Handbook Report

EDY-CARE:
INNOVATIVE SCHOOL EDUCATION
METHODOLOGIES AND TOOLS FOR
GUARANTEEING SOCIAL INCLUSION
OF YOUNG CARERS

EURO CARERS

Introduction

A considerable proportion of young people across Europe carry out a significant role in caring for their ill and/or disabled family members. The reality of young carers' situation and its expression is increasingly now the subject of study (Leu et al., 2019).

The phenomenon of young carers has largely been invisible in social policy and professional context. Yet the reality is that children with significant and substantial caring responsibilities for a family or significant other do exist. Further, they can face a diverse range of difficulties if not well supported and young carers may be in a more vulnerable situation and even risk compromising their own development, health and wellbeing and life chances.

In some contexts, and countries across Europe caring for someone may be considered natural and young carers rarely recognize themselves as carers which may result also in health, social and educational professionals also not being aware of the existence of young carers. Thus, it is often challenging for professionals to be aware of young carers' needs, preferences and situation and the effects that caring roles have on their everyday lives and future life situation (Leu & Becker, 2016).

Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that caring activities can have a positive impact on young carers such as an increased level of maturity, they may be able to work well independently, to better relate with adults, give them greater opportunities to develop skills, the ability to manage challenging situations, gain more knowledge about how to work and deal with people in general and gain self-confidence, a greater degree if tolerance, empathy, increased self-esteem, self-worth and strengthen family relation- ships (Aldridge et al., 2016).

However, when not well supported, caring activities can have a negative impact on young carers' education, as it can prevent them from working productively at schools, as well as their ability to maintain regular class attendance and reach their learning goals. In a longer-term perspective, this may lead to fewer opportunities for work and further education and may also lead to experiencing social exclusion. By investing in innovative educational methodologies and training targeted at school staff, this project had the goal of promoting young carers-friendly school environments and better support for young carers in order to enhance their educational opportunities and life chances.

THE EDY-CARE PROJECT

This project, *Innovative School Education Methodologies and Tools for Guaranteeing Social Inclusion of Young Carers (EDY-CARE)* aimed to empower teachers and other school staff (e.g., school nurses, psychologists, social workers, management) in upper secondary education (ISCED-3 level) to recognize adolescent young carers (16-19 years old) in classes and maximize their learning opportunities, while ensuring their social inclusion.

The specific project objectives were as follows:

- To develop an assessment tool that could help teachers and school staff to identify young carers;

- To develop and test a package of educational strategies, didactical approaches and organizational adjustments that schools can take to facilitate young carers and to support them in their scholastic career;

- To produce a handbook providing guidelines and recommendations on how teachers and school staff can best work with young carers;

- To develop a massive open online course (MOOC) for training teachers and school staff on the phenomenon of young carers, their needs and preferences.

By making innovative educational methodologies and training available to school staff, EDY-CARE thereby con- tributes to the promotion of young carers-friendly school environments.

THE EDY-CARE HANDBOOK

The four Eurocarers member partners Linnaeus University, SE (coordinating partner), University of Ljubljana, SL, Anziani e Non Solo, IT, and Cuidadores Portugal, together with Eurocarers secretariat, have worked together and with school staff and young carers themselves in their respective countries to co-produce this handbook.

The handbook is intended to act as a guide for school staff about how they can best work to support and empower young carers.

The handbook is targeted at schoolteachers and other school staff interested in knowing more about young carers, how to identify them in school, about good European practices and what to do to support young carers in schools.

The handbook is in English language as also available in Swedish, Slovenian, Italian and Portuguese.

THE EDY-CARE HANDBOOK: Foreword

Dubravcka Suica, Vice-President of the European Commission for Democracy and Demography and Elizabeth Hanson, Vice-President of Research at Eurocarers kindly accepted the invitation to do the foreword. Their involvement reinforce the commitment and the need *" to ensure that every child should have an equal and promising start in life and access to real opportunities*" as also "*the ultimate goal being to enable young carers to leave school with full grades, and in so doing, help them to fulfil their life goals*". Both recognized the young carers and the need to support.

THE EDY-CARE HANDBOOK: Contents

The handbook presents after the introduction, a contextualization of the Young Carers, the number of young carers across Europe. The impact of caring is illustrated with real life stories showing its impact in their emotional wellbeing, physical health, stable environment, education and socialization.

The third chapter is about identification and how to identify a young carer in classroom. The impact of caring activities in education and the Edy-care assessment tool.

The fourth chapter presents European Good Practices and shows good examples towards young carers friendly schools and towards a multi-stakeholders 'approach to support young carers. The Edy-Care team reviewed **good practices** in different countries to promote **young carers-friendly school environments**. The aim of this collection was to build on the experiences of other countries and try to adapt their strategies to the specificities of the project countries context. In this section you can find an overview of concrete activities that schools can implement, categorized by objective **(understand, raise awareness, identify, listen, support and evaluate)**.

The fourth chapter gives the reader information about each Edy-care country partner specifications, presenting a national summary, the description of the national context towards inclusion and education; co-created strategies; description of the national educational supportive tools; suggestions how you can help a young carer in the classroom and showing

was is still needed.

In the end of the handbook conclusions and policy recommendations are made. In the appendices teachers and school staff can have access to the Edy-care assessment tool.

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CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that **"Every child has the right to**…"- among others- an education directed to the development of his/her abilities to their fullest potential articles 28 and 29 (UN Human Rights,1989).

Other international instruments go further and call for an **inclusive education** (European Commission, 2018; UN, 2015). According to a definition from UNESCO, "Inclusion is seen as a process of **addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners** […] and reducing exclusion within and from education. It involves **changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies** […]" (UNESCO, 2005, p. 14).

This handbook aimed precisely to **empower school professionals so that they can address and respond to the needs of young carers**.

An effective and long-lasting way to address young carers' needs requires the involvement of different stakeholders: in addition to schools, health professionals, NGOs, general public, policymakers and young carers themselves.

Policy Recommendation nº 1: **Identify**

A large scale **awareness raising** among all these stakeholders is required: they need to be aware of the existence of young carers and empowered with tools to **identify** them in a proactive way (this is particularly important, as in many cases young carers don't self-identify as such, hence they remain invisible and their needs are not met).

Policy Recommendation nº 2: **Support**

Once young carers are identified, they need to be **support**ed. This handbook mainly presents ways to support young carers with their educational experience. Yet, we have seen that caring has an impact also on other spheres of the life of young carers, for instance their social inclusion and mental health. Hence, it is important to **complement the strategies to support young carers' educational experience with strategies to alleviate their care burden and to improve their resilience**.

A **whole family approach** should be adopted, whereby the needs of the dependent person are read in combination with the needs of the other family members, including young carers.

Policy Recommendation nº 3: **Listen to**

The support need to be **co-designed** with young carers themselves, to be sure that it fits their needs. Overall, the mission of policies and practices should be to **ensure that caring is based on a free, genuine choice** and to **prevent and minimize the (potential) negative impacts**

of growing up while being a carer (restricted education, reduced life chances, affected well-being, isolation).

The combination of these strategies and the active engagement of different stakeholders are key to **enable young carers to thrive and flourish as human beings**.

NEXT STEPS

European countries are at different stages in awareness and action as regards young carers' needs and preferences (Leu & Becker, 2016). The United Kingdom – from which most of the good practices come from- is classified as "Advanced"; Sweden is classified as "Intermediate"; Italy is classified as "Emerging" countries; Slovenia and Portugal can be positioned as "Awakening". This classification is an evolving one. Key drivers of changes in policies and practices are awareness raising and research.

The cooperation between countries – facilitated by European projects such as Edy-Care- can build bridges of knowledge/expertise, facilitate and enhance the development, implementation and scaling up of good practices.

This handbook is a first step which will hopefully help European countries to move forward in the classification of awareness and responses on young carers, with potential impact on young carers ́quality of life and well-being.

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