

Involving young carers

The
Children's
Society

No child
should feel
alone

When working with young people it is always important that we listen to them. They have so much to give and say, and working with young carers is no different in that respect. The young carers themselves are the experts – and that is why it is vital we consult with, listen to and involve them in all that we do, especially whole family assessments.

Young carers often feel isolated and alone. Giving them a voice to share how they feel and what they think about issues that affect them can enable them to feel empowered and valued.

Within your service or school there are many ways you can involve young carers in all that you do.

Allowing young carers to be involved at every level is important. Here are three areas to consider for active participation:

Allow space and resources for the work taking a slightly different direction – when young people's voices play a major role in decision making at strategic level, they may raise issues that were not outlined in the project plan at the outset. Try to build in flexibility that will allow your project to authentically address the points raised by the young people. This may feel scary at times!

Make sure the young people involved gain the skills they want – it's great if a project outcome is empowering young people. It's even better when the project process itself empowers young people and gives them skills.

Make it interesting and relevant – young people don't want to be patronised with over simplistic activities and goals that pay lip service to their genuine concerns and ideas. If you are going to involve young people – be it in a consultation, a project or a group – make sure you ask young people why an issue matters to them, what they want to do and support them to think about how they can realistically do it.

A '**young carer**' is defined in section 96 of the Children and Families Act 2014 as: '...a person under 18 who provides or intends to provide care for another person.'

This relates to care for any family member who is physically or mentally ill, frail elderly, disabled or misuses alcohol or substances.

The **key principle** is that: 'Children should not undertake inappropriate or excessive caring roles that may have an impact on their development. A young carer becomes vulnerable when their caring role risks impacting upon their emotional or physical well-being and their prospects in education and life.'

The **Care Act 2014** and the **Children and Families Act 2014** introduced a number of reforms to the way that care and support for adults with care needs are met. It requires local authorities to adopt a whole system, whole council, whole-family approach, coordinating services and support around the person and their family, and considering the impact of the care needs on the whole family; including children.

This means that both Children's and Adult's services **must have arrangements in place** to assess the impacts of inappropriate caring responsibilities upon children and young people to ensure that no young person's life is unnecessarily restricted because they are providing care to someone in their family.

Getting them involved

There are many different ways in which you can practically deliver the three areas we've mentioned, but here are a few tips you may wish to explore:

- Before you decide on what is best for the young carer, why not **talk to them** and see what they think.
- **Set up a forum group** who are nominated by the wider group and are the bridge between the young carers, project management and local governance. These young carers can feed directly into the work you do, whilst listening to their peers. Why not hold forum meetings and allow space in your regular sessions for the young carers to talk to forum members.
- **Have an ideas/comments box** at your regular sessions and a specific email address tailored to receive young people's comments. Some young people have lots of great ideas or things they want to share but are too nervous, shy or uncomfortable. By having a box, you can still hear what they have to say in an informal way.
- **Get involved in local and national events.** There are lots of events for professionals, as well as public awareness raising days that happen. Why not find out when these are and involve your young people in attending or doing something locally to raise awareness for young carers.
- **Work with the young carers** to influence change in your local area. You could organise a flash mob, speak to local decision makers, create posters to put up in key locations of your local area. For more information and ideas on how young carers can influence change, check out our influencing change toolkit. This resource includes information, templates, activities and quizzes designed to help young carers start an influencing change project safely and within the law in your local area. childrenssociety.org.uk/youngcarer/advice-for-young-people/rights-and-social-change

'We feel confident to say we are young carers in all sorts of situations now and can expect support. It makes us all feel so much better, less stressed and more able to do what we need to do.'

'In Carers Week we had a stall and were leafleting and people's response was not "so what is this?" as it has been before, but "oh you are part of that."'

'I am interested in making things better for other young carers, things have really improved for me at school, and I want other people to have the same opportunity. I want to make things better for all young carers.'

Support

The Making a Step Change Programme

website contains a series of briefings to support professionals to effectively implement the Care Act and Children and Families Act. The site also has resources related to the theme of Participation of Young People, including key messages, tools and resources that can be accessed here: makingastepchange.info/key-themes/participation-of-young-people

Influencing Change Pack: A resource to encourage young people to get involved in creating a change in their local area. The resource includes sections on How to Influence People; How to Put on an Event; How to Speak Out; How to Fundraise and How to Raise Public Awareness. childrenssociety.org.uk/youngcarer/advice-for-young-people/rights-and-social-change