

Young carers talking

Young carers' views on what's helpful

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Supporting Young Carers and their Families



Introduction

This report is a part of the *Building the Practice. Building the Evidence* programme, managed by Carers Trust and funded by the Department for Education since 2011. As well as funding and supporting the development of sustainable, local partnerships between statutory and Third Sector organisations via the Integrated Interventions partnership sites, the programme also includes the collation and dissemination of examples of practice that have been effective in supporting young carers and their families.


A subset of these examples were rewritten as one-page summaries designed to be accessible to young carers. Details related to funding and management were, in most cases, removed; the young carers' versions focused solely on the details of service delivery that would be most readily noticed by young carers themselves. Young carers' opinions and ideas were then sought, not just on the specific practice examples but on the wider themes they represented and their implications for young carer support. In this way, their responses to a limited number of examples can perhaps inform the development of a wider range of services.

The research was qualitative and exploratory in nature, designed to allow young carers to participate only in the aspects that interested them. The result is a flavour of the issues that matter to young carers, seen through the prism of their responses to practice examples. It is an inclusion of current young carers' voices into the discussion, not a rigorous survey.

Accordingly, the report is ordered and presented as a connected set of emergent themes, rather than as a strict

list of examples and the comments they elicited. It first discusses more general, fundamental themes such as identity, school experiences, whole-family working and relationships with professionals. It then moves to some more specific issues including transport, stigma, targeted support and involvement.

The practice examples used are highlighted throughout the document, and the one-page summaries produced for young carers are enclosed with this report. Each is based on the fuller, more detailed example for professionals that can be found at carershub.org.



EXAMPLE 7: BARNET (LONDON)

Time4Us

for young carers of people who use drugs or alcohol

Barnet Young Carers and Siblings runs activities and one-to-one meetings for young people who are affected by a parent's drug or alcohol use. They can talk about their worries as well as having fun time out and making friends.

<p>What happens?</p> <p>Time4Us supports young people who have someone at home abusing alcohol or drugs. There's one-to-one support for them to talk about their worries, advice, fun activities and a chance to make new friends.</p> <p>A family can make contact themselves. Or perhaps somebody like a teacher, mental health service or social worker might notice that a young person could do with some help. The Time4Us worker visits them at home first to see how they are. After that, they might meet once or twice a week at home, at school or in a café, as well as taking part in the fun stuff if they'd like.</p> <p>An important part of it is encouraging them to use the rest of the young carers' services (because young carers of parents with alcohol or drug issues don't always feel comfortable doing that).</p> <p>When it's useful, Time4Us also supports parents, with things like benefits advice and help to find the best services for them.</p>	<p>Why did it start?</p> <p>Some research showed that having drug and alcohol use in the family can have a big effect on young people. They found that there might be up to 2,000 young people in that situation in Barnet—but there weren't any support services for them.</p> <p>So, it was decided to start one, based at Barnet Young Carers and Siblings.</p> <p>What's good about it?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people who often didn't get any support now have somewhere to go • In a survey recently, most of their members said they get out and about more, and have more friends. • Time4Us is helping other services to understand that, when there's an adult in the family with a drug or alcohol issue, the young people in the family need support too.
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"Both children seem happy and contented with all the staff... it has played a part in helping to stabilise the family unit"

One of the practice example summaries

The practice examples

The consultation focused on the following 17 existing examples of young carer practice:

- **Young Carers Champion**, a former young carer employed in an awareness-raising role
- **VOICE YC**, a young carers' forum
- **Whole family assessment**, putting a support plan in place for the whole family
- **Positive Parenting Programme**, working with young carers' parents on their parenting skills
- **Family group conferencing**, bringing the family together to work out solutions
- **Out of Hours**, supporting young carers and their families at times that suit them
- **Time4Us**, for young carers of people who use drugs or alcohol
- **Time Out Project**, for young carers with special educational needs or disabilities
- **Transition Project**, for young adult carers
- **Mapping young carers**, tracking data on young carers' school attendance and attainment
- **Young Carers Standards Award**, recognising schools' levels of young carer support
- **Schools and Support Coordinator**, a dedicated contact person for young carers in schools
- **Young Carers Summer Scheme**, regular young carers' activities during the summer holidays
- **Kent Freedom Pass**, providing free bus travel to young carers
- **YCNet**, an online support service and community for young carers

Practice examples are introduced throughout this report using the wording from those summaries.

Methodology

Online consultation

Much of the consultation was conducted on a specially-created website at Wordpress.com. Originally a blogging system, Wordpress has a built-in commenting system that is perfectly suited for publishing content and creating discussion on it.

Practice examples were uploaded in stages, with more added every few days in order to keep a sense of activity. Young carers were invited to comment on any individual practice example, and many did. However, the main discussions took place on a separate page where, every four or five days, a new discussion topic was posed (for example, "What do schools know and what do they do?"). Some were recurring themes already identified by Carers Trust staff working on the *Building the Practice. Building the Evidence* programme; others were added to make sure that all practice examples and the main areas of their lives (home, school, family, leisure) were addressed from a number of angles.

For each topic, they were asked to look at between two and four relevant practice examples, commenting on each if they wanted, then return to the discussion and respond to a number of prompt questions. This way, conversations developed as people responded to each other's comments, exploring the issue partly by reference to the practice examples and partly from their own experiences.

Some of the themes identified in this report translate directly to the subjects of the initial discussions. Many, however, describe common themes that emerged throughout the consultation without any prompting in advance.

Moderation and safety concerns

A decision was made not to require young carers to create accounts or log into the system; effectively, it was open to anybody who discovered it. However, commenters were required to provide a name (which was published) and an email address (which was not), and to leave an initial message introducing themselves. Once this had been approved, all subsequent messages from that person would appear directly on the site without intervention. Every message, though, was monitored and read within minutes of its appearance to check for safety or interactional problems—of which, in the end, there were none.

This relatively unfettered style of consultation led to some successful, lively and honest discussion, but was not without its safety issues. A number of measures were put in place to address these:

- No person could contribute until a first message from them had been checked and approved, as described above.
- Only young carers aged 13 and above were allowed to take part. This threshold was chosen as it matches Facebook's age requirements; it was therefore reasonable to assume that people of this age were already familiar with internet contact and the issues it can bring.
- The site displayed a permanent link to a page on Carers Trust's website (YCNNet) that contained tips on staying safe on the internet.
- The project involved a single member of staff working mostly alone, interacting with young people. For the sake of transparency, therefore, all

YOUNG CARER TALK
Improving services for young carers

WELCOME! HOW THIS WORKS TALK THE PROJECTS STAY SAFE

Welcome!

Thanks for coming along to the Young Carer Talk discussion site. Great to have you with us!

This is a quick and easy chance for you to get involved in shaping what sorts of services are offered to young carers across the country. We've got some things to show you and some questions we'll ask, but there are no wrong answers. Every opinion counts.

To get started, you'll need to read the [How this works](#) page. There, you'll find everything you need to know about how the consultation will happen, how to get involved (it's *really* easy), and the site rules we'll need you to agree to. Oh, and we don't expect you to give us your time for nothing: we'll be giving out plenty of Amazon vouchers along the way.

Keep coming back as there'll be more questions to answer, more things to think about, and more vouchers to grab over the next few weeks.

[Ready to get started?](#)

Well hello there.

This is a project run by **Carers Trust**, the people behind [Youngcarers.net](#).

We **can't** get involved in personal problems, questions, advice or support here. Head over to YCNNet for that, or email the Online Support Team at youngcarers@carers.org.

Recent topics

- Thanks everyone!
- What do young carers need?
- Thinking about stigma
- Easier access
- Making young carers' views heard

Tweeted lately

You've done us proud... the Young Carer Talk discussions are now closed. We've said a proper

Part of the consultation website

emails regarding the project were sent via the mailbox used by the YCNet Online Support Team and visible to colleagues.

- Similarly, another member of YCNet staff was tasked with paying attention to the unfolding discussions and was specifically asked to identify problems or challenge anything inappropriate.

In-person focus groups

Separately from the online consultation, several focus groups were conducted with young carers in a local service. These began part-way through the online work, to enable a focus on the themes that were emerging from the discussions. This way, there was no requirement for the in-person groups to read the written practice examples; their role was to add thoughts and opinions on the subjects being discussed from a different point of view. It also enabled more discussion of themes that couldn't be so directly related to specific practice examples, such as trust and sustainability.

The young carers consulted in person differed from those consulted online in several useful ways:

- By definition, all were members of a young carers' group and were receiving support of one kind or another. This was not the case for all those consulted online.
- Issues such as transport and accessibility could be discussed from the opposite perspective: the in-person groups commented on what had been necessary to enable them to be there, while the online group discussed the barriers that prevented them from using services.
- The age ranges were very different: two focus groups were aged 8 to 11, one was aged 11 to 13 and another spanned 11 to 18. Perspectives on school support, for example, are very

different for a primary-aged pupil than for a secondary-aged one.

- Similarly, understanding of key ideas varied greatly. Many younger children interpreted the phrase *young carers* as referring to the service they attended. Others did not know what *government* or *council* meant. Combined, these issues presented a challenge in explaining the purpose of our conversations.

The final focus group was held during the last week of research. Its role was to be a checking mechanism: all of the main conclusions were stated in simple sentences and people were invited to agree, disagree or elaborate. In fact, they agreed on all points. As some have said in this report, there seems to be a surprising commonality among young carers on the issues that matter to them.

1. Identity

It's important to note that, for many, the label *young carer* does not purely, or even mainly, describe a disadvantage. Neither does it describe simply a situation in which they find themselves. Rather, it describes a fundamental part of their identity.

This was a clear underlying theme throughout a lot of the discussion, but was also specifically mentioned in two main ways. Firstly, several people—from the youngest to the oldest among those consulted—enjoy being carers, and wouldn't particularly want to change things. One was dubious of the idea of a family intervention to reduce caring, because she "...liked caring; it gave me a purpose in life." Many felt protective of those they care for and, by extension, of the situation as a whole:

"If someone asked me why is my sister like that my answer is normally she was born like that and what is your problem? She is perfect just the way she is!"

“I thought that all young people helped and listen to their mum when she was upset, look after their young siblings if their parents couldn’t and do things around the house to support the family. Well I wasn’t told any different.”

A younger carer just mentioned that “I like helping my mummy.”

The second main way in which the identity issue was expressed will be very familiar to carers and to those who work with them: for a lot of their life, they hadn’t been aware of anything unusual about their situation.

“I was not ‘identified’ as a young carer until I was quite old. Even now I struggle to see myself as a young carer sometimes. I have been a carer from as soon as I was old enough, because my mum has been ill all my life.”

“I didn’t realise I was a young carer until I was about 12. I thought everyone helped around the house, looked after their parents and siblings and calmed/talked to their mum.”

This has a number of implications. For some, attending young carers’ services and spending time with other young carers is tied up with this identity, so the ability to do so is far more personally significant than simply respite or fun. It relates to, and affirms, one of their purposes in life.

It also may help to explain why, apart

from the one doubtful comment above, there was no reaction to several practice examples’ stated aims of reducing young people’s caring activity. There is perhaps a degree of subtlety required when planning services aimed at reducing caring, or indeed when using phrases like *inappropriate caring roles*.

Finally, this sense of identity may well underly part of the negative response to the [Mapping young carers](#) practice example summary. The work found correlations between being a young carer, lower school attendance, lower attainment and reduced career prospects. On reading the summary, one young carer objected:

“What a horrible thing to read. I feel this is just setting young carers up for failure and upsetting parents that can’t help being ill or disabled... Young carers may read this, knowing that there is no support for them and give up. I know that young carers in generally are a lot stronger than that but when life gets on top of you there is no support and then someone says well you’re going to have bad grades and low attendance anyway... well you know what I’m saying.”

This was, to a large degree, exacerbated

Mapping young carers

Tracking how well young carers do at school

Oxfordshire County Council collected data that measured young carers’ school attendance and achievements, and who they cared for. This produced evidence showing that young carers are likely to do worse at school and be absent more, and need to be supported.

“I do not know if my school has any information about Young Carers or not. I think if they had more information it would help. It would be good if they were able to support young carers more than they do.”

by the oversimplified wording used in the summary. Every practice example was boiled down to the briefest and simplest language. With all nuance removed from this particular summary, it read as an insult, for which we apologised. However, there is an important lesson to be learned. From a professional's point of view, quantifying and articulating the kinds of disadvantages young carers face is an obvious (and, from a funding point of view, often vital) step towards addressing those disadvantages. For young carers themselves, though, it can feel like labelling, judging and writing them off.

2. School

Young carers' experiences

It was generally agreed, by those of secondary school age, that being a carer could have a negative effect on their experiences and achievement at school or college. One mentioned that school can be an extra pressure, added to those they were already under at home. Attendance was mentioned by many, echoing the findings in the [Mapping young carers](#) example:

"My attendance started to drop at a time when my dad was really poorly in and out of hospital or I daren't leave him because I was too scared."

"In secondary school I didn't attend most of year 7, 8 and part of year 9 due to caring and the affects of the stress of caring on my body and mind."

The responses they received from schools, though, varied greatly, largely by age. Those at or near primary school age were generally happy with the way their schoolteachers had responded, and most immediately mentioned a specific teacher or member of staff who had been supportive and helpful to them.

Secondary and college-aged young carers, though, had more varied things to say about their school experiences. (Several factors could explain the age correlation: more intensive contact with individual teachers at primary school, the possibility that things have improved over the years, and/or the fact that all the primary-aged young carers were interviewed in a young carers' service, demonstrating that they had been identified for support.)

None was familiar with the idea of schools having a policy on young carers, and many expressed the view that schools seemed unaware entirely of their existence or needs as carers:

"My schools, primary and secondary, were awful. I had no support at all and ended up having a breakdown. They didn't talk to me about it, offered no

Schools & Support Coordinator

Working with secondary schools to support young carers

Winchester and District Young Carers has a member of staff who works with five schools to support their young carers. Each school has a 'lead' teacher who works with her. Together, they make sure young carers get the help they need and schools learn more about young carers.

"Fantastic! All this support should be everywhere for the young carers that need it. I think that it's important that schools and colleges dont just have one named worker that they can go to but that named worker sharing their knowledge with other teachers and also with other students."

“I do not think other students are aware of young carers. I think this is mainly because no-one speaks out about it. Many young carers are scared of being judged as ‘the kid with a disabled parent’, or a disabled sibling, or related to someone ill, or whatever else it may be. I can understand that. But everyone is different and we did not choose for the people we know to have these problems. We just have to live with and care for them... We are still people too. Just we can not always come out, or have sleepovers if we have to care for someone. If friends knew and accepted this, I see no reason for young carers not to say they are a young carer, the friend would then hopefully help you.”

support and were not understanding at all when things got really bad at home and I had a day off.”

“On a day when [my dad] was in hospital I knew he was safe there for me to go to college, so I went in and sat down next to someone I got on okay with. She asked why my attendance was so bad to which I replied ‘Dad’s been poorly’ and she replied back with ‘I think you should get your priorities sorted out more, your dad’s a big man, he can take care of himself’. She just didn’t understand that I couldn’t.”

The theme of having asked for help but not feeling as though any had been offered was also mentioned several times. Two said that their schools knew they were young carers but that nothing had resulted from this.

One positive example of secondary school support, though, came from a young carer whose head of year realised there was little more that could be done to ease her situation without also attempting to improve things for her mother:

“...She asked questions about who could help and how, when she realised there was no other options she decided on another route. Get mum out of bed and get her to do something, My mum dropped out of school and never got her GCSEs but she always dreamed of being a school teacher, so with my head of year’s help we set up a way for those with no GCSEs to come and study for

them. My mum came along and it helped with her mental health, which helped with how I was struggling, and I became happier.”

Individual staff

During discussions on a number of themes, the value of a relationship with an identified, reliable adult was mentioned frequently (and will be revisited later):

“My primary school didn’t really help until I broke down in year 3 and they gave me support for a bit, but that was because of the teacher. As a school, they didn’t really understand, but some of the teachers did, if that makes sense?”

The concept of an identified point of contact for young carers at school was welcomed by most:

“I think it would be really good for schools to have a named person who could get to know the young carers and who the children could go to in times of stress at school.”

A concern mentioned several times was the fear of too much of a fuss being made; having a specific person who was familiar with young carers generally seemed a good way to reduce this:

“I think it would be a really good to get one person from your school who you could go and talk to when you needed to, that understands and listens but doesn’t

Young Carers Standards Award

Encouraging schools and colleges to do more

Swindon Young Carers have joined with a big insurance company to create an awards scheme for local schools and colleges. Schools are given an award at level 1, 2, 3 or 4 to show how well they support young carers. By improving things, they can achieve a higher level award.

“I think this is a good idea if it is going to get schools and colleges thinking about young carers and supporting them.”

make a scene of it cos most people don't like that.”

On a similar note, though, one possible downside to this approach was that it might be more difficult to keep their status as a young carer secret:

“If they do tell this person, and someone sees this person talking to young carers worker then everyone's going to find out, and she/he wouldn't want them to.”

So, while it was unanimously agreed that it was important for staff and students at school to know about young carers generally, it was also important for young carers to retain control over who found out about their own caring situation.

Overall school awareness

An increase in overall school awareness of young carers and their needs, as described in both the [Young Carers Standards Award](#) and [Schools and Support Coordinator](#) practice examples, was widely seen as a good idea. A large part of the attraction of this was that it would target all staff as well as other students, leading to a general culture of understanding something of the lives of young carers:

“What would have been really great would be to have had a whole school awareness thing. Maybe an assembly where someone could have talked to the school and staff about the stresses for young carers and how to help

them. rather than just ignoring them and expecting them to get on just as if nothing was going on.”

All the young carers consulted were in favour of a wider understanding of the issues and disadvantages that affect young carers in general, so work such as [Mapping young carers](#) was seen largely as a positive step. (They were, however, anxious to avoid assumptions being made that all young carers would do badly based on overall statistics.) Large-scale awareness in school was seen as having several distinct benefits. For one, educating the entire school rather than singling out individuals (as exemplified by the [Schools and Support Coordinator](#)) could lead to earlier identification of young carers:

“I think they should have had more information in general about young carers and then maybe they would have found me before me and my family got to crisis.”

Widespread awareness of young carers would enable teachers to cooperate, understanding not just a young carer's situation but the ways in which they could all play a part in making caring and school work together:

“I think it would be good if individual teachers were aware of the common problems young carers might have and told ways to help them. Of course then all teachers would need to know of any young carers but I think that would

be good and help the young carer be supported in each of their subjects. Also if teachers worked together it would help them. Like if there was a maths test soon then other teachers be aware of it and put less pressure on them if they are only working for the maths test. Then after the test the maths teacher gives less work so they can focus on another subject. Therefore reducing the pressure from all teachers but hopefully giving each subject the attention it needs."

The **Young Carers Standards Award** seemed to most people like a positive way to encourage and celebrate the support of young carers, despite one observation:

"Isn't it sad that a school, a place that is meant to school young people, needs awards to actually support their young people?"

Two raised concerns about what they saw as schools' tendencies to compete for rankings, but welcomed the idea on the whole:

"There are loads of these types of things around and too many of these may mean the basic things are not done if schools are focused on competing on each one. But overall I think it is a good idea that could work well."

Friends and peers

In fact, they all thought it valuable to be able, on a selective basis, to talk to a

friend at school, but thought this would be a lot easier if young people were generally educated about young carers:

"When I first told one of my friends I was a young carer they had no idea what it is and not many children my age do. I would like people to be more aware of what a young carer is. It would benefit me and others if it was more well known."

Closely related is the issue of young people's ideas about disability and illness generally. For many young carers, their peers' understanding of their own role is no less important than their understanding of the person being cared for:

"I personally don't feel embarrassed about my mother's illness but I don't talk to friends etc because their lack of understanding is frustrating. Especially when somebody has a problem that cannot be seen by people."

3. Whole-family working

Getting everyone together

Many of the young carers consulted had experience of whole-family working in one way or another. The specifics varied; some discussed the fact that young carers' services were also organising direct support for their parents (though it was more about social care and support than directly addressing parenting itself,

Whole family assessment

Talking to the entire family at the same time

A whole family assessment means that the young carer, their parents, and as many family members as possible are all brought together. They can then look at everyone's responsibilities, and come up with a plan together for how everyone can help.

"Overall I think that this assessment would be fantastic for some families however would build pressure and worries, for others. It would have to all be done very delicately!"

Family group conferencing

Bringing together everyone involved with the young carer

Barnardo's in Bolton organises meetings with everyone who's involved with the young carer. The idea is to let the whole family write a plan together, to decide what they'll do and what support they need.

"I think group conferencing is a good idea because there are other members of our family who could help us but don't know how to. I don't feel I can ask them but with all of us together it would make it much easier to get them involved."

as in the [Positive Parenting Programme](#)). Others could remember having been involved in a shared assessment or joint care plan, as exemplified in [Whole family assessment](#).

Though none saw it as having been very successful in their own cases, many could see the positive potential in working with the whole family. Some were particularly keen on involving extended family, as described in [Family group conferencing](#):

"I think working with the whole family is a great idea. My brothers didn't really want to join and I felt I was the only one who was doing things properly. If our whole family could be involved and our grandparents too it would make a big difference to all of us."

Cooperation issues

However, many saw some significant

drawbacks, a major one of which was the likelihood or desirability of their various family members cooperating with the process. Some thought it unlikely that family members would be interested at all:

"I think it would have been good to have had the [Kidstime](#) project in my area because the whole family was in denial that there was a huge problem and I suffered as a result. The problem in my situation would be how to get my family to get involved. I would do it but I don't think they would."

(As an aside, one benefit of this consultation happening online was that it included some young carers whose families or situations prevented them from accessing any in-person support.)

Several people had family members whom they specifically would not want to

Positive Parenting Programme

Working with parents to improve family life

Triple-P (Positive Parenting Programme) works with the parents of young carers to try to improve their family lives. They help parents to develop their parenting skills, so young carers are able to have a more 'normal' childhood with fewer problems.

"I think this is a good idea, love the idea that parents' confidence increases. I think this would be good for the parents of the young carers that care for a sibling or grandparent but not for the young carers that care for their parents as some parents are just unable to do any more around the house, and could build stress onto the disabled person."

be a part of any assessment or support:

“My mum definitely wouldn’t want my auntie and uncle involved and they don’t understand about mental health and what a young carer is.”

“When my granny was alive... she was very against support from anyone and stopped me and mum getting support we need. She also refused support for herself but that’s up to her.”

“We have extended family but they have all turned their backs on us because they feel that a mental health problem is a stigma that they don’t want to be associated with. For example my uncle told my dad to just get over it... (this was mid breakdown) so with family members like this why would we want to involve them with my dad’s care? Simply we wouldn’t!”

Who are young carers’ services for?

Aside from the more practical concerns over whether, and how, a whole-family approach could work for less cooperative families, several people had reservations about the whole concept of those who support young carers also forming connections with other family members as in the [Positive Parenting Programme](#). For some, it was simply important for a young carers’ service to be a sanctuary away from the other parts of their life:

“The young carers service, although this sounds selfish, was for me; it’s someone I knew I could trust as they weren’t connected to my family in any way, and it was a place I could get away and be a child, taking my mind off family life.”

Others felt that an important strength of young carers’ services is their separation, and differing approach, from other professionals:

“I believe that the young carers’ service should stay about the young carer themselves and not become like other services where they try and support both

the young carer and the person being cared for.”

“I believe that workers lose touch with their job role (support young carers) if they have a whole family to support. I believe young carers need someone away from everyone else (family, school, social workers) that just focus on them! So that they have someone they can trust and separate to the family’s support plan.”

Turning to the idea of direct support being provided for parents, the same scepticism was there for many:

“I am at a stage now where I feel that the young carers’ service are helping my mum more than they are helping me! Which 1) makes my role as a YC a bit abandoned and 2) does not support me at all.”

Many did agree, though, that the example of parenting support provided in the [Positive Parenting Programme](#) was a good one. However, it was pointed out that all sorts of parents, not just parents of young carers, could benefit from this, which returned to the overall conclusion that young carers’ services should stick to supporting young carers.

Focusing on usefulness

Nonetheless, some did recall examples of support for their parents having a positive effect on them:

“My mum came along and it helped with her mental health, which helped with how I was struggling, and I became happier.”

Others could think of times when a more connected approach to supporting their family might have helped:

“When going to the GP they never asked if I cared for my mum, even though they knew her conditions.”

When asked what would make their lives easier, a younger carer said it would be if

“I think if you were to ask each young carer and their family what they would like they would all say different, and you wouldn’t find two family situations the same!”

her sister behaved better; another wanted her family to help more. These were all examples of the potential relevance of a [Whole family assessment](#) to the young carers consulted.

On the whole, then, while the discussion mainly revealed drawbacks to a whole-family approach, a number of positive sides also emerged. Most felt that it could work sometimes, depending on the family concerned and if offered in the right way:

“I think overall it’s a good idea, depending on the family.”

“Just having the option for whole family support is positive. I don’t think it would help me personally as most people on my mother’s side are ill themselves or live very far away. Plus I like the fact my brothers can live their lives without being too badly impacted on by it. Having said that, should that option have been available towards the beginning it could have been really helpful...”

As previously mentioned, the most common problem raised was one of identity; a feeling that young carers’ services should reflect the unique nature of young carers themselves rather than widening their focus. However, among those who had experienced a whole-family approach, objections to it were mainly centred on the fact that no meaningful change had resulted from it:

“They sit there and argue with each other and make excuses for change not happening. Someone makes a plan and says who has to do what and everyone leaves. No one ever checks the plan and tasks set are not done. I feel stuck in this system that clearly does not work.”

Taken as a whole, then, the discussion suggests some useful priorities for

whole-family working. If services could ensure meaningful results by working with family members who were determined to cooperate, while finding ways to protect and acknowledge young carers’ need for a dedicated space that reflects their identity as carers, a whole-family approach could indeed be a positive option for the young carers consulted.

4. Working with professionals

Multiple agencies

A theme common to most of the practice examples is inter-agency cooperation: different services working together to support the young carer or share their learning. The only downside mentioned to this was the feeling that the young carer’s voice is lost or ignored at multi-agency meetings:

“We had [an] assessment and it was awful because none of our opinions were taken into consideration.”

“We had a child protection multi agency meeting... which was great because other agencies got involved to support but I was never really listened to.”

The importance of feeling genuinely listened to, both on an individual case basis as above and in a more organised, involvement-based project like [VOICE YC](#), arose several times through the discussions.

Despite the potential problems, though, the principle of multi-agency working was a popular one. As discussed earlier in the context of schools, the young carers were clear about the benefits of different relevant professionals working together to understand their situation. A major motivation for this was simply that their situations can be very complicated;

the sharing of information between organisations (e.g. [Mapping young carers](#)), along with active cooperation between them (e.g. [Family group conferencing](#)) are important in managing this:

“To me it is important not to repeat things (I hate telling stories lots of times and get mixed up with who knows what very easily) So it is important to try and keep everyone up to date with what is going on.”

“It is important not to have to explain everything over and over again to different people, especially if you’re caring for someone who has a complex medical history and it takes you two hours just to explain that before you even go onto explain your caring role.”

Practice examples that helped to reduce the complexity of dealing with different agencies and professionals, such as the [Transition Project](#) and the [Schools and Support Coordinator](#), were popular for this reason.

Single point of contact

Taking the idea further, many were keen on the idea of there being a specific caseworker or contact person whom they could get in touch with. This was for several reasons; firstly, it can be stressful for young carers and those they care for to have a stream of different professionals entering their lives:

“There should be one person that co-ordinates the support for the cared for

person rather than lots of people coming in and out of my families lives, which is distressing for all of us but especially my dad who doesn’t deal well with change because of his mental health problems, meaning we have to start prepping for this person coming into the house weeks before they actually turn up.”

A related advantage was that a single point of contact might be able to help a young carer negotiate the complexities of services and entitlements that they are often faced with:

“There also needs to be a specific person that the carers can call who can help organise the help rather than having to go through a minefield to get the end and find you are not entitled to anything because along the way you haven’t filled out a certain form or taken the wrong step. Also having a one stop shop will help minimise the amount of phone calls, time, energy and stress that those who are caring have to deal with.”

Finally, a single professional point of contact could enable a trusted relationship to be built with “a named person who could get to know the young carers.” This was a key advantage of the [Schools and Support Worker](#), discussed earlier, as well as with the small-caseload approach of the [Think Family Project](#):

Think Family Project

Supporting young carers in families with complex needs

In Norfolk, some families are identified as being “at risk” (meaning they have a lot of different kinds of problems at once). The Think Family Project works intensively, for a year or so, with at-risk families that have a young carer in them.

“The Think Family Project is a brilliant project! I think that families would work more closely with these workers than social services. I think small things like the worker being able to take the young carers swimming or bowling, can make a massive impact!”

“It could be a chance for the parent(s) to see that they are there to help not just to annoy you / waste your time.”

Several people, however, recognised the potential stigma that could be associated with the allocation of a single member of staff as an intensive caseworker:

“The Think Family Project sounds good in principle but... I wonder how the service gets them involved without it seeming like an official intervention sort of thing. Doesn't it scare lots of families away?”

“You would feel they are on your case all the time as they do not give up on you.”

Indeed, one was concerned that the whole notion of organising home-based support would be a worry because of its perceived association with Social Services:

“The majority of parents that are being cared for by their children think ‘support at home’ is ‘social services’ and not many people want anything to do with social services, as social services have a sort of ‘bad’ thing about them and that all they’re going to do is take the child away from them.”

Others agreed that Social Services (and other agencies who appeared to offer similar types of support) had a bad reputation, but all agreed that the reality wasn't necessarily so negative:

“I think that sometimes people do not understand how much help you can get from Social Services. As people say bad stuff about them and the stories get passed around which results in less business for Social Services.”

It was agreed, in fact, that the experience largely depended on the individuals involved:

“I’ve found social services both helpful and pointless, It depends on the social worker and the people needing one and also the situation.”

Trust and relationships

This theme—the importance of individual staff's characteristics, and the young carers' relationships with them—arose perhaps more frequently than any other issue, across all the discussions both online and in person.

One young carer's experience of school support was entirely affected by her relationship with the member of staff concerned:

“At college there is a “Learning Mentor” and I really dislike him, always have done and will not go and see him. But there is no-one else that does anything similar. But, not everyone can get on with everyone... sometimes I feel punished for not getting on with everyone. If they had two people or more it would be better for that reason.”

Young Carers Summer Scheme

Fun activities for young carers over the summer

Newry and Mourne Carers runs activities three times a week, as well as their regular young carers' club, in July and August. They include games, arts, sports, barbecues, film nights and days out, so young carers can have a break and some fun during the school holidays.

“All I can say on this one is I would love something like that were you can meet other young carers in the same situation and take time out to do something for yourself because where we live as we have nothing !!”

Even for more leisure- or respite-based provisions like the [Young Carers Summer Scheme](#), the qualities of the young carer workers themselves were some of the most important factors. Many younger carers were horrified when asked what it would be like if the staff in their young carers' service were to change. Others thought it might work, but would take a long time for them to get to know each other properly.

For home-based support, too, consistency of staff was seen as very important:

“There needs to be someone who is consistent and isn't going to visit the house one minute and pass the case over to another person in the next breath.”

On the whole, the notion of trusted relationships was a complicated one, depending on a number of factors: personalities and skills of staff, consistency of staff and services and, as seen earlier, dedicated young carers' services providing “someone I knew I could trust as they weren't connected to my family in any way.”

These issues are perhaps an interesting corollary of the professionals' concerns over sustainability and security of funding, a key theme that has arisen across a wide variety of practice examples in the last few years.

5. Availability and accessibility

Most of the young carers of secondary school age upwards commented, at different times, about services not having been available to them for various reasons. When discussing the [Young Carers Champion](#) and [VOICE YC](#), which use different approaches to get young carers' opinions on service provision, one person mentioned funding constraints:

“The only disadvantage of all this... is funding and having to tell young people that the service is unable to do that, or support them like that.”

Time and place

For many people, though, the biggest constraint on their ability to use services was the need to travel to them. In some cases this was purely about location:

“We have also found because we don't live in the city centre that there are not many young carers groups around.”

However, many saw the greatest difficulty simply in getting away from home at all. Sometimes this was because they themselves would worry:

“I think that people's barriers of using groups is the worry something is going to happen at home and they are not the right timing.”

In other cases, it was more about the impact that the caring situation had on

Kent Freedom Pass

Free bus travel for young carers

The Freedom Pass is a bus pass that young people in Kent can buy if they're in years 7 to 11 at school. The pass lasts all year and lets them travel free on buses. Now, young carers can get a pass completely free of charge, right up to year 13.

“I would love this! I get a third off with my student card but it's still expensive. I would get out more often with free travel.”

Out of Hours

Support at times that suit young carers and families

Blackpool Carers' Centre has support and activities at the times when young carers and their families need it, even if that's not during office hours. It lets them reach people who might not normally use their service, and get those people in touch with others who could help.

"Brilliant. I think this would really be beneficial to young carers and their families. Especially parents that work as well as care."

their parents' ability to drive them to the project at specific times. One carer described the situation that enabled her to attend the group: only because her brother had respite care on a Thursday evening was her father free to drive her to the young carers' service.

For young carers in this situation, the flexibility of a project like [Out of Hours](#) was a very positive step. It also addressed the worry that many feel about getting through the days and times when there doesn't seem to be any support available:

"Brilliant. I think this would really be beneficial to young carers and their families... Also I think it would end a lot of anxiety around being alone over the weekend, and not having anyone to call."

There are downsides, though, to a service that operates at a different time from other agencies:

"Only issue I would share is that no one else works on weekend. So if the family needed immediate support there will not be many people the young carers worker could call. And also the family would have to wait till Monday or the next day till the young carers worker could do anything anyway."

Returning to the issue of transport, a number of ways to address the problems were raised. Some mentioned that their own young carers' service provides free transport in one way or another; most greatly appreciated this (although one

was uncomfortable getting taxis on her own). The [Kent Freedom Pass](#) was a popular idea:

"I would love this! I get a third off with my student card but it's still expensive. I would get out more often with free travel."

In fact, one mentioned travel costs as a particular problem because of the costs involved in caring, so the Kent Freedom Pass was particularly apt:

"Fantastic idea! I struggled at college as all the money I earned at my part time job went towards, bills, medication, things for my sister etc and I couldn't afford bus fare every day because of it. It will definitely give young carers more independence and freedom, also giving them a break!"

Several people also cited online services such as [YCNet](#) as a solution to the access problem, as they can eliminate travel requirements and enable a more flexible schedule. Returning to the earlier quotation:

"People's barriers of using groups is the worry something is going to happen at home and they are not the right timing but with the use of YCNet them barriers are thrown out the window. As you can still watch out for them and there are many opportunities to choose when you join in!"

Another agreed, but pointed out that the helpfulness of an online service is perhaps limited by the the difficulty in finding out that it exists:

YCNet

Online support and community for young carers

YCNet (Youngcarers.net) is a website where young carers aged 18 and under can come together to chat and get support and advice from each other and the staff. It has discussion boards, a live chat four times a week, an agony aunts page and an email helpline.

"YCNet is the best thing I have ever come in contact with. When I first was called a young carer I didn't know what it meant. I found YCNet and the amazing support workers on there and the other young carers explained and supported me."

"I think YCNet is really effective at reducing any sense of isolation young carers may feel because nowadays most people have an access to computers be it at home or school though you need to know these things exist before they can help."

Disability

Turning to a different aspect of accessibility, people certainly saw the value of projects like [Time Out](#), for young carers with disabilities themselves:

"The Time Out Project looks really good and if people can get to them, I think they'll be really fun and good for people."

While definitely in favour of projects like Time Out, some were aware of a tension between dedicated services like this and the desire to include people with disabilities in more mainstream services:

"Fantastic! Many young carers with additional needs get over looked and

I think this is a brilliant way to support them. I do think though that they could be encouraged to go to the young carers groups too though as they shouldn't be excluded!"

However, one person had direct experience of being a young carer with a disability herself, and felt that her 'mainstream' young carers' group had difficulty in supporting her:

"I notice from the group I go to they are very good at giving young carers a good time. But, they really struggle with me, because I have a disability too. They are simply not used to working with people with additional needs but the 'normal' people that care for them."

In fact, several of the practice examples were of support for specific subcategories of young carer; examples included [Time4Us](#) (for young carers who have someone at home with drug or alcohol

Time Out Project

For young carers with special educational needs or disabilities

Crossroads Care Richmond & Kingston upon Thames runs Saturday clubs for young carers who have special educational needs or disabilities. They also show other professionals how to spot the signs that a young person with a disability might be a carer.

"Many young carers with additional needs get over looked and I think this is a brilliant way to support them."

Time4Us

For young carers of people who use drugs or alcohol

Barnet Young Carers and Siblings runs activities and one-to-one meetings for young people who are affected by a parent's drug or alcohol use. They can talk about their worries as well as having fun time out and making friends.

"It gives you a chance to talk to someone who understands and affects it has on other people. I guess it's also nice to see you're not alone and not the only one who's in that situation."

issues), the [Time Out Project](#) (for young people with disabilities or special educational needs), and the [Transition Project](#) (for young adult carers). This theme will be revisited later. However, from the point of view of accessibility, the young carers were asked whether it was better to develop specific services to address accessibility/approachability issues, or to work to make existing generic services more inclusive:

"I think it's better to improve your current services, then when you think they're brilliant and can't be improved anymore, then add more if you can."

Stigma

A repeated theme throughout the discussions was the stigma that can surround being a young carer. Many described embarrassment or worry about admitting to being a young carer:

"Some young carers are quite ashamed to be young carers and you would never find out that they're caring for someone. Or they don't want anyone to know."

As discussed earlier with reference to the [Schools and Support Coordinator](#), this was a large potential barrier to approaching an identified young carers' contact.

Perhaps indicating a more negative side to the previously-discussed issue of identity, some felt that their status as carers would lead to negative judgments of them:

"I could never speak to anyone about the problems at home because I thought I'd be judged. All my friends seemed to have perfect families and lives and I couldn't be different. In the end I had a breakdown because of keeping everything covered up."

One related this to a feeling of blame, which will be familiar to those who work with young carers:

"I think young carers sometimes embarrassed about things that aren't their fault because they may not understand it."

A lot of the stigma, it was felt, seems to rub off on young carers from people's judgments of those whom they care for. Discussion of [Time4us](#) prompted a poignant comment:

"People were always asking what was wrong with my parent and I had a set story I would tell which was a complete lie because I was so ashamed that it was to do with drugs and alcohol."

Similarly, several people recognised mental health issues as a particular source of stigma:

"I realise that it is an area which is the most stigmatised and those projects [[Kidstime](#)] strike me as very

Kidstime

For families affected by a mental health condition

Kidstime is for families where somebody has a mental health problem. They run a series of workshops that help the family to communicate and understand mental health better, but the main focus is on the young carers in the family.

“Great idea, gets people talking about mental health which is a massive step forward, breaking those stupid stigmas. This would let young carers and their families know that they are not alone and that people care.”

helpful, by giving the young carers more confidence and a better understanding.”

In fact, in almost every case, they linked stigma with a lack of understanding, both on their own part and on the part of others:

“I wish that someone explained to me what mental health was and what some of the illnesses mean. I think I would have been able to support my mum better and not be so worried about it all.”

So, as discussed in the Schools section, educating themselves and educating their peers are equally important parts of addressing stigma. For that reason, if a project such as [Kidstime](#) took place somewhere where others might see, it would be a problem:

“If they were in my school or college then I may not have gone, as the project may be breaking stigmas in group but others (friends, bullies) they are not talking to.”

For those who felt particularly embarrassed or nervous about their caring situation, it was generally felt to be a good idea to offer specific services for those in a similar position:

“I think if there’d been a specific group with other young carers in similar circumstances it would have helped me sooner.”

Self-confidence

Many people mentioned the fact that general self-confidence, not necessarily

related to the stigma of being a carer, can be a barrier to coming forward for help. Several simply felt uncomfortable talking to people or interacting in groups:

“My local service used to run lovely trips ...I enjoyed it although I did find it really stressful. I am quiet and have no confidence but some of the young carers were very confident and very loud and I found I had to force myself to go in the end.”

For these people, as well as for those who were uncomfortable coming forward as a young carer, it was felt that online services like [YCN](#) might be a good solution:

“YCN would be really useful for me as I don’t get a lot of time but I do use my computer to chat. It makes me feel part of things when things are difficult and when I don’t feel like meeting people in person. I get really anxious talking to people and also to other young carers but I feel much freer online to say what I really mean and what I really want to say without clamming up.”

“I think, including me, lots of people don’t want to make a fuss that they’re a young carer and sometimes just want a normal life which is why the YCN thing is good. I use it and it’s very helpful.”

6. Specialist services

Returning to the theme of more targeted services (such as [Time4us](#), the [Time](#)

Transition Project

Supporting young adult carers

Suffolk Family Carers supports carers aged 16–24 as they make decisions about their future lives. They help them to think about education and careers, to start using services for adults if they need to, and aim to reduce the effect that caring has on them.

“I think the Transition Project would really help should it be more widely accessible as there are new challenges that can impact highly on the future.”

Out Project, the Transition Project, the Think Family Project or Out of Hours) as opposed to more all-encompassing or generic services (e.g. Young Carers Summer Scheme, YCNet, Young Carers Standards Award), the young carers were in favour of both. The overall view that emerged was that, while separating different groups of young carers wasn't desirable, it was fair enough to provide specific services to those who might benefit most from them.

Out of Hours was praised for its appeal to young carers who hadn't previously accessed support:

“I definitely think that it will find hidden carers and bring carers out of isolation as families may ask for support, or have time to receive the support easier.”

The Transition Project, too, was recognised as serving a need specific to young adult carers:

“I think the Transition Project would really help should it be more widely accessible as there are new challenges that can impact highly on the future.”

“I asked my local carers support centre what support was available to me and they explained to me about the adult services. These services included coffee mornings and games of Scrabble. Although this is amazing for the elderly carers this was just not for me. I also needed support at that time with careers, money, housing and everything else that comes along with being a young adult, not including the pressure of being a carer too.”

As well as being able to offer specific kinds of issue-based help, more targeted or specialised services were thought to offer a sense of solidarity among people in similar situations:

“Often it is important for people and young carers to have support that is specific to their situation as they will face different challenges with educational needs compared to coping with substance abuse. Meeting people in similar situations means you are more likely to be able to support each other which can reduce the isolating impact that caring often has on young people.”

All that said, they valued the mixing of different 'types' of young carers that happens in more generic young carers' services:

“It's nice to see you're not alone and not the only one who's in that situation. But, it's nice to have awareness of other types of young carers too.”

In fact, for many, the unique things that most young carers share are more relevant than the differences between them:

“I think that being a young carer, whatever illness or disability your loved one has, you’re still a young carer and many situations can be the same even if the issue is different.”

They also placed great value on the simple chance to relax and have a break, but in a supportive environment, that young carers’ services like the [Young Carers Summer Scheme](#) frequently offer:

“The young carers’ service is a chance for them to have a break, make friends and have someone to talk to.”

The importance of choices

On the whole, if there was one thing everybody agreed upon, it was the importance of being able to choose between a variety of options. This was just as true for choosing which local services to use as it was for deciding whether, when and how to access support in schools:

“I think it is very useful to take different approaches as many people react differently. Different projects will help people benefit more to different things/projects.”

“Schools should have lots of options so that young carers can choose what support they would like...They should also be open so that if the young carer doesn’t want the support at the moment they are asked then can go and receive it when they need and want it.”

The option not to be called a carer

This freedom of choice should extend to include each person’s right to decide whether to identify as a young carer at all:

“If someone was identified as a young carer, tried the support and did not like it or want it, then they could always go back to not calling themselves a young carer and to how things were before if

they wanted to. (Or I personally think they should be able to, and that no-one should be forced to have support if they think it is making things worse.)”

Another echoed this idea, saying that staff expressing concerns too often could feel like them “getting in your business”. It’s important for help and support to be available, but not constantly present.

Early intervention

Equally, though, many emphasised the importance of intervening before problems reach crisis point:

“It is really important to have teachers’ training and assemblies on the subject as this way, many hidden carers would be found before crisis.”

Recalling the importance of stability, one person mentioned that intervening early with things like [Family group conferencing](#) would also be less disruptive, and therefore easier to cope with:

“Should that option have been available towards the beginning it could have been really helpful in the long run, because everything is new anyway what’s one more thing.”

The overall ideal picture seems to be a mixture of services and styles. There are many young carers who might benefit from a specialised service, but a generic one is valuable to everybody too. Crisis services have a place but, where possible, earlier intervention is preferable, and neither should be at the expense of services that offer a chance to relax, “get away and be a child”. Amongst this variety, young carers want to be able to choose for themselves the services they use and the support they receive.

“I think all young carers and their families need is time. Time to talk, time to relax, time to have fun and smile.”

7. Young carer involvement

Continuing the theme of young carers being able to choose for themselves, services that clearly involve young carers in their planning were highly regarded.

One singled out the [Young Carers Summer Scheme](#) for this reason:

“The YC summer scheme sounds really good, especially as YCs are involved in choosing the activities etc.”

Another young carer credited the [Think Family Project](#), [VOICE YC](#) and [Young Carers Summer Scheme](#) for the same reason:

“I think there are lots of positives to all the examples given above especially as most of them centre around listening to what is wanted by those who the activities are aimed at. Something which would seem really obvious but often isn't actually the case.”

Voice and influence

Not surprisingly, all were keen on projects that specifically aimed to get young carers' views recognised. The [Young Carers Champion](#) and [Voice YC](#) were both popular:

“I think anything being done to highlight young carers' situations and to make their opinions heard is really positive. I like the idea of a YC being employed to be a Champion for YCs. And yes I agree that YCs need to be asked about their

situations as only they can try to put across what their own lives are like.”

One had met the Young Carers Champion and was thoroughly in favour:

“Fantastic!!! I have met the champion of Blackpool and she is brilliant. I think this way you get a powerful story across to professionals to make them listen and understand. I think this is a fantastic idea and wish they did this across the country!”

Simply raising the issue of young carers more could potentially lead to positive change:

“Usually the best way for people to take something seriously is when it becomes reasonably common knowledge. Such awareness can be achieved through local councils by telling them the reality of caring and what realistically could help.”

It was generally agreed that only people who had direct experience of it themselves could really understand what life was like for young carers:

“The advantages of actual carers telling people about issues they are facing is the fact they are going through it and the staff aren't. How can you tell someone ‘I understand what that must be like’ when you've not and are not going through it? If someone turned around to me and said ‘I understand that...’ I'd be like: “but you don't.”

Young Carers Champion

Raising awareness of young carers' issues

Blackpool Carers' Centre employed a former young carer to be their Young Carers Champion. She gave presentations to professionals and politicians, ran training sessions, and produced a DVD, all to help people understand what things are like for young carers.

“I think anything being done to highlight YCs situations and to make their opinions heard is really positive. I like the idea of a YC being employed to be a Champion for YCs.”

VOICE YC

A young carers' forum to get their views heard

VOICE YC stands for Views, Opinions, Ideas and Choice for Every Young Carer. It's a forum where young carers discuss issues that matter to them, and influence the decisions that affect young carers in Bromley and across the country.

"I would love to be part of the "Voice YC" as I would like to be more confident and in myself and know I am being listened to by an organisation/service."

Equally, one felt that adults' understanding of young people's experiences in general could be limited, simply because times change:

"The thing about adults is they think they know what's best for us because they've been our age once, but times change and so does circumstances, for example we have YCNet... when my father was a young carer he didn't have someone to log online and chat to."

Shaping services

As well as just conveying their experiences, they were keen on projects like **VOICE YC** that provide ways for young carers to influence local services:

"Of course it's helpful for young carers to have a say on how things are run in their area, since things will be run to benefit them."

From a practical point of view, it was felt that young carers themselves are in the best position to know what would be the most helpful:

"They are the ones that know the most about caring, about what support they will or do need!"

"I think it's really important that YCs are asked what services they would like to be offered in their area especially because

many YCs are extremely busy and will probably have a good idea of what would be most helpful for them."

In shaping services according to young carers' views, though, it was acknowledged that it wouldn't be possible to suit everybody:

"It may be difficult to get a rounded service that will support everyone like they want to be supported as all young carers are individual and may have different needs at different times."

Hidden carers

One person pointed out that increasing young carers' participation in service planning and delivery could lead to more carers coming forward in the first place:

"It's highly important as that's how you will find hidden carers as once the carers you're aware of build confidence and fun and supportive services they will talk to others or others will notice this service and come forward."

The extra power of involvement

Involvement-based projects, though, need not necessarily be at the expense of more support- or respite-based work. In fact, the distinction between consultation and support is not a clear one, considering how personally rewarding many of them find these activities:

"What are the best ways for people to find out what's important for young carers? The answer to this question is obvious! Talk to them! They are not aliens and they are also very level headed and strong individuals!"

“I would love to be part of the “VOICE YC” as I would like to be more confident and in myself and know I am being listened to by an organisation/service.”

“This is brilliant! I attended the YC’s Voice in my area and it’s a fantastic chance to get your voice heard (which isn’t heard in many places) on things that affect or will affect you. It builds confidence and self esteem too!

“I now attend the carers version of this and I would have never been able to talk in front of all the people that turn up if it wasn’t for YC’s Voice!!!”

For most people, the connection between representing young carers’ views and increasing their self-esteem and confidence was very clear, which perhaps is part of the reason why the idea of the [Young Carers Champion](#) was so popular.

Similarly, the chance to get involved in improving others’ situations was an experience that many valued:

“I believe YCNet will support many young carers through difficult times, and also

build young carers self esteem by making them feel good about supporting others.”

In fact, the the positivity with which many people reacted to the chance to be involved in this consultation speaks volumes:

“I think this is an amazing idea as there isn’t enough support especially for older young carers.”

“I think it’s an amazing idea which needs to be more known and advertised so other young carers know.”

“This is a fantastic idea!!! It’s great to know that people care about young carers opinions!”

Under the right circumstances, involving young carers, listening to their experiences, and seeking their views on services can be a positive and powerful experience for all concerned.

It’s therefore appropriate to leave the last word to one of our participants:

“I really enjoyed contributing to this and it made me think hard about my situation too. Thanks for the chance :)”

With thanks

Enormous gratitude is owed to the staff of [York Carers Centre](#) and [Inspired Youth](#) for their help in arranging the in-person focus groups, and to the [Online Support Team](#) at Carers Trust for their cooperation and watchful eye.

More importantly, our thanks and appreciation to the young carers at [Young Carers Revolution](#) and [York Carers Centre](#) for participating in the discussions, and to the many across the country who devoted such efforts to writing so many thoughtful and considered comments. Their time is more precious than most.

Finally, the photograph on the front of this report is of some of York's young and young adult carers, at a gala dinner organised by the young adult carers to raise awareness and funds for local services. Speaking out has never been so classy.

Young Carers Champion

raising awareness of young carers' issues

Blackpool Carers' Centre employed a former young carer to be their Young Carers Champion. She gave presentations to professionals and politicians, ran training sessions, and produced a DVD, all to help people understand what things are like for young carers.

What happens?

The Young Carers Champion is a **full member of staff**, so she works alongside young carer workers and gets to find out all about what they do.

She has designed and delivered a training course for professionals to highlight young carers' needs. With the help of other staff at the Carers' Centre, she has trained around 150 professionals including **local councils, health, social workers, and the local Safeguarding Children Board**. The training tells people about what life is like for young carers, what's available for them at the Carers' Centre and how to access it.

As part of her role, the Champion helped to produce **a film about what it's like to be a young carer in Blackpool**. It's shown in training sessions, became very popular on YouTube and has won an award.

The Young Carers Champion also takes part in all sorts of other activities—including **going to London to talk to the government** about funding young carers' services.

Why did it start?

A young carer who had used their service said she was interested in working in the area of young carers. They realised this would be a way to give her some valuable work experience, and was a good way of teaching staff in other services about young carers.

What's good about it?

- Blackpool Carers' Centre has been able to **get a young carer's point of view** on all the decisions and choices they make.
- Hundreds of professionals, politicians and others have **learned more about what a young carer's life is like**, and what might make a difference.
- The Champion has **developed confidence** and experience in speaking in front of lots of people.
- She has **gained qualifications** in helping people and has started studying youth work at university.

“I have grown greatly in confidence... and I've been able to raise awareness for young carers all over Blackpool.”

VOICE YC

A young carers' forum to get their views heard

VOICE YC stands for Views, Opinions, Ideas and Choice for Every Young Carer. It's a forum where young carers discuss issues that matter to them, and influence the decisions that affect young carers in Bromley and across the country.

What happens?

The group meets four times a year. There are currently 25 members, but they don't all come to every meeting. Any young carer aged 11 or over can join—they **don't turn away anybody**.

They **discuss how the Young Carers Service runs**, and give their opinions on things like trips and activities, the website, behaviour rules, articles for the newsletter, and more. They also talk about other issues, like **giving their views to the local council**, and helping to recruit new social workers.

The Young Carers Service Manager runs each meeting (it used to be a young carer who did this, but it was too much pressure for them). She also writes notes about what was discussed and sends them to everyone afterwards.

The meetings are held in the Carers' Centre. Although they can't pay for people's transport there, **pizza is always provided!**

Why did it start?

When the Young Carers Service was started, they realised that they should get young carers' opinions **to make sure they were offering what people wanted**. So, VOICE YC was set up.

What's good about it?

- It lets young carers **influence** the services that affect them.
- It has helped to **develop young carers' confidence** and self-esteem; it makes them feel listened to.
- It's really helped the Young Carers Service to **make the right decisions**. Sometimes they were planning one thing, then changed their minds completely after talking to VOICE YC.
- It has **encouraged other services to talk to young carers**, and to bear their opinions in mind when making important decisions.

“I'm able to have a say and feel listened to.”

Whole family assessment

talking to the entire family at the same time

A whole family assessment means that the young carer, their parents, and as many family members as possible are all brought together. They can then look at *everyone's* responsibilities, and come up with a plan together for how everyone can help.

What happens?

Child Action Northwest wants to **reduce the amount of caring** that young people have to do, and make families **more able to cope** with their situations together,

When a young carer needs some help or support, Child Action Northwest meets with them as usual. But they **treat the family as one complete thing**, instead of separating the young carer from the cared-for person, the parents, the brothers and sisters, and so on.

This means that they can think about the relationships in the family and **how they all behave towards each other**, instead of just looking at one person's problems.

By looking at the whole family together, they **can come up with a plan that involves everyone**. The aim is to make sure that nobody is doing an inappropriate amount of caring work, by agreeing the jobs and roles of everyone in the family together.

Why did it start?

Like a lot of young carers' services, Child Action Northwest were helping young carers with one-to-one support and activities that gave them a break. But at the end of each session, the young carer just went home to the same stuff. **Nothing had changed at home** and so their lives never really got much better.

That's why they thought working with the whole family might make more of an improvement.

What's good about it?

- Young carers are **having to do less** at home.
- Family **relationships have improved**.
- Supporting the whole family means that different services have to work together, so young carers and their families **don't have to tell their stories so often**.
- It also means young carers' workers and people like social workers understand a lot more about each other.

**“Mum's happy and that makes me happy
—I can relax at school now.”**

Positive Parenting Programme

working with parents to improve family life

Triple-P (Positive Parenting Programme) works with the parents of young carers to try to improve their family lives. They help parents to develop their parenting skills, so young carers are able to have a more 'normal' childhood with fewer problems.

What happens?

Winchester and District Young Carers **works with young carers' parents**, in groups and in one-to-one sessions, to help them improve their parenting skills.

Each year, they **identify young carers who are experiencing particular problems**—for example, low attention in school, trouble with the police, or arguments at home. The parents are invited to come to a Triple-P group, and maybe individual sessions too.

Parents have 10 weekly sessions, usually in their own home. They **choose one particular behaviour that's a problem** and really focus on that, trying to give the parents the skills to make a long-lasting change.

The idea is to increase parents' skills and confidence, **allowing young carers to be children first and have a childhood more like other young people**. This could prevent some of the emotional problems young carers often experience.

Why did it start?

When they were working with young carers, Winchester and District Young Carers realised that supporting parents might be a good way to deal with some of the problems in families.

What's good about it?

- It's based on a system that has been **developed around the world over 30 years**, so it's well-known and it seems to work.
- Winchester and District Young Carers have built more positive relationships with the parents involved.
- Parents say their **confidence has increased**.
- Although they choose just one issue to focus on with each set of parents, they usually find that **other things improve too**.

“This Triple P programme has helped me in lots of different ways... I have become closer to my children as a result”

Family group conferencing

bringing together everyone involved with the young carer

Barnardo's in Bolton organises meetings with everyone who's involved with the young carer. The idea is to let the whole family write a plan together, to decide what they'll do and what support they need.

What happens?

Family group conferences bring together **everybody in the family who is involved with a young carer**. This might be the young carer, parents, brothers, sisters, grandparents, aunts, uncles—anyone.

First, a coordinator visits the family at home to decide what issues should be discussed at the meeting. Together they decide where it should be held, what time and day would be best, whether they need a translator, and so on.

As well as the family, people like **social workers, teachers and someone to support the young carer come too**.

At the beginning everybody talks together about their issues and worries. Then **the family decides on their plan together, in private, without the workers there**. The workers come back and everybody must agree that the plan is safe and realistic.

Two or three months later, they all come back together to discuss how it's going.

Why did it start?

Barnardo's in Bolton thinks that, instead of supporting young people to keep being carers, they should instead be trying to **reduce how much caring young people do**.

They found that running their normal activities didn't really change the young carers' lives, so the same people used their service for a long time and there wasn't space for new people. So, they decided to start working with whole families together to reduce the young person's caring role.

What's good about it?

- Families are supported to **solve their own problems**. It makes their relationships stronger and teaches them to deal with future problems.
- The family's needs are all looked at together—**nobody is ignored**.
- Young people's caring has been reduced. In Bolton, when they're looking at what care somebody needs, **nobody under 16 can be treated as the main carer**.

“I will admit it's always a bit nervewracking.. but I think it was really good; I felt really confident.”

Out of Hours

support at times that suit young carers and families

Blackpool Carers' Centre has support and activities at the times when young carers and their families need it, even if that's not during office hours. It lets them reach people who might not normally use their service, and get those people in touch with others who could help.

What happens?

Blackpool Carers' Centre has a Family Support Worker whose job includes working on evenings and weekends. This means she can meet with young carers and their families **at times that are best for them**.

When a young carer is referred to them, they **try to understand the whole family's needs**. Particularly for families who have lots of problems, it can be hard to get them to be available or to trust the workers. So, Out Of Hours runs **fun activities** at weekends and evenings for the whole family. Everyone gets to know each other and **trust starts to build up**.

During the sessions, Out Of Hours will then try to make sure **the whole of the family is getting the right help and support**, and see what could be done to improve things.

If they notice any particularly difficult things for the young carer, they can talk privately about those during the young carers' sessions at other times.

Why did it start?

While running the young carers' service, they noticed that the **young carers with the most difficult or stressful home lives** often found it the hardest to get the support and activities that might help them.

In particular, parents and families with the most problems often found it hardest to **trust the people and services who might be able to help them**. This problem was reduced by Out Of Hours meeting with them gradually, at convenient times, doing fun things, until they'd got to know the workers.

What's good about it?

- It appeals to families who **might not have been willing to get support** for themselves and their children otherwise.
- It targets the people who might be the most isolated, and **encourages them to meet people**.
- It runs at times when **many other helping services are closed**.

“The project has opened doors for us and has given us access to support we have not previously been able to receive.”

Time4Us

for young carers of people who use drugs or alcohol

Barnet Young Carers and Siblings runs activities and one-to-one meetings for young people who are affected by a parent's drug or alcohol use. They can talk about their worries as well as having fun time out and making friends.

What happens?

Time4Us supports young people who have someone at home abusing alcohol or drugs. There's **one-to-one support** for them to talk about their worries, **advice**, **fun activities** and a chance to **make new friends**.

A family can make contact themselves. Or perhaps somebody like a teacher, mental health service or social worker might notice that **a young person could do with some help**. The Time4Us worker visits them at home first to see how they are. After that, they might **meet once or twice a week** at home, at school or in a café, as well as taking part in the **fun stuff** if they'd like.

An important part of it is **encouraging them to use the rest of the young carers' services** (because young carers of parents with alcohol or drug issues don't always feel comfortable doing that).

When it's useful, Time4Us **also supports parents**, with things like benefits advice and help to find the best services for them.

Why did it start?

Some research showed that having drug and alcohol use in the family can have a **big effect on young people**. They found that there might be up to 2,000 young people in that situation in Barnet—but **there weren't any support services** for them.

So, it was decided to start one, based at Barnet Young Carers and Siblings.

What's good about it?

- Young people who often didn't get any support **now have somewhere to go**
- In a survey recently, most of their members said they **get out and about more, and have more friends**.
- Time4Us is **helping other services to understand** that, when there's an adult in the family with a drug or alcohol issue, the young people in the family need support too.

“Both children seem happy and contented with all the staff... it has played a part in helping to stabilise the family unit”

Time Out project

for young carers with special educational needs or disabilities

Crossroads Care Richmond & Kingston upon Thames runs Saturday clubs for young carers who have special educational needs or disabilities. They also show other professionals how to spot the signs that a young person with a disability might be a carer.

What happens?

The Time Out project runs Saturday clubs in two areas of the city, every week during term time. Breakfast is included in one, and lunch is included in the other.

Young people can choose from all sorts of activities, ranging from singing to sports. A timetable of each week's activities is written in advance. It's a positive environment where they can be themselves and have fun, away from caring, and where their extra needs are taken into account.

Before young people come, the staff check very carefully about things like behaviour, communication problems, allergies, safety and anything else that might be an issue.

The project carefully monitors what works and what doesn't. This is so that other professionals (like schools, social workers, and so on) can learn from them and see the best ways to recognise, and support, young carers with special educational needs or disabilities.

Why did it start?

Crossroads Care was running Saturday clubs for young people with special educational needs or disabilities, so their parents could have a break. They noticed that some of these young people were particularly tired, quiet, anxious, or worried about how their families were.

It turned out that these young people were carers themselves. Because of their extra needs, it might be harder for them to have time away or get the support they needed. So the Time Out project was set up.

What's good about it?

- It has given lots of young carers some time out, in a place where their own needs are the focus.
- They get to do activities they wouldn't normally be able to do.
- The young carers are less anxious and stressed, feel better about themselves and are doing less caring.
- Other services in the area are now better at spotting young carers with special educational needs.

“I love coming to club—it's much better than staying indoors all day!”

Transition Project

supporting young adult carers

Suffolk Family Carers supports carers aged 16–24 as they make decisions about their future lives. They help them to think about education and careers, to start using services for adults if they need to, and aim to reduce the effect that caring has on them.

What happens?

The Transition Project offers **one-to-one support, group work and advice for young carers aged 16 to 24**. They also support them to use other services, and speak up on the young carers' behalf if they need it.

When a 16- to 25-year-old is recognised as being a young carer, a Transition worker goes through lots of questions to see what their needs are. **Those with the highest needs might get all sorts of support**: advice, mentoring, help with benefits, grants, a break away from caring, or other things. If their needs are lower, the worker instead helps them to get support somewhere else, like from school/college or a youth worker.

The project **works with schools, colleges and careers advisers** to make sure they aren't doing the same things with the same young person. They help the young person get set up for future life, by focusing on things like **money, education, jobs and help for the person they're caring for**.

Why did it start?

Suffolk Family Carers found that when people became too old for the young carers' service, they **almost never got help from anywhere else**. Although there is a service for adult carers, it just didn't seem to be suitable for young adults.

For those who do move on to services for adults (like health or social services), **the change can be very difficult**. So, helping people who are 16+ is very important.

What's good about it?

- **Over 600 young adult carers** have been given information or support since the project started.
- Young adult carers are experiencing **less stress and worry**.
- Their **amount of caring has gone down too**, as extra help is found for the people they care for.
- Staff in colleges and other places now understand young adult carers better, so they're **more likely to stay and do well**.

“The transition group is an invaluable resource... For me it is making me realise I am not alone.”

Mapping young carers

tracking how well young carers do at school

Oxfordshire County Council collected data that measured young carers' school attendance and achievements, and who they cared for. This produced evidence showing that young carers are likely to do worse at school and be absent more, and need to be supported.

What happens?

First, the Council produced **a list of all young carers in the area**. They did this in two ways:

- by collecting information from young carers' services;
- and by looking at who applied for some extra money that's available for young carers in Oxfordshire.

This information is kept on a secure computer. By **also looking at school records**, they can measure young carers' attendance, how well they do at school and how often they are excluded. The information is collected every year.

It has shown that young carers are **absent from school more, get worse exam results, and are less likely to go into education, employment or training** when they leave.

This is good evidence for why young carers need support. It has been used to **change services** in the area, and **increase the support** young carers can get.

Why did it start?

Although they knew that young carers needed support, Oxfordshire County Council **wanted to understand more** about them and their needs. There hadn't really been a full measurement like this before.

By looking at all this information together, they could add some more evidence that young carers needed support. In particular, by **comparing young carers against other young people**, they could show the problems young carers face at school and what might help.

What's good about it?

- There are now some really clear numbers showing some of the **disadvantages that young carers face**.
- The people who work in Oxfordshire Children's Services now **pay much more attention to young carers**.
- Young carers now **receive more support** through schools and other places.

“Looking at this data on attainment and attendance, it becomes quite clear something needs to be done.”

Young Carers Standards Award

encouraging schools and colleges to do more

Swindon Young Carers have joined with a big insurance company to create an awards scheme for local schools and colleges. Schools are given an award at level 1, 2, 3 or 4 to show how well they support young carers. By improving things, they can achieve a higher level award.

What happens?

Swindon Young Carers have worked out a set of standards to **measure how well a school or college supports young carers**. They test how well young carers are identified, how their individual needs are met, what services are put in place, and how they check whether they're really helping the young carers.

These standards were **invented along with young carers themselves**—and for each issue, a school can be awarded Level 1, 2, 3 or 4. If a school achieves one of the levels, they're **invited to a big awards ceremony** and receive an award to display in their school (all paid for by the insurance company that sponsors this).

It means that schools who are good at supporting young carers get some praise for that, and others can learn from them. It also means, by working towards the higher levels of award, that **schools have a good reason to keep trying to improve things for their young carers**.

Why did it start?

Young carers in Swindon were having problems balancing school with caring. **People at school didn't always understand the challenges young carers faced**.

Many schools had a 'young carers policy' but teachers didn't know what it said or where it was. So, Swindon Young Carers decided to invent an award that schools could be really proud of and would really want to achieve. That way, **schools and colleges would take charge of helping young carers themselves**.

What's good about it?

- Schools have become **much better** at spotting when someone is a young carer, and at **giving them the right support**.
- The awards they receive are proudly displayed in school, and this helps to **teach others about young carers**.
- As well as paying for the awards, the insurance company has got involved in **fundraising for young carers and taking them on trips**.

“Thank you for coming into my school. I felt alone but your assembly made me realise that I don't have to do things by myself.”

Schools & Support Coordinator

working with secondary schools to support young carers

Winchester and District Young Carers has a member of staff who works with five schools to support their young carers. Each school has a 'lead' teacher who works with her. Together, they make sure young carers get the help they need and schools learn more about young carers.

What happens?

The Schools and Support Coordinator works in five secondary schools across Winchester. She runs **training for school staff, assemblies, drop-ins for young carers, and other activities**.

In each school, a **particular teacher is chosen** to work closely with her. At first, she runs assemblies (often with young carers taking part) to talk about caring and what support is available for young carers. **Every student is given a piece of paper** so they can say if they would like to know more.

There are group sessions where young carers can talk about their hopes and worries. **The Coordinator sees who needs the most support**: those with high needs get one-to-one sessions with her or go to Winchester Young Carers, while others might just be supported by the school.

In some schools, there is also a **peer mentoring system**, where young carers give each other emotional support.

Why did it start?

In Winchester, young carers said that **school was one place where there wasn't any support** for them—so it was obvious that something was needed.

What's good about it?

- The Schools and Support Coordinator has **trained over 200 teachers** in the last year, so there's a big increase in how much schools understand young carers' issues.
- After the assemblies, over **70 people have come forward** to say they're a young carer, and got some extra help.
- **Other school students have learned about young carers too**—and they've all learned that it's ok to talk about problems and ask for support.
- They've also developed **an ID card**. Young carers can show it to teachers, to ask for things like extra time and support for homework or being allowed a mobile phone on silent, without having to explain their situation again.

“I never felt alone... In stressful times in school I had someone I could talk to and open up about how I was feeling.”

Young Carers Summer Scheme

fun activities for young carers over the summer

Newry and Mourne Carers runs activities three times a week, as well as their regular young carers' club, in July and August. They include games, arts, sports, barbecues, film nights and days out, so young carers can have a break and some fun during the school holidays.

What happens?

The Summer Scheme runs through all of July and August, holding **different activities three times a week**. All young carers in the area are invited, and 30–50 of them come each day.

The activities vary a lot: they could be morning, afternoon or evening and include **arts, crafts, sports, karaoke, fancy dress parties, cookery lessons, days out and more**. It's all planned with young carers, to make sure that there are activities they will all enjoy.

There are also plenty of chances just to relax and spend time with each other. For some people, it's a **chance to get out of the house when school isn't on**.

Most activities happen at the Carers' Centre, so that it **doesn't cost too much**. For the monthly days out, they do fundraising in various places to cover the costs.

Why did it start?

They did some research and found that young carers would benefit from **days out and a place to meet each other regularly** during the summer holidays.

What's good about it?

- Many young carers and their families **aren't able to go on holiday** over the summer, so this is a nice break for them.
- The Summer Scheme attracts some **young carers who aren't able to come to the normal young carers group** through the year.
- It's all based on **input from young carers themselves**.

“The young carers really enjoy the Summer Scheme activities and days out, especially when the weather is good.”

Kent Freedom Pass

free bus travel for young carers

The Freedom Pass is a bus pass that young people in Kent can buy if they're in years 7 to 11 at school. The pass lasts all year and lets them travel free on buses. Now, young carers can get a pass completely free of charge, right up to year 13.

What happens?

The Freedom Pass lets young carers **travel by bus all across Kent, whenever they want, for no charge**. They can use it all the way up to the end of year 13 at school.

Normally, the pass costs £50 for people who receive free school meals, or £100 for others, and runs out at the end of year 11. However, **anyone who is registered with a young carers' service** can have one free of charge, and use it for an extra two years.

First, they download an application form from the Council website or get one from school. Then, they get it signed by the young carers' service, and send it in along with a photo of themselves. It then has to be renewed every year.

Why did it start?

The Freedom Pass already existed. It was first brought in **to try to encourage more people to use buses**. The aim was to make the roads less busy (because there'd be fewer cars on them) and to make people more able to travel.

Workers from young carers' services in Kent then spoke to the Council to ask about young carers, and it was decided to **remove the fee and extend the age range** for them.

What's good about it?

- It lets young carers **travel for free**, anywhere they want across a very large county.
- It makes it easier for young carers to **stay at school or college**, and to do things like **seeing their friends** too.

“I am even doing GCSEs and A-S levels now. Otherwise, without the pass, my parents would never be able to pick me up.”

YCNNet

online support and community for young carers

YCNNet (Youngcarers.net) is a website where young carers aged 18 and under can come together to chat and get support and advice from each other and the staff. It has discussion boards, a live chat four times a week, an agony aunts page and an email helpline.

What happens?

Any young carer can read what's on the website or email the staff for help with a problem. To write on the discussion boards or take part in a webchat, they have to register for an account.

Webchats are held four days a week, for 1 or 1.5 hours, and have a member of staff in them to keep things safe. Discussion board and blog messages are checked by staff before they appear, to make sure nobody can swap contact details or upset each other. Staff check the boards and reply to helpline emails every day of the year.

The service is only for young carers, but it's often a chance for them to forget about caring and talk about daft stuff instead!

YCNNet also includes a 'buddy' system (where new users can exchange emails with older users for their first two weeks), and sometimes offers one-to-one webchats with a member of staff if a young person might need the extra support.

Why did it start?

YCNNet began as a way for young carers to get information if they weren't able to use a young carers' service near them.

At first, the plan was for it to be mainly pages of information but with workers available just in case. However, it quickly became clear that the interactive parts were the most popular; YCNNet turned into something a bit like an online youth club, where the members know all the staff.

What's good about it?

- It lets young carers get in touch with others across the country, and with staff, when they might not have any other way to get support.
- Emails to the helpline are answered, and the discussion board is kept going, every single day.
- Some young carers feel able to talk to others about their problems online when they would feel too nervous to do it in person.

“To suddenly be in an environment where people were friendly, supportive and know what it's like to be a young carer was fantastic.”

Think Family Project

supporting young carers in families with complex needs

In Norfolk, some families are identified as being “at risk” (meaning they have a lot of different kinds of problems at once). The Think Family Project works intensively, for a year or so, with at-risk families that have a young carer in them.

What happens?

Some families have **lots of different needs and problems at once**. The Think Family Project looks at a list of issues, including low income, low school attendance, anti-social behaviour, and risk of being evicted. **If a family has several of these issues going on, and there’s a young carer too**, the Think Family Project might help them.

Each Project Officer works with **a maximum of 15 families at a time**. That’s a lot more attention each than most services offer!

They give **very personalised help and support** to the family. That might include one-to-one emotional support for the young carer, swimming and theatre trips for the family, helping with money and practical problems like housing, and all sorts of other things, **all at times to suit the family**.

By spending a lot of time with the family and being patient with them, **gradually they can build up trust**. They work together to make a plan for what will happen when the Think Family time ends after a year or so.

Why did it start?

Crossroads Care Norfolk has supported young carers and their families since 2003. But they only have the equivalent of **3 staff supporting 150 young carers at a time**.

This didn’t allow enough time to support those with complex needs. So, when extra funding was available, they developed the Think Family Project too.

What’s good about it?

- It allows staff to **spend a lot of time with each family** and really focus on their own personal situation.
- If the family misses an appointment or ignores a letter or phone call, **the worker keeps trying and doesn’t give up**.
- They’ve supported **60** young carers from **42** families with multiple problems.
- For most young carers, their **physical or emotional health had improved**. Many were attending school more often, and some of the families weren’t depending on people like social workers any more.

“The officers have gained a really good understanding of the families’ complex issues”

Kidstime

for families affected by a mental health condition

Kidstime is for families where somebody has a mental health problem. They run a series of workshops that help the family to communicate and understand mental health better, but the main focus is on the young carers in the family.

What happens?

Kidstime sessions are run by young carer workers and a mental health worker, with volunteers. **Six families attend together**, every week for eight weeks.

Each session begins with a 20-minute introduction with the whole family, where they talk together about a particular theme (for example, anger). Then **the young carers and their parents separate**.

Parents talk about their experiences of mental health and parenting together, and **think about how their children's needs relate to it**. Meanwhile, the young carers do fun activities (including arts, crafts, games and discussions), focused on **learning about mental health and talking about their lives** as young carers.

For the last half an hour, **the whole families have dinner together**. They check how each session went and whether anyone needs some extra support. They can also make changes for the following week if needed.

Why did it start?

Action for Children knew that **a lot of young carers look after someone with a mental health condition**, but nothing was aimed at them in the area.

Young carers and their families **often find it hard to talk** about mental health, with each other or with people outside the family, so they set up workshops that enabled this.

What's good about it?

- It's a safe place for young carers where they can ask questions, talk about their parents' illness, and **not feel judged**.
- Families said they felt **less isolated**, and young carers **gained confidence** and understood mental health better.
- People have kept in touch, **supporting each other after Kidstime ended**. It's a big step as they often were very anxious about meeting new people.
- The young carers have **gone on to attend the normal young carers' project**, so they have more support now than before.

“You meet people and you can talk to other people who are in the same situation as you—it's fun too!”