

Ref Code	Organisation Name
2022-05-YC13	Solihull Carers Centre
Visit Date	Visited By
27 th July 2022	Victoria Southwell (Zoom)
Overall aim of the funding	
To support schools in improving the academic achievements of young carers through their increased attendance and engagement by providing help from peer mentors and befrienders.	
Background to Organisation and governance	
<p>Solihull Carers Centre (SCC) is a registered charity trading under the name Carers Trust Solihull, that was established in 2002. SCC employs 9 full time and 17 part time staff and has 49 current volunteers. A board of 11 Trustees meet every six weeks with every other meeting being a long business meeting where detailed information is reviewed. The Trustees have a wide range of skills that include teaching, local government, finance, marketing, and HR. At least 50% of Trustees must be carers and an annual skills audit is undertaken to identify any gaps. Each Trustee also has a link role with a specific area of work undertaken by SCC.</p> <p>A detailed Strategic Plan is in place for 2022-24 setting out strategic aims for the organisation in three key areas; Customer Care, Learning and Growth and Internal Business. For Customer Care the aim is to 'ensure the provision of consistently high-quality services to carers and outlines four specific objectives. Learning and Growth focuses on 'working with Health and Social Care to enable staff and volunteers to raise carer awareness' and also focuses on four specific objectives. Internal business aims to 'improve and develop our services' scope, efficiency, and effectiveness' and once again links to four specific objectives. Trustees were closely involved in the development of the strategy and are updated on progress every quarter.</p>	
Leadership and expertise	
<p>On the call I spoke with Gina Ward (Young Children & Young Adult Children's Team Manager), Debbie Taylor (Trustee - Vice Chair) and Peter (Volunteer Fundraiser).</p> <p>Gina joined SCC in 2003 and has worked across multiple areas of the organisation over that time. She has led the young carer team for the past 7 years. She is a trained social worker and has a wealth of knowledge around issues linked to young carers. She is a warm and enthusiastic leader with a palpable commitment to the organisation and improving the lives of young carers. She demonstrated good leadership skills in her answers and a strong awareness of the needs of her staff and a desire to ensure that they are well supported and enjoy their work.</p> <p>Debbie has been a Trustee since the organisation was founded and until recently managed a small local charity. She is a carer herself and has strong management skills and disability awareness. She is a highly involved and engaged Trustee.</p> <p>Peter started volunteering with SCC shortly before the start of the pandemic. He previously worked for IBM before retirement and has a deep interest in young carers. He has been incredibly successful at helping to raise funds for SCC, especially during the pandemic.</p>	

Aims and Activities

Solihull Carers Centre aims to support adult and young carers who are, or were, carrying out a caring role by providing practical help, advice, assistance, advocacy, and support. SCC also aims to advance education concerning caring amongst carers, professionals, and the public.

SCC provides a wide range of services that includes; face to face support, events and activities, information and advice, clubs and drop-in sessions, training and workshops and Carer Assessments.

In October 2021 SCC had 2,909 adult carers, 671 young carers and 296 young adult carers registered with them.

Safeguarding

SCC has a comprehensive approach to safeguarding. This is demonstrated with a clear policy that outlines the processes that are in place including mechanisms for raising concerns and staff induction and training. The Safeguarding Officer is the Young Children & Young Adult Children's Team Manager and they spoke knowledgeably about safeguarding within SCC.

When asked about safeguarding issues in the past year Gina said that safeguarding is split into two areas – observations and causes for concerns. Observations are noted by staff if they notice anything that feels worrying and tracked to record any patterns. Causes for concern are more serious issues that require a formal response and escalation to other agencies. The last full year audit showed 46 young carers had been identified as a cause for concern and a further 55 flagged for observation. There is always at least 1 safeguarding issue at any time and safeguarding is considered a big issue within SCC which is rightly given a lot of focus. Trustees receive an update on safeguarding matters at each meeting.

Finances

Audited accounts for the year ending 31st March 2021 show income of £719,337 against expenditure of £622,812 resulting in a surplus of £96,525 for the year.

The balance sheet shows net current assets of £291,640 of which £257,689 is unrestricted. The reserves policy states that SCC should “maintain sufficient unrestricted funds to provide financial stability and ensure the work of the charity is not affected by unexpected events, delayed receipts or a short-term lack of incoming funds”. The Unrestricted funds currently equate to 5 months of ongoing expenditure. Trustees reviewed both the reserves policy and the levels of reserves as of 31st March 2021 and were satisfied that the reserves were adequate.

Budgets and funding predictions for 2023/24 and 2024/25 are due to remain stable. Main funding is received from Solihull Metropolitan Council by way of a large unrestricted grant and a smaller restricted grant. This funding contract runs until 2024 and has a plus 2 element which will take it up to 2026. So, SCC is financially secure for the two years that this grant request would run over.

Clear financial systems are in place and there is strong oversight from the Board via the Treasurer who presents management accounts and cash flow reports at each Trustee Meeting. Trustees are involved in working with the CEO to develop the annual budget. Day to financial matters are dealt with by the Finance Officer, who is managed by the Communications and Business Systems Manager. Fortnightly Senior Management Team meetings are used to keep an overview on budgets.

Current Situation and need

National research has studied the impact of caring on children and young people. It has shown that being a young carer can often have a severe, significant, and long-lasting impact on a young person's physical health, emotional wellbeing, socialisation and having a stable environment. All of these areas impact on a young carers capacity to enjoy and achieve at school, presenting extra demands and challenges. It is commonly known that young carers have significantly lower attainment at GCSE level, the difference between nine Cs and nine Ds, that a quarter report being bullied at school because of their caring role and over a quarter miss school or experience emotional difficulties (40% where the young person cares for a relative with drug or alcohol problems). On average young carers miss or cut short 48 school days a year.

Even before the start of the pandemic and the subsequent lockdowns, young carers were more likely than the national average not to be in education, employment or training and classified as NEET. Of this group at least 75% had been NEET at least once, compared with 25% of all young people and having to shield with vulnerable family members, even when schools were open, has exacerbated many of these problems. Part of the problem is that there is a complete lack of awareness of the needs of young carers and so few people within schools are looking out for warning signs that a young carer needs support. 42% of young carers said that there was not an identified person at school who recognised them as a young carer and helped them. Even when attending school, a young carer can be very distracted and lack focus in lessons due to worrying about the person they care for, but this can be misinterpreted as lack of interest and application by teachers.

SCC regularly conducts surveys with young carers aged 5-16 and in their 2021 survey 58% of respondents answered no to the question "Have you received any help from your school". Of those who responded yes 80% said they would rate the help as excellent or very good showing that young carers clearly value and respond to help they are given within their schools. This highlights the need to expand the number of schools locally who can offer this kind of support.

SCC has previously run a Peer Mentoring and Befriending programme funded by Children in Need, but this didn't operate in a school environment. This kind of support though has been identified by young carers as being a service that they would like to see extended into that setting. As a key way of addressing the significant issues that have been identified linked to education, SCC wants to bring this support into schools and work alongside school staff to identify young carers having the most difficulties.

A part time Peer Mentor and Befriending Coordinator will be recruited to take this project forward. Their role will include recruiting young carers who will become Peer Mentors and support other young carers to achieve identified outcomes. Mentors will be supported through regular training and drops ins which will also help with their own confidence and skills development. Alongside this community befrienders will be recruited who will be able to offer young carers additional out of school support around issues such as learning and helping with school attendance.

Expected Key Achievements in Year 1
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EKA 1

An increase in the amount of support available to young carers in school settings.
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EKA 2

An increase in young carers and young adult carers' desired outcomes, leading to improved attendance, achievement, and enjoyment of education.
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EKA 3

Increase in number of young carers being identified and supported in schools.

Request and Budget

SCC is requesting **£60,000** over 2 years to employ a Peer Mentoring & Befriending Coordinator and associated project costs.

£30,000 in year 1 - £26,500 (salary and associated costs), £3,500 (venue hire, transport, and activities). *£3,500 has already been secured from another funder.*

£30,000 in year 2 - £26,500 (salary and associated costs), £3,500 (venue hire, transport, and activities). *£3,500 has already been secured from another funder.*

Conclusion

SCC is a dynamic organisation that is in tune with the needs of the people it supports. It is rooted in an organic support service started by carers who felt unsupported, overlooked, and invisible and those still form the driving ethos within the organisation. Despite having grown quite considerably, services are still designed to meet the broad needs of carers, who are put at the forefront of all organisational developments.

The work focused on young carers and young adult carers is comprehensive and clearly meets a real need. These needs are identified through strong understanding of the experiences of young carers alongside formal consultation and research being undertaken via the DMG (decision making group). This group is made up of young carers and young adult carers and has high levels of engagement that help to frame all developments. Whilst I did not meet anyone from this group the way it was described felt like a fundamental element of the young carers work.

The local needs identified by the team and the DMG align with the national needs that research from organisations such as Carers Trust highlight. These needs form the basis for the proposed project, and I am confident that it will be able to address issues around young carer's attendance, attainment, and experience of school/education.

The peer mentoring and befriending support that SCC has previously offered gives them a strong foundation to develop this work in a school environment – a component that was missing through the previous project. The outcomes that Peer Mentoring has managed to deliver, for both mentee and mentor, have made a huge impact in improving social and emotional confidence and supporting future opportunities and aspirations. Delivering this in a school environment will undoubtedly help to mitigate some of the challenges faced by young carers that have been exacerbated by Covid.

By also utilising the staff on this project to support schools to achieve the Carers Trust School's Award, there will be a longer-term legacy left within the schools to both identify and support young carers. Many of the schools that SCC has links with are keen to provide more support but unable to progress their work towards achieving the award without help. This project would give SCC additional capacity to do this.

I have met many projects over the years with dedicated and committed staff but Gina and the rest of the team at SCC really stood out in terms of their passion and determination to support young carers. This is an organisation with a lot of expertise in supporting young carers and their knowledge around peer mentoring models will add huge value to the wider portfolio. It is a well-planned and realistic piece of work that will add significant value to the support already being offered to young carers in Solihull. Therefore, I would recommend support with a grant as requested.

Recommended Priority Rating

Risk = Low	Difference to organisation = High	Priority = High
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