

## **PE1470/F**

West Lothian Council Letter of 5 April 2013

### **Public Petitions Committee**

**Petition Number:** PE 1470

**Main Petitioner:** Lauren King on behalf of Scottish Youth Parliament

**Subject:** Young Carers Grant - Calls on the Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to establish a Young Carers Grant for carers in full time education or under the age of 18.

In West Lothian we are committed to ensuring that young carers are supported to achieve the same life opportunities as their peers. While we recognise that many young people can benefit from providing care to a relative or friend affected by illness, disability or substance misuse, we are committed to ensuring that young carers are relieved of inappropriate caring roles and are supported to be children and young people first and foremost.

It is clear that young carers do not care in isolation from the rest of their family and therefore their support needs must be considered in the context of their whole family – which is the approach taken here in West Lothian.

We have followed the national framework for the development of the West Lothian Young Carers Strategy – the strategy takes a holistic approach to determining and delivering support services for young carers. It focuses on improved identification of carers, carer assessment, information and advice for carers, carer health and wellbeing, carer support and carer participation.

The Action Plan resulting from the development of our local strategy provides the work plan which is being used to improve support and services for young carers across West Lothian. The focus of this has been to put into place services and support that the statutory, voluntary and private sector agencies in West Lothian can take to ensure that young carers:

- have timely access to support as required to promote their health, wellbeing and safety, and their ability to fulfil their potential
- are able to enjoy childhood and have an age appropriate contribution to caring.

It should be noted that the Strategy and Action Plan do not have a particular focus on financial payments to young carers.

We recognise that, if the household is in receipt of benefits that they are generally linked to the adult who is in need of care. Although there are some instances that relate to financial support that a young carer might receive in their own right, these are:

- Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA)
- College and University Discretionary funds for students who need extra support.
- Carers Allowance of £58 if over 16 years and caring for more than 35 hours a week and not in full time education.

In West Lothian we recognise that for young adult carers the transition into adulthood can present particular challenges. At a time when their peers are leaving school and making positive plans for employment, training and education, older young carers often have to deal with demands, responsibilities and emotional challenges that influence their choices and limit their future opportunities.

The Young Carers Project has highlighted that young carers in West Lothian have confirmed that they do face particular financial constraints which impact on their ability to engage in the same activities that their peers would. Whilst recognising this we believe that in order to improve their life chances young carers should be encouraged and supported to stay in education where possible and would be concerned if the establishment of a young carer's grant did not take this into account.

We do however recognise that we need to better understand the complexity of their lives, the challenges in balancing critical family roles with the demands of education, employment opportunities and developing adult relationships if we are to achieve positive outcomes.