Abertay Student Carer project 2021-2023

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1. Background

This project came about due to the findings from the previous i2i Dundee Carers project where it was identified that a Young Adult Carer's support network falls through the gaps when they transition from school to Further Education / Higher Education: "lack of support puts other young carers off applying for Uni / College as they see that they won't get similar help or support". These findings were validated by a Scotland wide study where one in four Student Carers drop out of College and University with 74% saying that socializing i.e., extra-curricular events with peers, are often held at times that are impossible for someone with caring responsibilities which can be a very isolating experience (Carers Trust Scotland, 2020). There was a clear need for new support mechanisms / interventions to enhance Student Carer success rates at University.

The Abertay Student Carers project began in summer 2021 resulting with the creation of a cross-departmental working group that included Abertay Student Services (SS) and the Student's Association (SA). The group recognises the many factors that contribute to feelings of isolation and the potential for increased drop-out rates.

2. 2021 Project start up and initial interventions.

Student Carer Working Group and introduce Student Carer Registration

Regular working group meetings took place between September and December 2021 with key activities including data gathering for developing interventions that may improve the current student carer experience at Abertay. Initial meetings with SS revealed that Abertay did not know the number of Student Carers that attended the University as this was not a question asked during matriculation / registration. It was decided that this would be included from the next academic year onwards (2021-22). An MS Teams folder was also set up as a collaborative platform to store, share and manage information as it was gathered.

By December, new members from SA (parent and carer representative) joined the group where discussions took place to apply for a national recognition award that makes it easier to identify, support and report on student carers, and recognise good practice (https://carers.org/college-and-university-work-in-scotland/going-higher-for-student-carers-recognition-award). It was also acknowledged that this would be a long process and that many of the interventions put in place as a result of this project would be used to evidence Abertay's commitment to Student Carers and help improve the student experience to enhance retention and success.

3. 2022 New Interventions

The Abertay Student Carer Working Group continued to have regular meetings throughout 2022, led by Abertay I2I team members.

Student Carer Survey

At the beginning of 2022, the working group codesigned a survey for Abertay Student Carers. The survey used a Likert scale questions from the de Jong Gierveld and the Campaign to end loneliness evaluation tools (CEL, 2015) based on feelings of loneliness and the multidimensional approach to improving service delivery – the 7 items for accessibility of services (OECD, 2019).

Further questions were based on 'the Student Carer Experience in Scotland' report (Carers Trust Scotland, 2020), i.e., focus during classes / study; meeting deadlines; making time to socialise; health

and wellbeing; finances. The respondents were asked if they would find a Carers Hub useful and a final open ended question invited respondents to suggest any improvements that they thought would support Carers with their studies.

Student Carer Survey
This is a survey to inform researchers working on the I2I project (https://northsearegion.eu/i2i) in collaboration with Abertay Student Association which is trying to reduce social isolation and loneliness that you may be experiencing as a student carer.

Below are some questions regarding your student experience and support that the university provides. Your answers will help us to better understand how Abertay can better support you as a student carer.

All responses will be treated as confidential and the survey is anonymous unless you wish to provide contact details for more information or wish to help us with further research.

By completing the survey, you are agreeing that we can use the anonymised responses in future scientific publications or in Project reports.

For more information on this research please contact Kirsty Watson your Parent and Carer Student Representative on 1802224@abertay.ac.uk or a.duffy@abertay.ac.uk

From isolation to inclusion with Abertay Student Association

Thank you very much for your responses

Below are two videos we think you will like.

The first is a one minute video for a trailer developed by Abertay students for Dundee Carers to raise awareness of a day in the life of a young carer. We think you will enjoy it!

The second is also a one minute video on the EU Interreg funded i2i project (from isolation to inclusion).

Home Trailer for young adult carers developed by Abertay students
http://youtube.com/watch?v=K4fMVRLKi1s

From isolation to inclusion project
http://youtube.com/watch?v=A59y2F1F6Go

This content is neither created nor endorsed by Google.
Google Forms

Spread the word 2022 – celebrate Young Carer Action Day and launch the Survey

The working group planned to support Young Adult Carers Action Day 16.3.22 as the theme was 'Taking Action on Isolation' which aligned well with I2I project objectives. Banners and flyers were developed and the Student Carer survey was launched.

Post Analytics

UWTC @AbertayUWTC · Mar 16, 2022
Great @CarersTrustScot #YounCarerActionDay event @AbertayUni - thanks to @AbertaySA @ToInclusion @Watson2804 @ThielRobyn @EMPLabAbertay for the huge support – we connected with many #studentcarers - yay 👋 🙂

♡ 11   ⇄ 3   ◯ 4

Impressions   1,461
Engagements   84
Detail expands   24
New followers   0
Profile visits   9

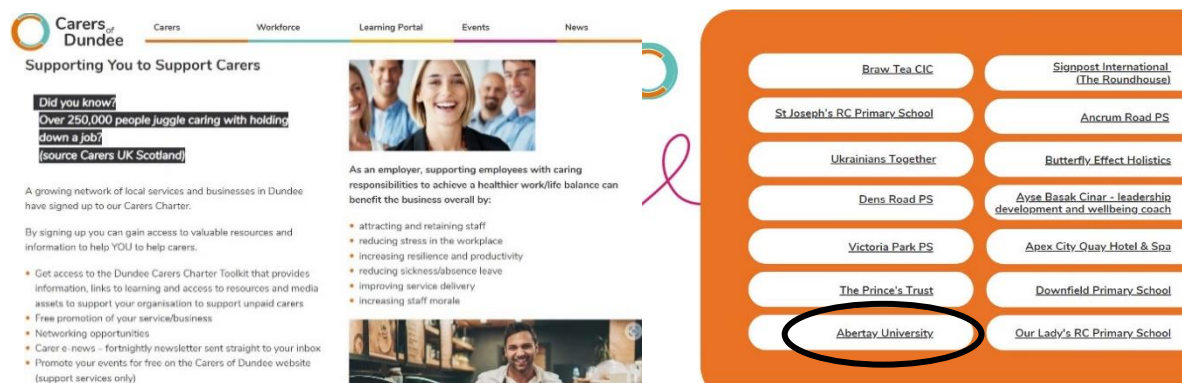## New Abertay Management Support and Sign the Charter

During the summer months, the new Student Services Manager joined the Abertay Student Carers working group where bi-weekly ½ hour meetings were set up. The group signed up for the Carers of Dundee 'Carers Charter' with a pledge to support Student Carers (below in blue italics). Abertay was awarded the pledge and added to Carers of Dundee website September 2022.

Abertay university recognises the importance of understanding the unique needs and challenges faced by students that have caring responsibilities.

We aim to ensure that all our students who are Carers (and potential applicants who are Carers) have a positive experience whilst studying at Abertay.

This will include clear and accessible information that signposts to the range of bespoke support provision and resources in place for our students who are Carers.

To achieve our aims, we will work closely with our Student Carer cohort and with agencies that support Carers locally. This will ensure that we can provide the best learning environment and the best chance of future success for our students with caring responsibilities.

New working group members and Dedicated support for Student Carers

During the summer months, the Working Group investigated the potential of a Student Carer benefit Support Package and another hand over with the incoming SA 2022-23 President and Vice President. The SS also provided a dedicated Student Carer Advisor as part of the Student Enquire Zone who was available to support Student Carers with any queries.

Additional funding from Abertay's Learning and Enhancement Academy (AbLE)

During this time Abertay's AbLE Academy learning and teaching team (EnAbLE) opened a call for projects that would fund student's working with staff to deliver student learning experience led projects. The Abertay Student Carer working group aims satisfied three project themes (building student communities, enabling success for students, supporting student engagement) and were awarded funding in recognition of meeting these objective eincluding the fact that the I2I project was supporting an under-represented group at Abertay.

4. 2023 Final Interventions and going forward (a legacy project)

The Abertay Student Carer Working Group continued to have regular meetings throughout the first half of 2023, led by Abertay I2I team members. With the employment of Student Carer Ambassadors to help truly deliver student led interventions, additional weekly meetings and workshops occurred.

Spread the word 2023 – celebrate Young Carer Action Day and re-launch the Survey

Young Adult Carers Action Day, March 2023 new theme was 'Make Time for Young Carers'. A new banner was design including flyers etc. There was also a second launch of the survey. The 'Make Time for Young Carers' theme emphasises the importance of mental health and wellbeing (especially social inclusion) for young adult carers whilst juggling their caring role with university work. Research indicates that inproved support mechanisms, better access to counselling / therapy, more financial support and effective campaigns were all intervention that would help student carer success which aligned with many of the working group survey questions. The second launch of the survey was combined with a social media launch run by the SA using a QR code (twitter, facebook, instagram, etc.) and the SA Student Carer Advisor sent email invitations to all Students Carers that had disclosed their caring status.

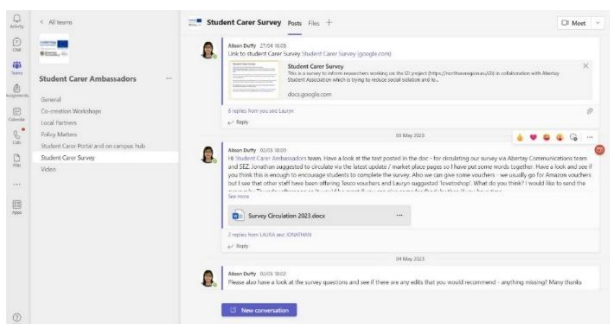## Welcome Student Carer Ambassadors

With the funding received from the Abertay EnAbLE bid, 4 Student Carer Ambassadors were employed in March 2023. The Ambassadors all had caring responsibilities and were at various stages of the student journey and spead across the various academic schools. A dedicated Student Carer Ambasador MS teams was set up to store information / data and share ideas. The working group and the ambassadors met for one hour a week until the end of June 2023 (Friday afternoons). During this time the group had several co-creation sessions and workshops to decide on the content of a web portal dedicated to Student Carers and a video aimed at informing Abertay staff of the challenges faced by Student Carers. Survey results were also evaluated and a report prepared for the EnAbLE team and Abertay Student Services manager.

Abertay Student Carer Ambassador Team

A small team to help improve the Student Carer experience and enable successful learning.

Student Carer Definition
"Student Carers are students studying at College or University, while caring, unpaid, for a friend, or family member who due to illness, disability, a mental health problem or an addiction cannot cope without their support. Student Carers can be of all ages, and at all stages of their learning Journey"

Key Findings - Scottish Research into Students with Caring Responsibilities
Based on current research, there is limited provision and dedicated support for Student Carers resulting in an increased risk of isolation and increased dropout rates. Our project aim is to embed support mechanisms and resources that fit the unique circumstances of Student Carers.
Carers Trust Scotland, (2020)*

Student Carer Ambassador Tasks
- Train as a Student Carer Mentor
- Web portal dedicated to Student Carers
- Videos – a day in the life / I ticked the box
- Student Carer survey evaluation and impact monitoring
- Workshops to help inform us of the Student Carer experience

Abertay Student Carer Group contact details:
Project Lead: Alison Duffy (a.duffy@abertay.ac.uk)
Student Services Manager: Richard Ogston (r.ogston@abertay.ac.uk)
Student Carer Advisor: Rachael Hinchcliffe (r.hinchcliffe@abertay.ac.uk)
Student's Association: Lauryn Baldie, Vice President (lauryn.baldie@abertay.ac.uk)
Abertay SA Student Engagement Coordinator: Fiona Brunton (f.brunton@abertay.ac.uk)

* Carers Trust Scotland, (2020). The Student Carer Experience in Scotland. Available at:
https://carers.org/downloads/scotland-pdfs/the-student-carer-experience-in-scotland.pdf

Survey Findings

In general, most student Carers are female (60%), with 42% of all Student Carers under 25 years of age and most studying at undergraduate level (80%).

Overall Abertay provides a good service for Student Carers, especially from an academic service perspective. Areas for improvement by staff to better support Student Carers:

- Abertay staff should have a better understanding of Carers needs (42% felt needs were only considered some of the time or never);
- 47% felt they only have emotional support some of the time or never;
- 63% find it difficult to focus on studying and exams;
- 84% struggled to find time to socialise due to caring responsibilities;
- and 67% struggle financially.

Student Carers Numbers 2021-22 and 2022-23

From Academic Year 2021 a question was asked of students when they registered at the beginning of each year: " Are you currently a carer? (a carer is someone who carers paid or unpaid for a friend or family member due to illness, disability, mental health problem or addiction who would not be able to cope without their support"). The number of Student Carers that disclosed their caring status for the academic year (AY) 2021-22 was 167 which is about 4% of the total student population (Abertay is a small University with an average 4000 students on campus). The number of discolsures for AY 2022-23 was 168. During this AY Abertay had introduced several online and upskilling courses (Table 1). For an initial crude analysis to indicate and trends these numbers were removed (Table 2).
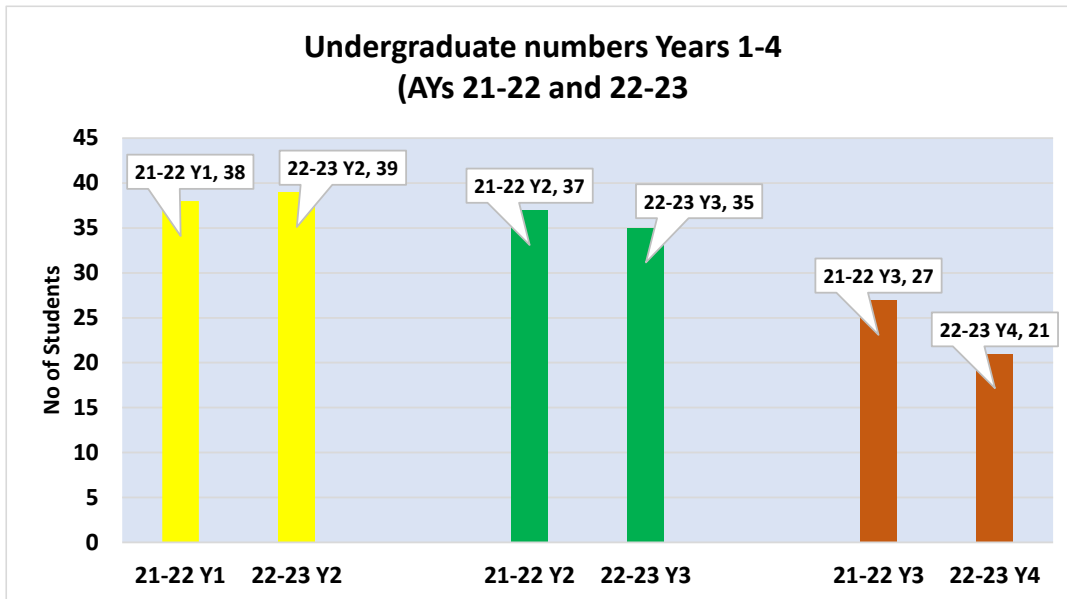
Abertay Student Carer Numbers AY 2021-22 and 2022-23						
2021-22						
Stage of Study	**Year 1**	**Year 2**	**Year 3**	**Year 4**	**Year 5**	**Total**
AHEAD	4					**4**
UG	38	37	27	31		**133**
PGT	8	9	7			**24**
PGR	2	1	1	1	1	**6**
Total	**52**	**47**	**35**	**32**	**1**	**167**
2022-23						
Stage of Study	**Year 1**	**Year 2**	**Year 3**	**Year 4**	**Year 5**	**Total**
AHEAD	1					**1**
UG	24	39	35	21		**119**
PGT	13	3	7	1	1	**25**
PGR	4		2	2	2	**10**
Online	12					**12**
Upskill	1					**1**
Total	**55**	**42**	**44**	**24**	**3**	**168**

Table 1: Student Carer numbers for academic years (AY) 2021-22 and 2022-23

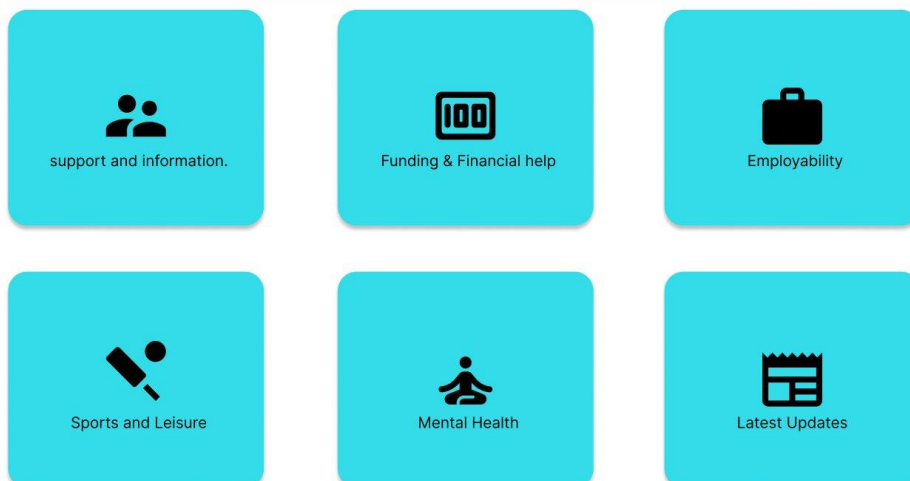| Abertay Student Carer Numbers AY 2021-22 and 2022-23 (minus Online / upskill)						
2021-22						
Stage of Study	**Year 1**	**Year 2**	**Year 3**	**Year 4**	**Year 5**	**Total**
AHEAD	4					**4**
UG	38	37	27	31		**133**
PGT	8	9	7			**24**
PGR	2	1	1	1	1	**6**
Total	**52**	**47**	**35**	**32**	**1**	**167**
2022-23						
Stage of Study	**Year 1**	**Year 2**	**Year 3**	**Year 4**	**Year 5**	**Total**
AHEAD	1					**1**
UG	24	39	35	21		**119**
PGT	13	3	7	1	1	**25**
PGR	4		2	2	2	**10**
Total	**42**	**42**	**44**	**24**	**3**	**155**

Table 2: Student Carer numbers for academic years (AY) 2021-22 and 2022-23 with new courses removed (online and upskilling courses).
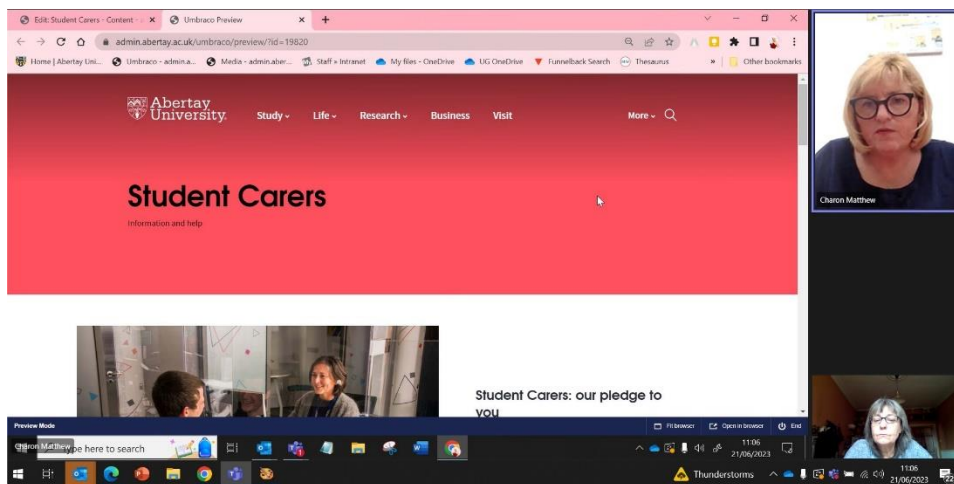
The number of Student Carers that registered in AY 2022-23 declined from the previous year. Comparing numbers from the previous year; student carers moving from year 1 to year 2 increased by one, student carers moving from year 2 to year 3 decreased by two and student carers moving from year 3 to year 4 decreased by six indicating that year 3 may potentially be a year to target additional support for Student Carers to ensure successful completion of year 3 to enable advancement to year 4 and completion of studies. However as only 2 years of data have been collected to date, this is a very preliminary analysis with anecdotal information required to validate the assumption.

**Undergraduate numbers Years 1-4
(AYs 21-22 and 22-23**

Chart data (No of Students):
- 21-22 Y1, 38
- 22-23 Y2, 39
- 21-22 Y2, 37
- 22-23 Y3, 35
- 21-22 Y3, 27
- 22-23 Y4, 21

Develop a dedicated web portal for Student Carers

Several versions of the dedicated Student Carers Web portal were codeveloped by the working group and Student Carer Ambassadors with final approval by Abertay digital content editor in June. The portal will go live during freshers week (w/c 11th September 2023). Final content includes: First line Supprt at Abertay; Finance and funding support; Mental Health and welbeing support; employement and careers; other useful information. This information will be reviewed annually with ammendments / additions made depending on feedback from Student Carers.

support and information.

Funding & Financial help

Employability

Sports and Leisure

Mental Health

Latest Updates

Create a training Video for Abertay Academic and Professional Services Staff

Based on findings from the survey, it was decided that a video would be useful as a tool for staff training to inform them of a 'day in the life of a Student Carer'. Again there were many ideas with the resultant video consisting of talking avatars – the student ambassadors and volunteers talking through their day and the challenges of combining caring responsibilities and studying / University classes. The SA and SS also provided information for context for Abertay staff – definition of student carers, legislation and the need for this project etc.

Miro Board and future Student Carer Cocreation sessions

Finally, the Student Carer Ambassadors design a Miro Board for future cocreation sessions wih fellow Student Carers in the academic year 2023-24.

Welcome to the Abertay Student Carer Ambassador Miro Board

This is your white board to tell us about your Abertay experience

Just follow the arrows 😀

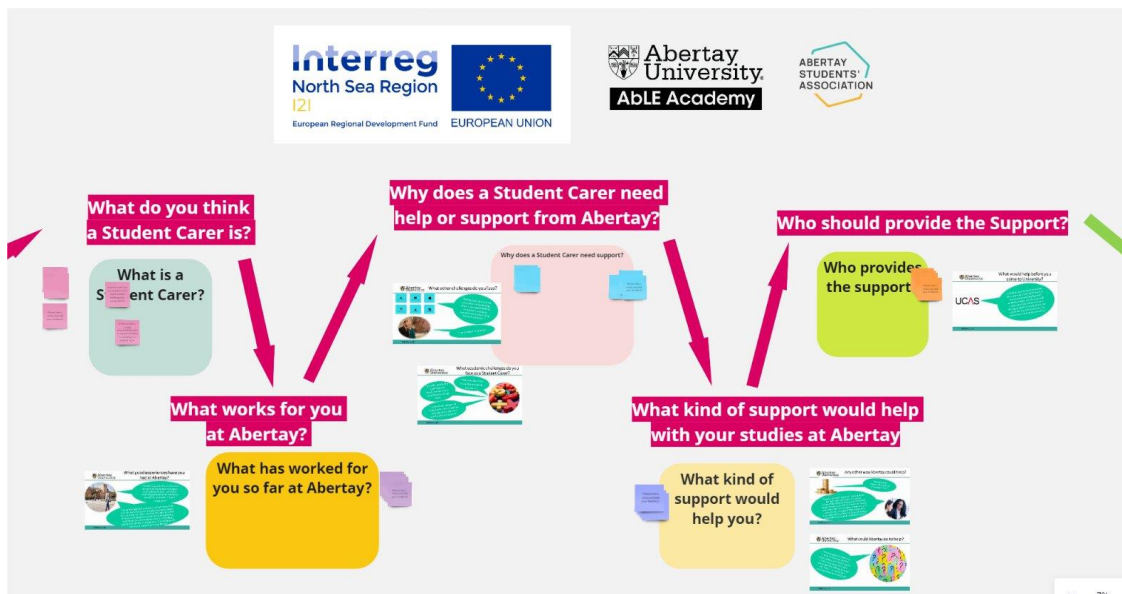**Miro Navigation**

Miro Ice Breaker

Select a sticky note
Click on the arrow cursor (or selection tool), then click on the sticky note icon (see left sidebar)
Choose your colour and drag to where you want to place the sticky note
Alternatively use the 'V' key to enable / disable the arrow cursor / selection tool

Move around the board
Click on the background and drag if the selection tool is disabled
Click on the space bar while dragging if the selection tool is enabled

How to zoom
Click '+' or '-' keys on the board (see bottom left)
Or use your mouse scrolling wheel

How to copy a sticky note
Select the sticky note and right click 'duplicate' or right click 'copy'
Or use cmd + 'd'

How add text
Double click the sticky note, when the cursor appears you can add text
(size will adjust automatically)

What do you think a Student Carer is?

What is a Student Carer?

Why does a Student Carer need help or support from Abertay?
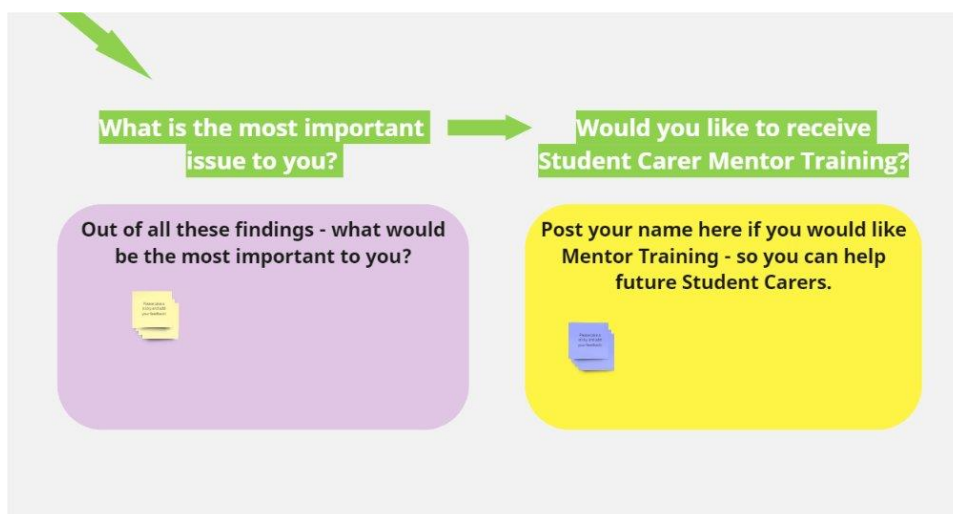
Who should provide the Support?

Who provides the support

What works for you at Abertay?

What has worked for you so far at Abertay?

What kind of support would help with your studies at Abertay

What kind of support would help you?

What is the most important issue to you?

Would you like to receive Student Carer Mentor Training?

Out of all these findings - what would be the most important to you?

Post your name here if you would like Mentor Training - so you can help future Student Carers.

5. Discussion and Recommendations

- This was an innovative project that will undoubtedly become a legacy project. The working group will continue to develop new student led processes and aims to widen participation / relationships to include external organisation. The Student Services Manager and Student's Association wish to continue the Working Group and aim to regularly review progress with the interventions developed and feedback provided by Student Carers in the Survey and future cocreation sessions. The Student Carer Ambassadors are happy to continue to work with the group on a voluntary basis ensuring that the working group remain a student led initiative. Previous contacts with Dundee Carers (https://dundeecarerscentre.org.uk/) have expressed interest in working with Abertay to deliver training materials for Abertay staff.

- The group will continue to work towards the 'going higher' recognition award with Carers Trust Scotland. Much of the interventions developed through this project (and still to be implemented) and actions taken will provide the evidence base required to gain this award.

- Abertay now collect student numbers. Annual review / analysis of this information will provide useful information to assist with trending datasets year on year, particularly Student Carer retention and dropout rates. This information may also provide data to assist with targeting vulnerable year groups that require particular attention by the working group.

- Continue cocreation sessions with existing student carer volunteers and new volunteers to capture thoughts and ideas as the interventions created via this project become embedded in the Abertay student carer experience.

- Establish a 'Carer Hub'. This was an aspiration of the project based on good practice observed in secondary schools (from the I2I Young Adult Carer project) that would transfer across to the higher education sector. This was a question posed in the survey that had 100% positive response – in that Student Carers thought that a Carer Hub would be useful as it would help to increase social inclusion and feelings of isolation. However this intervention, although discussed several times was not achievable in the time available.

6. References

Carers Trust Scotland., (2020). The Student Carer Experience in Scotland. Available at: https://carers.org/resources/all-resources/118-the-student-carer-experience-in-scotland

The Campaign to End Loneliness (CEL), (2015). MEASURING YOUR IMPACT ON LONELINESS IN LATER LIFE. Available at: https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/wp-content/uploads/Loneliness-Measurement-Guidance1.pdf

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), (2019). Measuring Public Sector Innovation Why, when, how, for whom and where to? Available at: https://oecd-opsi.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Measuring-Public-Sector-Innovation-Part-5b-of-Lifecycle.pdf