

Move On Up Evaluation

Executive summary report

June 2020

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www.commonwealhousing.org.uk

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www.quakersocialaction.org.uk

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1. Introduction

Move On Up is a housing and support project for young adult carers which is being delivered by Quaker Social Action (QSA) in partnership with Commonweal Housing. Move On Up is testing whether a shared housing pathway, alongside empathetic and specialist support, is effective in securing a range of positive outcomes for carers aged 18-25, and the project's potential for replication elsewhere. By providing young adult carers with their own space away from the family home, alongside tailored and holistic support from a dedicated worker, the project aims to enable:

- The best outcomes for the young people in terms of increasing the future options available to them, measured by increased wellbeing, education and employment options.
- Improved relationships between young people and their family members.
- Successful transitions into the private rental sector/independent living.

This summary report presents the key final findings and conclusions of the evaluation of Move On Up, commissioned by Commonweal Housing and carried out by Learning and Work Institute. The evaluation ran from March 2017 to March 2020 and took a mixed methods approach, combining the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. Five waves of data collection were carried out over the three-year period of the evaluation.

1.1 Policy context

Young adult carers' needs have become increasingly recognised in policy and by service providers in recent years. Yet despite this, the links between caring and housing instability amongst young people has, until now, been overlooked in research and policy. In June 2018, the Department of Health and Social Care launched a new Carers Action Plan¹, setting out a cross-government programme of work to support carers in England over the next two years. The plan includes a full section on young carers and young adult carers, but their housing needs are not explicitly recognised or discussed.

The nature of young adult carers' lives, combined with the UK's housing crisis, means that many young adult carers are living in situations which have a serious impact on their physical, emotional and mental health and wellbeing, or are homeless as a result of unsustainable caring arrangements and breakdowns in family relationships. Learning and Work Institute's consultations with carers services as part of this evaluation suggests that housing is an increasing concern for carers services, and that they are spending more time supporting young adult carers to manage housing-related issues. However, young adult carers do not appear to be recognised as a group requiring specific housing-related support.

In the current climate of extreme housing need, demand for shared housing and nervousness about developing specialist housing schemes unsupported by revenue commitments, Move On Up stands out as an innovative project, focused on a group whose needs have typically been overlooked.

¹ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/713781/carers-action-plan-2018-2020.pdf

2. Key findings and lessons learned

The summative evaluation has identified a set of **key findings and lessons learned** from the Move On Up project.

2.1 Project management and design

Move On Up is now a well-established project which is addressing a gap in support for young adult carers. Several changes have been made to the project model over the three years, demonstrating QSA's willingness to learn from their experiences and the evaluation. The project model is now relatively firm (see Appendix 1), although project staff are flexible and will continue to adapt their delivery of the project to suit participants' needs.

Move On Up is running at a surplus, largely due to QSA's decision to allocate investment income to the project and its success in securing income from trusts. The Commonwealth subsidy has also been important in enabling the project to be financially viable (full project costs can be found at Appendix 2). It would be difficult to run the project on rental income alone. Other funders/organisations replicating delivery of the project would need to ensure that they could secure additional grants or invest their own funds to bridge any income gap.

2.2 Project recruitment and delivery

The consistent stream of referrals – and in particular self-referrals – suggests that project staff have been successful in raising awareness of Move On Up amongst the target group. After two and a half years of delivery, the evaluation has identified that the most appropriate target group for Move On Up is young people who:

- Are a current or recent carer, or a previous carer who is still impacted by their caring role
- Have a less urgent housing need or have an immediate housing need but with a desire to utilise the project support offer to progress personally
- Have clear personal goals or are willing to agree goals and work towards these
- Have low or moderate support needs
- Can afford the costs of living in a Move On Up property, through their salary or benefits

Participants receive tailored support on a range of issues to sustain their involvement in the project and enable progression towards their goals, including education and employment, health and wellbeing, and plans for future living arrangements. The project development worker is looking to introduce more intensive support to enable participants to access more secure employment and address the issues of rent arrears discussed below.

Over the last year, a key focus of the support for participants has been on enabling a successful move-on from the project. Project staff have found that some participants have unrealistic expectations of their move-on destination. Consequently, potential move-on destinations are now discussed with participants at the outset of their involvement in the project, to set expectations and ensure their plans are realistic.

2.3 Participants' experience of the project

Participants continue to be happy with the quality of the properties and staff's work in maintaining these. They also appreciate the tailored and pragmatic nature of the support, although a small number said they would appreciate more intensive support to progress

towards their goals. One participant commented that the support they received on the project had given them the confidence to engage with other formal support workers.

Generally, participants were very positive about their experiences of living independently. They report few challenges with living away from the family home, although the high levels of rent arrears suggest that project staff may need to have more open discussions with participants about their budgeting and money management skills.

Participants have had varying experiences of shared living in the project. For some, this has been very positive, but many have experienced challenging situations. Where participants are well matched, relationships between flatmates can enhance outcomes. However, challenging relationships can be detrimental to their engagement with the project. Going forward, QSA will adopt either a peer interview or pre move-in meeting approach to matching, depending on their judgement of the situations within each property.

2.4 Challenges and how they have been addressed

The project continues to experience high levels of rent arrears. A common reason for this was the move to Universal Credit, which requires new claimants to wait five weeks for their first payment or request an advance loan, and immediately places participants in a position of debt. Other reasons included zero-hour contracts and irregular work hours.

Participants' engagement with project staff varied hugely. Motivations for engaging in the project appeared to be an indicator of engagement levels. However, other factors (such as disruptive flatmates) also impacted on engagement. QSA adopted the 'three buckets' test to measure engagement in terms of paying rent, taking up support and being a good housemate. They expect at least two of these 'buckets' to be filled by a participant, otherwise there is cause for concern.

Within the last year, the project experienced its first significant staffing change when the original project manager left and was replaced by two part-time staff. However, with the exception of two tenants who struggled with this change, participants were generally very positive about having two members of staff on the project rather than just one.

Several participants have had difficulties with their housemates over the course of the project. To address these issues, QSA moved from tenancies to licences so they can remove particularly difficult tenants more quickly, and have taken steps to improve the participant matching process. It is worth noting that these experiences should provide participants with the skills to manage conflict and difficult situations with future housemates.

Issues with shared living challenge the assumption that carers will necessarily get along or offer effective peer support to each other. Other factors appear to be more important in ensuring a good match between flatmates, including age/maturity, motivations while on the project, and potentially gender. However, it is recognised that a caring role can contribute to maturity and personal goals and, once initial friendships have been established, common experiences of caring provided additional opportunities for peer support.

A small number of participants are presenting with higher mental health needs than identified in their initial assessment, which has been time consuming for project staff. This has resulted in a more robust assessment of applicants' support needs to ensure these can be met, and a recognition that additional needs will emerge during participants' involvement in the project.

2.5 Outcomes for participants

Participants have experienced a range of positive outcomes, which have been mapped to a theory of change (see Appendix 3). Many of these outcomes have resulted from the respite from caring which living independently affords them, and include improvements in their family relationships, accessing education, finding employment and refining their future plans. Other outcomes included a better understanding of their own needs and aspirations, improved independent living skills and increased social participation and friendships.

Evidence suggests that both elements of Move On Up – independent living and specialist support – is needed in order for the project to be a success. While living independently has enabled participants to make progress, outcomes such as education/employment progression and improved wellbeing, family relationships and social life, would not occur (or at least not occur so quickly) without the support of the project staff.

Ten participants have now moved on from the project. Of these, four were deemed to be positive move-ons; two were neutral or 'sideways' moves; and four were viewed as negative move-ons. Participants who experienced a positive move-on found the support from project staff invaluable in enabling them to make decisions about when and where to move to. However, some participants feel that discussions about move-on destinations need to start earlier, to maximise the likelihood that they will achieve a positive move-on.

The mixed range of move-on experiences highlights the challenges in supporting vulnerable young people to achieve a successful transition, even with tailored and holistic support. For many, the costs of living prohibited them from making this move, while others achieved a positive move-on by going to university. However, it is worth noting that previous participants who made 'sideways' moves, and current participants who anticipate that they will move back in with relatives, still identified many benefits as a result of being involved in the project.

2.6 Project replicability

The level of referrals to Move On Up demonstrates a demand/need for provision of this type in the London area. Research with external carers services and young adult carers suggests that there is a demand for projects similar to Move On Up in other parts of the country.

Considerations for any organisation wishing to replicate Move On Up include:

- The nature of the lead delivery organisation or partnership and how to ensure that they have expertise in both supporting young adult carers and running a housing project.
- The type of housing model adopted (shared housing is likely to be the most affordable and potentially beneficial for participants, but other models may also be used).
- The staffing model for the project. The experience of this project suggests that splitting the project manager and development worker roles across two members of staff (or across two separate organisations through a partnership delivery model) may help promote engagement with support and rent payments.
- How the project can be funded and financially viable. A property acquisition model such as the one adopted by Move On Up is necessarily expensive. Models which utilise existing housing stock may be more financially viable for other organisations to run.

- The location of properties and cost of living for participants. Both factors were important in participants' decision-making about whether to join the project. Many wanted to be close to their family and needed to be able to afford the costs of living independently.
- Other considerations include: the specific target group and capacity of the project; the type and length of contracts used; and what the support offer for participants would be before, during and after their involvement with the project.

3. Conclusion

The key conclusion of this evaluation is that the Move On Up model should be replicated and sustained. Any replication of Move On Up should include both elements of the project model: the independent living and tailored support. The evaluation found that providing young adult carers with their own living space away from the family home enabled them to reflect on their own needs and aspirations, develop their sense of identity and make progress in a range of key areas. However, the tailored support provided by QSA was crucial in enabling participants to make a successful transition into independent living, sustain their tenancies and achieve outcomes much more quickly than they would have done without this support.

The housing model utilised for the independent living element of the project could vary, depending on the local context. The conclusion of this evaluation is that a shared housing model exclusively for young adult carers would be the preferable option for any replicated project, as it can create opportunities for strong peer support, based on shared experiences of caring, which enhances outcomes for participants. In addition, shared housing is the most viable option from a funding perspective. Replicating organisations may find it easier to house young adult carers in individual properties or with other young people (who are not carers), but this may miss out on opportunities to build peer support between participants.

It must be noted that Move On Up is an expensive project to set up and deliver, and that the costs per participant are high. Whilst other organisations may be able to replicate the financial model, it is important that other financially viable delivery models are considered. A further key finding of this evaluation is therefore that mainstream housing providers, particularly local authorities and social housing providers, should establish partnerships with organisations such as carers services, to address the housing needs of young adult carers in their localities. This would require housing providers to allocate some stock specifically for young adult carers, who are then supported by carer or youth organisations to overcome individual barriers. This approach would both build on providers' expertise in their respective areas and create economies of scale, whilst maintaining the independent living and specialist support elements of the project.

4. Recommendations

The findings of the evaluation lead to **two key recommendations regarding the replicability of Move On Up**:

1. **Move On Up is an innovative project which should be replicated in other parts of England.** The evaluation findings suggest that the project successfully enables young adult carers to secure positive outcomes by providing them with the opportunity to live independently, alongside access to empathetic and specialist support.
2. **Replications of Move On Up should be delivered as a partnership between housing and carer/youth organisations.** Socially responsible private landlords, social housing providers and local authority housing providers with suitable properties should allocate housing stock specifically for young adult carers, whilst carers services or youth organisations should provide tailored support to meet young adult carers' individual needs. This approach would both build on providers' expertise in their respective areas and create economies of scale, whilst maintaining the independent living and specialist support elements of the project. Where possible, replicating organisations should adopt a shared housing model exclusively for young adult carers to deliver the project.

Below are further recommendations for national government, local authorities, housing providers, carers services and wider stakeholders. These support the two main recommendations above. Further details on these recommendations can be found in the full report.

For national government

- The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) should undertake a two-year review of the Carers Action Plan 2018-20, with a specific focus on housing.
- DHSC and MHCLG should commission national research to explore the extent to which unpaid caring responsibilities contribute to homelessness, to inform government policy and feed into an updated Carers Action Plan.
- DHSC should ensure that Transition Assessments (TAs) for young adult carers are routinely undertaken, and make it a duty for these to include an assessment of housing need. Where housing needs are identified through a TA, this should trigger the local authority's prevention duties and right to refer, under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. DHSC should issue guidance to local authorities about how to conduct TAs and ensure they assess housing need.
- DWP should work with MCHLG to ensure that the benefit system is an adequate safety net which prevents homelessness, including by abolishing the five week wait and restoring LHA rates to reflect at least the bottom 30th percentile. At the time of writing, this has been implemented due to the coronavirus crisis and should be maintained.

For local authorities

- Local authorities should prioritise funding for carers services to support young adult carers' transitions into independent living.
- Local authorities should ensure that Transition Assessments for young adult carers are routinely undertaken and include an assessment of housing need. Local authority carer leads should be trained in the links between caring and housing need amongst young people.

For housing providers

- National umbrella and membership bodies supporting socially responsible landlords should consider how they can promote within their membership the housing needs of young adult carers and the relevant recommendations in this report. Social housing providers should run training sessions to raise staff awareness of young adult carers and build strong partnerships with local carers services.

For carers services

- Carers services should build partnerships with their local authorities and housing providers to raise awareness of young adult carers and their needs in relation to housing.
- Carers services should also consider employing a staff member with expertise or training on housing.

For wider stakeholders

- Wider stakeholders should work to increase awareness and understanding of young adult carers amongst housing providers and representative organisations. Carers organisations should work with housing organisation to run a joint campaign which promotes the needs of young adult carers amongst housing providers.
- In addition, carers organisations should support their services which work with young adult carers to develop their expertise in relation to housing and equip them with the skills and tools required to advocate on their behalf to housing providers.

Appendix 1: The current project model

The stages of the current Move On Up project are described below. This delivery model is now relatively established, although project staff are flexible and will continue to adapt their delivery of the project to suit participants' needs.

Promotion of the project: The project manager promotes the project through leaflets, online advertising, engagement with relevant stakeholders, meetings with potential referral agencies and attendance at events. This promotion is supported by an in-house comms assistant.

Referral made: A young person is referred to the project, either through self-referral using the form on the QSA website or through a referral agency such as a carers service or housing officer.

Assessment: The young person's suitability for the project is assessed by the project manager and development worker in a face-to-face meeting which explores their caring situation, housing needs, wider support needs, financial situation and their plans for the future.

Waiting list: If the young person is deemed suitable for the project and wants to join, they are placed on the waiting list for a vacancy in one of the properties. The project manager calls them at least once a month to keep them updated on the project and make sure they are still interested in joining.

Selection process: When a vacancy comes up in one of the properties, the project manager and development worker review the young people who have recently been referred and pick one or two who they feel might be a good fit with the existing tenants in the property. These potential participants then meet with the existing tenants to ensure that they will get on as a household. The preferred participant is then offered the vacancy.

Initial move-in meeting: The new participant meets with the development worker to go through the licence agreement for the property and sign their contract. They also discuss their goals and develop a support plan, and the development worker answers any questions they have about moving in.

Initial tenancy management training: The new participant takes part in two hour-long workshops, one on their responsibilities in relation to paying rent, service charges and bills, the other on living with others, sharing and conflict resolution. This may happen pre move-in, or shortly after they move into the project accommodation.

Support to move in: The participant is offered support to move into the property, if needed. For example, practical help to move belongings.

Participant moves in: The participant is provided with a booklet outlining the ground rules for the property, key information and contacts.

Post move-in meeting: The participant has a face-to-face meeting with the development worker within two weeks of moving into the property, to ensure that everything is going smoothly with their housemates, their direct debits and bills are set up, and address any initial teething problems.

Tenancy management: The project manager monitors participants' rent and service charge payments. The finance team chase any rent arrears or outstanding service charges. Significant rent arrears may result in an exit from the project.

Support to progress towards goals: The participant is offered tailored, one-to-one support from the development worker and monthly catch ups to ensure they are progressing in line with their support plan. Poor engagement with the development worker and/or flatmates can lead to an exit from the project. Participants also have access to a small pot of funding to help them progress towards their goals, for example, by paying for driving lessons.

Move on support: When a participant feels ready to move on, the development worker provides support to go through their options, find and apply for appropriate accommodation, and move out. Participants can also access the rent deposit scheme which was set up by QSA using underspend from one of their other projects.

Follow-up support: Once the participant has successfully moved on, the development worker can continue to support them for up to 12 months. This involves monthly catch up calls and advice to ensure they settle into their new accommodation and to help them deal with any challenges that arise during and after their move on.