

POLICY DISCUSSION PAPER - YOUNG ADULT CARERS: EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

Since 2008 the Learning and Work Institute (L&W) has worked extensively with young adult carers, learning providers, carers' services, employers and policy makers to enable young adult carers to engage and succeed in learning and at work. This paper discusses three key policy changes that L&W wants to see. We believe these changes will make a significant difference to thousands of young adult carers' lives, by enabling them to make successful transitions in learning and work and benefit from opportunities that they often find themselves excluded from.

WHO ARE YOUNG ADULT CARERS?

Young adult carers are young people aged 16-24 who provide unpaid care to someone, usually a member of their family, on a regular basis. They may care for a parent, sibling, grandparent or other relative who has a disability, long-term illness, mental health problem or other condition which results in a need for care, support or supervision.

"I was 14 when my mum suddenly became ill. Everything fell apart. Mum had to stop work, we had no money and there was nobody to look after us. At first mum tried to carry on, but this became more and more difficult as time went by. Gradually everything became my responsibility – looking after my little sister, cooking and cleaning, helping mum to get around and sorting out her tablets. Eventually I left school. I couldn't look after mum and Jess and go to school. I'm 17 now, with no GCSEs and hardly any friends. Things have settled down a bit at home, but I feel like I've missed my chance. I'd like to get qualifications and a job, but we can't afford to lose my benefits. I couldn't cope with GCSEs two years ago, so I don't suppose it would be any different now." Sarah, young adult carer, aged 17.

KEY FACTS AND FIGURES

The 2011 Census identified more than 314,000 young adult carers aged 16-24 in England and Wales, the equivalent of more than 1 in 20 young people. However, the real number of young adult carers is much higher as many do not consider themselves to be carers or have the confidence to tell others about their caring role. In total, these young people provide £5.5bn of unpaid care per year and over one in ten young adult carers provide 50 or more hours of unpaid care a week (Census, 2011).

A caring role can have a significant impact on a young person's experience of learning and work. On average, carers miss five per cent of school days because of caring, and caring interferes with a quarter of all school days (Sempik and Becker, 2013, 2014). As a result, young adult carers have significantly lower educational attainment at GCSE level, the equivalent to nine grades lower overall than their peers e.g. the difference between nine C's and nine D's (The Children's Society, 2013).

This impact on their school attainment can make it more difficult for young adult carers to engage in further education, training and employment. It can also place financial restrictions on young people's opportunities to engage in learning and work. For example, 24% of young adult carers in school say they cannot afford to go to college or university (Carers Trust, 2014). These barriers to learning and work result in young adult carers being three times as likely to be or have been NEET (not in education, employment or training) than other young people the same age (Audit Commission, 2010).

Caring continues to impact on the experiences of those young adult carers who are able to progress into further learning, training and/or work after school. In college and university, carers miss three days per month and experience disruption to half of their days as a result of caring (Sempik and Becker, 2013, 2014). Young adult carers also lose an average of 17 work days and experience disruption to a further 79 days each year because of caring (Sempik and Becker, 2013, 2014).

CONTEXT – WHY THIS ISSUE IS IMPORTANT

Young adult carers make an invaluable contribution to the lives of the people they care for, their local communities and the national economy. The majority of young adult carers are passionate about their caring role and fiercely protective of their loved ones; they also recognise that they derive a range of benefits from being a carer. However, as the figures above highlight, young adult carers' lives are often really difficult.

Like all young people, young adult carers have the right to participate in learning and to access the services they need. Likewise, society, learning providers and policymakers have a duty to support them and ensure that they have fair access to learning and work. Whilst acknowledging that recent legislation will lay the foundations to strengthen carers' rights, a range of policy that falls outside of this legislation is, effectively, creating a complex landscape that often hinders, rather than enables young adult carers to make positive transitions in learning and work.

The complex framework of policy that impacts on young adult carers' participation in learning and work is difficult for professionals to understand and navigate; for young adult carers it is a minefield. It is, therefore, not surprising that many young adult carers respond by disengaging from learning and work, which effectively pushes them and their families deeper into the cycles of poverty and exclusion that they experience.

Jenna is 16. Since the age of 11, she has been the sole carer for her mum, who has multiple sclerosis. Like many young adult carers she's unable to do the simple things in life that other teenagers take for granted – doing homework, attending after schools clubs, going on school trips, socialising with friends. Her lack of a life beyond being a carer, and poor attainment at school, has led to Jenna having very low confidence and self-esteem. She is leaving school this summer with an uncertain future, unable to do a catering course at her local college due to the 21 Hour rule – which would mean she will lose her entitlement to Carer's Allowance if she starts the course.

OUR VISION

Learning and Work Institute convenes the National Policy Forum for Young Adult Carers. The Forum brings together representatives from government departments along with young adult carers, a range of national third sector organisations and learning providers to identify how national government policy can enable, rather than hinder, young adult carers' engagement in learning and work.

With the support of Forum members, L&W is advocating for a joined-up approach that enables and supports young adult carers to engage and succeed in learning and at work. We believe the following policy changes will make a difference to young adult carers' lives.

THREE KEY POLICY CHANGES

1. **Young adult carers should be formally identified as a 'vulnerable group' giving them full entitlement to the 16-19 Bursary**

The 16-19 Bursary is available to (a) all young people who fall into one of the three identified 'vulnerable' groups and (b) on a discretionary basis to some young people studying full or part time. Young adult carers are **not** currently one of the three identified 'vulnerable' groups, therefore have no automatic entitlement to the bursary, of up to £1200 per year. Whilst young adult carers may be entitled to claim the discretionary element of the bursary, lack of awareness (amongst both learning providers and young adult carers) means they often miss out on this vital support that could help them with the additional financial costs of learning. As a result many either don't take up learning or drop out due to financial pressures.

2. **Young adult carers, aged 16-21, should be exempt from the 21 hour rule in the benefit system** - Currently, young adult carers lose Carer's Allowance (£62.10 per week) if they participate in learning for longer than 21 hours each week. Most further education courses require longer participation, leaving young adult carers in a catch-22 position. Given that many young adult carers have lost out on several years of education as a result of their caring responsibilities, they deserve greater flexibility to gain the skills they need for successful careers.

3. **Young adult carers should be able to access flexible hours apprenticeships and traineeships to boost their skills and careers**

Currently Skills Funding Agency guidance states that apprenticeships should be at least 30 hours work per week, except in exceptional circumstances. Exceptional circumstances are not defined and no data is collected. Traineeships do not have this limited flexibility. As a result, many young adult carers are locked out of these opportunities to improve their skills and progress their careers.

Watch this short film to hear young adult carer, Emily Hicks, talking about the three policy changes and why they are needed - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y3Vga4i56MA>

Find out more about L&W's work with young adult carers by visiting <http://bit.ly/1ToEYbU> – where you'll be able to access a range of free resources, information and materials. E-mail nicola.aylward@learningandwork.org.uk to join our network and for further information about our work.