



Children in challenging circumstances

Young Carers

This information sheet provides your school with suggestions to support your work on South West Healthy Schools Plus. It includes background information about young carers, helps you select actions which will bring about healthier behaviour outcomes, identifies early success indicators and signposts to key resources.

Background Information

Young carers are children and young people under the age of 18 who take on care responsibilities usually dealt with by an adult. This tends to happen if a parent/carer is seriously ill, disabled, has mental health problems or misuses drugs or alcohol. The 2001 census indicated 175,000 young carers in the UK but some organisations working with young carers say this is underestimated.

The following figures are from The Princess Royal Trust for Carers¹:

- The average age of a young carer is 12
- On average each young carer has spent four years looking after a relative or parent before they receive any support
- 13,000 young carers are caring for over 50 hours per week.

There may be unidentified young carers in your school who would benefit from your support. Not all young carers are easily identified as there is often secrecy around who is caring for a family relative. Schools should be aware of the sensitivities around identifying a young person with a caring role.

The Princess Royal Trust for Carers also provides advice about identifying young carers including:

- Often late or miss days or weeks off school for no apparent reason
- Secretive about home life
- Often tired or withdrawn
- Difficulty joining in extra-curricular activities
- Isolated or a victim of bullying
- Under-achievement with homework of poor quality, not submitted on time or not handed in at all
- Anxiety or concern over ill/disabled relative
- Behavioural problems with the young person taking out their pent-up frustration or stress at school
- Physical problems such as back pain from lifting an adult.

Many young carers find their lives are restricted because of their caring responsibilities. The Government review on carers² outlined a strategy aiming to create a support system for carers. It recognises that children and young people should not have to take on inappropriate types and level of caring, as this can affect school attendance, emotional and physical well-being and longer-term life opportunities.

It is important for schools to realise that many young carers don't want to give up caring but do want a life where they can enjoy learning, have friends and progress. As many as 27 percent of young carers of secondary school age experience problems in attending and achieving at school. For young carers in families affected by substance misuse, the problems are particularly acute, with 40 percent experiencing educational difficulties.³

¹Princess Royal Trust for Carers: Key Facts about Carers www.carers.org/articles/information-for-press,2822,CA.html ²DH 2008 Carers at the heart of the 21st Century

²DH (2008) Carers at the heart of the 21st Century

³Dearden and Becker, Young Carers in the UK: the 2004 report, 2004

Possible Actions (Evidence Based or Good Practice Principle Led)

South West Healthy Schools Plus can help your school make a useful contribution to tackling issues around supporting young carers, if you select them as a priority group. It focuses on bringing about actual changes in behaviour through increased knowledge, skill development and in some cases attitudinal change. Actions that address these three elements could feature in your school's plans and should result in healthier behaviour outcomes.

Evidence Based Practice

South West Healthy Schools Plus encourages schools to follow evidence based practice where it exists. As far as young carers are concerned, the evidence base of what works is thin but the focus on what schools can do is well documented. The role of schools in supporting young carers cannot be underestimated. School staff are often the first point of contact for identification and referral of young carers. In addition, schools can provide:

- A member of staff with responsibility for supporting young carers in school and putting them in touch with the relevant external services
- Information packs outlining how to identify a young carer and details of the issues they face
- Encouragement of a culture where young carers can ask for help without fear of bullying or stigma.

Schools can play a key role in improving the health and well-being of young carers by understanding more fully the issues that they themselves see as important and helping to address them.

Follow Good Practice Led Principles

As explained in the information sheet **Selecting Actions and Carrying Out Baseline Surveys**, schools will sometimes develop their own actions where evidence based actions do not exist. In such cases, it is essential that your school develops a rationale which clearly shows the steps from action to behaviour change which will lead to a healthier behaviour outcome.

Example

Healthier Behaviour Outcome:

Increase in the number of young carers who feel supported in the school environment.

Action:

Develop a plan to involve and consult with all young carers in the school regularly to explore what they see as the barriers to participating fully in all curriculum activities.

Rationale:

Research shows that many young carers don't want to give up caring but do want a life where they can enjoy learning, have friends and progress. Many of them experience problems in attending and achieving at school. Young carers should be given the opportunity to access a range of unique opportunities within a supportive environment, where they feel they are listened to and possible issues are addressed. This will result in increasing the involvement, achievement and attainment of this disadvantaged group. Overall improved educational attainment will be achieved and children and young people will move further towards fulfilling their potential.

Note:

When following an action that follows good practice led principles it is important that it is evaluated carefully. If successful the action will be added to the evidence base of what works.

Baseline Survey

Before taking any action, your school will carry out a baseline survey to establish current levels of behaviour. This will be the starting point from which to plot progress. After an action has been completed, a follow up survey will take place to show how well actions have worked. This will enable your school to build up its own evidence base. Over a period of time, this approach will provide your school with a clearer picture of what actions are most successful.

When you plan a baseline survey, remember that you are not starting from scratch. Try to use any information already available in your school, such as data from the Ofsted reporting system or from your previous Healthy Schools work. You can supplement this by asking questions in a written format (questionnaires) and/or by talking to young carers to hear their views (interviews or focus groups).

Sources of Baseline Information

- Authorised and unauthorised absence figures
- Attainment statistics
- Bullying logs.

Qualitative data gives a rich insight into why young carers in your school behave the way they do. For example, a young carer may be absent because they are taking a relative to a medical appointment or providing care at home, or they may be failing to complete coursework because of chores at home. It is important for you to be sensitive when collating this information. Drawing attention to a young carer might increase stigmatisation or bullying.

You also need to bear in mind that young carers often face complex and interrelated problems and may lack access to the support they need.

The Princess Royal Trust for Carers provides advice for professionals working with young carers. Resources include a Young Carers' Assessment Questionnaire⁴ which enables professionals to identify problems faced by individual young carers. Other useful information may be available from support groups in your area.

Healthier Behaviour Outcomes and Early Success Indicators

Schools will need time to bring about healthier behaviour and you will need to monitor how your actions are working. You will do this by focusing on early success indicators, which will help you capture data along this path. The first early success indicators are likely to be process indicators. New policies, curriculum innovations and staff training are examples of actions that are necessary in order to bring about healthier behaviour but do not themselves show healthier behaviour – hence they are 'process' indicators. Later there will be impact indicators, such as changes in knowledge, attitudes and behaviour, all of which lead, in time, to the final healthier behaviour outcomes.

The following key areas will help your school focus on school healthier behaviour outcomes for young carers:

- Increasing reports from young carers that they feel supported
- Improving motivation and participation within the curriculum
- Increasing attendance and achievement at all key times.

⁴Princess Royal Trust for Carers <http://static.carers.org/files/ycassesstnycc-3105.pdf>



Examples of Early Success Indicators

Process indicators
Increased awareness of all staff on how to identify young carers and understanding their needs
Review of enrolment policy to identify young carers at an earlier time
Increased consultation opportunities with young carers
Impact indicators
Reduced unauthorised absence of young carers, to the school average or below
Increased number of young carers who report feeling supported and listened to
Early indication of improved achievement

Resources

The following are a selection of information sources which your school can draw on when developing your actions. Developments are taking place rapidly in this area, so this list should be used as a starting point rather than considered as a definitive list of recommended resources.

Government Resources

Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF)
Advice on behaviour and attendance issues.

www.dcsf.gov.uk/behaviourandattendance/

Department of Health (DH)

Carers at the heart of the 21st Century (2008) which sets out the Government's short-term agenda and long-term vision for the future care and support of carers.

www.dh.gov.uk/en/publicationsandstatistics/publications/publicationspolicyandguidance/DH_085345

Every Child Matters (Resources and Practice)

Targeted support to young carers after school.

www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/resources-and-practice/EP00224/

Teachernet

Information for teachers about young carers.

www.teachernet.gov.uk/teachingandlearning/library/youngcarersandschools/youngcarers/

Carers Direct local database

www.nhs.uk/CarersDirect

Other Resources

Barnardo's

www.barnardos.org.uk

Carers UK, the voice of carers

www.carersuk.org/Home

Joseph Rowntree

www.jrf.org.uk/knowledge/findings/socialpolicy/630.asp

The Children's Society

www.youngcarer.com

The Princess Royal Trust for Carers

www.youngcarers.net/

**Young Carers Research Unit
Loughborough University**

www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/ss/centres/YCRG/current_research.html

Young Minds

www.youngminds.org.uk