

Coleg Penybont | Bridgend College

About the college

Coleg Penybont/Bridgend College is a multi-site college in Wales offering post-16 education and 14-16 Junior Apprenticeships. The college has approximately 2,500 full-time and around 6000 part-time students. Bridgend was 2019 TES FE College of the Year and is a 'Double Excellent' inclusive college

Whilst the college already had relatively well developed support in place for different groups of learners they hoped that getting involved in Driving Change would enable them to develop new ideas and support, and provide a form of quality assurance that they were doing everything they could for their cohort of young adult carers.

"I think it's just trying to make sure we've tightened everything up so that it's robust support that's available for young carers, exactly the same as other vulnerable groups within college."

At the start of the project, identification of young adult carers was a key issue for the college; they acknowledged that the numbers of young adult carers known to them were probably much lower than the actual numbers in their student population.

Very few young adult carers approached the Student Wellbeing Team directly for support. Most young adult carers were identified over the course of the academic year through disclosure to tutors. The college had introduced measures such as regular tutor reminder cards to promote ongoing awareness and consideration of the needs of vulnerable students and the support available. However, when a young person self-identified, tutors weren't always passing this information on:

"A lot of our tutors... are absolutely fantastic but it was identified that they may not always fully understand what the term 'young carer' means, why it is important to refer to Student Wellbeing and what support is available to young carers."

As a result, increasing staff and student awareness of the support available and more consistent and clear information to engage young adult carers, were key targets in the college's plans for improvement. Developing the college's data collection and monitoring processes to allow reporting on outcomes for young adult carers was also a focus of the college's Driving Change action plan.

Support for young adult carers

Driving Change has helped Bridgend College to implement changes across all the key actions identified in their action plan.

Student induction

The college has introduced a question about caring responsibilities, including an explanation of the term 'young carer' and what support is available to them, as part of the enrolment process. If it is identified that a student has caring responsibilities, this information is passed directly to the

Wellbeing Team so the college can identify early on who is a young adult carer and offer appropriate support from the start of their time in college.

The college has also undertaken further work with tutors, to ensure that when a young person does tell them about a caring role, they know how to pass the information on, who to pass it to and are confident to do so without fear of breaking confidentiality.

Ongoing support

Another key development in the college's support for young adult carers is the introduction of a student pass, which has been embraced by both students and staff. Having attended one of the Driving Change webinars, in which a young adult carer from Solihull college spoke about the benefits of having a carer's pass in college, Bridgend College has introduced their own version. The card, which sits behind a young person's ID card on their lanyard, provides young adult carers with a simple way to identify themselves and ensure that considerations and adjustments are applied, for example if they need time out of a lesson or to keep their phone on without needing to explain themselves each time. Bridgend refer to this as a 'student', rather than a 'young adult carer' pass. In developing support for young adult carers, or other vulnerable learners, the college is careful not to attach labels to young people, to reduce stigma:

"I've called it a student pass, and it's got an explanation about what it means to be a young carer. It means that they've got additional responsibilities at home, they might be 5 minutes late, they might need to leave 5 minutes early, and it's got all the Student Wellbeing information at the bottom of the card... it hasn't got, 'Young carer,' or, 'Wellbeing' written on it. It's got the Bridgend College logo and 'Student pass,'. There is only very small writing that explains for them, just to hand to their tutor... We had a student that said she didn't have anything like this in her school and it's really reassuring to know that the support is set up and ready for her, so that was really good."

In developing their support, Bridgend has made innovative use of technology to support young adult carers, especially during the pandemic. The college has introduced a Google Classroom, a free online classroom, specifically for young adult carers. Once it has been identified that a student is a young adult carer the college links them into the 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. This is an example of good practice that will continue beyond the restrictions caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

The college has also established a Carers Society to facilitate peer support for student carers, so that *"at least they know there are other people there who are in a similar position to them, they're all learners in college."*

Staff training and awareness raising

Bridgend College already had well developed processes in place before the start of the project to raise staff awareness of the needs of vulnerable learners, although this was not specifically tailored to the needs and experiences of young adult carers.

Developing their action plan for Driving Change has enabled Bridgend to focus on their messaging to raise awareness of the needs of and support available to young adult carers, particularly during the pandemic. Since the start of remote working the college has developed a new online poster

aimed at supporting wellbeing. The poster which is circulated via social media, invites young adult carers, or anyone concerned about a young carer, to get in touch for a chat.

“it’s just consistently repeating that message throughout the academic year, either through the workshops or, we use social media a lot to promote messaging. We use the screens around college. We do a lot of inductions, so we go into the groups and we explain... and the tutors are there and we [tell them] all the support that we can offer.”

Through their involvement in the project, the college has successfully explored new approaches to engaging with young adult carers. One of these is a podcast for young adult carers developed with staff from Bridgend Young Carers. The podcast discusses issues such as what it means to be a young adult carer, how the pandemic might be affecting them and self-care during this period. The podcast, which is hosted on seven different platforms also aims to raise awareness of support for carers both inside and outside the college and helps to identify the college as “carer-friendly”.

Data collection and monitoring

At the start of the project the college lacked systems to record and report specifically on young adult carers. A new database system which includes an identifier for young adult carers enables data to be broken down at college, campus, course or individual level. This will help to provide the college with the evidence needed to assess the impact of current practice in supporting young adult carers and to inform future developments in support.

Over the coming months, further changes are planned, including a Young Carer Group to provide peer support and opportunities for young adult carers to review and shape future developments.

Challenges

The pandemic has presented a range of new challenges for colleges, including the shift to online delivery and supporting the mental health and wellbeing of students during remote learning and periods of lockdown.

As a result, the key challenge for Bridgend has been time to progress their plans to improve support for young adult carers. The flexibility, reassurance and additional support provided by the Driving Change project team has been key in helping them to remain engaged with the project and achieve good outcomes.

Outcomes

One of the main positive outcomes for Bridgend College, as a result of their involvement in Driving Change has been the increased level of engagement with their young adult carers. The college has found that young adult carers can sometimes be reluctant to ask for support; they are often quite independent and may not seek help until things reach crisis point. The improvements in support implemented through the college’s action plan and increased messaging about the support available has helped to build rapport with young adult carers.

The success of the Google Classroom in particular marks a real step forward in the college’s relationship and level of engagement with this cohort of students. Since changes were introduced, conversations with young adult carers indicate that student carers feel reassured and are confident that they can access support;

“they feel safe, because they know the support is there if they need it, so we’re not pushing it on them, we’re not saying, ‘You have to do this’ but we’re explaining to them about all the support that is available if they need it.”

Key Success factors

- A new enrolment process has enabled the college to identify young adult carers earlier and ensure they are able to access support straightaway.
- Using technology, including the Google Classroom and the podcast with Bridgend Young Carers, has been particularly effective in raising levels of engagement with young adult carers, especially during the pandemic.
- The development of an action plan provided the college with a focus and the impetus to improve their support for young adult carers.

“The action plan has focused us and we’ve had the time and space to get new strategies developed and implemented for our students and staff to access.”