

Partnership working for young carers in military families



What is the initiative?

Wiltshire Young Carers Strategic Partnership's project for young carers in military families

Who runs it?

The partnership is led by Youth Action Wiltshire, the youth arm of Community First – the local rural community council. Partners include Wiltshire Council and Carer Support Wiltshire, as well as organisations working with military families such as Home Start Kennet and representatives from the Army Welfare Service.

Who does it benefit?

Young carers aged 5–25 and their families in East Wiltshire. There is a focus on military families as Wiltshire is home to Britain's first 'Super Garrison'.

What does it do?

This initiative works to improve the identification and understanding of the needs of young carers from military families and provides tailored support to their needs. Specialist support for military families may include helping young carers understand the role of rehabilitation, or providing extra support for a parent when the other parent is on tour. The project works with military organisations such as Army Welfare Support to deliver this provision.

The initiative is couched in a wider project which aims to improve the identification of all hidden young carers and support them through transitions in their lives. Young carers and their families are provided with a mixture of bespoke support, including family programmes and activities, workshops, respite, one-to-one mentoring and advocacy.

When did it start?

2012.

Why was it started?

Young carers in military families may be caring for parents who have returned from service injured or have post-traumatic stress disorder, or they may be caring for

a parent – often a mother – with health problems while their partners are away. As many military families live far away from their extended family and support networks, these young carers can face extra caring responsibilities than their non-military family peers. For a variety of reasons, including the propensity for frequent relocation and the tendency to try to look after themselves and not reach out for external support, young carers in military families can be particularly hard to identify.

Although some young carers from military families were being supported by the core service that Youth Action Wiltshire provided for young carers, numbers were low. It was felt therefore that this particular group of young carers needed targeted support. The partnership funded by the Integrated Interventions grant allows holistic programmes to be developed for families with young carers transitioning from primary to secondary school, the families of young adult carers and young carers in military families.

What are the aims and objectives?

Funding was applied for in order to enhance and widen the scope of the wider project through improved partnership working. This aimed to improve support for young carers undergoing significant transitions and to develop the focus on improving specific identification and support for young carers from military families.

Aims:

- To strengthen multi-agency processes to improve the awareness and identification of young carers from military families.
- To ensure families are better able to cope with caring responsibilities and will access support if they are struggling.
- To improve the physical and mental health, aspirations and social skills of young carers and their families.

Objectives:

- To represent the interests of young carers at multi-agency forums across Wiltshire.
- To utilise the services of the partners which are beneficial to young carers and military families.
- To provide one-to-one support for young carers and their families, signposting where appropriate.
- To run Family Health Together programmes for the whole family.

How is it funded?

This partnership site is 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?

“I like going on days out with other Wiltshire young carers and I get to make new friends.”

Young carer

“My son really loved the practical approach to the issue based work ... It also has helped with his social interaction with his peer group.”

Parent

“I am still hearing brilliant things about Wiltshire Young Carers Service around the county.”

Professional at Wiltshire Council

The development of the Wiltshire Young Carers Strategic Partnership has increased support for families who have reported that since joining the programme their wellbeing and health has improved. Individual family members have also said they feel better equipped to cope with the challenges of being a carer or being cared for. The needs of young carers and their families are now better recognised and represented at a strategic level, which in turn better protects young carers from inappropriate caring.

Clearer identification systems and referral routes have also been established between all partners, as measured by increased referral channels and the numbers referred from target groups. For example, the project has led to the strengthening of Youth Action Wiltshire’s referral pathway with the 18+ service Carers Support Wiltshire. This is now much stronger as a result of partnership working.

Although there is still some room for improvement with the number of referrals from military agencies in general, there has been success with increasing referrals of young carers among partnership organisations and other organisations.

Specific examples highlighting this and the resulting outcomes include one young carer being moved to Carers Support Wiltshire for adult carers, two being referred to counselling at Relate and three being referred to the Young Carers Development Trust – a programme giving individual support to those young carers who have been assessed as gifted and talented. Moreover, one family who had been served an eviction order was able to remain at home after accessing help to manage its debts after it was referred to Care 4UR Cash.

Support has led to a reduction in negative outcomes and a rise in positive outcomes for young carers as measured by the tools in the Manual for Measures of Caring Activities and Outcomes for Children and Young People.¹

Both parents and young carers from military families have consistently reported that they really appreciate the specialist provision for them. In particular, parents have said that they have really enjoyed the opportunities to take part in activities as a family, as their lifestyle and the lack of affordable and convenient transport in rural Wiltshire can otherwise prevent them going out on family day trips.

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

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

The Family Health Together programme was planned with the young carers and families themselves. The topics covered, such as understanding rehabilitation and health and wellbeing, are based on what they felt would be useful.

Feedback from young carers is gathered after all activities in order to shape delivery in the future. Young carers have also helped plan their own respite over the summer holidays and families have decided there should be a group outing at the end of the pilot family projects.

How is the initiative run?

Promotion of the service is through Community First's websites, press releases and publicity materials and directly at partnership meetings and events such as two Carers Awareness events hosted by the **Wiltshire Involvement Networks (WIN)** outreach group for health and social care.

All agencies within the partnership work together to identify and refer young carers most in need; this is done through individual agencies' one-to-one work and multi-agency forum meetings across Wiltshire. Young carers are assessed using the MACA-YC18 and PANOC-YC20 tools from the Manual for Measures of Caring Activities and Outcomes for Children and Young People. At the same time adults are asked what support they themselves are receiving. Following assessment, a comprehensive activity and support package can be readily developed. This can be quite varied as plans are tailored to the individual family's needs. It may include one-to-one support with the young carer, with the Support Worker acting as the lead professional in liaison with the young carer's school. Other support may be family days out, advocacy for the family and signposting to other services.

Families have had the chance to join in with Project Florence, an existing project for military families, as well as day trips to Longleat Safari Park and other attractions around Wiltshire. Through the connections of the partnership organisations, the military families have engaged with the Operation Nightingale project for the rehabilitation of wounded soldiers. The Project Florence scheme of Operation Nightingale has enabled young carers to participate in an archaeological dig, make a film and learn about the rehabilitation of service personnel. Three young carers have achieved a Bronze Arts Award through Project Florence. Additionally, young carers have the opportunity to work towards an ASDAN Young Carers Award through completing workshops on topics such as identifying hazards within the home, appropriate use of medication, when to contact the emergency services and self-care, self-esteem and mental health.

An eight week Family Health Together programme, delivered by the Support Worker and in partnership with the Army Welfare Service, Carers Support Wiltshire and the NHS, is open to the whole family. Family Health Together provides first aid training, budgeting advice and tips for managing stress. It also promotes healthy eating, physical activity and smoking cessation to the whole family, in the comfort of their own home.

When the partnership work began, there was also a plan to arrange a Forces Forum to bring together relevant agencies for military families. The partnership decided not to pursue this when it became aware of other groups that perform this function,

including a forum managed by Army Welfare. However, the partnership will still undertake a consultation on service provision with military families and report the findings back to Carers Trust as part of its Integrated Interventions work.

What methods have been particularly effective?

Wiltshire Council has multi-agency forums based in 16 communities in Wiltshire for local practitioners to share practice and discuss how best to support individual cases. Wiltshire Young Carers Strategic Partnership attends these meetings and has found them to be a really useful way of sharing information and gaining publicity.

A partnership site meeting was held which allowed each partner to explain what it does. This sharing of information resulted in for example, the team at Youth Action Wiltshire hearing about the Wiltshire Carers Support Sitting Service which has volunteers to offer respite should a carer want a short break.

Meetings at Army Welfare Support and Help for Heroes' Tedworth House Recovery Centre have been useful in raising awareness about the prevalence and identification of young carers in military families.

Have there been any challenges along the way?

Although military families often do have strong social networks, in addition to being separated from their extended family, they are often separated on camps from their friends in other military families. Today, garrisons can be very large so regiments are not typically based together and families may be housed on estates with civilian families too. With military communities more fragmented, families can be isolated and as military families may often prefer to be self-reliant, this isolation can add to the problem of hidden young carers.

The culture of military communities has also made identification of families in need of support challenging. Adults in military families are used to being independent, so reaching out for help is something they are not used to doing. Families may also be quite wary of contacting Army Welfare as they are fearful of being seen to be weak and that asking for help may affect their next posting. To overcome these cultural barriers, working in partnership with military organisations is essential.

There have been fewer referrals from Army Welfare than was hoped for. Youth Action Wiltshire aims to deliver a training session with Army Welfare in the future to improve young carer identification and increase the number of referrals to the project. The training would emphasise that young carers might not be caring for service personnel, but their other parent or siblings. More could also be done to understand what might be the most appropriate questions for Army Welfare to ask the families it is in contact with, to identify if the children are young carers.

What hints and tips might help me get started?

- Be aware that it may take longer than thought to identify young carers in military families and that you will need to work hard with partners to overcome the cultural reasons that prevent military families from seeking help.
- If working in a rural area like Wiltshire, providing transport to the families will be vital. Factor in the cost of running a minibus.

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

The Young Carers pages of the **Youth Action in Wiltshire** website.

Community First's website.

Operation Nightingale's Project Florence blog.

Learn about **Tedworth House Recovery Centre** in Tidworth, Wiltshire.

The Royal Caledonian Education Trust has a **DVD and Support Pack** called 'Forces Kids – This is my life' to help professionals understand the experiences of children and young people from military families.

Where can I get further information?

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