

YOUNG CARERS REVIEW GROUP

4 June 2014

PRESENT – Councillors Cruddas, Lister (in the Chair), EA Richmond, S Richmond, C Taylor and Wright.

APOLOGIES – Councillor Hutchinson.

OFFICERS – Lisa Holdsworth, Service Development Officer and Karen Graves, Democratic Officer.

Also in attendance – Ms R McCormack, Darlington Young Carers Service.

Purpose of the Meeting – To give consideration to the Darlington Young Carers' Action Plan and note progress made by the new service providers DISC.

Points Discussed and Considered -

- The Chair welcomed all attendees to the meeting and, following introductions and an explanation of the role of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee, stated that the meeting had been convened in order for Members to receive an update on the work of the new service providers DISC who worked with under 25-s;
- Lisa Holdsworth explained that, following the tendering process, a new provider had been identified in September 2013 for Young Carers and that the service transfer from YMCA had gone well with new ideas being developed by DISC;
- It was also stated that separate funding from the CCG had been made available for a post to work with schools raising awareness of Young Carers. This funding will enable DISC to employ a School Worker to continue the strategic work of Sue Walker (YMCA);
- Ms McCormack stated that schools could identify young carers if awareness was raised and DISC had taken guidance from the Princess Royal Trust and Carers UK on best practice. It was essential to share information amongst agencies to ensure support is given to young carers. Head Teachers had been made aware of the Darlington Young Carers Charter and the information cascaded down to all staff;
- Two schools had already signed up to the Charter and 12 school assemblies had been attended promoting the Charter. St Aidan's Drop in sessions had also been held in Secondary Schools so that young people could access support services and DISC had been to Darlington College to ensure young adult carers could be identified;

- It was noted that few faith schools had signed up to the Charter although they tended to have good pastoral support;
- It was noted that agencies did refer any carers they were aware of but that schools were the best places to identify new carers, it was hoped that the correct support could be given to any young carer, possibly with help from another family member;
- It was stressed that it was the hope of the Young Carers Strategic Partnership Group to bring all agencies together and make systems aware of all young carers. For example, if a parent had a mental health need was the service aware of the needs of the child;
- Cross-agency working was to be improved but the child was not always thought of in a situation of caring and it was this unknown which needed to be improved, schools maybe knew but were unsure how to help the situation and in that regard a School Carers Leads Network had been established with a named person in a school allocated to support and refer young carers;
- Schools have a duty to explore 'triggers' such as a child sleeping in class and refer the matter to the relevant agency, the Memo of Understanding had a protocol to follow;
- Another sign of a young carer was poor attendance at school, this was almost certainly due to the young carer feeling too frightened to leave a parent, especially if that parent was dependent on drugs or had mental health issues and the child was unsure what the adult would do if left along;
- It was stated that in some cases the child was used as a crutch and that both parent and child needed the correct support, bridges needed to be built through adult and child services to ensure the correct agency was aware of any issues;
- It was stressed that it was also imperative that young carers were given the opportunities to continue their education as some did want a career, and the necessary funding sought if necessary, whilst also ensuring that the parent was looked after;
- The Review Group were advised that whilst the 2011 census identified 197 under 15 years old carers, previous research suggested that there was four times as many in that role. The 2011 census also identified, 16 to 24 year old carers;
- It was also stated that since March there had been 50 referrals which indicated that work in schools had worked, with a target of 150 it was suspected that this would be surpassed as many more carers had to be identified;

- It was also stressed that although awareness and knowledge would be increased some families do not want support as they believed their own children were the best people to look after them;
- Following a question it was suggested that where there was poverty in a family more was put on a child, not necessarily a caring role, but this cross-cut across safe-guarding issues, less money and incorrect food could lead to poor diet and raise other issues;
- If a household income was reduced due to illness a family had to learn to adjust;
- Ms McCormack advised that they had links to the Citizens Advice Bureau and Housing Services to seek help and that there was a need to work with the new Customer Services Section within the Town Hall in order to establish a One Stop Shop;
- The Group were informed that once a carer reached the age of 18 years a link was made to the adult carers service and they were naturally moved to that service through natural transition and that DISC helped to manage and facilitate the transition;
- The group was aimed at 16yrs to 25 yrs old as needs were different to an under 16 year carer
- Lisa Holdsworth advised that the Council was doing appropriately what they could within the available resources, schools work was doing well but awareness still needed to be increased further;
- The separate CCG funding was also noted. Schools need-to be constantly reminded to undertake focussed work, although it was stressed that although school workers were doing an excellent job, they could only work within available resources;
- Young carers needed to know there was someone they could get support from and not get into trouble when homework or classwork was not completed;
- If a young carer was late for class and given a detention this would not help the situation, teachers needed to be made aware of a carers home situation and have knowledge of the child;
- Ms McCormack advised the Group that there was a drop in facility at the 6th Form College which was currently being reviewed with staff and needed to be fully advertised;
- It was also noted that there had been a rise in self-harm cases which was a worrying trend, DISC were working with CAMHS in order to help alleviate the

trend;

- The cause of the increase in self harm is unknown at present and research is sporadic. Ms McCormack speculated re possible causes, eg in response to musical influences or that young people felt that they were not being listened to. However, this is an area that needs additional research;
- It was noted that social services would not always be aware of young carers unless there was a safeguarding issue and that Health Visitors stopped visits once a child reached the age of six months;
- It was commented that if there was a health issue GP advice would be sought, a GP had attended a Young Carers Strategic Partnership Group meeting and the NHS was committed to carers therefore awareness raising was taking place;
- Tees Valley agencies work together to support young carers, it was in a teacher's interest to know what was getting in the way of a child's education;
- Group were informed that there was no longer an Education Welfare Officer, there was now a Family Outreach Worker who visited the home and saw any issues or problems, schools no longer suspended or expelled as they wanted to work with children, agencies got together to help provide the required support; and
- Teachers had to be accountable to Ofsted and it was in their best interest to know of any problems or issues;

IT WAS AGREED – (a) That the Young Carers Review Group be given the opportunity to review the Action Plan.

(b) That a further meeting of the Group be held in six months' time to see what progress had been made