

Whole-family support for at risk families and young carers



What is the initiative?

Norfolk Young Carers Think Family Project

Who runs it?

Crossroads Care Norfolk
Young Carers Project

Who does it benefit?

At risk families with young carers carrying out inappropriate care for an adult in rural and urban Norfolk

What does it do?

The Think Family Project delivers sustained, intensive work with targeted young carers and their families over a period of around 12 months. The work is personalised to each family and may address the needs of young carers through educational, social and emotional support, as well as the wider needs of the family through parenting and relationship work, family activities and advocacy.

When did it start?

2010.

Why was it started?

Crossroads Care Norfolk Young Carers Project had been providing one-to-one support for young carers and their families in the area since 2003. The caseloads of the project workers, however, were very large with the equivalent of three full-time staff supporting 150 young carers at any one time. This made it difficult to deliver intensive work to families with complex needs.

The government's Think Family Pathfinder programme, which aimed to pioneer a range of intensive, whole-family interventions to families who face multiple and

complex problems, offered a means of expanding the project's work to cater for these families. A successful bid for Pathfinder funding, which was built upon the expertise of Crossroads Care Norfolk, was made by Norfolk County Council and subsequently Norfolk Young Carers Think Family Project was established.

What are the aims and objectives?

Aims:

- To reduce inappropriate caring by young carers through integrated support for the whole family.
- To support disabled parents.
- To improve young carers' school attendance and levels of attainment.
- To reduce families' dependency on statutory services.

Objectives:

- To use Norfolk County Council's Enabling Parents with a Disability or Long-term Illness Protocol as the framework to the whole-family approach.
- To empower young carers to act as partners in the design, assessment, delivery and evaluation of the service so that it better meets their needs.
- To promote and improve inter-agency working with the whole family working model.
- To resource young carers projects more effectively to support more of the most vulnerable young carers and their families.

How is it funded?

Norfolk County Council funded the Think Family scheme delivered by the Crossroads Care Norfolk Young Carers Project through a grant from the government's Family Pathfinder programme.

Additionally, Big Lottery funded some of the young carers activities based at Norfolk Young Carers Project and the consultative group the Norfolk Young Carers Forum, which some of the young carers engaged with.

What has it achieved?

The Think Family Project has supported 60 young carers from 42 families with complex and multiple problems. Of these, 29 were single parent families meaning that the children and young people in these households were invariably the main carers. Many of the families had been referred by Family Intervention Projects and most of the young carers were caring for an adult with a mental health problem, often with a dual diagnosis.

Through whole-family work a number of successful outcomes were achieved. The final report of the Project Manager showed that 72% of the young carers' physical or emotional health had improved, in 40% of cases young carers' school attendance had improved and 15% of families were now no longer dependent on statutory support.

Young carers were encouraged to complete exit questionnaires from the Manual for Measures of Caring Activities. Those who completed the PANOC-YC20 questionnaire at the end of the intervention reported feeling better emotionally and physically, and experiencing more positive and less negative outcomes than before. Of the young carers who completed the MACA-YC42 questionnaire on exit, 64% were doing less caring than when they started.

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

The young carers were involved in the assessment process and writing up their action plans. All three Think Family Project Officers used the Common Assessment Framework (CAF), either as an assessment tool upon referral to the project or as part of a full multi-agency CAF, and ensured that young carers and their families were involved in the process of completing these assessments. Young carers were also encouraged to complete the self-assessment questionnaires PANOC-YC20 and MACA-YC42 at the beginning and end of their involvement in the project.

How is the initiative run?

The Think Family Project covers three regions in Norfolk – Norwich, Great Yarmouth and the rural area of North Norfolk and Broadland. Each region has a Project Officer who works with a maximum caseload of 15 families at any one time. The Think Family Project Officers work flexibly from home and may work outside normal office hours and at weekends in order to best support their caseload.

The constituencies in which the Think Family Project operates coincide with three designated Family Intervention Project (FIP) areas which support families involved in anti-social behaviour. Many of the families that the Think Family Project works with have been referred from one of the FIPs and the Think Family Project Officers liaise closely with the FIP teams.

Referrals from the Family Intervention Projects were given priority and 16 of the families, including 26 young carers, which the Think Family Project supported, came from a FIP. Other families were among Crossroads Care Norfolk's existing client base. Families that were not involved with a FIP were accepted onto the project if they lived in one of the FIP catchment areas and met at least five of 11 risk factors including low income and unemployment, poor school attendance, anti-social behaviour and risk of eviction.

Each Project Officer was allocated a £5,000 activity budget to develop activities for the young carers and families in their caseload. The interventions they delivered were tailored to individual families and were quite varied. For example, they included one-to-one emotional support for young carers, swimming and theatre trips for the whole family, financial and practical help to improve a family's housing, and advocacy support at CAF meetings and with completing benefits forms.

Additionally, the Think Family Project worked in conjunction with other agencies. If young carers had been involved with anti-social behaviour or criminal activity, connections were made with the Youth Offending Team to help prevent reoffending. Young carers could also attend the support and consultative group, the Norfolk Young Carers' Forum, run by Crossroads Care Norfolk. Parents attended parenting programmes run by the Strengthening Parenting Programme, in addition to the

parenting support provided by the Think Family Project Officers such as support with planning meals and budgeting.

The Think Family Project Officers had quite intense contact with the families they supported over the course of the project. Together they provided almost 1,000 individual sessions and attended nearly 300 casework meetings. The length of time families were in contact with the project varied according to their needs, but on average was around 12 months. An exit strategy for each family was planned by the Project Officer in agreement with the family, whereby the frequency of individual sessions and home visits was decreased and then replaced with weekly telephone calls until both parties agreed the intervention was no longer necessary.

What methods have been particularly effective?

The small caseloads of the Think Family Officers have enabled them to engage effectively with some very hard to reach families. Building trust with these families can take several weeks, as appointments are often cancelled and telephone calls and letters go ignored. The time afforded by a small caseload to be persistent and devote time to building relationships with individual families has allowed the officers to gain a really good understanding of the families' complex issues and work with them to develop successful strategies.

The Think Family Officers also work outside normal office hours and at weekends, which has helped them to meet the complex needs of families and deliver a whole-family approach. Weekends might be the only time when it is possible to get the whole family together.

Recruiting highly experienced Think Family Officers also helped meet the target of working with 40 families in a short time frame as the officers had a range of knowledge and expertise of working with children and adults, and the health, education and voluntary sectors. The project's connection with the well-established Young Carers 1:1 Support Project at Crossroads Care Norfolk also aided the quick establishment and success of the Think Family Project.

Using Norfolk County Council's Enabling Parents with a Disability or Long-term Illness, a joint policy and protocol to support partnership working between adult and children's services around disabled parents and their children, has helped secure further support for families. For instance, by citing the protocol, a Think Family Project Officer made a referral to social services to instigate an assessment of care needs for the father of a family and a carer's assessment for the mother. The father was subsequently granted a personal budget which included money for family outings.

Have there been any challenges along the way?

The 18 month timescale was shorter than the two years available to most Pathfinder projects. This was mitigated by recruiting skilled staff with a degree or equivalent professional qualification and experience of teaching, social work, nursing and work with families and young carers. Being able to draw on the local expertise of Crossroads Care Norfolk was also an asset.

Parenting programmes are a key part of this work with at risk families. However, for the families who were not referred by a FIP, there were long waiting lists for these programmes. Think Family Project Officers provided some parenting support and

advice for these families such as helping them to budget and plan weekly meals, but it would have been more beneficial if they had been involved in the delivery of the parenting programmes, since they had already built up a relationship with the parents attending them.

What hints and tips might help me get started?

- Experienced Project Workers who together have a broad range of knowledge and expertise of the education system, health and housing services, illness and disabilities, work with parents and young carers and experience of multi-agency working, are very beneficial.
- At the start of the project, ensure staff have a planned exit strategy for their cases, such as decreasing the frequency of one-to-one sessions so they become weekly phone calls.

Are there any useful documents that could assist me?

An independent evaluation of the project:

- Ward, T (2011), '**An Independent Evaluation of the Norfolk Young Carers Think Family Pathfinder 2010–2011**'. Forward Consulting.

An internal review of the project:

- Norfolk Young Carers Project (2011), '**Think Family Young Carers Project**'. Crossroads Care Norfolk Young Carers Project.

Information on effectively delivering a whole family approach:

- Frank, J, McLarnon, J (2008), '**Young Carers, Parents and their Families: Key Principles of Practice**'. The Children's Society.

Government documents explaining the Think Family initiative:

- Cabinet Office Social Exclusion Task Force (2008), '**Think Family: Improving the Life Chances of Families at Risk**'. Cabinet Office.
- Department for Children, Schools and Families (2009), '**Think Family Toolkit: Improving Support for Families at Risk**'. Department for Children, Schools and Families.
- Department for Children, Schools and Families (2010), '**Parenting and Family Support: Guidance for Local Authorities in England**'. Department for Children, Schools and Families.

An evaluation of the Family Pathfinder programme:

- York Consulting (2011), '**Turning Around the Lives of Families with Multiple Problems – an Evaluation of the Family and Young Carer Pathfinders Programme**'. Department for Education.

The protocol underpinning work with disabled parents in Norfolk:

- Norfolk County Council (2006), '**Enabling parents with a Disability or Long-term Illness: Joint Policy and Protocol**'. Norfolk County Council.

Outcomes assessment tools:

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

Where can I get further information?

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