

Organisation Name	Reference	2021-05-YC027
Signpost Stockport for Carers		

Visit Date	Visited By
28 th April 2023	Karen Drury

Grant Summary

By enabling, empowering and supporting school staff to establish and sustain much needed provision within their own settings. This work will significantly enhance and increase the support available for Stockport's Young Carers in school, improving their emotional, mental & physical health, impacting positively on their educational outcomes.

Visit Details (People met, premises visited etc.)

I think I might have been introduced to everyone in the charity!

We met at the Signpost premises, a Victorian hall where space was also let to Mind and the Samaritans. I met Katy Freeman (Young Carers Manager), Johnny Woodhams (Schools Development Worker), Cathy Johnson (Secondary Schools Support worker), Jude and Jeanette (Assessors and Family Support Team), and Dave (Admin).

I was also introduced to Aliah, a Young Carer who had been supported by the organisation since she was 6, caring for her mum, who suffers from mental health issues. Aliah is now at college, studying to be a Social Worker and volunteers at Signpost, working with some of the younger carers.

If Aliah is a product of the Signpost way of working, she is a credit to them; she told me that her confidence had grown to the extent that she was able to speak at their recent Celebratory event in March, to an audience of varied stakeholders including some of their funders. She was articulate and passionate, and so incredibly grounded – despite her own mental health issues – I was very touched.

Information about the Organisation

This is a stable, well-established and close knit organisation; the members of staff I met, with the exception of Johnny, had been there for between 15 and 20 years. The affection between them all was plain.

Staff pride themselves on the relationships that they build to deliver their work – relationships between themselves, with carers young and old, with those cared for, schools and teachers, the local authority and other charities. (They're currently investigating the opportunity for a kind of supervision with Mind, to help workers deal with some of the more difficult cases)

They recognise that referrals come from 'schools that know them' and therefore expanding relationships with schools that don't know them was a sensible thing to do.

They view the project undertaken with Triangle money as something that has 'changed their direction', enabling schools to identify young carers and start their own activity groups in schools – and certainly Johnny is a complete breath of fresh air when it comes to changing perceptions of young carers. With a cultural/ art

background, he uses objects from his personal 'museum' to prompt conversations in schools with groups of young carers and those who *don't* have caring responsibilities and the results sound little short of spectacular in breaking down barriers and creating safe spaces for young carers. This particular workshop has been instrumental in spreading understanding in schools so that young carers feel less isolated.

The choice of Johnny as the Schools Development Worker was an indication of their maverick approach, which enables them to try new things, new approaches, adopt new ideas. It also enables them to be flexible, and respond to their clients; consultation is a natural part of their service delivery.

I was a little surprised that Signpost have gone into a private school of Cheadle Hulme; Katy and Johnny are of the view that young carers are everywhere, but in private schools, the stigma for the schools, parents and young carers is likely to be even higher – and therefore in need of rooting out. Signpost isn't being welcomed by all private schools, but use of other schools in a video to promote the Young Carers Award (a standard for schools in working with young carers) is a great way to encourage a little gentle competition. The need for schools to identify young carers as part of changes to the Census (a statutory responsibility) may help throughout all schools, state as well as private.

Issues and Comments

I asked Katy and Johnny what their biggest concern for the future was, and Katy was concerned about keeping momentum in schools. She recognises that schools either are, or perceive themselves, to be restricted in what they can do and Signpost is gunning for partnership, not just delivering a service.

She is delighted with the tender from Stockport BC ('massive recognition for us'), but is concerned that this just isn't enough for the work they need to do – and of course, she will need to find additional funds for Johnny's post when our funding comes to a close. Johnny himself would like to do more in raising awareness throughout the whole school population, and linking it to mental health, which seems to be a core theme.

Further thoughts for their future include growing the respite offer, and targeting it at those young carers who are suffering from mental health issues.

Other Feedback

They're very happy to be part of the pilot project with Place2Be and found the peer discussions really useful. They also found the interview with Vic to be very useful in helping to explain their position, and the contact they have from Cranfield is still helping them develop future strategy.

Stockport, like many places, is heading for local elections and I have suggested they might usefully liaise with Kinship to understand a bit more how to work the political side of their stakeholders.

I could have happily stayed all day; a really worthy project.