

# PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 6 SEPTEMBER 2018

## YOUNG CARERS DEEP DIVE REPORT

Report by Councillor Nick Carter, Deep dive lead member

### Introduction

1. In 2016 the Health Inequalities Commission was sponsored by Oxfordshire's Health and Wellbeing Board to review the current state of health inequalities in the county and make recommendations for their reduction. In its report the Commission emphasised the significant impact that older carers have on the lives of those they care for and the positive contribution they make to the economy, but also how, all too often, they do not get the practical and emotional support they need. It acknowledged the importance of providing older carers with the very best support to help them in their caring role, but did not make the same reference to young carers or highlight the inequalities they face.
2. Whilst reviewing the Council's progress on implementing the Commission's recommendations the Performance Scrutiny Committee raised concern about this. In response, a deep dive group was established to uncover the many hidden issues faced by young carers, and understand how they are identified and supported across Oxfordshire.
3. The initial lines of inquiry were:
  - The profile and number of young carers in Oxfordshire;
  - Understanding the key challenges faced by young carers;
  - The range of ways that young carers can access support;
  - Services currently offered to support young carers; and
  - How the Young Carers Service works in partnership (across service areas and with other organisations) to identify and support young carers.
4. I have led this deep dive with the support of Councillors Emily Smith and Glynis Phillips. Officer support has been provided by the Young Carers Team Manager and Senior Practitioner, and a Senior Policy Officer. I thank them for their input, ideas and guidance through this process.
5. This report presents our findings and recommendations for review by the Performance Scrutiny Committee.

### Who is a young carer?

6. The term 'young carer' refers to children and young people under 18 who provide regular or on-going care and emotional support to a family member who is physically or mentally ill, disabled or misuses substances. A young carer becomes vulnerable when the level of care-giving and responsibility to the person in need of care becomes excessive or inappropriate for that child.
7. Some of the ways young people make care for another person are:

- staying in the house a lot to be there for the person,
- non-attendance at school to be available to care,
- helping the person to get up, wash or dress, use a toilet and other levels of intimate care,
- taking an inappropriate level of responsibility for the medication of the cared-for person,
- doing lots of the household chores like shopping, cleaning and cooking,
- taking responsibility for the care of younger brothers and sisters,
- providing emotional support.

## Issues faced by young carers

8. It is clear that having a caring role is likely to have an impact a young person's emotional or physical well-being, educational achievement and life chances. It can also lead to a loss of self-esteem and confidence.
9. An analysis of young carers undertaken by the Children's Society in 2013<sup>1</sup> found that:
  - Young carers are one and a half times more likely to have a special educational need or long-standing illness or disability,
  - One in 12 young carers is caring for more than 15 hours per week,
  - Approximately one in 20 miss school because of their caring responsibilities,
  - Young carers tend to have significantly lower educational attainment at GCSE-level,
  - Young carers are more than one-and-a-half times as likely to be from Black, Asian or minority ethnic communities, and are twice as likely not to speak English as a first language,
  - Young carers are more likely than the national average to be 'not in education, employment or training' (NEET) between the ages of 16 and 19.
10. As a result of their caring role, around a third of young carers in Oxfordshire have school attendance below 85%. 13% are less likely to achieve Level 4 or higher at Key Stage 2 and 22 % less likely to gain five or more A\* to C at GCSEs. 38% of young carers are identified as having special educational needs.<sup>2</sup>
11. The latest statistics from the Oxfordshire Education, Employment and Training Service show that 6% of 16-18 year olds who are known to be not in education, employment or training (NEET) are young carers. However, officers report that this is unlikely to be a fair representation the number of young carers who are NEET, and the type of data and methodology for collecting data on young carers in under review.
12. Unfortunately, we did not have the opportunity to meet with young carers directly during the deep dive, therefore the voice of young carers in Oxfordshire is not reflected in this report. However, our focus on young carers will not stop after this report is published. The Young Carers Service supports a Young Carers Forum,

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<sup>1</sup> 'Hidden from View: The experiences of young carers in England', Children's Society, 2013

<sup>2</sup> Statistics from 'Oxfordshire Uncovered' – Oxfordshire Community Foundation, 2016

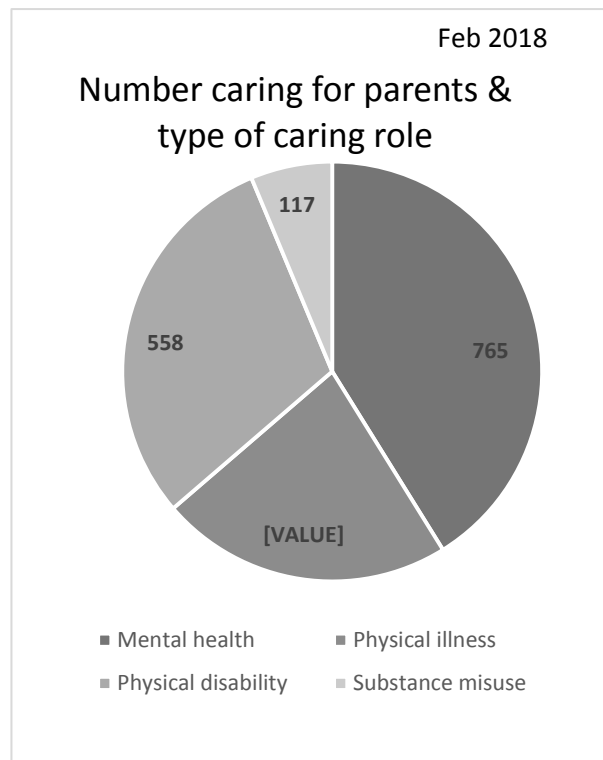
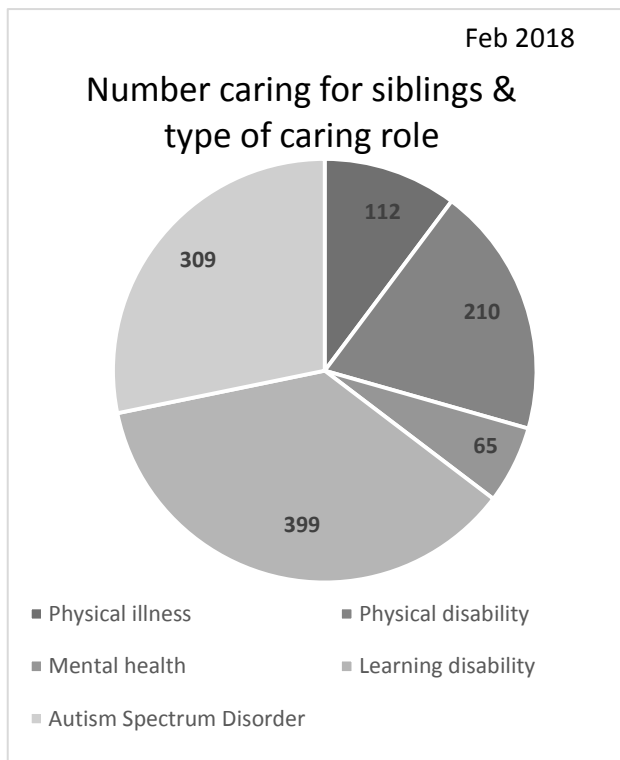
whose membership is currently being refreshed, and we are committed to attending their next meeting to hear young carers' views directly. We would welcome the opportunity to report back to the Committee after this, to inform any further work.

## The profile of young carers in Oxfordshire

13. In a 2016 report by the Oxfordshire Community Foundation – 'Oxfordshire Uncovered' – the number of young carers thought to be in the county was as many as 12,000 more than those already identified (based on census data).
14. Officers informed us that the number of young carers known to the Young Carers Service continues to grow each year and there are currently more than 2,900 identified in Oxfordshire. Between November 2017 and February 2018 alone an additional 374 young carers were identified – an increase of 12.8%.

<b>Total young carers identified – Feb 2018 (by Hub)</b>		<b>2,914 (100%)</b>
Banbury	15.4%	North area total 24.9%
Bicester	9.5%	
East Oxford	11.3%	City area total 22.3%
Littlemore	11.0%	
Southeast Oxfordshire	17.3%	South area total 34.2%
Southwest Oxfordshire	16.9%	
West Oxfordshire	14.9%	West area total 14.9%
Unknown	3.8%	

15. Alongside the Young Carers Service, the charity Be Free Young Carers supports more than 550 young people with caring roles in South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse. Some of these individuals are also known to the Service.
16. When we met with the charity's Director and Chair of Trustees they reported that there can be as many as 7 new referrals for support to them each week. These come from families, young carers themselves, schools, GPs, social and health care teams and other statutory professionals. Whilst Be Free Young Carers predominantly work with young people aged 8 to 18, the largest cohort of young carers they currently work with are in their early teens.
17. Of the young carers identified, the Council's Young Carers Service has seen a significant increase in the number of young people caring for more than one person (19%). Their caring responsibilities range from caring for a parent with drug and alcohol problems, to caring for a severely disabled sibling. The most common caring responsibility is supporting parents with mental ill-health. The youngest carer referred to the Service was just 3 years old.



## The Council's statutory responsibilities

18. Under the Children and Families Act 2014 and the Care Act 2014 the Council has legal duty to take reasonable steps to identify young carers up to the age of 25 and carry out a statutory assessment that considers the impact of the caring role on the child and whole family. The assessment must determine the extent to which the young carer provides or intends to provide 'inappropriate' or excessive' care, defined by the Care Act as anything which is likely to have an impact on the child's health and wellbeing or education, or which is unsuitable for the child.
19. Where a young carer is moving into adulthood a transition assessment is required under the Care Act to examine their needs after 18. In these assessments a 'young carer' is someone under the age of 18 who cares for an adult. Whilst this excludes young carers who look after a younger sibling, a different assessment can be offered under the Carers (Recognition and Services) Act, but only for children who have had a disability assessment.
20. One of the biggest challenge for the Council is identifying young carers; they are often isolated and hidden from view and may not see their role as anything 'out of the norm'. Where an adult with disabilities is known to the Local Authority, systems are in place to ensure identification, but if a young person's responsibilities are excessive or inappropriate because of another's misuse of alcohol and substances, or domestic violence, these young carers are more difficult to find. In these cases schools, the Police, GPs and other agencies play a vital role in identifying and referring potential young carers.

## Oxfordshire's Young Carers Service

21. Since 2010 the Council has had a Young Carers Service and there has been a Young Carers Strategy since 2008. Prior to 2017 the Young Carers Service was a specialist service with an in-house team based delivering direct support, and a third sector provider undertaking statutory assessments for young carers.
22. Following a review of the service in 2016 the assessment and support functions were brought together under a single County Council service of 13 staff, including social work qualified staff. Statutory young carers assessments are undertaken by specialist workers in the service and the threshold of needs<sup>3</sup> is used to identify the needs of children and families in Oxfordshire and provide appropriate support.
23. In June 2018 the service moved from Corporate Parenting into the Family Solutions Service<sup>4</sup> which works with a much wider range of vulnerable families in need. This change is expected to increase awareness of young carers and the support available across social care, and promote earlier identification of young carers through collaborative working with early help and social care practitioners. Members of the service will be based in Children & Family Centres, developing local community links and advising early help practitioners and social workers on a consultative basis in relation to the assessment of and support to young carers.

### Referrals

24. Despite the obstacles faced in identifying young carers, the number of referrals to the Young Carers Service has been increasing. In February 2018 officers reported that there were 200 active cases and 91 children awaiting assessment. In 2017 a total of 377 referrals were made to the service – a 9% increase on the previous year – with a significant majority being new referrals. A large proportion of these referrals came from the north and south of the county.

<b>Total young carer referrals 2017</b>	<b>379 (100%)</b>
City area	16.1%
North area	30.6%
West area	19.5%
South area	33.8%

25. The service uses a simple allocation checklist to internally triage and prioritise cases. This includes an appraisal of whether the cared for person is a single parent of the child, if the cared for person is terminally ill, whether the young person cares for a number of people and if the family is known or open to other early help or children's services. In 2017 a total of 97 Young Carers assessments were completed following referral to the service, although more than 130 were still open for assessment. 79 of these young people received support after their assessment.

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<sup>3</sup> The Threshold of Needs Matrix can be found at: [http://www.oscb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Oxfordshire-Threshold-of-Needs\\_Final.pdf](http://www.oscb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Oxfordshire-Threshold-of-Needs_Final.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> A locality based service delivering early help and support, and statutory safeguarding interventions from eight Children and Family Centres across the county.

## The Council's support offer

26. The Young Carers Service works with children aged 4 to 18 and young adult carers aged 19 to 25. The type of support currently provided by the service includes:
- Liaison with schools and other professionals involved with a child and their family;
  - Referrals for and/or liaison with services providing support to the 'cared for' person;
  - Signposting to other support activities and organisations; and
  - Short term specialist provision focused on building emotional resilience and getting child's voice heard (typically 1:1 sessions).
27. 1:1 interventions are usually delivered by the young carers specialist support workers (7.5 members of staff). The sessions last for as long as they are required, either to reduce a young person's level of need or until another professional takes over their support. In some cases a young person may only need one or two sessions, but others will have been directly supported in this way for more than a year. Depending on the young carer's needs assessment this direct support may be provided by another professional, e.g. an Early Help worker already working with them, who they have an existing relationship with. The support would be provided by whoever is best placed to deliver it.
28. The service is also researching the benefits and practicalities of providing outcome-focused therapeutic interventions to build young carers' resilience and help them understand risks. Such targeted group work is no longer part of the core offer of the Early Intervention Service, but these sessions could help young carers identify with their peers, relate to others with shared experiences, and provide them with a better understanding of their own situation.
29. General group activities for young carers, as with any specific cohort of vulnerable children, are not offered by the Council and open access youth groups that were run by Early Intervention Hubs, stopped in 2017. Families and professionals are now signposted to the Family Information Service to find activities in their local area and in some areas community groups are trying to replicate previous universal services. Instead of general activities, the Service's preference is to build lasting links for young carers by connecting them with their own communities.
30. The wider role of the service is to equip professionals across a range of settings to support young carers more informally. Not all young carers are eligible for support from the County Council, but there are a number of community groups and charities offering broader support to young people with a range of needs. For young carers specifically, we learned about the charity Be Free Young Carers and their offer of respite trips, activities, training and emotional support in the south of the county.
31. To measure the impact of the service's work a performance dashboard is being developed that will include a focus on:
- referrals for assessment,
  - young carers who are also children in need or on child protection plans,
  - the outcomes of these plans, and
  - children supported in the community.

## Cross-service / agency working

32. The Young Carers Service works in partnership with health partners, schools, the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board and voluntary sector providers. There is a well-developed Young Carers School Standards Awards Project which was recently highlighted by the Local Government Association as an effective way of meeting the health and wellbeing needs of young carers<sup>5</sup>. However, the Standard is not checked on an ongoing basis and the scheme duplicates the national Young Carers in School Award run by Children's Society, therefore the Oxfordshire scheme is likely to be phased out.
33. There are particularly well-established links with the School Health Nursing Service. They are well placed to identify young carers and the wider impacts of a child's caring role. It was therefore, surprising to learn that there is poor take-up of the Young Carers Service training offer for School Health Nurses and that only some have received training from the Department of Health on young carers. More work needed to explore whether schools who have counsellors could do more to support young carers.
34. The service has established a good model with Adult Social Care, whereby dependent children are identified through an adult carers' assessment. The Adult Social and Healthcare Team works closely with Carers Oxfordshire to get carers assessments for any person over the age of 18. However, it was concerning to learn that when a young carer is identified as part of an adult social care assessment the case is not automatically prioritised. There was a clear desire among officers to review the system of 'flagging' cases.
35. Since the Young Carers Service has been using the threshold of needs matrix to assess young carers' needs there has been better join up with other teams across children's services. This approach is reinforcing the message that young carers should be considered like any other child with needs and not as a special case – an ethos that is supported by the revisions to 'Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018' (Department for Education) which now refers to young carers under the early help arrangements. The service's main aim is to embed young carers in all frontline services and they are now planning a joint event with all managers from Early Help and social work teams to promote this approach.

## **Support for young carers in the community**

36. Outside of the statutory assessment and support offered by the Young Carers Service we were surprised to learn that there is a lack of specific support for young carers in the community. As far as we know, the only organisation working with this cohort is the charity Be Free Young Carers, operating in the South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse areas.

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<sup>5</sup> Local Government Association & Bright Futures, 'Meeting the Health and Wellbeing Needs of Young Carers', Jan 2018. Available at: <https://www.local.gov.uk/meeting-health-and-wellbeing-needs-young-carers>

37. Currently Be Free Young Carers offers social activities, training, workshops and opportunities for relaxation to young carers, which they report are popular with young people and reduce their feelings of stress, anxiety and isolation. Every young carer referred to the charity receives a home visit to have an assessment of their caring activities and the positive and negative outcomes of this. Whilst the charity currently has simple mechanisms for gauging the impact of their work, they are striving to develop methods that clearly demonstrate the impact of their support on young carers over time through reviewing these initial assessments. More information about the organisation is included in Appendix A.
38. As a charity they are heavily reliant on donations, grants and fund raising, and despite existing for more than 23 years, the organisation has been at risk of closure at least twice – once in June this year – because of issues with the sustainability of funding. In recognition of the work the charity does they are well supported financially by the local town, parish and district councils. However, there is still a significant shortfall in their annual income, currently over £100k. They receive no financial support from organisations who frequently refer young carers to them e.g. the County Council, Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group and Academy schools.
39. Despite their working relationship with the Council, the charity leaders shared with us that they feel their relationship with the Local Authority is uneven; the Council refers and signposts to the charity if a young person does or does not meet the threshold for a statutory support, but referring young carers to the Council does not guarantee the offer of statutory support and in some cases the young person may be signposted back to the charity.
40. When we met with the charity's leaders they also reported that awareness of young carers varies significantly from school to school and they expressed concern that pastoral care in schools is being marginalised due to a lack of resources, which could increase young carers' disadvantage. They claimed that schools often prefer to refer to the charity rather than the Council because of the length and complexity of referral forms and the assessment process; they perceive access to support through Be Free Young Carers to be much quicker. More worryingly was their claim that many families they meet do not want to approach the Council because of the fear of family break up through contact with social services.
41. The charity also expressed concern that the local health-system's emphasis on moving to a more community-based system of care has the potential to put significantly more pressure on young people to take on caring responsibilities.

## **Summary**

42. The information and data gathered through this deep dive suggests that only a small proportion of young carers in the county have been identified and many young people with caring responsibilities remain hidden. Taking a whole family approach, raising awareness and intelligently sharing information across statutory agencies and community organisations is therefore vital. Basing the Young Carers Service in a



front-facing service area is expected to help, but the impact of this change is too early to assess.

43. Nevertheless, the Council's Young Carers Service has identified a significant number of young carers in the county and as a result of their work an increasing number are being found every year. However, the Council's focus on delivering statutory assessments and 1:1 support to those most in need has left a vacuum of broader support for young carers. More work is needed on effective practice in provision of support for this specific group of vulnerable young people.

## **Recommendations**

44. **The Committee is RECOMMENDED to:**

- a) **Ask the Cabinet to explore ways of funding the unique support to young carers provided by Be Free Young Carers.**
- b) **Support the development of good quality, evidence-based targeted group therapeutic work for young carers within the Young Carers Service.**
- c) **Review the impact of moving the Young Carers Service into the Family Solutions Service in 12 months' time.**
- d) **Ask the Cabinet to review and improve the timescales for completing statutory young carers' assessments and delivering support.**
- e) **There are examples of good in identifying and supporting young carers practice in some schools, e.g. opportunities for young carers to complete homework on school premises. This good practice needs to be recognised, captured and shared.**
- f) **Invite the Regional Schools Commissioner to make it a requirement for schools to their staff to identify where a child may be undertaking a caring role, the impact of that responsibility, and to understand what support is available to minimise the impact.**
- g) **Ask the Education Scrutiny Committee to review the measures used by Ofsted to assess the standard of support delivered to young carers as vulnerable learners, and to scrutinise the effectiveness of this regulatory oversight.**
- h) **Ask the Education Scrutiny Committee the scrutinise the range, quality and impact of pastoral care across Oxfordshire schools and colleges, particularly in relation to young carers.**
- i) **Ask the Education Scrutiny Committee working group focused on rates of school attendance to give specific attention to young carers, as a cohort at particular risk.**
- j) **Ensure Oxfordshire's health and social care system specifically considers the impact of its drive to deliver more community-based care on young carers and ask the Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee to review this as part of its scrutiny of transformational change across the system.**

- k) Ask the Council to establish a Young Carers Councillor Champion to help people understand the needs of young carers and promote the identification and support of young carers.**
- l) Review progress against these recommendations in 12 months' time.**

**Councillor Nick Carter**

Lead member – Performance Scrutiny Committee Young Carers Deep Dive

**Contact Officer:** Katie Read, Senior Policy Officer  
August 2018

## Appendix A –Be Free Young Carers

### The charity's background

- The organisation has existed for 23 years. It was originally established by the County Council as one of three centres supporting adult carers, operating across South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse area.
- In 2011 the Centre became independent charity after the carers service was recommissioned and a contract was awarded to a separate single organisation. The other two centres closed. The charity is now based at the Harwell Campus and still covers South and Vale.
- The Care Act 2014 introduced statutory obligations for the Council to support adult carers; there was less of an opportunity for the Centre to be impactful. The charity undertook a review of carers support across the County from which it identified a clear gap in support for young carers; as a result, the adult service was closed and the focus of the charity was readjusted to support young carers.
- With funding from the Oxfordshire Community Foundation the organisation rebranded and relaunched as 'Be Free Young Carers' (BFYC) in 2017, to make its focus clear and not tie the charity to one geographic area, with the clear ambition to become a Countywide organisation when funding permitted.
- The charity is funded entirely through its own efforts in fundraising; it has been at risk of closure due to a lack of funding on two occasions - once in 2014 and again in 2018.
- In June 2018, the charity decided it did not have sufficiently sustainable funding to support the increasing number of young carers and decided it had no option but to close. As a result of publicity around the planned closure, the charity has received a number of donations which has enabled it to avoid closure and remain open for 6 – 12 months. There is now a need to find sustainable funding during this time.

### Overview of the charity

- BFYC not a statutory provider. The charity offers social activities (organised activities and trips), training (in first aid, cookery and nutrition), workshops, opportunities for relaxation for young carers and, in partnership with BETTER Leisure, a young carers discount leisure card. All activities are intended to give young people time away from caring, time for themselves to make friends, socialise and be a child. These activities are popular and reduce the stress, anxiety and isolation that so many young carers say they feel.
- The charity describes a young carer as someone under 18 who is caring for a member of their family or a friend who is ill, disabled or misusing drugs or alcohol – BFYC follows the NHS definition of young carer.
- As part of the registration process, BFYC assess each newly referred young carer in their home using MACA (Multidimensional Assessment of Caring Activities) PANOC (Positive and negative outcomes of caring) assessments (also used by the Council's Young Carers Service). They flag and report any other concerns, e.g. safeguarding, and signpost to statutory support for the young carer and cared-for person where necessary.

- The charity currently supports 556 young carers. There can be as many as 7 new referrals for support each week; referrals come from families, young carers self-referring, schools, GPs, social and health care teams and other statutory professionals. BFYC predominantly works with young carers aged 8 to 18 and provides some support for young adult carers up to the age of 25 through its Leisure Card. The largest cohort of young carers they currently work with are in their early teens.
- The charity has good working relationships with statutory agencies and regularly liaises with schools and colleges to share good practise and advise on supporting young carers.
- The charity employs 5 part-time staff with specific skills (a director, a volunteer co-ordinator, a schools liaison officer, and two support workers). It has 6/7 volunteers and a Board of Trustees. The charity is partnered with another charity that provides pro-bono fundraising and back office support.
- The charity's current annual turnover is c. £150k-170k. It receives no income from the County Council. It is well supported by the parish and town councils and South Oxfordshire District Council, who provide in the region of £46k each year. The charity's remaining income is as a result of regular donations and fundraising activities.

Opportunities for development
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- BFYC is aspiring to extend its services to become a county-wide organisation knowing the lack of support for young carers in other parts of the County, and recognising the number of young carers in Oxfordshire.
- To measure the impact of their work BFYC asks young carers to complete feedback forms about how they feel at the end of organised social activities and training. It accepts that it can be difficult to demonstrate impact from this alone and is planning to introduce a light touch annual review of the MACA / PANOC assessment with each young carer to show the impact of their support on the young carer over time.
- BFYC is currently undertaking research, collaboratively with Healthwatch Oxfordshire, to understand the needs of young carers for support in Oxford City. This is hoped to inform a case for the expansion of BFYC support into the City.
- To assist with the financial sustainability of the charity, BFYC is considering how it can use the skills it possesses to generate income.
- BFYC recognises that more could be done to support the transition of young carers into adulthood, working more closely with Carers Oxfordshire.
- BFYC is currently recruiting volunteers to train as befrienders for its new volunteer befriending service which will provide regular emotional 1:1 support for young carers.