

Ref Code	Organisation Name
2022-05-YC05	Carers in Bedfordshire
Visit Date	Visited By
18 th July 2022	Victoria Southwell (Zoom call)
Overall aim of the funding	
To employ a School Link Worker who will encourage and facilitate young carer support by schools and deliver support directly to young carers within schools.	
Background to Organisation and governance	
<p>Carers in Bedfordshire (CiB) is a Registered Charity that was formalised in 2010 although an informal support organisation (The Eve Project) had been in existence since 2004, run by volunteers who had been carers themselves. CiB employs 40 staff and has 51 current volunteers. A board of 10 Trustees meet six times a year. Four of these meetings are business meetings and the other two are strategy meetings. The Trustees have a wide range of skills that include social work and child protection expertise, HR, fundraising, the NHS, and finance. Between 70-80% of Trustees generally have personal experience of being a carer. There are also two sub-committees; a finance committee that meets every 2 months (two weeks before a Trustee meeting) and a Governance sub-Committee.</p> <p>A detailed Strategic Plan is in place for 2020-24 setting out clear plans for the organisation in five key areas; Reaching more carers; being transparent, efficient, and effective; working in partnership; investing in high quality support and advocating on behalf of carers. The strategy was developed with the support of Cranfield Trust and was developed during the pandemic so speaks to the challenges that have impacted many organisations' development. Work on a new strategy is due to start in early 2023 as more progress has been made on the strategy than had been anticipated and it is now in need of review. Trustees are engaged with the development of the strategy and use their two annual strategy days to input into its development.</p>	
Leadership and expertise	
<p>On the call I spoke with Chris Stelling (CEO), Harriet Opalinski (Operations Manager), Janice Styles (Young Carers Coordinator), Jolene McNaughton (Fundraising and Communications Manager) and Helen Battersby (Trustee).</p> <p>Chris has led CiB since 2019 and has a background in the public and private sector before moving into the third sector 10 years ago. He has lots of expertise around leadership, strategy development and organisational growth. He joined CiB shortly before the pandemic and used his considerable skills to navigate the way through. He reflected that he likes to think that he is an adaptable leader with an open, inclusive, and democratic approach. However, the pandemic meant that he had to be more assertive and authoritative than he would have ordinarily been in different circumstances. The clear strategy he developed in challenging times indicates a capable leader.</p> <p>Harriet and Janice are hugely experienced managers and Janice has been with CiB for 12 years and worked with young carers for 18. Janice would manage the new post that is being proposed alongside 4 other young carer workers she manages. Helen has been a Trustee for two years and is a Family Court Magistrate.</p>	

Aims and Activities

Carers in Bedfordshire aims for carers to feel confident, supported and included by giving carers access to knowledge, skills and support that enables them to remain in a caring role for as long as they chose.

The main activities undertaken are group support, peer support, 1-2-1 support, phone support, and a wellbeing and counselling service. They work with carers aged 4-90 and operate through hubs in hospitals, community drop ins and groups run from their centre. CiB categorises support across 3 levels – Universal preventative support, Group support and 1:1 support and this informs the frequency of contact, type of service offered, and support level allocated to each carer.

Annually CiB works with over 7,000 carers and have 10,000 registered with them. Around 900 of these are young carers aged between 4-18.

Safeguarding

Carers in Bedfordshire has a detailed approach to safeguarding that has been developed over many years. All relevant staff receive online mandatory safeguarding training as part of their induction. This is refreshed annually through in person training. The Young Carers Coordinator is the Designated Safeguarding Officer named in the policy which clearly outlines the process to be followed if a concern is identified.

Around 3-4 concerns are externally escalated each quarter and 20-25 raised internally. Strong systems are in place to review these concerns and develop plans to ensure that these concerns don't get bigger.

Finances

Audited accounts for the year ending 31st March 2021 show income of £1,279,996 against expenditure of £1,220,438 resulting in a surplus of £59,558 for the year.

The balance sheet shows net current assets of £317,515 and a reserve figure of £340,472 of which £154,196 is unrestricted and £144,058 designated. The reserves policy states that reserves should be held under 3 categories for future activity – unrestricted, designated, and restricted. Designated funds link to activities and projects identified by CiB that are necessary to achieve certain outcomes or objectives. Unrestricted funds are held to manage uncertainty and unforeseen financial difficulties and short-term changes in circumstances. A minimum of one month's salary costs of all staff on all projects and three months central organisational costs are targeted as a minimum. Unrestricted reserves currently fall within this target. This policy is reviewed annually.

Budgets and funding predictions for 2023/24 are due to remain stable. Statutory funding is secure for the next three years and a Fundraising and Communications Manager has a strong pipeline of Trust and Foundations funding in place for any funding gaps.

Main funding comes from Bedford Borough Council, Central Bedfordshire Council and Luton Borough Council. Other funding comes from Trusts and Foundations such as Big Lottery, Children in Need, and the local Community Foundation.

Good financial systems are in place managed operationally by the Finance and Central Services Lead and a Finance Team who provide support. The Treasurer has an accountancy background and good oversight happens at board level through the presentation of management accounts and the scrutiny of the Finance sub-committee.

<p>Current Situation and need</p> <p>Research commissioned by Barnardo's in 2017 found that 36% of teachers did not feel confident referring young carers for support. This mirrors the referral numbers that CiB receive from schools. Out of the 72 schools in Bedford Borough only 13 currently refer to them. Of those that do the ones that CiB work closely with refer high numbers (49 young carers since 2017 from one school) compared to much lower numbers from those who don't actively engage (6 over the same period from a similarly sized school).</p> <p>Training for teachers is clearly a vital component in ensuring that teachers are able to help young carers be identified, referred for appropriate support and ultimately meet their educational goals. A Schools Award, such as the one developed by Carers Trust (the UK's largest organisation working with unpaid carers), incentivises support for young carers and improves their attainment. A 2018 review of Carers Trust's "Young Carers in Schools" programme consulted schools who had implemented support for young carers. 73% reported that young carers were more engaged in class and 63% said their results had improved. It follows therefore that young carers not supported by their school are less likely to be engaged and achieve the results they are capable of.</p> <p>In Bedford Borough only two schools have achieved a Carers Trust Young Carers in Schools Award. In contrast CiB's own Schools Award, which was launched in January 2022, has already made three awards. The ten standards set out in CiB's award were written by young carers and provide a vital framework in highlighting the core issues that schools need to build awareness on. Engaging more schools with CiB's award as well as embedding more CiB staff resource into schools to run groups and workshops for young carers with similar needs forms the backbone of the proposed project.</p> <p>A School Link Worker will take this work forward and identify a network of Young Carer Leads who will be able to feel confident in their ability to support young carers. This will also support young carers who are transitioning between primary and secondary schools as vital continuity will be in place that doesn't currently exist. Schools will also be supported to achieve CiB's School's Award which is seen as being a key way of raising awareness across the whole school and addressing linked issues that affect high numbers of young carers such as bullying. The School Link Worker will also attend multi-agency meetings to support young carers through specific problems at school. They will work alongside the rest of CiB's Young Carers team to ensure that the project adopts a joined-up approach with other activities and services being provided by CiB.</p>
<p>Expected Key Achievements in Year 1</p>
<p>EKA 1</p> <p>Increased awareness of young carer issues across school staff will lead to more identification, onwards referral and support offered to young carers.</p>
<p>EKA 2</p> <p>A network of Young Carer Leads will feel more confident in their ability to support young carers in their schools.</p>
<p>EKA 3</p> <p>Young carers will experience less bullying due to an increase in awareness of young carer issues amongst all pupils.</p>
<p>Request and Budget</p> <p>CiB is requesting £58,622 over 2 years to recruit a part time School Link Worker and associated project costs.</p> <p>£29,798 in year 1 - £22,718 (salary and associated costs), £816 (laptop and phone), £1,440 (travel), £2,184 (management costs), £1,540 (overheads), £1,100 (training).</p>

£28,824 in year 2 - £22,718 (salary and associated costs), £1,440 (travel), £2,184 (management costs), £1,540 (overheads), £942 (training).

Conclusion

CiB is a well-established organisation working in a part of the country that includes some extremely rural areas as well as pockets of significant deprivation. Despite having good transport links to central London and visibly wealthy areas along the commuter belt, there are also some key challenges that can remain hidden. These issues, poor transport links, social isolation, and low incomes, affect families where illness impacts the family significantly. CiB meets a real need therefore in helping many families to address these.

They run a wide range of activities and have a well-established young carer service that has been in place for the past 12 years. This is a team of 5 current workers and the proposed role will join this team. This team helps to deliver a Peer Mentoring project funded by Children in Need which will add value to the Schools Link Worker role by training young carers to provide peer support in schools. These peer mentors were instrumental in developing CiB's own School Award which appears to be already making more of an impact than the Carers Trust own version. A Young Carer Wellbeing Practitioner will also work alongside the Schools Link Worker and identify young carers they are finishing sessions with who may need some additional help in the school environment.

So, this project does feel like it is well linked to other work CiB is doing with young carers and the focus on working with schools is a logical one that will address a current gap. Janice, the Young Carers Service Lead, who would manage this new member of staff is extremely knowledgeable and has significant experience. I am sure therefore that this addition would make a big difference to the work that the team does.

When I compare this application to others that have been received though, and in the context of needing to identify projects that won't be able to be supported, I feel that CiB's application lacks some of the urgency that other applications demonstrated. There is already a good offer available for young carers through CiB and whilst this may not be as extensive as it could or should be I did feel that overall, there was good access to support for young carers locally. Lots of referrals come from parents, often after themselves receiving support for their own caring responsibilities. So, school referrals are a gap but there clearly is work taking place already to try to address this. This makes me reluctant to prioritise this application above others where the need felt more tangible.

I also felt that CiB had a rather lukewarm response to the questions that were asked about identifying areas suitable for Cranfield Trust support through the Spark Programme. This was both in terms of mentoring and consultancy opportunities and participating in the Peer2Peer Exchanges. This was disappointing as a key part of our strategy is providing opportunities for grantees to network, share learning and build their resilience. Other grantees showed much more engagement and enthusiasm for these opportunities which makes me consider CiB less of a priority if they won't add value to the wider portfolio. Therefore, whilst this is by no means an application that we shouldn't support I would recommend that Trustees consider prioritising other applications over this one.

Recommended Priority Rating

Risk = Low	Difference to organisation = Medium	Priority = Medium
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