

## Development work within schools



What is the initiative?	Who runs it?
Suffolk Young Carers Schools Development Work	Suffolk Family Carers, a Network Partner of Carers Trust, in partnership with Suffolk County Council
Who does it benefit?	
Young carers (aged 9–15) living in Suffolk.	

### What does it do?

Suffolk Family Carers works with schools to raise awareness of young carers. Schools are supported in identifying a young carers lead, introducing a young carers policy and developing support for young carers. Each school can work towards achieving a Schools Award to recognise their carer awareness.

### When did it start?

2011.

### Why was it started?

In April 2010 Suffolk County Council and Suffolk Children's Trust produced Supporting Young Carers and Young Adult Carers in Suffolk, a multi-agency strategy developed with input from a young carers strategy group, which included Suffolk Family Carers. One of the priorities within the strategy was to work with schools to raise awareness of young carers and increase the number of young carers identified and supported by schools.

Initially, the plan was to work with Healthy Schools Co-ordinators to progress the project, but due to structural reorganisation within Healthy Schools, the Co-ordinator position was removed before the work could begin. Suffolk County Council therefore approached Suffolk Family Carers to lead on working with schools.

## What are the aims and objectives?

### Aim:

- The aim of the project is to work with schools to raise awareness and support for young carers.

### Objectives:

- Every school in Suffolk to have a policy for young carers.
- Every school in Suffolk to have a young carers lead.
- All schools to have a young carer friendly culture.
- Improve young carers' attendance at school.
- Improve academic achievement of young carers.
- Reduce the number of young carers potentially becoming not in education, employment or training.

## How is it funded?

Suffolk County Council provides £45,000 funding annually for development work with schools. This funding is used to employ a part-time Schools Development Worker and to fund associated costs including IT and travel expenses. The funding will continue for three years as part of the strategic partnership with Suffolk Family Carers. In addition, Suffolk County Council provides funding to the carers centre for other generic work supporting young carers, and some of this is used to support the development work in schools.

## What has it achieved?

“My school is more understanding about young carers now we have a Young Carers module in PSHE.”

Young carer

“School is much better since [the Support Worker] spoke to them about my caring role and how much I worry about Mum. Now I have a Young Carers Card I use if I need to leave a lesson, and a teacher to talk to about my caring role.”

Young carer

As a result of the project, young carers in Suffolk receive more understanding and support within schools, and school staff and governors are better equipped to

identify young carers and provide the necessary support. The project has been particularly beneficial to young carers who are at the lower need level and might therefore otherwise not get support from Suffolk Family Carers, due to the limited resources. By increasing awareness and support within schools, the project has helped to ensure that more young carers are being identified and that more support is available.

When the project began in January 2011, the partners agreed to focus on working with the 38 high schools in Suffolk, and since that time Suffolk Family Carers has:

- Produced awareness raising leaflets for teachers and a checklist on how to set up a young carers group.
- Provided information packs on young carers to 24 schools.
- Delivered six governor training events across the area in the last two terms.
- Delivered assemblies and staff training in over 40 schools (including junior schools).
- Held meetings with staff at individual schools about appointing a young carers lead and setting up support groups.
- Worked with local young carers to produce an animated film which can be shown at school assemblies to raise awareness of young carer issues with pupils and staff.
- Developed a Schools Award to encourage schools to work towards different levels of young carer awareness and support.

20 schools in the area now have an identified a young carers lead and seven schools have set up a young carers support group within the school.

In addition to work with school staff, training has been provided to governors at several schools, and this has proved effective and popular. Due to the success of this training, Suffolk Family Carers and Suffolk County Council are due to provide training for teaching assistants.

Suffolk Family Carers has now set up a schools monitoring database to record which schools have young carers policies and support in place. This database will form the basis for monitoring the progress of the project within partnership monitoring meetings.

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

Young carers are involved in shaping and monitoring the progress of the schools work via forums. Four forums, spread across the Suffolk area, give young carers the opportunity to give feedback to Suffolk Family Carers on all aspects of the service, including the schools development work. The young carers provide feedback to Suffolk Family Carers on whether the service is using the right tools and approaches and whether the approach is helping to improve their school life. One of the key outcomes of this involvement work has been the production of an animated film. The young carers identified a need to have a short film to use in school assemblies and were involved in every aspect of its creation, production and the awareness raising message it seeks to highlight.

## How is the initiative run?

The Schools Worker, appointed by Suffolk Family Carers, works 18.5 hours a week as a development worker across the county. On the council side, the Children and Young People Carers Champion is the lead contact, monitoring the schools work and liaising regularly with the Project Manager to provide a link between Suffolk Family Carers and the council's children and young people department.

Project staff work with schools to identify someone within each school to act as a champion for young carers – not necessarily a senior member of staff but someone with an interest in young carers' issues. Once identified, the young carers lead helps to raise awareness about young carers within the school, leads on developing school policies and establishes support groups. The young carers lead also acts as the first point of contact for young carers within the school.

Suffolk Family Carers provides ongoing support to each young carers lead. Project staff offer one-to-one meetings with the young carers lead, training to other school staff, information packs, awareness raising in assemblies and drop-in sessions for students.

The information packs provided to schools contain policies and literature on young carers. Wherever possible, the project uses existing guidance and information sources rather than producing new guidance. The packs currently contain:

- Leaflets for teachers and guidance on setting up support groups (produced by Suffolk Young Carers).
- An awareness raising DVD (funded by the council).
- National information and guidance from Carers Trust and The Children's Society.

Through the young carers lead, each school is encouraged to develop a young carers policy. This may be as a standalone document or may be achieved by including policies for young carers in other documents. Project staff provide the young carers lead with information on how to approach this task, along with details of other schools that have developed young carers policies.

Project staff also ask the young carers lead to consider establishing support groups for young carers within the school to enable peer support between young carers. The young carers lead is provided with a checklist on how to go about setting up these groups, including details of similar groups at other schools and how these were established. Young carers leads are also put in touch with other schools, enabling them to exchange information and benefit from peer support.

In addition to the one-to-one support provided to young carers leads, project staff also continue to visit schools to raise awareness with front line staff and provide training to school governors in conjunction with staff from the council.

## What methods have been particularly effective?

The council and the carers centre had already been working together for 20 years, and strong relationships had built up over time. Suffolk Family Carers also had existing links with several schools as a result of previous awareness-raising and support work within schools. These strong relationships helped to ensure a solid foundation for the project.

Providing training to school governors has been particularly useful as a method for influencing school policy, as governors play such an important role in setting the agenda within schools. The use of real life case studies for the training has been particularly effective as these illustrate very clearly the complex issues often faced by young people having to cope with a caring role.

Sharing examples of schools that have successfully appointed a young carers lead, introduced young carers policies or set up support groups has been an effective way of helping other schools to approach these tasks, allowing schools at different stages in their development of policies and support to learn from each other and exchange advice and peer support.

## Have there been any challenges along the way?

Unfortunately, the Healthy Schools Co-ordinator roles were removed before the start of the project, so the initial route into schools was gone, making it more difficult to implement support. A young carers lead had to be identified within each school before the work could proceed.

It can take time to find the right person within a school to take the young carers agenda forward. Sometimes the best person is not a senior member of staff, but buy in is still needed at a senior level in order to influence school policy.

## What hints and tips might help me get started?

- Take time to build relationships with schools, and take every opportunity to talk to members of staff and spread the word. Once you identify someone who is positive about young carers, provide them with information and encourage them to talk with senior staff about the issue.
- Allow schools to go at their own pace. It is important that young carers' policies are embedded within their work, and forcing schools to develop policies or introduce support too quickly may have a negative effect.
- Keep in regular contact with schools to see how they are getting on with implementing a support group or policy as this can be important in order to progress the implementation. Be sure to provide encouragement and additional help to maintain their focus on the issue.

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

Visit the **Suffolk Family Carers'** website for information and resources.

Access the **Carers Trust and Children's Society Schools Resource Pack**.

## Where can I get further information?

Claire Fraser-Lim  
Schools Worker  
Suffolk Family Carers  
Units 6 and 8  
Hill View Business Park  
Old Ipswich Road  
Claydon  
Suffolk IP6 0AJ

Email: [claire.fraser@suffolkfamilycarers.org](mailto:claire.fraser@suffolkfamilycarers.org)

Tel: 01473 835 462

Website: [www.suffolkfamilycarers.org](http://www.suffolkfamilycarers.org)

Funded by

