



Healthwatch Brent

Identifying Young Carers in Substance Misuse Households – Review of Recommendations

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Introduction

This report follows up on the recommendations made by Healthwatch Brent in our report: 'Identifying Young Carers in Substance Misuse Households 2018'. We have reviewed the recommendations and spoken to the organisations involved in the original report to understand how much progress has been made.

Background

In 2018, Healthwatch Brent funded research by Brent Carers Centre and Addaction (now New Beginnings) looking into the reasons for low numbers of carers being identified from households with substance misuse. This was a result of concerns from staff at Brent Carers Centre, who had identified the low number of referrals. From 102 referrals from Brent Children Services over a set period, none were caring for parents identified as having an addiction. A report on the findings was published in 2018.

In 2021, Healthwatch Brent approached Brent Carers Centre, Addaction, and Brent Family Wellbeing Centre in order to revisit the recommendations in the 2018 report and understand the current situation.

Overview

The 2018 report made seven key recommendations to be actioned by local addiction and carer support services. These were:

- All 'Substance Misuse Workers' to attend Young Carer Awareness Training, as they are trusted by their clients and are best placed to communicate with service users in a non-judgmental and confidential way.
- The job descriptions of 'Substance Misuse Workers' to be modified to include their role in identifying, signposting and making referrals to young support services.
- More publicity and promotion within alcohol services and schools of Young Carer issues and support services available for staff, service users and young people.
- Improve the referral pathways from children's services & schools where it is known that a parent or adult living in the household has an addiction.
- Agencies to identify a Carers Champion as a lead in all schools and substance misuse support services in the borough.
- Young Carer Services to appoint a designated Specialist Young Carers Outreach Worker assigned to work with addiction services in the borough.
- A dedicated phone line for young people in substance abuse families to call or increased promotion of Childline.

The groups that we approached told us that the recommendations are still relevant and appropriate following the Covid-19 pandemic. They explained that: "with families being home together during lockdown and with the strain on people's mental health, it is likely more adults are using alcohol at home."

Review of the recommendations

Several of the recommendations made in the 2018 report have been fulfilled or partially fulfilled. This has included increased training, the introduction of referral pathways for young carers living in substance misuse families, better promotion of support directly to young people, and the start of a Young Carers Champion Programme to improve awareness of support for young carers.

Unfortunately, the impact of the pandemic and other service pressures has slowed progress in some of these areas. Areas such as education/training of staff and promotion of services to young people could be expanded on or developed further. This would ensure better awareness of the services that are available and the issues that young people face.

Below we have outlined whether each recommendation has been fulfilled, partially fulfilled, or not fulfilled.

Recommendation one: All 'Substance Misuse Workers' to attend Young Carer Awareness Training, as they are trusted by their clients and are best placed to communicate with service users in a non-judgmental and confidential way.

This recommendation has been partially fulfilled. In-house training is now offered by the Family Wellbeing Centre and Safeguarding Young Carers Training is available within the borough as an optional training program. There has also been work done to raise awareness of the issues that Young Carers face specifically related to substance misuse. However, not all staff are taking up the offer of training. The groups we approached told us that making this a mandatory part of induction could lead to further improvement.

Recommendation two: The job descriptions of 'Substance Misuse Workers' to be modified to include their role in identifying, signposting and making referrals to young support services.

The Family Wellbeing Centre have taken this proposal to managers of different substance support agencies including Addaction, WDP and B3, however it has not been implemented.

Recommendation three: More publicity and promotion within Alcohol Services and schools of Young Carer issues and support services available for staff, service users and as young people.

This recommendation has been achieved, with continuous promotion of young carers support through schools as well as other forums and outreach opportunities. Groups that we have engaged with have stated that: "It would be good to re-engage with substance support agencies." This would allow for more comprehensive publicity and promotion going forwards.

Recommendation four: Improve the referral pathways from children services & schools where it is known that a parent or adult living in the household has an addiction.

Referral pathways are now in place, improving the ease with which young people living in households with substance misuse can be referred for young carers support programmes. However, there is still more work to do encouraging these families to come forward. The Family Wellbeing Centre explained that: "[families] fear that asking for support from external agencies will create a risk of social care being involved and children potentially being removed. It is difficult to address this stigma."

Recommendation five: Agencies to identify a Carers Champion as a lead in all Schools and Substance Misuse Support Services in the borough.

Work has begun on this, however progress has been slowed by the impact of the pandemic. When the Family Wellbeing Centre meet with a partner agency, they now identify the individual that they meet with as a Young Carer Champion. This ensures that the Champion ensures relevant information and updates. A strategic Young Carer Champions group has been established to steer the work.

Recommendation six: Young Carer Services to appoint a designated Specialist Young Carers Outreach Worker assigned to work with Addiction Services in the borough.

This has not been fulfilled. Work needs to be done to link Brent's existing Young Council Outreach Workers in with existing addiction services.

Recommendation seven: A dedicated phone line for young people in substance abuse families to call, or increased promotion of Childline.

Although a dedicated phonenumber has not been established, there are several routes available for young people living in substance abuse families to seek support. These include Brent Gateway Partnerships, Brent Family Front Door and local Family Wellbeing Centres.

Conclusion and Next Steps

The responses to our follow up work shows that more work still needs to be done to ensure that carer support services are linked in with substance misuse services. More work is also needed to address the barriers that stop substance misuse households from requesting external support. In particular, more work is needed to ensure joined up working between the carer support services and substance misuse organisations within Brent.

Given the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic, we understand that some changes have taken longer to implement than may have been expected. There are three specific areas which we would like to see more progress on:

- Young Carer Awareness Training for substance misuse workers. While some staff are now receiving training, our recommendation is that this should be extended to all staff as a mandatory part of induction.
- Young Carer Services to appoint a designated Specialist Young Carers Outreach Worker assigned to work with Addiction Services in the borough. Young Carer Services need to link up with addiction services more closely, and should appoint specialist outreach workers to ensure there is a joined-up approach. Brent's Addiction Services should be proactive in supporting local care services to make this possible.
- A dedicated phone line for young people in substance abuse families to call or increased promotion of Childline: As a dedicated phonenumber has not been created, our recommendation is for more work to be done to promote existing avenues of support (Brent Gateway Partnerships, Brent Family Front Door and local Family Wellbeing Centres).

We will be revisiting these recommendations in six months, and returning to the organisations to understand what further progress has been made.