsibility.

• To ensure parents are receiving the maximum support and benefits they are entitled to.

• To employ a full-time fCAF lead professional to work intensively with families and co-ordinate the multi-agency fCAF process.

• To provide a tailored support plan to improve the health, resilience and lifestyles of all the family.

How is it funded?

This partnership site has been funded via the Integrated Interventions programme, managed by Carers Trust with funding provided by the Department for Education towards the delivery of the Government’s Carers Strategy. Carers Trust is a new charity formed by the merger of The Princess Royal Trust for Carers and Crossroads Care.

What has it achieved?

“My feelings and opinions were listened to by the professionals. It was a positive experience which really helped me and my family.”

Young carer
“This is a really important service and needs to keep running as it can help families with their problems.”

Parent

Partnership working within this project has developed a much closer relationship between Birmingham Young Carers and the CAF team at Birmingham City Council.

Previously, Birmingham Young Carers did not have regular contact with adult services but the fCAF initiative has helped to develop links with adult services which enables a more holistic approach to supporting families. Since the CAF has changed to the fCAF the assessment process has become more streamlined and stronger networks have evolved which has increased the level of multi-agency working especially with adult services.

Many of the families who have been supported by the pilot thus far have experienced a range of positive outcomes:

- Having newly arrived in Birmingham after leaving a domestic violence situation, one family has been re-housed. The mother has received a diagnosis for her illness and is accessing appropriate services while the young carer is accessing one-to-one support, counselling and group activities which have noticeably improved his confidence.

- In another case, a young carer and his mother, who has a personality disorder, agoraphobia and chronic self-harm issues, had been living in a council flat in a terrible state of disrepair and with only one heater. The family had numerous pets, including some in poor health. Following the fCAF assessment and after an Integrated Support Plan had been agreed, contact was made with the adult mental health team who allocated a Care Co-ordinator. Contact was made with housing who fixed the broken front door and windows of the flat. A referral was made to EON for help with the heating and washing machine and animal charities arranged for treatment for the animals. Contact was also made with Birmingham Law Society to support the family with their housing case. The young carer continues to attend Birmingham Young Carers as he did before. He is now also receiving mental health support from the youth clinical support team in Birmingham.

How have carers been involved in planning and delivering this work?

Young carers and their parents are completely involved in the fCAF process; what interventions they want as a family and their hopes and aspirations of the process. An Integrated Support Plan is designed around their needs and families give consent to each agency that provides support. The family controls their own fCAF and may close its case when it wishes, if there are no safeguarding issues.

Feedback is sought annually through pre and post evaluation questionnaires from both young carers and their parents on the quality of Birmingham Young Carers and specifically about the benefit of the fCAF.

As a direct result of feedback from parents and young carers, the service, with the help of other agencies, has established support funds for families in times of crisis and financial hardship. With monies from the Norton Fund, for example, families can receive support for items such as school uniforms.
How is the initiative run?

The fCAF process is now being implemented across Birmingham as a methodology for assessing the needs of parents and children in the family and a co-ordinated approach to interventions from adult and children’s services to meet identified needs. It is being promoted across Birmingham with the strong message that all professionals could potentially act as the lead professional and be supported by the Birmingham City Council CAF team. The fCAF builds on the existing CAF work and adds an extra dimension by looking at the needs of the child and wider family. The principles of fCAF now draw together children’s and adult service providers to provide an Integrated Support Plan addressing family needs. The assessment paperwork has been revised to reflect this new approach.

The fCAF pilot, which is a partnership between Birmingham Young Carers and Birmingham City Council, is a ‘stepped up’ approach to using the fCAF specifically for young carers. A new full-time role has been created – a Birmingham Young Carers fCAF Co-ordinator – to lead on fCAFs for young carers and their families.

The Birmingham Young Carers fCAF Co-ordinator is based at Ladywood Family Centre, which Birmingham Young Carers shares with several other Action for Children projects. The manager at Birmingham Young Carers allocates three hours a week to oversee the scheme and supervise the Birmingham Young Carers fCAF Co-ordinator.

The role of the Birmingham Young Carers fCAF Co-ordinator is to lead on the fCAF. Unlike other staff at Birmingham Young Carers they work not only with young carers, but with families as well. Their role primarily is to undertake all the paperwork for the fCAF and chair the Integrated Support Plan meetings however, direct family support work has also formed part of the role.

fCAFs are initiated following the referral of young carers to Birmingham Young Carers. Referrals to the young carers service are normally from children’s social care and education. Others come from health, the voluntary sector and from families self referring. Those that do come from adult services are usually from adult mental health services.

Referrals are initially assessed by the manager of Birmingham Young Carers, against criteria for the fCAF initiative. This states that there is a young carer within a family aged 8–17, who is the sole or primary carer for a parent and has a regular and substantial caring role. The family must also be living in Birmingham.

The cases of families meeting this criteria are passed to the fCAF Co-ordinator. They visit the family and initially assess the young carer with the MACA and PANOC tools from Manual for Measures of Caring Activities and Outcomes for Children and Young People to check that they do have a regular and substantial caring role (alternatively this might take place at school).¹ If they do have a regular and substantial caring role and if the Co-ordinator believes that the family is likely to benefit from the fCAF, this is discussed with the family. If the family is happy to proceed then an fCAF is undertaken.

The fCAF assessment is a single form that is split into a parent’s section and a child’s section (this could be several children and include siblings who are not young carers). If the family is happy to proceed then an fCAF is undertaken.

carers) which can both take up to two hours to complete. Completed assessments are sent to the CAF team at Birmingham City Council.

On receipt of completed assessments, the CAF team logs details on its computer system and sets up the first Integrated Support Plan meeting. It invites all agencies who are already working with the family as well as other agencies suggested by the Birmingham Young Carers fCAF Co-ordinator. The CAF team could also suggest agencies where there are gaps in support. At the first meeting, chaired by the Birmingham Young Carers fCAF Co-ordinator, a structured plan is produced and clear, accountable actions are identified. The Birmingham Young Carers fCAF Co-ordinator is responsible for writing up the family support plan and notes of the meeting. On receipt of the notes, the CAF team at the council uploads them onto its computer system. A new e-CAF system has just been introduced to Birmingham which is an online CAF paperwork service which will streamline services and paperwork.

Integrated Support Plan progress reviews usually take place approximately once a month when a decision is made as to whether the individual needs of the family have either been fully or partially met. If they have been fully met or if only one agency is required to remain involved, the fCAF can be closed. If there are still ongoing needs from different agencies, a further date is set for the next review.

The aim is that a range of services – both children’s and adult will then support the family. Birmingham Young Carers allocates a key worker for the child and the Birmingham Young Carers fCAF Co-ordinator is able to undertake some direct family support which may include supporting parents to attend appointments or fill out forms.

Through Birmingham Young Carers, young carers can attend weekly support such as counselling or confidence building and self-esteem sessions. They can also access monthly group activities such as theatre trips and workshops and if needed, one-to-one sessions with a keyworker.

**What methods have been particularly effective?**

Involving parents in the whole process, ensuring the process is transparent and that they are in control has been critical. Parents are truly included in the process and can consent to which services they wish to be involved in their support. Families work with the process. It is not ‘done to them’.

The partnership with the CAF team from Birmingham City Council has been hugely beneficial. A huge amount of time has been saved as a result of the team’s wide knowledge and contacts – providing advice and contact details.

The CAF team has been the oil in the machine and has provided leverage for engaging agencies and bringing about more speedy outcomes. The team has been really useful in problem solving and has sent representatives to the more challenging Integrated Support Plan meetings.

Birmingham Young Carers’ awareness of other agencies that it can refer families to has vastly improved as a result of the partnership with the CAF team as well as increased networking. A multi-agency steering group for Birmingham Young Carers has also increased its knowledge base of local support. This group is attended by a range of agencies and professionals including the children’s commissioner for Birmingham City Council, the adult mental health safeguarding lead and a representative from the CAF team.
Have there been any challenges along the way?

It has often taken a long time for the first Integrated Support Plan meeting to be set up and it can be hard to get all agencies to attend the meetings due to other diary commitments. However, being persistent, using the local authority CAF team’s contacts and taking time to form working relationships with more hard-pressed agencies does eventually pay off.

There are still issues with getting some adult services to attend Integrated Support Plan meetings, although they are increasingly coming on board. They are beginning to understand that this is about meeting the needs of the whole family. The CAF Team has been carrying out a lot of work with senior management, cascading this message out. The voluntary sector fCAF champions group that meets every six weeks has also been pushing this message out to the voluntary sector, through events and its website.

Appropriate housing for families is a common problem, as well as a difficult one to address. Frustratingly, it is often the case that many of the other issues would fall in to place if the housing issue could be addressed.

The needs of families are becoming increasingly more complex, especially those with parents who have mental ill health and multiple diagnoses. Troubles with finances, housing and changes to benefits also add to their problems. It is therefore really important for services to be aware of these issues and offer a response that is flexible and accommodating – particularly since many parents often need to change appointments because of ill health. It has also been important to act as an advocate for parents when liaising with other agencies as parents often lack confidence in self representation and struggle to do this for themselves.

Some agencies see the fCAF team as having the same powers as social care teams, which can result in the buck being passed to the fCAF team. It is therefore important to highlight that the fCAF is a voluntary process which parents can withdraw from at any time.

What hints and tips might help me get started?

- Spend time networking with lots of services and building up your contacts including agencies that will support in ensuring families have appropriate housing.
- Network, for example, Birmingham Young Carers developed useful links with The Law Society, a local solicitor and the charity Shelter as well as the school admissions board who have helped in getting some children moved to more suitable schools.
- Submit assessments at the earliest possible date to get your first Integrated Support Plan meeting set up. Otherwise, the allocated key worker can end up trying to meet the needs of the family which other agencies could fulfil. Remember that new information can always be added to the assessment at later meetings.
- Face-to-face contact is the most effective method for communicating with families. Parents need clear and concise communications which is jargon free.
Are there any useful documents or resources that could assist me?

The Introduction to fCAF on Birmingham City Council’s website explains the principles and process of the fCAF approach and has links to the fCAF pre-assessment and fCAF forms.

A DVD demonstrating how the fCAF can help meet the needs of a family through multi-agency working will be available shortly and can be requested from Birmingham Young Carers.

Where can I get further information?

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