

Barnardos Carefree

About the organisation

[Carefree](#) is a Barnardo's project for young carers, including young adult carers up to the age of 19, in Leicester and Leicestershire.

The What Employers Want (WEW) project complements other work Carefree have been doing on ways to support young adult carers. For example, work with Leicester City Youth Service to pilot an accredited Managing Your Own Home course in which young people attend courses on subjects such as finance, living independently and cooking on a budget; research with the Learning and Work Institute on the needs of young adult carers in relation to career planning and work with the local Young Adult Carers network that brings together organisations including colleges, secondary schools, universities and DWP.

Carefree recognise that employers can be a valuable source of advice and support for young adult carers and saw the WEW project as an opportunity to explore in more detail, not only what employers want from young people but to find out what employers know about young adult carers – is there more information about young adult carers that organisations could benefit from?, what can young adult carers do to prepare themselves and how can they add to their skills, to be able to enter into the world of employment?

Delivering the project

The project lead, the lead officer for young adult carers at Carefree, wanted to involve young people with different levels of confidence and ensure engagement beyond those young adult carers who routinely put themselves forward for projects. Ten young people were engaged in the project. Half of these were recruited from the Manage Your Own Home group. The project lead approached, on an individual basis, other young adult carers who she thought might be interested or would benefit from involvement.

The initial training was delivered in two sessions in the evening to allow for different young people's availability and to fit in with their normal routine of attending young carer's sessions in the evening. At these sessions, participants were encouraged to think about what they wanted to get out of the research and to take the lead in shaping and developing the project. The group were happy to use the example

interview questions, provided as part of the Project in a Box materials, but wanted to ask the questions in their own language as this would allow them to feel more confident in the discussion.

The young people carried out 5 employer interviews. These were conducted in pairs, with those who were less confident paired up with someone who was initially more comfortable to lead the interview. The project lead stepped in to take notes on one occasion when a young person was unavailable on the day.

Carefree approached large employers with whom Barnardo's have established relationships, such as financial organisations, but were also keen to engage smaller businesses to explore the flexibility that different types of employer could potentially offer in response to employees with caring responsibilities. Small businesses included a café and a clothing shop. Some of the employer contacts were provided by the City's Youth Service which had developed links with small businesses offering work experience opportunities.

The project lead made the initial approach to employers to discuss when they would be available for interview, after which the young people made contact to agree a specific time. Interviews were conducted with employers in the city centre over three weekends. The project lead made themselves available in a café nearby so the participants could check in with her how things were going and get support if needed and to ensure safeguarding arrangements.

Following the interviews, the young people met to share and compare their experiences and then had a final session to write up their findings into a report. The project lead plans to explore with the group, the possibility of using the findings as part of a young adult carers' training programme.

Challenges

One of the challenges for Carefree in delivering the project was that initially, not all participants were confident to take the lead in the interviews. However, once they had observed an interview, and better understood what was involved, these young people felt more confident to take on the 'talking role'.

The biggest challenge was arranging times for interviews that fitted in with the young peoples' caring responsibilities and for example college work, whilst also offering flexibility to fit in with employers' availability. In particular, the project lead was mindful that young adult carers should not be asked to extend their day more than necessary.

Benefits - for young people, organisations and employers

Participation in the project has enabled young adult carers to become more confident in talking about themselves and has helped them to believe that they can repeat this successfully in a job interview.

“ It was good being the person asking the questions – I don’t feel as scared of the idea of interviews as much.” Participant

The experience has also helped the young people to recognise what transferable skills they bring as carers, to the interview process and to potential employers, and their ability to progress in the future.

“So, feeling more confident about actually saying, ‘Yes, this is me and this is part of my life, but that doesn’t mean to say that I have to hide it ...I can talk about it, and transfer some of those qualities that I’ve got in my caring role to, and relate it to... job interviews in the future.’ Project lead

Feedback from the interviews suggested that smaller employers in particular had gained awareness and a wider understanding of young adult carers and the skills they offer.

For the organisation, the project has linked in well with Carefree’s wider work on careers including the development of a set of resources around developing young adult carers’ career aspirations and skills.

Success factors

Taking a flexible approach to how the project was delivered and encouraging young adults to take ownership of the project ensured that participants got the most benefit from their involvement.

Project resources

Both project staff and participants found the Project in a Box toolkit resources, particularly the sample questions, a useful resource to support delivery of the project.