

Supporting Students with Caring Responsibilities:

A Resource for Further Education Providers
to Help Young Adult Carers Succeed in
Further Education in Wales



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Introduction

This resource has been developed by Carers Trust Wales, in partnership with Learning and Work Institute (L&W).

There are around 370,000 carers in Wales and this figure is rising. It is estimated by 2030 the number of carers in the UK will have increased by around 60% (Carers UK, 2001). Three in five people will be carers at some point in their lives in the UK.

Young adult carers are young people aged 16–25 who care, **unpaid**, for a family member or friend with an illness or disability, mental health condition or an addiction.

The 2011 Census figures show that there are more than 21,000 young adult carers in Wales aged 14–25 who provide support and assistance to their families and friends. For a young person who has caring responsibilities, trying to transition to, through and beyond further education, can be extremely challenging. For some, these challenges present a significant barrier to achieving their ambitions.

This practical resource has been expanded and developed from a shorter publication, produced in 2015 by Carers Trust and National Institute for Adults Continuing Education (NIACE). It is designed for use by managers and staff working in further education colleges in Wales.

This user-friendly resource is designed to increase awareness and understanding of young adult carers and their specific needs. It outlines who young adult carers are, the challenges they face and how their caring roles can impact on their education. It draws together some of the good practice that is already being developed in several colleges in Wales, often in partnership with local carers services, and makes recommendations for how student carers can be supported to sustain their participation in learning and achieve their potential.

Throughout this resource, different terms have been used to describe the same student group; young adult carers, student carers and students with caring responsibilities. The term young adult carer has been used for all young people aged 14–25 with caring responsibilities. While this resource focuses specifically on young adult carers, many of the challenges experienced by older students who are carers will be similar.

Although some sections within this publication are specific to Wales, many of the ideas and practice are relevant to colleges across the UK.

About Learning and Work Institute (L&W)

L&W is a campaigning, policy and research organisation dedicated to lifelong learning, full employment and inclusion in Wales and the UK. We bring together 90 years of combined history and heritage from 'National Institute of Adult Continuing Education' and 'Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion'. We want everyone to realise their potential in learning, work and throughout their life.

About Carers Trust Wales

Carers Trust Wales is part of Carers Trust, a major charity for, with and about carers. We work to improve support, services and recognition for anyone living with the challenges of caring, unpaid, for a family member or friend who is ill, frail, disabled or has mental health or addiction problems.

With locally based Network Partners we are able to support carers in their homes through the provision of replacement care, and in the community with information, advice, emotional support, hands on practical help and access to much needed breaks. We offer specialist services for carers of people of all ages and conditions and a range of individually tailored support and group activities.

Our vision is that unpaid carers count and can access the help they need to live their lives.

Contents

This resource is designed to generate the momentum for identifying and supporting student carers within colleges. We hope that it will inspire and assist all colleges to build on good practice already taking place to develop their own approaches to identifying and supporting this student group. This will ensure that students who are caring for others – who in many instances have overcome very difficult circumstances and have acquired extremely valuable skills along the way – are able to reach their potential and successfully achieve their aims within education.

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1

Why it is important for your college to support carers

Who are young adult carers and what they do

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Life as a young adult carer

Who are young adult carers and what do they do?

Who are young adult carers?

Young adult carers are young people aged **14–25** who care, **unpaid**, for a friend or family member who could not cope without their support.



How many young adult carers are there?

- There are over 375,000 young adult carers in the UK.
- They are likely to be in every school, college, university and workplace.

Young adult carers care for someone:

- With an illness or disability.
- With a mental health condition.
- Who misuses drugs or alcohol.



“I want college to understand I’m a carer.”

Being a young adult carer can have a big impact on the things that are important to growing up

- It can affect a young person's health, social life and self confidence – over 50% reported a mental health problem.
- Many struggle to juggle their education, working life and caring role which can cause pressure and stress.
- Recent research on young adult carers who were no longer in education showed their highest qualifications were GCSEs grade D–G.
- 29% had dropped out of college/university because of their caring role. This is four times greater than the national average for degree courses.



What might a young adult carer do?

- Practical tasks, such as cooking, housework and shopping.
- Physical care, such as helping someone out of bed.
- Emotional support.
- Personal care, such as helping someone dress or go to the toilet.
- Managing the family budget and collecting prescriptions.
- Helping to give someone their medication.
- Helping someone communicate.
- Looking after brothers and sisters.



Young adult carers should have:

- Support that gives them the same opportunities as their friends such as being able to:
 - Go to school, college or university and complete their studies.
 - Get a job.
 - Have a social life and be independent.
 - Have support for the person they care for.



“I lost over half of my hours at work because I care for my dad. Is that fair?”

Research on young adult carers

Carers Trust commissioned the University of Nottingham to undertake research to examine the experiences and aspirations of young adult carers aged 14–25 in relation to school, further and higher education, and work. This research formed part of a wider campaign by Carers Trust called Time to be Heard; a campaign to give young adult carers a voice to tell everyone who they are, what they do and why this awareness is important (see Carers.org/timetobeheard).

An accompanying report, Time to be Heard: A Call for Recognition and Support for Young Adult Carers, draws on the findings of the research and sets out the key recommendations for UK and Welsh Government and public bodies to secure a positive future for the UK's young adult carers (Alexander, C, 2014).

The research found that young adult carers:

- Miss or cut short an average of 48 school days a year because of their caring role.
- Are four times more likely to drop out of college or university than students who were not young adult carers.
- Have higher rates of poor mental and physical health than the average young person.

- Rarely receive the assessments they are entitled to, with only 22% of those surveyed receiving a formal assessment of their needs by the local authority.
- Experience high rates of bullying – one quarter reported bullying and abuse in school because they were a carer.

Retention

- Research by The Children's Society (The Children's Society, 2013) discovered that one in 20 young carers miss school due to their caring responsibilities. Further research, (Sempik, J and Becker, S, 2013, 2014, 2014a) found that young adult carers were four times more likely than the UK average of dropping out of university. 36% of student carers felt able to balance their studying commitments, compared with 53% of students who didn't have caring responsibilities (NUS, 2013).
- 2010 research found that the likelihood of young adult carers aged 16–18 not being in education, employment or training for six months or more, was twice that of their peers (Audit Commission, 2010).

Achievement

- Disadvantage can start early, with young adult carers having significantly lower educational attainment at GCSE level than their peers who don't have caring responsibilities. Oxfordshire local authority collected data on the attainment and school attendance of pupils with caring responsibilities and found a clear educational attainment gap for young carers (Carers Trust, 2012). This is a trend that is likely to be replicated in local authorities across Wales.
- 2013 research found that young carers have significantly lower educational attainment than their peers, that is the difference between nine Bs and nine Cs at GCSE (The Children's Society, 2013).
- It is essential that colleges understand the needs of this specific student group and the impact of caring upon their education if the necessary support isn't in place. The early identification of young adult carers in your college and implementing support across the student life-cycle, will help ensure that the students who are more likely to drop out, or who are at risk of not reaching their potential, will be more likely to succeed and make a successful transition into higher education, training or employment.

Government guidance

- Young carers and young adult carers in Wales have rights to care and support, either for themselves or for the person they care for. Colleges can signpost a student carer to their local authority for a carer's assessment. Get in touch with your local carer service to find out more. Visit Carers.org.
- To find out more about carers' assessments, see www.carersuk.org/wales/help-and-advice/factsheets-carers-wales/getting-an-assessment-in-wales.
- In April 2016, the right to a carer's assessment in Wales was extended under the Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act (2014), defining a carer as a 'person who provides or intends to provide care for an adult or a disabled child'. This Act places carers on an equal legal footing to those they care for, ensuring that local authorities have a responsibility to promote the well-being of carers who need support. The key areas where support can make a difference to the well-being outcomes are 'education, training and recreation'.
- To find out more about the Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act 2014, see <https://socialcare.wales/hub/sswbact>.

Life as a young adult carer

Each young adult carer has a caring role which is particular to them and this may fluctuate over time. The examples below give an insight into the demands that caring places on a young adult's life.

Lucinda, 21

Lucinda has been caring for as long as she can remember. Her mother has a personality disorder which causes hallucinations and rapid mood changes. Lucinda's sister has attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and a speech disorder meaning Lucinda cares for the two of them. It wasn't until Lucinda was 12 that she realised this "wasn't normal".

Eloise, 18

Waking up at 5:15am to get ready for college, checking in on the family throughout the day and arriving home at 6:55pm to make the dinner and sort the house out. This is a good day for Eloise who has been caring for her mum since she was seven and also helps care for her brother and her sister who both have disabilities.

Jake, 18

Jake has been a young carer since he was seven, taking on tasks such as food shopping, household chores, helping with younger siblings and supporting his mum to be mobile. Jake became passionate about cooking and the importance of knowing how to cook when you are a young carer. Jake is always pushing himself to achieve more.

Lucinda*, 21

“ I have been caring for my mum since before I can remember. My mum has a rare personality disorder with rapid mood and thought changes and hallucinations. She also has spina bifida occulta which causes her severe pain at times, this combined with non epileptic attack disorder means that she can spend the day in bed and has to be careful when leaving the house. When I was seven my sister was born, she has a severe speech impediment and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

Through school I coped with home life by not letting anyone see what I did. In primary school I didn't even realise what I was doing was any different from peers and felt as though I wasn't good enough as all my friends seemed to have so much time to themselves. I spent the time before school helping my mum out of bed and setting her up for the day with plenty of water, food and the TV remote close to hand.

During school, I'd use breaks to check on her. I was a bright kid and fought to keep people from knowing what I was doing by completing homework and tasks before they were due. I used this to my advantage so that going to my mum's appointments and having days off where needed never affected my work. At 12, I realised that the other people in my class weren't rushing home to look after their mothers or siblings but I thought that

perhaps they hid it better than me. I didn't realise that I had my issues buried so deeply that no one else noticed.

In high school, it got harder to hide but I pushed myself and missed out on sleep which seemed like a small price to pay to keep up the facade.

At 16, teachers noticed my tiredness as my sister's ADHD was starting to manifest in more violent ways which affected my mum. They started to check on me more regularly but I convinced them that it was just exam stress so they backed off. During sixth form, my head of year started to notice I wasn't sleeping well and asked how I was every time she saw me. Eventually I told her and she put me in touch with my local carers service who showed me that it was okay to talk about what was going on at home.

Now, four years later, I'm able to talk about it and have the support I need to do anything I want. I took my A-Levels and applied to university. I'm in the final year of my BSc Mathematics and have been accepted onto a PGCE. I'm now proud to say I'm a carer and feel like it has had a very positive impact on my life.”

* Lucinda's identity has been changed in the interest of privacy.

Eloise*, 18

“ I have been a young carer for my mum since I was seven due to her having fibromyalgia, mobility and mental health problems. I then began caring for my brother who has been diagnosed with learning difficulties and my sister who has an auto-immune condition and is visually impaired.”

5:15am – Wake up. Feed rabbit. Gather stuff for college. No time for breakfast.

6:15am – Leave the house and walk to catch the bus that takes me to the nearest village with a train station.

7:30am – Train leaves for 45-minute journey to get to my college.

8:30am – Catch the bus to college. Check Snapchat too see if the kids got up for school.

8:40am – Arrive at college.

4:00pm – If I've made it through the day without a message from either sibling or my mum, describing some school related problem, I'm on for a winner. Time to walk to catch the train.

4:45pm – Arrive at the train station. Train due at 5:29. I spend this time doing some college work while I don't have to stop and start to help at home.

5:35pm – Train leaves.

6:15pm – RUN! The bus is a four-minute run away and it leaves at 6:20.

6:22pm – The bus is usually a little late which is good for me. But there is the odd occasion where it's early and I miss it. If I do, this results in a long wait for the next bus ... over an hour later.

6:55pm – I get back to the house. 50/50 chance dinner has been made. If it hasn't, I need to make it.

7:30pm – Tidy up whatever didn't get done in the day and shower the children. Check on rabbit.

8:00pm – Start my assignments, disrupted by arguing children.

9:00pm – The kids' bedtime, resulting in more disagreements. Lucky if they sleep for 10pm.

10:00pm – Mum goes to bed. I can fully concentrate, so will carry on with my work a bit longer.

11:00pm – By the time I close my eyes (or so it feels) it's 5:15am again.

Note: This is a relatively good day. This is when my mum's knee isn't bad, my sister's muscles don't hurt so much, making her irritable, and my brother hasn't had an awful day at school, which is rare.

* Eloise's identity has been changed in the interest of privacy.

Jake, 18

“ I've been a young carer since I was around seven years old. My mum had a stroke when she was just ten years old and she was told she would never be able to walk, work or have children. She proved everybody wrong though and even though she has limited mobility, she managed to raise five children and become a fully qualified teaching assistant. At first her stroke only caused damage to the right side of her body, but over the years it got progressively worse and she now uses a wheelchair and had to give up work.

As the second oldest son in my family, I had to take on quite a few tasks to help Mum on a day-to-day basis. Anything from food shopping, household chores, helping with my younger siblings and helping her get around. It made it harder for me to get into training and employment or do things other young people normally do.

Because I was a young carer I started going to a young carers project where I met other young people like me and took part in many projects. One of them was a cooking scheme where we showed other young carers that cooking can be fun, easy and cheap. As a young carer, you often have to help out with cooking

and we thought it'd be great to create a cookbook to make it a little easier. The cookbook got through to the Money for Life Welsh National Finals, but unfortunately, we didn't win.

I really wanted to push the idea further and reach more young carers, so I came up with the idea to make the cookbook into a free cooking app. It was important to me that the app was free, because money is often an issue when you're a young carer.

I received a £1,000 legacy grant but it was really difficult to find someone who could develop an app within the budget I had. I did a lot of research and found a small company that was willing to help. The process wasn't easy, especially because I was still caring for my mum and working full time, but I learnt a lot of new things along the way including planning, coding, design, communication and much more.

The hard work paid off and I finally managed to launch Starter Chef last year. The app is still in the early stages but I hope that it will make life a little easier for people, especially for young carers. Life can be difficult but I've learnt that you can always push yourself and strive for the best to achieve more.”

2

Establishing a solid foundation of support for young adult carers in your college

Developing and promoting a commitment to student carers

Establishing or integrating policy for student carers

Appointing a college lead/champion for student carers

Working with local authorities to raise awareness at freshers' events

Providing awareness training on student carers for all relevant staff

Establishing a partnership with local carers services

Initiating good practice

Developing and promoting a commitment to student carers

Developing a college commitment to student carers is a good starting point for the development of policy and support mechanisms and can be included in college literature to highlight to students and potential students, the support available to them.

Coleg Gwent's commitment to identifying and supporting carers

Coleg Gwent has highlighted in its strategy the need to identify young carers at the earliest point to provide a tailored experience, from pre-entry guidance through to progression, and to deliver the following:

- Accessible outreach activities.
- Impartial pre-entry guidance on further and higher education.
- Effective publicity for college support for potential vulnerable groups and those colleagues in for example, local authorities who are supporting them in educational progression.
- Support prior to and on entry as well as throughout the learning programme, provided by college leads.

- The offer of identified personal support before the course starts and arrangements for any continuing support post enrolment if required.
- Support that reflects and accommodates individual circumstances within processes related to application and other funding provision.
- Impartial progression guidance relating to higher education, or progression routes into employment and where relevant to support transition.

Establishing or integrating policy for student carers

It is essential that colleges have a clear policy for student carers, either in the form of a separate policy or by integrating student carers into existing policies (for example, Safeguarding or Equality and Diversity policies). This provides a structured support system to students with caring responsibilities.

Enabling student carers to balance their studies with their caring role, requires colleges to offer flexibility. See the good practice example on the next page.

Coleg Gwent good practice example

Coleg Gwent is committed to developing its policies to support vulnerable learners (including carers) to enhance their experience, development and progression opportunities. In 2011, a Protocol Agreement was implemented in partnership with its five-borough council, social services departments and other stakeholders, which ensures sharing of information between partners in relation to vulnerable groups who have expressed a wish to study at college.

As a direct result of this collaboration, the number of attendees has significantly increased, as has the percentage of these learners successfully attaining their qualification.

Pembrokeshire College good practice example

Pembrokeshire college highlights carers in its safeguarding and fitness to study policies. In addition, its admissions policy allows for mitigating circumstances to be applied for entry requirements where there are extenuating circumstances, such as caring responsibilities.

The development of clear policies should lead to colleges implementing specific actions and processes that will enable them to support student carers effectively.

Appointing a college lead/champion for student carers

Bridgend College understands how important it is to have a named person within the college to lead on implementing policy to support student carers and advocate on their behalf.

Having a college lead has improved communication and increased partnership working between the college and Bridgend Carers Centre.

Young people with caring responsibilities coming into student services are then passed to the lead who discusses how the college can help meet their needs.

Admission forms now have a tick box for carers which enables the lead officer to record details of the student on the dedicated database for young carers. The lead then contacts the student and it is assessed whether the student will benefit from additional support, if so, the lead contacts Bridgend Carers Centre.

Having a named contact makes it easier for Bridgend Carers Centre to notify the college to ensure that the support is implemented if they are working with a young adult carer who is about to start college. The college lead invites Bridgend Carers Centre to events to raise awareness about the support it provides and Bridgend Carers Centre keeps the lead informed about what they are doing, so that the relevant information can be provided to students.

Working with local authorities to raise awareness at freshers' events

Having identified that it would be beneficial to young adult carers, Bridgend Carers Centre attended Bridgend College Freshers Fair. At the fair, they provided information and were available to talk to students. A student carer who was already accessing support from Bridgend Carers was also present to offer their own experiences of college.

Some of the young people who spoke to the team identified themselves as being in a caring role and others wanted to take information. Young people could put their name down and request a call back from the appropriate service or book in to a drop-in session if staff felt they may benefit from a longer, more private chat. Some people were unsure what defined a young adult carer. Raising awareness with these students can help them to identify peers in caring roles and have a better understanding of their situation.

The team spoke to approximately 30 young people in total and handed out information to many more. They also spoke to many college staff. Some of the staff were aware that students in their classes were student carers and agreed to pass on the information about Bridgend Carers Centre.

The stall was set up within student services, with access to two private rooms. The event was promoted to the wider student population and staff via the college intranet. Any student carers identified at the fair were invited to contact Bridgend Carers Centre.

Providing awareness training on student carers for all relevant staff

For policies and processes to be effective, college staff need to have a basic understanding of the needs and experiences of young adult carers, and how they can support them to stay in learning and achieve their potential.

At Pembrokeshire College, all course teams are given training on the issues carers face and how they can support them with these issues. This forms part of their safeguarding training and signs and safety meetings.

Establishing a partnership with local carers services

Establishing partnership working between a college and local carers support service is essential.

Bridgend Carers Centre has worked hard to establish a good working relationship with Bridgend College to ensure that young adult carers receive a good level of support.

Some of the work undertaken by Bridgend Carers Centre includes:

- Initial meeting to discuss partnership. Setting realistic and achievable aims and outcomes. Gaining an idea of capacity.
- Joint working to develop college commitment which includes a tick box for carers on the enrolment form and the procedure that will follow.

- Identification of a carers champion whose role is to support student carers and liaise with Bridgend Carers Centre.
- Establishing a presence within the college. This includes posters to raise awareness and attending Freshers Fairs.
- Developing training opportunities for staff. Offering face-to-face training to create awareness and providing staff with information about what Bridgend Carers Centre offers.

As a result, Bridgend College now liaises regularly with the carers champion to ensure the partnership is sustained.

Initiating good practice

Crisis plan

For a young adult carer, a sudden change in home circumstances, such as deterioration in the health of the person they are caring for, can have a significant impact on their ability to continue their learning. Under these circumstances, some student carers stop attending college and, by the time they make contact several weeks later and explain what has been happening at home, they no longer feel able to return.

To tackle this issue, the carers lead at the college should consider adopting a proactive approach to crisis planning, working with student carers before problems arise and putting a crisis plan in place. This will ensure that if something does happen, they know what to do.

3

Promoting support for young adult carers at your college

Developing approaches to support young adult carers at college

Financial support for student carers

Developing approaches for supporting student carers

Multi-agency work and a whole family approach

Improving support for the student's family can help reduce caring responsibilities for the young adult carer. Colleges can assist by helping students to access support for their family from adult social care, health services and carers services.

Colleges can support students to request an assessment of their needs as a carer from their local authority which will take into consideration the needs of the whole family, including any siblings who

are caring. A local carers service will be able to offer support with assessing the student's needs in relation to their caring and if necessary, initiating support for their family.

Colleges can initiate or help students to access wider support from local services, for example a local young adult carers service or counselling service.

There are different approaches to providing support, including:

- Family focused approach.
- Peer support.
- A whole organisation approach.

Estyn

Estyn will now be requesting that further education institutions provide information on the number of young carers educated within their organisation as part of their pre-inspection process.

“When I was 16 I was doing a course at college. It was going okay, but then other things started to go wrong – I broke up with my boyfriend and I got in trouble with the police. I didn’t know what to do so I just dropped out. My support worker [at the young adult carers group] really helped me though. She helped me to sort stuff out, and came into college with me. I’m on another course now and it’s going good.”

Young adult carer

Family focused approach

Learning as a family and developing a family focused approach to learning are effective ways of engaging and motivating carers and their families, many of whom would not participate in learning otherwise.

Offering this holistic approach takes into account the personal circumstances of each individual student carer and the impact of engagement in learning and other areas in their life. It particularly recognises the wide range of caring responsibilities that student carers face, including the amount of time that they care for a family member, the pattern of care, who they care for, the type of care that they provide and the impact this could have upon their learning. It also recognises the distinct challenges faced by young adult carers as they make their transition to adulthood and independence.

In practice, this may involve a learning provider working with a family to identify a suitable course for a student carer, and putting arrangements in place to ensure that alternative care is available while the student is engaged in learning. Alternatively, it may look at the learning needs of other members of the family, or as a family learning together. This is a personalised approach that provides student carers and their families with choice, control and flexibility.

Peer support

It is important to provide opportunities for student carers to support each other and have access to informal drop-in sessions.

Colleges should work on developing peer support for student carers through bringing students together from different curriculum areas and courses.

To develop and build on this type of peer support, colleges can invite their local carers service to deliver mentor training to student carers.

The colleges that have taken this approach noted that students who took part in this training had benefited from their involvement and recognised how their experience of caring had equipped them with skills they could use beyond college. Coleg Y Cymoedd has worked closely with RCT Carers in Rhondda Cynon Taff to use this approach, encouraging student carers to mentor newly identified carers – providing invaluable support and guidance.

“The aim is to get not just young carers learning about young carers but all the students in the school learning about caring issues, and all the staff ... It’s part of the wider agenda of improving emotional and mental health within the school population. So many young carers struggle with emotional problems, and mental health in schools is a big problem in general.”

Young Carers Education Adviser

A whole organisation approach

Colleges have a number of departments and deliver their provision through a range of policies, processes and approaches. A whole organisation approach seeks to ensure that the needs of student carers are actively considered and catered for at all levels, across all departments and by all staff within a college. This includes from recruitment and marketing, through to enrolment, support, delivery and progression.

In order to raise awareness as a whole organisation, Coleg Y Cymoedd has worked closely with RCT Carers to ensure each campus has a carers champion who takes responsibility for supporting student carers while in college. In addition, it has created the Young Carers College Award which is implemented in each campus across the institution. The award consists of three levels: Bronze, Silver and Gold. The bronze award is made up of a set of standards, with colleges having to achieve and evidence each standard before achieving the award and being able to progress to the next level. Email YoungCarersSupportTeam@rctcbc.gov.uk for more information about the set of standards.

“I now feel confident that I can approach my tutor for support, as they now have an understanding of my caring role and how it affects me. I didn't feel like they understood how caring affected my life before they started the Young Carers College Award.”

Young adult carer

Financial support for student carers

Research has identified that young adult carers and their families often live in or on the edge of poverty (Becker, F, and Becker, S, 2008). If a young person participates in learning for more than 21 hours per week, they are not entitled to claim Carer's Allowance. This benefit is vital to many student carers and their families. In Wales, Student Finance Wales provides financial support via Education Maintenance Allowance and Welsh Government Learning Grant Further Education. In addition to this, student carers can benefit from the support of colleges and carer services to help them access the financial support they need to help them sustain their learning. For example, Coleg Gwent has a Learner Support Fund that offers financial assistance so that students can attend college and successfully complete their programme of study. The types of support provided includes for example, free meals/travel, course related equipment/resources, visits and childcare.

Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) and Welsh Government Learning Grant Further Education (WGLG FE)

Student Finance Wales provides financial support via EMA and WGLG FE to eligible young people and adults who live in Wales and wish to continue with their education at recognised schools or further education colleges.

Young adult carers aged 16–18 may be able to receive EMA, which is a 'something for something' contract in which eligible young people can receive their weekly allowance by attending college fully and achieving their learning goals.

Young adult carers aged 19 or older may be able to receive a WGLG FE grant to help with the costs of studying. The grant is paid termly and is based on attendance and progression.

If eligible for EMA or WGLG FE, students are required to sign a contract (known as a Learning Agreement) with their school or college. The agreement form includes an 'extenuating circumstances' tick box which young adult carers can tick to enable recognition of their caring responsibilities when they are late or miss classes because of caring.

No evidence should be required when carers tick this box; however this will be at the school's or college's discretion.

EMA and WGLG FE will not affect any benefits currently paid into the student's household. Further information can be found at www.studentfinancewales.co.uk.fe.

4

Applications and admissions

Identifying student carers during application and admissions processes

Providing student carers with information and advice online, in prospectuses and at open days

Identifying student carers during application and admissions

Some schools now have designated leads for young carers within their Senior Leadership Teams. This is something that is promoted as good practice as part of the Young Carers in Schools programme in Wales. Colleges are encouraged to liaise with carers leads in schools to ensure transition to further education goes as smoothly as possible.

See for example: <https://professionals.carers.org/Young-Carers-in-School-Wales-toolkit> Step 6 Tool 9 Supporting young carers to participate post-16

In addition, a tick box for carers should be added to admissions forms to enable the carers lead officer to record details of the student on the dedicated database and feedback to local carers services. This is a process that is used effectively in Bridgend College.

Providing student carers with information and advice online, in prospectuses and at open days

Colleges are encouraged to work with local carers services to ensure their attendance at the college freshers' fairs.

In addition, the support you offer carers can be promoted on your website and in your college prospectus. See for example, www.cymoedd.ac.uk.

5

Student support

Offering attendance and coursework flexibility for student carers

Providing personalised and holistic support

Providing support to deal with emotional and behavioural difficulties

Encouraging and facilitating self-identification

Supporting the transition of student carers between school, college, higher education and the workplace

Developing peer support networks and groups

Enabling students to learn from home

Offering attendance and coursework flexibility for student carers

Talk to the individual student carer and find out how minor flexible attendance could help them. For example, a parent with a mental health problem may need care in the morning to get up, take medication and face the day ahead. If so, pressure on a student carer could be significantly reduced if there was some flexibility with their start time. Other student carers may have differing responsibilities on different days and would benefit from having an adapted timetable to fit with these responsibilities. However, before flexibility is offered, support the student and their family in seeking support that does not rely on the young person being late or missing college.

With effective additional support arrangements, many student carers will be able to complete coursework and assignments within deadlines. They will also be able to succeed in exams. However, being a student carer can be unpredictable – unexpected problems can occur which take priority over everything else. For example, a parent may be taken into hospital unexpectedly, or urgent problems with money or housing may arise. It may therefore be hard for a student carer to focus on submitting an assignment on time.

Most student carers will not always need extra time but it will reduce the pressure on them if they know it is an option if a crisis occurs. It's also important that they know how to get support and who to approach in that situation.

Providing personalised and holistic support

Student carers often lead complex lives and regularly juggle a range of responsibilities and pressures – such as managing household finances, communicating with services, dealing with housing and benefits issues, sorting out medication and respite care, and managing health and emotional difficulties. However, as student carers all have unique situations and challenges, so personalised and holistic support is fundamental in enabling a student carer to overcome both practical and emotional barriers to learning.

Learning providers can play a key role in identifying the wider support needs of a student carer. Specialist staff within a college may be able to provide direct personalised support to deal with some issues. However, if there are issues that they are not equipped to deal with, it is important that they have effective partnership and referral arrangements in place to enable student carers to access the support they need.

Providing support to deal with emotional and behavioural difficulties

Recognise that frustration, anger, lack of confidence and low self-esteem are understandable and normal reactions to the complex pressures that student carers can experience. For some, personalised support to manage their emotions and channel their behaviour in a positive way may be valuable. It is important for the student carer to understand their emotions and how to deal with them.

Think about the different ways to support student carers to deal with any emotional or behavioural difficulties they may be experiencing such as anger management sessions, gym membership, group support, or one-to-one counselling sessions. Talk to the individual student carer about the difficulties they are experiencing, the impact on their lives, future consequences and what the college could do to help. Support may be available within the college or you may need to access external services.

Encouraging and facilitating self-identification

Negative experiences at school, bullying and discrimination may mean that many student carers are reluctant to declare their caring responsibilities. It is important that colleges implement both formal and informal mechanisms to enable and encourage a student carer to declare their situation. This can include questions on enrolment forms, at the interview and induction process, and in meetings with tutors.

It is also important that you promote the support you offer student carers – refer to student carers in the college prospectus and on the college website. This will help students to feel that their needs are important to the college, and that they are likely to receive the support they need. Posters and leaflets that raise awareness of student carers' needs, and that signpost student carers to staff who can provide support will also encourage declaration. As with all information, these resources will need to be written and produced in a way that is accessible to all learners.

Supporting the transition of student carers between school, college, higher education and the workplace

To ensure consistency of support for carers, it is important that the transition from school to further education runs effectively. Coleg Sir Gar does this through a mentoring service. The college has a dedicated team of mentors across all campuses, who offer support on a one-to-one basis with applications, advocacy and personal mentoring. While engaging with the mentors, students can work on many issues or worries they may have. The team is experienced in creating bespoke methods and looks at current barriers to the students accessing teaching and learning. The team can refer students where necessary to other agencies such as Coleg Sir Gar Counselling Team, health teams and other specialised services. The mentors can also advocate for students where required with college tutors, and work on action plans to assist the student learning experience.

As well as the one-to-one support, the Mentoring team is committed to the transition of new students into college. Each Carmarthenshire Comprehensive School has been assigned a mentor who links with heads of Year 11 – school based youth workers as well as Careers Wales advisors. The mentors also attend Vulnerable Assessment Profile meetings at the schools. During these meetings, students who are

believed to be at risk of becoming not in education, employment or training are highlighted and mentors are able to assist them with their enrolment into college.

The transition provision offered by the mentors is often a bespoke opportunity for the young people who are looking to engage with further education. Opportunities include:

- The chance to discuss school fears and expectations of college life with a mentor.
- Campus visits individually or by groups.
- The opportunity to attend a week of tasters during February half term across all campuses. During the week, advice and guidance is available as well as support with applying for courses.
- The chance to engage in informal mentoring prior to enrolment.
- The opportunity to attend a range of activities during July during the summer transition programme.
- Support during enrolment.
- Mentoring support for the start of the academic year if required.

Developing peer support networks and groups

Student carers can feel alone and isolated. Contact with other student carers can help them to realise that there are other people in a similar situation to themselves. Simply knowing that they are not alone can be a big confidence boost. Many student carers may talk frankly and honestly to peers and share concerns about the person they care for, the uncertainty of their role, what will happen if the person they care for dies and about their own future. There are all emotive and difficult issues that many student carers feel more comfortable talking to other student carers about than to someone who doesn't have caring responsibilities.

A support group within the college could therefore significantly benefit carers. The group could be run in partnership with a local carers service or support organisation. Before doing so, talk to student carers to find out how they might like to be involved in a support group, what form it should take, how often they should meet and where it should take place.

A student-led group will empower student carers and enable them to develop skills, feel valued and ensure that the group is appropriate for their needs.

Enabling students to learn from home

There may be occasions when a student carer temporarily and unexpectedly cannot get into college, for example when a parent requires extra care, or when a sibling is unwell. Supporting the student with resources and materials to learn from home can enable them to continue studying. This might include ensuring they have the access to an online learning platform, or sending notes, activities and materials to students.

However, again, support the student and their family in seeking support that does not rely on the young person needing to learn from home.

Find out if the student carer has access to a PC or laptop at home. If not, see if the college is able to offer support through its hardship funds or provide one on a temporary basis.

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Due to the sensitive nature of our work we have changed the name of some of the carers and those
they care for, in this resource.