Carers (Scotland) Bill

Scottish Young Carers Services Alliance

The Scottish Young Carers Services Alliance is an unconstituted network of over 50 organisations across Scotland who deliver, or intend to deliver services to young carers, or who have an interest in issues affecting young carers. The Alliance was formed around 2002 and is facilitated by a Co-ordinator, who is employed by Carers Trust.

Alliance members met recently in Glasgow to discuss the Bill as it stands. These members represent a good cross section of young carers services; urban and rural, small and large services. Some are from independent services, some sit within condition specific organisations, some are attached to an adult carers centre, some work within larger national children's organisations. We also had representatives from NHS and social services. The group considered the questions put forward by your committee to form the basis of the discussions. The Co-ordinator has brought together the comments and responses from this consultation to present to the Committee to assist the process of the Bill and to ensure that it works as well as possible for young carers in Scotland.

Q1. Do you support the Bill?

The majority of staff support the bill, but some felt unsure, asking how will it impact on young carers, with a few asking how practical it is. It was explained that secondary legislation will be developed to help facilitate how the Bill is enacted. We look forward to being involved in the development of that.

Q2. What do you feel would be the benefits of the provisions set out in the Bill?

The most significant part of the Bill for young carers is the duty to provide a Young Carers Statement (YCS).

There was overall approval of the Young Carers Statement, if some uncertainty about how it would be delivered.

The national strategy for young carers in Scotland (Getting It Right for Young Carers, Scottish Government 2010) acknowledges a large gap between the numbers of children and young people who say they have a caring role and the numbers of those young carers who actually receive support from services. The 'hidden' nature of caring remains an issue. The majority of respondents felt that a YCS would be better at catching young carers as opposed to the more generic approach of GIRFEC, as it was specifically targeted at young carers. However, there was still concern around identification of young carers within universal services.

It was felt that there needed to be clarity about how the Young Carers Statement would connect to the Childs Plan under Children and Young People’s Act.

Alliance members also welcome the inclusion of young carer strategies within the Bill. Around half of the areas represented at our meeting have a local young carers strategy in place, and this has helped to progress multi agency as well as direct
service work to support young carers. We would prefer that Local Authorities and Health Boards would produce separate strategies for young carers to produce better outcomes for young carers and to acknowledge the very different needs of this group from adult carers.

We wholeheartedly welcome the duty on Local Authorities to provide support to young carers. Our audience voiced comments and concerns about how support would be funded. For young carers up to the age of 16, only 3 of the 4 options within Self Directed Support are applicable.

Involving young carers in planning, shaping and delivering services will be a benefit Scotland wide for young carers. There are services in our network who already do this and will be able to provide examples of local practice to help develop this measure nationally.

Q3. How do you feel the Bill could be amended or strengthened?

Q4/5. Is there anything you would add or remove from the Bill?

Our discussions raised a variety of issues. Many of them point to suggestions for strengthening or adding to the Bill, and they are grouped together to answer Questions 3, 4 and 5.

There were a number of questions posed around the YCS, and how it would work. Whilst some of these concerns might not be able to be directly turned into change within the Bill, we hope that the Committee will find it helpful to consider how the Bill might impact on young carers, and how it is being viewed by practitioners.

People were concerned about the sharing of the YCS with the Named Person (where there is one). We would want to see robust guidance produced about this.

Staff felt that information had to be protected but were concerned about how this was done. There was acknowledgement that there could be occasions where disclosing the young carer statement to Named Person may actually help the young carer, for example it might flag up that the young person is a young carer requiring additional support. However this could also be a Catch 22 situation if the young carer does not want school knowing anything about their caring situation or did not have a positive relationship with the Named Person?

Some staff suggested an option that the Young Carer Statement is only shared with Named Person if it is essential, that is, if being a young carer is likely to impact adversely onto the young person in such a way that it affects the principles within GIRFEC, such as safety, education etc.

Our members want to see training for staff within schools around Named Person and confidentiality, as it could be a barrier for some young carers completing a statement knowing that it will go automatically to Named Person.

People also wanted more information about what would be included in the young carer statement, and is it about support for young carer’s needs, or is it about support for cared for person’s needs?
A recent experience of one young carers worker centred around a young carer contributing care and subsequently being brought in as part of the cared for person’s support plan. The Bill needs to provide clarity about the roles of a young carer – about age and gender appropriate input, and about the right to refuse to provide care.

Sometimes giving support to the cared for person can ease pressure on young carer, but a Young Carer Statement should focus on needs of young carer. We would like more clarity within a YCS as to how provision of services to the cared for person and the needs of the cared for person interacts with needs of the young carer. We also need to consider the reverse of this and what is the position when the cared for person refuses to have support into the home.

In line with colleagues from other National Carers Organisations, we would like to see anticipatory and emergency planning as part of the Young Carers Statement.

We discussed the need for eligibility criteria. There was worry that local authorities might set criteria at a high level due to austerity cuts at present. Members felt that national criteria could usefully form a framework within which local criteria could be set.

Questions were raised as to whether local authorities would have a duty to publish any unmet need which may arise as a result of young carer statements. This could be incorporated into local young carer strategies, providing accessible information about this.

Our members thought that the Bill could be strengthened by Local Authorities requiring to set out timescales to carry out young carer statements, or making decisions on implementing young carer statement. We think it is reasonable for young carers and their families to have an indication of how long the process will take to result in support.

In addition to timescales, the question of funding was raised. How will services be funded to meet the needs raised in young carer statements? This may not be a direct function of the Bill, but it is directly related to people’s concerns about how effectively the Bill will work for young carers.

We also think that Local Authorities who are under pressure for resources might commission third sector organisations to produce Young Carer Statements. At present, this is not clear. Where Local Authorities are able to carry out young carer statement that is fine, but we would hope that they would work in partnership with local third sector organisations where that is appropriate.

Finally, going back to the provision of young carers strategies, as stated in our response to question 2, we believe that separate young carers strategies would strengthen this Bill in regard to what is being provided for young carers. There is a danger that if strategies to support young carers are combined with those for adult carers, not enough regard will be given to support measures for young carers. There needs to be at least a set of specific measures which will be documented locally to support young carers to achieve the best outcomes.
Young carers strategies should also set out local plans for how they will involve young carers in the planning shaping and delivery of services for the cared for and for young carers.

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