

Kirklees College

About the College

Kirklees College is a Further Education college offering a wide range of courses and study options. The college has more than 18,000 students across full-time study, apprenticeships and part-time courses. The college has nine sites covering the whole of the Kirklees region in West Yorkshire, including two main centres in Huddersfield and Dewsbury.

Students are predominantly from the local population but can also come from outside of the region; e.g. Calderdale and Bradford. At the start of the project, the College had identified about 40 young adult carers, aged 16-19, within the student cohort, but were aware that there were likely to be more within such a large student population.

The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Team Leader has overall responsibility for vulnerable students, including young adult carers. Within the team, a Care Coordinator works with progress coaches to support young adult carers on a day-to-day basis. On taking up the post, the Team Leader identified a lack of clear guidance, and structure, within the college, to support young adult carers, and had begun to develop guidance and recommendations on what needed to be put in place to address this.

Although they were performing strongly in some areas such as data collection and analysis - for example retention, success and monitoring rates - the Team Leader recognised that in other areas there was still some way to go and saw the Targeted Support for Colleges project as an opportunity to get advice around how to implement their plans.

A key focus of Kirklees' project was to raise awareness amongst staff of the needs of young adult carers, and to find ways to ensure the message was reaching as wide an audience as possible across such a large organisation. By improving the provision for young adult carers, the Team Leader also hoped to make Kirklees an attractive option for young adult carers, where they could be confident that they would get the support they need to succeed. Plans to ensure that individualised support plans are in place from the start of a young adult carer's time at college was seen as crucial to this.

"For us, the most rewarding, is their journey...to see them succeed, growing in confidence, and exploring their options for further study or employment. We want our young adult carers to realise that they can achieve whatever they want, not to limit themselves because they have caring responsibilities, and that as a College we will be there to support them every step of the way" Team Leader

Provision for young adult carers

Since the project began, the college has begun to develop an online training package for staff to raise awareness around young adult carers and the support available to them. This includes, for example, things to look out for that might suggest a student has caring responsibilities.

The Team Leader delivers this information as a presentation to all new staff as part of the corporate induction process and has also arranged to deliver a training session on support for young adult carers at team meetings for progress coaches. Future plans include training for wider curriculum staff. In addition, the college's safeguarding policy has been updated, to

include an extensive guide for staff on supporting young adult carers, and made available to staff online.

The college has introduced several changes to provide more opportunities for disclosure and to ensure young adult carers can access the support they want or need.

These include changes to the enrolment process for 2018/19. Enrolment staff will have a 'crib' sheet to use with young people to help them to self-identify as a young adult carer. Students will then be invited to make an appointment with the EDI Team to ensure they are receiving support, both from within the college, and from local carers' services, from the early stages of their course.

A new 'pattern of care form' adapted from a version provided by another college participating in the project, captures information about the young adult carer's caring responsibilities, the extent of their caring and how it might affect their college course. This information is used to inform the development of a crisis plan – key actions that the young adult carer and the college will take if a crisis situation occurs. The Care Co-ordinator and the Progress Coach complete the form together with the young adult carer. One young adult carer, who had been struggling to attend college, came in with his mum to talk through the plan and identify where support was needed. The plan is reviewed regularly, and this has proved to be very effective in improving the situation for the young person.

Following discussion about the Targeted Support for Colleges project with Carers Count and Barnardo's, the two lead carers' services in the area, the EDI team have arranged the first meeting of a new network of carers services and local colleges, to learn about project findings, work to improve support for young adult carers, and to share good practice.

Challenges

The one aspect of improving support that has proved to be a challenge is bringing young adult carers together, in a group, to inform policy. The Team Lead plans to approach a small number of young adult carers, already active in the student union, to explore if they would be willing to take a lead on this and promote a young adult carers group to other students.

Staff awareness and training about young adult carers was the other big challenge. However, the College has made good progress with this within the relatively short timescale of the project and has plans in place to develop training further.

Outcomes

Involvement in the project, and in particular, working towards the QSCS, has helped the college to break down the different aspects of support and focus improvement where it was most needed.

The college's commitment to supporting young adult carers, has increased levels of awareness across the college. More opportunities for young adult carers to disclose has been identified as one of the main benefits of the project. The commitment of the senior leadership team, particularly the assistant principal, who has responsibility for EDI, has helped to drive progress forward.

“I think raising awareness of the challenges faced by our young adult carers has been our biggest achievement. As a College we have a commitment to offering an individualised support package for those students with caring responsibilities.” Team Leader

In March, Kirklees won a Times Educational Supplement (TES) Award for their support for vulnerable groups, including young adult carers. Both TES and OFSTED, in a recent inspection, commented on the College’s use of data to inform improvements in support leading to a narrowing of the achievement gap for these groups of students.

Success factors

- Commitment from the senior leadership team, particularly from the assistant principal with responsibility for this area has made a big difference. The carers lead sits on the college’s strategic group for equality, diversity and inclusion and this has also helped to get senior management on board and to take the project forward.
- Introduction of staff training about the needs of young adult carers has been important in raising awareness and ensuring that good support is in place.
- Formal mechanisms for identifying young adult carers and understanding their needs has enabled the college to provide support that is tailored to individuals, this includes new enrolment processes and ‘crib sheet’, and ‘pattern of care’ form.