



A Better Relationship with Learning

An evaluation of
the Young Carers in
Schools Programme

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Acknowledgments

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The Queen's Trust

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1 Background

Coram was commissioned in October 2017 to undertake an evaluation of the Young Carers in Schools (YCiS) programme. This report is part of a wider evaluation that sought to explore the implementation of the programme and its impact on a young carers' relationship with education, their academic progress and personal wellbeing.

2 The Young Carers in Schools (YCiS) programme

The Young Carers in Schools Programme is an England-wide initiative that equips schools to support young carers and awards good practice (see youngcarersinschools.com). The Programme is run in collaboration by Carers Trust and The Children's Society. They are improving the identification and support of young carers in schools across the country, so that they get the help they need to enjoy and achieve.

A young carer is someone under 18 who helps to look after someone in their family, or a friend, who is ill, disabled or misuses drugs or alcohol. Young adult carers are young people aged 16–25 who care, unpaid, for a family member or friend with an illness or disability, mental health condition or an addiction.

3 Methods

An online survey ran between December 2017 and January 2018 to obtain an overview of implementation from schools. An approach was made to 316 schools that had identified some kind of interest in the Award scheme run as part of the programme. In the Award scheme schools are asked to show that they meet five Young Carers Standards at Bronze, Silver or Gold level. One hundred and three schools responded to the survey, of which 57 had an Award at the time.

The subsequent stages were interview based. Interviews supplemented the survey by obtaining a more nuanced view of how implementation was achieved in the schools, the role played by local carer support agencies and by taking a more in depth look at the experience of specific young carers. Interviews took place with i) schools, ii) local stakeholder organisations, iii) focus groups of young carers and iv) descriptive interviews with school staff in Carers Trust trailblazer sites that had observed young carers over several years.

There were 16 interviews in total; 5 school interviews, 7 local support organisations interviews, 2 focus groups of young carers interviews and 2 trailblazer school interviews.

4 Summary of Findings

Overall this study considered the following questions:

- 1) How successfully have schools and young carers services been able to implement the different parts of the programme?
- 2) To what extent does implementation of the programme improve the ability of schools to identify and respond to the needs of young carers?
- 3) How well have young carers been able to improve their relationship with education and their academic progress?
- 4) Do young carers experience wider improvements in terms of personal wellbeing?
- 5) How does service provision connect to or inspire the wider network of services?
- 6) What are the policy messages that emerge from the findings?

4.1 How successfully have schools and young carers services been able to implement the different parts of the programme?

Where schools have the motivation they have been very successful in using the resources to implement support for young carers. Perhaps surprisingly the nature of implementation varied from school to school with some having a strong emphasis on a regular group and others focusing more on individualised support. Schools found the resources useful and particularly valued the baseline review and the step by step guide.

Schools rated the current programme highly. Eighty-seven percent of schools rated the scheme as good or very good and 94% would recommend the programme to other schools. However there is a market for a simple list of actions that some local carers services were seeking to support.

4.2 To what extent does implementation of the programme improve the ability of schools to identify and respond to the needs of young carers?

The YCiS programme helped schools identify over twice as many young carers as they otherwise would have. On average schools said that they had identified 59% of their young carers as a result of their participation in the programme.

The programme was reported as having a positive impact on the confidence of staff to identify young carers, understand the support they may need and be able to support young carers' needs. Ninety-four percent of schools indicated that staff were more likely to know what to do if they identified a young carer, and the same proportion of schools indicated that staff had a better understanding of the support that young carers needed.

4.3 How well have young carers been able to improve their relationship with education and their academic progress?

Schools surveyed identified improvements in the young carers' relationship with education. Almost three quarters of schools (73%) reported that classroom engagement had improved, while 72% thought that young carers' motivation to learn had improved, and 63% reported improvement in the achievement of young carers.

Sixty-three percent of schools also said that young carers were less likely to have high absence rates since the schools became involved in the young carers programme.

4.4 Do young carers experience wider improvements in terms of personal wellbeing?

Both the survey and the interviews furnished examples of young carers having their needs better met. In the survey young carers were reported as having improved wellbeing (85%), as being happier (83%) and more confident (83%).

The ability of young carers to make connections with other young carers in their school across the years was regularly mentioned as a positive impact of the programme. Examples were supplied of young carers worrying less, becoming more confident and more positive about their future. It was also noted that friendship groups were more secure when a person identified as a young carer as peers would now understand why a young carer would sometimes need to be elsewhere.

4.5 How does service provision connect to or inspire the wider network of services?

Two thirds of schools reported that since becoming involved in the programme young carers were better supported by other organisations.

Local young carer services (usually based in carers centres) were a strong and valued presence. They were usually mentioned either because they ran regular weekly centre-based activities that young carers in the school could access or because they had a range of activities and excursions that young carers could sign up for both in term time and over the school holidays.

Schools also reported good experiences in referring to the local authority and getting support, eg through the early help offer. Sometimes the local young carers services were able to support schools and advocate for young carers to local early help services.

Some of the schools had established relationships with other schools in the area, including feeder schools, and were helping them to identify and support young carers. Local young carers services were also active in supporting the young carers in schools programme, however outreach to new schools tended to be related to the presence of funding for dedicated posts to do this. Without such posts there was a focus on supporting schools already engaged.

4.6 What are the policy messages that emerge from the findings?

There was almost universal support for extending the pupil premium to young carers. The principal reason given was that this would give an added impetus to schools that currently did not prioritise young carers and encourage them to do so. The argument went that if the purpose of the pupil premium is to help disadvantaged pupils of all abilities perform better, and close the gap between them and their peers, then young carers were a prime group to be considered.

It was recognised that many young carers would already be eligible for pupil premium under other criteria and that the resultant additional resource to schools may not be that great. There was also concern that funding via pupil premium might create a restrictive definition of what makes someone a young carer which could dissuade schools from providing more universal support. So any announcement of funding should stress that young carers exist in a wide continuum beyond what can easily be defined for funding purposes.

The second suggested area was for provision for young carers to be explicitly identified as part of the Ofsted inspection framework for schools. Young carers are one group mentioned in the common inspection framework alongside many other groups. Positive examples were given of Ofsted inspectors meeting with young carers groups, so practice may be ahead of guidance, but the needs of young carers is not a major inspection focus.

Ofsted inspectors are required to assess the learning and progress of disadvantaged pupils (para 65 of the Inspection Handbook), but the handbook defines disadvantaged pupils as “those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding”, which excludes many young carers and does not explicitly identify them.

Another suggested driver for good practice was the inclusion of young carers in the schools’ annual s175 safeguarding audit, so that schools would have to identify young carers numbers and provisions for them alongside the safeguarding and anti-bullying issues currently covered.

Joined up services between schools and external services remain important. When asked what they wanted some children indicated that what would make a difference to their lives would be having help at home and in the community. If we want young carers to do well in education a lot can be done in school to support this. This study had seen many positive examples of real change being achieved. However equally valuable is the support given to them to reduce their caring role, to give them permission to worry less and provide them with wider opportunities to enjoy their childhood.

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