

South Gloucestershire and Stroud College

About the college

South Gloucestershire and Stroud College is a large college offering a wide range of provision, including vocational courses, apprenticeships, GCSEs, A-Levels, adult learning and Higher Education programmes, to over 8,500 full-time and part-time students. The college has six campuses; four in Bristol, one in Stroud and one in Berkeley. Their students are mainly local and come from the three local authorities covering Bristol, South Gloucestershire and Gloucestershire, but some travel from South Wales and North Somerset.

Prior to their involvement in the project, the college had been undertaking some work to review and improve their support for young adult carers. The Deputy Head of Learner Services of the college's Bristol campuses had worked with the local Carers Support Network to review and update the college's policy on young adult carers. The college had good links with the Carers Support Network, who attended their freshers fair, sent the college awareness-raising materials and also ran some training with college staff. The college also included a tick box for young adult carers on their application forms for courses and for the 16-19 Bursary, and were starting to receive referrals from the Carers Support Network.

Despite having some good support in place for young adult carers, the college felt that, in places, this was quite disjointed and that they needed a consistent approach to identifying and supporting young adult carers across the college. They also felt that they could make more of their external links with local carers services and improve the awareness of young adult carers amongst staff working in different curriculum areas. Another key aim for the college was to improve their monitoring of their identified young adult carers, to inform where additional support may be needed.

Provision for young adult carers

The college found the QSCS framework very helpful in enabling them to make their support for young adult carers more explicit to both students and staff. For example, although the college had designated leads for carers, their names and contact details were not promoted anywhere, and students and staff were unclear about the support they offered. Through the project, these staff were able to add their details to the college website, the student magazine and posters which were put up around campus. They also developed promotional materials and presentations, used these on Young Carers Awareness Day and linked through to them on the college's SU Facebook page.

The college also met with local carers services to discuss and agree information sharing and referral processes for young adult carers. Although the college had previously received referrals from these services, these agreements formalised these processes across the three local authorities that most of their students come from.

To ensure that their support reflected young adult carers' needs, the college ran a 'Voice Of The Learner For Young Carers' session. These groups provide opportunities for students to provide feedback on their experiences and feed into the continuous improvement of the support offered by the college. The Learners Services team ran a session specifically for

young adult carers, to find out what support they would like the college to offer and how they would like to be involved in developing this. A clear message that arose from this session was the need for a peer support group, so the college has established this with the help of the local carers service. They ran one session with the carers service and subsequently the young people have met and shared their experiences of caring. The college's student union will continue to support this activity as a specific peer support group.

"...they've met together and they've shared email addresses. The student union will continue to follow that up and that's like a group then that sits within the Student Union as a support group." Deputy Head of Learner Services

As the college had recently run training on young adult carers for staff, they worked with the carers service to develop a training session for student union representatives, who can then carry out awareness-raising activities with their student groups. This training was due to take place in the spring term and will be followed up with tutorials for wider students if it is successful.

A key improvement that the college has seen as a result of the project is in their monitoring and tracking young adult carers' progress. The Learners Services team has been working closely with the college's MIS team to run reports not just on young adult carers but on other vulnerable groups as well. This has enabled them to identify some students whose attendance was falling and put additional support in place for them to stay at college. This is an ongoing piece of work to draw more information into the reports and allow for more detailed interrogation of attainment and progression data.

As a result of the Zoom session with York College, the Deputy Head of Learner Services spoke to the finance team and requested that young adult carers be identified as a priority group for the enhanced Bursary. They are now included as a vulnerable group in the college's finance policy and can access an additional £20 per month through the Bursary, which can be spent on a wider range of items, including toiletries, clothing and transport to take siblings to school.

Challenges

The link Vice Principal for learner services left part way through the project, which has created some challenges in securing buy-in from the college's governors as the team does not have a senior manager to take items to the Board. As a result, they have not gained the governor support that they were hoping to achieve through the project. However, they do have good support from the senior leadership team and hope to build on this once a new Vice Principal starts in the summer.

Making links with local authorities has proven challenging within the timeframes of the project. This partly due to the college straddling a number of different local authorities and each having different processes in place. This is an area that the college is keen to work on and develop.

Outcomes

The young adult carers at the college have benefitted from the improved support that has been implemented through the project, particularly the peer support group. The 'Voice Of The Learner For Young Carers' session was very well received and has helped young adult

carers feel that they are being listened to, as well as enabling the college to develop tailored support for this group.

“I think that they feel they have had their voice heard and I think peer support has been invaluable. Enabling them to work together ensures a holistic approach to the support we are able to offer.” (Deputy Head of Learner Services)

For the college, the project has enabled them to establish a whole-organisation approach to supporting young adult carers and join up a lot of the support which was previously provided on a more ‘ad hoc’ basis. It has also helped them to promote their support for young adult carers to staff, students and externally, which should encourage other young people to choose South Gloucestershire and Stroud College over other providers.

Success factors

- Consulting with a group of young adult carers enabled the college to identify and address a gap in their support that they were not previously aware of, and empowered young people to get involved in developing the support on offer at the college.
- Engaging in practice sharing sessions with other colleges provided the Deputy Head of Learner Services with the practical information needed to get young adult carers included as a vulnerable group in the college’s finance policy, providing them with access to the enhanced Bursary.
- The college’s strong links with the local Carers Support Network has enabled them to implement many changes and ensure that these are tailored to young adult carers’ needs.