

Young carers strategic partnership board



What is the initiative?

Sunderland Young Carers Multi-agency Partnership (MAP)

Who runs it?

Sunderland Carers Centre and Sunderland City Council

Who does it benefit?

Young carers aged 4–16 and young adult carers aged 16–25.

What does it do?

The Sunderland Young Carers MAP is a partnership between organisations that encourages working across children's and adult services. Senior staff from a range of services get together to set out plans for improving the identification and support provided to young carers and their families. Each member takes responsibility for leading on changes and raising the profile of young carers within their own service.

When did it start?

2008.

Why was it started?

For many years, there was an ad hoc young carers working group in Sunderland. The group was informal and attendance varied, but Sunderland Carers and Sunderland City Council saw potential to develop it further. In 2008, the group was formalised into the Young Carers Multi-agency Partnership, as part of the Young Carers Family Pathfinder funding from the Department for Education.

What are the aims and objectives?

Aim:

- The aim of the MAP is to improve awareness, identification and support for young carers using a MAP approach.

Objectives:

- To disseminate information and raise awareness of young carers.
- To strengthen links between partners.
- To make the most of limited resources by empowering partnership members to raise awareness of young carers within their own services.

How is it funded?

The MAP was originally established as part of the Young Carers Family Pathfinder funding from the Department for Education. The costs have now been mainstreamed, with administrative and running costs covered by Sunderland City Council and Sunderland Carers Centre from its core funding. Specific pieces of work are covered by small pots of funding from member organisations.

What has it achieved?

The Young Carers MAP has helped to raise awareness of young carers and improve links between partner organisations. Partners including the mental health trust, the acute hospital and social services have included young carers in publications and strategies, and several partners have produced literature and information packs for staff and families. These awareness raising measures have led to better identification of young carers at the time of diagnosis, which has helped to increase referrals before the point of crisis.

Since the MAP was established, Sunderland Carers Centre has seen a steady increase in the number of young carer referrals (from 60 young carers a year in 2008 to 62 in the first six months of 2011/12), and it is clear that many of these referrals are a direct result of the MAP's work. In addition, the partnership has led to better support for young carers, as strong relationships mean that services can work together to ensure the whole family receives the required support.

Within mental health services and neurology, the MAP has helped to increase awareness and identification of young carers. Before the partnership, both services were seen as an important link to identify young carers, but referrals from these services were low. The board began with awareness raising, which eventually led to mainstreaming of a carers lead and the provision of carers information and the family rooms on wards. Staff in these services now have a greater understanding of young carers and are better equipped to spot potential carers. As a result, referrals of young carers have increased, particularly directly from wards.

Another result of the partnership is that Common Assessment Framework (CAF) boards now have young carer representation, and these boards are now making young carer referrals. By ensuring young carers are considered when CAFs are undertaken and establishing strong links between services, the MAP has found that many young carer and family needs can be met without using additional funding.

Another area of the MAP's success is within City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Trust. The relationship took some time to develop, but the MAP's steady work to raise awareness with the service has paid off as City Hospitals has independently gained funding to produce two publications on carers and young carers – one aimed at families, and one for staff on identifying carers and young carers.

The MAP has also created opportunities for sharing expertise and working collaboratively on specific projects such as a guide for practitioners to help them recognise young carers, information packs to raise awareness within statutory organisations, and a schools card for young carers. The schools card, which was created by the partnership and funded by the council, has been a huge success, with all the secondary schools now signed up and young carers getting better support.

Finally, the partnership has created an environment where creative solutions can thrive. The most notable example of this relates to issues around transport for young carers to and from groups and clubs. When a community transport system was under threat of closure, partners pooled ideas for alternative sources of funding and worked together to get media coverage about the impact the closure would have on young carers.

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

Feedback is regularly sought from young carers through Sunderland Carers Centre and other member organisations. Young carers are invited to attend MAP meetings a few times a year or whenever direct input is needed, and young carers are given updates on how their input has influenced policy and practice.

How is the initiative run?

The MAP consists of representatives from Sunderland City Council, Sunderland Carers Centre and other agencies and organisations. The membership is fluid rather than static, with representatives from particular agencies being invited to join as necessary, depending on the issues being discussed. The group currently consists of representatives from children's services, adult services, education, the mental health team, City Hospitals Sunderland, Sunderland Carers Centre and Connexions. The council's Head of Safeguarding (Children's Services) chairs the group, and the Chief Executive of Sunderland Carers Centre is the Vice Chair.

Meetings are held bi-monthly at the Sunderland Carers Centre, and the agenda of each meeting varies depending on the issues raised by members at previous meetings or current topics of concern in the local area. The group works together to examine issues from all sides and devise collective solutions to problems, often through joint working and sharing resources or funding. Past topics have included how to provide better support for young carers within schools, how to ensure that young carers are considered when the CAF is undertaken and how to deal with the potential closure of the community transport system used by young carers. The next issue the partnership will tackle is how to ensure better support for young carers within colleges, so representatives from colleges are currently being invited to join the partnership.

Outside of meetings, a large part of the MAP's work is raising awareness within agencies and services. The Chair often makes the initial links by raising the profile of the MAP with management teams in local authority services and encouraging them to join the partnership or to advocate it with their external partners. Once links have been established with a service, the MAP's Vice Chair and other staff from Sunderland Carers Centre meet with service representatives to talk in more detail about the MAP's work and young carers more generally, in order to raise staff awareness and encourage future engagement.

Both the Chair and Vice Chair regularly promote the board and young carers at other forums, which helps to recruit new members and engage with other services, and all of the MAP's representatives take responsibility for raising awareness of young carers within their own service.

What methods have been particularly effective?

Sunderland Carers Centre, the council and other organisations had been working in partnership for many years before the MAP was formalised. This meant that the partnership was built on a solid foundation, with good working relationships which had developed over time.

Having senior staff from the council and Sunderland Carers Centre as Chair and Vice Chair of the group has been important in demonstrating both parties' commitment to the partnership. It has also helped in raising the profile of the board with other services.

Getting individual members to take responsibility for raising awareness of young carers within their own services has helped to make the most of limited resources. For example, there are 82 schools in Sunderland (including 18 secondary schools), so it is not possible for staff at Sunderland Carers Centre to be in close contact with them all. Having representatives from schools attend the MAP has helped to reach out to these schools, which has in effect extended the reach of the carers centre.

Have there been any challenges along the way?

Some services were slower to engage than others, and some changes took longer to implement than was originally anticipated. In these cases, it was necessary to be persistent and let relationships develop over time rather than trying to force change on services that were not ready. Working at a pace that was appropriate to the individual partners ultimately helped to ensure their engagement.

A number of the services the MAP tried to engage had little understanding of young carers at the outset. In these cases, awareness-raising was crucial in order to ensure that services fully understood the issues and were able to effectively identify and provide information to young carers.

Funding is always an issue, and some thought had to be given to long-term sustainability from the outset. Luckily, the partnership approach helps to make the most of limited resources, and often there are ways that partners can pool funds or devise collective solutions to financial concerns.

What hints and tips might help me get started?

- Use your existing contacts to raise awareness and build relationships. Often the best way to begin is by talking to the individuals and groups that you already know and using your contacts to help identify appropriate people within services.
- When approaching services, it is important not to be deterred if an initial approach is unsuccessful. It might not be the right time today, but it might be right in six months' time. Persistence can pay off in the long run.
- Don't try to rush the development of relationships. While encouragement is often needed to keep partners' focus, too much pressure to implement changes may damage the relationship in the long term.

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

Recommendations for a Multi-Agency Steering Group for Young Carers and their Families.

An evaluation of the Family and Young Carers Pathfinder Programme.

Sunderland City Council's Carers Strategy which outlines its multi-agency approach to supporting carers.

A guide for practitioners to help recognise young carers.

Where can I get further information?

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