



## **RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee**

#### **YOUNG CARERS REPORT**

**AUTHOR: Mari Ropstad, Service Manager – Carers, RCT Council**

#### **1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update members on the RCT Young Carers Service.

#### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Scrutiny Committee considers the attached report and the work undertaken for young carers in RCT.

#### **3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 Prior to the implementation of the Social Service and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014, Health Boards in Wales had a lead role under The Carers Strategies (Wales) Measure 2010 to prepare, publish and implement with partners a strategy for the benefit of unpaid carers, including young carers.
- 3.2 The Carers Strategies (Wales) Measure 2010 was repealed following introduction of the Social Service and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014. A new national plan for carers was expected for 2020/2021 but COVID 19 and the subsequent lockdown and disruption has led to a delay in progressing the public engagement which is now planned for October 2020 - January 2021.
- 3.3 Once confirmed a Regional Action plan will be required to implement the National priorities and recommendations established in the new national.
- 3.4 A Cwm Taf Morgannwg Carers Partnership Group was established to monitor the implementation of the Statement of Intent and promote the integration of services for carers, as required by Part 9 of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act.
- 3.5 Welsh Government provided transitional funding of £1million per annum for Wales in 2019/20 (£161,000 for Cwm Taf Morgannwg) to protect and build on progress to date and to support the expansion of Carers rights

under the implementation of the SSWB Act. Young carers are included in this regional work.

#### **4. KEY POINTS**

- 4.1 This has been a challenging year for young carers as their circumstances have changed significantly. The support provided has continued within Coronavirus restrictions and the RCT Young Carers Service has supported young carers and families to deal with challenges.
- 4.2 A new national ID card for young carers will be launched before the end of March in RCT. This scheme has been piloted with a group of young carers currently accessing support and additional shopping discounts has been added with support from RCT Council's Staff Benefits scheme.
- 4.3 Once restrictions allow, all-age carers services in the borough will be co-located in a newly refurbished office in Gelliwastad Road, Pontypridd. Grant funding has provided equipment and furnishings to allow the space to be used for carer events, workshops, training and meetings and will effectively act as a carers hub for RCT.

#### **5. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 There are no foreseen equality and diversity implications associated with this report.

#### **6. CONSULTATION**

- 6.1 This report has been prepared in consultation with Action for Children, who provides a commissioned support service for young carers, and the dedicated young carer assessor within the Information, Assistance and Advice service.

#### **7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)**

- 7.1 There are no financial implications aligned to this report. The Cwm Taf Morgannwg Carers Partnership Group oversees the use of the Welsh Government transitional funding, reporting to the SSWB Transformation Leadership Group and the SSWB Partnership Board.

#### **8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED**

- 8.1 The Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 came into force in April 2016 and is intended to transform the way services are delivered. It repeals the majority of community care legislation including the Carers Strategies (Wales) Measure 2010.

8.2 The new Act provides a definition of a carer as “a person who provides or intends to provide care for an adult or disabled child” and removes the requirement that carers must be providing a “substantial amount of care on a regular basis.” The Act includes new rights for carers and new duties on local authorities.

9. **LINKS TO THE COUNCIL’S CORPORATE PLAN & OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES**

9.1 The work to implement the Statement of Intent for Carers and the Welsh Government national priorities for carers has complemented the Council's priorities to Promote independence and positive lives for everyone including carers of all ages.

**Other Information:**

***Relevant Scrutiny Committee***

- Children and young people Scrutiny Committee



**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

**AS AMENDED BY**

**THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985**

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**REPORT OF GROUP DIRECTOR, COMMUNITY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES, IN DISCUSSIONS WITH THE RELEVANT PORTFOLIO HOLDER, COUNCILLOR LEYSHON**

**RCT YOUNG CARERS REPORT**

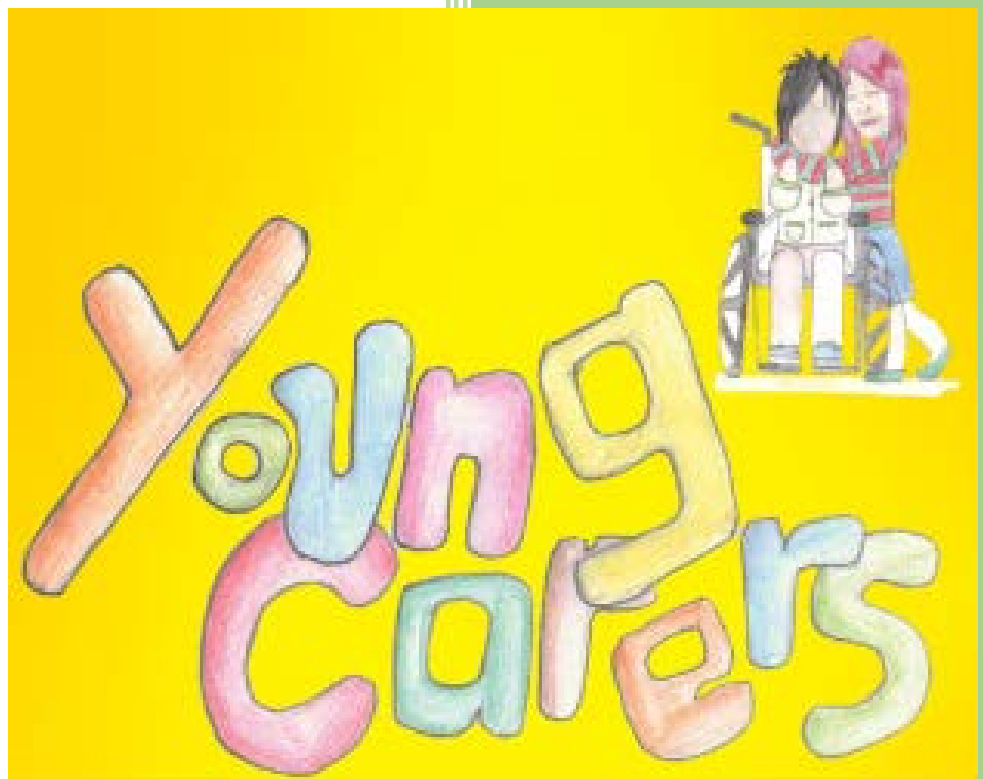
**Background Papers:**

RCT Young Carers Report

**Officer to contact:** Tracy Prosser, Head of Service, Children's Services

Annual report

# RCT Young Carers



Mari Ropstad  
Service Manager - Carers  
Annual report

## **OVERVIEW**

This year has been a challenging and different one. With the global pandemic it has been necessary to adapt working practices and finding new ways of supporting young carers. Many young carers have also found their roles have changed significantly with many required to do more. In some instances, this has been coupled with additional anxiety in terms of catching or spreading the virus, as well as additional pressure to keep on top of schoolwork with distance learning. Our support services have tried to adapt by offering more individual sessions throughout the year, providing continued breaks for young carers in smaller groups when restrictions allowed and delivering food parcels and care packages.

This report attempts to summarise the support provided to young carers (aged 0-17) and young adult carers (aged 18-25) during a turbulent year and recognise some of the key developments achieved despite extremely challenging circumstances.

## **BACKGROUND**

The Young Carers Service now sits within the wider all-age Carers Support Project following a review and restructure carried out towards the end of 2018/2019. The review identified a need for a strategic lead for carers within the authority and the Service Manager for Carers now has responsibility for all carer issues, including young carers, young adult carers and adult carers.

The restructure resulted in changes to the support provided to young carers. The service still has a dedicated Young Carer Assessor who now sits within the wider Information, Advice and Assistance function of Children's Services. This is to ensure that statutory obligations are met in terms of assessment and monitoring of young carers.

Staff within the Carers Support Project who were previously working with specific groups of carers (such as parent carers and sibling carers) are now working across all carer services and the project has absorbed the young carer work as part of the all-age carer support.

It was also recognised that greater integration was required with the third-sector commissioned young carers support service (currently provided by Action for Children) so this service will be integrated with the Carers Support Project in Gelliwastad Road once restrictions allow.

The support for young adult carers (aged 18-25) continues to be provided by a dedicated part-time worker, funded via the Families First grant. This funding has not yet been confirmed for 2021/2022.

## **YOUNG CARER SUPPORT SERVICE**

The young carer support service is currently provided by Action for Children. From March 2020, when the first lockdown was announced, the service has been based primarily on virtual support with individual face-to-face support for the most

vulnerable young carers. The below year-on-year statistics illustrate how the service has changed:

	2018	2019	2020
<b>April-June</b>			
Number of referrals	11	10	4
1-to-1 sessions	19	5	62
Group work	24	27	8
<b>July-September</b>			
Number of referrals	15	14	11
1-to-1 sessions	17	6	5
Group work	21	18	20
<b>October-December</b>			
Number of referrals	9	12	8
1-to-1 sessions	12	4	29
Group work	18	18	20

There were several challenges to overcome for the staff and young carers:

- Not everyone had access to a computer or a digital device.
- Not all families had Wi-Fi to join in the virtual sessions or didn't have enough data on phones.
- Some young carers do not like engaging over Teams/Zoom.
- There were travel restrictions to consider when dropping off equipment and some staff had to self-isolate.
- Generally, the caring roles of young carers known to the project increased due to the lockdowns and being at home 24/7. This also impacted on their health and wellbeing.

The virtual groups allowed young carers to have contact with staff and peers and receive support if they needed it. This was combined with socially distanced one-to-one individual support, often face-to-face, for the most vulnerable young carers. Wellbeing visits were also made to families as required, following all restrictions and guidelines.

In between lockdown periods, Action for Children were able to re-start group sessions to provide a break away from home for some young carers. These groups have been smaller than normal groups and transport has been an issue for many as staff were not able to carry passengers in their cars as they would normally.

Every month from March 2020, Action for Children staff have posted out different care packages, including games, equipment, treats and gifts to young carers to help them through a very difficult time.

Many families were struggling financially, and Action for Children applied for more than £2,000 worth of grants their own Action for Children Covid Appeal. Through these grants families were able to purchase essential items such a gas, electric and food.

Many families were also unable to get shopping and staff supported with collections and deliveries, including collection prescriptions from families.

## YOUNG CARER ASSESSMENTS

There is a dedicated worker responsible for assessing young carers who is located within the children's services Information, Advice and Assistance (IAA) team. This means we can ensure statutory obligations are met for assessing and supporting young carers with greater ease and accuracy.

### **Referrals received**

Q1 Apr-Jun	10
Q2 Jul-Sep	16
Q3 Oct-Dec	28
Q4 to date	4
<b>TOTAL to date</b>	<b>54</b>

Referrals during the first two quarters were significantly lower than average due to the lockdown beginning, schools being closed and not as much contact with families.

Once schools returned in Q3 the referrals picked up again. More agencies were having contact with families again and this referral rate was above average for a quarter. The lack of awareness-raising in schools is likely to contribute to the reduced referral rate.

Hardly any raising awareness work has been carried out by the young carers project during the pandemic, understandably, and this could also be contributing to the reduced referral rate.

### **Source of referrals**

Children's Services	10
Resilient families	9
Family	9
School	9
Disabled Children's Team	6
Health	3
College	3
YEPS service	3
Adult Services	3
Carers Support Project/Young Carers Project	2
Miskin	1

To date, 80 reviews have been completed during the year, mainly over the telephone due to the need to prioritise visits during lockdown restrictions. Overall, little progress have been made on support plans as the majority of support sessions have taken



place online and this causes issues for many young carers due to IT issues, reliance on parents/carers to set equipment up or little confidence in engaging online.

### Work during Covid-19

During initial lockdown period, most of the assessor's work involved carrying out welfare calls to the most vulnerable families, ensuring they had access to food and medical supplies.

Assessments were completed over the phone which was not ideal in terms of forming a relationship with the family, but any immediate needs were identified and support or referrals were provided.

Reviews were completed over the phone which was a way of carrying out welfare checks and identifying any support needed.

This period also involved a lot of work with the schools as many young carers didn't have the IT equipment needed to complete their online education. Many schools classed young carers as being vulnerable and loaned IT equipment out or arranged for work to be sent to their homes. It is likely our prior work on setting up and promoting the Young Carer Schools Award programme has contributed to increased awareness in schools of young carers and the reasons why they are vulnerable.

The emotional and wellbeing support offered to the young carers increased once visits (with appropriate PPE) could be carried out.

Most schools returned in September, but several young carers experienced a lot of anxiety about returning to school. Some were anxious about picking up the virus in school and infecting their vulnerable relatives and some had become even more isolated than they were pre-Covid and couldn't contemplate returning to a busy, noisy environment. A lot of joint working was completed with school staff to arrange flexible and staggered returns. Some young carers continued to work online. Some young carers have not yet returned to school due to the very vulnerable nature/health of their parent and schools continue to provide welfare calls to these families.

### **SIBLING CARERS**

Sibling carers (those helping to care for a sibling with additional needs) continue to receive a limited specific support service via the Carers Support Project. Normally activities would be planned for school holiday periods to allow the sibling carers to spend some quality time with a parent and meet other children in a similar situation. During the pandemic, the support has been provided at a distance with welfare calls and delivery of Boredom Buster packs. During the autumn we were successful in obtaining some grant funding to allow us to plan and run a 10-week wellbeing course called Project S, focused on emotional wellbeing and resilience. This course allowed 11 sibling carers to attend regular Zoom sessions and completing tasks in their workbook in between. All who completed received a prize at the end.

## **YOUNG ADULT CARERS SERVICE**

The Young Adult Carer (YAC) Service has a dedicated part-time worker who is funded via a Families First grant. The worker is responsible for assessing the members of the group, which is currently 84, to provide evidence of how the service helps them develop resilience and mental wellbeing. The aim of the service is to support YACs with personal growth through educational workshops and some social events. It also provides a break from the caring role and a chance to learn new skills.

The service has been delivered exclusively online from March 2020 and young adult carers (YACs) have been provided with information and assistance via their closed Facebook group. A number of events have taken place to help support YACs through this difficult time and provide some light relief from caring, including mindfulness sessions, yoga, baking workshops, anxiety workshops and quiz nights.

The YAC service also supports the Caring and Supporting Each Other (CASE) group, which was set up as a charitable community interest group by the YACs. The CASE group has successfully applied for funding from the regional carers grant to allow them to organise a programme of educational and skills workshops this year, including a wellbeing festival, cooking skills, budgeting workshops, CV writing and how to write grant applications.

## **CARERS HUB**

Following the restructure of the carers services in RCT, the Carers Support Project office in Gelliwastad Road required refurbishment in order to accommodate additional staff from Action for Children and making it suitable as a permanent office space. RCT Council invested in the refurbishment, installing a kitchen and re-designing the room layout to allow Action for Children their own room within the office.

A capital grant was awarded via the Intermediate Care Fund to allow the newly refurbished office to be used as a Carers Hub for carers of all ages in RCT. Items such as soft seating, a projector and screen, tables and chairs, soft furnishings, external signage and window transfers, a TV and kitchenware was funded by the grant to allow workshops, social events, skills sessions and young carer groups to use the space on a regular basis once restrictions allow.

## **YOUNG CARER ID CARDS**

RCT Council are an early adopter for the Welsh Government's national ID card scheme for young carers. Our launch date remains fluid due to Covid, however the card launch is imminent and will happen before the end of March 2021. We have completed a pilot project with young carers accessing our young carer support project and these already have their cards.

We are currently producing a launch video to be used across social media platforms, featuring young carers and their views on what the card means to them. Following the launch we will be able to accept application from all young carers and we will be working with the Carer Champions in schools (secondary schools in the first

instance) to train them as Trusted Referrers for the ID card scheme, thereby allowing easier access and more awareness of the card.

The purpose of the card at present is primarily for identification of young carers in schools, health and other settings as young carers have repeatedly indicated this as a need. We have however successfully attached a benefit via the Council's staff benefit scheme which will entitle all successful applicants to also receive the Vectis card for local discounts on shopping. It is likely more benefits will in time be attached to the card, both nationally and locally.

## **OTHER DEVELOPMENTS**

### Chromebooks

We have distributed 20 Chromebooks to young carers, sibling carers and young adult carers in December 2020 and January 2021. These were provided by Welsh Government and included 12-months worth of free mobile WiFi.

### Young carer and young adult carer recognition evening

The recognition evening planned in June 2020 to celebrate the achievements and contributions of young carers and young adult carers was cancelled due to Covid. We have repurposed this funding to produce a celebratory film instead, focussing on the challenges young carers have overcome this year. This film is currently in production however the changing restrictions continue to make this process difficult.

### Grant schemes

We have been required to repurpose much funding this financial year as our original plans were not able to take place due to Covid. For young carers we have launched a wellbeing grant scheme which young carers can apply to for funding to purchase anything which will improve their emotional wellbeing and mental health.

## **FUTURE PLANS**

Our key aims for the immediate future is to continue to provide young carers with support despite any restrictions. Once the schools reopen fully, we hope to promote the Young Carer Schools Award programme to ensure young carers in all RCT primary and secondary schools are identified and aware of the support available to them.

The launch of the young carer ID card scheme will support this aim of early identification and support and should deliver several benefits to young carers.

We are scoping the possibility of achieving the Carer Friendly Employer accreditation, awarded by the Carers Trust South East Wales, in order to support working carers, some of whom may be young carers and young adult carers. This will require coordinated effort across all areas of the Council in order to adopt a Carers Policy for staff, maintain a staff carers network, ensure carers within the workforce are identified and supported and that all staff receive carer awareness training.

