



Young Carer Jack & Carers Support Services Medway: A Commissioned Service by Medway Council and NHS Kent and Medway

HWB Area / Location: Southeast Region

Organisation: Medway Council

1 December 2022

Scheme type(s): Carers Services & Community based schemes

Overview

Carers First Medway is a commissioned service, as part of the Better Care Fund programme

This case study features a 16-year-old young carer, Jack*, *Names have been changed to protect identities who has been supported by Carers First Medway.

Medway's BCF funding allows us to provide an integrated holistic approach to supporting young carers. The Joint Medway Carer's Strategy is our commitment to Medway Carers and aims to support Carers, both young and old to continue their valuable caring role and improve or maintain their health and wellbeing, through a balanced and person-centred health and caring environment. The strategy was coproduced with carers and key partners, including young carers. The young carers felt isolated; that they needed support with respite to allow them to live their own meaningful lives, required financial support to help with their education, required support with advice around mental health and wellbeing services and transition into adulthood.

The aim of this case study is to show how we seek to ensure young carers like Jack are supported in their caring roles and that caring does not impact negatively on their emotional health and wellbeing or educational/career opportunities. We seek to ensure that that they have the same opportunities and aspirations as their peers, even after their caring role has ended.

Aims and objectives

This case study aims to show the way in which an integrated approach to the Medway Carers Support service had a positive impact on the life outcomes of a young carer.

Jack is a 16-year-old young carer who was referred to the Medway Young Carers service by the Youth Offending Team. Jack was living in Rochester and caring for his father who has bi-polar disorder and life changing physical disabilities following an attempt on his own life. Jack's father is separated from his mother, and they do not live together.

Jack's caring role included providing emotional support to his father and checking that his father was taking his medications.

Jack's caring role was challenging, and he experienced emotional abuse from his father, due to his father's poor mental health. This was impacting on Jack's own anxieties, behaviour and health and wellbeing, and potentially his future life outcomes. Jack was referred to the Medway Young Carers Service by the Youth Offending Team after his behaviours led him to become known to the Police.

Jack was guarded and distrustful of professionals, found it hard to manage his emotions and was anxious that he too would become bi-polar. The service found Jack hard to engage with, not involved with positive social activities and had a limited support network.

Method and approach

Commissioning a joint Adult and Young Carers Service in Medway, enabled an efficient and effective use of BCF funding. This ensured a flexible holistic service provision, where both young and adult carers can access carers support payments.

The Medway Adult and Young Carers Support Service is commissioned through a Voluntary Community Sector (VCS) Consortium contract, with five other service Lot areas. The aim of the Consortium is to prioritise health and social priorities, for members to identify carers and refer carers to the Medway Carers Service and to ensure VCS resilience. Key performance indicators ensured that the Medway Carers Support Service seek other funding avenues to support their service users, to bring sustainability and social value to the contract, as in the young carers' social activity groups.

Case study aim is to show:

- how the commissioned Medway Young Carers Service supported and engaged with Jack through this challenging time so that he could be discharged from the Youth Offending Team
- how important it is to assess the risks of the young carers in their caring role, and ensure young carers are not undertaking any inappropriate responsibilities
- how the Medway Young Carers Service supported Jack to improve his own health and wellbeing, alleviate his anxiety and improve his educational/ career outcomes
- the effective and efficient use of BCF funding, in relation to Medway Young Carers Service linking with and using the Carers Wellbeing Support Payments, and the positive impact this can have on the carer, whether young or adult
- how funding can be resourcefully used to support community resilience for the direct benefit of the residents (in this case Young Carers), for example seeking other funding avenues to support young carer activities, especially within the current economic climate

Successes

Jack has been supported by the Medway Carers Service since September 2021. The Young Carers Lead held a multi-agency meeting with Jack and the Youth Offending Team to understand his case.

A Young Carers Assessment was undertaken with Jack. The in-depth Young Carers Star assessment can take 2-4 sessions to fully understand the needs and circumstances of the young carer. Safeguarding and risk are assessed (high, medium, low) including any inappropriate caring responsibilities. The level of support needed is assessed by three Tiers: Tier 1 (green) representing the universal offer, Tier 2 (amber) which offers tier 1 plus targeted support and Tier 3 (red) which offers the first two tiers plus multi-agency support. Jack was assessed as Tier 3 and assessed as high risk.

The Medway Young Carers Team Lead provided one to one support to Jack, as well as offering their own personal experiences of living with someone with bi-polar. Jack was supported to manage his emotions and anxiety of getting bi-polar and learn more about bi-polar itself.

The service referred Jack to Children's Social Care to ensure any concerns on safeguarding were addressed and worked with them to improve and lower Jack's risk.

Jack did not have a working laptop to complete his schoolwork and received funding to buy a new one, funding was provided by the Carers Wellbeing Support payments, which forms part of the commissioned Carers Service.

Jack was encouraged to get involved in young carer peer support activities and emerged as a leader in the group. He proposed running a Graffiti workshop, as this form of art is a passion of his. He helped support the Graffiti Jam event in August 2022, in which young carers helped revamp a Youth Shelter at Hillyfields Community Park in Gillingham.

Jack had low aspirations believing his own and his family's history would prevent him from achieving anything. Jack was encouraged to join the Medway Together project which trains young carers as a Carers First Digital Champion to help vulnerable adults get online. Jack flourished through this project, completing the training, and successfully delivering group training with another young carer to six vulnerable adults.

Jack has recently used his experience as a Digital Champion to apply for an apprenticeship with a company to work on social media and digital marketing.

After the Young Carers Services intervention Jack's health and wellbeing and life outcomes have improved, he is now on a positive life path with career aspirations and is putting back into the community through volunteering.

Challenges

Jack's challenges were the anxieties around getting bi-polar with no future opportunities and escaping the life path he was on, which led to his challenging behaviour and getting in trouble with the Police.

The Medway Young Carers Service understood his situation and engaged with Jack to open himself up to a different path, one which supported an improvement in his health and wellbeing and anxieties and provided a career/educational goals, which Jack felt were unobtainable before.

Other measurable impact

Following the support provided, Jack has been discharged from the Youth Offending Team and moved from Tier 3 to Tier 1 and low risk.

He self-identified improvements in areas of his Young Carers Star Assessment to include feelings, behaviour and relationships.

During the time of supporting Jack, his father unfortunately went to prison, and Jack was moved to North London in supported accommodation for a short time. Whilst in London, Jack was fearful of getting mixed up with local gangs. The Carers First,

Young Carers Lead introduced Jack to the 'People's Army' community organisation and Jack volunteered, producing a rap song and graphic design for hip hop artists.

Jack has now returned to live in Medway with his mother. who commented below on the positive changes she has seen in Jack.

"The Young Carers Service has given Jack something to focus on and make him feel good about himself. You've given him opportunities he wouldn't otherwise have had, which help distract him from things. He is always buzzing before and after an activity and he has made friends he otherwise wouldn't have made."

Jack commented:

"The Young Carers Service have changed my life for the better, you have enabled me to access so much and been hugely beneficial shaping my life going forward. The support has helped my wellbeing and living situation."

The Youth Offending Team commented:

"I just wanted to say a massive thank you to and the service for all your help and ease of referrals. I initially made a referral to Young Carers in September 2021 and within days you had contacted me to discuss the young person, but more importantly the best way forward to support his individual needs and lived experience as a young carer.

Your dedication, commitment but above all the care you show to the young people is infectious and genuine.

As a practitioner and a human being, I have often felt calmer and happier knowing you were another pair of safe hands looking out for the young people and understood the very real personal challenges they faced.

I wouldn't hesitate to make additional referrals into the services, and I often share my positive experience with colleagues and peers."

Jack continues to be involved in the Young Carers service.

As a system we have identified that there is further scope to investigate measures on how this scheme has impacted on admission avoidance and discharge

Key learning points

Properly trained staff who can connect with the young carers' experience and engage them. In this case, the Young Carers Lead had personal experience of bipolar, however, it is important that staff can relate to the young carers' lives to encourage them to open up and engage.

The importance of multi-agency working relationships such as the Youth Offending Team and other local services helps create better outcomes for the young person.

Trust is hard to win and easily lost with vulnerable young people. It is vital that professionals do not overpromise, but work with them to achieve their goals, in a step-by-step holistic approach.

This highlights the success of linking all Carers Support services together, as an example, by using the previous Adults Carers Support Payments to include Young Carers in the eligibility. The Carers Support Payments supported Jack with funding for a new laptop, which helped him with his schoolwork, but ultimately impacted on a lot more. It provided Jack with new social activities, enriching his life, having a positive impact on his own career path, and provided Jack with the confidence to support other vulnerable adults with IT and volunteer.

Funding a commissioned joint Adult and Young Carers Service in Medway enables the service to seek other funding avenues to support young carers activities. This has delivered the social value aspect of the contact and supported young carers through their challenging caring roles with respite.

Next steps

The Young Carers Service is to be reviewed for recommissioning, with a new contract award by 1 January 2024. The aim will be to review how the service will evolve to collaborate more fully with other VCS organisations to support both adult and young carers in a joint holistic approach. We will ensure that carers needs are supported as well as the positive impact that these services are having on their lives to make sure this vital service for young carers will remain in place and grow.