

Engaging with young adult carers in FE



This resource has been developed as part of the Driving Change in FE project. We hope that the ideas in the resource, drawn from practical examples shared by colleges participating in the Driving Change project, will provide inspiration for you to explore and develop new ways to engage with young adult carers. Providing opportunities for active engagement will help to support identification of young people with caring responsibilities in your student cohort; build rapport with this group of students; and enable you to better understand and tailor improvements in support to meet the specific needs of young adult carers at your college. This will help to ensure that young adult carers have a positive experience of college and the best chance of achieving good outcomes.

The examples below provide suggestions on different ways that you can engage with young adult carers, from informal social events through to active involvement in shaping and reviewing improvements to support.

Ongoing engagement with young adult carers

- **Informal events** - such as coffee mornings provide relaxed opportunities for young adult carers to drop in for a chat with other student carers. Colleges involved in the Driving Change project ran a variety of dedicated events and activities throughout the academic year, for example Christmas parties. As well as group events, you could also consider offering individualised activities to meet specific needs. For example, at one college a young adult carer who did most of the cooking at home was offered individual cooking sessions. You could consider running group cooking sessions for young adult carers.

- **Awareness raising events** - Running specific engagement activities such as targeted induction sessions supports young adult carers to develop relationships with staff and to build confidence from the start of their college journey. Organising activities to combine with national campaigns such as Carers Week, which takes place in June each year, can also work well to provide additional information to young adult carers about the support available to them both within and outside college. Consider inviting your local carers services to these and Freshers Week events to talk to students about the support they offer.
- **1-1 engagement** – The chance to speak to staff on a 1-1 basis helps young adult carers to build trusting relationships with staff. This could be with a member of the student wellbeing team, a named carers lead or often, a personal tutor. At one college, for example the pastoral team offers regular mentoring sessions throughout the academic year. Individual engagement ensures there are ongoing opportunities for a young person to disclose a caring role or to share any concerns they have at home or in college. This helps to keep them on track and reduces the chances of them dropping out of college.
- **Peer support** – A dedicated young adult carers group or society can provide a regular opportunity for student carers to take a break and meet other young people who are caring, in a supportive environment. If you are thinking about setting up a new group, you could go along to the first meeting or two to help get things started and then hand over lead of the group to the young adult carers themselves.
- **Development opportunities** – An effective and different way to increase engagement is to provide opportunities for young adult carers to take part in activities that will help them to develop new skills. For example, you could ask individuals to take on voluntary positions in college. One college that participated in Driving Change has specifically created roles, for example chairing the young adult carers support group, to provide ways for student carers to work towards achieving a Duke of Edinburgh Award. You could also consider creating young adult carers champions roles.

Use technology to engage in more creative ways with young adult carers

During the pandemic, many colleges have successfully embraced the shift to online delivery to explore new and different ways of engaging with their young adult carers and plan to continue with online support as part their longer-term engagement plans. Being able to access support remotely can be particularly helpful for young adult carers juggling college work with caring responsibilities at home. Creative approaches using technology have proved particularly effective in improving levels of engagement with young adult carers:

- **Set up a Google Classroom** (a free online classroom area) for young adult carers. At one college, when a student has been identified as a young adult carer, the college links them into a dedicated Google classroom which provides access to relevant advice and information about support at the college and external sources of support, such as helplines and information about local services. Students linked to the classroom meet monthly using a video call.

- Explore opportunities to facilitate **peer support for young adult carers online**. For example, one college has developed a young adult carers support group using an app that students access on their mobile phone.
- Consider developing a dedicated **college podcast** for young adult carers. This is an innovative and stimulating way of reaching a wide range of listeners including not only young adult carers at your college but their wider families and staff working to support them. One college from Driving Change has developed a regular podcast for young adult carers in partnership with staff from the local carers service. Topics covered in the podcasts have included what it means to be a young adult carer, mental health and wellbeing and self-care during the pandemic. You could consider inviting young adult carers to take part in a podcast to share their experiences of caring and being at college.
- Teams, Zoom and other **social media platforms are a great way of maintaining 1-1 contact** with young adult carers for everyday communication or scheduled catch ups both during periods of remote learning and as face to face teaching resumes.

Involve young adult carers in awareness raising activities

Participating in awareness raising activities can provide creative opportunities for young adult carers to gain experience and develop new skills:

- You could **invite young adult carers to get involved in producing a video** on the support available for student carers at the college. This could be embedded in the college website or used as part of the induction process.
- Involve and **support young adult carers to take part in awareness raising training for** different groups of college staff. Hearing directly from students with caring responsibilities can be really effective in communicating some of the challenges they face during their time in college and the benefits of improved support. Alternatively, you could ask them to write an account of their experiences to share as a case study.

Involving young adult carers in shaping and reviewing support

Colleges who took part in Year 1 of the Driving Change project reported benefits from involving young adult carers in shaping improvements to support or through gathering feedback from young adult carers on changes made. This helped to ensure that improvements in support responded to the specific needs and wishes of young adult carers at the college. Practical examples from colleges taking part in the project include:

- Direct involvement in **developing support materials**. One college for example, had involved a young adult carer in producing the college's Pattern of Care form.
- **Reviewing policies and plans**. You could ask a small group of young adult carers to review an existing or newly developed young carers policy. You could also invite feedback from young adult carers at your college to assess their experience of support and identify areas for development.
- Supporting young adult young carers to **speak directly to members of the college senior management team** about their experiences of caring and learning at college. First-hand testimony can be hugely powerful and influential in securing high level

backing for improvements to support and provide a great opportunity for young adult carers to have their voices heard.

- **Establish a young adult carer advisory group or run focus groups** to canvass the views of student carers. One college for example runs a monthly focus group where young adult carers can feedback on any issues they are experiencing in college and what types of support they need. This has informed improvements in provision for young adult carers, for example financial support for meals in college, and the introduction of a young carers ID card.
- **Develop and publicise online surveys** asking for feedback and ideas from young adult carers on improving support at your college. These could sit on the college website or intranet so that young adult carers can access the survey throughout the academic year. One college has a “You said, we did” feedback process to tell students how they have implemented suggested changes.
- **Peer support** can offer a more accessible opportunity for student carers to have their voices heard and influence the development and improvement of support. For example at one college, young adult carers are encouraged to get involved in improving college support services through their role as peer reps on the Student Voice group and to support other students to engage through participating in college events for young adult carers.