

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.