

“Improving the outcomes for  
**Young  
Carers**  
- Closing the gap”



Children & Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee  
2010-2011 In-depth Scrutiny Project  
**Final Report & Recommendations**

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## Foreword

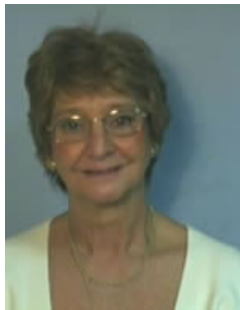
In 2010/11 the Children & Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee decided to undertake an in-depth scrutiny study evaluate the work currently being done to improve outcomes for young carers and maximise opportunities.

We would like to thank all those who have been involved in this in-depth scrutiny project, in particular those who took the time to attend the stakeholder event to share their expertise and knowledge, and to our colleagues on the Children & Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee, together with the officers who supported the Project Team.

The event certainly helped to raise awareness, generate discussion about services, identify gaps and create ideas about the changes that could be made to support young people who undertake this invaluable yet exceptionally demanding role and to improve the lives of those who often go unnoticed and slip through the gap.

Although I was unfortunately unable to attend the event, I would emphasise that on behalf of the Committee, we are so grateful to these young carers who have bravely shared their stories with us. They have really opened up to us.

It is clear that the support these carers receive is so important to them. We have explored the support they have and considered their views, thoughts and suggestions.



Councillor Liz Day  
Chairman  
Children & Lifelong Learning  
Scrutiny Committee



Councillor Nigel Folkard  
Vice-Chairman  
Children & Lifelong Learning  
Scrutiny Committee

## 1. Purpose of Report

The Council's Children & Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee undertook an in-depth study to evaluate the work currently being done to improve outcomes for young carers and maximise opportunities.

This would involve a review of the processes for identifying young carers, the processes for evaluating the needs of young carers including:

- Access to services;
- Specific barriers/challenges they face;
- Support in maintaining a life outside of their caring role including a social life, employment and/or education;
- Targeted support at high-risk times any major changes in their lives; and
- an evaluation of the strategies in place to support for young carers and identify other measures which might be undertaken to improve outcomes for young carers.

The Scrutiny Committee was assisted by a Project Team comprising:

- Councillor E A Day (Chairman), N J Folkard (Vice-Chairman), R A H Brown, Mrs L Burdett, A J Delaney, I D Gilbert, R N Morgan, Mrs P E Rayner and D F Russell.)
- Tim Row – Principal Committee Officer and Project Coordinator
- Jane Theadom – Head of School Support and Preventative Services
- Jane Allen – Group Manager - Connexions
- Brenda Lewis – Young Carers Worker
- Janice Lyons – Local Service Manager (East)
- Tess Boyes – Personal, Social Health and Citizenship Education (PSHCE) Adviser
- Darren McAughtrie - Group Manager Plans, Performance & Commissioning

The project team considered a wealth of evidence, including the Young Carers' Strategy and the information, projects and initiatives that had been identified through the library network. Following a visit to the various Youth Centres around the town (Shoebury, Focus and Leigh), it was decided that the most effective way to gather evidence from young carers and relevant key stakeholders, would be to stage a Scrutiny Stakeholder Event.

Unfortunately due to the extremely inclement weather the event had to be postponed on two occasions<sup>1</sup>. The event eventually took place on 25 January 2011 at the new Shoebury Youth Centre in Delaware Road, Shoeburyness.

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<sup>1</sup> Originally scheduled to take place on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2010 and was rescheduled to take place on 21 December 2010. but due to safety reasons as a result of inclement weather both were postponed.

The Youth Centre is used by Young Carers for the “Cool 2 Chil<sup>2</sup>” Sessions. The venue was chosen and the event was arranged to coincide with one of their sessions. This provided a relaxed and informal atmosphere in which the young carers could be involved in the discussions and share their experiences.

The outcomes from the event inform this final report and the recommendations. The project team also wanted all the delegates to be given the opportunity to see and comment on this report.

## **2. Definition of Young Carer**

For the purposes of this study the definition of a young carer was agreed as follows:

*“A young carer is someone that is under 18 years of age and helps to look after a family member who is disabled, physically or mentally ill or has a substance misuse problem or has a condition connected with a need for care support or supervision. Caring can involve physical or emotional care, or taking responsibility for someone’s safety or wellbeing. The level of responsibility assumed by a young carer is often inappropriate to their age<sup>3</sup> and at a level beyond simply helping out with jobs at home, which is a normal part of growing up.”*

## **3. Scrutiny Stakeholder Event**

Councillor Nigel Folkard, the Vice-Chairman of the Children & Lifelong Scrutiny Committee welcomed all the delegates and young carers to the event and outlined the purpose of the study and introduced David Fuente. David was a young carer, currently working as a Youth Support worker at the Shoebury Youth Centre.

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<sup>2</sup> (“COOL” Club [Caring Over Our Lives] is for young carers aged 8-12. This club offers support, activities, trips and so much more. A fully trained team is on hand to listen to any issues or concerns they may have whilst running fun activities enabling them to take a break from their caring roles.)

(“CHIL” Club [Carers Have Individual Lives] is for the slightly older young carers aged 13-19. Similar to COOL Club are offered support, activities and trips access to all of the facilities at the new Shoebury Youth Centre. CHIL offers a break from their caring role with other young carers)

<sup>3</sup> examples include washing, ironing shopping, giving medicine, help dressing, shower/bathing, looking after brothers and/or sisters and emotional support

David, with a team of young carers, set the scene for the event by presenting the “Cool 2 Chil” DVD which was viewed by delegates. The DVD contained a short film comprising a combination of animation and footage of Ben & Charlie, two real life young carers and portrays how young carers’ lives can differ from those of most other young people. However, with proper support from teachers, the integrated young support service young carers group and other partner organisations, their responsibilities can be eased and young carers can live a supported life. A copy of the DVD is enclosed with the resource pack published by the Connexions Team for teachers and professionals to use as a reference guide.

Delegates then observed a group of young carers being interviewed by David on their experiences, which included a brief overview of what their life is like and the benefit of the support provided by COOL & CHIL. The same group of young carers then presented their “Top Ten Tips” for professionals who may come into contact with young carers. These are attached at [Appendix 1](#).

#### **4. Collaborative Thinking**

Representatives from partner agencies and key stakeholder groups were identified and invited to attend the event. 25 young carers were also identified to attend. At the time of registration, each of the delegates and young carers present were issued with a coloured badge. The colour on the badge related to a focus group to which they had been appointed and which would consider a particular issue relating to the study. After the presentation detailed above, the delegates with the same colour badge assembled in their respective groups and appointed a spokesperson. Each group was supported by an officer to help advise and co-ordinate the discussions. Each group was asked to focus on one of the following issues:

- Identification of Young Carers,
- Needs Evaluation,
- Support in Place; and
- Way Forward.

Most of the groups were able to cover all of these aspects as part of their discussions. The young carers also kindly shared their views, ideas and experiences. The issues raised in the discussions within each group were fed back in turn by their appointed spokespersons. The young carers who attended were also encouraged to post comments, feelings, thoughts, experiences etc. on a wall. Some of the posted messages are set out below, and the full list is attached at [Appendix 2](#).

*"I feel that schools should reach out more as due to a need to fit in with fellow students they may feel too scared to talk or even accept their problems."*

*"It's great to know that people want to listen and help us in any way they can."*

*"I thought that today gave a chance to speak about my role and how to help young carers that have not been identified."*

*"I feel there should be more support outside schools."*

*"...it was good to talk about the issues we had wanted to share with others."*

*"I believe that the meeting went well and they understand us better."*

*"Could help more by enforcing more connections with the school. Today was good! Really made me reflect."*

*"Being a young carer is hard but CHIL helps me and tonight helps to make the services better."*



## 5. Experiences and Identification

At the event the young carers provided information on how they were identified and their experiences as a young carer. Many young people with caring responsibilities did not necessarily recognise themselves as a young carer and for them it was just a 'normal day'. Some of those who attended the event also felt that not enough was being done to help identify young people who may be carers and that the professional organisations were often too involved in 'tick-box' exercises instead of finding out what the needs of the young carers are. It is important that these young people are identified so that support can be provided to them as early as possible.

They highlighted that not all young carers wanted to admit they were in a caring role. Whilst young carers were the same as other young people, with the exception that a member of their family needed care / support, some were embarrassed about feeling different or were afraid of being labelled and concerned at the possible stigma that this may attract. They would rather talk to their friends rather than coming forward and sharing their experiences. Some wanted the fact that they were a young carer to be kept in the background, but at the same time have support mechanisms in place when they needed them. There were also a number of young carers who did meet the criteria to be officially identified as a young carer. This led to a number of young carers who 'unofficially' existed.

The importance of a supportive school was also highlighted as much of the young person's time is spent there. In a large number of cases however, young carers were only identified when the situation was at a critical / danger point such as high levels of absence at school, when support could have been provided at an earlier stage. There was also an inconsistent approach across schools in the Borough. Some schools were very effective at identifying young carers and supporting them while others were less successful. There was good practice in junior and senior schools in identifying young carers but it was more often at a senior school level where young people were not being recognised as possible young carers. There was a real gap between schools and good practice especially during transition from junior to senior schools in the passing on of information. By the nature of junior school work, staff know the families individually this helps them to understand the needs of the family and therefore are in a good place to support identification. This is key to improving support.

Raising awareness of the support available was key so that young people knew that there was support available and where they could access it. It was also essential that particular needs of young carers were taken care of during any transition stages such as when moving between schools. It was also essential that particular needs of young carers were taken care of during any transition stages such as when moving between schools. Young carers often felt uncomfortable having to keep re-telling their story and indicated that some had tried to cope on their own. Concerns were also expressed at the availability of support for adults as the support mechanisms were not as robust and there were limited opportunities to access the type of support

available to young carers. We are aware that there is a gap for those 18 – 25yrs.

The approach to identifying young carers was also inconsistent between the various relevant agencies such as the Police, Health, Social Workers, etc and it was suggested that children seen by a social worker did not always get the same response. Local GP practices also had a role to play in helping to identify young carers, in particular as GP's were regarded as 'community leaders', were in contact with all members of the family and would have knowledge of the issues the family faced and experienced and might be minded to consider whether there is a young carer in the family.

Several of the young carers explained some of the difficulties they had experienced when attending hospital with their parents/siblings for whom they had caring needs. Many had the feeling that they were either ignored or excluded from discussions, even though they lived with and had first hand knowledge of the issues affecting the person for whom they had caring responsibilities. It was evident that young carers wanted to be involved and included at all levels of the care process as they are recognised as the responsible person, including easy access to the doctor for whom they had caring responsibilities. The young carers in the group which focussed on this area stressed that it was not the admissions side at the hospital (which was excellent) that was the problem but it was when the parents/siblings are admitted and become an in-patient at the hospital that they felt excluded by the doctors and other professionals. This was extremely frustrating.

The young carers pointed out that the youth service provided outlets to allow them to have a life outside of caring. They emphasised that their main support came through particular representative of the integrated youth support services and the COOL & CHIL groups. This support was invaluable to them as everyone understood their situation and was sympathetic to their individual needs. Here they could learn life skills, make friends, enjoy themselves and have respite. They described this group as their 'CHIL family'. More young people may come forward if they knew about the benefits.

Questions were asked about how young people could be encouraged to 'tick the box' on the Census form which related to being a carer. It would be more appropriate to include the age of the person who undertakes the caring role as part of this question. One young carer said that it is important to emphasise that you should be proud of who you are and be proud of caring for that person.

## **6. The Way Forward?**

Having discussed issues of the identification of young carers, their experiences, their needs and the support in place, the groups also discussed possible measures to resolve some of the issues above. The following is a summary of the suggestions that were made:

- Wider/high profile advertising/promotion should be considered to raise awareness of the support available to young people with caring responsibilities who have not been identified or recognised as a young carer. Wider publicity of Carers Week should be made to all children, young people and families (activities are dependant on funding). Information and adverts promoted by celebrities would help raise awareness of young carers and may lead to people being more confident about coming forward. The Young Carers Forum had contacted some celebrities in this regard. It was highlighted that Oritse from JLS has been a young carer for his mum and this had raised the profile of young carers. It was also noted that there are “youtube” clips of him talking about his role. His involvement in an event would attract a significant level of attention. It was suggested that these could be used in assemblies too. Another celebrity young carer is Tulisa from N-Dubz. One of the young carers said that, the day after a TV programme had been shown about her, many of the pupils in the school had talked about it. This clearly showed the impact that celebrity endorsement could have.

TV/radio/newspaper adverts that involved celebrities and young carers would also heighten awareness. A number of the young carers who attended the event indicated that they would be willing to take part. It was suggested that this would be something that could be used to coincide with Carers Week in June.

Another suggestion was a Children in Need style event that could be held at the Cliffs Pavilion. This could be used to raise money and awareness of young carers. If celebrities were involved, then the attendance and interest would be increased. This would be dependant on funding and timing.

Newsletters and other forms of media should be considered. Young Carers could be given the opportunity and encouraged to put articles in the Council’s and other partners’ publications/newsletters (e.g. Outlook) and local newspapers. The use of school’s websites and intranet pages could feature articles about young carers provide information for them, including links to support sites, and promote young carers issues. This would be particularly beneficial during carers’ week. The use of social network sites such as ‘facebook’ would also be help potential young carers to come forward and help young carers share their experiences. More leaflets and posters should be on display in key locations such as Schools, Libraries, Doctor’s surgeries, Clinics, Dentist etc. including details of the COOL and CHIL clubs<sup>4</sup>.

- More awareness in schools is needed. The young carers felt that there was a lack of knowledge within some schools in the borough and that a comprehensive training package was needed. This should also include the Princes Royal Trust Packs, which are provided to schools as part of

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<sup>4</sup> Posters etc. are currently given to all of these

the curriculum, or a compulsory young carers' awareness course for teaching staff to help them identify young carers at an early stage. Whilst some teachers were aware, they didn't always understand the role of a young carer and how it impacted on their life. Other instances included information not being shared between staff which meant that some teachers had a different attitude to others. This was particularly evident with the issue of mobile phones during school time – some leniency should be given by all staff to young carers as this was an important method of communication as part of their caring role. All the young carers in one of the groups said that teachers needed more training in understanding the role of young carers, how to identify a young carer and how to support them. Southend Carers Forum had suggested that they could go in to schools and provide some training with the staff to highlight those points. Additionally/alternatively Southend Carers Forum could meet with special educational need co-ordinators (SENCOs) to provide the training and information so there is an appropriately trained representative within all schools in the borough.

- Promote - On-line e learning

An easy to read booklet/leaflet about young carers could be given to teachers which could include information on the role of a young person with caring responsibilities and how to identify and how to support a young carer. A copy could be placed in the school staffrooms so it could be easily accessed.

It was important for young carers to know who they could go to at school to seek advice and could help them. They felt that it would be good to have a designated contact person within a school who they could speak to. There needed to be a support network available to help make information more readily available to young people with caring responsibilities such as information on transport to school, details of the carers forum and the various activities in the evenings and to assist with filling out forms

One of the groups discussed how young carers could be encouraged to come forward. They suggested that Schools should have more assemblies about young carers and include within the PSHE lessons issues about young carers, disabilities, etc. The young carers in this group emphasised that the assemblies when Brenda Lewis attended were very effective, particularly in primary schools. It was noted that when people go in to schools to take assemblies, they are recognisable. However, the young carers did point out that there had been occasions when they felt that older students did not always listen during the assemblies, particularly if they felt the matter was not relevant to them. This could then put others off and the meaning of the assembly is lost. The young carers felt that it would be more effective to talk about disabilities, explain about the help that is required and how it impacted on family life, rather than talking specifically about caring.

It was suggested that schools should be encouraged to participate more in 'Carers Week'. Southend Carers Forum were looking to encourage schools to be involved in an awareness day. It was pointed out that the survey that had been produced and circulated to all schools in the borough by the Health & Equalities Board included a question about caring. Unfortunately this had not been completed by all pupils in all schools. Many young carers explained that they would be happy to act as peer mentors to help other young people with carer responsibilities.

The Cool 2 Chil resource packs included a Young Carers' Charter. Schools should be encouraged to sign the young carers' pledge<sup>5</sup> and those that have already signed should be reminded of its content. The DVD included in the Resource Packs should feature as part of a compulsory induction for teachers.

- A Consistent approach should be followed by all responsible bodies including schools to identifying and supporting young carers, e.g. including a question – Are You a Young Carer/Do you have caring responsibilities for parents/siblings? In all protocols/surveys, etc. A more consistent, integrated approach is needed between all the partner agencies to help identify children and young people with caring responsibilities. It was suggested that the Social Care Protocol should include a question along the lines of – Do you think the young person/child has caring responsibilities? An element on the identification of young carers could also be added within the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) training<sup>6</sup>.

Easier access to see their doctor for their parent/siblings who had caring needs would be welcomed as young carers were sometimes overlooked when details of their relative's disability was discussed. Additionally a link to the Senior Discharge Nurse Coordinator could be provided to young carers to help them discuss their relative's needs and the services available at times when they are discharged from hospital.

Processes also needed to be in place for the police, ambulance and fire services in particular to identify and assist young carers at night, (e.g. a young carer could be out in the late evening trying to find their parent who is getting drunk). Additionally, when police made visits to families of a young person with caring responsibilities the use schemes such as the "Message in a Bottle" could be used to include details that there is a young carer in the home. This could avoid social workers being called and the young carers having to repeatedly explain their situation.

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<sup>5</sup> Policy once good practice is in place

<sup>6</sup> There are issues around referral routes and the use of CAF which are currently being considered

- “Identity cards” or young carers pass could be produced for young carers to help them be identified and provide their details to ‘professionals’ (police, hospital, social workers, teachers etc). This would be helpful if they need to collect prescriptions etc for the person for whom they had caring responsibilities and to show teachers if their phones had been confiscated and if their phones need to be used in break time. It should be noted that the use of phones during school time would not be permitted.
- A Carers allowance or prepaid card for young carers would be helpful. This could be used to help with the costs incurred through their caring responsibilities such as taxis to and from doctors’ surgeries/hospital or other urgent situations etc.
- The Census should include a question asking if there is a young carer in the house and what their responsibilities are. The person completing the form however, is usually a parent and may not complete the form appropriately for fear of the child being taken into care as a result of their illness or disability. This is particularly relevant where mental health issues, addiction or substance misuse are concerned.

## **7. Conclusions and the Next Steps**

Whilst helping to care for a family member is something that many young people are happy and proud to do, and taking on a caring role can strengthen family ties and build maturity and independence, inappropriate or excessive levels of caring puts their education and health at risk and may well prevent them from enjoying and achieving throughout their childhoods in the same way as their peers. The young carers we spoke to were extremely dedicated, fiercely independent and would not want to change their caring role, other than to have their family member well again. Not knowing who to turn to in times of need or where support is available increases the pressures faced by young people with caring responsibilities. Equally, lack of clear understanding of young carers by professionals with whom they have contact and the impact of their responsibilities on their lives can exacerbate the risks and reduce the opportunities for young carers.

There are young carers everywhere and whilst some want to remain unknown as carer they need to have the assurance that support is there and it is easily accessible. Early identification of young people with caring responsibilities is imperative in improving the opportunities and increasing their life chances.

The Young Carers Forum meets on a monthly basis. This forum enables young carers from the area to have their say on the issues which affect them. Young carers report feelings to be listened to and take the opportunity to express themselves.

Our Young Carers Forum is a focus group to make sure that young carers in Southend are getting the right emotional, mental and physical support they need. It also talks about what issues young carers face in everyday life. It is our aim to raise the profile / awareness of young carers across the borough of Southend.

We need to build on the excellent work and good practice currently being provided and continually review and refresh the Young Carers Strategy to ensure it is up to date and fit for purpose.

The following list of recommended actions has been drawn from the various suggestions made by the young carers attending the stakeholder event and the project team. Whilst this may not provide a definitive answer, it will essentially assist in the early identification of young people with caring responsibilities and significantly improve opportunities for young carers:

- Identify a Young Carers Champion within each relevant partner agency/department to ensure a consistent approach is followed supported by a standard flow chart with actions<sup>7</sup>;
- Identify a nominated staff member with the lead responsibility for young carers within each school;
- Explore the use of an identity card for young carers that is recognised by all agencies;
- Promote the young carers charter and the top ten tips for young carers;
- Increase publicity at key locations for the services and support available for young people with caring responsibilities;
- Maximise publicity for Young Carers Week each year;
- Improve and promote information sharing between departments/agencies in the Borough including schools;
- Provide young carers' awareness course within schools and an element within the Common Assessment Framework training to assist in the identification of young carers at an early stage;
- Improve transition between schools.

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<sup>7</sup> This is being considered at the Success for All Children group meetings

# Top Ten Tips

Tips for professionals who may come into contact with young carers

1. We are normal, despite having a different lifestyle, don't treat us any differently.
2. Work with us, not against us!
3. Listen to what we have to say.
4. Respect our views, feelings and decisions.
5. Treat us as equals.
6. Live up to your role.
7. Give us 'positive' help on making big decisions.
8. Include us in what is going on concerning the person/people we care for.
9. Make us feel comfortable and able to trust and confide in you.
10. Give us the necessary encouragement and support we need.



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**Improving Outcomes for Young Carers: “Closing the Gap”  
In-depth Scrutiny Event – Tuesday, 25<sup>th</sup> January, 2011**

**Anonymous Comments from Post-it Wall**

“Very positive! Good to hear young carers sharing their views and ideas”

“I feel that schools should reach out more as due to a need to fit in with fellow students they may feel too scared to talk or even accept their problems.”

“That people should know we exist.”

“Young Carers’ Allowance.”

“I thought that today gave a chance to speak about my role and how to help young carers that have not been identified.”

“Such assertive intelligent young people – a real pleasure and I learnt a lot too.”

“I want to express my feelings in a fun way.”

“Young Carers allowance.”

“Could help more by enforcing more connections with the school. Today was good! Really made me reflect.”

“We are NOT IDIOTS.”

“I think this event should be advertised and given to teachers and head teacher.”

“I believe that the meeting went well and they understand us better.”

“Get to carers earlier in life. And this meeting was good.”

“Carers Allowance.”

“Very impressed with the openness of the young carers. This can only be the start of raising awareness.”

“To all the young carers who took part in this event THANK YOU for being so generous with your time and so frank with your comments.”

“Knowing we have someone to talk to and is there for us.”

“Young carers cards.”

“Good to hear directly from the young people themselves and how the support has helped them.”

“Young Carers allowance.”

“I should be able to tell that my brother is safe when he goes out.”

“Fantastic event invaluable having the young carers so involved. Also a great networking event for working together.”

“A really useful event in terms of getting professionals and service users together.”

“I feel there should be more support outside schools.”

“An awareness campaign including a celebrity.”

“A good chance to start making a positive change for young carers – need to ensure we feed back to them.”

“Excellent event – thought provoking”

“Being a young carer is hard but CHIL helps me and tonight helps to make the services better.”

“...it was good to talk about the issues we had wanted to share with others.”

“Young carers were very brave and inspiring.”

“It’s great to know that people want to listen and help us in any way they can.”

“I feel upset when strangers stare at the person I care for.”

“Well structured and relaxed atmosphere.”

“Excellent presentations from the young carers and good ideas discussed.”

“More information in hospitals and doctors surgeries.”