

**YOUNG CARER
SUSTAINED PROGRAMME
FOR STUDENTS AND
TRAIN THE TRAINER
PROGRAMME FOR
SUPPORTERS AND
INFLUENCERS**

**THEORY OF CHANGE
NARRATIVE**

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Theory of Change Narrative: Care Experienced Sustained Programme for Students and Train the Trainer Programme for Supporters and Influencers



Context

Situation

Higher Education Progression Partnership (Hepp) is a jointly funded initiative by Sheffield Hallam University and the University of Sheffield that provides impartial advice and guidance across South Yorkshire and North East Derbyshire. Hepp aims to encourage more children, young people and adults that have experienced personal, systemic, or cultural barriers to accessing higher education to consider it as a viable option. Hepp has identified target groups for activity based on their new strategic approach, these are Mature learners, Disabled Students, Care Experienced, Kinship Care, Young Carers, Black Students and Estranged Students, but also work with key stakeholders in the region that already have existing relationships with these groups.

The term 'young carer' refers to someone aged 25 and under who cares for a friend or family member who, due to illness, disability, a mental health problem or an addiction, cannot cope without their support as referenced on Carers Trust (2023). According to The Carers Trust (2021) young carers on average achieve one grade lower per GCSE subject than their peers without a caring role, with 27% of young carers saying that they struggle to balance caring with school or college work (Carers Trust, 2022). With young carers being more likely to not be in education, employment, or training (NEET) than their peers without a caring role between the ages of 16 and 19 (Carers Trust, 2021). Not all young carers disclose their caring responsibilities and so there is no official data on how many young carers are studying at higher education (Office for Students, 2020). The number of carers is fluid as people can become a young carer for short periods, people do not always see themselves in a caring role and others shy away from having a label attached to them.

Hepp is perfectly positioned as an impartial provider of advice and guidance to support the access of young carer students. Hepp has existing relationships with young carer organisations and within some schools there are young carer contacts allowing Hepp to connect with students from this underrepresented group.

Rationale

Hepp's main goal (40) is that its "evidence-based, universal and targeted offers are increasing engagement with higher education from anyone in our region with personal, systemic, or cultural barriers to access, as directed by the two universities through the HEPP board". They have identified several key activities to help them reach this goal, of which five are particularly relevant to sustained activity and the necessary work with "institutions or individuals who are in positions which directly influence care experienced students" (black text under box 90). It is felt that improving knowledge about higher education across multiple stakeholder groups (train the trainer) will increase knowledge amongst the target population.

- 10. More people with barriers in our region are choosing to continue their learning beyond level 4 if it's right for them.
- 20. There are effective ways to engage people in our region such that if it's right for them, they choose to continue their learning beyond level 4.
- 10. Someone or some entity is doing the effective engaging.
- 90. HEPP has reviewed the incidence/impact rates of groupings of individuals in their geographical region; and the evidence base for the intervention and has worked out what generic content will reach the widest number of people and which groupings should be a priority for the tailored intervention and receive specific content.
- 100. HEPP has used the outcome of 90 and designed evidence-based, universal offers to reach the widest number of people with generic content as possible and tailored offers to reach specific audiences with specific content where the evidence suggested this is most effective and this has been agreed by the two universities.

Hepp has also identified that currently stakeholders, school staff and parents of young carers have limited or outdated knowledge about higher education. This means that they may not understand the opportunities and benefits that could come from higher education for young carers. Therefore, if the knowledge of stakeholders is increased, they are more likely to engage potential young carers in conversations about higher education and refer them to trusted sources for further information and guidance.

Young carers can have a lack of self-belief and have a fear for failure which are barriers, as well as fear of failing whilst studying. This is a consequence of students struggling to gain qualifications due to disruption in their studies due to attendance (Kettell, 2020). There is a sense among young carers that they do not belong in a higher education institution, giving them a feeling of isolation (Read and Leathwood, 2003). This is highlighted in an Applied Inspiration/Specialist Evidence, Evaluation & Research (2022) report where there is a fear of students feeling different and misunderstood.

With the introduction of the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register (EORR) Hepp has identified that young carers have not been recognised as an underrepresented group. The research conducted by Applied Inspiration/Specialist Evidence, Evaluation & Research Collaborative HE (2022) reported that young carers are a cohort who may lack support, confidence, and knowledge in the context of higher education, thus making them an underrepresented group that would benefit from support to navigate into further and higher education.

Aim

The strategic outreach aims to provide positive and immersive experiences of higher education, providing opportunities to explore higher education, focussing on early awareness and later information, providing simple key messages. This is in addition to a suite of resources and sessions

to increase institutions' and individuals' (stakeholder) awareness and knowledge about higher education. The information will enable them to realise higher education is an option for learners who are 18+ and that they can confidently advise prospective students or direct them to relevant sources or organisations for more information.

Underpinning Theory

Evidence

The evidence about young carer students highlights the diversity in their backgrounds, motivation to study and structural barriers they experience. Hepp has tried various methods of engaging with young carer students including summer schools and days of activity for students from Year 7 to Y11. All direct activity to young carer students at times has been challenging, due to not having a single point of contact in schools and charitable organisations only working with individuals for a limited time resulting in interventions not being repeated. An extensive literature review along with a report written by Specialist Evidence, Evaluation & Research Collaborative HE by Applied Inspiration identified barriers young carer students experience accessing higher education. It is envisaged that this evidence will be used to inform the resources developed for the intervention. The evidence is presented below as barriers (Appendix 1: Literature review).

Barriers

- Finance: Young carer students may not be aware of the financial support higher education institutions can offer them through bursaries. They have concerns over seeking part-time employment due to their caring responsibility and for some they can be the income that supplements the family/household income.
- Demographics: Young Carer students are more likely to fall into one or more other underrepresented groups in higher education. With a high proportion suffering mental and health related problems. As a young carer student, they are more likely to go onto higher education as a mature student, be from immigrant families with the majority being women. Access to higher education is often through part-time vocational routes.
- Imposter syndrome: Young Carer students may lack a sense of belonging in further and higher education with a lack of peer networks. Many struggle to participate in extracurricular social activities and feel an estrangement from other students. There is a fear of being judged by their background and the lack of understanding by peers.
- Higher education knowledge: Young carer students lack knowledge about the higher education application process and what support is provided at institutions. Many institutions lack an understanding and as such there is inadequate flexibility within institutions.
- Context: According to Times Higher Education (2023), young carers are 38% less likely to have a degree than their peers who do not care for a family member or other. Depending on the number of hours of caring a young person does, it can increase this likelihood.

Assumptions

- Young carer students may not have access to the right knowledge that facilitates their transition to higher education. Stakeholders, school staff and parents/carers can have limited or outdated knowledge about higher education, so they cannot support young carer transition. This could mean that young carers may not understand the opportunities and benefits that higher education could provide them with. Therefore, if the knowledge of stakeholders is increased, they are more likely to engage potential young carer students in conversations about higher education and refer them to trusted sources for further information and guidance.
- Students may lack self-belief and have a fear of failure which are barriers to going onto higher education, but also a fear of failing whilst studying. This is a consequence of students having disruptive school experiences; due to not attending school and the struggle to balance studying whilst having caring responsibilities.

Outcomes

The outcomes of the train the trainer model is focused on the impact it will have on the parents/carers and stakeholders and their engagement and understanding of higher education. The expected change in the parent/carers and stakeholders is envisaged to benefit the target group by establishing the connection between the intervention and young carer access and progression into higher education.

The outcomes of the sustained programme are focussed on the impact it will have on the young carer students through the activities and the students feeling informed and comfortable to make a choice about higher education. Success of the programme is outlined by the students being supported by schools, supporters, parents and carers to attend multiple sessions during the three-year programme. The expected change in the student's aspirations will be supported by the thorough evaluation set out in the form of pre and post evaluation completed each academic year. The data collected and input onto HEAT will confirm whether the student progresses into higher education.

Long

In the long-term, stakeholders should be knowledgeable about higher education opportunities for young carer students and feel confident that they can aid prospective students to access the information and guidance they need. Crucial to the success of this intervention is the ability of stakeholders to access and use the knowledge gained through the train the trainer resources and supporting the students in attending the sustained programme.

In the long-term, students should feel more confident and reassured to make a choice about higher education, whether that is progressing to higher education straight from school, as a mature student or maybe not at all.

Medium

Medium-term change involves developing trust between Hepp and its partners with stakeholders, parents and carers. This trust will help Hepp to develop access to young carer students and for them to advocate for higher education.

In the medium-term the interventions want to develop the understanding of the higher education landscape, the level of support offered and the difference between school and higher education. This can be demonstrated through activity to show the students the range of study options, courses available and explaining the types of support.

Short

In the short-term, the train the trainer (TTT) intervention wants to develop stakeholders in four areas, this should be measurable directly after the intervention.

- Learning: Knowledge related to higher education and an understanding of options available to young carer students through the TTT videos.
- Attitudinal: Stakeholders begin to have aspirations and expectations of higher education for young carer students' participation in higher education.
- Skills-based: Stakeholders feel equipped to support student choices about higher education.
- Experiential: Stakeholders will know where and how to access expertise in higher education and support students to attend sustained activity.

In the short-term, the sustained programme wants to develop students in four areas, this should be measurable by pre and post evaluation each academic year.

- Learning: Positive and immersive experiences of higher education that are seen as realistic, encompassing multiple aspects of student life beyond study.
- Attitudinal: Students to develop familiarity with institutions and have a sense of belonging and choice.
- Skills-based: Activities to focus on simple key messages with flexibility for individual needs.
- Experiential: Students will know where and how to access expertise in higher education and the support offered.

Programme Delivery

The intervention activities are designed to meet the aims and outcomes and develop student and stakeholder knowledge and exposure to higher education.

Inputs

The inputs into the intervention fall into two categories: established Hepp infrastructure and specific programme resources for the intervention. The intervention will draw on existing Hepp staff, partners (HeppSY, TUoS, SHU), student ambassadors, graduate interns, schools, local authorities, young carer organisations and HeppHUB).

Activities

The main activities that stakeholders and students will be able to access and engage with are:

Stakeholders/Parents and Carers

- Video Programme: Seven short videos that address; finance, support, access routes, UCAS, benefits, myths and one to support asylum seekers and refugees. These videos will be available

Sustained Programme for Students

- Launch Event: An on-line activity to introduce the aims and objectives of the three-year programme.
- Sustained Programme: Will follow three activities per academic year for Y8's, Y9's and Y10's – the activity will be themed and delivered on campus or virtually. The activities will include subject specific tasters, developing transferrable skills and looking at university buildings and accommodation.
- Celebration Event: In Y11 the students will come on campus with parents and carers to celebrate their achievements from the sustained programme.
- Newsletter: To keep students informed of upcoming activity and any useful and helpful information to support them to make an informed choice about higher education.

Outputs

The main outputs for stakeholders, parents and carers will include the resources created for the suite of recordings and termly virtual parent/carers sessions. These will be available via Hepp's communication strategy and links with young carer organisations and schools.

For students the main outputs will be the delivery of a sustained programme over a period of 3 academic years, providing students with the confidence and ability to make an informed choice that is right for them.

Young Carer Students

Currently, young carer students do not have access to the right knowledge that facilitate their transition to higher education. Stakeholders, school staff and parents/carers have limited or outdated knowledge about H.E., so cannot support young carer transition.

Students have a lack of self-belief with a fear for failure both as a barrier to H.E but also thinking about failing whilst studying. This is a consequence of students having disruptive school experiences; due to not attending school and the struggle to balance studying whilst having caring responsibilities.

Input

Hepp Infrastructure: this project will be delivered as part of 'normal activity'.
Programme Specific Resources: video production, STEER and Applied Inspiration support.

Parents/Carers/Supporters:

Video Programme: Six short videos addressing: finance, support, access routes, UCAS, benefits and myths

Parent/Carer Sessions: 30 min tea-time sessions to find out how to support young people looking at H.E.

Sustained Programme

Y8—Y10 Activity: Three sessions per year (Y8—Y10), a launch event (Y7) and a celebration event (Y11).

Activity

The evidence about CES highlights the diversity in their backgrounds, motivation to study and structural barriers they experience. Hepp have tried various methods of engaging with young carer students including, summer schools and activity for students from Y7-Y11. All direct activity to young carer students at times has been challenging, due to not having a single point of contact in schools and charitable organisations only working with individuals for a limited time resulting in interventions not being repeated. An extensive literature review along with a report written by Applied Inspiration to identify barriers young carer students experience accessing H.E. It is envisaged that this evidence will inform the resources developed for the intervention. The evidence is presented below as barriers (Appendix 1: Literature review).

Evidence

Hepp has identified target groups for activity based on their new strategic approach, of which young carer students are one. The Carers Trust' highlights that students with caring responsibilities are more likely not to be in education resulting in young carers on average achieving one grade lower per GCSE than that of their peers. Hepp is perfectly positioned as an impartial provider of advice and guidance to support the access of young carers to H.E.

Situation

The strategic outreach aims to provide positive and immersive experiences of H.E. This is in addition to a suite of resources and sessions to increase institutions and individuals (stakeholder) awareness and knowledge about H.E. The information will provide them with confidence to advise prospective students or direct them to relevant sources or organisations for more information.

Aims

Rationale

Hepp has strong connections with young carer organisations and schools within SV and NED to share information and guidance about HE. Therefore, improving knowledge about HE (TTT) helping to increase knowledge amongst the target population. In addition to the TTT the connections will support the sustained programme through relationships to bring students onto campus—to feel confident, have a sense of belonging and improved knowledge of HE giving them the opportunity to make an informed decision.

Long

Both

Stakeholders should be knowledgeable about HE opportunities and feel confident to access information.
Students should feel confident and reassured to make a choice about H.E.

Medium

Both

Trust: between stakeholders, parents/carers, HE providers and Hepp.
Hepp: to develop understanding of HE: landscape, level of support and difference between school and HE.

Short Outcomes

Train the Trainer

Learning: HE Knowledge and an understanding of options through the TTT videos.

Attitudinal: Stakeholders see HE as an option.

Skills-based: Stakeholders feel equipped to support VC's.

Experiential: Stakeholders will know where and how to access expertise in H.E and support VC's to attend activity.

Sustained Programme

Learning: Positive and immersive experience of HE that are realistic, encompassing multiple aspects of student life.

Attitudinal: Students develop familiarity with institutions - sense of belonging and choice.

Skills-based: Activities to focus on simple key messages with flexibility for individual needs.

Experiential: Students will know where and how to access expertise in HE and the support offered.

Appendix 1: Literature review

Barriers	Explanation
Financial	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Young Carers (YC) more likely to be from single, low-income families.• Care responsibilities may prevent YCs seeking part time employment whilst studying.• YC income often used to supplement family/ household income.• YC 3x more likely to take on high-risk debt (e.g. payday loans).• Many are not aware they qualify for YC bursaries and other financial support
Attainment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Many YC do not have suitable study spaces at home.• Study often interrupted at home.• Care responsibilities are unpredictable and interact poorly with coursework deadlines and exams
Options	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• YC are much more likely to study subjects related to care.• Carers much less likely to study courses that involve a placement.• More likely to take part time or vocational courses.• Carers much more likely to stay closer to home.
Institutional	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of timetabling flexibility at university.• Lack of flexibility in course structure.• Lack of support/ understanding from academics.• Difficulty accessing support at university.• Many carers only disclose care responsibilities at a point of crisis – needs to be a greater emphasis placed on early disclosure.• Support not adequately signposted.
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of belonging at FE and HE.• Lack of peer network at HE – Australian evidence that universities lack YC support networks.• Unable to take part in extracurricular social activities due to care responsibilities.• Feeling of estrangement from other students.• Difficulty/ reluctance to disclose caring responsibilities. Lack of understanding from other students.

Barriers	Explanation
Health/ Wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2014 survey – 45% of respondents reported mental health problems. • Suggestions that mental health worsened due to covid. • Evidence that working from home more challenging for carers due to loss of separation between home and university/ study. • Feeling of split loyalties between care and study (wanting to be both good carers and good students).
Demographic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vast majority of YC with primary care responsibilities are women. • YC are more likely to come from immigrant families. • Mature students most likely to be carers, but traditional age students suffer most from care responsibilities. • YC can also face other barriers - I.e. many young carers also have learning difficulties (there is limited research available here, however).

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