

Minutes of the Cross Party Group on Carers

23 September 2015

MSPs and their representatives

Claudia Beamish, Graeme Dey, Bruce Crawford, Clare Adamson, Johann Lamont, Eleana Kazakeou (representing Jim Hume)

Organisations and individuals

Aaron Hunter, Amy Bain, Bernadette Monaghan, Carolynne Hunter, Charlene O'Neill, Christine Carlin, Ciaran Reilly, David Nicol, Feylyn Lewis, Fiona McMillan, Gillian Fergusson, Gillian Reid, Glenn Riddell, Harry Robertson, Jamie Todd, Jasmine Wild, Jennifer Corkindale, John Fraser, John McFarlane, John Wallace, Joyce Bell, Julian Thomson, Katla Helgason, Linda Allan, Lois Ratcliffe, Lorna Goodwin, Louise Morgan, Megan Baxter, Moira Oliphant, Molly Feinmann, Nicole Wilson, Paul Traynor, Peggy Winford, Roy McGregor, Samara King, Sonny Davidson, Kiren Zubari, Jack Chalmers, Persephone Scout Hughes, Tom Wightman, Oliver Browning

Apologies

Rhoda Grant MSP, Cath Logan, Kathleen Taylor, Angela McLeod, Elizabeth Morrison, Alana Todd, Lorraine Allan, Donna Nelson, Jude Clarke, Sarah McDermott, Adele Giles, Cat Scott, Cath Purdie

Claudia Beamish chaired the meeting. The minutes of the previous meeting were moved by Louise Morgan and seconded by Claudia Beamish.

Matters arising

It was noted that the Stage 1 report on the Carers (Scotland) Bill had been published by the Health and Sport Committee on Monday 21 September. Moira Oliphant confirmed that the response from the Scottish Government and the Minister for Sport, Health Improvement and Mental Health would be made available to the CPG when it is released.

Young Carers Festival

Lorna Goodwin and Louise Morgan spoke about the Scottish Young Carers Festival and showed the Festival DVD. The eighth Festival took place from 4-6 August 2015 in the Scottish Borders and almost 700 young carers attended. There is a big focus on consultation with young carers and this year, the main themes that young carers raised as part of the consultation were education maintenance allowance issues, mental health support for young carers and for the people they care for, better recognition of young carers' roles from GPs and other health professionals, and more support from schools. A report on the Festival, including the consultation write-up, will be available soon. Louise Morgan then spoke briefly about the Carers (Scotland) Bill and the discussions that had been had on the Young Carers Statement and how the Bill would interact with the Child's Plan.

Education Maintenance Allowance

Bruce Crawford noted that new guidance on education maintenance allowance (EMA) and young carers had been released in 2014, and wondered why there were still issues with its

application. Louise Morgan confirmed that although the refreshed guidance was welcomed, there were still issues in particular local authorities and particular schools and it wasn't clear what the actual problems were. Clare Adamson agreed that she had discussed this at the Festival and found it concerning that young carers who were absent had to provide evidence of illness via a GP's letter, which was chargeable to them. Graeme Dey confirmed that more guidance would come from the Scottish Government and so it was important to know which areas were particularly struggling to provide young carers with consistent EMA. It was agreed by young carers that if EMA applications could contain background information that covered the caring role, it would be more useful as reasons for absences due to caring could be explained. Joyce Bell confirmed that not all areas ask if an EMA applicant is a young carer, and other young carers commented that in their school, discretion over whether to award EMA rested with the Head of Year, which was then of course dependent on the pupil's relationship with the HoY. Claudia Beamish asked if this issue could be dealt with through the Carers (Scotland) Bill; Moira Oliphant said that the Bill wasn't the place for it but that she and her team were interested in the information that was being shared and would take this back to colleagues who worked on EMA. Johann Lamont asked if CoSLA could be notified about the discrepancies between local authorities, as if some local authorities were successfully including young carers then it should be easier for others to follow suit.

Identification and recognition

John Wallace asked about how young carers were identified. The complexities of this issue were discussed, including self-identification, but young carers considered the definition to be quite broad – it was a young person who had increased responsibility for a friend or family member. Statutory criteria to identify young carers was also discussed, and it was noted that different areas have different criteria. Lois Ratcliffe spoke of assessing practical caring duties but also measuring the emotional impact of a caring role, as many young carers are affected by this. Young carers also thought that in some cases, it did not help to be labelled as a young carer, as caring roles can have a positive impact on someone's life.

Schools: One young carer thought that in subjects like PSE, caring issues could be made more relevant for young carers which would help to identify them. For example, when discussing mental health issues, there is never information given about what to do if someone within the family has a mental health problem. School assemblies and liaison with local young carers' services was recognised as positive, but it is possible that young carers could still be hidden from these. Further training of teachers was suggested, as some are very understanding but others are not. Some young carers' services do schools liaison work and have a schools coordinator, but it was suggested that training for teachers should be carried out during initial teacher training and also as continuing professional development (which should be compulsory.) Louise Morgan confirmed that meetings of young carer workers had also identified this, and it had been proposed to have a conference to allow school staff and youth workers to share good practice. Young carers were also clear that there needs to be continuity of support within schools – many schools provide support to young carers through guidance staff, which means that class teachers may not be aware. A system where there is a symbol on the register may help to identify young carers to class teachers without breaching privacy – a similar system is in place in Fife and works quite well, as young carers can ask teachers to check the 'flag' against their name for information. However, several young carers spoke of incidents where the class register and associated flags were visible on a smart board in front of the whole class. Claudia suggested that Skills Development Scotland and other linked agencies could be asked for support to train and engage teachers and school staff. Louise Morgan confirmed that the Young Carers Strategy

contained an action point about development and implementation of pupil registration systems but implementation was happening differently in different areas.

Recognition of young carers

This issue is dealt with to some extent in the Carers (Scotland) Bill, but young carers were not convinced that schools and other agencies would act on new legislation or guidance. This is an issue currently seen with the young carers identification card – even in the pilot areas, not all schools know what the card means. Roy MacGregor pointed out that this issue was also seen within the GIRFEC framework – professionals who were concerned about young people contacted young carer projects and not the child's named person, who is usually school-based. There was further discussion about young carer authorisation cards – not all young people want them, and it was considered that a young carer indicator could be displayed on a Young Scot card instead.

There was some discussion about the impact of caring on siblings, who may not have practical caring tasks but will still be affected emotionally by the impact of illness or disability in the family – for example if they have to miss school because their sibling is in hospital. These young people may not need to attend a young carers' service but should still be supported and recognised through statutory channels, particularly GIRFEC, as it was pointed out that this situation is exactly what GIRFEC is supposed to tackle. This is also the kind of information that should be recorded in a Young Carer Statement when they are introduced.

Mental health

Mental health services for young carers are not up to scratch – mental health issues are always attributed to the caring role and individual compounding issues are rarely explored in detail. It was acknowledged that mental health support for young people generally is patchy and needs to be improved.

Claudia asked the Scottish Government representatives if they had any summary comments to make. Moira confirmed that it had been useful to listen to everyone's ideas and there were opportunities to take some of these into further discussion.

Going Higher campaign

Paul Traynor spoke about [Carers Trust Scotland's Going Higher campaign](#). This campaign will raise awareness of student carers and the issues they experience in Scotland, and will highlight the extremely challenging conditions endured by student carers that is negatively impacting on them being able to enter, sustain and meet their true potential in higher education.

AOCB

John Wallace asked if information could be circulated regarding a traffic order that had been lodged regarding a disabled parking space near his son's primary school.

Next meeting

The next meeting of the CPG on carers will take place on Tuesday 26 January 2016 at 1:30pm in Committee Room 5.

The Scottish Young Carers Festival video is available to watch at <https://vimeo.com/136848306> (password SYCF2015)