

## Young-carer-led and age-appropriate respite for young carers



**EASTERN RAVENS**

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50 YEARS 1961-2011

### What is the initiative?

Young Carers Service

### Who runs it?

Eastern Ravens Trust

### Who does it benefit?

Young carers aged 8–17, young adult carers up to 24 and their families living in Stockton-on-Tees.

### What does it do?

The Young Carers Service provides respite breaks and activities for young carers, but with young carers right at the heart of decision making – from choosing what activities they do to educating professionals about young carers' needs.

### When did it start?

2000.

### Why was it started?

The project started as part of a piece of research undertaken by the NCH (now Action for Children). Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council commissioned the research in 1999 and Eastern Ravens Trust was chosen to pilot a short 12 week programme of fun activities for young carers. The current provision has evolved out of the programme that was first delivered in 2000.

### What are the aims and objectives?

#### Aims:

- To provide respite for young carers.

- To boost the confidence and self-esteem of young carers.
- To educate professionals about young carers and the young carer agenda.

### Objectives:

- To let young carers decide what they want to do in their respite time.
- To provide transport to all activities.
- To provide a safe and welcoming environment.
- To allow young carers to discuss issues important to them.
- To enable young carers to enjoy a life similar to their peers who are not young carers.
- To empower young carers by letting them direct activities and be experts in training sessions and awareness raising with professionals.

### How is it funded?

The core offer of respite breaks is funded under contract to Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council. Additional funding from a variety of other sources has been utilised to expand the service further.

### What has it achieved?

“Eastern Ravens brings your childhood back.”

**Young carer**

“It has given my daughter a bit of freedom from home life. It is a very well-run trust and the children come first with everything. As parents we are well informed in all that goes on and the staff are so friendly and helpful.”

**Parent**

Eastern Ravens use the Multidimensional Assessment of Caring Activities (MACA-YC18) and Positive and Negative Outcomes of Caring (PANOC-YC20) tools to measure the impact they have on the lives of the young carers who attend.<sup>1</sup> The Young Carers Service has had some tremendous successes, with 79% of young carers receiving additional support reporting they feel less stressed, for example. An additional questionnaire is given to parents to monitor the impact of the service on families’ wellbeing and 100% reported that they felt supported by the Young Carers Service.

The Young Carers Service has grown from the local authority project that was set up 12 years ago. Whereas it once supported 30 young carers, there are now at least 100 who regularly use the service. Eastern Ravens Trust has successfully applied for funding from various external sources such as Carers Trust and Big Lottery Fund to support the project. It has also recruited additional specialist workers for whole family provision and working with schools.

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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.

Young people have always been at the heart of the Young Carers Service and their engagement and control over the design and provision of the service has grown. Particularly, they are now more involved in promoting the service and educating professionals about young carers. Through the Steering Group, young carers have devised a Roadshow they take out to professionals, a workshop called Getting it Right for Young Carers, for staff who work across adult and children's services and have helped re-write some of the content of the social work curriculum at the local university.

The service has also been involved with the National Young Carers Forum to promote good practice. It has also been awarded **Investing in Children** membership for the last five years for its commitment to a dialogue with young people which enables change.

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

Eastern Ravens Trust has a strong ethos of listening to the voices of the young carers it supports. Young carers and their families have always been involved in the planning and delivery of the Young Carers Service. Twice a year there is a consultation process, involving questionnaires, parent focus groups, and face-to-face sessions with young carers and their families. Through their Roadshow, young carers raise awareness about the service with a range of professionals.

## How is the initiative run?

The team that delivers the Young Carers Service consists of a Young Carers Interventions Worker, four sessional Youth Workers, a Family Support Worker, a Schools Support Worker and six volunteers. The Trust Manager has overall responsibility for managing the Young Carers Service.

Together the team provides two hour, age-appropriate respite breaks every weekday during term time at Eastern Ravens Trust centre. The five sessions cater to young carers aged 8–10, 11–13, 12–14, 15+, and for all ages who are a part of the Steering Group panel of young carers. Transport is included as part of the respite service, with all young carers being picked up and dropped off at their home address.

School holiday programmes also take place. As these happen when the young people have more free time and there is more daylight, these tend to consist more of full days together doing things such as team-building activities, challenges at an outdoor education centre and training sessions on issues such as mental health.

All of the term-time and school holiday activities are chosen by the young carers themselves. It is their respite time and Eastern Ravens Trust believes that the young people it supports should do something that they have chosen and not something that adults have said they have to do. Activities have included movie nights, pyjama parties, Ready Steady Cook and trips to the cinema and bowling.

A fundamental part of the Young Carers Service is the Young Carers Steering Group, which meets once a week. A key task of the Steering Group is to raise awareness of the service and young carers' issues with a Roadshow for local professionals. So far, health and social care staff and students of the local university, general practice staff, alcohol treatment workers and the mayor of Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council have taken part.

The Young Carers Service is also advertised by the staff and young carers through events such as the vulnerable young people's meeting at Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council, and awareness raising in schools.

Additionally, Eastern Ravens Trust provides placements for medical students from the local university. The students are assigned a day to help out at the weekday respite sessions and also attend home visits to see the assessment process in action. Offering this placement helps to embed the young carers agenda early in these students' careers.

Referrals to the Young Carers Service are received from a variety of professionals, including social workers and school nurses. Prior to accessing services all young carers are assessed using the referral form as an initial tool, followed by the MACA-YC18 and PANOC-YC20 assessment tool.

The Service is available to each young carer for as long as they need it. All young carers are re-assessed every 3–4 months to ensure they are receiving support appropriate to their needs. At these reviews and upon exit of the service, the MACA and PANOC assessments are conducted again.

Young carers may move on from the service if their family circumstances change or they gain the confidence to be more independent. At around 14 years of age many young carers who have been using the service leave, as it is often by this time that they have developed the resilience and assertiveness to be independent and develop other friendships.

## What methods have been particularly effective?

Providing transport for the young carers enables them to attend the respite breaks.

Eastern Ravens Trust considers listening to young carers' voices and responding to what they need, to be of paramount importance. The popularity of the Young Carers Service and the confidence it encourages in the young people who use it is no doubt due to the fact that young carers make many of the decisions and are given the opportunity to speak out and effect change.

Partnership work, such as providing training to the students at the local university and assigning a Young Carers Worker to the local substance misuse team, has proven an effective means to achieve positive outcomes for young carers and their families.

## Have there been any challenges along the way?

Transport to the centre and to recreational activities such as bowling has had to be factored in as a core part of the service, as due to living in poverty many of the young carers would otherwise not be able to attend.

Identifying hidden young carers and approaching them in a way which encourages them to join the service has been challenging. Hidden young carers can often come from families with complex care needs or substance misuse issues. They may be particularly afraid of social services and letting it be known they are a young carer. Young carers looking after a parent who misuses substances, for example, constituted just 3% of the young carers on the project. Therefore, Eastern Ravens Trust has applied for funding and recruited a worker to liaise with the adult drug treatment service and identify these young carers early.

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

Listen to young carers so you can design a service with what they need in mind. At evaluation meetings ask young carers what they suggest a frightened young carer would need to hear to then access help. You want to involve young carers as much as possible to normalise their role, break down the stigma and remove the fear of social workers taking them away from their families.

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

Contact Eastern Ravens Trust for a copy of its:

- Annual Report – 2011–2012 to read more and see how its other project initiatives tie in with the service.
- Ground Rules of the YC Aloud! Steering Group, as written by the young carers involved.
- Calendar of events.

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

Read about the **Investing in Children membership scheme**, which recognises and celebrates examples of imaginative and inclusive practice.

## Where can I get further information?

### General enquiries

Email: [info@easternravenstrust.org](mailto:info@easternravenstrust.org)

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