

Chilypep

**Evaluation of the
VOYCE Project
Final Report**

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1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Chilypep submitted an application to the Big Lottery in 2011 to support young people who are young carers. The application was submitted on behalf of a partnership between Chilypep, Sheffield Young Carers Project (SYC) and YMCA WhiteRose. These organisations had previously worked together to help support vulnerable young people.

- Chilypep is a charitable organisation that works with young people aged 8-25 to enable them to meaningfully participate in decisions that affect their lives. The charity works to empower and support children and young people (CYP) to recognise their needs and priorities and to help CYP take positive action to address needs and influence decision makers.
- SYC offers support for young carers, aged 8-25, who are providing care and emotional support to family members experiencing physical or mental ill health, are disabled or have substance misuse issues.
- YMCA White Rose is a registered charity and works to help young people grow to their full potential by providing a supportive and inclusive community through its various programmes and services. One of the key services provided was a Young People's counselling and therapy service – Interchange Emotional Wellbeing Programme. At the start of the project the Interchange programme became an independent Community Interest Company who took over the partnership work for VOYCE from YMCA.

1.2 Chilypep had an established relationship with Sheffield Young Carers and the YMCA prior to submitting the proposal for Big Lottery Funds. Building on existing evidence generated through consultations with young carers as part of the development of Sheffield City's 2010 to 2013 Carers Strategy¹, there was a recognised need to improve support for young carers. In particular young carers spoke of not feeling that they had a voice to tell people about their issues and needs, their needs not being recognised in schools and by other service providers and strategic decision makers, and the need for emotional wellbeing support. With the financial constraints curbing local authority expenditure, no additional resources were going to be made available from within the local authority. Therefore, the partnership applied for Big Lottery funding to help develop sustainable strategic and operational structures that would continue to influence local services, improve awareness among practitioners and develop support for young carers across the city.

¹ Sheffield First Partnership. Sheffield: *A city where every carer matters. A joint strategy for transforming the lives of carers in Sheffield 2010-2013.*

VOYCE

- 1.3 In 2010, young carers from within SYC identified a need and willingness to set up a young Carers participation group. SYC supported the initiative by accessing funding from the Youth Opportunities Fund to help develop young carers' skills and understanding of participation and representation. Chilypep provided the training to help build capacity among young carers, to enable them to represent themselves on the Carers and Young Carers Board established to take forward the elements in the carers' strategy. The group learned about young people's rights, communication skills, team work, representation, consultation and participation, equal opportunities and confidence building, in preparation for a residential. The group was given the name VOYCE by young carers, an acronym of Views of Young Carers Explained, which was used for the name of the Lottery Project. The young people then changed their name to VOYCE PG (VOYCE Participation group)
- 1.4 Chilypep and SYC had worked together previously to help develop systems for identifying and supporting young carers, but, according to Chilypep, communication and engagement across the various services was not at a senior enough level to bring about sustainable change. Therefore, the partnership had to lever in support at a more senior level to help drive change across the city.
- 1.5 Discussions between VOYCE, Chilypep, SYC and YMCA (to become Interchange Sheffield) were held regarding the opportunity to apply for Youth in Focus funding and, with a wider partnership agreed with SCC Children and Families, Adult Services, Sheffield Futures (Youth Service) and Public Health, a decision was made to put in an application in 2010 which was successful. The partnership was awarded circa £1 million.
- 1.6 Aims of the Big Lottery programme were to:
- Improve the confidence, knowledge and skills of young carers, so that they are more resilient and empowered to deal with life events that affect them, and able to support each other through key transition stages.
 - Develop new models of working which bring young carers and organisations providing services together, enabling the voice of young carers to be heard and to influence and improve the services and support they receive.²
- 1.7 The partnership developed significant evidence regarding the impact of VOYCE on young carers' confidence, knowledge and skills and this has been submitted to the Big Lottery. This report reviews the partnership's progress and impact against the second of the two aims related to developing new models of working to help develop sustainable support structures within and across services.
- 1.8 Field work included interviews with senior heads of services and two schools leaders in Sheffield, a focus group with young carers, and reviews of document (plans and minutes of meetings). All interviews were recorded and transcripts produced.
- 1.9 An Interim Report³ was completed in 2013 and this final report combines views generated from the interim period with views generated from interviews conducted in September 2015. The funded programme runs until April 2016.

2

Author's Positionality and Reporting

1.10 The evidence provided in this report was generated primarily from interviews with the stakeholders engaged in the VOYCE project, namely the partnership's senior leads, senior staff engaged in VOYCE (heads and deputy heads) within Sheffield City Council and young carers. This report provides an account of their views on what has been achieved. The ability of the evaluator to validate findings was limited by evaluation budget constraints.

1.11 The report is structured as follows:

- Section Two: Structure and Operational Delivery of VOYCE;
- Section Three: Progress and Achievement;
- Section Three: Conclusions.

³ York Consulting (2013) VOYCE Evaluation: Interim Report

2 STRUCTURE AND OPERATIONAL DELIVERY OF THE VOYCE PARTNERSHIP

Introduction

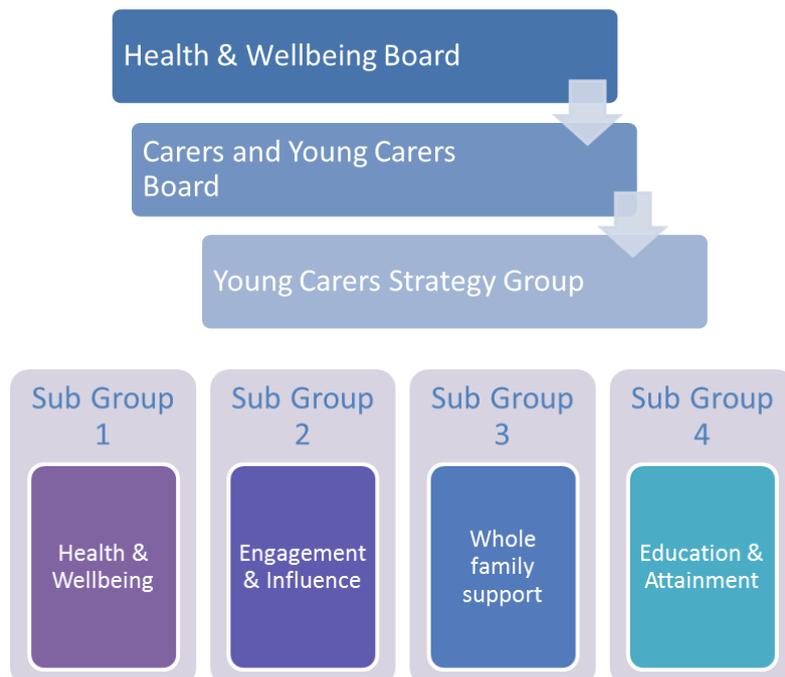
- 2.1 This section describes how the VOYCE partnership structured the strategic delivery of the programme.

Structure and Operational Delivery of VOYCE

- 2.2 To ensure commitment to the project, Chilypep requested all heads of service to commit to the aims and objectives of the VOYCE project.

“To get the money we had to get them [heads of services] to sign up to be partners, so I had to get the Director of Children’s Services, the Head of Adult Services, and one of the senior people in Public Health. They had to sign up to agree to it when we put the bid in.”
(Chilypep)

- 2.3 Having the resources to support the development of a strategic approach also encouraged engagement at the senior level.
- 2.4 The overall Carers and Young Carers Strategy (2010-2013), which the programme supported, was overseen by The Health and Wellbeing Board to which the Carers and Young Carers Board reported. The VOYCE Partnership was coordinated by Chilypep and steered by the Young Carers Strategy Group which met quarterly and provided a strategic steer and disseminated the learning from the project.



- 2.5 Four key areas of strategic importance were identified, which were based on the VOYCE project priorities. These were:
- Health and Wellbeing;
 - Engagement and Influence;
 - Whole Family Support, and
 - Education and Attainment.
- 2.6 To support the planning and delivery of each strategic development area, four sub-groups were convened and key heads or deputy heads of services were appointed to lead on each sub-group.
- 2.7 **The Health and Wellbeing** sub-group was set up to ensure that doctors and other health professionals were aware of young carers issues and priorities in relation to accessing health services for themselves, and referred in to relevant services where needs were determined. It also aimed to raise awareness with health professionals of the experiences and expertise young carers have about the health of the person they care for and the services they receive, to improve the opportunities for them to be heard and for their knowledge and experience taken into account in the care of the cared for person.
- 2.8 **The Engagement and Influence** sub-group was led by VOYCE PG, the young carers participation group, and facilitated by Chilypep. This group worked to identify key priorities and action plans for each year to facilitate and ensure young carers involvement and influence across the work of the other sub groups, as well as the priorities young carers identified that they wanted to be involved in as the project progressed.
- 2.9 **The Whole Family Support** sub-group was formed initially to develop an awareness of the needs for young carers' assessments to be carried out as part of support to the whole family. This group was established before the Care Act 2014 and the Children's and Families Act 2014, which entitles young carers to an assessment of needs as part of the wider family needs. Its long term aim was to bring services together to improve support to families, by developing a 'Whole Family Approach' and to take forward implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding for supporting Young Carers guidelines, issued by central government, and oversee the roll out of young carers assessments across the city.
- 2.10 **The Education and Attainment** sub-group worked to improve transitions for young carers between primary, secondary and further/higher education, training or employment by raising awareness of young carers among families of schools and supporting schools in putting in place methods of identification and support.
- 2.11 The next section describes progress and achievements against each group in relation to developing effective models of support.

3 PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENT

Introduction

- 3.1 This section provides an overview of achievements as they were reported by each of the stakeholders interviewed and by reviewing progress reports from each of the sub-groups where they were submitted. This is not a full account of everything achieved but aims to provide an overview of the impact on strategy and delivery where appropriate, as well as progress and challenges. *[Quotes from interviews are provided but not assigned to an interviewee to protect anonymity.]*

Strategic Engagement and Influence Sub-Group

- 3.2 Evidence from interviews and minutes of meetings shows there was a good level of engagement with the VOYCE project from senior heads of service from within Sheffield City Council. A number of senior leads were participating on the Carers and Young Carers Board and leading sub-groups including:

- Assistant Director of Children's Services.
- Director of Children and Families, Children's Services.
- Virtual Head Teacher for Looked After Children, Inclusion and Learning Services.
- Head of Early Intervention and Prevention Services.
- Manager of Chilypep.
- Managing Director of Sheffield Young Carers.
- Manager of Interchange.
- Senior officer from public health (prior to this becoming part of LA).
- SCC Commissioner of Children's Services.
- Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).
- Sheffield Futures manager.
- Director of Adult Services.

- 3.3 The lead partner (Chilypep) appears to have been well placed to deliver the project, being strategically connected within the authority; sitting on the 0-19 Partnership Board, chairing the voluntary sector Children and Young People's Partnership Network, attending the Children and Young People's Health and Wellbeing Board, and sitting on the Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Executive Board.

- 3.4 Senior staff interviewed reported that over the years since the start of the programme, awareness of young carers' needs and the young carers' agenda more generally has gained increased recognition.

"There was a young carers' service...but it was an isolated young carers' service and young carers were not big on the agenda, or known about, and if it was known about it was seen as an addition to the services rather than integrated into services. There was no clear vision across the city...now things are very different and awareness is much stronger."

- 3.5 According to the senior leads within Sheffield City Council, having the voluntary sector with the expertise around young carers lead VOYCE was crucial.

“It joined up the voluntary sector who were providing the support to young carers in to a voice with authority rather than different people all working to different agendas.”

- 3.6 The Young Carers Strategy Group existed prior to the VOYCE funding, but, according to one interviewee, was not effective at influencing change. It lacked a clear structure and action plan and no-one was accountable for ensuring actions were taken forward and change implemented. With the VOYCE funding secured, the City Council Children and Families Director appointed a new chair (Head of Provision for Looked After Children) to the group who reported directly to the Carers and Young Carers Strategy Board. This gave the Young Carers Strategy Group more of a focus and ensured that progress and challenges were shared with the wider Carers and Young Carers Strategy Group. This group became the steering group for the VOYCE project

“We were able to report against the 2010-2013 Carers Strategy, what we’d achieved, what our next steps were and what the issues we were coming up against were.”

- 3.7 As a result of the VOYCE project being driven primarily by what young carers said they need, heads of services stated they were highly influenced by the accounts of young people and have been more committed to engendering change. Through sharing their personal experiences young carers were able to ‘emotionally connect’ with leaders and raise their understanding of the situation with which young carers are often faced. Many senior leaders described a ‘light bulb moment’ when listening to young carers’ problems and realised their services needed to commit to change this.

“You should hire these guys. They really are amazing. I could harp on for months in meetings and these guys come in and within two hours they’ve got people fired up to really progress things. They got different departments of the council working together for the first time in this way for years.”

The Health and Wellbeing Sub-Group

- 3.8 The health and wellbeing sub group aimed to identify the opportunities for young carers’ needs to be identified, particularly around low level mental health issues. The sub group included a CAMHS worker, a worker from Adult Mental Health and the Head of the School Nursing Service, young people from VOYCE PG, plus delivery partners (Chilypep, SYC and Interchange). Interchange were well placed within this sub-group as they were a voluntary sector lead for a pilot involving General Practitioners (GPs) which aimed to improve links between GPs and the voluntary sector.
- 3.9 There was anecdotal evidence of the value of the sub-group meetings, where discussions were held with practitioners around their processes and at what point they could refer their young people to the statutory mental health services or to Interchange for therapeutic support.

- 3.10 The counselling service provided through Interchange has now been commissioned by the Local Authority for another year and it is hoped that young carers will be able to continue to access the support although the particulars have not been agreed yet. (Young carers are a specific named group in the contract)
- 3.11 However, it appears that longer term strategic or operational change was not achieved and the group struggled to maintain momentum after the Chair from CAMHS left in 2013. There was very little evidence of action plans being developed and reviewed. Although participation on the sub-group was good in the early phase, the committed members either did not have capacity to allocate time to this work, or were not senior enough to make a change in operational practice. Key organisations were not represented which limited what could be achieved.
- 3.12 There is evidence of wider problems with regards embedding support for young carers within the health sector. Two interviewees reported that the health and wellbeing service within Sheffield was dis-jointed and that support was patchy.

“I think the whole of the National Health wellbeing offer in Sheffield...is not connected as well as it could be...”

- 3.13 The City has a health and wellbeing strategy and leads are considering different ways of providing counselling to young people. Although there was agreement that the provision of the counselling services for young carers had been positive, there were concerns about the lessons learned from the project.

“I don’t know what we have learnt from that as a city for the benefit of young carers and how that will connect to other things.”

Whole Family Working Sub-Group

- 3.14 The Young Carers Strategy group and VOYCE staff and young people developed and set up a working group, the Whole Family Support Group to develop a carers’ assessment to be used in Adult and Children’s Services that took in to account young carers’ needs. Young People from VOYCE PG instigated the work, as one of the first things they asked for was for their needs to be assessed and responded to. They developed the assessment tool and worked with members of the group to develop a process to pilot it.

“We put loads of time in, it was really well thought through ...it took a while to get embedded but it is now being used.”

- 3.15 The young carers assessment developed by VOYCE came about before the recent changes in legislation requiring local authorities to consider the needs of young carers. Sheffield were very much seen as being ahead of the game.

“When I took up the post here, it was obvious to me that awareness of young carers’ needs was much greater than in my previous authority.”

- 3.16 Once the assessment was developed the sub-group stopped meeting, so a review of its use was not followed up. According to SYC, currently, the multi-agency support teams (MAST) and young carers champions (nominated officers who promote awareness of young carers needs to services) meet about how the young carers' assessment is being rolled out, which needs input from a number of partners, and SYC are progressing with this.

The Engagement and Influence

“Why I need to be involved is because I am the one that actually stops when Mum is going downhill and is heading for a serious crisis. If decisions are made about her care without asking me they'll miss a trick. They'll miss times when we could have avoided it rather than waiting for the crash to happen. But sometimes, I find it hard to have my voice heard until I can't cope”.

(Young Carer)

- 3.17 This element of activity was very well organised and supported across the partnership. It was clear when talking with Chilypep and SYC that there was a high level of commitment to the young carers in terms of developing their skills and capacity and on ensuring their young carers' life experiences were utilised to help influence decision makes and services.
- 3.18 The Young Carers Participation Group, which existed prior to VOYCE, became the group that led the Engagement and Influence sub-group. They received considerable training to help the group move from being a relatively inexperienced group of young people to one that could communicate with senior staff within the council and could make decisions collectively on what they wanted to focus their energy on.

“It's about getting young people to a point where they can participate in strategic meetings”.

- 3.19 According to the partnership lead, young carers influenced national legislation with regards the Care Act 2014: one young carer was working with the Children's Society and engaging with ministers on a regular basis helping shape the Act. At the time of interviews (September 2015), they were also helping shape the new Carers and Young Carers strategy which was being developed by the city.
- 3.20 To help ensure that services met young carers' needs, young carers were also trained in commissioning procedures. They assisted in developing a young carers' service specification, helping establish young carers' needs, and were involved in the commissioning process by attending a presentation by potential service providers and scoring their bids. According to the lead partner, their scores were taken into account in the overall decision making by the commissioners.
- 3.21 The Engagement and Influence group was joined with a group of young people looking at mental health. This resulted in young people across the two groups being able to work together, and gain an understanding of the different challenges facing young people.
- 3.22 Young people involved in the Engagement and Influence group have clearly been on a journey which helped develop them personally.

“When you look at some of them [name of young person], she was really shy, really quiet and uncomfortable about the fact that she was a young carer, would never tell anyone she was a young carer, it was like a secret. Nobody at school knew, none of her friends knew. We could never use her photograph in anything. Now she is 16, she is leaving school and she has written a story because we are making a book called Look at Me Now because it is our ten year anniversary this year of being independent. She has written this lovely story about what it has done for her in terms of her confidence. She is saying ‘I am a young carer and my Mum’s got mental health problems’.”

- 3.23 In a discussion with young people, there was very positive feedback on some of the general outcomes achieved by the participation group.

“We tried to raise awareness among professionals of what being a young carer is about.”

“We’ve got lots to say about this, we are the experts and we want to share this knowledge to help improve services for other people.”

“It’s been great. I’ve been able to speak my mind on things and I genuinely feel that it’s made a difference.”

“I didn’t think I’d be any good at it, but then I joined it and it’s been brilliant, I’ve learnt so much.”

- 3.24 In terms of the partnership, the young people have been able to influence the strategic partnership in various ways and some of it has been through sitting on the sub-groups. When the Strategic Board meetings have been held there has always been representation at the group through one or two young carers. A small group of young carers have been active in this role, usually the ones that have more experience and confidence in speaking at these settings. It was reported by the partners that in the early phase of the project some young carers felt unable to contribute in the meetings and conversations were too strategic. The decision to allocate a slot for young carers to contribute in meetings alleviated the need for them to sit through the whole meeting and this helped young carers feel their input was more valuable.

- 3.25 Young carers were also going in to families of schools and meeting with school transition groups to raise awareness of young carer’s issues in transition. This complemented the work delivered through SYC relating to raising awareness and training of school staff.

- 3.26 There are concerns regarding the future of the young carers’ participation group as there was considerable investment of time and money to support the group. Young carers came with talents and enthusiasm but also sometimes with concerns and needs that needed addressing. (The group was provided with support from Interchange to help them with any emotional needs.) Managing a group of young people who were learning to work together was extremely resource intensive. However, the partnership has successfully developed the capacity of young carers to represent themselves. One head of service believed that they will continue to speak out.

“Even if VOYCE stopped tomorrow the young carers group would still campaign.”

- 3.27 In addition, the services themselves have developed their internal capacity to provide opportunities for participation.

“We have worked on reducing the impact on the carers so they have got more time, they’ve got more confidence to speak out.”

The Education and Attainment

3.28 The sub-group defined two key objectives:

- Objective 1. To establish a process for identifying young carers in schools which included:
 - Raising awareness;
 - Promoting the use of ID cards for young carers to be recognised and to receive the support needed;
 - Ensuring the young carers are on the SIMS database that tracks pupil progress.
- Objective 2. Support for Young carers to achieve their potential in education and to enjoy the same educational opportunities as other children.

3.29 The schools work focussed on three families of schools which included three secondary schools and their primary feeder schools. This activity was delivered by SYC and included;

- Delivering awareness raising training in schools, across all the staff and governors;
- Developing a school identification tool, to enable schools to identify and then support young carers;
- Establishing support groups within schools in order to help young carers in their day to day school life;
- Establishing transition support programme to support young carers from primary into secondary school
- Working with schools to support achievement of the Carers Trust schools standards awards for young carers⁴;
- Direct one to one and group support for young carers identified in schools.

3.30 According to the lead of the sub-group, the work with the family of schools was very well co-ordinated and very effective in achieving its aims.

3.31 Interviews with two schools participating in VOYCE, one secondary and one primary feeder school, both confirmed how successful the programme had been in helping them put in place sustainable support for young carers.

3.32 Both schools described how they had developed a whole school approach to identifying and supporting young carers. Both described how VOYCE had done considerable work raising awareness in assemblies with school teaching and support staff as well as delivering arts based therapy to young carers identified as needing additional support in school.

3.33 The primary school had also up-skilled one member of staff to deliver the arts based programme; a six week session helping young people explore their thoughts and feelings. This will ensure the work can continue beyond the funded period.

⁴ The Young carers in Schools Award is an award given to schools who provide support to young carers. A gold, silver or bronze award is achieved. See <http://www.youngcarer.com/resources/young-carers-schools/award-guidance>

“Our school has gone from having no knowledge of how many young carers we had, to having identified 17 [out of a possible 520 pupils] that are young carers carrying out quite significant caring.”

(Primary School Learning Mentor)

“It’s been absolutely fabulous. The support we have had in school. We have identified a lot of young carers and have also set up a young carers’ council now which will help to continue the support in the school once the funding ends”.

(Secondary School Learning Mentor)

- 3.34 The primary school also spoke of how they were encouraging other feeder schools in their school family to engage in the agenda and believed that there was a notable change among schools regarding awareness and willingness to put support mechanisms in place.

“Because the secondary school has developed their awareness and support, they are asking the primaries for information on young carers in transition. We communicate much more about young people’s needs now which includes any identified young carers.

(Primary School Learning Mentor)

- 3.35 According to the two interviewees, the wrap around support delivered to young carers in schools as a result of the VOYCE funding has made a considerable impact on their health and wellbeing.

“The fact that young carers were defined as a priority group meant that we could access counselling support for them when they really needed it”.

- 3.36 However, concerns expressed regarding the longer term sustainability of support within schools as well as engagement in the young carers agenda more broadly across schools.

“Engagement among the schools involved in the pilot was excellent and there was clear evidence of knowledge transfer within schools and lots of good work happening. My concerns for the future are that young carers are still not high enough on the agenda of many head teachers.

- 3.37 There were challenges in engaging the schools as the project continued. In the first phase of activity back in 2012, the LA were advising schools to develop their support for young carers and could do this while there was a strong support and challenge relationship with the school improvement teams. However, as schools have become more independent from local authorities, LA leverage to encourage schools to adopt particular principles of working has significantly reduced.

“Where you used to have responsibility for schools, we have now got schools independent clusters where we have got to go in there and try and get involved. It has been about persuading schools to do it.”

Successes and Challenges

The Partnership

“Every week the landscape ahead was changing so it has been hard. Without a strong leadership, joint work between the voluntary sector groups and the commitment from a number of people within the statutory services it could have easily gone down the plughole.”

- 3.38 The three partners delivering the programme all reported a very positive experience working together and a strengthening of partnership relations. According to partners, each service has learned a lot about the other’s area or expertise which has strengthened the capacity within each service. SYC has further developed effective methods of participation and Chilypep have further developed their understanding about young carers and emotional well-being and how this is part of Youth Work.

“They [Interchange] have also learnt a lot about participation as well and we have learnt, both Chilypep and Young Carers, recognising how much of our work is around emotional well-being.”

- 3.39 The three partners stated they would continue to work together on any future opportunities should the opportunity arise post VOYCE. There were some inevitable challenges and some frustrations related to the allocation of resources, operational practices and the sharing of information which they agreed they would do differently if working together again.

“I do think we went through the group stages of forming, norming etc, and for the last two years have performed really well together. Each organisation has supported the others, and this has been especially important when trying to influence local strategies and formal structures.”

Strategic and Operational Influence

- 3.40 There was evidence from the interviews of a greater degree of awareness and understanding of the need to support young carers among schools, mental health practitioners and heads and deputy heads of services.

“I didn’t know much about young carers. When I first came here there was an inspection of the city and I phoned up the young carers group asking if they could help us out, not thinking maybe we should be doing something to help them out, rather than just working with the inspector. What we have achieved is that there is a much better understanding of young carers across social care and adult communities.”

“Lead officers in social care did everything to support this programme.”

- 3.41 Clearly, the work among families of schools has been highly effective and methods of identifying young carers are established in at least three secondary schools and some primaries as a result of VOYCE.

- 3.42 The Counselling service provided through Interchange has now been commissioned by the Local Authority for another year and it is hoped that young carers will be able to continue to access the support.

Participation of Young carers

- 3.43 The project has been very successful in developing and harnessing the power of the voice of young carers. There has been considerable investment in training the young people as part of the VOYCE project and the Young Person's Participation Group that existed prior to VOYCE, will continue. In addition, partners themselves including Interchange and Sheffield Young Carers have developed their own capacity to support participation activities, which will help ensure that young people continue to lobby on behalf of young carers.

Sustainability of Change

- 3.44 Although there have been considerable developments among services with regards to practitioners' awareness of young carers, and support has been put in place, particularly in schools and through the future commissioning of Interchange, there is still much to be achieved. Particularly in the health sector, there is considerable work to do among health professionals including GPs and community health visitors with regards to their awareness and understanding of young carers in the family.
- 3.45 Sheffield is moving to a locality model for delivering support services to people with needs and it was acknowledged that young carers needed to be included in the strategy and models of delivery. This will involve clear operating protocols (e.g. defined thresholds, referrals and assessment of needs) to ensure that appropriate support needs are identified and support put in place to prevent further needs from arising.
- 3.46 Although the schools work was very successful, concerns were expressed that the strategy would not develop further without VOYCE or something similar to identify plans, provide support and monitor progress. A mechanism to identify the needs of young carers in schools such as young carers being defined as a discrete group similar to Looked After Children and included in Ofsted inspections would, according to the sub-group lead, be the only way of ensuring that support for young carers continues to develop.
- 3.47 Sustaining the impact of the VOYCE project is perhaps the biggest challenge facing the partnership particularly in the current climate where preventative services are at risk due to budget constraints.

"The big challenge for us is, £900,000 over four years, that money will have gone and now we have lost our funding, it is going to be difficult, but the good thing is that it has embedded young carers into the agenda, it is now making sure it carries on."

- 3.48 Continuing developments is going to be made even more difficult because of the changes in personnel within the Statutory Sector engaging in the project. According to the partners, this was one of the biggest challenges.

"One person has hold of it and they have been part of it from the beginning, they get moved, somebody else comes in and it's not even on their radar."

3.49 The project struggled in getting the Memorandum of Understanding signed due to considerable changes in personnel within adult services and movement of other personnel. This document may have helped sustain commitment going forward within and across services. An interviewee stated that, on reflection, they should have focussed on this earlier and committed to getting it signed by heads of services rather than trying to implement it gradually.

“If everybody had signed up, not just Children’s Services, but Adults, Health, Police; if everyone had signed up to it there is a point of reference. Without it and the VOYCE going, you can’t wave the VOYCE piece of paper because it isn’t there.”

3.50 It has been apparent to the partners that senior members of the sub-groups in particular were very stretched and their capacity to support the project was limited as a result. Without the continued investment from the key partners in terms of monitoring and encouraging action, it is feasible that the needs of young carers will be subsumed. It was noted by a head of service that young carers are not referenced in the city wide age strategy.⁵

Key Lessons Learned

3.51 Key lessons reported by the partners included the following:

- Strategic change takes much longer than originally planned for and there were insufficient resources in for this element of work. Interchange had less funds for their senior manager to play a strategic role and this impacted on her ability to engage in strategic arenas.
- The need to focus on the Memorandum of Understanding so at least there is commitment on paper from Heads of Services to support young carers going forward.
- Monitoring the performance of the project was difficult across the partners in the early phase as each partner was monitoring their own activities. Trying to track information relating to project outputs was challenging because of a lack of central monitoring, which has been developed in subsequent years
- Operational practices such as consent forms and sharing of personal information across partners so that referrals and take up of support could be followed through, needed to be agreed earlier in the project.
- There was some confusion around the VOYCE project with regards what it was (and what it was not). In particular, SYC, delivering aspects of VOYCE, were also delivering other aspects of support and developing services. Sometimes people were asking questions relating to ownership of activities. Although this is not a major problem, it can lead to confusions over responsibility of services and continuation of support beyond the funded period of VOYCE. In the future, understanding how best to promote the project and raise awareness of the funded ‘offer’ will be important.
- Recruitment on to the participation group was not always easy and according to one partner, better use of the cross partner activities could have helped ensure representation from the range of services.

⁵ Sheffield First Partnership, Sheffield City Council: A City for All Ages: Making Sheffield a great place to grow old. See at http://www.cpa.org.uk/cpa-lga-evidence/Sheffield_50Plus/ACityforAllAges-26-12.pdf

4 CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

- 4.1 This section provides conclusions regarding the impact of the VOYCE project on strategy and operational delivery models within the city of Sheffield, relating to the four sub-groups as set out in Section Two.

Key Findings

Strategic Impact

- 4.2 There was a good level of strategic engagement from senior heads of services at the beginning of the programme and this continued. However, there were some key services, public health, Sheffield Futures (Youth Service) and adult services that struggled to engage due to conflicting priorities.
- 4.3 According to senior leads interviewed in the final round (September 2015) there was a lack of knowledge of what being a young carer meant prior to the commencement of VOYCE. Since 2011, awareness of young carers had improved considerably. Some heads of service spoke of a 'light bulb moment' when listening to young carers' accounts of their lives, their caring and support needs.

Impact on Young Carer Participation

- 4.4 Key aims of the Big Lottery fund were to develop the confidence and skills of young carers so that they are more resilient and empowered to deal with life events that affect them and to develop new models of working which bring young carers and organisations providing services together. The developments within the Engagement and Influence sub-group have provided young carers with the support and training to help them develop as individuals as well as influence services. The investment in this group has been significant; capacity of the partnership to continue participation activities has increased, although there is concern whether the VOYCE participation group will continue due to the significant financial and resource investments required.

Health and Wellbeing

- 4.5 Support for young carers with regards their emotional wellbeing was provided through Interchange counselling services and through arts groups delivered in schools by SYC after initial support from Interchange's Art Therapist. The Interchange counselling has been funded for a further year but the arts based support is under threat post VOYCE funding. Schools have reported concerns regarding this although one primary school reported developing their capacity to continue to deliver this. The sub-group folded early on in the programme due to having no suitable person with capacity or authority to chair the meeting and link with the Strategy Board. Strategic influence was not achieved and there were concerns expressed that health and wellbeing support for young carers across Sheffield remained dis-jointed.

Education and Attainment

- 4.6 This sub-group was very effective, delivered considerable support in schools and influenced schools' identification and support models in three families of schools. Schools reported having a much greater level of awareness of young carers' needs and having developed whole school approaches as a result of VOYCE. Concerns were expressed regarding the continuation of this support across the city once the support from VOYCE is withdrawn.

Whole Family Working

- 4.7 This sub-group effectively identified the needs of young carers and assisted the authority in developing a young carers' assessment. This is now in operation and SYC is working with MAST to review the completion of assessments and how information is shared across partners.

Partnership Effectiveness

- 4.8 The three partners, Chilypep, SYC and Interchange worked well together and provided a coherent model of engagement and support to young carers.
- 4.9 All reported a positive experience as a result of working together in VOYCE and that their knowledge of participation, health and wellbeing and young carers' needs had been improved across the partnership.
- 4.10 There were some key challenges and lessons learned regarding project monitoring, sharing of information and issues requiring consent and the marketing/promotion of the project which could have been done better, and that if they were to work together again, they would need to agree protocols early on. Funds for eliciting strategic change were under costed which put a strain on service resources in some instances.

Sustaining Change

- 4.11 The key challenge facing the partnership is building on the current successes achieved, and sustaining models of delivery particularly in schools across the city, but also in taking forward change within the health sector (GPs, health workers etc). This will present significant challenges for the three partners, particularly in an environment of budget cuts that will no doubt focus on constraining preventative services.

Concluding Remarks

- 4.12 This report has only skimmed the service in terms of representing the activities across the city but has aimed to cover key outcomes from the sub-groups as well as longer term influence on strategic change. What was very evident, was the commitment from all three partners to ensuring that young carers' priorities and needs led the project and influenced the change among services; this has been very clearly demonstrated. The partnership has developed and harnessed the knowledge of young carers as well as their own capacity to support participation in the future. This will help ensure that young carers' voices continue to be heard and influence future strategies in Sheffield.