

REPORT TO: POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE - 14 January 2002

REPORT ON: THE LOCAL AUTHORITY'S RESPONSIBILITY AND DUTY TOWARDS YOUNG CARERS

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK, DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION, DIRECTOR OF NEIGHBOURHOOD RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT AND DIRECTOR OF LEISURE AND ARTS

REPORT NO: 48-2002

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To inform members of the responsibility of the Local Authority in respect of young carers.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 It is recommended that the Policy and Resources Committee:-

2.1.1 Note the content of this report.

2.1.2 Adopt Best Practice Guidelines for workers as drawn up by the Young Carers Partnership. (Attached)

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

4.0 AGENDA 21

4.1 The Local Authority has a specific role to empower and enable vulnerable children including young carers, to participate in decisions that affect them, and to contribute to an improvement in the quality of their lives.

5.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The Local Authority has a specific responsibility to promote the status of all children in need, including young carers. It must also ensure that they are treated with equity and fairness, and that they are protected from discrimination.

6.0 BACKGROUND

6.1 Young carers are children and young people under the age of 18 years who help to care for a parent, sibling or other family members with a physical disability, learning disability, mental health problem, HIV/AIDS, other long-term illness or misuse of alcohol and drugs. As carers they may spend a substantial amount of their time in day to day care, or are involved in personal and intimate care of another person.

6.2 Under the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, the Local Authority has responsibility regarding the assessment and provision of services towards all children in need, including young carers. The Act specifically mentions children with, or affected by, disability, and their families. It gives parents and guardians the right to request an assessment of the needs of the young carer, if he/she is under 16 years. The duty to assess young carers' needs lies with the Social Work Department although the responsibility of being aware of, and recognising the needs of young carers lies with all workers who come into contact with children, young people and families in need of support.

- 6.3 The task of identifying young carers remains a challenging one. Many do not wish their care responsibilities to be widely known. In total, 66 young carers have been identified by the Young Carers Partnership to date, of which 15 are currently in receipt of active support. It is important that all departments of the Council work together to ensure that these vulnerable young people are supported in the caring roles that they undertake.
- 6.4 The thematic Social Inclusion Partnership for Young Carers was established under the auspices of Healthy Dundee in 1999 and since then a number of Dundee City Council departments have been actively involved in its management committee. The Young Carers Partnership is the only one in Scotland which has been set up to help identify young carers and to raise awareness of their needs and concerns.
- 6.5 To help achieve this aim the Young Carers Partnership has drawn up Best Practice Guidelines for departments and organisations to ensure that they take cognisance of the needs of young carers when undertaking their day to day responsibilities. The Best Practice Guidelines are appended for members information.

7.0 CONSULTATION

- 7.1 Consultation has taken place with all relevant partners in the compilation of this report.

8.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information), were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above report.

9.0 SIGNATURE

Director of Social Work

Date

Director of Education

Date

Director of Neighbourhood Resources
Development

Date

Director of Leisure & Arts

Date

YOUNG CARERS' PARTNERSHIP

Best Practice Guidelines for Voluntary & Statutory Organisations

Alice Ruthven Hughes
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INTRODUCTION

All relevant agencies should have a clear and comprehensive policy statement on their responsibilities towards young carers.

It is important that statutory and voluntary organisations recognise the existence of young carers and consider the support and services that the young person may need within and outwith the family.

The definition of a 'Young Carer' should not be restrictive; definitions should be inclusive rather than exclusive. Agencies need to take account of the actual or potential impact of caring on children, particularly where, in the absence of external help, children are left unsupported to provide care. Organisations should ask themselves what will or might happen to this child if no support is available to him/her and the family.

In their capacity agencies have the potential to raise the awareness of young carers and increase their understanding of the situation of young carers and their families.

Agencies should have a better understanding of the processes which draw or force some children into caring roles within particular families.

DEFINITION

Young carers are children and young people under the age of eighteen who are helping to care for a parent or other family member with a physical disability, learning difficulty, mental health problem, HIV/AIDS, other long term illness or misuse of alcohol or drugs. As primary carers they spend a substantial part of their time in day to day care or are involved in personal and intimate care of another person.

IDENTIFYING YOUNG CARERS

There are no precise figures on the numbers of young carers nationally, however, recent research indicated that there are about fifty thousand young carers in the UK.

Identifying significant numbers of young carers in Dundee has its difficulties. There was a growing concern that young carers needs were not being identified. Indeed identifying young carers appears to be a problem that confronts many authorities. Many young carers and their families are worried that if their situation becomes known to the Local Authority then there is a danger that young carers may be taken away from their parents or vice versa.

NEEDS OF YOUNG CARERS

- The need for information.
- The need for support and someone to talk to.
- The need for practical services.

POLICY & PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS

Young carers are children first and carers second and should be enabled to enjoy the same rights as any other child. They have rights, which are protected by legislation under The Children Scotland 1995 Act, and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

It should be the duty of statutory and voluntary agencies to ensure that young carers receive the services and support to which they are already entitled, and to develop provision which meets their needs in a sensitive way.

With the consent of his/her parent(s) or guardian any young carer has the right to request an assessment under the Children (Scotland) Act 1995.

PROVISION OF INFORMATION

A range of agencies can provide information. This needs to be child friendly and must take into account language and literacy abilities.

Young carers should be involved and consulted at every level. There should be effective mechanisms in place to ensure that the views of young carers are sought.

PRACTICE CONSIDERATIONS

Young carers from black and minority ethnic cultures require liaison and close co-operation with established ethnic groups.

Young carers are from both sexes; professionals can subconsciously assign traditional gender roles. Care must be taken to ensure that they avoid gender stereotyping.

Many young carers start caring at an early age. This needs to be acknowledged, while needs are broadly similar, some will be age specific. The age and level of understanding of the child must be considered at all times.

CHECKLIST FOR WORKERS

Finding out the facts

- Find out whether parents with disabilities or long-term illness are receiving any support, assistance or care in the home, and if so who provides it. You may find that a child is providing care, either alone or with another adult. Children and young people are more likely to become carers if they live in a one-parent family which does not receive adequate professional support or services and is living on a low income.
- Where children have health or social problems, such as a strained back, or emotional, behavioural or educational difficulties (eg they miss school, are often late, are tired in class, underachieve or are failing to do homework), always check whether this might be linked in any way with having to care for another family member, particularly a parent.
- If, from speaking with a parent or child, you have reason to believe that children may be providing care for parents or other family members, find out what it is that they are having to do, and why they are having to do it.

Making an assessment

- If you have established that children are providing substantial, regular or significant care to another family member, then speak to parents and children about this, either separately or together, and ask what help and support they each need to prevent children from having to continue to provide care, or to reduce their responsibilities.
- Young carers have a right to an assessment of their needs from social services, but many families* do not know about this. Talk to them about their rights to an assessment as a child in need under the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 and help them access this assessment if that is what they want. Assessments must recognise the needs and rights of all family members and services must be responsive to the needs of young carers and disabled parents. **(*NB - Parental / Guardian consent is required if young person is under 16 years)**

The whole family

- Intervention must focus on the needs of the whole family. Those which support ill or disabled parents, including offering help with parenting, will provide the best way forward. Services should be developed which cater for the needs of disabled parents and young carers.
- The emphasis must be on preventing children from taking on inappropriate caring roles in the first place, and stopping these roles from becoming firmly established once started.

Working with other agencies

- Be prepared to make a referral to another agency for specialist support or services. There is a local young carers project which can provide activities, counselling and other support to the young carer.
- Each relevant department should have a designated person who keeps up to date with the research and policy on young carers, and who can be used as a resource by other social workers for advice and information. They should know about any local projects and people in other agencies (health, education, the voluntary sector etc) who have particular expertise.

CONCLUSION

Organisations / Agencies should / could:

- **Provide** young carers with the information they require to improve the quality of their lives.
- **Include** young carers needs in future plans / development.
- **Remove** the fear of isolation, fear of bullying, of uncertainty and punishment for caring.
- **Protect** young carers as children and as carers.
- **Promote** the rights of children who care both as children and as carers.

