Co-ordinated multi-agency support for young carers and their families

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<th>What is the initiative?</th>
<th>Who runs it?</th>
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<td>A partnership between a young carers service and a council</td>
<td>Off The Record’s Young Carers Project, in partnership with the London Borough of Croydon’s Integrated Youth Support Services (IYSS). (Off The Record is a charity providing support for young people in Croydon).</td>
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Who does it benefit?
Young carers in Croydon, aged 7–18.

What does it do?
The project delivers strategic and sustainable change and co-ordinated multi-agency support for young carers and their families. The young carers targeted have the highest level of caring responsibilities and a clearly identified need for co-ordinated support across several services to address their family’s issues and reduce excessive or harmful caring.

The project, through the partnership, is using collaborative knowledge and contacts to enhance the support for young carers through improved identification, increased support for families with complex needs and engagement with adult services such as housing and mental health.

A Family Support Worker focuses on direct work with young carers while the Project Co-ordinator concentrates on the strategic element of the project, working closely with the IYSS Specialist Services Manager. By providing whole family support and joining up local authority agencies that work with families, the project improves the lives of the young carers it supports.

When did it start?
2012.
Why was it started?

There was a lack of awareness among local authority staff of the issues faced by young carers and the support available to them. This intervention was designed to better join up the work of statutory and voluntary services and create better links within statutory services themselves – particularly connecting children’s services with adult services, but also including general practices and primary healthcare. Evidence to inform this intervention, such as the benefits of a whole family approach and increasing the identification of young carers, was drawn from local and national research, local Ofsted inspections and consultation with young carers and their families.

What are the aims and objectives?

Aims:

- To support young carers with complex needs and demanding caring roles.
- To reduce harmful and excessive caring.
- To increase the identification of young carers through local strategic development.
- To join up and integrate systems across and within the voluntary and statutory sectors and across adult and children’s services.

Objectives:

- To develop and embed clear pathways between the Young Carers Project and education, health and social care agencies, fostering an expectation of multi-agency working.
- To deliver training on identification, impact and referral processes for young carers to local authority departments.
- To broker support for the whole family and individuals across different agencies.
- To encourage service user engagement in their own support, and participation in service development.

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?

“I have felt calm and content. I have been able to trust myself in decision making. I believe I am stronger and think I can deal with a lot more.”

Young carer
“My daughter has benefitted greatly. I have seen changes in her and even her teacher has commented on it. She has improved at school and is not crying and hiding under tables anymore. She knows when to ask for help and has improved academically as a result. At home she’s a little girl again, happier, talking about things, how she’s feeling and not bottling it up, and that’s not how she was before. She can sleep in her own room now, that’s a massive step.”

Parent

“Great training, very eye-opening and was great to see a young carer delivering some of the exercises.”

Youth Arts Manager at IYSS

One of the biggest achievements of the project so far has been bringing together more professionals from a variety of agencies involved with the families of young carers. Engaging adult services by providing training and making presentations to individual teams on the impact of caring on children and the impact of not supporting them, is beginning to become apparent in improved outcomes for young carers and their families.

Fast tracking particular cases, liaising with schools, arranging for transport for when parents cannot physically take their children to school and making adaptations to homes has meant that young carers are not missing school and the risks of harmful caring are reduced. Team Around the Family, Team Around the Child and Youth Early Support (YES) meetings are now attended by more professionals from adult services to complement those from education, health and young people’s services who attend regularly. This enables a full picture of the needs and support available to families to be established.

Working through Croydon’s YES panels has helped cases that have stagnated or needed a more co-ordinated approach, to be escalated to local authority managers working at a higher level. Raising these concerns to senior management can also help managers and commissioners identify gaps in provision at a strategic level.

The project is now experiencing an increase in the number of new referrals per quarter; from 15–20.

Referral and service pathways and protocols have been developed between the Co-ordinator of the Young Carers Project and the IYSS Specialist Manager in consultation with the Young Carers Project staff and directors of Off the Record and are in the process of being embedded into local authority systems. A referral pathway and protocol informs how referrals and discharges are conducted and a service pathway informs how care plans are formulated.

To date, a total of five half-day training programmes have been delivered to IYSS staff, the youth offending services and the Croydon Information and Support Service team. Presentations have also been delivered to the Clinical Commissioning Group and adult care services.
How have carers been involved in planning and delivering this work?

Consultation events are held regularly with young carers and parents. Consultation meetings were held to plan the Young Carers Awareness training and young carers have delivered some of the exercises in training sessions with project staff. Another consultation was held with parents to gather their input into the training sessions and survey their opinion about the impact and consequences of caring. This feedback will be used to inform strategy and service planning. Evaluations are also carried out with the young carers after each intervention and following trips to inform the planning of future events.

The Outcomes Star is sometimes used with young carers and their families to enhance engagement with their own support plan which is leading to more positive outcomes.

How is the initiative run?

A Complex Family Worker currently supports ten families on the project by carrying out one-to-one sessions with young carers and their parents both in and outside the home and addressing the multiple needs of the family by acting as a lead professional and liaising with the various services involved in their case.

The Project Co-ordinator is based one day per week at a local authority building called the Turnaround Centre. The Family Support Worker who delivers direct work with young carers and families is based at the Young Carers Project and is co-located with the Carers Information Service and other services that support children, young people and adults.

Other team members contribute when working with schools or when safeguarding issues are raised. The young carers project employs eight paid members of staff (4.5 full time) and two volunteers.

The Turnaround Centre in Croydon is a one-stop shop for all young people, including those that are particularly vulnerable. It provides access to advice and the services of locality workers (youth work background), YES panel co-ordinators, young people’s housing, the youth offending service and social workers.

In the near future the project will move into a new building which will act as a hub for carers services; it will share space with other organisations working for carers and young people and together they will be known as the Carers Support Network. This network will consist of the Carers Information Service, Croydon Crossroads Care, Croydon Mencap, Parents in Partnership and Mind in Croydon. The carers hub building should enhance communication and information sharing between the project and adult services as well as other carers groups and disability organisations.

At present, the Young Carers Project is in the process of developing effective working relationships with mental health services, drug and alcohol services and housing, to add to the adult carers organisations which are already affiliated with the project.

The Young Carers Project staff are connected with many of the local authority systems through their involvement in the multi-agency YES panel and attendance at children in need and child protection meetings. A Young Carers Working Group has been established, formed by members from both the voluntary sector (including the Project Co-ordinator of the Young Carers Project and the Director of Off The Record)
and the local authority. Members of the group from the local authority include The Head of Youth Services at the council; the Specialist Manager of the IYSS; the Carers Strategic Commissioner from adult services; the Team Manager of the adults in need team; the Strategic Lead for Vulnerable Children and Young People and the Head of the children in need service.

As senior members from the local authority attend the Young Carers Working Group, decisions can be made quickly, to the benefit of those supported by the Young Carers Project.

Families and young people can refer themselves to the project or be referred by a range of professionals. They are then assessed using the Common Assessment Framework, Multidimensional Assessment of Caring Activities (MACA) and the Positive and Negative Outcomes of Caring (PANOC)\(^1\) tools and the Family Outcomes Star. These tools are then used again to measure outcomes. A service pathway is then used to inform the care plan for the young carers and to negotiate with families the types of interventions that may be needed to help them.

Direct support can include counselling, one-to-one mentoring, educational support, representation at YES panels and liaison with other agencies. As the current partners, local statutory services and schools all deliver this support, interventions can take place at the Young Carers Project offices, family homes, schools or in local authority venues. Intensive work with families should last around 3–6 months, but young carers are likely to be registered with the Young Carers Project for many years – as long as they have some kind of caring role.

What methods have been particularly effective?

Being linked into local authority systems allows for easier communications, publicity for the Young Carers Project and helps prioritise young carers as a vulnerable group within the borough. Increased joined-up working with the local authority has also improved outcomes at YES panels and monitoring of young carers in schools.

Communication by professionals from different agencies has led to a better understanding of available services and creates a fuller picture of the family needs to be addressed. This has reduced the need for families to have to repeat their story to every agency or professional they come into contact with.

Splitting the role of family support work and strategic development into the two functions is proving to be effective. A Family Support Worker who works specifically with complex families, has over time enabled relationships with challenging families to develop.

The IYSS Specialist Manager and their expertise around young carers legislation and strategy has been instrumental in implementing the Young Carers Strategy at a senior level within the council.

Have there been any challenges along the way?

Amending the Confidentiality and Consent document – which is used at assessment, reviews and re-registering to set out which information about families can be disclosed to other agencies – was the major challenge as it had to be redrafted in consultation with various departments and funders. Families were also consulted to see how they felt about information sharing. Some people were uneasy about information sharing and confidentiality issues. This was overcome by clarifying to families who sees their data and giving reassurance that young carers’ personal details would not be identifiable.

Ownership of the data was another sticking point but this has also been resolved as Croydon Council has agreed for Croydon Young Carers to use its current database and record further outcomes for monitoring.

Trying to accommodate this work at a time of re-structuring within the local authority has been a challenge.

What hints and tips might help me get started?

- Agree and highlight in advance the changes you want to put in place and your priorities and build evidence to support what you plan to do using local and national research.

- Test your ideas with other senior leaders, families and young carers and then take your proposal to the Chief Executives of the council. It is very important to have senior members of the council on board. Think carefully about the timing of presenting your proposals and starting the project.

- Bring other people on board by engaging with potential partners through meetings, presentations and training. These events also increase the knowledge and skills of other agencies in identifying and supporting young carers.

- Co-location with many different departments allows easy access to leads in other services and to increase awareness of the support for young carers.

Are there any useful documents or resources that could assist me?

Read about Croydon’s YES Panels.

Read about the Croydon Information and Support Service, as well as other support for families in the borough.

Learn about Manual for Measures of Caring Activities and Outcomes for Children and Young People.

Look at the Family Star for:

- measuring change with parents, the at risk indicator for those who are not in education, employment or training

- the service pathway.
Where can I get further information?

Mubin Choudhury
Young Carers Project Co-ordinator
Young Carers Support Project
2nd Floor Courtyard House
1d Church Road
Croydon
Surrey CR0 1SG
Email: mubinchoudhury@carerscontactline.co.uk