

## **Cross Party Group on Carers**

### **Committee Room**

**20/2/13**

### **Note of meeting**

In attendance:

#### **MSPs:**

Claudia Beamish (co-convener)

Mark McDonald (co-convener)

Johann Lamont

#### **Individuals/organisations:**

Heather Noller	Princess Royal Trust for Carers
Lorna Goodwin	Princess Royal Trust for Carers
Louise Morgan	Scottish Young Carers Services Alliance
Fiona Mackay	South Ayrshire Carers
Megan Wait	Young carer
Megan Short	Young carer
Rachel Gouldie	Young carer
Lois Ratcliffe	Edinburgh Young Carers
Jamie Faichney	Edinburgh Young Carers
James Harrison	Young carer
Lachlan Boyd	Young carer
Roy MacGregor	Fife Carers Centre
Alanna McCain	Young carer
Teejay Burt	Young carer
Caitlin Self	Young carer
Michael Christie	Young carer
Kayleigh Malcolm	Young carer
Katelynn Fleming	Young carer
Jordana Gold	Fife Carers Centre
Jude Clarke	British Psychological Society
Colin Millar	SPAEN
Lesley McLaren	PAMIS
Gill Westwood	Citizens Advice kinship care project
Sarah Elms	Edinburgh North West Carers
Cath Logan	Big Lottery Fund
Raymond Jamieson	PKAVS (Perth and Kinross carers centre)
Abbie Scrimgeour	Young carer
John Wallace	Carer
Emma Azzopardi (&1 young carer)	Carers Link East Dunbartonshire
Julie Deegan Wood	NHS Lothian carers lead
Margaret Ralph (& 3 young carers)	Greater Pollok Carers Centre
Matt Stewart	Scottish Parliament
Elaine Garrick	Scottish Government Carers Policy Unit

**Claudia Beamish** opened the meeting and thanked everyone for coming along, particularly the young carers who were attending.

**Mark McDonald** was proposed as co-convener and was elected. He spoke briefly about his caring background and his now privileged position as an MSP which enabled him to make a difference for carers.

**Claudia Beamish** outlined the purpose of the meeting – at the halfway point between the 2012 and 2013 Scottish Young Carers Festival (which takes place every August), the group wanted to hear suggestions from the young carers about the Festival and how to improve on the issues highlighted at the 2012 Festival. All of the young carer workers at the meeting and the other professionals attending introduced themselves.

**Johann Lamont** spoke about the importance of carers' centres, particularly for young carers. Reflecting on her previous role as a teacher, she said that schools needed to understand how much a young person can be affected by their caring role and that schools must support young people who are upset or angry and view their behaviour and learning in the context of their being a young carer, as schools need to support young people to learn in a range of circumstances. She stated that it was particularly important that young carers who shared their caring responsibility with adults (such as those who care for a sibling) were not overlooked by support services. She also stated that there was cross-party understanding of the importance of carers and that it was great to see so many young people in attendance at the group.

**Jamie** from Edinburgh said that it was very difficult to juggle school and social activities with caring and that at school he was sometimes only seen as a young carer. Young carers services are really important and must get proper funding.

**Louise Morgan** asked if any other young people wanted to talk about their experiences in education.

**Caitlyn** from Fife said that when she was at school, she found it quite difficult – teachers didn't understand and she sometimes got into trouble for having the extra responsibilities of caring. Teachers didn't know what it was like for her and said that having these responsibilities wasn't an excuse for not being able to complete homework, etc. They didn't understand that she cared more about her brother being safe and well than she did about school. **Katelynn** from Fife added that teachers should show more respect for young carers.

**Jude Clark** stated that she used to be a teacher and there was nothing in her training about supporting young carers and that she had had to work out how to support young carers herself and had to learn to not make assumptions. She hoped that if she went back to teaching having learned what she had about young carers' experiences, she would be better. **Claudia Beamish** agreed that due to no national standards of teacher training around supporting young carers, support can be patchy. She referred to the parliamentary questions she had asked Aileen Campbell, the Minister for Children and Young People, earlier in the Parliamentary session about support and resources in secondary schools. **Louise Morgan** said that feedback from recent Festivals had been that schools were not recognising young carers and the problem might be about young people being unwilling to identify as carers, so schools need to be more proactive.

**Caitlyn** from Fife said that when her little brother (who she cares for) started attending the same school as her, she regularly got pulled out of her classes to help her brother's teachers with him. She missed a lot of classes this way and ended up leaving school earlier than she wanted to because school was no longer a break from caring for her.

**Roy MacGregor** said that even if young carers identified themselves as carers to guidance staff in schools, in large secondaries the communication between staff may not be as good so this acknowledgement of young carers might not filter down to subject and registration teachers. Ray Jamieson agreed that as there was a lack of national consistency, how a school dealt with young carer issues was very dependent on the headteacher's view point and the ethos of the school.

**Rachel** from South Ayrshire said that it was more difficult at secondary school because of the different kind of relationship with the teachers – more far removed than at primary. She said that she had felt embarrassed to tell teachers sometimes. **Margaret Ralph** asked the young carers to indicate which of them had told their school they were a young carer – quite a few young carers had not told anyone at their school. **Lachlan** from Edinburgh said that he had told his guidance teacher in S1 that he was a carer and they had taken him out of class to ask if he was OK far too frequently, making him think he was weird and affecting his friendships, as he was also being asked in class if he was OK. When his two brothers began attending the school, he advised them not to say anything to any teachers in case the same thing happened to them. **Claudia Beamish** reiterated that this is why guidance is needed for schools. It was agreed that teachers need to show an interest whilst at the same time being subtle and not overpowering.

**Abbie** from Perth and Kinross said that she found it quite easy to talk about her caring role. There was no help for her in primary school although lots of teachers knew about her situation. Now she is at secondary school, things are better for her and the guidance staff know about her situation and share this with subject teachers if required. She said it was hard to see other young carers struggle because they were shy about sharing their situations, but she wasn't sure why other young carers didn't want to talk about their caring roles.

**Claudia Beamish** asked if cuts to funding were an issue. **Ray Jamieson** said that stability was important and that funding inconsistencies could affect this. It was noted that if a support service lost funding but a new service started up, it's not the same for the young carer as they build a relationship with a specific service and the workers there, so even if a service is present it might not be what they want.

A young carer from South Ayrshire said that when her dad found out that her caring responsibilities were affecting her school work, he found out where she could get some support. Guidance teachers hadn't passed this information on. **Dani** from Pollok stated that she would prefer teachers to just listen, rather than feel sorry for her. **Margaret Ralph** said that young carers at Greater Pollok Young Carers were asked if they wanted a worker to speak with their school about their caring situation and that about a quarter took up this offer.

**Johann Lamont** said that training for schools and teachers and how schools operate with regard to young carers seemed to be coming across very strongly. Schools must be able to respond to a situation by providing the correct amounts of information but without overwhelming young people, and they must also not expect young people to always identify as a carer themselves. Attendance

issues in particular must be recognised a symptom of difficulties and not always lumped together with poor behaviour. Young carers must also be able to talk to any teacher or person they want to share the info with, not have it imposed that they must speak to a particular staff member. **Roy MacGregor** reiterated that primary and secondary schools were very different environments, and **Johann** agreed that transition is particularly difficult and that information known by the primary school must not disappear when the young person reaches secondary age. It was recognised that although teachers are busy, they are in a really valuable position to recognise young carers.

**Lois Ratcliffe** said that when she was a general youth worker, she was not told about young carers issues. She also noted that young carers who are unwilling to identify as carers can do this because of stigma associated with the specific condition that the person they care for has. Awareness raising and peer education might help with this and it is something that Edinburgh Young Carers are looking into.

**Mark McDonald** agreed that educating the wider peer group about carers' issues through PSHE and similar avenues would help raise awareness and ensure that young carers found it easier to communicate with teachers and their peers. Young people might also recognise carers in their wider family this way. More support would be opened up to young carers and stigma would be reduced. All local authorities should have a strategy to ensure delivery of this in their local schools, but recognise that schools will have their own take on how to address young carers' issues as well so best practice should be shared, so that good work can be applied in the areas where support is patchier. He also spoke about a specific issue he had become aware of when visiting the Festival, where a young carer was not seeking support because he was worried that he would be taken into care. The fear around this must be reduced. He reminded the group that they could contact their local politicians about carer issues as well, because they would definitely listen.

**Louise Morgan** and **Claudia Beamish** asked the group if there were any other issues to discuss and what would be most useful. **Roy MacGregor** spoke about the young carers authorisation card and the pilot that had taken place in Fife. Some of the young carers had their cards and **Megan** from South Ayrshire said that it was useful for school. Others agreed that they were helpful in case you didn't want to explain your situation yourself but wanted someone to know about it (the card states that the holder is a young carer, who they look after and why, that they may need extra support, and that they should be given information from medical staff about the condition of the person they care for (if applicable).) A young carer from Fife had found the card very useful when she had been viewed as too young to be given information about medication. **Roy MacGregor** said that it was also useful as a general ID card and was certainly not a 'get out of jail free' card. **Louise Morgan** said that the card was being piloted in six health board areas – the cards are issued by the young carers services on behalf of the NHS.

Speaking about the Scottish Young Carers Festival, one young carer said that they were not sure what activities were taking place at what times, because there were not enough signs. Some people would have preferred a loud disco to a silent disco. The boy band Supanova were well liked. **Louise Morgan** asked about the politicians attending – the young people agreed that it was good for the politicians to mingle and participate but they must wear casual clothes and not suits. Moving between groups was very efficient and meant that people had a chance to talk about a range of topics.

**Alanna** from Fife said that she would like the Festival to be longer, so there was more chance to catch up with friends. It was agreed that the 2-night Festival was good, and **Lorna Goodwin** noted that the 2013 Festival is earlier in the year and within the school holidays. Some issues with camping outside were also discussed, but there is not enough indoor accommodation at the Broomlee Centre for everyone so there will always be some people who are camping.

**Lois Ratcliffe** said that although lots of good information was collected at the Festival, some people forget the issues and it would be good if there was a reminder, or a way for the young carers to see the impact of their participation. **Lorna Goodwin** writes a report for the funders and the Scottish Young Carers Services Alliance, and wondered if this could be circulated more widely and made more accessible. It was acknowledged that it is difficult to get to the root of some of the issues, and a change from year to year might not be possible if it is a long term commitment.

**Elaine Garrick** thanked the young carers for participating and said she had learned some new information about issues in schools. She stated that it was good to hear from young carers at other events like this, not just the Festival. There was some brief discussion about the role of the school in young carers assessments, and how the forthcoming Children and Young People's Bill will influence this.

**Claudia Beamish** closed the meeting by thanking the young carers for participating and said she had been pleased to hear so many people's opinions. She assured the group that MSPs and professionals will keep young carers on the agenda as they were very important.