



APPG for Young Carers and Young Adult Carers

Wednesday 21st February 2024, 5pm to 6pm, Zoom

Attendees

Paul Blomfield MP - Chair
Duncan Baker MP - Vice-Chair
Edward Davey MP - Vice-Chair
Lord Young of Cookham - Vice-Chair
Liz Twist MP - Vice-Chair

1. Welcome; approving minutes of last meeting; 2024 workplan

- Paul Blomfield MP (Chair) welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies were received by Baroness Pitkeathley, Baroness Lister, Fleur Anderson, Gill Furniss and Marion Fellows.
- Our last meeting was our AGM on 13th September 2023 where we also focused on supporting young carers in schools.
- Following the last meeting, Fleur Anderson has had to step down as an Officer for the APPG but remains a member.
- We have put together our workplan for this year, taking us up until September. Our workplan is based on the findings of our inquiry which my colleague Duncan Baker chaired and we published our report last November.
- At our next meeting in May we will be looking at the impact that the Children and Families Act 2014 and Care Act 2014 have had for young carers and young adult carers. We are doing this because this year is 10 years since those laws were passed. So on Young Carers Action Day, on Wednesday 13th March, we will be launching a call for evidence to feed into this and I would welcome you all to feed into our review.
- Also on Young Carers Action Day we will be hosting a Parliamentary drop-in from 1pm to 2pm in Room O, Portcullis House where MPs and Peers can come and show their support for young carers and young adult carers and the Young Carers Covenant. I would encourage you all to write to your local MP and ask them to attend and show their support.

2. Update on the Young Carers Covenant

- Paul Blomfield MP explained how in the APPG inquiry report, one of the recommendations was to support the first ever Young Carers Covenant – a commitment to young carers and young adult carers.
- Carers Trust have been working with a group of young carers to finalise work on the Covenant. Paul Blomfield introduce Blathnaid and Freya who are two young carers supporting this to give an update.
- Blathnaid explained how the Covenant is a UK-wide commitment to young carers and young adult carers, and sets out the outcomes that we want to see for every young carer, based on the things young people said are most important to them.

- The covenant is needed because there could be over one million young carers. Evidence highlights the impact that caring can have health, wellbeing and life opportunities.
- Blathnaid explained how young carers are 38% less likely to obtain a university degree and struggle to balance caring with education or paid work.
- The Covenant is there to ensure that young carers are not put at a disadvantage
- The Covenant is also based on the draft Commonwealth Young Carers Charter and the views of over 400 young carers and young adult carers.
- Freya is 18, and a sibling young carer for her younger sister. Freya explained the plans for the launch. The Covenant is being launched on the eve of Young Carers Action Day – so Tuesday 12th March.
- The launch is being led by young carers from across the UK.
- On Young Carers Action Day, young carers will then be meeting with the Children’s Minister and then attending the APPG Parliamentary drop-in to speak with MPs and Peers.
- In Scotland and Wales, young carers are also meeting with politicians.
- Paul Blomfield thanked Blathnaid and Freya – they put it into context really well.

3. Young carers and mental health – What is the impact?

- Paul Blomfield MP explained how one of the key findings in our inquiry was the impact that caring has on the mental health of young carers and young adult carers.
- So we have invited Beth Neale, Research and Engagement Officer at Carers Trust, who worked on our inquiry report, and Dr Rebecca Lacey, an academic at St George’s, University of London who submitted evidence to give their thoughts on what the evidence is telling us around young carers, young adult carers and their mental health.
- Becca Lacey described how a couple of years ago, they set out to pull together all of the research from different sources, including charities and policy reports.
- What they found was young carers have poorer mental health compared to their peers, and higher rates of diagnosed mental illness and lower self-esteem. One thing that came out was that it really mattered how much carer was being provided – we particularly saw worse mental health outcomes for those caring for over 20 hours a week.
- We have now got some funding to help plug the research gap.
- There is a noticeable increase in anxiety and depression in the first year of caring which then persist for 2 to 3 years – particularly for young adult carers caring for 20+ hours a week.
- We will now be repeating this work with younger young carers.
- In terms of root causes – lack of recognition, lack of support, but also waiting lists . Very keen to hear from young carers themselves. We will be working in the Autumn with young carers to look at what worked for them in their mental health which we will then look to replicate through the national data.
- Very keen to see what worked from a positive perspective for young carers’ mental health.
- Caring intensity is really important – caring for more than 10 or 20 hours a week has a really big impact on mental health, so need to try and reduce that.
- The early impact on mental health highlights the importance of early identification.
- Beth Neale talked through a variety of evidence findings from different surveys.
- Carers Trust’s survey highlighted how young carers/young adult carers reported feeling stressed, worried and not getting enough sleep.

- In other studies, young carers frequently report lower outcomes across several well-being outcomes.
- In relation to root causes, Beth Neale explained how caring can often be linked to challenges such as pressure, a lack of time, and impacts of feeling of control over their futures. Many young carers will have experienced significant distress, grief and traumatic events.
- Young carers regularly tell Carers Trust that it can be difficult to talk about what they are experiencing, or that people don't understand. There are also issues around stigma, isolation, bullying and fear.
- There is a need for more research around what supports improvements in young carer mental health.
- Suggestions as to what might help include:
 - Including young carers in national and local frameworks around child and young people's mental health
 - Greater awareness of young carers in CAMHS services
 - Work to reduce the number of children providing significant levels of care
- Young carers have said access to breaks and relevant social opportunities are important, as is peer to peer support and strength-based coaching.
- Paul Blomfield MP thanked both Becca and Beth for their incredibly helpful insights.

4. Young carers' perspectives of impact of caring on mental health

- Paul Blomfield then introduced Leigh who is a Young Adult Carer from Newcastle and Claire Briston, who works for Newcastle Carers
- Leigh cares for mum and grandma. Have been caring for mum since 15 – she suffered from depression since she was a child, but became more aware as she got older.
- In terms of what helps mental health, being able to connect with people going through similar situations, talking to them – they can relate to what you are going through. That peer support is really helpful.
- Leigh also explained how the Carers organisation also gives me somewhere I can go to ask questions and get information – it is really re-assuring knowing they have the knowledge. They have also helped with things like travel which means I can spend time with friends and have time for myself.
- Paul Blomfield thanked Claire but particularly Leigh for giving a young person's perspective on this important issue.
- Ahead of this meeting the APPG gave individuals and organisations the opportunity to share their thoughts about what are some of the root causes of mental health challenges for young carers and young adult carers, as well as ideas about what can be done to improve the situation. Andy McGowan (Policy and Practice Manager at Carers Trust) shared a summary of the feedback received.
- There were a range of issues identified, many of which have already been mentioned, but other common themes included:
 - Lack of early identification/recognition
 - Sustained pressure – worrying about a parent or sibling from a young age, trying to balance caring and education over a number of years
 - Feeling overlooked and ignored by services – including those supporting the people who have health and care needs
 - The pressure to 'be so much older' than their peers.

5. Questions and comments

- Liz Twist MP thanked all of the young people for sharing their experiences – they are so powerful.
- Through another APPG we have been looking at young people and suicide and mental health and how we can reduce suicide amongst young people – it would be good to see how that can feed into that APPG’s inquiry which is underway.
- Lord Young commented how the presentations were really impressive and moving. Interested in the relationship between number of hours caring and impact on mental health – is there a straight line, or are there steps? It would be useful to know what the maximum that an average carer could experience without an impact.
- Becca Lacey explained how in the review, the previous studies looked at 10-hour threshold because of data available. In the other piece around mental health and becoming a young adult carer, it was the 20+ where you saw that really strong effect at a population level. But right now we are looking at if there is that graded approach in relation to young carers.
- Beth Neale explained how Carers Trust is trying to scope out some research around intensity of caring and impact, particularly for young people from different backgrounds and what it means for them.
- Claire Briston said it also highlighted that the type of caring being provided can also make a big impact.
- Lord Young asked about the 56% of young carers not stressed – what is it about those 56% who are coping? Is it because they are getting the support, or might it be because of the intensity of caring not being as high?
- Beth Neale commented how with surveys, the 56% will also include the “Don’t know” but it highlighted the need to look at resilience factors in research. Family backgrounds has come out as something which can be really important.
- Paul Blomfield said it would be good in future research to look at what interventions make a difference. What difference do young carer networks make, or recognition in schools. It would be good to know if there is any impact in terms of schools having policies that recognise young carers.
- John Bangs (Observer) had a question for Freya – she mentioned about what might happen in the future. Transitions Assessments are supposed to happen for young carers – has anyone talked to her about the future?
- Freya – I’m now 18 and only turned 18 last month – I had a transitions assessment 4 months ago, but the questions were laughable. I was then referred to the adult carer service, but only supports adults caring for adults so I don’t have a carers organisation that I can access now. Sibling carers often recognized.
- I have an offer to go to university, but I am worried I will be feeling really guilty. There is also the impact of the strain.
- Helen Leadbitter It says in policies that young carers have the right to prevent caring, but programmes are often short-term funded.
- Jo Rickword – Was a young carer and has worked with young carers for past eleven years. Many of them don’t see themselves as stressed, they just ‘get on with it, it’s what we do’.
- Leigh commented that for many young carers, they just deal with it because that is their normal – it is hard to recognise when I’m stressed and when it’s just life.

- Paul Blomfield MP concluded the meeting by thanking everyone for attending.
- Wanted to particularly thank Blathnaid, Freya and Leigh for their contributions.
- Reminder about the Young Carers Covenant launch webinar on Tuesday 12th March, 4:30pm and the Parliamentary drop-in on Young Carers Action Day, Wednesday 13th March from 1pm to 2pm in Room O, Portcullis House.