



# SUPPORTING YOUNG CARERS

THE PROVISION OF COUNTY-WIDE  
SUPPORT FOR YOUNG CARERS

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University of Winchester

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# Supporting young carers: The provision of county-wide support for young carers

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background

#### 1.1.1 Young carers and numbers

A 'young carer' is the term used for children and young adults who have informal caring responsibilities, often for a family member. There have been several different definitions of a 'young carer' including, *'A young carer is someone under 18 who helps look after someone in their family, or a friend, who is ill, disabled or misuses drugs or alcohol'* (Carers Trust). In the Children and Families Act 2014, which amended the Children Act 1989, a 'young carer' is defined as *'a person under 18 who provides or intends to provide care for another person'* (HM Government, 2014). Young people with caring responsibilities up to the age of 25, are often described as 'young adult carers' (Becker & Becker, 2008). This report is based on research with children and young people under the age of eighteen with caring responsibilities and supported by young carer services within Hampshire.

According to the most recent census (Office for National Statistics, 2011), there are 166,363 'young carers' (aged 5-17) in England and within Hampshire, that figure is 4109, an increase of 809 since the 2001 census (Hampshire County Council, 2016). Other research has however indicated that the number of young carers might be significantly higher (BBC, University of Nottingham, 2010).

In England, the implementation of the Children and Families Act 2014 (HM Government, 2014a), gives all young carers under the age of 18 (regardless of the type of support they provide) a right to an assessment of their needs. This is a responsibility of the local authority. This legislation also states that local authorities in England 'must take reasonable steps to identify the extent to which there are young carers within their area who have needs for support' (HM Government, 2014a). Moreover, the Children and Families Act 2014 (HM Government, 2014a), together with the Care Act 2014 (HM Government, 2014b), set out a preventative focus on supporting children through a 'whole family approach' (Department for Health, 2017).

Although research has found some positive impacts of being a young carer, including maturity; life, care-related and social skills (e.g. Dearden & Becker, 2000), there is strong evidence that points to a range of negative impacts on a child's health and wellbeing, social activity and education (e.g. Aldridge, Clay, Connors, Day, & Gkiza, 2016; Dearden & Becker, 2004; The Children's Society, 2013).

#### 1.1.2 Provision of support for young carers

Although 'young carers and their families have access to a range of different health, social care and educational support services' (Aldridge et al., 2016:6), research by the Children's Commissioner for England indicated that 'the emphasis on identification and assessment in legislation may lead to support for young carers being overlooked' (Children's Commissioner for England, 2016:5) and that



approximately 80% of young carers may not be receiving support from their local authority (Children's Commissioner for England, 2016). The most frequent provision of support provided by local authorities is currently a referral to a young carer service (Children's Commissioner for England, 2016). These dedicated support groups provide young carers with a break from their caring responsibilities and offer a range of support which includes providing opportunities for children and young people with caring responsibilities to socialise, have fun, meet others with similar experiences, talk about their concerns, the provision of information, advice and advocacy and support for parents (e.g. Aldridge et al. 2016).

### 1.1.3 The Hampshire Young Carers Alliance (HYCA)

The Hampshire Young Carers Alliance (HYCA) is an alliance of ten young carer services or 'projects' within Hampshire, with the common aim of supporting young carers within the county (See Appendix A). One service is part of a national charity, four are local young carer specific charities and the other services form part of other local charities with broader remits.

Originally composed of five young carer projects, the Alliance was formed around 2005 in order for the individual services to work closer together, share good practice and resources, to develop a single county-wide voice, and to advocate and campaign for young carers within the county.

HYCA services are currently funded by a broad range of funding streams, including funding from the local authority. Historically, the services have had different capacities and have worked in varying ways to meet the local needs of young carers. As has taken place nationally over the last ten to fifteen years, some of the HYCA young carer services have complemented the respite activities, clubs and trips that they had generally offered (and that are common to most young carer services), with schools work and a 'whole family approach' to supporting young carers and their families. For some of the HYCA services, this has included employing specific staff to work with families and other staff to provide targeted work in schools.

Between 2011 and 2014, HYCA received funding from the Big Lottery 'Youth in Focus' (YiF) grant for a pilot county-wide project. At the time, only seven of the HYCA services were in a position to join this 'Hampshire Young Carers (HYC)' project. This pilot project employed seven 'Schools Workers' and five 'Family Workers' within the seven funded areas and delivered support to over 1300 young carers and their families. During this period HYCA also developed and advanced what it describes as a '3-pronged' support model, with its services offering respite activities, family support and support for young carers in schools.

### 1.1.4 Current provision of HYCA services

HYCA services are currently in contact with 1856 young carers across Hampshire. They are actively providing support to 1139 young carers, including 610 within

schools and they are supporting 952 families.<sup>1</sup> Services cover both rural and urban areas, with more urban areas covered by services such as Basingstoke, Fareham and Gosport and Havant and more rural areas covered by the New Forest and Romsey.

#### 1.1.5 Big Lottery Funding 2016 – 2019

In 2016 HYCA was awarded additional funding from The Big Lottery in order to roll out and further embed the '3-pronged' support model across *each* of the ten districts within the county where the HYCA services operated and to bring about a more consistent county-wide service. HYCA aims to achieve this enhanced and consistent service by further developing and strengthening its collaborative working and through sharing resources, such as a new shared database, whilst still maintaining the support delivered by the individual HYCA services that targets local needs.

### 1.2 The evaluation

Using an allocation of The Big Lottery funding, HYCA commissioned the University of Winchester to undertake an independent evaluation of the work of the Alliance over the three year period from September 2016 to August 2019. The evaluation presented HYCA with an opportunity to explore their service delivery and how the individual services worked together as an alliance. This is the first report from the evaluation and presents research that was undertaken between December 2016 and August 2017.

The evaluation is being carried out for the University by Daniel Phelps who has worked in the field of young carers for over sixteen years and has supported the development of local, regional and national policy and practice for young carers and families. Daniel, who runs the website [www.youngcarers.info](http://www.youngcarers.info), has sat on the National Young Carers Coalition, is an Observer Member for Eurocarers and is part of an International Advisory Board for developing support for young carers in Switzerland.

### 1.3 The research

The research, carried out between December 2016 and August 2017, was undertaken as the first stage of the three year evaluation of the HYCA Alliance. It investigated the interventions provided by HYCA services for young carers and their families, the needs and experiences of those young carers and families and the impact of the services on the young carers, their families and other stakeholders. A second area of enquiry explored the HYCA collaboration itself and its potential benefits.

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<sup>1</sup> These figures are the most accurate figures that could be currently provided by HYCA. During the research period HYCA introduced a new shared database to support their reporting. However, the figures were not able to be derived from the new database due to its introduction mid-year. Figures used do not necessarily reflect variations in how individual HYCA services define and record support for young carers.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Research questions and design

The research sought to explore the following questions:

- **What are the most important changes that the young carer services made to the young carers, their families and to other stakeholders?**
- **What is it about the services that creates those changes?**

A secondary area of enquiry sought to learn more about the HYCA collaboration itself, the views of different stakeholders about what the collaboration could achieve and what was needed for it to be successful. Staff from the HYCA services and professionals from other services were asked supplementary questions to explore this additional area of enquiry.

The research included the following:

- **A rapid collation of the views of young carers** (written on post-it notes during their regular young carer club sessions) about what difference their young carer service made to them and their families and what they viewed was most important about the service. This was used to inform the design of semi-structured interviews used for the main part of the research.
- **Semi-structured interviews** were carried out between out between January and March 2017, with young carers, parents of young carers, HYCA staff and with professionals from other organisations that had contact with one of the local young carer services.
- **A thematic analysis** of the data was undertaken and the **report** was written up.
- **An audit** of the HYCA services provision of support<sup>2</sup>

### 2.2 Research ethics

Ethical approval for the research was granted under the Research and Knowledge Exchange ethics procedures of the University of Winchester.

All interview participants were recruited through the young carer services. Informed, written consent for participation was obtained from all interviewees and for young carers, informed verbal consent was sought prior to the interviews and written consent obtained from their parents. At the commencement of the interviews, all interviewees were given an information sheet that was read out to them, setting out the purpose of the research. Confirmation that they were happy

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<sup>2</sup> The audit was carried out between May and August 2017 and following the interviews. This is highlighted since the provision of some interventions by some HYCA projects (such as support in schools) developed subsequent to the interviews taking place.

to proceed was sought and participants were informed that participation in the interview was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time. Interviews were digitally recorded, with participant consent. No individuals, or specific settings or localities are identified in the research findings and all legislation relating to data protection has been complied with. See Appendices for the materials used with participants.

### 2.3 Sorting exercises

Each semi-structured interview was preceded by two short sorting exercises where interviewees were asked to firstly sort descriptors of different HYCA interventions and secondly to sort statements about the importance of different interventions into different piles representing differing levels of importance.

This exercise was carried out for two reasons:

1. To act as an 'icebreaker' to set participants at ease before the main semi-structured interview, and
2. To remind participants about the range of different support provided by the young carer service which supported them.

The exercise was useful for the above reasons, however the report focusses on the substantial data source of the semi-structured interviews.

### 2.4 Semi-structured interviews

Each of the four groups interviewed (young carers, service managers, parents and professionals) were asked about the needs of young carers and their families, what were the most important changes that the young carer services had made to the young carers and families and what it was about the services that created those changes.

In addition, the service managers and the professionals were asked about the HYCA collaboration, what they felt it could achieve and what was needed for it to be successful

### 2.5 Samples

Purposive sampling was used to select participants for the interviews. Young carers were selected from different services and selection was based on various characteristics including age, gender, length of time they had been supported by the young carer service, whether they were receiving support in school from the service and who they cared for. It should be noted however that the young carer services identified the participants and that also the availability of participants to be interviewed was another factor in determining selection. The service managers from the HYCA services were selected to ensure that both small sized and larger projects were represented. Parents were chosen to ensure that some were cared for by young carers and in other cases, young carers were caring for another family member. The professionals selected represented four of the areas that the HYCA services worked within and worked in either education or social care.

Table 1: Interviews

| Participants   | Number of participants |
|--|------------------------|
| Young carers   | 8                      |
| Parents of young carers <sup>3</sup>   | 5                      |
| HYCA young carer service (project) managers (staff)  | 6                      |
| Professionals from other organisations that had contact with one of the local young carer services | 5                      |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>24</b>              |

One parent was interviewed from 5 different services (n=5). All five parents were mothers and 3 were the person who was being cared for by their children. 6 young carer service managers from 6 HYCA services were interviewed (n=6). 5 professionals from services that worked in some capacity with HYCA services were interviewed (n=5). 3 of these services were social care services and two were schools. 2 of the professionals had contact with one HYCA service, 2 had contact with the same HYCA service and 1 had contact with two HYCA services.

In total 24 full interviews took place. 9 out of the 10 HYCA services were represented by at least 1 participant being interviewed. Efforts were made to arrange an interview with at least one participant representing the remaining 10th HYCA service, however this was not possible due to staff availability.

On average the interviews lasted 31 minutes (range 20-60 minutes with 21 of the interviews being in the range of 20-40 minutes). Interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed.

## 2.6 Data analysis

Interview transcripts were analysed thematically to three levels of coding. An Excel spreadsheet was used to assign 'Level 1' code descriptors and 'Level 2' categories. 'Level 2' coded categories were then assigned into 'Level 3' themes away from the computer, using 'cut-out' 'Level 1' and 'Level 2' codes. Once themes were established, these were again added to the Excel spreadsheet in order for raw data (transcript material) and 'Level 1' and 'Level 2' codes to be viewed together within specific themes.

Throughout the report, where certain ideas were talked about by only a small numbers of participants, this is reflected by stipulating the number of participants who had talked about those particular points, whereas for more commonly expressed ideas, numbers of participants are not specified.

<sup>3</sup> One parent was supported in the interview by her husband who also contributed some responses.

### 3. Main Findings

#### 3.1 What young carers and families need

##### 3.1.1 What participants felt that young carers needed

When asked about what young carers needed, participants reported a wide range of different needs which reflected other research on young carers and which are likely to reflect the individual circumstances of young carers, including their age and their different caring responsibilities.

Some of the young carers interviewed felt that they needed some support with their caring role, 'how to care for them [a family member]' and with making sure that they are caring correctly for their family member. Several also spoke about needing emotional support, including dealing with anger, stress or with 'feeling down'. The need for emotional support was also discussed by several of the staff and professionals and one of the parents, with several interviewees stating that young carers needed to talk to someone outside of the family.

***'Often they need help from outside of the family unit. I can talk to our son a lot, but I do think it helps that there's somebody outside of the unit that can help and talk to him as well and give their view on things as well. So I think it's very helpful that he's got somebody here that he can talk to, if he needs to.'* (Parent)**

A number of young carers themselves highlighted the need to be able to have free time to relax, something that was also spoken about by the adult interviewees and the parent group in particular.

***'I think the most support that I think would be good, would be just relaxing and getting free time to do what we need to do.'* (Young carer)**

***'Getting a bit of a break I guess, it can be a bit overwhelming at home, so coming here it's a bit more sort of chilled.'* (Young carer)**

Parents predominantly, but also some staff, professionals and one young carer, talked about the need for young carers to understand their family circumstances better. This included an understanding of the illness or disability of the person they cared for, but especially the need to understand that they were 'not the only ones' and that there were other young people who were in similar situations to themselves.

***'It's knowing that they're not alone'. (Parent)***

Participants from across the different groups felt that young carers needed to be able to make friends, meet other young carers, and to have opportunities to socialise and experience new activities.

***'Just like building friendships up really, I mean I know my children have made some great friendships, so it's just enabling them to have more, more social time really.'* (Parent)**

***'Probably like being, like getting friends, cos sometimes I would like try and make friends but it doesn't always work.'* (Young carer)**

Other participants felt it was important for young carers to be able to manage their caring roles alongside their education, and couple of young carers talked about needing life skills, including the need for acquiring skills for dealing with money.

### 3.1.2 What participants felt that families needed

In the same way that young carers had a range of different needs, those interviewed felt that families also had a diverse range of needs, although participants were less clear in articulating what they felt the needs of families were. Staff from the young carer services were the most consistent in stating that families needed a wider support network for them as a family, including being signposted to support, or being given information about the support that was available locally.

***'They [the young carer service] will respond or signpost me to the right people if, if it's something out of their remit, sort of thing.'* (Parent)**

Three of the young carers spoke about the need for their family to have improved relations, where family members got on better with each other, managed their situations better and perhaps more calmly. This idea was also reflected by a couple of the professionals.

***'I think they need the support with, so to keep together as a family unit.'* (Professional)**

Two of the parents stated the importance for them as a family of having emotional support and *knowing* that someone was there for their family. Reflecting the view that young carers needed to better understand their family circumstances, one parent spoke about the value to them as a parent of gaining a better understanding of their own family situation. A couple of parents also highlighted the importance of knowing that their children were receiving support, that they were meeting others in similar situations and that they were being given opportunities to 'be children'. As one parent put it, *'allowing my children to be children'*. Two of the professionals also viewed this as something that was important for parents to know.



## 3.2 What HYCA young carer services do

### 3.2.1 What HYCA services do for young carers

The HYCA services aimed to give young carers respite opportunities (or 'a break from their caring'), opportunities to develop new skills, to experience new activities and to provide young carers with emotional support. The services set out to achieve these aims through a combination of individual support and group work.

All services ran both trips and young carer 'clubs' or 'groups', however the frequency of these varied across the services in relation to their general capacity. The groups ran either on a weekly, fortnightly or monthly basis and were split into different age groups depending on the service. Clubs and activity days offered a mix of activities such as cooking, sports or crafts; eating together as a group; opportunities to share experiences and have group discussions and free time to relax and 'chill out' with peers through for example, playing pool, table football, or table top games. One of the services had established a 'Young Carers' Choir'. Young carers were also able to access support in school, with the majority of services employing staff to work within both primary and secondary schools, run 'drop-in' sessions during lunch times, or support students individually.

#### 3.2.1.1 A 'package of support' and preventative working

These diverse interventions focussing on supporting the children and young people, in concert with the support aimed at the family (to ensure families and the person with care needs received adequate support), created a 'package of support' that was highlighted by some of the young carer staff as being important and which reflects views nationally about what young carers and families need (See Children's Commissioner for England, 2016).

A couple of the professionals highlighted the value of the preventative work that the young carer services provided, with one professional emphasising strongly how the work of the young carer services prevented the needs of young carers and families from escalating.

#### 3.2.1.2 A break from caring

One intervention of the HYCA services that was talked frequently about and evidently valued by young carers, parents, staff and professionals alike, was the provision of respite breaks for young carers in the form of clubs, activities and trips. This provision gave young carers regular opportunities to get away from their family situation and have a break from, and forget about their caring role.

***'We've kind of concentrated on helping them have time away from the family really, because that's where their pressures lie.'* (Staff)**

***'I suppose just getting away from it, you know, just getting away from the situation and how having time for themselves, time to think about themselves and just themselves, you know, to be able to take part in those things and make new friends and be with people who understand what they're going through. I think is really important for them.'* (Professional)**



***'I think to, to feel they have a life other than being a carer. So to have the opportunity to access other things, other activities, support, friends, without feeling that they've abandoned the person they're caring for.'* (Professional)**

The young carer clubs gave a space for young carers to forget about their caring responsibilities and simply 'be children'. They enabled them to relax, to meet with other young carers, to make friends and to have fun. Having the chance to 'be a child' was seen by some as being valuable for young carers, whose family circumstances might otherwise limit such opportunities.

***'They can come and let off steam and you know, especially the younger ones come in and they run, they run, they were all around, they throw themselves on sofas, they play fight, they do all of that and it's, they're able to be a kid, which I think is really important and then they can go back with a fresh mind, "I've gone and done my thing, I'm now back at home, back in the situation", enabling them to deal with it a bit better I think.'* (Staff)**

### 3.2.1.3 Opportunities for activities

All groups of participants talked about the importance of the broad range of activities and experiences that were offered at the clubs and the wide variety of trips organised by services. Not only did the activities provide a break from caring, but they allowed the young carers to try out new things, visit new places that they would not normally have the opportunity of visiting and to socialise with peers. The activities were also available during the school holiday periods, which are times when young carers may be especially isolated from their peers and might particularly benefit from having a break from their home situations and caring roles.

***'It also gives them the opportunity to experience things, especially in the activities that they really might not have any hope of trying out had they not have been involved with the project.'* (Professional)**

***'They get a chance to try out things they wouldn't necessarily have the chance to do, not just in clubs, but also if we take them out on outings. Quite a few of them won't go away, you know they don't go away with their families, so even having a day trip to Harry Potter World or something like that, they wouldn't, that's something they wouldn't normally do, so there's all of those, all of those things I think, but the socialisation I think is a really important bit.'* (Staff)**

One of the reasons cited for young carers not having the chance to do activities, was financial. The HYCA services however enabled young carers to access them by offering activities that were either free, or were offered at a minimal cost.

***'And I also, the activities on sort of holidays and things like that, it's new because well, we don't have much of an income at home and some of the free activities give a chance to do things that we wouldn't normally get to do.'* (Young carer)**

***'Because a lot of the families that we deal with might not have the funding, so it's important that they can, to give them that break away, because some families***

***don't do anything with their children on the weekend, so this might be the only opportunity to have activities and trips away.'* (Professional)**

#### 3.2.1.4 Supporting young carers at school

At the time of the interviews, most of the HYCA services were working in schools in a variety of ways, although to differing degrees. Interventions included one-to-one support with young carers, peer support groups and raising awareness of young carers with staff. Young carers, as well as their parents, spoke positively about the difference that the support that they received within school and with their schooling had made.

***'And like at the moment, I'm not very well, so he's struggling, I'm struggling to get him into school. Young carers [the service] have been good with that in the fact that they have sort of had a chat and say "You know Mum will be alright," kind of thing, "if you go to school."'* (Parent)**

HYCA services also delivered talks in school assemblies for example, with the aim of raising the awareness of the issues related to young carers with other pupils and to facilitate the identification of pupils who are carers.

***'They came to my secondary school when I started, they did a massive assembly and I went to go and speak to, I went to go and speak to them.'* (Young carer)**

***'And we still use that assembly now, we do get a good uptake of people signing up and that was probably one of the key things how we get them to say they're a young carer without singling themselves out, and they came up with the idea putting a slip by every single one's chair and if they wanted to, they could slip it in the box as they walk out.'* (Staff)**

The direct support facilitated by some of the young carer services such as 'drop-ins' within some schools, was also highlighted and valued by young carers. These groups were seen as supportive and somewhere where young carers could go to and relax and talk with other pupils who were carers.

***'Also, cos we have 'drop-in' at school. So you can go there at lunchtime and like share your feelings and like what you've been up to and stuff like that. So that helps you relax more.'* (Young carer)**

#### 3.2.1.5 Opportunities to meet and be with others in similar situations

The projects provided young carers with the opportunity to socialise and to meet up with other others and specifically with other children and young people who themselves had caring responsibilities. All participants spoke about how important it was for young carers to be able to meet other young people, and make friends with others who are in similar situations and who share the experience of caring.

***'They have opportunities to meet people who are in a similar positions to them, which I think as young people is incredibly powerful.'* (Professional)**

***'Well when I think about the young person accessing young carers, you know they're able to, you know, make new friendships and share experiences with***

***others so that they, that they know they're not the only person undertaking a caring role. You know, there are others like them, and through that connection, I think they make, possibly make strong friendships within the young carers' groups because they've got that shared responsibility at home.'* (Professional)**

***'I think certainly the young carers who come to our clubs don't get a chance to mix with other children outside of school. Sometimes they find it hard to mix with children in school, so if they're not getting that opportunity to, they're not getting that opportunity in clubs, they really, some of them actually will be quite isolated, so I think it is particularly to mix with other children.'* (Staff)**

The projects were often the first place where young carers had come across other carers and they provided opportunities for mutual support.

***'I mean I don't think they know many other children out of this environment that are young carers or you know, have to care for somebody else, so yeah it's yeah, it's, I think this is the only place really they get that from.'* (Parent)**

***'With the club I get to meet new people with the same sort of problems, which is also very good.'* (Young carer)**

***'They've got other young people who are in the same boat as them and suddenly there's a lot of peer support. But what we see is that the age range doesn't seem to matter as much, you wouldn't necessarily get a 15 year old wanting to hang out with a 12 year old, but the age doesn't seem to matter, it's more the fact that they are all young carers.'* (Staff)**

#### 3.2.1.6 Providing information to young carers

One young carer talked about how their project gives them information that supports them as a young carer and how this is beneficial.

***'They talk about stuff and they give you information.'***

### 3.2.2 What HYCA services do for families

In the same way that HYCA services supported young carers in a variety of ways, services supported families through a number of different approaches, with the overarching aim of supporting the whole family in order to improve the situation for the young carers themselves.

#### 3.2.2.1 Support for the whole family

Several of the staff, professionals and parent participants, expressed the importance of taking a 'Whole Family Approach' and strengthening the support for families through a number of ways. Some of the staff articulated that by supporting the family, this alleviates the caring role for the children. One staff member stated that it was more beneficial to support the family, or to provide individual support for young carers in schools for example, than it was for the young carers to simply come to the clubs for respite.

***'We do it as a whole family approach, so having the family on board, having any organisations that might be working with them, enables them to support them [young carers] with that caring role...It's enabling them to feel they can undertake that caring role, but then decreasing it as well, because ultimately that is what you want to do.'* (Staff)**

### 3.2.2.2 Initiating and developing wider support for families

Examples were given by those interviewed, of a range of different support for families that HYCA services had initiated by working collaboratively with other services. Support for families had been triggered for example, from adult's and children's social care, local housing associations and services providing parenting courses. Two of the parents interviewed, expressed positively how the service that was supporting them had initiated support for their family.

***'If they couldn't support me, they would find somebody else that would be able to do it, they wouldn't just go "Oh no we can't support you with that". They would find somebody that could support me with that, make sure that I felt comfortable with that.'* (Parent)**

***'They're [the HYCA services] able to also maybe point the families in the direction of other support and also do the home-visits, so I think it's good that sometimes you know, they go to the home so they can see, you know what the kids are living with and the parents can also see that there is some support out there.'* (Professional)**

### 3.2.2.3 Support through a Family Support Worker

The majority of HYCA services supported families through a dedicated role of 'Family Support Worker'. This enabled services to work with the family and support them in a number of different ways, including carrying out 'home-visits', referring and signposting to other services, and providing direct support and advice to parents on parenting and family relational issues.

***'Beforehand, without that Family Support Worker, if I'm honest, we didn't have the time to sit with families and listen to all their worries and work with agencies and get them involved and put that additional support in place. We just could not do it.'* (Staff)**

***'You know I can say to a parent, "If you just want a cup of coffee and a rant, give me a ring" and I can go and do that.'* (Staff)**

***'I did a lot, I did a bit of work you know with Mum, quite a lot of saying, "Now she's (the young carer) got a phone, do you think maybe, you know it might do her good to go out," and it's taking a little while now, but actually it's quite a good success rate. From October she is now allowed out to her friend's house and she's allowed to go around the block for a walk and go to the park and stuff, as long as she is home before dark. So that's, and that's helped her gain a little bit of independence rather than being her and Mum, a lot of adult company all the time.'* (Staff)**

#### 3.2.2.4 Supporting families with their home or accommodation

Services have helped families where their accommodation has been unsuitable, by providing very practical help such as with clearing a house. They have initiated support from other agencies to help families with their rent, with changing and modifying accommodation and acquiring vital furniture.

***'We have done house clearances so that a kid can get in the bedroom where it was just bizarrely cluttered. We got a skip and we went and cleared the house out, so we could get the kids into two different bedrooms instead of them sharing a bed.'* (Staff)**

***'We had a family that had a two floor, three levels, but two floors house and the bedroom for the disabled mum was right on the top floor and they had to crawl all the way up the stairs just to get to bed and through our Family Support Worker working with the housing associations, we managed to get some funding to be able to install a lift.'* (Staff)**

#### 3.2.2.5 Supporting families with finances

As part of the 'Whole Family Approach' to supporting families, HYCA services have helped families with their finances, including making them aware of which benefits they were entitled to and assisting them with completing forms.

***'Yeah, we help them, tell them what they're entitled to and keep them updated on what help they can get out there, and I spoke about benefits didn't I, and how a lot of families, especially with disabled people in the family, they don't know the benefits they're entitled to because they don't get told.'* (Staff)**

#### 3.2.2.6 Providing activities for the whole family

Some HYCA services also provided activities and trips for the whole family so that families are able to share experiences and have fun together as a family unit. Family events included a trip to a fireworks display, a family picnic and swim, and a Christmas gala event that brought families together for a Christmas dinner and to celebrate some of the activities that the young carers had taken part in.

#### 3.2.2.7 Facilitating mutual support for parents

A few of the projects have facilitated coffee mornings for parents to enable them to meet other parents in similar situations, reduce their isolation and find mutual support. This led to one group of parents who met regularly, organising a trip to the Winchester Christmas market. They were assisted by their young carer service who organised the transport and mobility equipment for the day.

Some staff felt that the mutual support and the experiences shared by parents at these groups was valuable and would engender hope in other parents who were perhaps not *'in such a great place'*.

***'It's just knowing that we're not alone, just making new friends, being able to, building a routine of going out on a regular basis, rather than being at home and isolated... just by having regular coffee mornings. And they've encouraged me and reassured me to be able to attend those things...'* (Parent)**



For some parents, the support and experience of their young carer service was clearly reassuring and helpful to them in developing their own understanding of their family situation and how to deal with it.

***'They [the project] probably know more about it, we're still trying to understand it if you like, trying to get our heads round how to deal with certain situations and things, so obviously they know a bit more about it and that has been really helpful in how to deal with things.'* (Parent)**

### 3.2.3 What HYCA services do for other stakeholders

#### 3.2.3.1 Supporting and complementing the work of other services

HYCA services supported and complemented the work of a diverse range of partners. For example, all ten services were linked in with their local Early Help Hub, providing information about children and taking up referrals from other services to support children where appropriate. All services were working with primary and secondary schools and the majority had links with colleges.<sup>4</sup> How HYCA services worked with schools varied according to the service, but included training staff and raising their awareness of young carers; running assemblies to raise awareness of young carers; running 'drop-in' groups for students and supporting students individually. Services also worked with a wide range of other agencies and professionals, including adults and children's services, community mental health trusts (CAMHS) and school nurses. HYCA services had also forged links with a wide range of other local charities who provided support for families, and activities for children and young people.

***'They [the HYCA service] attend the weekly hub meetings, so we have a multi-agency hub meeting once a week. So we will accept referrals from the [name withheld] [locality] that have been triaged by our kind of central system and if they are determined as needing a 'level 3 multi-agency approach', they are then heard at the Early Help Hub which is where all the professionals in the local area come. And young carers [the service] attend as part of that meeting, so they're aware of the referrals that we get and then they're happy to take referrals from that meeting.'* (Professional)**

#### 3.2.3.2 Training staff and raising awareness of young carers locally

HYCA services also spent time raising the awareness of young carers locally and training staff in other services, including schools.

***'The young people know that we know [about young carer issues], but that's credit to the young carer professionals, because they've spent a lot of time even before I was here, training people and delivering assemblies and being available at the***

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<sup>4</sup> One service had not been working with schools at the time the interviews were carried out, but had begun to undertake work with schools by the time the audit was completed.

***end of a phone if people had questions, wanted to talk things through with them.'* (Professional)**

### 3.2.3.3 Working at a strategic level

HYCA itself was involved in advocating for young carers at a strategic level by its representation on the county 'Young Carers Multi-Agency Steering Group' and supporting with the county strategy for young carers. The Alliance had also recently formed a 'Young Carers Action Group' that aims to increase the participation of young carers in the county and facilitate their voice being heard by policy makers.

***'I think the project plays a key role in enabling policy, enabling county and local boroughs the opportunity to explore their duties and what, and what young carers are going through.'* (Staff)**

***'I think, by us being the advocate for the young people and raising their voices through, that is what has enabled change, because we're down the middle, the middle link, between the young people and the bodies to make big decisions on where money gets spent and things like that.'* (Staff)**

## 3.3 What has changed?

### 3.3.1 What has changed for young carers?

#### 3.3.1.1 A diverse range of impacts

There was evidence of a range of positive changes for young carers attending the projects. Changes were evident at home, with their schooling and with their socialisation. Many changes were also internal and related to how young carers felt and how they perceived things. Many of the changes addressed the needs of young carers that were identified through the interviews and are described in Section 3.1 (such as making friends, having free time and being able to relax). These changes were recognised by both young carers and their parents, who all spoke positively about the support that they had received from their projects.

***'The positives that we've seen at home and at school I think really, the changes that we've seen, it's going in the right direction. We're seeing progress if you like. We're not stuck in the same place we were you know, six months ago, we have some positive changes.'* (Parent)**

#### 3.3.1.2 Projects help young carers relax and reduce their stress

The most common benefit or change cited by young carers, was that the projects helped them to relax and de-stress. Having an opportunity to be able to relax and having a space where they can have a break away from their caring role, is certainly highly important to young carers and these findings reflect those of previous research.

***'Before this group I stressed really badly, like I'm stressing 24/7, but now I've come here I'm not as stressed. I know that there's always someone out there that can help me if I need it.'* (Young carer)**

***'It's definitely helped with stress, I mean being at home all the time is quite stressful, so getting a break is quite relaxing.'* (Young carer)**

***'Oh it's given me that time to relax and like chill and get rid of the stress, cos I get stressful at work sometimes and stressful at home.'* (Young carer)**

The parents of the young carers also identified the benefit of children being able to relax and not worry so much. This they felt, helped to remove some of the pressure on their children which subsequently improved family relations within the home.

***'So she's not so stressed out and stuff...yeah and it makes life easier at home.'* (Parent)**

### 3.3.1.3 Projects improve how young carers feel

The young carers commonly reported that being part of, and attending the young carer projects, improved how they felt.

***'Well before I was quite unhappy because I was always busy and stressing at school and stuff, but being here I've noticed that quite a big change in emotions as well. But for good reasons, because made friends, had a laugh and done some activities with them.'* (Young carer)**

Several young carers stated that attending project activities gave them something fun to do and made them feel happier. Parents similarly reported that when their children attended their local project, there were improvements in how their children felt.

***'Just made me and my brother more happy, just like cos, instead of like sitting in the front room just being bored, they've actually changed that for me and my brother.'* (Young carer)**

Some interviewees described how the local services made the young carers feel better about themselves in other ways. They used terms such as 'special', 'valued' and 'normal' to describe positive changes in how young carers felt and which they attributed to the services.

***'I don't know whether it's the atmosphere, the people, I don't know what it is. I think you feel special coming to young carers, that sounds silly, but it's good to celebrate, I'm really, [sic] cos they are important and you know, they do an amazing job.'* (Parent)**

***'That they feel valued when they go there and you know, yeah that's about it I think.'* (Professional)**

***'It just gives them a chance to be themselves and to, to, I don't want to say for them, but to feel more normal.'* (Staff)**



#### 3.3.1.4 Projects help young carers feel more confident

Parents reported that their children had gained increased confidence as a result of attending their project, and this was reflected by project staff and a couple of the young carers themselves. Participants highlighted a general increase in confidence in some of the young carers, which enabled them to take part in activities and which also helped some to speak out about their caring roles. One young carer stated that they had become 'more confident' about their mother's disability.

***'He's a lot more confident, a lot more confident. He was very shy before he came to Young Carers.'* (Parent)**

***'He refused point blank, he wouldn't go [on a residential], but he wants to go with Young Carers [the project] and to me, I think that's fantastic that he feels confident enough to go with them, but not with school, that he's been for years, so he feels more at home at Young Carers than what he does at school.'* (Parent)**

***'I think I'm more confident about my mum's disability. When I was younger I didn't officially understand it, and now I think because there are more people who have shared similar experiences I can understand like and what to expect, or how to deal with these problems, because they've experienced the same sort of thing, maybe before me, so I can see what might be coming, which is good.'* (Young carer)**

#### 3.3.1.5 Projects help young carers make friends

Being able to meet and make new friends with others who also have caring responsibilities was commonly identified as being very important for young carers by many of those interviewed. In contrast to peers who may not understand the challenges that young carers face, the young people who attended the young carer groups had a common understanding of what it is like to be a young carer and this seemed to help facilitate the forming of friendships.

***'All together I've made new friends definitely. I've met new people who share similar problems and different problems. I mean not everyone has disabled parents.'* (Young carer)**

One young carer who had highlighted that he had previously not had many friends and had been bullied, felt that the project which he attended had enabled him make more friends.

***'In a way it [the project] gives you more friends as well, like I didn't have that many friends in school cos I got bullied quite a lot and I never went out, so most of my friends, we were like "you never hang out with us" and like just stopped talking to me completely, so...cos I was helping mum, they didn't understand my situation.'* (Young carer)**

Parents, project staff and professionals all reported that the projects had facilitated friendships by providing a space where the young carers were able to make new friends and socialise, both which were identified by this and previous research, as things that young carers needed.

***'Just like building friendships up really, I mean I know my children have made some great friendships, so it's just enabling them to have more, more social time really.'* (Parent)**

***'So, I mean from when we've talked with our young carers themselves, the two main things are, it is that time out, it's being able to make friends, having a bit of fun, just yes it is, it's that time away from being carers, but being around young people that understand what they're going through.'* (Staff)**

### 3.3.1.6 Gaining understanding and new perspectives about their situation and themselves as carers

Another common change, or 'set of changes' that was clearly very important for young carers, was that being linked to a project and meeting other young carers in similar situations, transformed how they understood and perceived their own situation as a young carer. This change in perception of their situation came about in different forms.

### 3.3.1.7 Young carers knowing they are not alone in being a young carer

Becoming aware of, or 'knowing' that they were 'not alone', was highlighted as a significant change for young carers by several of the parents in particular. It was perhaps comforting and reassuring for parents to know that their children had met other children who were in similar situations and therefore would not feel as if they were unique in having caring responsibilities. Parents clearly viewed this as being particularly helpful to their children and something which helped their children to feel less isolated. This was also reflected by staff and professionals and by a couple of the young carers themselves. For some young carers, their project was the first time that they had met other young people who were carers. For them, it was important to see that they were not the only young person in that situation, and that other young people also cared for relatives, as they did. One young carer spoke about meeting others at their project who went to the same school as they did and who they had not previously known was a young carer.

***'Because it's knowing that you're not alone, that you're not the only one who's going through the same situation on a day-to-day basis.'* (Young carer)**

***'Knowing that they're not the only ones, it is knowing. To begin with my children thought that they were the only ones so yeah, them knowing that they're not the only ones there, and that there's other people the same as them, and they can get on and they can talk to other people and stuff.'* (Parent)**

The value of young carers knowing that they were not the only ones with caring responsibilities was also strongly emphasised by several of the professionals.

***'I think it's really important for them to know that they are not on their own, I think that sometimes life is so different for them you know, they can get bogged down...'* (Professional)**

### 3.3.1.8 I'm a young carer - but it's OK!

Another important change in perception that was highlighted by staff and professionals, as well as by the parents, was that the projects - by introducing young carers to each other - helped young carers to feel that it was 'OK' to be a young carer. In a sense, it gave them a 'licence' to be a young carer and to feel comfortable about 'being a carer'. It was suggested by one professional that this realisation, that it was 'OK to be a young carer', was foundational, and important in reassuring young carers that 'no one's going to take [them] away.'

***'But yeah, I try and make it more of a positive thing and he's very proud to come. He loves coming and he's the first one to show off and say "I'm a young carer" and when we get into places well you know, he'll say I'm disabled, "I'm a carer yeah, I'm a young carer, I go to [young carer service name withheld] ". So he's very proud of it, he wears it almost like a badge.'* (Parent)**

***'So understanding that there is children out there also helping their parents yeah, and if it wasn't for Young Carers [the project], they wouldn't know that, because obviously it's not something that's spoken about at school.'* (Parent)**

### 3.3.1.9 A greater understanding and confidence about their caring role and what to expect

One professional stated that learning how to 'deal with', or to 'manage being a young carer', was one of the things that young carers needed the most support with. There was no suggestion that this implied young carers should get used dealing with inappropriate and excessive caring roles (which would be contrary to the principles for supporting young carers as set out in English legislation (HM Government. (2014b)), but rather about learning to deal with their family situation and the fact that someone in their family needed care.

There was evidence that the groups did help change the perception that young carers held of their caring roles and their capabilities as a young person with caring responsibilities. Some young carers described how seeing others in similar circumstances to their own, seeing them cope, talking with them and learning about their experiences, had helped them gain fresh insight and confidence in their own ability to help care for family members. One young carer talked about how the support the project had given them had helped them become a 'better carer' and a 'better person'.

***'Coming to a group where people grow up with it and they're used to it and they sometimes talk about it, so then I get a bigger influence from them.'* (Young carer)**

***'When I was younger, I didn't officially understand it, and now I think because there are more people who have shared similar experiences, I can understand like and what to expect, or how to deal with these problems because they've experienced the same sort of thing, maybe before me, so I can see what might be coming, which is good.'* (Young carer)**

One staff member spoke about how young carers are sometimes not given sufficient information or adequate explanations for example, about the condition or disability of a family member.

***'Sometimes they [young carers] don't know what, ... they don't know what autism is straight away, it's, and they might just say, "oh just means that he can't handle situations and he gets, he doesn't like loud noises for example"... sometimes people don't explain it enough.'* (Staff)**

There was evidence however that the support offered by the young carer services (for example by providing young carers with information and by facilitating opportunities for discussions), enabled young carers to gain more understanding about their family situations, including about the illness or disability of a family member. This in turn gave young carers more confidence about dealing with their individual circumstances.

***'They have helped (our son) maybe to understand his brothers, what he may do - you know - that I think he's understanding him a bit better.'* (Parent)**

***'When I come here, I get more support and information of like what to do and how to control stuff.'* (Young carer)**

#### 3.3.1.10 Projects help young carers develop social skills

Several young carers talked about how attending their project had helped them develop their own social skills, including increasing their patience, being able to be a 'good sport' and developing the ability to ignore others, if for example, someone was 'being mean' to them.

***'Coming to club, it stops you having to do certain things and it teaches you new skills as well, so it like de-stresses you and teaches you new things as well, like, like if you are playing a game, a game or something, it teaches you not to be a sore loser or something yeah!'* (Young carer)**

Responding to the question about what the important things were that the project had changed for them, one young carer replied:

***'My relationship with other people. Cos here everyone's being nice, but at school some people are really mean, and here if people are mean, we just ignore them cos there's lots of other things to do. So at school I've been taking that there, so if people are mean to me, I just ignore it, let them do it, sooner or later they'll get bored if you're not reacting.'* (Young carer)**

#### 3.3.1.11 Improvements in school

A few young carers and parents talked about how their project had improved things for them in school or with their schooling. Young carers stated that having joined their young carer project, they had been able to relax and not worry as much about the person they cared for whilst they were at school. They reported emotional changes, including becoming calmer and being less stressed and also improvements with their school grades, which one young carer attributed to the revision they had done with others at their young carer club.

***'And I think what they do here and all the other groups that they do, I think it's fantastic work...it was difficult to cope with things at times. And I do think coming here it's reflected both here and at school. You know his school life has settled down really well cos he's in year five now. Year four was challenging and year five***

***since he's started he's much calmer. Year five has been a lot better. And I do think coming here does help.'* (Parent)**

***'It's made my life a little easier to be honest, cos it like, cos obviously with my GCSEs I got quite stressed cos of all the, all the trying to look after my mum and revise at the same time, but coming here gave me the time to revise, like I came here revised and got like, got better at school basically, a lot better. I was going to get like an E I think, in English and Maths, and I got a D, so I was really happy with that. I only failed by four marks in English and six in Maths. So I improved massively.'* (Young carer)**

One parent highlighted that their son's behaviour in school had improved once they began to attend the young carer group and one young carer stated that their own behaviour had improved once they received support from their project. Before they had received this support they would *'always feel stressed and angry'*, and were given detentions *'all the time'*.

### 3.3.2 What has changed for parents and families?

#### 3.3.2.1 A diverse range of impacts

As there were for young carers, there was also evidence of a range of positive changes that took place for the families of young carers being supported by HYCA services. The parents who were interviewed all spoke positively about the support they were receiving from the projects.

#### 3.3.2.2 Initiating support from other services

There was some evidence that HYCA services were initiating further support for families from a range of other services. For example, some of the professionals highlighted that the HYCA services regularly referred families to other services (for example through the Early Help Hub). This facilitatory type of support however was generally not focussed on by young carers or parents themselves in the interviews. Although some parents did report that their HYCA service would help facilitate further support for their family, responses focussed primarily on how the HYCA services supported them directly.

***'They will respond or signpost me to the right people if, if it's something out of their remit, sort of thing, so yeah, it's been you know, valuable all the way through.'* (Parent)**

One of the professionals discussed how the young carer service had contacted their service [the Early Help Hub] to inform them that the support in place for one of the young carer's parents had not been adequate. This communication subsequently triggered a successful intervention for the family.

***'The care package stopped and the young girl was worried that mum wasn't going to have a shower or have her bath. So she then shared that with Young Carers [the project] as part of the, I don't know if it was part of the group***

***discussion or just, and then they phoned me and we were able to get that sorted out... so the kids know as well, that we are all in it together.'* (Professional)**

Another example shared by one of the HYCA staff, revealed how their service had positively changed the situation for one family by contacting the appropriate agency responsible for their accommodation and by advocating on their behalf.

***'We managed to get their rent arrears waved, managed to downscale their house as well because it was slightly too big. Got them into a nice, a nicer accommodation. Managed through another organisation to get beds and beddings clothing etc. We just completely changed their life around.'* (Staff)**

### 3.3.2.3 Providing support for the child helps parents

A further change that was highlighted by parents was simply knowing that their child was receiving support from the project. Parents were pleased and reassured that their child was meeting other young carers and having the chance to socialise and have fun.

***'One of the biggest changes that have made for me is seeing a smile on my children's face, which means there's a smile on my face.'* (Parent)**

***'My brother gets really excited when I come in the door which is always nice to see and so does my mum and it's also helping my mum because she doesn't have to cook dinner for me because they do that here as well. And my dad's just happy to see that I'm doing something outside of what I usually do.'* (Young carer)**

***'I suppose again it gives them some confidence that their children are engaging with other children, that they do have some out of school activity that is focusing on them.'* (Staff)**

### 3.3.2.4 Projects help to improve family relations

Both young carers and parents credited the projects for improving and stabilising family relations, calming their households, and keeping, or bringing their family closer together. It was reported that young carers developed a better understanding of their home situations and dealing with and communicating with siblings who they cared for. Parents felt that when their children had respite at the clubs and on the trips, they became calmer, which '*calms the whole house down and breaks things up, so it's more manageable*'. One young carer stated that the biggest change the service had made to their family, was that there were '*not as many arguments*'.

***'So I do think you know, as a result of [the children] coming to the groups here, I can get them to calm down quicker than normally I would have done.'* (Parent)**

***'So they're calmer which makes the home calmer, yes which makes us calmer. It's a knock on affect.'* (Parent)**

When asked how else the project helped them and their family, one young carer replied:



***'I don't know, they've just brought us together more. Yeah, brought us together.'***  
***(Young carer)***

### 3.3.2.5 Projects help families have fun together

Another positive change was simply the opportunity for the family to be able to have fun together. This was highlighted by some young carers who indicated that it was perhaps not often possible to go out and have fun as a family unit, as a consequence of their family situation.

***'And with the sort of family meet ups, being able to do something exciting and new, it's a bit of a change for a family.'*** (Young carer)

When asked which part of the project they enjoyed the most, one young carer responded:

***'It's got to be either the club or the family events, only because with the family events, you don't see your family all happy at once a lot, with that sort of situation, so all going out is very nice.'*** (Young carer)

### 3.3.2.6 Parents knowing there is support for them to turn to

An important change that the projects have made for the parents themselves, was helping them move from a place where they had felt alone, to *'knowing'* that they were not alone and *'knowing'* that there was support there for them, if and when they needed it.

***'It's just knowing that we're not alone.'*** (Parent)

This assurance that there was a support network - someone there for them, in the background, who was there to support their family and who they could talk with if they needed to - was highly valued by parents.

***'Feeling like there's somebody there that I can talk to about my children as well, I mean if I had an issue with one of my kids, I know that I can phone them [the HYCA service] and if they couldn't help, they'd point me in the right direction and that's one of the biggest things I find that's really positive because you don't feel like you're on your own. When I first, when the kids first started going to Young Carers, I was quite depressed um, I tried suicide um and at that point I felt alone, I don't now, which is the biggest step ever.'*** (Parent)

***'It's knowing that they're at the end of the phone. So if I am having a bad day, they're always willing to, to talk to me, things and like there's the Facebook page so I can message them privately, so you know at some point they can, they will respond or signpost me to the right people if, if it's something out of their remit, sort of thing, so yeah it's been you know, valuable all the way through.'*** (Parent)

One parent described how having support herself from their local HYCA service had reduced her stress and had helped to improve the way she dealt with things.

***'When [name withheld] [HYCA Support Worker] first came out to see me, we had a nice long chat – very informal chat you know. I did feel so much better after'***

***seeing her. Whereas before, from being very uptight and very stressed about things, I'm not as stressed now. Some things do still stress me out, but you know, I've learned how to deal with things better and calmer, so I'm not as stressed if you like.'* (Parent)**

### 3.3.3 The wider impact of HYCA services: What has changed for other stakeholders?

#### 3.3.3.1 Supporting and complementing the work of other services

There was evidence that where HYCA services were working collaboratively with other local services including schools, they brought additional specialist knowledge and complemented the work of these services in a variety of ways. Professionals working for those services spoke very positively about the HYCA services. They appreciated the work they did for young carers and families and the added value that HYCA services brought to their own service.

***'They're very good, as a team of people they certainly know their stuff in [locality name withheld]. We have a bronze award in [the school] and certainly looking at different things that we can achieve to move that forward and we are very well supported by [name withheld] [the young carer service staff member working in schools] in that setting. I think they're good at it.'* (School professional)**

#### 3.3.3.2 Increasing the collective resource of an area

In addition to the changes that HYCA services had made to young carers and their families, HYCA services also impacted other services with whom they have partnered or collaborated with. Firstly, the individual HYCA services have increased the collective resource of their particular area. Their existence enables other services in that area to refer children and families who are known to them, on to the young carer services for additional support. Extending the capacity to support young carers and families beyond that of their own service, was evidently valued by the professionals from other services. Indeed, several of these professionals stated that the capacity of their own service to support young carers was limited and that the support from the young carer service was an important asset.

***'In [locality name withheld] we are very short on services for families as a whole and because they [the young carer service] take part in the Early Help Hub and work closely together through Supporting Families, it's just a resource that I know that I can guarantee on, I can guarantee and rely on [the] young carers [the service] picking up the young people that I refer to them.'* (Professional)**

One professional reflected that if the young carer service were not to exist, then this would leave a 'huge' gap in support for children.

***'I think it would be very difficult, well I mean there are...we wouldn't be able to provide the services that they, that they provide, so I think it would be a real shame.'* (Professional)**



Staff in schools also talked about the value of the additional capacity that the HYCA services brought, as well as the additional specialist knowledge about young carers that they had helped introduce into the schools.

***'I think, certainly this school would do everything they could to still have the one-to-one support and still have the drop-in, but our capacity to do that would be incredibly limited without the young carers project and without [name withheld]. We certainly wouldn't have the extensive knowledge of families that [name withheld] has and [name withheld] and the team has, because there probably wouldn't be a forum in which we'd be able to gather that information in a way that they [young carers] felt safe or happy to share.'* (School professional)**

### 3.3.3.3 A 'catalyst to support': Improving engagement of young carers and families with other services

As well as increasing the capacity for supporting young people and families within an area, where HYCA services were working collaboratively with schools and other services, this was helping to initiate and improve the engagement of young carers and families with these services. HYCA services were therefore acting as a catalyst to the support that young carers and families were receiving from those other services.

***'I do home visits in my role anyway, but [name withheld] [the Young Carers School Support Worker] and I will link up if we think it's valuable for families to have somebody from school and have [the young carer worker] and it's quite nice if families haven't engaged with us up until that point and they have a good relationship with [the young carer worker] for [them] to do a bit of a 'warm introduction' and families to know and put a name to a face of someone who they can talk to in school.'* (School professional)**

One school professional who had the role of 'School Lead' for young carers, described how the young carer service had introduced young carers to them and had complemented the work that the school did with families.

***'Families feel much more able to engage with school without having to explain anything else.'* (School professional)**

***'I personally think there's a huge benefit in that person introducing other people who may be able to help in a way that doesn't feel threatening or judgemental and it helps in terms of them linking up with us ... schools can feel like quite an intimidating place if you're trying to call in the morning and you've got to go through four different options before you get someone on the phone for example. And I think if they know there's a person that they can speak to who they can, they know, they know a face, they know what they're about, they know that they know their story. It can increase that engagement in a way that you might not [get], just by picking up the phone, to say "I'm such and such and I work with [the Young Carers School Support Worker] in school."' (School professional)***

### 3.3.3.4 Bridging the support gap for young carers

For several of the professionals, another important benefit of the young carer services was that they bridged a gap in support for young carers and their families

over holiday periods. Where schools for example were not in contact with young carers over holiday periods, this was seen by some of the professionals as a potentially vulnerable time where young carers might be isolated and unsupported. However, since parents were able to contact the HYCA services throughout the holiday periods and young carers were able to attend activities, professionals were reassured that children and families were not left without support during these lengthy periods.

***'For me, it's really nice to know that there are people checking in with the families. I don't have capacity, certainly for the holidays it's very nice for me to know that parents can pick up the phone to ... whoever is in the office ... they're not going to go six weeks in the summer for example, with not being able to access anybody.'* (School professional)**

***'You know for example, school holidays I know that there are other professionals that's going to be engaging with those children over the summer holidays...'* (Professional)**

### 3.3.3.5 Increasing the awareness and understanding of young carers

The HYCA services working within schools, had also contributed to raising the awareness and knowledge of young carers with school staff in general, as well as with those staff who held specific responsibility for young carers. They therefore had increased the capacity of schools to identify and support their own pupils with caring responsibilities.

***'[Name withheld of the young carer service staff member working in schools] came in and kind of took me under her wing and taught me what there was to know about them [young carers]...'* (School professional)**

***'It's raising the awareness, and I think by raising awareness it's enabled schools and other organisations to be more aware of what a young carer is and how to identify them. You know, when I first started nine years ago and I went to a school, they didn't have a clue what a young carer meant, what it was and how they identify. If I go there now, they know exactly who to identify and who to kind of pass on, so in terms of a change from a project perspective I think that's a key element. Without those [HYCA] projects being in place and national projects doing the same thing nationally, young carers would still be right down here and be unrecognised.'* (Staff)**

### 3.4 What is important about the young carer services for facilitating change?

This section sets out a range of features of the young carer services that were identified as being important for helping to facilitate the changes experienced by the young carers specifically<sup>5</sup>. These features include, how the projects are staffed, how they operate and the conditions the services bring about. Although a sizeable list, there are likely to be additional important features that facilitate change for young carers.

#### 3.4.1 Staff play an important role

Young carers and parents strongly emphasised the important role played by HYCA staff. The majority of young carers, parents and professionals interviewed, spoke extremely positively about staff and the significant role that they played in making the projects supportive for young carers. Responding to a question about how their project was different to other groups that they had attended, one young carer stated that:

***'Probably the people who work here. They're really nice and if you do something wrong, they don't go straight on and tell you "Oh you're not allowed here anymore", you've got to do something really bad to do that.'* (Young carer)**

***'They're amazing, they really are yeah.'* (Young carer)**

Participants also spoke frequently and extremely positively about how helpful and supportive HYCA staff were towards both young carers and parents alike.

***'Supporting our family through like tough times if we're having problems with home or anything, they're always there to support you as a person, they don't just sort of brush it aside, they really want to sort it out, so it's genuine.'* (Young carer)**

***'I don't know, I just think that they're an amazing bunch of people and they're always, they're supportive. If I walked in today and say I've got this problem, that problem and they'd say "Right well, let's try and sort it. Can I help?"'* (Parent)**

***'They're really helpful and if you need support they'll give you support and they'll comfort you in a way and they'll make you feel better about yourself. And they just make you happy really, yeah.'* (Young carer)**

Participants stressed the importance of the character of HYCA staff, and described staff for example as being 'really nice', 'caring', 'kind' and having 'compassion' and 'loyalty'.

***'I think it's the, the support workers and of the type of people, but loyalty and the passion and love for the work that they do.'* (Professional)**

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<sup>5</sup> Despite the evidence that HYCA services brought about changes for young carers, their families and for other stakeholders, the analysis drew out important features of the services that are mainly related to the changes associated with the young carers themselves. Some of the key features that are discussed here however may also be important in bringing about the changes for the whole family and the changes for stakeholders.

***'They're a caring bunch, all of them are.'* (Parent)**

***'The feedback from the young people has been that they've [staff] always been very kind and caring...'* (Professional)**

***'My personal experience of [the staff member] and her team, they have great compassion, again they, the children's needs are always paramount, not just the children, but the whole family.'* (Professional)**

How staff engaged with the young carers was also highlighted, and recognised as playing an important role by several of the participants, as were the individual personalities of staff. Their personalities were among other things, described as 'fun' and 'laid back'. It was clear that the staff brought a positivity to the groups which encouraged and enthused young carers to take part in activities and to enjoy them.

***'They give a lot of support and definitely a lot of support, they do try hard to keep us entertained. It's great going there. I do like it!'* (Young carer)**

***'Well I think, you know my experience of it is, it's run by really young, enthusiastic people who I think are absolutely brilliant at their job. They involve the children, get them excited about things, you know, really encourage them to come to different activities...'* (Professional)**

***'Well like they always like try and make everybody laugh, not like in a bad way, like just like make you laugh just like trying to be funny.'* (Young carer)**

### 3.4.2 Skills, knowledge and experience of staff

The skills, knowledge and experience that staff brought to the role were also clearly valued by young carers and parents, but particularly by professionals. The fact that staff clearly had a strong understanding about the issues faced by young carers was recognised as important. Two of the HYCA managers interviewed, emphasised the importance of training for staff, as well as for the volunteers who worked for the projects.

***'The people, the staff, need to be well trained, have experience of working with young people, not necessarily have to have direct experience of working with young carers, but it helps. The volunteers need to have undergone training around the basics about safeguarding, confidentiality, have an understanding of young carers and their needs and the impacts that caring might have. And once you've got that, then you've got the basics of a, of a good support group.'* (Staff)**

***'The skill set of those people, the length of time that they've been doing the role that they've been doing, the understanding what's the children's needs. Yeah, it's the individuals themselves that make the service what it is and it's the loyalty and how they are, you know, willing to go beyond, to meet, to support the child.'* (Professional)**

***'I know that [the support worker] is very skilled at what she does and stays in contact with parents. Nine times out of ten, knows things about families way before I do. So I think having that relationship with somebody who isn't in school and just feels like they're there to help, is important to families.'* (Professional)**

### 3.4.3 Projects provide specialist support for young carers

The fact that HYCA services provided specialist support for young carers, rather than simply providing generic support for young people, was highlighted by all groups of participants.

***'Well projects themselves are specialised because the group of young people we're working with is very targeted, it's not generic, so the things we're offering is specific to a young person, a young carer. So whilst we look at the needs of them as a young person, we'll be looking at the specific needs of being a young carer. So that might be looking at the understanding of the illness of the person they care for and making sure that they have a sound understanding of their parent's, sibling's medical conditions. And obviously you wouldn't get that through a generic youth club, so it's finding the balance between offering a fun place for them to have some time out and also giving them that space to offload.'* (Staff)**

***'There are other outside clubs, but they don't help with the in particular young caring sort of idea...' (Young carer)***

One reason given by one of the professionals as to why a specialist service for young carers was important, was that it provided a space where the young people felt that others understood their situation.

***'I think it's because it's specifically for the young carers, so I think it's very much, there's not that explaining, so the young people know what the young people around them are there for. It might not be the same situation, but they're there because they've got, they live in families where there are difficulties and there are additional pressures on them.'* (Professional)**

### 3.4.4 Projects understand young carers and families

Since HYCA services targeted support for young carers specifically, staff had a deep understanding of the needs and circumstances of young carers and their families. Young carers appeared to have confidence in services and to feel comfortable and safe in the knowledge that their project had knowledge of, and experience of working with other young carers. The value and importance of staff who understood about young carers was reported by many of those interviewed. Some contrasted this high level of understanding and awareness by HYCA staff with that held by other professionals and services.

***'It's more focused on the young carers, it's definitely not as stressful and people here get it more. Sometimes with teachers they don't understand certain things, or they try to understand too much.'* (Young carer)**

***'This is just based on people that help their parents or other family members... Other different youth groups, they don't know your background like the staff here do, so they support you when you need it and or even if you don't need it they try and support you as best as they can. But if you're in the other like youth groups around [the area] they don't really know you properly in a way, so they don't really know your background.'* (Young carer)**



***'I think the counsellor in school, she's very good, she listens but in some respects she doesn't personally understand, sort of problems, whereas people in [the young carer service] have either had experience, or that understand those experiences better, because they've either dealt with more people with a problem, or dealt with it themselves.'* (Young carer)**

The value of services having a specialised knowledge and an experience of working with young carers was also highlighted by two of the parents who acknowledged that this was beneficial in supporting both their children, themselves as parents and their families.

***'Again it's someone that knows, and they might have been through those things with other people, and I haven't been there, so it's always good to have someone with more experience than I have.'* (Parent)**

#### 3.4.5 Projects tailor support for young carers based on needs

***'It's a very person centred project. So it's driven really by the needs of young people rather than just prescribed.'* (Staff)**

Two of the HYCA staff in particular, talked about the importance of targeting support and providing bespoke opportunities and activities to meet the needs of the young carers in a very responsive way, based on for example, conversations with young carers. One manager expressed how their service had targeted small groups of young carers rather than delivered activities 'en masse'.

***'I believe actually that we work hard to put on really key, bespoke opportunities that fits the needs of the young carer and fits their ambitions and wants. I think there's, there's much more reasoning behind that as to then why they do succeed and I think that's where the confidence comes from.'* (Staff)**

This ability of at least some of the services to be responsive, flexible and to offer bespoke and creative interventions, targeted at the needs of individual groups of young carers, was summed up by one manager:

***'If they have any particular issues then we can do work on that, so self-harming or anything else that's going on. Focus sort of focus groups, we got sexual health to come in to talk to the kids because we had quite a few who were struggling with that, so whatever the need is, we can tailor it and pretty much do anything...'* (Staff)**

#### 3.4.6 Projects provide consistent support for young carers and families

A number of times participants talked about the consistency that their local young carer service had provided for young carers and families. For one parent this consistent support had been in place for a number of years and had clearly been important and helpful to them. It had helped build their confidence in the service and in the service's ability to help them.

***'Because they've been supportive in everything that I've been through, in the years that I've been with them, they've always supported no matter what it is. If they couldn't support me they would find somebody else that would be able to do it.'* (Parent)**

According to one HYCA manager, the consistency that they were able to provide for families contrasted with others services that supported families.

***'Consistency of support. One of the things that we're told time and time again is that we are often the most consistent thing in a family's life, so being able to offer that consistency and stability. Lots of statutory children's services, adult services come and go, there's a high turnover of staff at work within those organisations, so I think the project, certainly this project would offer some stability in that.'*** (Staff)

Another manager stated that there was a high degree of consistency within their service and linked this with the fact that staff got to know the young people and built relationships with them.

***'Same workers work the project all the way until they either leave or you know...there is a lot of consistency. We have the same people running the club each month, month in, month out, so yeah.'*** (Staff)

Another form of consistency that was talked about by a couple of the professionals was the consistency of providing support through clubs and activities throughout the year, and especially throughout the school holiday periods.

***'And you very much will hear [the young carer worker] discuss after school groups and drop-in or things that they've done in drop-in and you know that there's a consistency, which I think is important.'*** (Professional)

#### 3.4.7 Projects provide a range of support

Another important feature of the young carer services is that in general, they offered a variable and very diverse range of interventions and opportunities in order to meet the diverse needs of young carers. For one professional, this variety of provision was valuable and in their opinion unique.

***'And it's just the wealth of, the variety I think of the things that they put on offer, it's not the same thing all the time, you know, yes you get to come and meet your peers and people who are going through similar, similar ages and that sort of thing, but you know, you are offered all of these opportunities. Where else would you get that? It wouldn't happen anywhere else.'*** (Professional)

#### 3.4.8 Clubs 'not forced' and having a balance of structure and freedom

A couple of the young carers expressed how important it was that the clubs were somewhere they could go to if they wished to, but equally that they did not feel obliged to attend if they didn't want to. Similarly, some young carers, valued the fact that the activities at the clubs were 'not forced' on them, but were offered as a choice.

***'It's not very forced, it's not like other clubs where you have to go to every single session, it's not, if you don't want to go then you don't have to that week. But then again, you can go to them whenever if you need a bit of support or help outside of club.'*** (Young carer)

***'Getting a bit of a break I guess, it can be a bit overwhelming at home so coming here it's a bit more sort of chilled. There's nothing that you have to do, you don't have to do anything you don't want to do, but at the same time you can do anything that you do want to do.'* (Young carer)**

Two of the staff described how efforts were made to achieve a 'balance', or 'combination' of structure and free time within the sessions; where for example young carers could talk about issues, and where they could simply be free to 'be children' and to have fun with their peers.

***'And obviously you wouldn't get that through a generic youth club, so it's finding the balance between offering a fun place for them to have some time out and also giving them that space to offload.'* (Staff)**

As well as the importance of achieving a balance of 'structure and freedom', one HYCA manager highlighted the benefit of involving young carers in the design of the activities programme.

***'It's that combination of some structure, but not so structured that that they feel like they're back at school or it's a classroom...so they are involved in agreeing their programme of activities for the term, so there's some of that, which perhaps they don't have in other parts of their lives, where they can actually take the lead on certain things. It's about what they want to do, so I think all of those elements make, make up how the club session would run well and how they engage with it well. Yeah.'* (Staff)**

#### 3.4.9 Projects are relational

One of the important features of the HYCA services was staff getting to know the young carers (and the families) and building relationships with them. As one manager highlighted, the relationships were not simply between the young carers themselves who attended the groups, but between the young carers and the project staff, including project volunteers.

***'I think certainly the relationships, so the relationships will not just necessarily be with between the young carers themselves, but those relationships that they develop with the volunteers, with the youth workers, so with the adults involved in the project, all of that's important certainly yeah.'* (Staff)**

***'I don't know, I don't really know, it's a hard question, it's more personal maybe, more heartfelt, more like a family member helping you rather than you know, someone outside helping, more like having a friend isn't it I suppose, cos that's what we are really.'* (Staff)**

One factor that perhaps helped support the building of relationships was the available time that some HYCA support workers were able to spend with the young carers. This time factor was spoken about by one parent and one of the service managers.

***'I think yeah as I say, when he [the son] first started coming, they [the service] were with the confidence thing, they knew he was shy and it brought him out of his shell and they sort of gave him that extra time and they're now helping***



***him with his weaknesses and with his strengths. He's clicked quite a lot with (the support worker.)' (Parent)***

***'The numbers are lower so we can spend more time with the young people and we can actually, it's quality time rather than are "You OK?", "Yes thanks bye". It's, "Right, OK I'm able to sit down with you," and we have quite a lot of members of staff because then we're able to give that time. So if somebody's helping out with the food in the kitchen, somebody's there to chat with them for that. Somebody could be sat on the sofa, somebody could be playing pool and there'll be another one just floating, or doing an arts or crafts activity as well so...' (Staff)***

The majority of the parents affirmed the idea that staff got to know the children well and that they built positive relationships with them. This in turn was recognised by some parents as an important factor in how well their child engaged with the project.

***'My daughter has anxiety issues and if she didn't have that one-to-one relationship with them [staff], she wouldn't feel comfortable and she wouldn't want to come, so which meant that she wouldn't get a break from me.' (Parent)***

***'I know that they're being well looked after. They [staff] get to know the children very well so if, they can pick up very easily if there's anything wrong. I know it's confidential as well, it's just having yeah, they've enabled us to build up trust in them which is quite difficult to gain sometimes.' (Parent)***

One manager discussed the value of having time available to offer to families to talk with them if they needed to. This was reflected by several of the parents who spoke positively about the opportunities that they had to talk with project staff.

***'I think that parents like that, and we are trusted, and I can give time to a family whereas someone from children's services can't, and I've got volunteers who can give their time to a family and so I think it's that more human element rather than belonging to an institution, it's like you know, I can say to a parent, "If you just want a cup of coffee and a rant, give me a ring" and I can go and do that.' (Staff)***

#### 3.4.10 Young carers feel safe, accepted and supported

All the young carers and parents, as well as staff and professionals, agreed, and several emphatically, that the HYCA groups were somewhere safe and supportive for young carers to go. Interviews revealed that there were a number of factors that contributed to this view.

##### 3.4.10.1 Guidelines and no bullying

Some young carers felt that their group was safe because of the guidelines and the group contract that were in place in their group and that everything was confidential. One young carer reported that there was never any bullying in their group and this was something that a couple of staff also highlighted.

##### 3.4.10.2 Being with other young people who understand

It was frequently expressed by all those interviewed, including young carers themselves, how valuable it was for young carers to be with other young people with caring roles, who were in similar situations and who 'understand' or 'know' each other's background. Young carers felt comfortable and accepted when

attending the groups since they knew that others understood about being a carer and would therefore not judge them. Simply knowing that others within the group understand seems to be really important for the young carers, and helps them to feel comfortable, able to relax and make friends within their projects.

***'I know that we, that a lot of them say that once they've started to come onto the programme, they feel better and it's, and I think a lot of it is just knowing there's someone else there who understands what you're going through.'* (Staff)**

***'The carers themselves, because we all doing a caring role, being able to relax together and just having a break. All in all, knowing that we have sort of similar roles, it's quite nice to know.'* (Young carer)**

***'Just a relaxing atmosphere to be honest. Everyone's not manic, there's no bullying or anything here. Everyone knows each other background, so like I said earlier, everyone knows each other's background so it's easier to talk to people about what's going on in your life in a way.'* (Young carer)**

One of the staff proposed that when young carers met with others in similar situations and saw their positivity, this helped them to feel better themselves and more positive about their own situation. This idea of being with other young carers and seeing how they coped, was also something that was reflected by some of the young carers themselves.

***'Well it's once you become happy in life isn't it, and then you can change your thought processes and if you've got people role-modelling to you or if you're with people who are in the same situation as yourself and other people are positive, then you start to think positively and they're not feeling sorry for themselves because they're all in the same situation.'* (Staff)**

#### 3.4.10.3 Services build trust with young carers and families

Several of the young carers articulated that *'trust'*, was another important factor that contributed to the feeling that their project was a safe and supportive environment. Young carers felt that they could open up to others with confidence that what they said would not be talked about outside of their project.

***'Knowing that everything's confidential, knowing that people aren't going to judge on you and judge on the situation that you're in with your family.'* (Young carer)**

***'Well I mean some, I'm actually best friends with one of the girls that come to this group and she tells me everything, she feels comfortable in telling me something. So then it makes me feel better that people from this group can trust me and I can trust them too for me to speak to them.'* (Young carer)**

Similarly, the importance of trust being built up between the services and families was also something that was raised several times and as one would expect, appeared to develop over time, out of the relationship between the service and the families.

***'I think building a relationship with the family is just as important because they then learn to trust you and also who they're, whose lives they're putting their little young lives in charge in somebody else's hands.'* (Staff)**

***'I know that they're being well looked after. They get to know the children very well so if, they can pick up very easily if there's anything wrong, I know it's confidential as well, it's just having yeah, they've enabled us to build up trust in them which is quite difficult to gain sometimes.'* (Parent)**

#### 3.4.10.4 Early intervention to prevent negative impacts escalating

A couple of the professionals highlighted the value of the preventative work that the young carer services provided, with one professional emphasising strongly how the work of the young carer services helped to prevent the needs of young carers and families from escalating. The work of the young carer service they proposed, benefitted a multi-agency approach, supported the earlier identification of issues within families and therefore helped to keep support costs lower through earlier, preventative interventions.

***'So for young carers [the service] to go in, the project to go in and work with that family and put in those strategies to support the family and to enable them, then that stops them reaching that safeguarding level of level 4. So it is a safeguarding, but it hasn't yet peaked to that level 4 to need a social worker involved.'* (Professional)**

### 3.5 How do the HYCA services help facilitate change for young carers?

The previous section discussed some of the key features of the young carer services that were thought to be important and were valued by participants. These key features of a young carer service may be important pre-conditions for enabling the changes for those young carers to take place. The interviews also revealed some 'key dynamics', or mechanisms, that participants highlighted as being important, and which appear to be significant in helping to bring about the changes for young carers. Again, this does not assert to be a comprehensive list of these mechanisms.

#### 3.5.1 Being able to talk helps young carers

In addition to being something that *'has changed'* for young carers as discussed previously, being able to talk to someone may also be a *'key dynamic'* for facilitating change. There was strong evidence that being able to talk about issues, concerns, or things they were struggling with, was extremely important for the young carers and beneficial to them. This was frequently spoken about by the majority of the young carers interviewed, the majority of parents and was also backed up by staff and professionals. Talking with others encompassed talking with peers, talking with staff and talking in structured groups designed for the young carers to share together – 'Purple Time', as it was called in one project. Different terms were used by interviewees to describe the benefits of talking

including, 'having emotional support', 'offloading', 'having an outlet', 'sharing' and 'having a listening ear'.

***'I will talk outside of Young Carers [the service] or in, in the clubs things, we would sit down in the corner and have a chat.'* (Young carer)**

***'You go there and you get to share your highs and lows and like what you've been up to in the last week and what you're looking forward to.'* (Young carer)**

Some of the young carers reflected that what was important, was the opportunity to talk about their issues. However sometimes, they'd prefer not to talk about their situations, but rather to forget them.

***'It's understood, but you don't have to say anything about it, you don't have to talk about it, you can just forget it if you want, for the time that you're here, but if you do want to talk about it, that's ok too.'* (Young carer)**

Young carers also placed value on knowing that there were people in the young carer group who they could talk with, and on feeling free to talk about their personal issues if they wanted to, rather than having to worry about being judged by people who didn't understand.

***'Mainly just knowing that people are here to talk to...'* (Young carer)**

***'It's just knowing that you can talk about that if you want to and not having to hesitate and divert around the conversation.'* (Young carer)**

Parents also spoke about how important it was for their children to be able to talk with others. When asked about what they felt had contributed to the positive changes that they had seen as a result of their child being on the project, one parent replied that:

***'I reckon it is knowing that there's people around and that they can go on and talk to other people. I do think that's a big part of it.'* (Parent)**

Several parents also underlined the value to their children of having someone to talk with other than themselves and someone outside of the family. One parent reflected that their child would particularly not wish to talk to them if they were having a 'down day'.

***'They've got other children and obviously the adults that they can turn to if they need to talk to somebody. Where before it was probably hard for them to come to me because obviously, if I'm having a down day they don't want to make me, not upset and angry but obviously... if I've had a fit, they don't want to come to me and talk to me about it, they need that outsider to talk to about it because obviously sometimes it's not easy talking to your parents about some things.'* (Parent)**

### 3.5.2 Having mutual support

The majority of young carers talked about the benefit of the mutual support within their projects that they experienced with other young people. Often this support was articulated by young carers as being able to talk to others about problems,

but it also included supporting each other with revision and getting ideas that supported them in their caring role.

***'Being around your friends and with the people, it's just, you can talk to them about anything and they would know how to help you, or they can try and help you and so can your friends because like, if they've been through that situation, they know what to do, so it's quite supportive.'* (Young carer)**

***'But you know, but some people revised like me, [names withheld] people like that and we like helped each other with all the difficulties we had.'* (Young carer)**

The value of mutual support was also emphasised by several of the staff interviewed. Managers talked about how the young carers looked out for, and supported each other, and about the close 'bond' that the young carers had with each other in their projects. Some staff spoke about how young carers of different age groups mixed together and supported each other.

***'I know that also that as soon as you get a new child come in, and they come from a different school from everybody else, the bond that comes from all of the kids together is quite incredible, I've never seen it in any other group of kids that I've worked with. The fact that they all have this, they look out for each other, no matter who they are, where they come from, you know, what their differences are, they stick together it's quite incredible actually... it is yeah.'* (Staff)**

***'They got other young people who in the same boat as them, suddenly there's a lot of peer support, but what we see is that the age range doesn't seem to matter as much. You wouldn't necessarily get a 15 year old wanting to hang out with a 12 year old, but the age doesn't seem to matter, it's more the fact that they are all young carers.'* (Staff)**

### 3.5.3 Being a child and having fun

Several of those interviewed talked about how young carers, as a consequence of their caring responsibilities or family situations, missed out on being able to 'be children' and having the opportunity to just have fun.

### 3.5.4 Being a child or young person

The services however provided young carers with opportunities to have a break from, and to forget about their caring role, to take part in activities, and therefore enabled them to simply 'be children' or young people. This was evidently something that was valued strongly about the young carer services.

***'So by accessing Young Carers [the project] they have had opportunity to be a young person, undertake all those things that young people do and to just shelve the responsibilities as a carer for some time.'* (Professional)**

***'I've just seen so many people come into 'club' and leaving and we've still like been friends so like they've kind of given me a childhood really cos I didn't really have it cos I was caring for my mum, so they've kind of helped with that yeah.'* (Young carer)**

#### 3.5.4.1 Just having fun

The importance of having fun with other children was also frequently highlighted by those interviewed and was clearly also valued by young carers themselves.

***'Probably like every like usual Tuesday, I just usually just come home, sit on my bed bored, but now they've changed that for me so I get up, be active and have fun instead.'* (Young carer)**

When asked how the project had helped make their child happier, one parent replied:

***'The fun, the excitement, just knowing that someone is there, that someone cares.'* (Parent)**

***'I think something that my kids have found the hardest thing, is obviously we used to go on the train, used to go to the beach, we used to go to theme parks, we used to do all that. I can't do that no more with them, so I think that's one of the hardest things that they've had to overcome, being a child. Obviously being an adult it's not so hard for us, but being a child, it's taken that fun factor away and obviously Young Carers [the project] help with that because they go with them.'* (Parent)**

#### 3.5.5 Looking forward to something helps young carers

In addition to enabling young carers to have fun and to 'be children', the projects provided young carers with something to look forward to and to get excited about. Knowing that they have their young carer group where they can get away to regularly, was beneficial and gave young carers a lift. As well as knowing they could attend the regular young carer club nights, young carers often knew in advance what other activities were coming up from a programme of activities that the services developed.

***'You know, and particularly knowing that the youth club's on a weekly basis, it, it breaks it down for them knowing that they can have a night off sort of thing.'* (Parent)**

***'It's just knowing that I have something to look forward to when there is something to do with young carers.'* (Young carer)**

***'It's a bit of a change. It's something to look forward to, something new and exciting usually.'* (Young carer)**



## 4. Main Findings: The Hampshire Young Carers Alliance (HYCA) Collaboration

### 4.1 The benefits of the HYCA collaboration

#### 4.1.1 Increasing provision for young carers

Across the board, staff from HYCA services as well as the professionals interviewed, were very positive about the closer HYCA collaboration. Firstly, the three year funding from The Big Lottery was viewed as extremely beneficial and would enable services to increase their provision of support for young carers and improve the stability of the services. One HYCA staff member and a professional suggested that the closer collaboration might be useful in drawing in further joint funding and as another put it, *'It will open more doors'*.

***'Having the extra funding is fantastic, it's helped us be able to provide more. It's helped us, I mean I'm going back where I was working on 16 hours a week, me and me only, and volunteers, and I was the only paid member of staff ... so yeah, the funding has been a massive helping hand and we can do more things. We can take them out, we can provide more craft activities and more stuff so yeah.'* (Staff)**

#### 4.1.2 Mutual support through the collaboration

The support for individual services that has come out of the collaboration, was expressed very positively by HYCA staff. They talked about feeling less isolated and more supported by working closer together with colleagues from different services and knowing that there were colleagues from whom they could seek advice, if they required it.

***'We're well supported through our relationship through HYCA and everything we get there, so we've got a really strong grounding.'* (Staff)**

***'Because it's support isn't it, apart from anything. You feel supported and know that if you don't know something, you can turn to something else and get advice and help.'* (Staff)**

***'The thing is that you tend, you are in a bubble aren't you really, day to day you plod on with what you're doing and it's so all-consuming that it's really hard to see outside of that until you go along to a meeting and there's all that going on and you think "ah yeah ahah."'* (Staff)**

Staff used phrases such as *'power in numbers'* and *'united front'* to describe the collaboration and one manager described how working together as part of a larger group with shared goals, was empowering for them.

***'Having belonged to HYCA and being part of that and going to the meetings, you realise that you're all doing the same thing, which is fairly rewarding and it empowers you I think to be able to then, when you meet the kids, to know that you're all doing the same thing.'* (Staff)**



***'It's a united front which I like, a team, 'Team Hampshire'. Quite like that to be honest!'* (Staff)**

#### 4.1.3 Consistency of practice

Several staff and professionals expressed positively how the collaboration and working to the 'three-pronged approach' to support young carers and their families, should bring about a greater level of consistency of practice across the county.

***'A more standard way of working I think, a high standard of working, we are all singing from the same hymn sheet.'* (Staff)**

***'The other thing obviously, it's very strong to be able to see that we've got, a whole of Hampshire approach, and we're trying to reach consistency of approach. So what a young carer should receive is similar level of support and their family receive a similar level of support wherever they live in Hampshire.'* (Staff)**

One professional stated that an enhanced consistent approach by HYCA would benefit those professionals who were working across different areas in the county and were therefore working with more than one HYCA service.

***'But if they are all one, I think that will help with consistency of service, and I think for professionals, I guess it's handy for us to know that everybody's working to the same agenda.'* (Professional)**

A couple of staff felt that a more consistent and standardised level of support might be achieved by modelling those HYCA services where the provision of certain interventions was strongest. Some staff felt that a greater consistency in data collection would provide more robust information on the numbers of young carers across the county.

#### 4.1.4 Directly benefiting young carers

Staff also suggested that a more consistent county-wide service would have direct benefits for young carers. Firstly, a similar level of support would help remove any 'post-code lottery' to receiving support and secondly it would be of benefit to young carers where there were 'cross-boundary' referrals taking place.

***'Well it should eradicate the 'postcode lottery' that I kind of feel is still out there, so yeah you shouldn't be getting a different service depending on where you live, it should generally be the same regardless of what area you are in Hampshire.'* (Staff)**

It was suggested by a couple of participants that young carers might benefit from activities that were jointly run by the services which would provide opportunities for young carers to meet with others who lived in different areas.

***'It's good for our young carers to meet with other young carers from different areas.'* (Staff)**

Several participants commented that the collaboration had the potential to help increase the awareness and understanding of young carers across the whole county.

***'There'll be more opportunities then to more widely publicise young carers as an issue and to offer more and better opportunities for the young people.'* (Staff)**

#### 4.1.5 Sharing knowledge and resources as a collaboration

Staff were also generally very positive about how the collaboration would be helpful in sharing resources. For some particularly, they felt that it will be beneficial to them to find out about, and share with other HYCA staff, ideas about practice and activities for young carers.

***'You can get stuck in your own little rut and your own way of working sometimes. I think it's really helpful to hear other people's ways and then sometimes they've got a way and understanding, or they know things that you don't know. So you know, because we can't all know it all, so I think it's sharing brains, which I think is really helpful.'* (Staff)**

***'For me personally as a manager, from the support standpoint, having other people from the other projects to be able to bounce ideas off, I think it's something that will only grow ...'* (Staff)**

***'We are all trying to achieve the same things, we are all there to support each other, share ideas, share resources...'* (Staff)**

## 4.2 The development and success of the HYCA collaboration

### 4.2.1 What is needed for the success of HYCA?

A few themes emerged with regards to what was important for the ongoing development and success of the HYCA collaboration. Firstly, a couple of staff expressed the importance of all services in the collaboration ensuring that they lived up to the initial agreement set out in the collaborative bid to the Big Lottery, with regards to the development of the consistent 'three-pronged approach'. Moreover, they stated the importance of all services contributing to the development of the collaboration, rather than it solely being driven by a minority of the services.

***'It's everyone's involvement...everyone needs to be on board, everyone needs to support this and work with the strategic lead to ensure this happens.'* (Staff)**

***'Some 'buy-in'. For other projects to see the importance HYCA. For them to not only understand the importance of it, but be willing to put their fair share of work into it.'* (Staff)**

A couple of staff highlighted the importance of consistency with recording data and of developing more standardised guidelines, processes and paperwork to enable the consistency in practice that the collaboration sought to achieve.

Examples where standardisation might be developed included assessment and referral processes and the forms used by services for reporting. One staff member specifically commented that there was a need for clearer guidelines on the referral process.

***'I think we need clearer guidelines on what everybody is doing. It's like when you have a referral, my opinion of what a young carer is might be different from what [another HYCA staff's] opinion of what a young carer is.'* (Staff)**

***'So it is more about the referral form, the initial assessment and how we do those initial assessments is linking into My Star<sup>6</sup> as well and the process for that. But it's also about how we record that data...'* (Staff)**

On a very practical level, a couple of staff mentioned the importance of ensuring there is efficient communication between the services. One member of staff felt that emails to their questions had been slow or had not been replied to.

***'So it would be helpful if we had replies to emails a bit quicker.'* (Staff)**

And when asked what they needed from HYCA, another staff member stated:

***'Good communication.'* (Staff)**

#### 4.2.2 Potential areas for development

Responding to the question about whether there were any changes that they wanted to make to their individual young carer project, staff suggested a range of different areas for development. Staff from three services reported that they might like to increase the frequency of the clubs that were offered, in order that young carers would have more regular support.

***'I'd like to provide the kids with a club each week. Instead of seeing them on a monthly basis, cos we've got 100 children on the books...'* (Staff)**

More regular support for young carers had also been highlighted by one of the parents as a potential area for development.

***'Maybe more than just once a month. Maybe more than...cos sometimes it can be a long time in between...'* (Parent)**

The manager from one service that was currently not offering support in schools, acknowledged that young carers were not being identified by schools in certain areas and were therefore not being referred to their service<sup>7</sup>. This was therefore highlighted as an area for development for that particular service.

***'So that's something we don't do that at the moment [school's work]. It's important, but we're not doing it, do you see what I mean? It's kind of, it's important, it's where we want to get to, but we're not actually currently offering it.'* (Staff)**

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<sup>6</sup> A proprietary tool used by HYCA services for supporting and measuring change.

<sup>7</sup> This service began to deliver school's work by the time the audit was carried out.

This service was still considering the best model to approach the work in schools in order to achieve most impact, whilst recognising the capacity of their service.

***'So actually we've got quite a few schools to engage with, but what perhaps my ambition would be to, rather than have a scattergun approach, is to actually do some really solid work with a small number of schools and then let them try and promote it to their surrounding schools, than to sort of, to do a little bit in each, because we won't achieve great impact that way.'* (Staff)**

Further areas highlighted for development by managers included the acquisition of a minibus, increased work with siblings, the development of more outcome focussed small group work and more out-of-school support. Two of the managers acknowledged that they wanted their service to further develop the provision of their family support.

***'I'd like to be able to give more family support to be honest, we are very heavy on the needs of the young people...'* (Staff)**

One service manager stated that they particularly wished to develop a support group for parents.

***'I'd love to be able to do like a family group you know, where maybe parents could attend a group like a support group or something. That's something I've wanted to do for years and years and years.'* (Staff)**

## 4.3 Concerns and challenges related to the HYCA collaboration

### 4.3.1 Capacity and services starting from different positions

A couple of services spoke about how their service was significantly less developed than some of the larger services and suggested that this would involve additional and more challenging work in order for them to attain a similar level of provision. There was some concern expressed from the manager of one service about how their service would be able to accommodate increased numbers of young carers who might be identified as they developed their approach to provision. They also stated that they would need the support of other HYCA services that had greater experience, in order to grow their service.

***'Our expectation is as soon as we have the family support and the more activity in school support, that's going to trigger more referrals, so actually we need support to be able to manage the growth of the service. We are definitely not reaching as many young carers in [the area] as we should be and the thing is, once you start opening up what the families need, we don't know what that might turn out, so we really need as much expertise as we can. The other thing obviously, is that other organisations have got a stronger infrastructure than we have in terms of our young carers' work.'* (Staff)**

***'We could end up with significant more development work that we'll need to do to meet the need and needs that come up when we start actually opening the doors and finding out what's behind them.'* (Staff)**

Two services were keen that the other HYCA services understood that they were currently not in such a strong a position as some of the others and that it would take time for their service to build up their provision to the expected level.

***'These are all things that we're way behind, way, way behind the other projects in offering that sort of support, so these are all the things that we're working towards.'* (Staff)**

***'Honestly, understanding that we're not at the same level as some of the rest...'* (Staff)**

***'Understanding that we're not going to be up to that level as quick as some of the others because this is new and it's happening quick, so you can't change it from a very small young carers tiny little group, to suddenly you're doing twelve residential a year and you're doing...it just doesn't happen.'* (Staff)**

When asked about whether they had any concerns about the HYCA collaboration, one manager stated that they did not have concerns with the collaboration in general, however their concern was about letting down the other services.

***'No, not with the collaboration, only that we're letting down the rest of the, we're potentially letting down the other partners with not being, pushing as far, as quickly as we should have done with developing the family support and the schools support...'* (Staff)**

#### 4.3.2 Additional workload from the HYCA collaboration

A second area of concern was in relation to the increased workload that had come about as a consequence of the HYCA collaboration and the consistency it was trying to achieve. A significant change that took place during the research period was the introduction of a new shared database. This had created additional work for services, which was raised as a concern, although it was mostly recognised by the services as something positive and beneficial in the long run.

***'I don't know what I need from HYCA because you're just so busy, you don't have time to think about those things. Unfortunately I think they've added to our workload with this database.'* (Staff)**

***'Ah no, no, it just creates challenge for us, for because there's things that sometimes creates more work but then that's a good thing because the work is only benefitting the project.'* (Staff)**

#### 4.3.3 Sustainability

One manager highlighted their concern about financial sustainability and the possibility that if further funding was not secured, then they would have invested significant work into the development related to the HYCA collaboration for it only to be 'taken away' in the future.

***'And obviously the other thing is the continuity with the funding and why is it you do all this work like with the database for instance, and then in three years' time or two years' time, whenever it runs out, there's no guarantee that we're going to have it again, so that could all just be taken away from you.'* (Staff)**

## 5. Conclusions

### 5.1 Main conclusions

(Relevant to all those interested in the development of policy and practice for young carers and their families).

The research set out to find out about the interventions provided by HYCA services for young carers and their families, the needs and experiences of those young carers and families, and the impact of the services on the young carers, their families and other stakeholders.

This report has described:

#### **The needs of young carers**

Reflecting previous research, this study found that young carers have a broad range of needs including: having emotional support; being able to have a break from their caring roles and free-time to relax; having someone outside of the family to talk to about personal issues and concerns; having opportunities to socialise, make friends and experience new activities and understanding that they are not the only young people who are carers and that there are others in situations similar to their own. Some young carers felt that they required support to help them with their caring role.

#### **The needs of families**

The study found that families also have a range of different needs which include having a support network and information about available support; improved family relations; having emotional support and knowing that someone 'is there for' their family. Parents who were interviewed focussed primarily however on the needs of their children. For them, it was important to know that their children were being supported, had opportunities to forget about their caring roles and were able to 'be children'.

#### **What the young carer services do**

The HYCA young carer services all provide opportunities for young carers to meet with others in similar situations to their own. They deliver a rich and diverse range of interventions for young carers and reflect the service delivery of many young carer services across the UK. Interventions include: respite activities (or opportunities for young carers to have a break from their caring roles); day trips; residential trips; dedicated young carer clubs, offering varied activities; individual and group emotional support and support in schools. HYCA services also provide support for families through a 'whole family approach'. They initiate a variety of further support for families from other agencies and support families directly, although not all the services had a specific 'Family Support Worker' role. The majority of services were also providing family activities and opportunities for parents to meet up for mutual support through coffee mornings. All services were



working through their local Early Help Hub and by the end of the study all were working with local schools. HYCA services were not offering identical levels of support however. There is inconsistency with for example, the regularity of groups that young carers could attend, the level of schools work being undertaken and the degree of support available for families.

### **The impact of services**

There was evidence of a diverse range of positive changes that took place for young carers and their families. Young carers themselves experienced positive changes at home, at school and in their social life. Knowing other children with caring responsibilities, making friends and having regular groups to attend, had helped reduce isolation that young carers might have been experiencing. Other internal changes had also taken place relating to how young carers felt. For example, there was evidence of young carers feeling more relaxed and less stressed, and happier and more confident about themselves being a young carer and about their family situation. Many of these changes that took place, reflect those needs of young carers that were identified in this and previous studies.

Services also brought about changes for families and reflected the needs of the families identified by the study. For example, families benefit from knowing that the young carer services are there, and knowing that there is support for them that they can turn to, if they need it. Families also benefit from additional support that is facilitated by the young carer services, from other services such as social care and housing services. Other important changes that took place for families were improvements in family relations and the reassurance and comfort that families drew from knowing that their children were receiving support and were being given opportunities to socialise.

There was evidence that HYCA services were also having a wider impact on services with whom they had links. Firstly, HYCA services increased the collective resource of the areas in which they operated. For example, by working with their local Early Help Hub, they were able, as well making referrals to other services, to receive referrals from services themselves. They also acted as a 'catalyst to support' for other services, in particular with schools. By sharing their expertise with schools, and through joint working, HYCA services enhanced the provision of support for young carers that schools offered and helped young carers – and families – engage with that support.

### **Important features for facilitating change**

A large number of different features were identified and are described that appear to be supportive in helping to facilitate the changes experienced by young carers. These included a 'diverse package of support interventions'

offered by services; the specialist nature of the HYCA services, enabling young carers to meet other children with caring responsibilities and to feel safe, supported, understood and accepted; the significant role played by staff; the relational nature of the services; the consistency of the support provided by individual services and the early intervention that services engender.

### **Key dynamics in facilitating change**

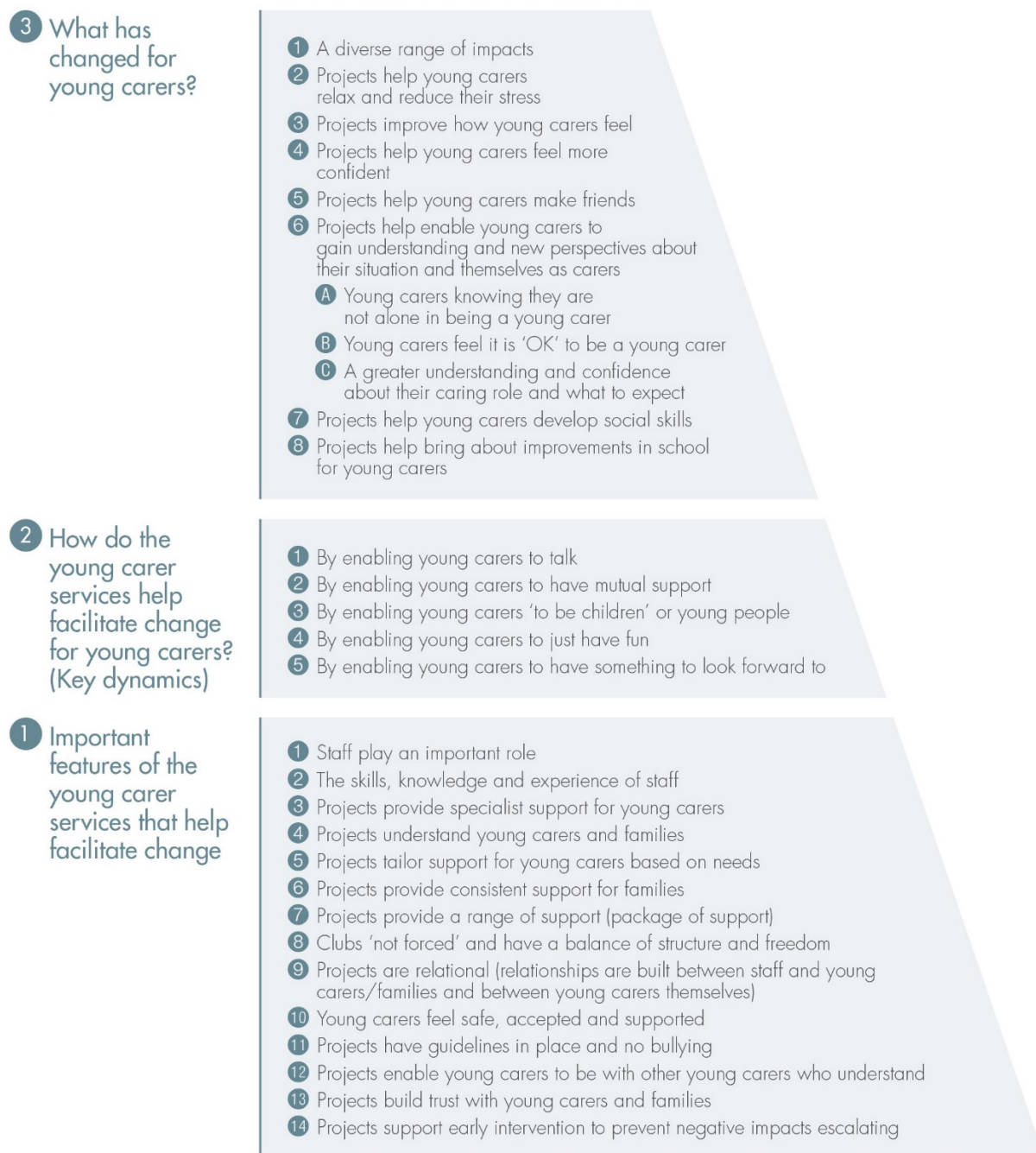
The report describes some 'key dynamics' that appear to be particularly important in helping to facilitate change for young carers, such as talking with other young carers, providing mutual support and having opportunities to 'be a child' and to have fun. Previous studies have also highlighted the importance of these for young carers.

Based on the findings of this study and what has been identified as being important in helping to facilitate changes for young carers and their families, recommendations are made as to how the young carer services can further develop and strengthen their service provision. These recommendations to the young carer services include recognising and valuing what has been identified as important in facilitating change and maintaining and developing work in those specific areas. Recommendation is also made for services to consider how they promote their service to young carers, families and stakeholders, in ways that accurately reflect what has been identified as important about the services and the changes that the services bring about.

## 5.2 Supporting Change for Young Carers

The findings of this study have led to the following model (in development), that proposes a hierarchical structure for how change for young carers may be facilitated by the young carer services.

Figure 1: Supporting change in young carers: Model in development



Model in development,<sup>8</sup> by Daniel Phelps, University of Winchester:  
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<sup>8</sup> Although this proposed model is focussed on changes for young carers, there may be some parallels to a corresponding model for changes connected to families. Several of the important

The lower tier, Tier 1 of the model, summarises the important features of the young carer services that were identified by participants. The author proposes that where Tier 1 features are in place, this engenders the Tier 2 'Key dynamics', which in turn help facilitate the positive changes identified and set out in Tier 3.

It is not proposed that the model is rigid. The author accepts that the tiers can be viewed in a more fluid way and that it may well be argued that certain features set out in one particular tier could be placed in an alternative tier. For example, 'young carers being able to talk', or 'young carers just having fun' could be viewed as changes in themselves. Conversely, it could be reasoned that for example, 'young carers gaining new understanding and new perspectives about their caring role' (a change) might also be a 'key dynamic' for change and therefore be placed in Tier 2. It is also not proposed that any of the tiers is an exhaustive list, but rather, what has been included, has been derived from this particular study on the young carer services within Hampshire.

What the model does attempt to do, is to differentiate between the changes experienced by young carers and the 'key dynamics' involved in those changes, and the features of a young carer service that are important, and which may be foundational in *enabling* those 'key dynamics' (or mechanisms).

For example, where services create an environment where young carers can mix with other young carers who understand them and where they feel safe, accepted and supported, this is likely to enable them to talk about their own situations and concerns and worries, whereas they might not feel comfortable talking in another environment. Similarly, young carers are likely to find mutual support as a result of the relational nature of the projects, the trust they build with other young carers who understand them, and feeling safe, accepted and supported.

Lastly, those involved in the development, funding or commissioning of young carer services, or who support these services in any way, may wish to consider how they can help *create the conditions* that enable young carer services to build those important features within Tier 1.

### 5.3 Conclusion: The HYCA collaboration

(Relevant to the HYCA Alliance specifically and those interested in the development of similar collaborations of services).

The research also set out to find out about the HYCA collaboration itself and how the ten young carer services were working together as an alliance and the potential benefits of this. The findings from this study reveal that participants – both HYCA staff and professionals working for services engaged with the young carer services – are predominantly positive about the potential benefits that the HYCA Alliance could bring about. Participants felt that the three year funding from the Big Lottery, along with the enhanced collaborative working of the ten services,

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features of the young carer service, for example, relate to both young carers and families (parents).

would lead to increased service provision and improved working practices that in turn had the potential to directly benefit young carers.

The potential benefits of the collaboration are:

1. Improved consistency of practice and procedures across the county, resulting in a more consistent offer and service for young carers and their families, as well as improved and a more consistent awareness and understanding of HYCA services by stakeholders across the county.
2. An enhancement of knowledge sharing and resource sharing across the HYCA services, including operational tools, ideas and resources to enhance practice, such as the delivery of respite activities. Improved sharing of knowledge and resource has the potential to develop the provision of individual services and reduce costs for individual services and for the Alliance as a whole.
3. Increased mutual support amongst HYCA services and their staff resulting in: decreased isolation of HYCA staff; improved transference of knowledge across services (in particular between more developed services, and those less developed and with less capacity); improved support with the development of services.

The report also sets out some concerns held by HYCA staff about the collaboration itself, which include: the additional workload that the enhanced collaboration has brought about; the variable contributions that individual services make towards the work and development of the Alliance; and the challenges that result from the differing sizes and capacities of HYCA services and specifically those for the smaller, less developed services.

A general conclusion would be that the HYCA collaboration has many potential benefits, however, in order to fully realise these, there should be acknowledgement by the Alliance of the concerns in relation to the collaboration that are held by individual service staff and prompt action taken to address those concerns. The report offers a set of recommendations for the Alliance based on these findings.

## 6. General recommendations for services

(For HYCA young carer services, but also relevant to young carer services in general).

### 6.1 Services and the workforce

- Develop service provision and criteria for accessing services that promote preventative working with young carers and families.
- Recognise the value of services having both specialist knowledge of young carers, and providing specialist support for young carers. Maintain these specialisms when developing services.
- Recognise the value of the character and skills of staff. Invest in regular training and development opportunities for staff.
- Recognise the value of providing a consistent service and aim to maintain a consistent workforce with a stable workforce.
- Continue to recognise the value of working in schools and develop collaborative models of practice that reach all schools in an area - both primary and secondary.
- Maintain or develop a strong presence in local schools to improve the awareness and understanding of school staff and pupils of young carers and the young carer service.

### 6.2 Supporting young carers

- Consult and listen to young carers regularly to understand their individual needs. Be responsive to those needs through targeted interventions for individuals and groups of young carers with common needs.
- Recognise the value of providing a diverse range of activities and opportunities for young carers.
- Aim to create a balance of structure and freedom within young carer clubs through a combination of regular structured activities and times and a comfortable space for young carers to 'chill out' with peers and 'be children'.
- Recognise the value of and provide regular and a range of opportunities for young carers to talk with adults and share experiences with peers.
- Recognise the value of and provide regular and a range of opportunities for young carers to find mutual support with other young carers.



- Recognise the value of having a high staff/volunteer to young carer ratio to allow staff and volunteers to spend quality time talking and interacting with young carers within the groups.
- Recognise the value of and provide opportunities for young carers to take part in activities appropriate to their age and to have fun.
- Recognise the value of young carers gaining an improved understanding of their situation and develop different ways of facilitating this for example through information giving and discussion groups.
- Develop support for and improve ways to engage young carers with disabilities.
- Consider expanding support for younger carers under eight years old.
- Recognise the value of 'home-visits' for young carers and maintain or develop these as part of the service provision.

### 6.3 Supporting families

- Recognise the value of supporting families and maintain or develop further family support.
- Develop ways of reporting and measuring the level of support for families and measuring the impacts of supporting families.
- Recognise the value of the relational aspect of the HYCA service and maintain or develop ways that strengthen the relations between services and young carers and their families.
- Recognise the value of and maintain or develop opportunities for parents to meet with others and find mutual support.
- Recognise the value of and provide activities that enable families to have fun together.

### 6.4 Young carer clubs and activities

- Provide young carers and families with a programme of activities that gives them things to look forward to.
- Recognise the value of establishing clear and consistent guidelines for behaviour at clubs and in group work that young carers can sign up to.

- Recognise the value of staff interacting with young carers at clubs and activities and plan and develop the capacity of the project to enable staff do this.
- Recognise the value of regular club and activities for young carers and maintain or develop more regular clubs and activities.

### 6.5 Promotion of service

- Young carer services should develop more consistent and focussed messaging about its aims and its services, based on the research findings about what is important about the services and its benefits for young carers and families.
- Young carer services should strengthen its promotion of its services to young carers, families and professionals to ensure that that all stakeholders are aware and are clear about what the services offer, for example using leaflets, services' websites and service 'Open Days'.

## 7. Recommendations for the HYCA collaboration and its development

(Relevant to the HYCA Alliance specifically and those interested in the development of similar collaborations of services).

### 7.1 Strategic

- All services should prioritise the core areas for the development of HYCA that are required and/or set out in the collaborative bid to the Big Lottery:
  - HYCA as a collaboration and as individual services should prioritise the development and implementation of consistent and accurate data collection.
  - HYCA as a collaboration and as individual services should prioritise the provision of the 'Three-pronged approach': providing respite for young carers, support in schools and support for the family.
- Ensure the partnership agreement is sufficiently robust by including timescales for example and consider what actions should be taken where services are not hitting agreed targets.
- Re-evaluate and modify as appropriate, the HYCA partnership agreement on an annual basis.
- Develop an action plan, divide up tasks and assign different HYCA services with lead roles based on strengths and interests.
- Where possible, align the development of specific areas of work within individual services with other HYCA services.
- Agree on, and embed within HYCA's annual monitoring and review processes, a set of measures for how well HYCA is 1. Delivering a preventative whole family approach 2. Impacting individual young carers.
- HYCA should consider how best to support the development of those HYCA services with less infrastructure than the larger services. This might be achieved through a buddy system.
- HYCA needs to acknowledge the infrastructures of individual HYCA services and consider how best to allocate any future joint funding across services.
- Plan timescales for the development of HYCA that accommodate all HYCA services.

- Continue monthly HYCA meetings and consider establishing an annual 'HYCA away day' with focussed workshops for reviewing and planning purposes and targeted staff training.
- Using the HYCA audit undertaken as part of the study as a guide, agree on metrics for an annual audit and embed this within HYCA's annual monitoring and review processes.
- Develop ways to spread well-developed practice of individual HYCA projects across the other HYCA services. An audit of project strengths may be a useful initial phase.
- Develop a sustainability plan for the HYCA collaboration and identify opportunities for further joint funding bids at an early point.

## 7.2 Development of a consistent approach

- Carry out an audit of individual service processes and consider which of these should be standardised across HYCA services.
- Develop, implement and promote with stakeholders, standardised criteria for young carers and families to be supported by HYCA services.
- Develop a more standardised referral and assessment process across HYCA services: Implement and promote with stakeholders, standardised referral processes, guidelines and forms.
- Ensure there is consistency with defining and recording data across services.

## 7.3 Sharing practice and mutual support

- Consider new, creative ways to further develop opportunities for mutual support among HYCA staff.
- Seek collaborative ways of raising awareness of young carers across the county and sharing resources.
- Recognise the value of the character and skills of staff. Seek ways of undertaking joint staff training and development.
- Develop a shared HYCA knowledge bank of resources, tools and forms.
- Consider new, creative ways to further transfer practice between HYCA services, utilising the strengths of services in different domains.
- Capitalise on greater buying power when purchasing resources.

- Develop a joint HYCA county wide awareness raising strategy and action plan

#### 7.4 Developing activities collaboratively

- Develop a shared bank of resources for activities and clubs and a shared contact list for activity providers.
- Plan and run more joint activities between HYCA services to enable young carers to meet other from different groups.
- Capitalise on greater buying power when booking activities and trips

#### 7.5 Strengthening communication

- To improve communication and reduce workload, HYCA services should develop and implement an email protocol which includes timescales for responses
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#### 7.6 Promotion of service

- HYCA as a collaboration should develop more consistent and focussed messaging about its aims, its criteria for support and its services, based on the research findings about what is important about the services and its benefits for young carers and families.
- Further develop joint HYCA promotional literature for stakeholders.
- HYCA should strengthen its promotion of its services to young carers, families and professionals to ensure that that all stakeholders are aware and are clear about what the services offer, for example using leaflets, the HYCA and individual service websites and perhaps an annual HYCA 'Open Day'.

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