

A one-stop holistic service for young carers and their families experiencing multiple challenges



What is the initiative?

The Family Support Project

Who runs it?

Kingston Carers' Network, in partnership with the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames

Who does it benefit?

Young carers and their families living in the Kingston area who currently do not have sufficient services in place to meet their needs and are at risk of inappropriate levels of caring. These families are typically experiencing multiple challenges including parental mental ill health, substance misuse, unemployment, financial hardship and inadequate support networks.

What does it do?

The Family Support Project targets young carers who are experiencing multiple challenges, such as parental mental ill health and financial hardship, and who are most at risk of harmful or excessive caring. This target group requires a tailored, multi-agency approach and the Family Support Project provides a brokerage service for young carers and their families, ensuring that they can access all the services they require. In-house services, including welfare rights, community care, employment, housing and other legal advice, are also provided by the Family Support Project, so offering a one-stop holistic service for the whole family.

When did it start?

2012.

Why was it started?

The whole family approach is widely accepted but there was inconsistent use of the model in Kingston. It was evident that services were often overlooking the needs of young carers and families and were not accessing all possible support – often due

to a lack of co-ordinated support from different agencies. Furthermore, cuts to services were compounding these problems as fewer families met the criteria for support from social services. Kingston Carers' Network felt that brokering co-ordinated services for families needing additional support would help to reduce the caring responsibilities of those young carers at risk of excessive or harmful levels of care.

What are the aims and objectives?

Aims:

- To co-ordinate packages of support where there are significant and complex family needs.
- To increase families' resilience and prevent or reduce the amount of excessive or harmful caring undertaken by young carers.
- To share knowledge, skills and resources developed from the partnership site which demonstrate the prevention or reduction of excessive or harmful caring.

Objectives:

- To offer timely and prioritised support to the whole family.
- To co-ordinate and broker services where there are currently gaps in provision.
- To use the borough's new Young Carers Protocol to promote the pathway of support for young carers to local authority agencies and help identify hidden young carers.
- To provide one-to-one support to young carers to help develop coping skills and achieve personal goals.
- To provide a training programme for health, social care and education professionals to support the embedding of a whole family approach.

How is it funded?

This partnership site has been funded via the Integrated Interventions programme, managed by Carers Trust with funding provided by the Department for Education towards the delivery of the Government's Carers Strategy. Carers Trust is a new charity formed by the merger of The Princess Royal Trust for Carers and Crossroads Care.

What has it achieved?

"We all understand a lot more and are all happy ... Mum asks less of me."

Young carer

"I don't think that I would have managed without the Family Support Project Co-ordinator. She is the only professional person that I have dealt with that has common sense and really does care. To her it's not just a job that she has to do! She has made me a better person and parent and brought my children so much happiness."

Parent

“As part of Early Intervention and Prevention Services, working with the Family Support Project Co-ordinator has been very positive ... Assessment skills used for completion of CAFs has always been clear, evidence based and outcome driven. The Family Support Project Co-ordinator has also been an excellent advocate for families, organising multi-agency meetings and taking on the role of the lead professional with expertise and commitment.”

CAF and Lead Professional Co-ordinator

By the end of this Integrated Intervention project the partnership will have supported a total of 30 families and at least 30 young carers, in three cohorts of ten families. To date, the project has fully met the outcomes set in regard to young carers and their families for the first round of ten families. Completed Multi-dimensional Assessment of Caring Activities (MACA) and Positive and Negative Outcomes of Caring (PANOC) assessments show improved positive outcomes, reduced negative outcomes and reduced levels of caring among the young carers.¹ Evaluations by parents have also shown extremely high levels of satisfaction with the service.

Families have reported feeling better able to cope beyond the six month intervention period. The project has been able to help families to source help, such as focused one-to-one support for young carers and emotional support for parents. Advocacy has enabled families to access services and financial support to be better able to cope by themselves in the future.

Joint working between adult and children’s services has also been a significant success for the project. Training on the borough’s Young Carers Protocol has been delivered to 55 professionals to raise awareness of hidden young carers. Relationships with statutory partners have improved, the agencies involved have co-operated well and the local authority has a greater awareness of young carers. Families have reported better relationships with services than they had before. Professionals involved with the service have given very positive feedback about the project and have stated that is much needed.

Services have been put in place where they were previously missing or where needs were unidentified. These services include mental health support for parents, appropriate educational support for young carers in schools, and community care assessments. Personal budgets have been granted to the person with care needs in many cases, which has reduced the level of caring carried out by the young carer.

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

Consultation with families and young carers was carried out at the beginning of the project which helped scope the interventions that were needed. A focus group with young carers was held to discuss what services they would like to see developed too. This consultation and focus group session made it clear that there was a desire for greater support for the person being cared for, which would in turn relieve the amount of caring carried out by the young carer.

1 Joseph S, Becker F, Becker S (2012), ‘Manual for Measures of Caring Activities and Outcomes for Children and Young People’. Carers Trust.

A young carers focus group meets every quarter to monitor what is most effective, what else could be done to help those at risk of excessive and harmful caring, and to ensure that the project is meeting young carers' needs and expectations.

Family assessments at the start of individual interventions ensure that the unique and specific needs of each family are mapped and a support plan is agreed upon by all parties. Feedback and evaluations are carried out with families to check that the interventions are meeting the needs of young carers and the rest of their family. Any learning from the post-intervention evaluation will be considered in the future development of the project.

How is the initiative run?

The Family Support Project works with ten young carers and their families at a time, over a period of six months. In total, 30 families will be supported over 18 months as the project works in three waves. Bespoke, intensive interventions which pull together a range of support, such as counselling, benefits advice and community care assessments, are provided to help families function better in the long term with less support.

The initiative is run by the Family Support Co-ordinator at Kingston Carers' Network, who works 25 hours a week on the Family Support Project. The Family Support Co-ordinator works mainly with the adults in the family, while the young carers are offered additional one-to-one support from a part-time (18 hours a week) Young Carers Project Worker. A Legal Advisor also works with the project for four hours a week, advising families on benefit claims and appeals, employment, housing and community care issues.

Leads from key teams at the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames, including Adult Social Care Social Workers, a Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator and a School Nurse, attend regular focus group meetings of lead professionals for the Family Support Project. These focus group meetings are an effective way of co-ordinating approaches to the cases the Family Support Project is working on. This is also the primary means that the service is promoted to agencies across the borough – owing to the high demand for the service and restricted timeframe, the Family Support Project has not been actively promoted beyond the local authority.

Referrals are typically made to the Family Support Project from agencies that attend the focus group meetings of Kingston Carers' Network. After a home visit by the Young Carers Project Co-ordinator and a Young Carers Support Worker from Kingston Carers' Network, the Young Carers Project Co-ordinator and the Family Support Co-ordinator, with the input of the Young Carers Support Worker, use a triage approach to prioritise support to families.

Families are prioritised where children are at risk of providing excessive levels of care and the family is struggling to cope. The family's willingness to engage and benefit from the project is also gauged during home visits and taken into consideration when triaging the cases. It is therefore not always the families with the most complex needs who are selected for this project; often families with very complex needs would benefit from longer-term support. Families who are not supported by the project are signposted or referred to other agencies more suited to their needs; if there is an adult carer in the family they are welcome to join Kingston Carers' Network to use services for adult carers such as holistic therapies, counselling and support groups.

During home visits, a holistic family needs assessment is carried out to ensure that the unique and specific needs of a family are identified and, wherever possible, addressed as part of a whole-family approach to working with young carers. For the young carers, the Multi-dimensional Assessment of Caring Activities and Positive and Negative Outcomes of Caring tools are used in this family needs assessment. This data is subsequently used to monitor the changes in the level of caring and to measure outcomes when the six month intervention ends. It is during the initial family assessment that a support plan is formulated and agreed upon by all parties.

With each tailored family support plan, the Family Support Project endeavours to broker and co-ordinate appropriate support from all of the relevant agencies to a case. In this regard, wider use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) has been found to be useful to help ensure that the needs of young carers are addressed beyond the typical agencies and their family's situation is considered by adult services or mental health teams, for example. While brokerage of services is mostly in liaison with teams in the local authority, services run by voluntary organisations in Kingston are also used, such as a voluntary agency Mental Health Floating Support Service.

Some of the support for families is delivered by Kingston Carers' Network. Benefits advice, information, advocacy, one-to-one support for parent carers, young carers activities and emotional support for the whole family is on offer. At the end of the intensive intervention, young carers can continue to access the universal young carers services at Kingston Carers' Network. Adult family members can access the services at Kingston Carers' Network if they also have caring responsibilities.

What methods have been particularly effective?

Joint working between adult and children's services has been a significant success for this project. Kingston Carers' Network has taken a pragmatic approach to ensure that a whole range of needs can be met, and where services have been unable to meet these needs they have provided direct support – such as with housing, employment and benefits advice. This holistic, whole family approach for young carers is unique within the borough.

The intensive support package offered, which is tailored to the family, has ensured the development of a trusting relationship where this has sometimes been missing with statutory services and has led to improved engagement with professionals.

Transparent and honest communication with young carers and their parents, as well as the non-statutory status of Kingston Carers' Network, are believed to be factors in the successful and trusting relationships that have been nurtured with the families who use the project.

Have there been any challenges along the way?

Cuts to some services in Kingston have made it harder to broker support and the Family Support Project has directly delivered more services to families using Kingston Carers' Network than it envisaged. The loss of the Advancing Services for Kingston Kids (ASKK) Service, including the post of CAF and Lead Professional Co-ordinator, at the local authority has also made the job of brokering services more challenging. The closure of the borough's information sharing hub – the ASKK Service – will likely result in less seamless information pathways.

The loss or reduction of services has meant there are fewer opportunities for long-term support for families once they finish the six-month Family Support Project. To a degree, this has led to the project selecting families who obviously show a willingness to engage and who would benefit from the short-term intervention on offer.

Linking with some professionals has been difficult, but the Family Support Project is working to improve the level of engagement with a number of statutory teams.

What hints and tips might help me get started?

- Ensure that the statutory partner fully supports the project and is positive about the role of voluntary sector organisations. If senior management within the statutory partner is positive about a partnership with a voluntary sector organisation this can help change the hearts and minds of the professionals who have been reluctant about working with a charity.
- Setting up and closing ten cases simultaneously can be challenging, so consider a staggered approach or take on fewer cases at a time to begin with.

Are there any useful documents or resources that could assist me?

Kingston Carers' Network's website.

The Royal Borough of Kingston's Young Carers Protocol, available from the contact below.

Where can I get further information?

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Funded by

