

Service: Children and Young People's Services
Title: Young Carers
Manual: Children in Need Manual
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This process is under review and will be reissued early 2009

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of these guidelines is to support workers in their statutory duties towards young carers as children in need. The legislative framework that informs our work with young carers and their families includes, The Children Act 1989, NHS and Community Act 1990 and The Carers (Recognition and Services) Act 1995. Reference will also be made to the 1986 Disabled Persons Act and The Disability Discrimination Act 1995. There is also a National Carers Strategy 1999 which includes the Government's intentions for services for young carers.

Research carried out in 1995 (Mahon and Higgins) suggests that there could be as many as 40,000 'Young Carers' in Britain. A further survey carried out between 1994 and 1995 by the Office for National Statistics, on behalf of the Department of Health, estimates that there could be 32,000 'Young Carers' in Britain.

It is widely felt, however, that these figures are a severe underestimation of the real number of children and young people who are required to perform a caring role of some kind, without acknowledgement and support.

The reasons for this are that on one level many young carers do not define or see themselves as carers at all and are therefore unaware of the support that can be offered. Another reason is that many young carers and their parents live in fear of what professionals might do to the family if their situation was recognised. This is especially so where the parental condition carries some social stigma, e.g. mental health problems, drug/alcohol misuse, HIV or Aids.

What distinguishes a young carer from other children involved in usual family duties and household tasks is the extent to which their responsibilities and circumstances are likely to restrict their childhood. The question to be considered is their caring role having an effect upon their health, education and social opportunities and therefore denying them the usual opportunities for emotional and social development.

ABBREVIATIONS

CYPS Children and Young People's Service

SaSS Safeguarding and Specialist Services

SCD Social Care Direct

IAT Initial Assessment team

CURRENT CYPS STRATEGY

CYPS has adopted a Strategy with regard to Young Carers. The key principles and values of this Strategy are:

- support for young carers requires a collective response.
- adopting a child/young persons centred approach.
- recognising young carers as individuals, with their own needs.
- working with families to ensure that parents are supported in their parenting role.
- involving young carers in project and service developments.
- acknowledging individuality and giving young carers a choice.
- respecting young carers differing cultural backgrounds and experiences.
- encouraging young carers to exercise power and responsibility over their own lives.
- encouraging young carers and their families to access Local Authority services and community resources.
- providing information to young carers and their families that is appropriate, accurate, comprehensive and accessible.

WORKING TOGETHER

As with all “children in need”, the needs of young carers are best served by universal services and Safeguarding and Specialist Services working together. Young Carers’ education can often be disrupted by their caring role and additional health issues can arise for them.

Young Carers can too often slip through the gap between adult’s and children’s services. This can result in neither service recognising the needs of a young carer, or some of their needs being recognised but lack of co-ordination leading to a poor level of service.

Staff need to be familiar of the protocol designed to bridge gaps between Adult and Children’s services. The “Protocol for Working together in the Delivery of Services to Adults and Children” details processes, procedures and protocols enabling effective good practice between Children and Young People’s Service and Adult service.

It is essential that to assist young carers, children and adult teams work together.

It is important that the child or young person does not feel overwhelmed by the assessment process. It is recognised that many young carers have misgivings about becoming involved with SaSS. They need recognition of their role, support with caring tasks, information about support available to them and emotional support. Many fear that they will receive a negative response and disruption to their family life.

RECOGNITION

If it becomes apparent to an Adult’s services Care Manager involved with a family that a child/young person is providing care which is beyond that of normal household tasks, the Care Manager involved with the family will gather the relevant information.

With the child's or young person's permission a referral can then be made to Social Care Direct.

NOTE: where a request comes from a child then the assessment will take place even in the face of parental opposition (Carers’ Recognition and Services Act 1995).

It is important that the Care Manager gathers enough information to enable a decision to be made in relation to the child or young person meeting the criteria for a young carer. If this is done, SCD will only need to log and screen the information and send the referral onto the Initial Assessment Team (unless there are immediate safeguarding concerns). This will prevent the need for another contact with the child/young person and hopefully make the assessment process less 'overwhelming' for them.

Once the referral has been allocated to an IAT Social Worker it is essential that he/she contact the Adult Care Manager involved with the family. Initially this will be to check the information given and inform him/her of IAT involvement.

Any decision for the need for immediate services will be made by the child care Social Worker. An initial assessment will then be undertaken by the child care Social Worker. If the outcome of the assessment is that the child/young person fits the criteria then appropriate services will be planned.

It is essential that the social worker allocated at this point then makes contact with the Care Manager involved with the family. A joint plan will be drawn up for the adult and young carer. This will enable us to provide a cohesive plan of services for the family, thus preventing situations such as a parent receiving respite care with no complementary support being made available to the child/young person.

A joint reviewing system will then be put in place.

YOUNG CARERS' PROJECT

In some circumstances the child/young person may be reluctant for a referral to be made to Safeguarding and Specialist Services.

If they are reluctant for a referral to be made to Safeguarding and Specialist Services on their behalf, then they can be given a contact number for their local Young Carers' Project and encouraged and if necessary supported in making contact with the project.

If any child/young person involved with a Young Carers' Project needs further support from Safeguarding and Specialist Services, a worker from the project will either make a referral to Social Care Direct, with the young person's permission, or support and enable the young person to make a self referral. Again if the information supplied is sufficient to enable the workers to decide that an assessment under the Children in Need procedures will be undertaken, then they can log and screen the information and send the referral to the appropriate children in need team.

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION

"Protocol for Working together in the Delivery of Services to Adults and Children"- DCC Intranet

This is a Controlled Document