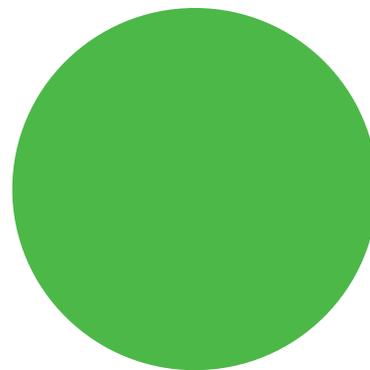
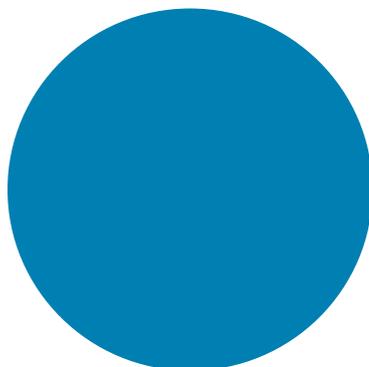
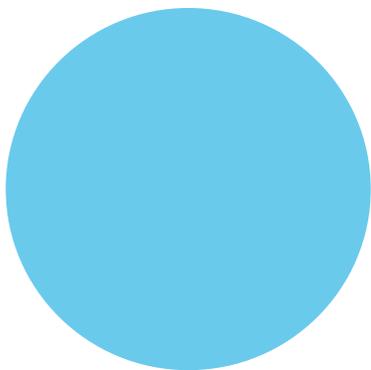
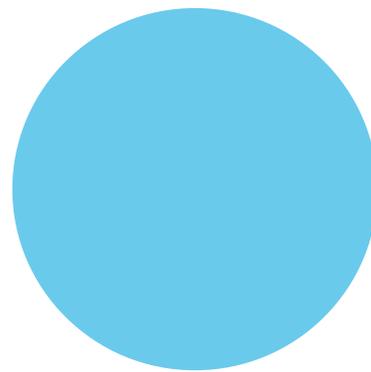
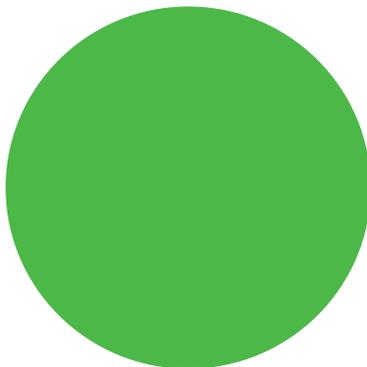
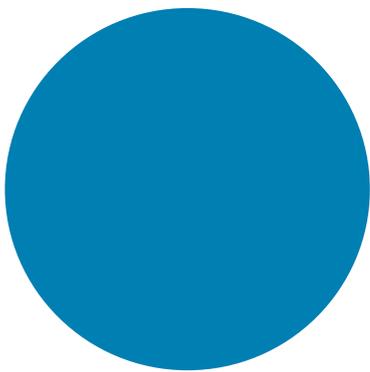


● Access to Education
● and Training for
● Young Adult Carers
● Policy Briefing Paper

● December 2009



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NIACE has a broad remit to promote lifelong learning opportunities for adults. NIACE works to develop increased participation in education and training, particularly for those who do not have easy access because of class, gender, age, race, language and culture, learning difficulties or disabilities, or insufficient financial resources.

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Access to Education and Training for Young Adult Carers

Policy Briefing Paper

December 2009

"I became unable to do anything except care for my daughter and my mum. I now cannot work, go into education, etc. I would like to be able to go into employment or further education."

"In some ways I hate being different, but in other ways I'm quite proud of what I've achieved. I think I'm more mature than lots of other young people, and I'm good at sorting things out, money and stuff. And talking to officials. I've had to grow up fast."

"Although I don't get the chance to do lots of things, in many ways I think it's made me more determined."

Young Adult Carers focus group participants

Introduction

Until very recently, almost all research on young carers has focused on young people up to the age of 18 and not beyond this age. However, secondary analysis of census data, undertaken in 2008¹, identified 229,318 young adult carers aged 18–24 in the UK. The real number is likely to be higher as research shows that many young adults do not realise that they are carers, or do not wish to be identified as carers. The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) was funded by the Nuffield Foundation to research and identify key issues around access to education and training for young adult carers aged 16–25 in England, with a specific focus upon transition to adulthood. The purpose of this research is to raise awareness of the needs and experiences of young adult carers by providing an analysis of the issues that impact on their access to, and participation in, education and training. The work on this project was carried out between April and December 2008 and was comprised of a desk-based literature review, nine interviews with practitioners and professionals, and four focus groups with young adult carers.

This policy briefing paper provides a summary of the project findings and presents a number of recommendations that are primarily intended for policy-makers, decision-makers, managers and practitioners across the learning and skills sector, but are also of relevance to those working in the social care sector.

Summary of findings

Transition and access to education and training

For most young adults, the age span of 16–25 is the pivotal period during which they make the transition to adulthood; this transition brings choices, opportunities, responsibilities and rewards. A fundamental factor of this transition phase is the acquisition of skills, qualifications, experiences and relationships – a gradual shift away from dependence to independence. However, existing literature and the findings of this research project provide clear evidence that:

- ❖ as a result of their caring responsibilities, many young adult carers do not make linear transitions, are not afforded the opportunities taken for granted by their peers, and therefore become isolated, disaffected, and marginalised;
- ❖ many young adult carers and their families live in poverty, and young adult carers experience significant problems and high levels of disadvantage as a consequence of their caring responsibilities which have a direct impact upon their motivation, opportunity and ability to engage in effective learning;
- ❖ young adult carers, many of whom are not engaged in learning and training, have few or no means of meaningful interaction or engagement outside of the family home;
- ❖ negative experiences of learning, such as bullying and lack of understanding by peers and professionals, mean that many young adult carers become deeply marginalised and ‘turned off’ learning at a young age; and
- ❖ a significant proportion of young adult carers have low aspirations, fail to achieve their potential and leave education with few or no qualifications.

¹ Becker and Becker (2008) *Young Adult Carers in the UK*. London: The Princess Royal Trust for Carers

Policy impact

During the previous decade, the UK has witnessed high levels of investment in the education and training of young adults aged 16–25. Underpinned by the skills agenda, and a strategy to ensure that the UK is competitive in the increasingly complex global economy, a range of policy initiatives, such as *Every Child Matters*, have been introduced with the objective of improving the participation and achievement levels of children and young adults. However, not all young adult carers benefit from the five *Every Child Matters* outcomes: be healthy; stay safe; enjoy and achieve; make a positive contribution; achieve economic well-being; and this was endorsed by those who participated in the focus groups conducted as part of this project.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that:

- ❖ the learning experiences of young adult carers have failed to improve;
- ❖ this significant group of young adults remain unseen and marginalised;
- ❖ young adult carers' participation in learning is commonly disrupted and they can become NEET (not in education, employment or training) at a young age; and
- ❖ young adult carers in the focus groups did not epitomise the government's vision for children and young people, as outlined in the national carers strategy, *'Carers at the Heart of the 21st Century'*:

*"Children and young people will be protected from inappropriate caring and have the support they need to learn, develop and thrive, to enjoy positive childhoods and to achieve against all the Every Child Matters outcomes."*²

How can access to education and training for young adult carers aged 16–25 be improved?

Whilst there is still much work to be done at a national level to improve young adult carers' access to, and participation in, learning, there is also much that learning providers can do to support young adult carers and create more positive experiences and outcomes for them. Evidence from this research project suggests that a range of factors and measures can have a positive impact upon young adult carers' engagement in learning. These include:

- ❖ flexible provision – for example, recognition that young adult carers may not be able to achieve high attendance levels, catch-up sessions, and the opportunity to learn at home;
- ❖ relaxed provision – many young adult carers report negative experiences of school; provision should therefore be relaxed and comfortable and 'different' to school;
- ❖ sensitive arrangements – for example, providing young adult carers with the opportunity to have their mobile phone switched on during lessons;
- ❖ emotional support – for example, access to a mentor or counsellor, or small group sessions with other carers;
- ❖ holistic support – for example, access to a transitions worker or a support worker who will develop an understanding of the caring responsibilities of a young adult and how these responsibilities impact upon their life; and
- ❖ effective multi-agency working – for example, through contact and the sharing of information with other services that support young adults carers, such as Connexions and social services.

² HM Government (2008) *Carers at the Heart of the 21st Century Families and Communities* (p. 123). London: HMSO

Anecdotal evidence from this project suggests that community-based projects and non-formal learning programmes are particularly effective in engaging and supporting young adult carers because they:

- ❖ provide opportunities for young adult carers to engage in a 'safe' and non-threatening environment;
- ❖ allow young adult carers to develop their confidence and self-esteem, take small steps of progress and improve their social capital; and
- ❖ provide the holistic and emotional support that is often so desperately needed.

Summary of recommendations

Promoting awareness and understanding

- ❖ A campaign that includes TV, cinema advertising and billboard posters to raise general awareness of the needs of young adult carers aged 16–25.
- ❖ Curriculum and equality and diversity awareness activities for children and young adults to develop their understanding of the value and importance of the role and responsibilities of young adult carers and the support that they may need; in order to help to reduce discrimination and bullying.
- ❖ Information/training on the needs and experiences of young adult carers for professionals and support workers who come into contact with young adult carers (such as doctors, social workers, Connexions PAs and Job Centre Plus staff).
- ❖ Information about the needs and experiences of young adult carers to be included in both initial teacher training courses and in staff development programmes.

Developing consistent support from services

- ❖ A statutory agency to be identified to take responsibility for supporting and signposting young adult carers aged 16–25, through key transitions, and possibly through local authority's carers' strategies.

Improving support through transition

- ❖ The replacement of the LSC with the Young People's Learning Agency and the Skills Funding Agency in 2010 will see the responsibility for the education of disabled learners up to the age of 25 who have a statement of education needs transfer to the local authority. A similar arrangement for young adult carers could be a way of supporting them through the transition from school and into, and through, further or higher education.

Developing support from learning providers

- ❖ Development and publication by learning providers of policies that outline their strategy for, and commitment to, identifying and supporting young adult carers.
- ❖ Assigning an individual to have overall responsibility for strategy and support for young adult carers.

- ❖ College Self Assessment Reports (SARs) and equality impact assessments to include mechanisms for monitoring support and provision for young adult carers.
- ❖ The adaptation of support mechanisms already in place for other vulnerable groups, young parents, and young adults in or leaving care, in order to address the needs of young adult carers.
- ❖ Production of guidance for learning providers, particularly colleges, about effective ways of identifying and supporting young adult carers, for example through detailed induction programmes to include specific guidance on how to encourage young adults to disclose their caring responsibilities, and processes for supporting them effectively when they do so.

Better joined-up support from services

- ❖ One organisation/named individual to take responsibility for the holistic needs of a young adult carer. This individual should provide intensive support, where needed, and should also act as a mechanism for inter-agency support and provision, providing information about the young adult carers needs as appropriate.
- ❖ Young adult carers to be targeted as one of the priority groups in the pilots of the New Adult Advancement and Careers Service.

Gender issues: raising awareness

- ❖ Production of awareness-raising materials or a campaign that will include a focus on the needs and experiences of young adult male carers.
- ❖ Production of materials targeted specifically at young men, to encourage them to disclose their caring role to learning providers and access support.

Improving practical help and support

- ❖ Provision of good quality replacement care to enable young adult carers aged 16–25 to engage in learning. In order to do this, a family-focused approach must be taken with key agencies working together to support young adult carers and their families.
- ❖ Identification of a named support worker who a young adult carer can approach for help with immediate needs (possibly via social services or Connexions).

Support around financial hardship

- ❖ The provision of clear information for young adult carers and their families about relevant financial matters. This could be provided in the form of an information pack, to include information about budgeting, benefits, Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA), and where to go for further information and support.
- ❖ EMA rules should be reviewed and applied flexibly to young adult carers. It is often not realistic to expect a young adult carer to achieve 100 per cent attendance, or to arrive on time every day. This should be taken into account, and young adult carers should not be penalised.
- ❖ Colleges to develop and offer support sessions on financial management and literacy that could support young adult carers with their responsibilities.

Further work

In July 2009, NIACE and the National Extension College produced a report for the Learning and Skills Council (LSC): *Including Carers: Towards a framework for meeting the needs of carers in further and adult education*. This report can be downloaded from:

http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/National/230709_Including_Carers_Report_final.pdf

There are plans to establish an implementation group based at the DCSF to take forward the recommendations of the LSC report. The findings of the Nuffield Young Adult Carers project will be very relevant to the work of this group, which will be aiming to influence policy development.

This project briefing paper can be downloaded from:

<http://shop.niace.org.uk/access-carers-briefing-paper.html>

The full project summary report can be downloaded from:

<http://shop.niace.org.uk/access-carers-summary.html>

For further information about this project please contact Nicola Aylward, Project Officer at NIACE on 0116 204 7059, or email: **nicola.aylward@niace.org.uk**

The Nuffield Foundation is a charitable trust established by Lord Nuffield. Its widest charitable object is 'the advancement of social well-being'. The Foundation has long had an interest in social welfare and has supported this project to stimulate public discussion and policy development. The views expressed are however those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Foundation.