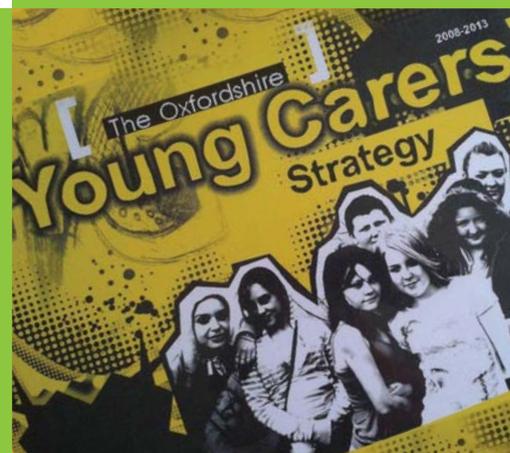


Collection of data on the attainment and school attendance of pupils with caring responsibilities (young carers)



What is the initiative?

Oxfordshire mapping of young carers in schools

Who runs it?

Oxfordshire County Council

Who does it benefit?

Secondary school age young carers. The increase in knowledge and evidence base will also support schools and the local authority.

What does it do?

The initiative collected data on the attainment and school attendance of young carers. This analysis formed part of a wider mapping of young carers by the local authority, carried out in order to better understand the needs of young carers in the county of Oxfordshire.

The mapping gives the local authority a clearer picture of the make-up of young carers within the county such as their attendance and attainment in school, who they care for and what are the specific conditions of those they care for.

When did it start?

October 2009 and it is ongoing as of April 2012.

Why was it started?

The work was begun in order to understand more about young carers in the county and to assess what their needs were in terms of service delivery. Before this work there was very little coherent tracking of young carers and no knowledge of any similar work being done to the same extent.

What are the aims and objectives?

Oxfordshire County Council believed that in order to best provide services for young carers it needed a better understanding of their situation.

The main aims were to:

- Increase understanding of young carers and their needs and build up an evidence base in order to shape services from a more informed position.
- Give weight to the belief that young carers should continue to be supported fully.
- Specifically monitor the school attendance and attainment of young carers in order to compare it with other pupils.

Since the mapping began, the objectives remain the same, however, the emphasis may now have shifted more towards measuring the outcomes of the commissioned service with a view to better shaping services and ensuring the best use of limited resources.

How is it funded?

The funding for this work came from the same source as the young carers services generally, via the local authority. It was the responsibility of the local authority's Young Carers Team Manager and Young Carers Development Worker to develop the mapping mechanism initiative and report the findings.

What has it achieved?

The mapping of young carers within schools has provided unequivocal evidence that there is an educational attainment gap for young carers.

- Young carers are much more likely to be persistently absent than county average – in 2009/2010 12.4% were persistently absent where the county absence rate for secondary school was 6.7%.
- In 2009/2010 only 62.2% of young carers achieved level 4+ in English and Maths at Key Stage 2, compared to the county average of 75%.
- In 2009/2010 only 29.1% of young carers achieved 5 GCSEs at A*–C (including English and Maths). The county average was 56.9%. In the previous year (2008/2009) this had only been 16.2% where the county average had been 52.6%.
- In 2009/2010, of the 142 identified young carers over school age, 13.4% were not in education, employment or training, compared to the county average of 4.9%.

These findings and the wider findings from the mapping project were presented to senior management and transformation teams during the redesign of Children's Services. It has led to a greater profile for young carers within Children's Services in Oxfordshire and has helped to progress the work with schools. Support for young carers has increased through schools and early intervention hubs.

“Looking at this data on attainment and attendance, it becomes quite clear something needs to be done.”

Assistant Head Teacher, Didcot Girls School, Oxfordshire

It has also helped to build a stronger case to encourage increased identification, referral and support of young carers with all other agencies including schools, mental health services and with NHS staff.

As a result of this work and its findings, one of the objectives developed for the early intervention hubs in Oxfordshire, has been to reduce disadvantage as a result of caring responsibilities.

Without this data, reducing caring responsibilities would not have been developed as one of the key performance indicators.

This data is important as it enables the continued tracking of the growth of the young carers service by monitoring how many young carers are reached. As the service seeks to narrow the attainment gap between young carers and other pupils, this data will serve as a baseline from which work progresses over the years to come. And because the figures produced have strengthened the case for supporting young carers, further analysis and tracking will continue as functions of both the young carers team and the early intervention service.

These findings indicate that young carers are a vulnerable group whose attainment gap could be narrowed with targeted support. The impact of this work could be increased if this model were adopted elsewhere.

How have young carers and their families been involved in planning and delivering this work?

Young carers are involved in the wider commissioning process for young carers delivery within Oxfordshire and this mapping data has been presented to them as part of this process when seeking their views on the design of services. They have taken these findings into account in their response to the consultation on how support for young carers should be developed in the future.

How is the initiative run?

Oxfordshire County Council’s Young Carers Development Worker and Young Carers Service Manager developed the mechanism for data collection, drawing on both local knowledge and national research such as the Young Carers in the UK Report (Dearden and Becker, 2004) as a guide to what to look for.

Work was carried out in partnership with Spurgeons Young Carers Service and the county’s Education Services who committed resources to the project.

Data on young carers is collected in two ways:

1. By young carers services, using a bespoke data collection form (which includes a data disclaimer) and which the voluntary sector provider uses on a quarterly basis, as part of their contract to collect the relevant baseline information on young carers.
2. Through the form that is used in the application process for the Support Fund for young carers in Oxfordshire. This is a fund that can be used to make payments to young carers of up to £200 per year with the aim of relieving the impact of caring and the reduction of negative health outcomes.

Details of all young carers who are identified, are kept on a secure database. This database is then cross-referenced with the Education Management System (EMS) database used by Education Services in Oxfordshire to match up the young carers with their Unique Pupil Identification Numbers and hence their school attainment, attendance and exclusion figures. This data collection is undertaken on an annual basis. So far, data has been collected on 1,200 young carers.

Education Services committed the support of a member of their performance team to this project for approximately one day per month, to provide the data input and analysis. The project now has its own administrative support to keep the data up to date and accurate.

After two years of attainment figures a report was compiled. The local authority Young Carers Development Worker and Manager also report to the young carers strategic partnership.

Work is currently underway to move away from the separate young carers database to a more integrated model, where data is included within the EMS database used by Education Services.

The project will continue to track young carers and to use data to enable growth and improvement of support for this vulnerable group through universal services, early intervention and through social care.

What methods have been particularly effective?

Having the data on the numbers of young carers in each school who had accessed services, has meant that the project was able to approach schools with the numbers of young carers they had on their role or in their feeder schools. Young carers' services also found this information useful when approaching new schools they had not yet worked in partnership with.

Have there been any challenges along the way?

There was resistance from young carers projects in providing information on the individuals whom they supported (despite a data disclaimer in relation to the use of this information).

As data was collected, the project was able to inform schools about how many young carers it was aware of within their school. However, schools and Attendance and Engagement Officers were keen for the project to provide individual names of pupils who were young carers. This was a cause of tension.

The project found a way forward by saying to schools that once they had set up support for young carers within their school it would invite the young carers known to the project along to this support.

It is an ongoing challenge to ensure that identification of young carers is carried out sensitively and appropriately, however, all these issues can be overcome with good partnership working.

If the project was better integrated with the social care and early intervention systems, mapping young carers would be even more successful.

A future challenge may well be obtaining the necessary information from new academies in order for this to work.

What hints and tips might help me get started?

- Aim to integrate data collection on young carers within existing databases in the local authority by including 'carer' as an indicator.
- Be sensible about what information you collect and ensure you have the capacity to interrogate everything. It's not just about collecting the data, it's about analysing it. Use the 'so what?' motto. If you have this information what are you going to do about it? Focus on specific issues such as which service the referrals are coming from and data from schools.
- Think carefully about the data disclaimer and use one that already exists in your Children's Services.

Are there any useful documents that could assist me?

- Report on data on young carers 2008–2010.
- Attainment statistics for 2009, 2010 and 2011.
- Young Carers Support Fund – application form.
- Baseline information form.

Contact Alix Michaelis (see below) for copies.

Where can I get further information?

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