



6 Good practice in... working with young carers

Introduction

This guide outlines the approaches to working with young carers that have been successful for projects funded through the Big Lottery Fund's (BIG) Young People's Fund (YPF). It provides advice and practical examples to help you to work with young carers based on the findings of the five year UK-wide YPF evaluation, carried out by GEN Consulting and Wavehill Consulting, and wider research.

Despite the known issues and challenges faced by young carers, and their significant support needs, this is a group that remains largely hidden in society. There are considerable gaps in research literature, policy and practice to ensure they receive the support they need.

Through YPF projects a variety of approaches to the engagement of young carers have been tested and activities delivered. Lessons identified in this guide reflect the experiences of YPF projects and other organisations working with the target group.

Who are young carers?

A young carer can be defined as anyone aged 18 or under who helps to look after a relative or friend who has a disability, illness, mental health condition or substance abuse problem where these duties go beyond what would be expected for a person of their age.

In 2010 research carried out in secondary schools revealed that up to 700,000 children and young people across the UK could have caring responsibilities. This is more than four times the size of previous estimates. Organisations supporting young carers have highlighted the fact that this issue has been underestimated. They have lobbied for change to support young people who are hidden from view. Young people may not be recognised in their caring role for a number of reasons but this is often due to fear of the impact of revealing stigmatised conditions (including mental health issues, substance abuse, HIV/AIDS). They may also have concerns about negative consequences for their family about disclosing issues to statutory services.

Recognition that there are considerably higher numbers of young people in the UK with caring responsibilities has come at a time when public sector cuts could result in declining support for them and their families.

It is therefore essential that this group becomes more visible and that the necessary awareness, resources and support are available and channelled towards them to meet their needs.

Why engage young carers?

Young carers have many responsibilities and face challenges that are not experienced by their peers. These often include:

- ▶ Being reluctant to discuss their caring experiences with friends or in public as they do not want to stand out as different from their peer group, or potentially bring on bullying.
- ▶ Feeling isolated because they do not wish to discuss their situation or do not know where to turn for support.
- ▶ Finding someone that they can confide in and secure appropriate and practical responses to their concerns.
- ▶ Worrying about leaving those for whom they care for an extended period, resulting in limited involvement in activities away from the home.
- ▶ Poor school attendance and achievement due to wider responsibilities and concerns.

Where young carers participate and become actively involved in activities away from the home benefits can be significant. These can include:

- ▶ Realising they are not alone. Many young carers are unaware of others in the same position, for example within their own school.
- ▶ Finding someone they can talk with to share concerns and get advice from.
- ▶ Providing young carers with time to simply focus on being a young person and engage in activities they enjoy.

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- ▶ Giving young people the space and time to develop a sense of self, their motivations, desires and aspirations that define them away from their caring responsibilities.
- ▶ Helping young carers to plan their next steps in education or employment and how to get there.
- ▶ Providing an opportunity to shape future service provision to make their voices heard and help others in similar situations, now and in the future.

How can you involve young carers?

It is important that you:

- ▶ Encourage young carers to refer themselves to services or make themselves known to individuals or groups which can provide support.
- ▶ Offer a range of information, advice and guidance services, giving young people the opportunity to discuss all of the issues that may be concerning them, get professional advice and identify solutions.
- ▶ Provide organised activities that allow young people to take time away from their caring responsibilities.
- ▶ Provide personalised support, including care either for the 'cared for' or other family members (for example young siblings) to reduce pressures on young people and give them time to themselves.

Your project must recognise that the needs of young carers will vary depending on their personal circumstances, the support network of family and friends they have in place, and the level and nature of other services provided to them and their family. While some young people may require more support in one area, others may benefit from more extensive provision.

In other words...

...work with young carers to identify the most appropriate support for them, so as to meet their needs without overwhelming them...

A further step is to actively involve young carers in shaping future provision of individual and wider care provision. This allows the value of their experience to be recognised and helps them to support others in similar situations.

As noted in the guide '2- Good Practice in Actively Involving Young People' that accompanies this series, involvement can bring about considerable benefits for young people, organisations and services working with them and communities as a whole. These benefits are applicable to a wide range of young people to become involved, including young carers.

What works...?

The following factors are important when working with young carers:

Intervene early

In many cases the needs of young carers are only recognised at the point they begin to encounter problems, for example poor school attendance or attainment. By intervening early, an appropriate support package can be agreed, such issues prevented and crisis points avoided.

Working with schools and existing care services (i.e. organisations already in touch with the family) is important to achieve this. An example is provided on the following page:

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Case Study Example 1

Country: Wales

Project: Young Career Development Worker

Organisation: Crossroads and Neath Port Talbot Social Services

This project supported a development worker to work across 15 schools and one college in Swansea. The post helped to raise awareness of the existence and needs of young carers in education by approaching carers and their peers directly. Awareness raising sessions and presentations were run with young carers and wider groups of young people to help increase understanding.

For more information see:

Evaluation of the YPF Year 4 (2011)

or

www.crossroads.org.uk/index.php?mid=21&sid=45&pgid=142&id=174

Focus on young people not young carers

You should see young carers as young people first and foremost.

While specific support needs will vary from person to person, services should provide an opportunity for young carers to be themselves. Young carers may wish to discuss their issues at particular times and at other times, they may simply want to take a break from their caring responsibilities and focus on other things. Case Study Example 2 outlines the approach taken by one YPF project.

Case Study Example 2

Country: England

Project: Me Time Project

Organisation: Coventry Carers Centre

YPF paid for an Activities Coordinator to work directly with young carers. They offered drop in sessions, individual activities, day trips and residentials, providing young people with time away from their caring responsibilities. Workers were also available to discuss any issues if approached by young people.

The project was keen to ensure that when attending the project, participants are seen as young people, not specifically young carers. Siblings were placed in different groups to ensure that young people were free from caring responsibilities during their time at the project. The project worked with parents so that they knew where their children were going, what they would be involved in at the project and the times that they would be attending to make sure it was convenient.

The Centre now works with younger carers, building on experience gained through the YPF supported project. The project has moved to new premises to allow young people to have their own dedicated space and to allow the needs of different age groups to be accommodated. The events programme has continued to diversify in response to young people's feedback and the needs of different age groups to ensure provision is age appropriate.

For more information see:

Evaluation of the YPF Year 5 (2011)

or

www.coventrycarers.org/yc

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Listen to what young carers need

Successful support responds to the needs of its target group. This relates to both:

1. Support services that are needed to respond to young carers' specific requirements.
2. Social activities that should reflect young people's interests and available time to support attendance.

It is also important to ensure maximum flexibility in provision to accommodate changes in family member health and associated caring responsibilities.

Examples of how provision has responded to young carer needs are presented as Case Study Examples 3 and 4.

Case Study Example 3

Country: England

Project: Young Carers Project

Organisation: Blackpool Advocacy

In response to a gap in provision for young carers a programme was developed to provide opportunities for young people to meet other young people and to socialize, and to develop practical skills.

Social interaction was welcomed by the young people and the practical skills being developed (e.g. cooking and money management) will support their future independence.

For more information see:

Evaluation of the YPF Year 1 (2007)

Case Study Example 4

Country: Scotland

Project: Dumfries and Galloway Befriending Project

Organisation: Befriending West

This project supported young people who would benefit from a positive adult role model by allocating an adult volunteer 'befriender'. Beneficiaries include young carers who need time away from their caring responsibilities.

Befrienders were allocated on the basis of support needs, interests and location to ensure they could properly support their allocated young person. Typically, befrienders met young people on a weekly basis to provide practical and emotional support and take part in activities, such as trips to the cinema or participation in sports.

For more information see:

Evaluation of the YPF Year 5 (2011)

Or

www.befriending.org

Explore opportunities for active involvement

The experiences of young carers can shape programme planning and delivery. This may be at the project or wider local authority level. If managed effectively, there may also be opportunities for young carers to join a forum or provide mentoring support to help others in similar situations. An example of how active involvement has occurred in practice is provided in Case Study Example 5.

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Case Study 5

Country: Wales

Project: Sibling Carers Project

Organisation: Barnardos

This project provided carers with a break from their responsibilities and allowed them to develop skills to contribute to their communities. Activities included public speaking and interviewing new project staff as part of the recruitment process.

Participants helped to increase awareness of the needs of young carers amongst service providers and other stakeholders along with developing new skills. All participants were involved in planning their own programme of support and reviewing the services they received as well as agreeing a plan for how they should move forward.

For more details of the approach being taken in Carmarthenshire see:

Evaluation of the YPF Year 2 (2008)

Or

www.barnardos.org.uk/carmarthenshireyoungcarers.htm

Involve parents where appropriate

Although support services should respond to the needs of young people, involving their parents in the planning and delivery of provision can be very positive and increase the impact of activity.

A whole-family approach can help to build trust and by talking to parents it is possible to identify additional support needs and the most convenient time and way for supported to be provided.

Where can I find out more?

There are many sources of information and support for projects wanting to engage young carers.

If you would like further information on national structures and policies supporting the engagement of young carers see:

- ▶ **England:** England's Recognised, Valued and Supported: Next Steps for the Carers Strategy.
- ▶ **Scotland:** The Scottish Government's Carers and Young Carers Strategy.
- ▶ **Northern Ireland:** The Northern Ireland Carers Strategy.
- ▶ **Wales:** The Welsh Assembly Government's Carers Strategy Action Plan. The WAG Carers Strategy is due to be revised.

Young carers seeking support can find information and advice through the following organisations and web sites:

Princess Royal Trust for Carers

The trust has developed 'young carers.net', an innovative online service. The site allows young carers to raise questions, learn about the experience of others and find information about young carers clubs in their local area.

Visit: www.youngcarers.net

DirectGov

DirectGov provides information on services for young carers in your local area.

Visit: www.direct.gov.uk

In Northern Ireland

Visit: nidirect.gov.uk

The Children's Society

The organisation provides information and advice for young carers, including details of the Young Carers Festival.

Visit: www.childrensociety.org.uk/youngcarers

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Children in Wales

The organisation has facilitated the Young Carers Network that supports the development of services and support for young carers in Wales.

Visit: www.childreninwales.org.uk/areasofwork/youngcarers/youngcarersnetwork/index.html

Northern Ireland Regional Young Carers Service

This service helps young carers to access the support services that they need and offers activities to allow young people to spend time away from their caring responsibilities.

Visit: www.youngcarersni.com/

Support and information is also available to 'cared for' parents through organisations such as the Disabled Parents Network.

Visit: www.DisabledParentsNetwork.org.uk

If you would like information about the national evaluation of the Young People's Fund contact:

BIG: 0845 410 2030

Copies of the YPF evaluation reports and supporting documents are available online from BIG at:

www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/eval_ypf