

Service Delivery Update for COVID-19 Carers Matter Norfolk (Young Carers & Families Service)

Carers Matter Norfolk delivers 1:1 and group support to young carers and their families in the home or school setting. The service is designed to work with some of the most vulnerable families in our society who may need the young person supporting them to help with their daily living tasks (washing, dressing, eating), medication, healthcare procedures (changing catheters, PEG feeding) and emotional support. **Much of this support is usually delivered face to face or in group settings which is no longer possible due to the tight social distancing restrictions and the increased health risks for the cared-for.**

The current situation is already causing additional strain on carers and the people they care for, as fear and uncertainty regarding health issues and potential infection become paramount in minds. For many there are additional strains such as closure of schools and support groups; changes to employment (short term lay-offs, redundancy and home working); problems sourcing food and medication due to panic buying, delivery/manufacturing problems and lack of access to services. Young people and their families are more likely to become lonely or socially isolated and there is an increased risk of breakdown in the caring situation. Under these pressures, carers and their cared-for will be more vulnerable to abuse, neglect, deprivation and violence. Simultaneously they are likely to be less visible, due to school closures, fewer home visits, social interactions and their usual health & social care support.

The current government policy around tighter social distancing makes delivering support on a 1:1 basis challenging and in groups impossible. Increasingly we are going to have to rely on other methods to support young carers such as telephone support, video chat, texting and messaging, while looking to more creative ways to support young carers and their families such as open space conversation walks.

In response to this we are increasing the amount of young carers we contact and the frequency and channels by which we contact them. Carers who already access the different sources of support will be offered regular calls during this difficult time. We are also identifying and

contacting young carers who look after someone in the 'at risk' groups and those young carers who are more 'at risk' themselves.

As the situation becomes clearer and young carers themselves identify the support they need, we will add to and develop our services accordingly.

Advice Line

The Advice Line is the main front door to our Young Carers & Families Services and is still operating normally. The line has been transferred to the Family Carer Advisors who are working from mobile phones at their homes. All calls are being triaged and information/advice/support provided to carers. If a young carer or family has a need for ongoing support this is still being passed as normal onto Carer Connectors or partner Youth Workers.

The Advice Line have one worker triaging incoming calls and a different worker making outgoing calls. This will help to manage demand and ensure carers can get through when they need to.

The Referrals Administrator will continue to pick up website referrals, while the Advice Line will pick up NCAN referrals.

One to One Meetings with Young Carers – Carer Connectors

At this stage, we are avoiding doing home visits unless essential (see below), so for the moment we will be offering telephone support, as well as utilising other forms of communication such as email, text and online. We need to be clear that due to Government Policy we currently cannot offer one to one support in either homes or community venues unless absolutely essential. We are prioritising those who are vulnerable, our existing clients and those who have received support in the past six months, to offer continued support, whilst ensuring we have capacity for new referrals.

There is a need to prioritise support to the most vulnerable and this will include undertaking necessary visits whilst taking appropriate infection control measures. Visits to drop off food/medication etc can be made via a door step drop by all Connectors. Visits within the home will only be carried out by Carer Connectors who are not in the "vulnerable" group as defined by the Department of Health as a last resort.

Visits to a young carer's home will currently only be able to be carried out under the following circumstances (but may change in the future):

- Caring role is at risk of breakdown;
- Cared for or carer is considered to be at risk or potentially at risk of harm;
- Delivery of food/medication/urgent information or a CMN Tablet;
- Meeting would assist completion of essential forms;
- Both carer and Carer Connector are symptom free and are not self-isolating after being exposed to COVID-19 (drop off's can still take place if carer or family have symptoms or are self isolating).

Contact will be minimised with other persons, meeting will ideally happen in an open air environment, maintaining strict social distancing. Connectors may need to enter the home to check on welfare or observe an environment, especially where there are concerns about welfare. Appropriate PPE will be worn throughout the visit.

If a visit is for the purpose of dropping off food/medication/tablet then this should be safely carried out via a doorstep drop off by Connectors following procedures. All home visits will only take place if sanctioned by line manager first.

If the UK is subject to tighter controls on movement Carer Connectors will have documentation supplied to verify that they are visiting a vulnerable client to deliver care and support.

Community Development

Connectors will be mapping the initiatives that are going on in our communities and working with the Better Together Norfolk teams. The additional resources will be added to the Carers Matter (Young Carers & Families) website and awareness raised through our social media.

Targeted 3 – 6 month 1:1 support

At this stage, all partners are avoiding doing home visits, for the moment partners are offering telephone support, as well as utilising other forms of communication such as email, text and online.

All groups are also currently postponed but again other ways of meeting are being considered. Youth Workers within the partnership are still taking referrals and supporting young carers.

Education Sessions

- The Norwich groups scheduled for March have been cancelled, however Norfolk & Suffolk Care Support are exploring the potential to offer these groups some online session to replace.

Wider Voluntary Sector response

Voluntary Norfolk is working with Norfolk County Council, the health authorities and other voluntary sector partners to recruit additional volunteers to support the Covid-19 response, prioritising the most vulnerable people in our communities. It is possible that these volunteers could provide additional support to young carers/cared-for. Details regarding this service are still being worked out, but as soon as I have more info I will let you know.

Conclusion

This is a current service update with some thoughts to look at to support young carers and their families more widely through an ever changing landscape. We need to protect this vulnerable group more due to schools closing and young carers becoming invisible as they are staying at home (although government guidance is that they should attend school).