

Support fund to help young carers to stay mentally and physically well



What is the initiative?

Young Carers Support Fund

Who runs it?

Oxfordshire County Council Young Carers Team in partnership with NHS Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group

Who does it benefit?

Young carers up to the age of 25 in Oxfordshire, many of whom live in rural areas or in areas of deprivation.

What does it do?

From a fund of £60,000 each year, payments of up to £200 are made to individual young carers. These payments are to relieve the negative impact of caring and improve health outcomes for the young carer. Support fund payments are typically for sports equipment, sports club fees, after school activities and transport to activities.

When did it start?

2011.

Why was it started?

A fund for young carers in Oxfordshire has existed since 2008, although it was previously called the Young Carers Emergency Fund and had a focus on supporting the urgent needs of the young carer. When the former primary care trust was looking at ways to support healthier outcomes for young carers, it was decided that re-focussing the existing young carers fund to offer more long-term and preventative support would be a simple and effective means of achieving this aim.

What are the aims and objectives?

Aims:

- To improve the health and wellbeing of young carers.
- To reduce the negative impact of caring.

Objectives:

- To finance sport, education and other extracurricular activities for young carers on an individual basis.
- To increase identification of young carers by GPs and other health care professionals.
- To increase the number of young carers' assessments by a range of professionals.
- To improve the reach of services and the quality of the data about young carers.

How is it funded?

The Young Carers Support Fund receives £60,000 of funding each year from the Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group's budget for carers.

What has it achieved?

"I have been able to do my homework and research without putting things on Mum or going to the library."

Young carer who received funding for a tablet computer

"I feel much more confident in many different situations and I thoroughly enjoy it!"

Young carer who received funding for drama classes

"It has really helped boost her confidence."

Parent whose child received funding for Tai Kwon Do lessons

"Having fun together helps strengthen our relationship. It has made us both happier and healthier."

Parent whose child received funding for swimming and bus fares

Since 2011, 627 young carers have been supported by the Young Carers Support Fund. In the first year of the programme 292 payments were made to the Fund. In the second year, there were 355 payments after increased funding was received in April 2012 and the young carers team carried out a systematic training programme for children's and adult services teams resulting in an increase in applications. Having a Support Fund means that there is greater awareness of young carers across local authority services working with families. This in turn means more young carers are identified and more professionals are carrying out assessments for young carers.

In addition to an increase in applications, research into the impact of the Fund from the point of view of the young carer indicates some worthy achievements. This research suggests most young carers feel that payments from the Support Fund have benefitted them. 16 recipients were asked about the impact of the funding. Scores were given between 1 (low benefit) and 5 (high benefit). The average score for whether the funding had made a difference was 4.1. An average score of 3.3 was given for the question 'Has the funding made you healthier?', and an average score of 3.7 for 'Has it made you feel better about your caring role?'

Assessments using the Multidimensional Assessment of Caring Activities (MACA) and Positive and Negative Outcomes of Caring (PANOC) tools from the Manual of Measures of Caring Activities and Outcomes for Children and Young People, have been carried out for all 627 of the young carers supported by the Fund.¹ MACA and PANOC questionnaires are now being understood by professionals other than those who specifically work with young carers. Adult social workers, for example, are in a position to identify many hidden young carers and it is likely that without the Support Fund in place many of these assessments would not have happened. There has been positive feedback from Adult Social Services and the Children with Disabilities teams that doing these assessments helps both professionals and adults in families think about the needs of young carers.

For families, the Young Carers Support Fund can mean that they are less likely to be wary of other interventions. It can lead to referrals to one-to-one work with young carers, which in turn can lead to improved services being provided for both the young carer and the person they care for. Indeed, many of the assessments conducted have led to referrals to Young Carers Support Workers at Oxfordshire County Council, the Spurgeons Young Carers Project or to support within schools. Giving a family some respite through provision from the Support Fund can also allow them to feel supported and help to change the circumstances that cause children and young people to perform a caring role or lead to excessive or inappropriate caring.

The Young Carers Support Fund has made it easier to obtain consent from parents than it has been with other interventions. It is easier for parents to welcome support for their child when that support is tangible and immediate. In this way, the funding opens doors to young carers workers where families have been reticent in the past.

The funding has been used to give young carers opportunities and has encouraged them to take part in activities that they would not have done before, such as attending a young carers group or going to judo or ballet lessons. As well as improving young carers' health and wellbeing, the access to these activities and opportunities has reduced isolation for many young carers in Oxfordshire.

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

All young carers are consulted about how they want to use their funding. A professional helps them by asking them to think about what would be useful to them but ultimately the funded activity is the young carer's choice.

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

A questionnaire was recently conducted with a random sample of Support Fund recipients, asking if their emotional wellbeing and health had improved and how the funding might have made a difference. This questionnaire functions as a sort of safety net. If further support is still required for some individuals this will be followed up. The results from the questionnaire will steer further development of the Support Fund.

How is the initiative run?

The Support Fund is administered by Oxfordshire County Council, although it is funded by the local NHS Trust. Oxfordshire County Council's payment systems require that there is both an authorising officer and a requisitioner. The project does therefore require input from the Development Worker and Administrative Officer in the Young Carers Team.

Applications to the Young Carers Support Fund need to be backed up with an assessment of a young carer consisting of the MACA and PANOC questionnaires. For young carers aged eight and under, a game version has been developed based on these questionnaires. This young carer's assessment is carried out by the social worker, teacher, young carers support worker, early intervention worker or other professional working with the young person. During the assessment, young carers are also asked if they would like someone in school to know more about their caring role. If they do, the Young Carers Team notifies the school about their young carer status.

Once the application form and assessment are received by the Development Worker and if the minimum requirements of a MACA score of ten and some negative outcomes on the PANOC are met, the application is authorised. The form is then forwarded to the Administrative Officer to record the data and action the payment.

If, on the other hand, the scores of the assessment are very high, then the Development Worker will recommend a referral to young carer services at Oxfordshire County Council if this has not been done before. The Development Worker will also most likely refer the young carer to an organisation such as Spurgeons for a more intensive intervention, in addition to or instead of activities financed by the Young Carers Support Fund.

Young carers have significant freedom about what item or activity their funding from the Support Fund is spent on. The professional conducting the assessment guides the young carer to think about what would be of most help to them and improve their wellbeing. Purchases via the Support Fund are typically for:

- Sports equipment, for example for a karate kit or bike.
- Sports subs or club fees.
- Gym membership.
- Equipment for studies, for example laptops or tools for vocational courses.
- After school activities.
- School trips.
- Transport to access activities and young carers groups.
- Driving lessons.

Data is stored on an Excel spreadsheet and on the Capita One management information system (this is the system often used by early intervention services and can hold data on pupil attainment and attendance). This data may or may not be visible to other professionals working with the young carer, depending on which data sharing permissions are deemed appropriate.

Routine meetings with mental health, children's services, adult services and NHS bodies by the Young Carers Team at Oxfordshire County Council help publicise the Support Fund. Analysing how many referrals come from, for example young carers projects and local authority children's disability teams, family support and adult social care agencies, gives the Young Carers Team a steer as to where the gaps are in terms of awareness of the Young Carers Support Fund.

What methods have been particularly effective?

Good relations with the NHS were fostered through Oxfordshire's Carers Strategy Group. This relationship and mutual understanding of the needs of young carers is thought to be an instrumental reason in why the local authority was able to secure ring-fenced funding from the NHS for young carers in addition to funding for adult carers.

The support fund has been a fantastic resource that has facilitated the engagement of families who other agencies have previously found difficult to engage with. For instance, families have been more willing to agree to transport to pick up their children to take them to young carers groups and other extra-curricular activities, or for their child to be assessed by a social worker, compared to previous situations in the past. It is thought that the immediate offer of something tangible has helped facilitate engagement with support services.

Have there been any challenges along the way?

In most cases, the Young Carers Fund has awarded £200 to a young carer. However, it may be advisable to grant larger amounts for those who have higher level needs and smaller awards for those for whom the impact of caring is not as great. It has been difficult when there have been several siblings in a family, all caring to an extent. In these cases the Young Carers Support Fund wanted to fund the siblings equally to avoid envy or conflict so it was decided to reduce the amount given to each child, for example giving £100 to each of four siblings.

There have also been the logistical challenges of getting the money to the young carer. In the past, money was internally transferred to teams within the local authority who would then make payments to the supported families on sight of receipts and invoices. Recently, Oxfordshire County Council has been paying invoices directly and purchasing items online to reduce bureaucracy.

What hints and tips might help me get started?

Carefully consider the storage and sharing of data. In the experience of the Young Carers Support Fund, a centralised system has been very useful for reporting on young carers. However, not having the necessary permissions in place on the system to identify some children as young carers to other professionals has been a hindrance.

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

The website of the **Capita One** management information system which is used by professionals who require a single view of a child to improve decision making.

The **Manual of Measures of Caring Activities and Outcomes for Children and Young People** detailing the MACA and PANOC tools.

The Young Carers Team's game version of the MACA and PANOC assessments for young carers under eight, as well as the Young Carers Support Fund application form are available from the contact below.

Where can I get further information?

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