Supporting infant young carers (aged 5–8 years) in Lewisham

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is the initiative?</th>
<th>Who runs it?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Infant Young Carers Respite Project</td>
<td>Carers Lewisham in partnership with the Pre-School Learning Alliance’s Family Pathways Lewisham, Ringway Community Centre (Grove Park) and All Saints Community Centre (New Cross)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Who does it benefit?
Children aged 5–8 years living in Lewisham who have caring responsibilities for a family member with a physical disability, illness, mental ill health or substance misuse problem.

What does it do?
The project targets young carers aged 5–8 years by providing respite opportunities through play sessions and day activities, and signposting families for specialist support where necessary.

When did it start?
January 2013.

Why was it started?
Carers Lewisham recognised the need to improve access to respite and play opportunities for children under eight years old with caring responsibilities, as well as the need to increase signposting and support for parents who require specialist services. To address these gaps an approach was made to the Family Pathways Partnership to partner with them on this new project.

The Family Pathways Partnership provides holistic support to children and families and in particular those who are not reaching social care support thresholds and
where the eldest child in the family is between the ages of five and ten. This partnership was seen as an opportunity to provide early intervention support to younger young carers.

**What are the aims and objectives?**

**Aim:**

- To provide early intervention support and help to reduce inappropriate caring of younger young carers.

**Objectives:**

- To offer younger carers respite breaks, holiday day trips and clubs.
- To improve access to play opportunities for younger carers to enable them to make new friends and have fun.
- To identify and signpost parents to relevant practical and emotional support agencies.
- To introduce an informal monitoring system for younger young carers.

**How is it funded?**

The initiative is funded through Lewisham’s Pre-school Learning Alliance’s Family Pathways Project. This covers one part-time Lead Infants Worker post and two sessional workers, the trips, venue hire, equipment and refreshments.

Further funding has been generated from local assemblies to purchase new equipment for the club and additional funds have been sought from the Lloyds Community Trust to sustain the current programme.

**What has it achieved?**

“Young Carers is a good place to make friends and we go on lots of trips.”

Young carer

“I wish I knew about this service months ago, it is great what you do for the children. My daughter loves coming to group.”

Parent

“Until Carers Lewisham approached the Family Pathways Partnership to request funding to provide young carers with support through a monthly club and one-to-one support, I had no idea that children as young as five had caring roles and responsibilities that might impact so profoundly on their lives, or that the need in Lewisham would be so great. The support provided for infant young carers in Lewisham is invaluable and we are really glad to be able to offer support for children through these funded activities.”

Family Pathways Project Manager
“The staff are so friendly and show so much compassion it’s unbelievable. The games they play are so enjoyable.”

Parent

There has been a range of positive outcomes from this work with younger carers.

Firstly, the project has led to early identification of the needs of younger carers and increased their access to respite opportunities. Over 25 younger carers have attended breaks. 24 monthly clubs and school holiday day trips were delivered between February 2013 and April 2014. Critically, young carers report that attending clubs and trips makes them feel happier and it has helped them make new friends, get a break, play games and talk to staff.

Since its inception in January 2013, over 40 new referrals have been received from at least five different referring agencies. The high number of young carers engaging demonstrates the importance of and the need for this type of service.

The intervention has also led to the identification of eight parent carers who have been supported to access support from Carers Lewisham’s Adult Carers services.

Additionally, Carers Lewisham and Pre-School Learning Alliance workers have co-facilitated four two hour parenting workshops for parents/carers of children with autism spectrum disorder and other specific educational needs. Furthermore, carer awareness training and support to the other partner organisations on Family Pathways has allowed experiences of working with children with caring responsibilities to be shared. As a result, referral and communication links with a range of relevant support services have improved throughout the borough of Lewisham.

Overall, there is now greater awareness of support for younger carers particularly within primary schools and children centres associated with the Pre-School Learning Alliance.

How have carers been involved in planning and delivering this work?

Carers Lewisham has always been aware that children as young as five were undertaking caring roles but over the years lacked resources to deliver anything for this age group until 2013.

They encouraged the participation of infant young carers in decision making when planning activities and day trips by asking them what they would like to do and where they would like to visit. Regular surveys present opportunities for parents and/or guardians to offer feedback about the service.

Data is captured periodically using the My Star tool which charts the journey of the young carers and resulting changes across ten different domains. Children and families also complete feedback forms on a yearly basis. Both of these inform the planning and delivery of the work.
How is the initiative run?

The partnership

Family Pathways has been developed to provide a rapid response service embracing the ‘no wrong door’ policy, taking a whole family approach to work with families. The key objectives of the work involve:

- The use of the Family Star tool in partnership with families.
- Engaging local services particularly within the voluntary sector.
- Establishing links with local families.
- Supporting families to build resilience for their future.

Family Pathways is led by the Pre-School Learning Alliance Lewisham and supported by voluntary sector partners. It provides holistic support to children and families who are not reaching social care support thresholds, and where the eldest child in the family is between 5–10 years at the start of the project. Partners include Family Action, School Home Support, New Cross & Deptford Families First Ltd, Clyde Early Childhood Centre, Carers Lewisham, Place 2 Be and child and adolescent mental health services.

Other support that is provided for families comes through a range of different programmes, including one-to-one family support, parenting programmes, and a community groups programme for children aged 4–11 who have witnessed domestic violence and abuse.

Publicising the project

The project is publicised through Family Pathways and Carers Lewisham’s communication networks, regular newsletters, the website and through links with those who already refer to the service.

Referrals

Referrals are generated by Carers Lewisham and the Family Pathways Partnership and are received from parents and guardians, social services, schools, children centres and voluntary groups.

As soon as Carers Lewisham receives a referral form, it is forwarded to the Family Pathways Project Manager for approval and for input onto its centralised tracking system.

Home visits and assessment

The Lead Worker is responsible for conducting home visits for all new referrals approved by Carers Lewisham Young Carers Service Manager and Family Pathways Project Manager. The My Star outcomes tool is used to ensure the child’s appropriateness for the project by capturing changes experienced by the child and the impact of external factors such as parenting on the child’s overall wellbeing and development.

Home visits are also an opportunity to provide information to improve parents’ knowledge of the carer’s role and help parents to understand their child’s needs and work towards meeting them.
The Young Carers Family Information Pack is given to parents and parental consent for trips and safeguarding forms are signed.

**Respite**

Respite is provided through monthly Saturday clubs that take place at different venues across the London Borough of Lewisham. Day trips are also offered at various venues within London and surrounding areas such as trips to the cinema, adventure parks, play centres and restaurants.

The Lead Worker supervises and supports two sessional staff to run sessions and trips. For all activities there is an adult:child ratio of 1:4.

Minibuses are used for transporting the young carers during holiday periods.

**Case work and referrals**

The Lead Worker provides basic casework and support for infant carers and for parents. They aim to respond flexibly to the diverse needs of the child including any cultural considerations. Where appropriate they will liaise with other professionals and signpost, refer and support families to access both internal and external specialist services.

Signposting or referrals can be to a wide range of services and play opportunities, for example to a local childrens centre that runs a parent-child holiday scheme and family support programme.

Carers Lewisham also advocates for carers to access community networks of support in order to build resilience, and access support and respite opportunities. For example, it attends Team Around the Child/Family meetings to ensure caring needs are identified.

**What methods have been particularly effective?**

The partnership model has effectively increased awareness of young carer issues across the voluntary sector, education and social care and has improved integrated working. It has also established and strengthened links with Lewisham’s primary schools and the local childrens centre run by the Pre-School Learning Alliance.

**Have there been any challenges along the way?**

- Dealing with other family issues such as inadequate housing, low income and the need for effective parenting support and/or specialist services can make family work extremely complex and require follow-up work over and above the funded staff capacity.

- Insufficient staff resources to respond to high levels of referrals and to carry out periodic reviews for My Star.

**What hints and tips might help me get started?**

- Identify relevant funders who will support this age group of young carers.

- Be aware of [The Early Years Foundation Stage](#) which sets standards for the learning, development and care of children from birth to five years old.
• Determine whether you need to register with the Early Years and Childcare Registers.

• The Lead Worker should have:
  — Substantial experience of working with the target age group of children aged 5–8 in a group setting and working with children from diverse and often difficult backgrounds.
  — Experience working with young carers.
  — A recognised group work, youth work or social care qualification (or equivalent).

• Provide transport for young carers.

• Consult with all stakeholders to establish and agree on clear project aims, objectives and outcomes that will make a difference to the lives of young carers.

• Dedicate sufficient time to planning service delivery – highlighting realistic timeframes.

• Decide early on what evaluation and monitoring tools/systems would be most meaningful and practical to show impact and progress.

• Keep the needs of young carers central and look at creative ways to generate feedback.

Are there any useful documents or resources that could assist me?

The Family Pathways Lewisham website.

My Star – the new Outcome Star for children.

The Carers Lewisham website.

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Where can I get further information?

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