



**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
CYNGOR BWRDEIS TREF SIROL RHONDDA CYNON TAF**

A virtual meeting of the **Corporate Parenting Board** will be held on the

14th March 2022 at 10.00 am

Contact: Yula Kampouroulou- Council Business Unit, Democratic Services (07747 485569)

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

1. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

To receive disclosures of personal interest from Members in accordance with the Code of Conduct

Note:

1. Members are requested to identify the item number and subject matter that their interest relates to and signify the nature of the personal interest: and
2. Where Members withdraw from a meeting as a consequence of the disclosure of a prejudicial interest, they must notify the Chairman when they leave.

2. MINUTES

To approve, as an accurate record, the minutes of the previous meeting held on the 31st January 2022.

(Pages 3 - 10)

3. RCT FORUM QUARTERLY REPORT

To receive a report from Voices From Care Cymru which provides the Corporate Parenting Board Committee with an overview of the preparedness for Care Day 22 and approach adaptations to meet young people where they are.

(Pages 11 - 16)

4. YOUNG CARERS ANNUAL REPORT 2021-22

To receive the Young Carers Annual Report 2021/2022.

(Pages 17 - 30)

5. TO CONSIDER PASSING THE FOLLOWING UNDER-MENTIONED RESOLUTION:

“That the press and public be excluded from the meeting under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act, 1972 (as amended) for the next item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 13 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A of the Act.”

6. REGULATION 73 REPORTS

To receive the report from the Group Director, Community & Children’s Services, containing exempt information

(Pages 31 - 76)

7. URGENT BUSINESS

To consider any urgent business as the Chair feels appropriate.

Circulation:

County Borough Councillors:

Councillor C Leyshon (Chair)
Councillor G Caple (Vice-Chair)
Councillor J Bonetto
Councillor E Griffiths
Councillor L Hooper
Councillor S Rees
Councillor S. Rees-Owen

Officers:

Christian Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication
Ceri Jones, Head of Access & Inclusion
Annabel Lloyd, Service Director, Children's Services
Paul Mee, Group Director Community & Children's Services
Cara Miles, Childcare Solicitor
Jayne Thomas, Complaints & QA Manager, Social Services

Tros Gynnal Plant Cymru – Electronic copy



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board held on Monday, 31 January 2022
at 10.00 am.

County Borough Councillors - Corporate Parenting Board Members in attendance: -

Councillor C Leyshon (Chair)
Councillor G Caple (Vice-Chair)
Councillor S Rees-Owen
Councillor E Griffiths
Councillor J Bonetto
Councillor S Rees

Officers in attendance

Ms A Lloyd, Service Director, Children's Services
Ms S Edwards, Service Manager
Mr A Cope, Regional Development Manager-Fostering Services
Ms M Davies, Tros Gynnal Cymru
Ms J Thomas, Complaints & QA Manager, Social Service
Ms C Jones, Head of Access & Inclusion
Ms C Miles, Childcare Solicitor

Others in attendance

Annabel Galt at Vfww/Blueprint Forum – Development Officer
Tracy Greuter – Foster Carer Pioneer
A W- Young person Representative

43 Declaration of Interest

A declaration of interest was raised from County Borough Councillor S Rees for Agenda item 3; as she is a representative of RCT as a Member of the Adoption Panel.

44 Welcome

The Chair took the opportunity to welcome County Borough Councillor G Caple to the Committee along with Officers from Voices from Care Cymru to the meeting, with a particular welcome to the young person representative.

45 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillor L Hooper and Mr P Mee, Group Director – Community & Children's Services.

46 Minutes

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the Corporate Parenting Board Committee meeting held on the 29th November 2021.

47 VOICES FOR CARE CYMRU- YOUNG PERSON REPRESENTATIVE UPDATE

The Development Officer introduced the young person representative (AW) to the Committee; AW provided Members of the Committee with an update on her recent activities within the last 3 months. She highlighted her attainment of an award known as the Young Achiever of the Year through Care to Work. She highlighted the significance of Care to Work and the RCT social services team who aided her in attaining permanent accommodation and bill management support. AW informed Members of the continued support provided by Voice for Care Cymru (VfCC) to young people throughout the Pandemic for instance through, event arrangements via Zoom, and phone, and video calls to maintain contact.

The Chair took the opportunity to congratulate AW on her award attainment and was pleased to see all the progress made within her personal life.

The Development Officer informed Members of recent event cancellations as a result of the Pandemic; however, VfCC were able to adapt their services by introducing outdoor activities, online events and one-to-one support. As restrictions are lifted, the Development Officer from Voice for Care Cymru (VfCC) informed Members of future projects to be implemented to attract wider groups of young people within RCT. The Officer also highlighted a collaboration with the Service Director of Children's Services to set up a workshop for the Best Practice Charter for parents who have been in care.

The Chair was pleased with the verbal update and recognised the need to resume face-to-face services to connect with young people in RCT.

Following the Verbal update, it was **RESOLVED**:

- To note the update provided to the Board

48 VALE, VALLEYS & CARDIFF REGIONAL ADOPTION ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21

The Service Director of Children's Services provided a brief overview of the Vale, Valleys & Cardiff Regional Adoption Annual Report. It was highlighted to Members of the Committee that consideration of the report had already been undertaken by the Scrutiny Committee in December 2021; the report was favourably received.

The Service Director of Children's Services highlighted to Members that the report is the 6th Annual Report of the Regional Adoption collaboration established based on the Social Services Well-Being Act (2014). The report provided details of the performance reporting surrounding matters such as Adopter recruitment, decision-making for Children to be placed in Adoption, Family Finding and Post-Adoption support.

Members were informed of the slight decline in demand during the first period of the Pandemic however, demand has since begun to increase.

The report highlighted the 26 placement orders, however, when performance was last investigated in Children's Services, 33 Adoption orders had been made during 2020/21. During the reporting period 2020/21 the Service Director of Children's Services confirmed the placement of 22 children for Adoption by the end of 31st March 2021.

Members were advised to note the effectiveness of the recruitment campaign and increases in the number of adopters which has created a positive impact of reduced numbers of out of agency adoptions. The Service Director of Children's Services advised Members of the increase in requests for post-adoption support and acknowledged the significance of providing support to adopters. The Service Director of Children's Services recognised the need for additional resources for adopters as demand has increased.

The Chair was pleased with the information provided and referred to Members for questions.

One Member was pleased with the funding provided to attain a part-time social worker to support birth parents; however, the member queried the referral mechanisms and the type of support which can be implemented to support birth parents.

As part of additional services development, the Service Director of Children's Services informed Members of the introduction of a 'Pre-Birth Pathway' service. This aims to enhance the support in place to prevent child and parent separation. The Service Director of Children's Services informed Members of a new trial development service known as Parent Advocacy. This will involve support for parents attending meetings such as Child protection conferences. Great results have been identified from other Local Authorities trailing this as parents have felt better engaged in support services provided.

Regarding referral mechanism, the Service Director of Children's Services advised of the importance of birth parent counselling as part of the adoption process. Thus, before an agency decision maker can consider child adoption, they ensure referrals have been made to both parent counselling.

One Member expressed a welcome for the trials of parent advocacy and recognised it was vital in permitting parents to participate and express themselves. The Member requested further information on the services future on investments following an increase in demand the following year.

The Service Director of Children's Services agreed with the Member stating the need for further investment and funding to progress additional services further to meet demand. The Service Director of Children's Services informed the Committee of an arranged date in the following month to investigate how adoptive parents can attain the right support at the right time and ensuring adoptive parents are able to access all the early support services available to them. The Service Director of Children's Services confirmed the launch of the multi-Agency support service, which is a therapeutic service for adoptive and looked after Children. Further updates would be provided to the Corporate Parenting Board in future meetings to highlight the action plans and progresses made by the service.

Following Discussion, it was **RESOLVED**:

- To note the content of the report

48 FOSTERING SERVICE QUALITY OF CARE ANNUAL REPORT

The Service Manager began by introducing herself to the Committee as the named person for CIW purposes in fostering in RCT and informed Members of the Committee that the purpose of the report was to provide an overview of the annual quality of care in fostering 2020/21. The Service Manager confirmed the focus of the service during the period of 2020/21 was to ensure Foster Carers were provided with the utmost support. The Service Manager confirmed the use of technology had enabled consistent contact to be maintained with foster carers, for instance through phone or video calls, and had permitted adaptability of the service to undertake meetings virtually for instance the Foster Panel.

Along with on-going consistent support for foster carers, the Service Manager informed Members of a new service introduced which involved consultation for kinship carers and mainstream carers. The purpose of the consultations involved identifying improvements that could be made in attending panel meetings, panel processes, appraisals for panel Members, and rescheduling panel meeting dates to encourage attendance of social workers. The Service Manager recognised the need to work closely with parents, and as a result of consultation with parents for Children in foster, this has been implemented. The team are currently working with the IRO service to provide reports for parents in order to permit parents to express their views about the foster care received.

During the first Lockdown, the Service Manager confirmed collaboration with a Fostering Network as part of a wellbeing programme. Members were informed of the success of the wellbeing programme in introducing Pioneers. Members were informed of the significance of Pioneers in supporting new foster carers within RCT. Members were advised of challenges faced by the service such as the recruitment of additional foster cares willing to work with young people with complex needs, and older teenagers.

The Service Manager introduced Ms Greuter to the Committee, who then provided an overview of the role and experiences of a Pioneer within RCT. The Pioneer detailed the numerous activities undertaken within the role, these included collaboration with Fostering Wales regarding the Fostering 22 Door Launch, attending Employment Panels and discussing Policy effectiveness. The Pioneer advised of the significance of the role in creating support systems for Foster Carers and environments of encouraged open communication to discuss challenges faced and solutions. The Pioneer informed Members of the evolution of the role, with support being provided virtually to Foster Carers as a result of the Pandemic, however, the Pioneer hoped to resume the face-to-face service as restrictions are lifted.

The Chair was pleased with the work and supporting channels being provided to foster carers by Pioneers. The Chair acknowledged the importance of communication between foster carers and Pioneers in order to share experiences, advice and solutions.

The Corporate Parenting Board **RESOLVED:**

- To acknowledge the information in the report.

49 CWM TAF FOSTERING FRONT DOOR

The Regional Development Manager of Fostering Services provided an update on the two significant developments made since reporting to the Board in the previous year. It was confirmed that thus far Bridgend County Borough Council have joined the Regional Front Door to further expand on the collaboration and share resources, and good practice. Currently as a team, the Regional Development Manager confirmed dedication of the three Local Authorities in relation to Foster Care recruitment. Members were informed of the other significant development that surrounded the launch of Foster Wales, which was a national collaboration of all 22 Local Authorities under one banner heading. The Regional Development Manager was pleased with the investments provided by the Welsh Government.

Members were informed of the implemented changes to services such as new branding, and Website across all Local Authorities. Members were advised of the significance of the new Websites across all Councils to aid in promoting the message for Local Fostering and to maintain the Mission statement of 'Local Children are at the Heart of everything we do'.

Despite the successes of the Service, the Regional Development Manager of Fostering Services recognised the challenges faced in fostering recruitment across the UK. Members were advised of the 50% drop in inquiries and initial visits for foster caring roles, as a result investigations have been undertaken to gain an explanation. It was identified that the drop was a result of post-pandemic recovery and on a Local level, people's unawareness of the re-branding. Despite the reduction in inquiries and initial visits, the Regional Service Manager of Fostering Services was pleased to see an increase in the number of people proceeding into investment and approvals. Within the last 3 years it was identified that there has been an increase of foster carers year on year. The Regional Development Manager of Fostering Services informed Members of improvements that need to be made surrounding provisions of foster care retention and ensure Local Authorities abide by the National Commitment.

In relation to the future, plans will be implemented to promote Foster Wales in order to attract younger generations to become foster carers. Successful Campaigns have been launched, for instance through Radio, TV, Spotify, and social media in order to promote Foster Wales. On a Local level, the Regional Development Manager of Fostering Services informed Member of a campaign launch which advertises Foster Wales on Buses and Radios (Capital FM) across Cwm Taf.

The Chair thanked the Regional Development Manager of Fostering Services for his report and work undertaken as part of the Corporate Parenting Board across the three years. The Chair wished him the best of luck within his new role at Cardiff County Borough Council.

50 TROS GYNNAL QUARTERLY REPORT

The Board received an update from Ms Davies who provided an update of progress made by Tros Gynnal Plant (TGP) Cymru. Ms Davies began by focusing on the Active offer section of the report. Based on the Active Offer in Quarter 3, 32 young people accessed the Issue based service along with 12 young people who were referred to Active Offer. Over half of the young people who accessed the Issue based service were doing so for the first time. Members were advised of the decreases in both Issue Based Advocacy (IBA) and Active Offer in Quarter 3 compared to previous Quarters (2). During Quarter 3, 86 young people became eligible for the Active Offer, out of those, 18 were from Children Looked After (CLA). Members were made aware of 2 young people who were counted twice as they met the eligible criteria via the CP and Looked After Children criteria thus making the number to 84 young people.

Based on the information provided from Local Authorities (LA), 50 children and young people rejected the Active Offer meeting when suggested by their social workers however, 11 accepted, and then referred. 20 young people rejected the Active Offer without a reason and 30 young people rejected the offer to meet with an advocate and 12 stated they preferred to speak to a family member.

Ms Davies directed Members to the graphs within the report which provided a breakdown of eligibility criteria of the Active Offer Referrals, Issue Based Advocacy, and demographics of service users of Quarter 3.

It was **RESOLVED:**

- To note the content of the report
- To receive updates on future progresses made by TGP

51 Exemption of Press and Public

It was **RESOLVED** that the press and public be excluded from the meeting under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act (as amended) for the following items of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of the exempt information as defined in paragraph 14 of Part 4 of the Schedule 12A of the Act.

52 Social Services Quarterly Complaints and Compliments

This report provided the Corporate Parenting Board with an overview of the operation and effectiveness of the statutory Social Services complaints procedure between **1st October 2021 – 31st December 2021**.

The report contained information on the number of complaints received, the nature of the complaints and any lessons learnt as well as detailing councilor, A.M and M.P enquiries and the number of compliments received.

Following discussions relating to the exempt item, Members **RESOLVED**:

- To note the content of the report and the work undertaken by the Complaints Unit.

53 TO RECEIVE AN UPDATE FROM THE SERVICE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN SERVICES

The Service Director of Children's Services provided a verbal update regarding three main activities which have occurred thus far. Members were informed of the approval of the Looked After Children prevention strategy by Cabinet.

Secondly the Service Director of Children's Services credited the work undertaken by Ms Ceri Jones- Head of Access & Inclusion and Ceri Webster- Deputy Principal Educational Psychologist for their role in leading the appointment of a Headteacher for Looked After Children (LAC). The Service Director of Children's Services advised Members of the significance of the Headteacher in transforming Education for Looked After Children (LAC). Lastly, The Service Director of Children's Service informed Members of a recent research project undertaken by CASCADE which identified a significant need for meaningful support for young people who become parents. The Service Director of Children's Services informed Members of a Workshop due to be Post-election, with the Board being invited whereby the findings of the research will be presented.

The Chair was very pleased with the update and looked forward to attending the Workshop to gain further insight on the research.

The Corporate Parenting Board **RESOLVED**:

- To receive a report on the Looked After Children Strategy.

**This meeting closed
at 11.11 am**

**Cllr C Leyshon
Chairman.**

RCT Forum Quarterly Report

Introduction:			
Name of Project:	RCT Local Group	Funder:	RCT Local Authority
Team Member:	Francesca Pritchard and Annabel Galt	Project Timeframe:	Dec 2021 - Feb 2022

Project Summary:	
Young People connected with	<p>During the last quarter, the project has continued to engage with nine (9) care experienced young people throughout the RCT area. Of those young people engaged in the sessions - three (3) were aged 16 – 21-year-old and six (6) were aged 21+ year olds.</p> <p>Throughout this time, a total of five (5) consultations were held on a 1-2-1 basis – three (3) face-to-face and two (2) by phone. Through the 1-2-1 connections and engagement with young people; the Local Groups Officer has referred two (2) young people to VfCC internal services for additional support.</p> <p>A total of five (5) group sessions were held, focussing on good practice support for care experienced parents, care day and outreach activities.</p>
Projects Themes	<p>The RCT forum’s sessions principal areas of focus have been as follows.</p> <p>Engagement into the group: During the quarter engagement has been encouraged through promotion on social media, to maintaining connections with regular contact and information sharing directly to current members of the group and professionals within the local authority. The focus of engagement has been to bring the members together as a group to seek innovative approaches to engage with younger children (14-16); through our collaboration with Actif Woods - with the next session set to take place in Easter is April 11th.</p> <p>Care Day 2022. A number of events and activities took place in the lead up to and on Care Day of this year; throughout this time, we supported care experienced young people within RCT to link in with care experienced young people from across the 5 nations (Wales, Scotland, Ireland, Northern Ireland, and England). Through the delivery of this young people provided us with feedback as to what they needed, as a care experienced child/young person to thrive. This feedback can be seen as below;</p>

- | | |
|--|--|
| | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. More counselling and Mental Health services.2. Further emotional support (as the young people felt that there was not enough understanding of their feelings and trauma/behavioural responses.)3. Wanting consistent and positive relationships, with Social Workers who could inform them of their rights.4. Continued support post 25 from the local authorities through an outreach model (due to long term concerns regarding mental health, wellbeing, and isolation)5. Continued support to manage longer term aspirations i.e. support in buying a car, insurance etc. |
|--|--|





Care experienced parents within RCT:

We have supported local group members and other care experienced parents from the RCT area to contribute to several consultation opportunities throughout the last quarter. They have contributed to the Welsh Government's 'Childcare and Parental Employment Report - Minding the Future, the Childcare Barrier facing Working Parents'; supporting in the development of recommendations which can be found within the report.

Project Successes



A copy of the report can be found as follows -

<https://business.senedd.wales/documents/s122062/Report.pdf>

Those individuals have also contributed to Children in Wales Period Dignity Consultation providing their views and experiences, regarding the impact of being looked after upon their access to information, advice, and support around women's health issues. This feedback will support the work being completed by Welsh Government around the "*Period Dignity Strategic Action Plan*".

Given the success of our engagement with care experienced parents, Voices will now be involved in further opportunities in the next quarter for care experienced parents within the RCT area. This includes plans to meet with care experienced parents and the local authority in relation to the "*Supporting Parents in and Leaving Care*" charter; previously co-produced between CASCADE and care experienced parents from VfCC.

	<p>Basic Income Pilot.</p> <p>Throughout the last quarter Voices from Care Cymru have worked with care experienced young people within the RCT area, to support and provide feedback to Ministers regarding the recent plans for the Basic Income Pilot for Care Experienced Young People. Voices from Care Cymru, will be leading on further opportunities for care experienced young people from across Wales to provide feedback/support in the development and reviewing of the Basic Income Pilot Model.</p>
<p>COVID Recovery Response to Near Misses.</p>	<p>Steering Group</p> <p>Throughout the last quarter a total of three (3) sessions were cancelled due to concerns raised by both the pandemic and severe weather warnings. In addition to this, whilst activities have been planned over the last quarter to carry out face-to-face sessions, we have received no referrals for the group or outreach activities (with only current members engaging in the activities).</p> <p>Having recognised the difficulties in maintaining consistent engagement into the group, VfCC have begun work with the local authority to review the delivery of the group to increase its reach and establish engagement mechanisms, to work with a wider representation of the care community. Therefore, VfCC will continue to deliver face-to-face sessions and outreach activities; whilst working with the steering group to review the group’s model of delivery – in which feedback will be sought from care experienced young people.</p>

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

MARCH 2022

REPORT OF DIRECTOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES: YOUNG CARERS AND YOUNG ADULT CARERS REPORT

Author(s): Mari Ropstad, Service Manager – Carers, Engagement and Direct Payments

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Corporate Parenting Board members with an update on the work with young carers in RCT during 2021/2022.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 It is recommended that Members:

Acknowledge the information contained within the report.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 This is an information report.

4. BACKGROUND

4.1 The support service for young carers (aged 5-17) continues to be provided on a commissioned basis by Action for Children. Specific support is available via an externally funded post for Young Adult Carers (aged 18-25). Sibling carers (children whose sibling has additional needs) receive limited support via the Carers Support Project.

4.2 The assessment function for young carers remains within the Information, Assistance and Advice Service for Children's Services.

4.3 The all-age carers hub in Gelliwastad Road, Pontypridd, is now operational, with the Carers Support Project, the Young Carers Services, the Young Adult Carers Project and the Sibling Project all under the same roof.

4.4 The full report for RCT Young Carers and Young Adult Carers 2021/2022 (to date) is attached in Appendix 1. Members may wish to note the below key details:

- There has consistently been a higher than average rate of referrals for young carer assessments throughout the year.
- Similar to last year, a higher level of one-to-one sessions were provided to young carers this year to mitigate the continued restrictions on group work. Face-to-face group sessions were held when possible to provide young carers with a break from caring, including trips in the summer and Christmas parties.
- There are indications that the pandemic has significantly affected the health and wellbeing of young carers, and that it has increased the caring responsibilities for many.
- A pilot project has trialled a bespoke service for sibling carers. The project is based on a six-week period of intensive support to improve emotional wellbeing and resilience, followed with opportunities to take part in a range of activities throughout the year. This pilot will be evaluated at the end of the year to determine a way forward.
- The Young Adult Carers Services has had limited staffing during the year, but a new worker is now in post. Most support has been provided online and there is a need to deliver more face-to-face activities for this group of young people.
- There are various other pieces of work worth noting throughout the year, including the further development of the Young Carer Card, the Carers Covid film and the Young Carers Schools Award.

5. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

5.1 This is an information report.

6. CONSULTATION

6.1 This is an information report.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

7.1 There are no direct financial implications aligned to this report.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

8.1 The Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 came into force in April 2016 and is intended to transform the way services

are delivered. It repeals the majority of community care legislation including the Carers Strategies (Wales) Measure 2010.

8.2 The National Plan for Unpaid Carers published in early 2021 will become increasingly important for developing strategies and delivering support to carers of all ages going forward.

9. LINKS TO THE COUNCILS CORPORATE PLAN / OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES/ FUTURE GENERATIONS – SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT.

9.1 The business covered in this report contributes to the following well-being goals:

- A prosperous Wales
- A resilient Wales.
- A healthier Wales.
- A more equal Wales
- A Wales of cohesive communities
- A globally responsible Wales

10. CONCLUSION

10.1 Young carers were significantly affected by the pandemic and support services going forward will need to focus on dealing with the ongoing consequences.

10.2 Work to adopt an all-age cohesive service approach to unpaid carers will continue, with the commissioned young carers service due to co-locate with the Carers Support Project from September 2021.

10.3 The new National Plan for Unpaid Carers will inform regional and local carers strategies and priorities.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

MARCH 2022

APPENDICIES

Appendix 1 – RCT Young Carers and Young Adult Carers Annual Report 2021/2022.

Annual report
2021/2022

RCT Young Carers and Young Adult Carers



Mari Ropstad
Service Manager - Carers
Annual report 2021/2022

OVERVIEW

The pandemic has continued to challenge service delivery over the last year. The support provided by young carers has continued to change depending on the restrictions and vulnerability of the people they care for. Many young carers have reported experiencing more isolation and anxiety as a direct result of the pandemic. Services have adapted to the changing restrictions by offering support in smaller groups and more individual sessions, however it has been challenging to provide sufficient breaks from the caring role for young carers. At the same time, our referral rates for assessment for young carers has remained higher than average throughout the year.

This report attempts to summarise the support provided to young carers (aged 0-17) and young adult carers (aged 18-25) during a turbulent year and recognise some of the key developments achieved despite extremely challenging circumstances.

BACKGROUND

The Young Carers Service now sits within the wider all-age Carers Support Project following a review and restructure carried out towards the end of 2018/2019. The review identified a need for a strategic lead for carers within the authority and the Service Manager for Carers now has responsibility for all carer issues, including young carers, young adult carers and adult carers.

The restructure resulted in changes to the support provided to young carers. The service still has a dedicated Young Carer Assessor who now sits within the wider Information, Advice and Assistance function of Children's Services. This is to ensure that statutory obligations are met in terms of assessment and monitoring of young carers.

In order to encourage greater integration of services, the commissioned young carers support service (currently provided by Action for Children) is now based within the Carers Support Project in Gelliwastad Road.

The support for young adult carers (aged 18-25) continues to be provided by a dedicated part-time worker, funded via the Families First grant. This funding has not yet been confirmed for 2022/2023.

YOUNG CARER ASSESSMENTS

There is a dedicated worker responsible for assessing young carers who is located within the children's services Information, Advice and Assistance (IAA) team. This means we can ensure statutory obligations are met for assessing and supporting young carers with greater ease and accuracy.

Referrals received (to 17/2/22)

Q1 Apr-Jun	35
Q2 Jul-Sep	30

Q3 Oct-Dec	30
Q4 Jan-Mar	15 (to 17/2/22)
TOTAL	110 (to 17/2/22)
Total 20/21	88

We have seen a high level of referrals throughout the year and this has been consistently above what we would on average expect. This has continued as a trend from Q3 20/21, when the schools returned and we saw higher levels of assessments for young carers.

Source of referrals

<i>Children's Services</i>	13
<i>Resilient families</i>	30
<i>Family</i>	23
<i>School</i>	19
<i>Disabled Children's Team</i>	16
<i>College</i>	1
<i>YEPS service</i>	1
<i>Adult Services</i>	1
<i>Carers Support Project/Young Carers Project</i>	1
<i>Third sector</i>	5

A total of 135 reviews (year to 23/2/22) were completed during the year, mostly over the telephone with feedback from the key workers at the young carer's project. If there have been any concerns identified or the young carer has not been engaging with the project, then the assessment worker has arranged to visit the families and contacted other agencies involved, including schools, to find out the reasons for non-engagement and if alternative support is needed

For most young carers this has still been a year of disruption. The Young Carers Project has had to alternate between online group sessions, outdoor meetings, and a few 'normal' indoor groups. This means that, for most young carers, again there has been little progress made on their support plans.

YOUNG CARERS SUPPORT SERVICE

The young carer support service is currently provided by Action for Children. As the below statistics show, the service has changed over the course of the pandemic to focus more on one-to-one support sessions due to the restrictions placed on group work:

	2019	2020	2021
April-June			
Number of referrals	10	4	9
1-to-1 sessions	5	62	31
Group work	27	8	21
July-September			
Number of referrals	14	11	13
1-to-1 sessions	6	5	14
Group work	18	20	21
October-December			
Number of referrals	12	8	8
1-to-1 sessions	4	29	24
Group work	18	20	18
January-March			
Number of referrals	10	11	12
1-to-1 sessions	8	12	52
Group work	27	24	12

Young carers have positively welcomed periods when face-to-face support sessions were possible, but the service has put in place many restrictions to ensure the safety of staff, young people and families. In September 2021 Action for Children also moved offices to be co-located in Pontypridd with the Carers Support Project.

According to Action for Children, the following has worked well:

- Face to face group session reintroduced when restrictions were lifted.
- The project was able to carry out trips throughout the summer holidays.
- The Young Carer Choir have been able to meet and take part in some amazing opportunities.
- Grants have been applied for to access food vouchers for families.
- Christmas Parties were held for young carers and their families.
- An 18+ Reunion was held to see all those that had left the project throughout the lockdown.

However, the project and the young carers still faced several issues and barriers:

- IT access to join online sessions remains an issue for some families.
- Transport for young carers to access face-to-face group sessions is still an ongoing issue due to the restrictions in place.
- The impact Covid has had on the health and wellbeing of young carers due to the increase in their caring roles.
- Families struggling with finances.

- There are some issues with accessing venues for group sessions due to closures and restrictions in place.

The virtual groups allowed young carers to have contact with staff and peers and receive support if they needed it. This was combined with face-to-face sessions and wellbeing visits were also made to families as required.

In between lockdown periods, Action for Children were able to re-start group sessions to provide a break away from home for some young carers. These groups have been smaller than normal groups and transport has been an issue for many as staff were not able to carry passengers in their cars as they would normally.

Many families were struggling financially, and Action for Children applied for more £1,000 worth of grants through their own Action for Children Covid/ Iceland Appeal. Through these grants families were able to purchase essential items such as gas, electricity and food.

SIBLING CARERS

Sibling carers (those helping to care for a sibling with additional needs or who are impacted socially/emotionally by growing up with a sibling with additional needs), continue to receive a limited specific support service via the Carers Support Project. Funding was secured in October 21 from the Carers Respite Grant to carry out a pilot model of service delivery for sibling carers. To date there are 79 young people registered to receive support, 62 of whom have accessed at least one activity over the past 6 months. There have been 39 sibling referrals made in the year 21/22 (to date), however 18 of these have been made since October when the additional funding was awarded. During 20/21 there were 22 siblings referred in total so there has been a definite increase this year.

Once they have been assessed by the Young Carers Assessment Worker, they are offered the opportunity to engage in a 6-week programme focusing on the social and emotional aspects of being a sibling carer. The key themes of the programme are raising self-esteem, discussing feelings (good and bad) associated with being a sibling carer, strategies to support them in their role as a sibling of a brother/sister with additional needs, opportunity to spend time with other young people who understand and are experiencing similar things.

As well as the 6-week programme sibling carers have been offered the opportunity to attend an ASD workshop. A large proportion of the sibling carers registered with the service have brothers/sisters with ASD so this workshop gave them an opportunity to gain more knowledge of ASD and understand why their siblings present certain behaviours.

RCT Carers Support Project has also made links with the bullying charity Kidscape who are running a ZAP workshop during February half term. Research from Carers Trust has shown that young carers (including sibling carers) are more likely to be bullied so this workshop will help sibling carers raise self-esteem, identify bullying

and bullying roles, increase assertiveness, identify the impact of positive body language and explore cyber bullying.

An important part of sibling support is to provide opportunities for sibling carers to spend quality time with a parent/carer, something they very often miss out on due to the care needs of their brothers/sisters. As part of the Carers Respite Grant and with funds from an additional Winter of Wellbeing Grant, sibling carers and their parents have been given the opportunity to do a cooking activity and attend Zip World Towers.

Sibling support also provides a way of respite and escape for sibling carers. Sibling carers have been given the opportunity to take part in a bushcraft session, ice skating at Winter Wonderland, cookery workshop, boxing and mindfulness session, virtual escape room, and photography session. There is also a 4-week pottery project called Expression Through Art starting in March which gives sibling carers an opportunity to express feelings and emotions by creating a piece of artwork with clay. Due to the pandemic and difficulty providing face-to-face activities, sibling carers have also been given the opportunity to have packs delivered to their home which have included craft packs, outdoor/indoor play packs and cooking packs.

Before the end of the financial year, we will be running the Sibs Grant scheme again where sibling carers can apply for something up to the value of £50 which benefits one of the below:

- Health and Wellbeing
- Education
- Family relationships
- Social isolation
- Breaks from the caring role

During the Easter holidays RCT Carers Support Project will be hosting Sibs Fest – an event specifically aimed at celebrating sibling carers. A mini festival taking place at Dare Valley Country Park, sibling carers and their families can take part in circus workshops, live music, sports taster sessions, live fire breathing shows, fairground stalls but also have access to information and advice from a range of organisations such as Papyrus, Kidscape, Meic, Challenging Behaviour Support, Resilient Families and more.

Feedback received for the Sibling Carer Service

“This is the first time I have ever been to the fair as my brother doesn’t like the noise and lights.”

Sibling carer aged 15

“We had lots of fun it was challenging getting it to stay together but we got it to work eventually. Thank you again so much.”

Sibling carer feedback on the gingerbread house cooking activity

“The cooking zoom was lovely, thank you for the opportunity to do it.”

Sibling carer

“B [sibling carer] really has a problem with talking about J’s [sibling with additional needs] behaviour. I think he feels that he is going to get J in trouble or something. So it was so good for him to hear others talking about their siblings. He kept saying to me ‘that’s just like J’. I think it really helped him so thank you.”

Parent feedback on the six-week programme

“Thank you so much, A [sibling carer] really enjoyed the experience and we were blown away by the cooking bundle! Such a positive experience, we are very lucky.”

Parent

YOUNG ADULT CARERS SERVICE

The Young Adult Carer (YAC) Service has a dedicated part-time worker who is funded via a Families First grant. The worker is responsible for assessing the members of the group, which is currently 89, to provide evidence of how the service helps them develop resilience and mental wellbeing. The aim of the service is to support YACs with personal growth through educational workshops and social events. It also provides a break from the caring role and a chance to learn new skills.

The YAC service also supports the Caring and Supporting Each Other (CASE) group, which was set up as a charitable community interest group by the YACs.

The YAC service was delivered almost exclusively online during the first part of the year, except one outdoor social event at Barry Island in the summer. YACs have been offered the opportunity to join online mindfulness sessions, yoga, baking workshops, anxiety workshops and quiz nights.

Unfortunately, the YAC worker post remained vacant between August 2021 and January 2022, which meant a significantly reduced service was provided during the period. Workers within the Carers Support Project picked up some provision when capacity allowed, and were able to organise a cinema trip and a pizza night for the YACs.

Since January 2022, a new YAC worker has been in post and the following activities have taken place:

- The Cwm Taf Morgannwg Carers Grant enabled the wider Carers Support Project team to provide YACs with a Christmas Hamper during December 2021.
- Successful applications to the Winter of Wellbeing Grant resulted in three different activities being organised for the YACs during February/March 2022; namely white-water rafting, escape rooms and a team bowling night. The hope is that this can help to re-engage YACs into the Service.
- There has been increased use of the YAC Facebook Group and dedicated Facebook page to aid in engaging with YAC's registered with the service.

The priority for the service going forward will be carry out an audit of YAC registrations and review existing membership of the service; identifying carers who are no longer eligible for the service (owing to a change in their caring roles, age, etc.), and then to streamline the intake, assessment, and review process. Grant funding will be applied for to provide means for future events for the coming year.

YOUNG CARER CARDS

RCT Council was an early adopter for the Welsh Government's national ID card scheme for young carers. March 2022 will mark the one-year anniversary of the launch of the service. To date this year we have received 29 applications in 2021/2022 and 58 young carers currently hold a card.

We are organising a prize draw to mark the one-year anniversary where any young carer who either has a card or who applies for one by 31st March 2022 will be in with a chance of winning an Amazon voucher.

The promotional videos for the Young Carer Card are available here:

Welsh version: <https://youtu.be/fui0ePeRiQM>

English version: <https://youtu.be/1V3WxVBH6RA>

The purpose of the card is primarily for identification of young carers in schools, health and other settings as young carers have repeatedly indicated this as a need. We have however successfully attached a benefit via the Council's staff benefit scheme which entitles all successful applicants to also receive the Vectis card for local discounts on shopping. It is possible more benefits will in time be attached to the card, both nationally and locally.

The ongoing funding and resource to enable administration of the card scheme will need to be decided shortly as the current grant arrangements from Welsh Government are uncertain.

OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

Carers Covid film

A film was produced during the pandemic, highlighting the experiences of unpaid carers of all ages. It includes young carers as young as 5, as well as young adult carers, parent carers and adult unpaid carers. The film is available here:

<https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/EN/Resident/AdultsandOlderPeople/Caringforotherpeople/Areyouacarere.aspx>

<https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/CY/Resident/AdultsandOlderPeople/Caringforotherpeople/Areyouacarere.aspx>

Young Carers Schools Award

Sadly, since the start of the pandemic in 2020, the RCT Young Carers Schools and College Award uptake has been poor, in comparison to previous years. At present 16 out of the 17 secondary schools have come forward to say they still wish to be involved with the initiative, however it is proving extremely challenging to obtain any evidence for their portfolios. Tonyrefail Community School has recently secured the Bronze Award and very positively, the Gold Award has been achieved by Coleg Y Cymoedd. Coed y Lan Primary School have also expressed an interest in completing the primary school award aimed at Year 6 pupils.

The Schools Award officer within the Carers Support Project sends out a bulletin each term to all the school Carer Champions with information and news relevant to young carers and their families. Awareness sessions run by our young carers service will be reinstated for staff and pupils in secondary schools.

FUTURE PLANS

We hope to delivery an improved support programme for young carers next year, which will consider the changes they have experienced during the pandemic and provide a more individually tailored package of support. The integration of services within the Carers Support Project should help delivery smoother transitions from young carers into young adult carers and support joint delivery where appropriate to maximise resources.

We intend to review our YAC service provision to ensure it remains fit for purpose and provides clear outcomes for young people.

We hope to obtain clarity on the ongoing funding arrangements for the Young Carer Card in order to support the Welsh Government's priority of early identification and support.

A report will be produced on the Sibling Carers pilot programme to evaluate its effectiveness and decide on the future of this type of bespoke service.

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