An Evaluation of the Improving Health Outcomes Programme

An impact report on the ways that 31 Carers Trust Network Partners have supported the health of carers through funding from People’s Health Trust and the support of Carers Trust

Executive Summary
Acknowledgements
Executive summary

In 2011, The Princess Royal Trust for Carers and Crossroads Care\(^1\) were selected to coordinate the delivery of health related projects managed by carers centres, Crossroad Care schemes and young carers services across England, Scotland and Wales. As part of its Healthy Places, Healthy People funding programme, carers centres and schemes in locations pre-determined by People’s Health Trust were invited to submit project proposals detailing how they would spend funding to develop effective services to improve health outcomes for either older carers (those aged 60 plus) or young adult carers (aged 16–24) from socio-economically disadvantaged communities. The overarching aim of the programme was to improve the physical health and emotional wellbeing of carers across England, Scotland and Wales.

For older carer projects, Network Partners’ aims were divided into two categories, with Network Partners opting for either category:

- Increase the opportunities for older carers to access activities aimed at improving health outcomes, or
- Increase the ability of older carers to access breaks from their caring role and improve the emotional, physical and/or financial health of older carers.

For all young adult carers projects, the specific aims were as follows:

- Improve the life chances of young adult carers.
- Increase access to and/or develop support structures to enable young adult carers to move from appropriate children’s services to adult services.
- Increase the support available for young adult carers to make informed choices about their own physical and mental health.

31 Network Partners were awarded funding in 30 geographical areas. 23 Network Partners planned to work on developing services for older carers, and eight Network Partners aimed to work with young adult carers. The grant available for each area was £40,000 for 12 months during 2012–13. The evaluation of the programme concentrated on the project design and the impacts created for the beneficiaries supported by the projects. It also looked at the wider impact of the grant funding on the Network Partners, in particular exploring how grant funding can be used to address five wider issues that Network Partners are facing – strategic, demand, asset, preventative and carer-led challenges.

---

\(^1\) Carers Trust is a new charity formed by the merger in 2012 of The Princess Royal Trust for Carers and Crossroads Care. Carers centres and schemes are now known as Network Partners.
The projects identified key areas of need relating to the health and wellbeing of the carers they supported, taking into account the local context, which raised different priorities. Both older carer and young adult carer projects identified needs for access to health and social care, social integration and training and support. Older carer projects also identified a strong need for respite care, and young adult carer projects identified needs for prevention and policy work. Several projects targeted specific demographics such as black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) groups, and some young adult carer projects targeted young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) and those affected by family issues and substance misuse.

Carers Trust is a major new charity for, with and about carers. We work to improve support, services and recognition for anyone living with the challenges of caring, unpaid, for a family member or friend who is ill, frail, disabled or has mental health or addiction problems.

We do this with Network Partners – a unique network of 116 independent carers centres, 59 Crossroads Care schemes and 105 young carers services. Together we are united by a shared vision for carers – to make sure that information, advice and practical support are available to all carers across the UK.

People’s Health Trust is an independent charity addressing health inequalities by investing in local organisations with great ideas to create fairer places to grow, live, work and age. People’s Health Trust is funded through 51 society lotteries, each designed to raise money to address health inequalities in a separate part of England, Scotland and Wales. The society lotteries operate through The Health Lottery. [www.peopleshealthtrust.org.uk](http://www.peopleshealthtrust.org.uk).

**Key findings**

- The older carer projects adhered to three activity models: holistic support packages, a one-off respite service and specific programmes of support (such as a counselling course). There was less variety in the models used by the young adult carer projects – with young adult carers transitioning into adulthood, a greater need was identified for personalised, holistic, intensive support.

- Both older carer and young adult carer projects used a combination of five intervention approaches: 1) activities and breaks; 2) information, advice and guidance; 3) counselling, therapy and direct health care; 4) training, capacity and peer support; and 5) emergency planning to bring about a wide range of benefits for carers’ physical and emotional wellbeing.

- The average number of carers supported by young adult projects is 90 compared to 235 for older carers. This was due to the emphasis on more intensive, key worker support within the young adult carer project models.
Network Partners that were most successful in meeting their objectives worked effectively in partnership with other local organisations to maximise the impact of interventions. Partnership work helped some projects to reach targeted beneficiaries, share resources and expertise for delivery of initiatives, and to ensure the approach was coordinated with the wider landscape of provision.

The impacts reported by the older carer projects fell into four categories:
1) tangible mental and physical health outcomes
2) confidence of the carer
3) relationships between the carer and others
4) access to support.
Together these outcomes contributed to overall improvements in the health and wellbeing of older carers.

The impacts reported by the young adult carer projects fell into six categories:
1) tangible mental and physical health outcomes
2) access to support
3) confidence of the carer
4) social participation
5) access to education, employment, and training
6) family outcomes.
These six outcomes together led to overall improvements for the health and mental wellbeing of young adult carers.

Seven of the projects identified training among health professionals and communities as a key need owing to the stigma associated with caring and the lack of awareness of carers’ needs.

The areas of generic need identified by the projects encompass those specifically related to the caring role such as poor mental health and social isolation, as well as wider issues affecting young people such as limited opportunities to access education, employment and training, which are further exacerbated by the caring role.

The experience of young adult carer projects suggests that in order to support young adult carers into education, employment and training, it is important to both work with the young adult carer to establish what is right for them and to work in partnership with providers to make links between the young adult carers and opportunities.

The overarching lesson from this study has been the value of using funding to have wider impacts on organisations by addressing five key challenges in designing and delivering support to carers.

**Strategic challenges:** To create strategic impact, some Network Partners ensured that the new service fitted with their existing provision, and complemented wider provision in the area. Some used the funding to do strategic work such as policy and awareness work to facilitate wider change in the local area.
**Demand challenges:** These are the challenges Network Partners face in genuinely meeting the needs of the carers they support. Those that were most successful in meeting carers’ needs worked flexibly, had ongoing consultation with carers and worked with partners to reach specific groups.

**Asset challenges:** Projects met resource challenges by maximising assets through volunteers, partners and the assets of carers themselves.

**Prevention challenges:** Grant funding can provide an opportunity to build in prevention work, creating sustainable outcomes. While some projects did this by deliberately designing interventions with a preventative focus (such as whole family support for young adult carers), some projects indirectly created preventative outcomes, such as those which had a focus on empowering carers.

**Carer-led challenges:** These are the challenges in ensuring that Network Partners are led, to some degree, by the carers they are supporting. Many of the young adult carer projects involved a strong carer-led element – this proved a valuable way to develop the confidence of carers, ensure they were at the centre of the projects, to build in peer support and to use the skills of carers.

**Recommendations for Network Partners**

- Targeting health is an inherent part of what Network Partners do, but being explicit about it within project design can help focus attention on the areas that carers are often resistant to – their own mental health and stress.

- Grant funding should fit within a plan for the development of the Network Partner as a whole. It is through this that the greatest impact for carers can be achieved.

- The views of carers are essential in ensuring that the project is relevant to their needs, and where possible, specific engagement should be used about new service development rather than a more generic survey.

- The Network Partner should ensure that the new resource is sustainable and that all or key parts of it can continue beyond the end of the grant funding.

- Learning from this study has demonstrated how partnership working can help projects to maximise resources and reach, and ensure that projects fit with local service provision. Network Partners therefore, should consider how best to use partnerships when designing and delivering interventions.

**Report structure**

This report is divided into five main chapters. The first chapter sets the context for the study. The second explores the needs identified by the projects and the activity models and interventions designed by the Network Partners. The third looks at the impacts created by the projects for the beneficiaries, exploring the reach of the projects and the outcomes which supported the overall improvement of physical health and emotional wellbeing of carers. The fourth looks at the effect of the grant funding on the wider organisation, exploring this in terms of meeting challenges related to strategy, demand, assets, prevention and being carer-led. The final section sets out the conclusions that can be drawn from the study and recommendations for Carers Trust Network Partners, Carers Trust and funders.