

Ref Code	Organisation Name
2022-05-YC22	St Helen's Carers Centre
Visit Date	Visited By
20 <sup>th</sup> September 2022	Victoria Southwell (Zoom)
Overall aim of the funding	
<p>To further enhance work already taking place in both primary and secondary schools to identify more hidden young carers and further support those already known. To raise awareness with staff and have a visible presence in schools to prevent young carers from falling behind in subjects or disengaging entirely with education.</p>	
Background to Organisation and governance	
<p>St Helens Carers Centre (SHCC) is a registered charity that was established in 2001. It is a Carers Trust Network Partner. SHCC employs 34 members of staff. A board of 6 Trustees meet every month and have a range of skills that include HR, mental health, NHS, local Government, and finance. Sub-Committees are formed as needed to work on specific issues. There is also a young carer voices group called Chattin 4 Action. A Trustee attends their monthly meetings and feeds back their views to the board. They are also included in consultations and act as Ambassadors at events.</p> <p>A Strategic Plan is in place for 2022-24 and identifies four strategic intentions; Deliver Excellent Services; Enhance Positive Partnerships; Influence Change and Improve Digital Development. These four areas are underpinned by four supporting pillars; Governance; Funding &amp; Income; Staff &amp; Volunteers and Brand &amp; Communications.</p> <p>The strategy was developed through consultation with service users, staff, management, and Trustees and was designed to take into account the post pandemic environment, ever changing external landscapes and associated challenges.</p>	
Leadership and expertise	
<p>At the assessment I met with Alan Ashton (CEO) and Lorraine Pennington (Head of Young Carers Services). The founding Chair had planned to attend but was unable to at short notice.</p> <p>Alan joined SHCC in 2004 and has steadily grown the organisation since then. His previous roles were in the voluntary sector with his role before joining SHCC running Westminster Victim Support. He is passionate about the service and whilst recognising that his role is strategic likes to keep a link with the day-to-day services. He is good at working closely with people and enjoys developing staff. His length of service shows his commitment, but he was keen to say that he regularly questions if he has overstayed in the role and if new blood would bring something more valuable.</p> <p>Lorraine joined SHCC in 2009 as a Support Worker working with parent carers. She established the Young Carers Service in 2012 and has developed it from there.</p>	
Aims and Activities	
<p>St Helens Carers Centre aims to provide high-quality, person-centred support services to unpaid carers, aged 6+ throughout the St Helens area. Young and adult carers are supported to recognise their own needs, have their voices heard, help with their physical and mental well-being, and ensure they are fully understood, valued, and supported in their caring role.</p>	

SHCC provides a range of services that include statutory carers assessments, benefits advice, emotional support, training, and respite breaks. For young carers they offer ongoing intensive support, breaks and activities, residential trips, and advocacy.

In April 2022 SHCC had 14,003 carers registered with them, 700 of which were young carers. Around 5,000 carers will access support annually and up to 1,000 new carers register each year.

### **Safeguarding**

SHCC follows the policies and procedures laid out by St Helen's Safeguarding Board. This ensures that all professionals working with Adults and Children in St Helens have access to up-to-date policies and procedures and it also provides a consistent approach for all professionals.

The policy clearly explains safeguarding and outlines the steps that need to be followed should a concern be raised. The Head of Young Carers Services is the named Designated Children's Safeguarding Officer and is the Deputy Designated Adult Safeguarding Officer so holds a lot of knowledge and expertise.

All staff receive LA safeguarding training and regular refresher training. New staff also undertake an internal induction to Safeguarding that helps them understand safeguarding issues within a specific carer context. Internal processes are robust. Thresholds for referrals locally are high so SHCC ensures that good quality information is collected about concerns and that all referrals are well evidenced. Over the course of a year up to 50 referrals could be escalated externally. This is an experienced organisation used to working with beneficiaries often with complex needs.

### **Finances**

Audited accounts for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 show income of £1,260,440 against expenditure of £1,152,583 resulting in a surplus of £107,857 for the year.

The balance sheet shows net current assets of £479,115 of which £424,487 is unrestricted and £48,500 classed as designated. The reserves policy states that SHCC should aim to retain unrestricted reserves that will cover between three to six months of annual expenditure. SHCC currently achieves this.

Main funding is received from St Helen's Council through a core grant, 66% of the value of which is unrestricted. This was awarded through a tendering process and a 3 years +1 +1 contract given. The contract is up for renewal again in 2025. Other funding comes from Trusts and Foundations such as Big Lottery and Children in Need. Budgets and funding predictions for 2023/24 and 2024/25 are due to remain largely stable and the majority of income has been secured. This makes SHCC financially secure during the period of the grant request.

A Finance Manager oversees all financial processes. She works closely with the Treasurer to produce management accounts and provides regular budget updates to SMT meetings. The CEO also is able to produce financial information using the systems that are in place.

### **Current Situation and need**

In recent years there has been a significant increase in St Helen's in people suffering from depression and/or having drug and alcohol dependency. St Helen's currently has one of the highest rates of alcohol related admissions in England and self-harm levels are of significant concern. This trend is resulting in more and more children and young

people finding themselves with no option than to take on the role of a young carer. These children and young people can remain hidden from other services due to the nature of the caring and concerns that disclosing a chaotic family situation may lead to the intervention of services that could result in the family being split up.

On top of these worries, it is already widely reported that over 25% of young carers aged 11-15 miss school or experience educational difficulties and 1 in 4 are bullied due to their caring role. All of this takes place in an environment where schools are being asked to do more for less and other pressures make it difficult for pastoral staff to focus on the needs of young carers and develop initiatives to prioritise their needs.

This issue has been particularly highlighted for SHCC through their young carer led, Chattin 4 Action Committee. This group flagged that there is not enough support currently offered in schools. Alongside this current 1-2-1 work with young carers has consistently identified the gap in support within the school environment and see this as a key driver in ensuring that young carers don't fall behind or disengage entirely.

SHCC held an event in March 2022 and invited representatives from schools across the borough and a group of young carers delivered a training session they had designed. Feedback afterwards showed that the school staff had previously not considered the needs of young carers, had not prioritised them and did not feel confident in asking them about their caring roles.

SHCC delivers direct support to young carers in school settings through drop-in services, but they don't have the capacity to raise awareness of issues related in young carers across the school setting nor provide more intensive support to a young carer outside of the drop-in sessions. By increasing the team and having a dedicated member of staff focusing just on school settings SHCC hope to be able to build a consistent and ongoing relationship with school staff, have a named person that the school can liaise with when they have concerns and identify young carers who are either hidden or find it hard opening up to teachers. By linking in more closely with the school pastoral teams the worker will also be able to provide early support to young carers who are not attending school or are repeatedly late and will be able to work with Welfare Attendance Officers and visit the home and consider what support can be offered to the young carer to get them back into school as quickly as possible.

Funding will be used to employ a dedicated member of staff who will focus on raising awareness in primary and secondary settings through assemblies, staff training and facilitating a programme of school drop-in services across secondary schools in the borough. A nurture group will also be developed in each of the primary schools worked in. They will also develop a Forum where school staff can hear for themselves the difficulties faced by young carers and provide a chance to learn from each other and take ideas and best practice back to their own schools so that they can be implemented.

<b>Expected Key Achievements in Year 1</b>
EKA 1
There will be an increase in the number of Young Carers identified in 3 primary schools and 3 secondary schools.
EKA 2
School staff in the 6 schools will have increased confidence and will be better equipped to identify and support Young Carers internally.
EKA 3
Increased peer support for young carers from those who understand their situation.

**Request and Budget**

SHCC is requesting **£59,574** over 2 years to employ a Young Carer School Support Officer.

**£29,574 in year 1** - £26,400 (salary), £2,580 (NI), and £594 (pension).

**£30,000 in year 2** - £26,826 (salary), £2,580 (NI), and £594 (pension).

**Conclusion**

This application was probably the weakest that was taken forward after the first stage of shortlisting and much of this decision was due to the recognition that St Helens experiences significant deprivation and challenges. Due to external factors the assessment had to take place via Zoom rather than face to face, but despite this it was impossible not to recognise the huge need for this project.

SHCC is a well-established organisation that has developed and grown since it was established over 20 years ago. It has a strong leadership team and is clearly an important local charity that has strong relationships with key stakeholders and provides support to large numbers of unpaid carers. Most recent beneficiary data suggests that SHCC works with 56% of unpaid carers in the area, which is significantly higher than many similar organisations, the average percentage of Carers identified across the northwest of England within Carers Trust Network is 24%). They work with high numbers of young carers and provide a lifeline to many families who are experiencing severe hardship due to issues linked to caring around social and economic disadvantage.

A particularly interesting element of the application was the mention of caring responsibilities due to mental ill health and drug/alcohol misuse. These are often health issues that fall under the radar when identifying young carers and the impact of these issues on the lives of children and young people are significant. They also can be linked to safeguarding concerns so the need to support young carers living within these situations is vitally important as well as the need to do this in an informed and sensitive way. SHCC is definitely the organisation to be leading on providing this support and the work they already do with young carers is testament to the impact they can make. The desire to root some of this support more firmly into schools makes huge sense and would add great value to the work already being done as well as positively impacting for a young carer at a really crucial point of their life.

Schools are clearly ready for this project and eager to work more closely with SHCC should resources allow. The proposed work plan isn't overly ambitious and will allow enough time for the new worker to fully embed themselves within the schools, each of which has been chosen due to deprivation levels and previous requests for help. The introduction of nurturing groups and drop ins run with other young carers will provide valuable additional support in the school setting.

The focus on uncovering hidden young carers impacted by mental health and addiction will make this a really interesting project to support and add an interesting strand to the overall portfolio. Therefore, I would strongly recommend support with a grant.

**Recommended Priority Rating**

Risk = Low	Difference to organisation = High	Priority = High
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