

Supporting young carers in General Practice - a framework of quality markers



Windsor and Maidenhead Primary Care Networks, in collaboration with Family Action, implemented a comprehensive young carers identification and support system through trained Care Co-ordinators acting as Young Carer Champions within Family Action's Young Carer Service.

This initiative led to improved wellbeing outcomes for young carers and addressed multiple National Quality Markers for Carers in Primary Care - particularly focusing on identification, developing carer-aware practices and providing tailored support.

Why?

Young carers (someone under 18 who helps look after someone in their family who is ill, disabled or misuses drugs or alcohol) often remain hidden in general practice. Many do not self-identify or fear the consequences of disclosing their caring role.

Where young carers are identified, assessment is a statutory requirement, but the provision of support is not. Where support is provided, this can be focused on activities, rather than addressing what has led to the child/young person having caring roles, and if these are appropriate.

Without a systematic identification and support process, young carers risk adverse outcomes in health, education, and social inclusion. This prompted the creation of a structured programme to proactively support young carers.

The organisations and aims

Family Action supports people through change, challenge or crisis, and has done for over 150 years. Protecting children, supporting young people and adults, and offering direct, practical help to families and communities, Family Action's vision is a society that understands the importance – and power – of family as a foundation for individual futures and connected, resilient communities.

Family Action bases the development of services on the ability to benefit society as an organisation as well as through partnership work. Objectives emphasise family health, relationships, wellbeing and resilience.

Windsor Primary Care Network (WPCN) and Maidenhead Primary Care Network (MPCN) aimed to establish a standardised approach for identifying young carers and providing consistent, proactive support through dedicated Care Co-ordinators, in alignment with the National Quality Markers for Carers in Primary Care framework.

The solution

A Standard Operating Procedure (SOP), specifically for young carers, was developed jointly by Family Action and the Primary Care Networks (PCNs), ensuring a standardised and proactive identification and support process.

Widely recognised that providing care in this way positively impacts long-term physical and emotional health, the SOP enabled general practice to best support young carers to maximise their wellbeing.

Introducing a partnership approach to proactively monitor and support the health of young carers demonstrates a commitment to improve individual futures for young people with caring roles.



This programme formed part of a wider 'Young Carers in Healthcare' project, funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, which celebrated being finalists at the Children & Young People Now Awards 2024.

Quality Markers (QM)

This case study primarily addresses the following National Quality Markers for Carers in Primary Care:

Quality Marker

What we did...

QM1: Identification and registration

Identification Protocol

- Young carers are identified via Family Action referrals (with consent) or by practice staff.
- Collaboration with Family Action enabled a dedicated pathway and secure information sharing with GP practices to be developed. All young carers are coded using SNOMED CT codes (224484003: "Patient themselves providing care" or 302767002: "Cares for a relative").

Carer Registration

- The Care Co-ordinator team contacts newly registered patients to identify who lives in the home and who may be a carer, allowing proactive carer identification and accurate coding.
- Registrations are audited on an annual basis to ensure pathways are embedded.

Quality Marker

What we did...

QM2: Holistic support of carers

Proactive Reviews

- Care Co-ordinators check in every six months (April and October) to assess wellbeing. For those under 16, parents are contacted; for those aged 16–18, communication is tailored according to consent preferences.

Referral Pathways

- Referrals are made to services such as: Mental Health Practitioners, Social Prescribing Link Workers, Health Coaches, and Clinical staff as appropriate.

Structured Young Carer Assessments

- These include discussions around: Physical and mental wellbeing, Impact on school or college, Access to hobbies and social time, Support needs and barriers

Resource Provision

- WPCN and MPCN provide young carers with supporting materials including a leaflet to help frame GP conversations, information packs, and signposting resources.
- Family Action provides young carers and their families with a Carers Contingency Plan at their Young Carers Assessment to enable families to consider alternative care arrangements in case of emergency. Families are recommended to share this Contingency Plan with their GP.

Quality Marker

What we did...

QM3: In-practice support

- By performing the biannual wellbeing checks this allows the Care Co-ordinators to recognise if the young carer requires any additional services from Primary Care and actioning this need.



Quotes from QM 6 – Awareness and Culture – training to support Care Co-ordinators:



Really insightful to get a full understanding from both the Young Carer's and organisation's side.

Care Co-ordinator



Very informative training from Family Action. Lots to think about and relay back to key staff.

Care Co-ordinator



Family Action's training was really good. I became more aware about recognising young carers.

Care Co-ordinator

Quality Markers (QM) continued...

Quality Marker

What we did...

QM4: Appointments and Access

- Following the biannual review young carers are referred to appropriate services that they require to support them with maintaining their health and wellbeing.

Quality Marker

What we did...

QM5: Information, involvement and communication

- In collaboration with Family Action, the young carer is included in their care planning and relevant information is tailored to their situation.
- Family Action's Young Carers Ambassadors participate in discussions with commissioners and co-produces services and resources.

Quality Marker

What we did...

QM6: Awareness and Culture

- Family Action provided free training to support the Care Co-ordinator team to raise awareness and culture within their practices.
- Staff are educated about young carers and their needs, and practices are designed to be welcoming and supportive.
- Further training for healthcare practitioners is routinely provided by Family Action on 'Young Carers and the NHS Plan'.

Next steps and sustainability

- Strengthen links with Family Action through shared training and casework reviews
- Increase data monitoring to assess long-term outcomes
- Share this model with other PCNs and practices as an example of good practice

The program is sustainable due to its integration of Care Co-ordinators within the PCNs. By aligning with the National Quality Markers, it meets national standards while requiring minimal extra resources.

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Challenges

- **Non-disclosure** – Many young carers do not see themselves as such or worry about stigma.
- **Consent management** – For under-16s, gaining parental consent could pose challenging. Discussing barriers should be done so sensitively in order to identify how to overcome these.
- **Staff capacity and training** – Ensuring co-ordinators were equipped to support young people required investment in training.



Learning points

- Regular, proactive contact with young carers helps identify changes or challenges early on and can implement early help.
- Communication must be tailored by age- and stage- of the young carer
- Consent preferences must be clearly recorded and respected
- Collaboration with Family Action improved both identification rates and referral quality
- A structured SOP with trained Young Carer Champions ensures consistent, high-quality support.

