What is the initiative? | Who runs it?
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BOOST 4 Young Carers | Suffolk Young Carers at Suffolk Family Carers

Who does it benefit?
Young carers aged 9–17 living in Suffolk.

What does it do?
BOOST is a self-esteem and confidence building course for young carers who are part of the Suffolk Young Carers project. As an additional programme to Suffolk Young Carers’ core service, it can be offered both as a two night residential or be tailored into a three day non-residential course for young carers unable or unwilling to be away from home. It is designed to give young carers respite from caring while enhancing their personal development and boosting their self-esteem so they feel more confident about themselves and being a young carer.

When did it start?
October 2009.

Why was it started?
BOOST is underpinned by Suffolk Family Carers’ firm belief that young carers are first and foremost children and young people and that they should be protected from inappropriate caring roles with the support they need to learn, grow and develop, enjoy their childhoods and achieve against the Every Child Matters outcomes.

The Suffolk Young Carers service was already offering one-to-one support, information, respite and social activities to young carers. However, they identified through working individually with young carers, and in consultation with young
carers, that many wanted to be around other children going through similar experiences to themselves. BOOST was conceived of as a programme which delivered one-to-one type work in a group setting that would also enhance the confidence young carers.

A pilot of BOOST as a peer support group with team-building activities was successful, and from that Suffolk Family Carers successfully bid for funding from Big Lottery Fund.

What are the aims and objectives?

Aims:

- To boost the self-esteem, confidence and resilience of young carers.
- To give Suffolk Family Carers an improved ability to understand the needs of young people and how to meet these needs, in order to influence other areas of work.

Objectives:

- To provide young carers with respite care and an opportunity to enjoy themselves.
- To provide young carers with the opportunity to make more friends and improve social relationships.
- To facilitate discussions so young carers can talk about their problems, see that many others face similar situations to them and gain peer support.
- To promote healthier lifestyles to young carers and encourage physical and mental health.
- To teach young carers a range of skills linked to personal development and making the most of their life chances.
- To provide support so that young carers will be better able to look after themselves and make the transition to adulthood.

How is it funded?

BOOST 4 Young Carers was funded by a three-year grant of £195,000 from Big Lottery Fund from October 2009–October 2012.

What has it achieved?

“Ever since I went to BOOST I felt so much happier and stronger in myself and I knew after BOOST that I weren’t alone.”

Young carer

“The process provides the opportunity for shared experiences and support from peers. Young people realise and understand that they are not the ‘only ones’ experiencing life as young carers. Simply being given the opportunity to hear other young carers talk about their experiences,
emotions, feelings and frustrations (possibly some of which they feel guilty about) is hugely beneficial. Young carers are encouraged to reflect on their own caring situations and how a balance may be achieved to ensure they maintain their own friendships, activities and education in order to maximise their own life opportunities and aspirations for further education and/or employment.”

Young Carers Lead, Suffolk County Council

There has been really positive feedback from the young carers who have taken part in BOOST. In a focus group conducted by eg: consulting, an advisory and development consultancy for the voluntary sector, the average score young carers gave BOOST for the affect it has had on their confidence was 9 out of 10 and when asked to rate the positive impact it has had on their life overall the average score was 9.1 out of 10.

Over the course of three years, around 350–400 young carers have been supported by BOOST – well above the target number of 240 young carers agreed with Big Lottery Fund.

The success of the BOOST project has also provided a platform for Suffolk Family Carers to develop other targeted and age-appropriate projects, such as the Transition Project for young adult carers.

Suffolk County Council regards BOOST as a vital and cost-effective support service for young carers. Due in part to the consultation that Suffolk Family Carers did for BOOST which highlighted the need for Suffolk schools to become more aware of young carers, Suffolk County Council is promoting the identification of and support for young carers in schools in its Young Carers Strategy. With funding from Suffolk County Council, Suffolk Family Carers has also now recruited a Schools Worker.

In 2012 BOOST was shortlisted for the National Lottery Awards prize for charity and voluntary organisations, making it into the top ten out of 500 other contenders. BOOST has also been promoted and used as a model for the development of targeted support services in Essex and Norfolk through the East of England Young Carers Network.

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

There are regular consultation groups with young carers. As the project was being set up there was a consultation with young carers to see what they wanted out of the course. Those young carers who were being supported by the existing one-to-one service offered by Suffolk Young Carers expressed their wish to continue with similar work, but in more of a group setting.

Young carers on the BOOST course are given straightforward feedback forms to complete. The How am I feeling form seeks to gauge the positive and negative impacts of caring. The What did you think of BOOST? feedback form, is used to evaluate the impact of the programme and give young carers the opportunities to make suggestions for improvement.

In response to young carers’ requests, the content of BOOST has been altered accordingly. Working with many external groups, Suffolk Family Carers has offered
information sessions on specific conditions with the help of the MS Society, and has added more variety and creative activities with input from Dance East, Suffolk Artlink and Live Well Suffolk.

In addition to the feedback forms and consultation groups, young carers can provide feedback through the newsletter and website. The feedback and evaluation inform external evaluation reports, internal reviews, budgetary and statistical information, and the future plans of the service.

**How is the initiative run?**

The BOOST programme is only available to young carers already registered with the project and referrals therefore come from within the Young Carers Team. Young carers who have completed a course of one-to-one sessions and express an interest in moving on to talking to and interacting with other young carers, or who are thought to be in need of building their confidence and self-esteem, are recommended for the BOOST programme.

There is one full-time member of staff for the BOOST project who organises the groups and takes the lead on delivering the groups. When available, other staff from the Young Carers Team at Suffolk Family Carers help facilitate the BOOST sessions, with the number of staff needed varying according to the type of workshop being delivered.

BOOST groups can be delivered in a variety of formats. Workshops can be residential breaks for a couple of nights, or whole day or evening workshops depending on the needs of a particular area and group of young carers.

The BOOST 4 Young Carers course is not based at a single location, but moves around the county to provide the course in areas local to the young carers who are participating. The practicalities of the location and the type of venue that Suffolk Young Carers can access, as well as the needs of the local carers that they are visiting, determines whether the course will be delivered in a residential or non-residential format.

The cost of delivering BOOST varies. A residential for 20 young carers across two nights and three days costs approximately £2,500; a non-residential for the same number across three days would be in the region of £600.

Residential BOOST courses can accommodate up to 30 young carers at a time. These take place out of school term time in the February half-term break, Easter and summer holidays. Sessions run in the morning, afternoon and evening, and comprise of a mix of facilitated discussions and activities. The discussions may be based around questions such as ‘Because of caring how do you feel?’ Activities might include canoeing, orienteering and archery, team-based activities and arts and crafts. Young carers also have a chance to unwind and socialise with other young carers by doing something like watching a film together. The content of non-residential courses is much the same.

Collecting feedback from the young carers is an important part of the project and has directly informed the provision of some elements like the more creative activities and information on specific conditions. Feedback is gathered with straightforward forms which are easy for young carers to complete themselves. How am I feeling? is a form sent to young carers before they attend BOOST for them to complete in the comfort of their home surroundings. The same form is
completed at the end of the BOOST experience and allows Suffolk Family Carers to compare the difference BOOST has had on young carers’ wellbeing.

What methods have been particularly effective?

Running the BOOST groups in specific geographical areas has created better opportunities for friendships formed at BOOST to be maintained, especially as Suffolk is a large and rural county.

The peer support element of BOOST in gathering young carers together so that they can learn from each other’s experiences has been effective. Even if they choose not to disclose very much at the sessions, it has proved a good basis for developing meaningful friendships. This is seen to be, in effect, a more sustainable version of the one-to-one support which is offered, as it creates friendships and peer-support networks.

Many young carers reported that they would like to explore creative methods of expressing themselves and managing their feelings. Suffolk Family Carers therefore incorporated arts and crafts, drama and music into the programme. It has proved hugely successful in encouraging those young carers that found it difficult to talk in a group to come out of themselves. This is a technique that the rest of Suffolk Family Carers is exploring in its delivery of one-to-one and group work.

Have there been any challenges along the way?

Being away from home has made it harder for some young carers to talk about their personal life and role as a carer. A model, therefore, where BOOST is offered as a two day non-residential, with a one night sleepover later on is now being rolled out.

Although Suffolk is not as rural as some counties, it did prove a challenge for Suffolk Family Carers to get young carers to venues. In order to get young carers along to BOOST and to limit the cost of transport, Suffolk Family Carers decided to take BOOST out to various locations across the county. However, this threw up a further challenge in that it was difficult to secure premises to put on the BOOST programme in small towns and villages. Therefore, the majority of the BOOST sessions have been in large towns.

What hints and tips might help me get started?

- Always ensure that the project is led and shaped by young carers. The success of BOOST can be attributed to responding to the feedback offered from young carers who have been through the programme.

- Send questionnaires such as the How am I feeling? form to those attending, well in advance of the first workshop. The questionnaire should gauge individual learning styles as well as an insight into how they are feeling about attending. This will help to pitch the workshop appropriately; for instance, if the majority of those on the course state that they do not like talking in groups and dislike writing, it would be preferable to start with light-hearted activities or games and paired work rather than whole group discussion.

- Avoid using worksheets too much in your activities, but do ensure they are available, especially for those individuals who benefit from writing their feelings down.
Are there any useful documents or resources that could assist me?

The questionnaires How am I feeling? and ‘What did you think of BOOST?’

The Young Carers pages of the Suffolk Family Carers website.


Where can I get further information?

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