

Improving support for young carers

This section describes the Government's strategy to help young carers, including the extended Family Pathfinders which have been set up to identify and disseminate good practice, and broader resources and support which are available.

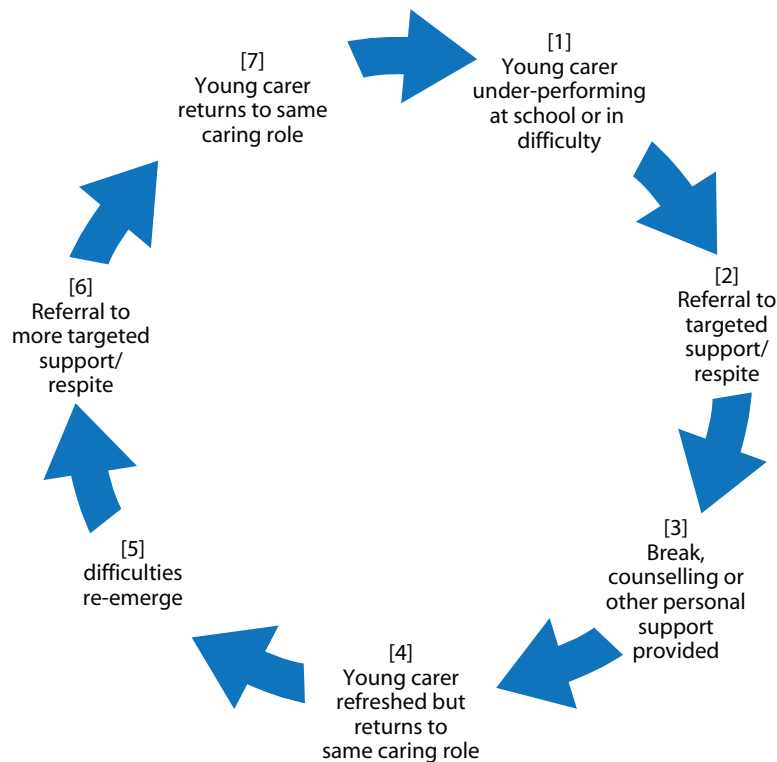
1. In 2007, the Government undertook a major review of support for carers. The national consultations and research highlighted the continuing vulnerability of many children and young people who provide care because of long-term illness, disability or substance misuse problems in their families. Providing good quality and reliable support to people being cared for and taking a "whole family" approach were found to be critical to ensuring children were protected from excessive or inappropriate levels of caring.
2. In response to the review's early findings, in December 2007 the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) announced that it planned to fund six of the existing 15 Family Pathfinders to look how better systems of support could be provided for families with young carers. These six 'extended' Pathfinder areas are Bolton, Leeds, Gateshead, Islington, Somerset and Sunderland. Lessons from these areas will be shared with local authorities nationally. Further pathfinders are planned in 2009.

Extended Family Pathfinders for young carers: key features of the work underway

- integrated support services for a targeted cohort of young carers and their families;
- frontline support staff from adults' and children's services and the third sector working in collaboration;
- broader action to promote earlier identification; and
- wider systems change so that all services take account of the need to protect children from inappropriate caring.

3. Following completion of the Carers Review, in June 2008 the Government published its new National Carers Strategy¹. The strategy acknowledged the value of the personal support for young carers which is often offered locally by dedicated young carer projects. But it also found that too many young carers were referred to projects only after their difficulties had become deeply entrenched and when their well-being and education were already at risk.
4. Not enough was being done by services already in touch with the family and the person cared for to identify problems earlier or to ensure that support was offered before young people took on excessive or inappropriate caring roles. Personal help and respite offered to the young carer can be invaluable but on their own may not resolve whatever underpinning problems are causing the young person to have to take on heavy caring responsibilities in the first place.

Diagram 1: Young carer supported in isolation: pattern which can emerge



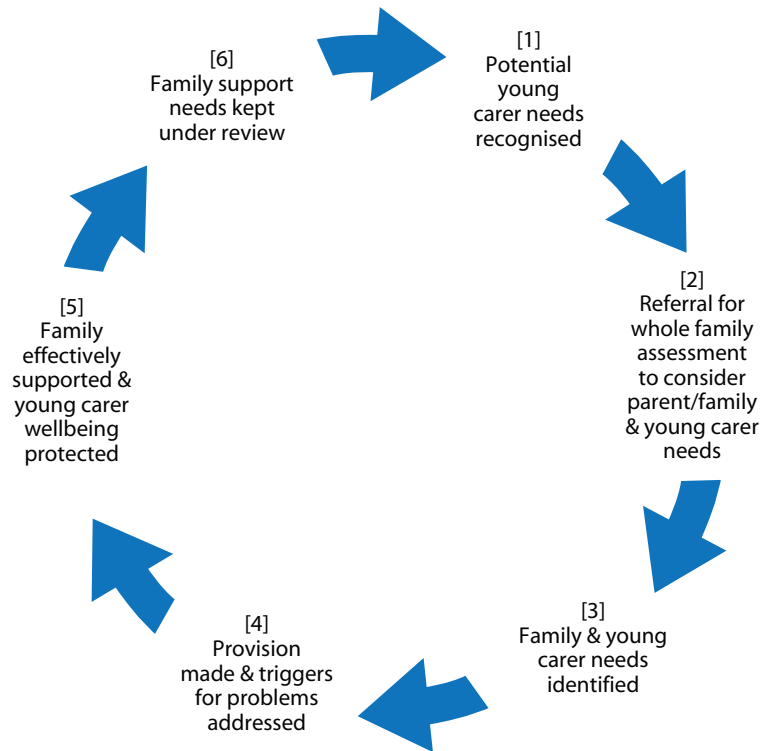
5. The strategy's main aim, therefore, is to ensure that services focus greater effort on early intervention and prevention and that they do so by providing properly integrated support around both the person cared for and the family as a whole.

1 Carers at the heart of 21st century families and communities, DH, 2008.

6. In practice, this “whole family” approach means, for example:

- All services working with disabled adults checking from the outset whether those adults are parents and ensuring, through joint work with other agencies and other family assessments, that enough support is offered to ensure a heavy burden of care does not fall onto children.
- Hospital discharge teams, GPs and other staff supporting patients with long term or deteriorating illnesses, considering the likely impact of the illness on the family children and working with other agencies to plan the care and support that is provided so that children are protected.
- Children’s services working with families with disabled children considering the support needs of siblings who may be helping with the care of the disabled child.
- All services, whether health, social care, public sector or third sector, working jointly to meet the needs of families with young carers.
- All services keeping support needs under review. Many illnesses and conditions can vary significantly in intensity from month to month. Periodic ‘light touch’ checks help ensure that increasing pressures and problems are picked up early and acted upon. Unforeseen problems and emergencies may still arise so local services should also ensure that plans are in place to provide any emergency or out-of-hours advice and support if this is needed and that the family and the young carer know who to contact.

Diagram 2: Virtuous circle: a whole family approach



Young carers: vision for future services

- Universal services – GPs, schools, etc – equipped to play their part in early identification.
- Targeted and project-based support: good practice already available in some areas shared across all others.
- All areas focusing greater effort on prevention – better joined up support around the family so young carers are protected.

Young carers and *Think Family* Programmes

7. Families with young carers often experience a range of overlapping problems and pressures including low income, worklessness and broader health problems. Seeking wider support for families to help address these can strengthen the family as a whole and will often make life better for the young carer.
8. Many families being supported through wider *Think Family* services such as Family Intervention Projects or targeted parenting support have parents affected by mental

health, substance misuse problems or physical health problems. These parents will often rely on one or more of their children to play a caring role for their siblings or for the parent themselves. This means that even though caring issues may not have been identified as the core issue it does need to be considered as a part of the wider support being provided for the family.

Young carers and *Think Family*: other developments/sources of support

9. **Whole Family Pathway.** The Children's Society *Include Project*, funded by DCSF, in partnership with The Princess Royal Trust for Carers have developed guidance (*Key Principles of Practice*) and a web-based resource on whole family working in relation to young carers. A programme of training for frontline professionals accompanies this. For more details visit www.youngcarer.com and www.youngcarers.net
10. **Keeping the Family in Mind resource pack.** Aimed at anyone who works with parents with mental health problems, their children and their families. It is a multimedia package of training resources designed to raise awareness of the issues that families face. All the resources have been written and produced by Barnardo's with the participation of young carers. Available from: www.barnardos.org.uk/resources/research_and_publications.htm
11. **Listening to Young Carers.** The Children's Society, in partnership with the Princess Royal Trust for Carers, have supported the development of the first national Young Carers Forum for England. Members of the forum have made a DVD called *Listening to Young Carers*, in which the young people talk about the issues they face and share solutions that will help improve their lives. Available from: The Children's Society www.youngcarer.com
12. **Minds, Myths and Me** is a fact pack for young carers (aged 12+) who live with someone with a mental illness. It was designed and produced by four young carers in Gloucestershire, using their own experiences to help others in the same situation. Available from: The Royal College of Psychiatrists www.rcpsych.ac.uk

