



## **Spotlight Series**

### Carers Strategy



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## Carers Strategy

### A spotlight on the feedback we have heard from Carers in Medway

In April & May 2019, we proactively sought the views and thoughts of Carers in Medway. We were particularly interested to hear from people under 25 who had Caring responsibilities. We also spoke with people who offer support to young carers including help around educational, social and personal development issues.

Whilst listening to people about their experience of being a Carer we also talked to them about the draft Carers Strategy which is being developed by Medway Council and Medway Clinical Commissioning Group.

Everything we heard is detailed in this report.

## **Executive Summary**

### **Our Aim: We wanted to do two things:**

- hear directly from young Carers about their current experiences but also their needs for the future.



- ask their thoughts and feedback about the draft Carers strategy for Medway

We wanted to share our findings directly with health and social care commissioners at both Medway Council and Medway Clinical Commissioning Group to inform and influence the Carers strategy in Medway.

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### **Overview: What did we find?**

**Reaching young Carers is not an easy task. Young people may not recognise themselves as an official Carer which makes them extra hard to get in touch with.**

We worked with Carers First. With their help we were able to speak to a small group to hear what they had to say. Although this was a small pool of people, we did hear some clear feedback.

None of the young people we spoke to were aware of the Carers Strategy and none of them felt their views had been taken into consideration as part of the strategy. All of them reported that they would struggle to read the document as it currently stands.

## Executive Summary

### What have we recommended?

Healthwatch have recommended that future work should include a young person on the group putting together the strategy to make sure their voice is heard.

The strategy needs to be clear on how it will address the following issues:

NHS staff need to be more aware of young carers and their responsibilities to the person they are caring for.

The move from child to adult services was not always smooth and the young person often felt in limbo.

Young carers are potentially socially isolated and support around respite to allow for more free time or financial support would be welcomed.

Young carers need to know what support is available for their mental wellbeing and meeting their own needs.



The strategy should have actions to try to address these issues over the years, it should also be available in an easy to read summary, braille, large print and other languages if requested.

Healthwatch will continue to support the council and the clinical commissioning group in making sure the voice of the young person is heard, not only in the Carers strategy but across health & social care in general.



## How did we go about it?

We worked with Carers First to reach young Carers. We organised a focus group in April to hear directly from 8 people about their experience. Carers ranged from 7 years old to 20 years old.

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## What did people tell us?

We heard some powerful stories from young carers.





## Anxiety and mental health

All the young carers we spoke to talked about issues around anxiety and the mental strain of being a carer.

Disturbed sleep was a problem for most of the carers, with several reporting that they were exhausted. Several of the children we spoke to were sharing a bedroom with the sibling who they were caring for. The cared for child would keep them awake and would need help during the night. One child told us they shared a house with seven people which meant there was a lot of noise at night.

All of the Carers we spoke to had experienced bullying at school. One child told us this had continued for 5 years until he felt “suicidal”.

Carers told us they felt stressed and anxious “most of the time”.

Carers told us that they are so busy focussing on someone else they lose their own identity. Carers asked for help to ‘find who they are’.

Pastoral care at schools was reported to be good but in most cases did not exist. One young person told us their school wouldn't help until he got death threats.

Another young person talked to us about anxiety about her house which she felt was unsafe.

The young people talked about being “in limbo” as they transitioned between child and adult services

One young person told us that although they had 3 years of family counselling, this had focused on the patient with no support for her as a Carer or her Mum who was also a Carer.

One 10 year old child told us that she felt unsafe as a Carer after her Mum had fallen asleep whilst driving and crashed the car.

We spoke with a professional who offered support to young carers. They reported an increase in young carers who were suffering from depression and self harm with many self medicating.

One young person felt they didn't get the mental health support that they needed.

Several young people we spoke to refuse to go to the Children & Adolescent Mental Health service due to previous poor experiences.



## Clinical information and support

**Several of the carers we spoke to didn't feel they were fully aware of the condition of the person they were caring for. This made it difficult for them and added to their anxieties.**

Young carers told us that they are not officially recognised by the NHS as a Carer even though they are listed as the primary carer for the patient. Carers felt their views and opinions were not listened to or taken into consideration by health and social care professionals when decisions were being made about the patient.

Some Carers told us that they have had great support from nursing staff, but others did not feel that way.

One young person told us he did not go to hospital when they themselves had a bad asthma attack, because he was the carer and he could not leave his Mum.



## Connectivity of services

**Carers asked if they could have extra support from education services particularly during exam periods and when trying to apply for jobs. Carers reported that they found juggling caring responsibilities with exams and job interviews very difficult.**

All Carers can travel on public transport for free after 9am but if they have an early medical appointment then they have to pay for the ticket. Carers reported early appointments as a regular occurrence.

Several carers talked about the lack of financial support and the pressures of money.

## Support for Young Carers

**All the Carers we spoke to felt that they had not received the support that they needed.**

None of the Carers felt they were involved in decisions made about them. They felt being better supported in school and being able to talk about things without being dismissed by professionals would have helped them. Designated support for young carers within school was mentioned as lacking.

Some of the young carers we spoke to had no respite from their caring responsibilities.

The professional support worker told us they are increasingly offering food to young carers due to financial pressures at home.

**When asked what was important to them they listed the following:**

**Activities**

**Socialising**

**Feeling supported and understood**

**Food**

**Being listened to**

**“Being able to tell people how I feel without them being dismissive”**





# Healthwatch Medway

**Healthwatch Medway is the independent voice for local people in Medway.**

We gather and represent people's views about any health and social care service in Medway.

Our role is to understand what matters most to people and to use that information to influence providers and commissioners to change the way services are designed and developed.

Our **FREE** Information and Signposting service can help you navigate Medway's complicated health and social care system to ensure you can find and access the services that are available for you. Call us on 0800 136 656 or email [enquiries@healthwatchmedway.com](mailto:enquiries@healthwatchmedway.com)



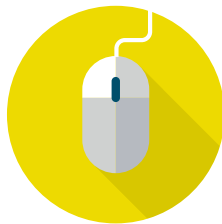
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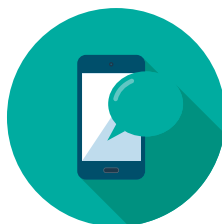


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By texting 'NEED BSL', Healthwatch's British Sign Language interpreter will make contact and arrange a time to meet face to face.