

Cambridge Regional College

Cambridge Regional College (CRC) is the largest further education college in the East of England, supporting approximately 9,000 students every year. The college has two main sites in Cambridge and Huntingdon and offers a range of courses, including vocational learning in areas such as engineering and hospitality.

Before their participation in Driving Change, the college felt that they generally offered a good level of support for young adult carers. However, this was part of a 'generalised' support package for all vulnerable learners, and so the college recognised that support could be more consistent and tailored towards the specific needs of young adult carers. Although, at the start of the project, CRC felt that they had a good idea about who the young adult carers were in their student population, they were keen to ensure that effective support was in place for these students once they had been identified.

'... Making the support a bit more individualised for young carers. At this point in time, yes, we can offer support the same way we offer all our young people and our students, but, actually, what we're trying to do is reach them earlier ... What we're going to be doing, going forward is, in August, before they enrol with us, we're going to contact with them, complete a support plan with them, offer them out what they need, and link that up with their tutor so their tutor is aware of what support they might need' (Strategic Carers Lead)

Support for young adult carers

Since the project began, Cambridge Regional College has made significant progress in developing support across many different areas of the *Quality Standard in Carer Support* (QSCS) framework.

Policy and strategic commitment

Prior to Driving Change, the college already had a policy in place for young adult carers, however, this was limited in scope. The college developed the policy to ensure that it explained issues relating to young adult carers in greater depth, such as identification and support processes, and monitoring systems. The policy has also been made accessible and promoted via the college website.

Information on how to contact the Carers Lead has also been added to the existing section on young adult carers in the college's wider safeguarding policy. All new and existing staff are required to confirm they have read the safeguarding policy and HR will track and monitor staff completion. This is so that the college can have confidence that young adult carers are being kept safe and supported whilst at college.

Enrolment and induction

At the start of the project, the college was able to identify some young adult carers through transition processes established with schools and the local carers services. The college's application form also had a question to identify young adult carers, which was already in place before the project. Therefore, the main focus for CRC was to ensure that support was put in place early, once it had been identified that a student had caring responsibilities.

Since taking part in the project, the Carers Lead now checks the college's database for any young adult carers who have been identified through enrolment and makes direct contact with them to invite them to an initial meeting. In previous years, all new young adult carers received a generic welcome email, but for the start of the 2021/22 academic year, an earlier and more personal contact is planned to introduce young adult carers to the Carers Lead and help to facilitate early assessment and support planning.

Staff training and awareness raising

Before the project, the college recognised that there was a gap in their training package for staff, and a need to raise awareness of the challenges faced by young adult carers. Through Driving Change, the college introduced a pre-recorded 15-minute audio presentation which covers the signs and impact of caring, as well as college support. All new staff members will listen to the presentation as part of their training, and it will also be delivered as part of every Staff Development Day. This has helped to raise awareness among staff, which has been particularly beneficial for the enrolment team, who need to understand the signs of being a carer amongst prospective students.

'We've put together a young adult carers training, which is just a 15-minute webinar where we talk through what tutors can expect to see, what a young adult carer looks like, what it means for them, how it impacts their education, and things like that. We put that out as a compulsory teacher training that they had to do on the last teacher training day' (Strategic Carers Lead)

Ongoing support

A key change in support implemented through the project is the introduction of a 'Time Out' card for young adult carers. This allows student carers to identify themselves easily and discretely to teaching staff and includes internal and external support contact details. A young adult carer at the college explained that they particularly appreciate the flexibility that this card provides.

'... Say if I have to answer the phone in lesson and have to leave suddenly it's helpful so I don't have to interrupt lessons I can just put it on my desk' (Young adult carer)

The college also works with individual young adult carers to develop a detailed and comprehensive Carers Support Plan. Before the project, support plans were sometimes completed for young adult carers, but this was done as part of a more generic support package for all vulnerable learners. The new support plan, created around the specific needs of young adult carers, identifies required flexible adjustments for the student, such as access to a phone, deadline extensions, flexible start/finish times, and financial support. This can also be shared with tutors if the student chooses to do so, which can help to reduce anxiety for young people who may not want to speak directly to their tutors about their caring responsibilities.

The introduction of the new Carers Lead role, implemented through Driving Change, has also led to more regular, one-to-one support for young adult carers throughout their time at college. This allows students to build up a relationship with a specific staff member and means that young adult carers are consistently receiving targeted support. The Carers Lead has also created a 'tracking spreadsheet' to monitor the level and type of support accessed by each young adult carer, and to identify what else could be offered to support each individual student.

Partnership working

Through their involvement in Driving Change, Cambridge Regional College has strengthened their relationships with external partners. For example, the college already had a long-standing relationship with their local young peoples' service that supports young adult carers with wider needs such as mental health, housing, and sexual health. However, since taking part in the project, they have now built on this relationship by joining a local network of organisations working with young adult carers that meets every month to discuss further partnership opportunities. This has also led to the college accessing useful resources shared by partner organisations, such as 'assessment tools' that have helped in the identification of other young adult carers.

'We are also much better linked up with our external services. Centre 33 is our accredited service in the county, and we were always quite close with them anyway because they deliver counselling, housing advice, and things like that. But from a young adult carers point of view ... our Young Adult Carers Lead is now part of a Champions Group, which is basically a group ... of education providers ... and they all meet together once a month, talk through what they're doing, talk through how we can link up and work together' (Strategic Carers Lead)

Involving young adult carers in improving support

The college is committed to ensuring that the voices of young adult carers are heard in shaping and reviewing support. As part of Driving Change, they have established a young adult carers forum to provide information and updates on the support that's on offer, and to be a place for student carers to voice their concerns, put forward their ideas for additional support, offer feedback on potential changes to support, and

meet other young adult carers. The college has already implemented ideas that have been generated by the forum, and they are also planning to further involve young adult carers in developing support moving forwards.

'We've really enjoyed the forums, actually ... And we've got lots of ideas of how we can pull some little projects together with a bit of participation work. So, for example, they're the reason we got the cards. We weren't actually thinking about the cards ... but we actually got requested that by one of the young adult carers in the forum ... They've also recommended ... that we put some ... videos together of independent living skills. Not just [aimed at] young adult carers, but that will help them specifically. So that's another really great thing they've put in there' (Strategic Carers Lead)

As part of their involvement in Driving Change, the college has also created a young adult carer Student Ambassador post. The Ambassador has been elected to the Students Union and will provide an active voice for young adult carers among current and prospective students, for example, by participating in Q&A sessions for young adult carers who are considering college. The Student Ambassador post has helped to improve the visibility of young adult carers at the college, encouraging other students to declare caring responsibilities. For example, another student representative in the Union has self-identified as a carer since the ambassador post was introduced.

Challenges

The main challenges for Cambridge Regional College in taking their Driving Change plans forward related to the Coronavirus pandemic and the associated restrictions. The move to remote learning has made it difficult for the college to fully engage young adult carers in certain aspects of the project, such as the young adult carer forums.

'It's so much harder to engage people when there's no face-to-face option ... We really missed out on that opportunity. And that was quite frustrating because I think we would have gotten a better uptake on our forum had we have had the option of face-to-face. So, we're really hoping to see that change this year' (Strategic Carers Lead)

Outcomes

For Cambridge Regional College, the main positive outcomes of their involvement in Driving Change have been tailoring their support to young adult carers and enhancing the opportunities for these students to access regular, one-to-one support. This means that young adult carers can build up relationships with staff, and in turn, staff are able to identify any issues or concerns as early as possible.

'So, in terms of the young adult carers, the positives are, is that it's really clear to them now that they don't have to suffer in silence, they don't have to go through it alone. They've actually got someone [the Carers Lead] who's really,

really understanding, really gets it and is happy to help dispose stuff set up for them' (Strategic Carers Lead)

This impact of the support offered was echoed by a young adult carer at the college:

'[The support has] been really helpful just to kind of make me feel like I'm not alone in navigating everything, every step of the way they've been able to offer support and check in' (Young adult carer)

Key success factors

- The key factor in improving support for young adult carers at CRC has been in ensuring that individual and early support is offered once a learner has been identified as having caring responsibilities. Early support was seen as particularly important for the next cohort of students who may be more anxious about starting college after extended periods of online learning throughout the pandemic:

'I think, especially this year I'm quite worried about the next cohort that are ... coming up to us who have gone through 2 school years of COVID ... I think they're going to be very nervous. I think they're going to have missed a lot of socialisation ... So, if we can avoid people not coming to college [because they might be too nervous] ... by meeting them early and getting those plans in place, I think that's going to be a massive difference in their education' (Strategic Carers Lead)

- Making full use of the support on offer through Driving Change has also provided the college with many useful resources and templates to use in developing their support, and has helped them to improve all aspects of their provision for young adult carers.

'We had access to the webinars, and ... the online services section [project support page], which was really helpful because we put together a couple of support plans and a ... 'Young Adult Carers' card ... We pretty much found those from the templates that were already on the resources page, which really helped us and gave us a little bit of an idea, and it really helped with doing our Young Adult Carers Policy, to get a bit of information from what other people had done, and taking that and adjusting that to our service as well' (Strategic Carers Lead)