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**All-Party Parliamentary Group on Young Carers and Young Adult Carers**

**Meeting with Children’s Commissioner for England**

Tuesday 24 January 2023, Zoom

**Parliamentarians present:**

Duncan Baker MP

Paul Blomfield MP

Barbara Keeley MP

Liz Twist MP

Lord Young of Cookham

**Other speakers:**

Andy McGowan (Policy and Practice Manager, Young Carers and Young Adult Carers, Carers Trust)
Dame Rachel de Souza (Children’s Commissioner for England)

Young carers and young adult carers

**1. Welcome**

1.1. Paul Blomfield began by providing an introduction to the APPG and welcoming everyone. He expressed his particular thanks to the young carers for joining from areas across the country including Cambridgeshire, Dorset, Enfield, Leicestershire, Liverpool, Oxfordshire, Rochdale, Sefton, Sheffield, Wigan, Windsor and Maidenhead

**2. Children’s Commissioner for England, Dame Rachel de Souza**

2.1. The Children’s Commissioner for England, Dame Rachel de Souza spoke about the work of her office and issues which have been raised by young carers.

2.2. Dame Rachel explained how she wants to ensure children have everything to achieve and thrive in life. That starts with understanding what they need. When she came into post, she launched The Big Ask. It asked young people ‘What do you need to thrive? What are the barriers? What do you want for your futures?” There were 557,044 responses, making it one of the biggest surveys of its kind across the world. Dame Rachel saw how ambitious children are but also the need for support to achieve their goals – from families, school, and specialist support like the NHS.

* 1. There were 6008 responses from young carers – they published a specialist report on young carers. Most young carers (66%) said they were happy with life overall, 51% happy with every aspect. There were a significant minority who unhappy with certain aspects of their life – mental health, choices of things to do in their local area, experience of school and college. Unsurprisingly they were much more likely to be worried about their family’s health, more so than other young people.
	2. Dame Rachel stated how students and teachers should know about young carers. School and college should know. Young carers often are unknown in the system – this was really prevalent in the Attendance Audit. The system has been complacent around attendance – where are the children? What do they need to attend? They heard lots from young carers about how they try to struggle home and education – even young carers in primary schools. Young carers reported struggling to tell people in school about their needs. Many didn’t have an adult who could champion their need.
	3. To hear more from young carers, the team visited the Young Carers Festival, the biggest gathering of young carers in the world.
	4. Dame Rachel stated how we need to let children be children. Schools need to work with local authorities, health, family hubs. Young carers in primary school should be supported with transition to secondary school. She welcomes young carers being added to the school census as this will help ensure young carers are supported their school career.

Schools need to prepare for this flag by identifying young carers in their school by using tools such as the MACA – she has told every school they should use it. Every school should have a co-written young carers policy so there is a codified offer and a champion. School policies should reflect the needs young carers face and acknowledge the responsibilities they take on, not punish children who are trying to do their best. Her office has produced resources to support back to school.

* 1. Dame Rachel concluded by thanking Andy McGowan and the team for his support with this work and championing young carers. Young carers are an absolute priority for her and always will be.
	2. Paul Blomfield thanked Dame Rachel for her excellent overview of the issues and also thanked Andy McGowan and Carers Trust for providing the secretariat for the group.

## 3. Young Carers’ experiences

3.1 Andy McGowan gave an overview of the emerging findings from Carers Trust’s latest Young Carer and Young Adult Carers survey.

3.2. It was an online survey for young carers and young adult carers aged 12 to 25. The survey ran from November 2022 until mid-January 2023 and over 1100 young carers/young adult carers from across the UK took part.

3.3. Carers Trust are in the process of producing a report, together with young carers and young adult carers to launch for Young Carers Action Day in March.

3.4. Over half of young carers and young adult carers are caring for between 20 to 49 hours a week (equivalent of having a part-time to more than a full-time job). More than half of respondents reported that the amount of time spent caring has increased over the past year.

3.5. Young carers and young adult carers were asked what support would help most. Key priorities were better identification and support in education and having time to do things that matter to them. Mental health support (including counselling and therapy) was also a priority.

3.6. More than half of young carers and young adult carers said that politicians did not understand their needs as a young/young adult carer ‘very well’ or ’at all.’

Over a third of young carers and young adult carers felt the NHS did not understand their needs as a young/young adult carer ‘very well’ or ’at all.’

3.7. Five young carers and young adult carers then shared their experiences of being young carers. Their experiences covered a wide range of areas including impact on education, opportunities to have time away from their caring role and the difference that young carer services make. **See Appendix One for full transcripts of their experiences.**

3.8 Liz Twist thanked all of the young carers for sharing their experiences.

**4. Questions for the Children’s Commissioner for England**

4.1. Lord Young of Cookham stated how really brave and moving the young carers’ experiences were. He then asked Dame Rachel what is the role of SENCOs? Some young carers may have SEN but can SENCOs help raise awareness amongst other staff? Does their training cover young carers?

4.2.Dame Rachel replied by saying that sometimes the SENCO will pick this up if they are aware, but there needs to be a whole-school approach – so all teachers are able to identify and all teachers need to know how to support with a plan. She would like an identified senior leader responsible in every school to take leadership.

4.3. Morgan (young carer)asked whether carers passports could be available as a form of ID in the future. They are used in some areas of the country, but not others. Some young carers can’t get any form of ID, like provisional licence or passport until they start to work, and they can’t afford it.

4.4. Dame Rachel responded by stating how recognition, identification and support are really important. This sounds like it could be a really legitimate way of identifying and recognising their need for support.

4.5. Andy McGowan explained how carers passports are used in some areas across health, but also leisure facilities – they helped young carers during the pandemic by enabling them to access priority shopping slots.

4.6. Barbara Keeleythanked all of the young carers and said it’s really important the APPG is here to listen and do something about it. She then asked Dame Rachel what she thought the barrier to vitally needed recognition and identification is? Does there need to be put some onus onto schools as to how we do this?

4.7 Dame Rachelexplained how she has been listening to young carers and organisations like Carers Trust. She is wanting to raise awareness with headteachers and headteachers groups. She is very pleased with DfE adding young carers added to school census but there is a need to train and support schools through local organisations and headteacher associations to recognise how to identify and support young carers. It is shocking that there are still so many schools who don’t know. Local authorities need to ensure they are supporting schools with this.

Dame Rachel will raise with Children’s Minister Claire Coutinho, Nick Gibb, Baroness Barran and Gillian Keegan to ensure that they should prioritise this. They have the power to make this happen. It’s such a simple, straight-forward thing for schools to do to ensure they know who young carers are and that they are supported.

4.8 Paul Blomfield stated how this issue around young carers and the school census is something which the APPG should pick up.

4.9 Thomas (young carer) asked how the government and schools can build opportunities for young carers to make sure they can be kids. When asked by Dame Rachel what he would want school to do, Thomas said to provide time for young carers to have time to reflect and calm down if they’ve had a bad day, or have times to go out and take different opportunities up if they don’t get chance to go out of the house. Thomas said about trips and more funding for young carers.

4.10 Dame Rachel suggested that an idea might be to work to produce a video with young carers to go to every headteacher in the country.

4.11 Holly(Young Adult Carer)asked how given at the moment, young carers are on average getting one grade lower in every subject at GCSE – is there any way of making it compulsory for schools to target young carers, but also looking at FE/HE to look at it and contextualise the academic gap?

4.12 Dame Rachelagreed that it’s really important that schools, colleges and universities are aware but need to be speaking to employers about young carers as well. Employers could for example provide internships, mentoring or guaranteed interviews for young carers, they could support with travel to get to interviews, mentoring. Dame Rachel said that she is talking to large employers and university vice-chancellors about children in care but promised to also talk to them about young carers.

4.13 Duncan Bakerpraised the great work that Holt Youth Project does with young carers. One of the pieces of the work that they have educated him on is that young carers are often not just social carers. Young carers do a huge amount and can take away from their normal lives – a piece of work that has never been done is about what the impact on being a young carer has on their life chances – from age 5 all the way through. Duncan asked Dame Rachel if such a piece of work has ever been done.

4.14Dame Rachelsaid she can go away and look into it; detrimental educational outcomes is something which has come up. She is interested around progression into HE and HE outcomes but also something around mental health and wellbeing as well.

4.15 Jemima(Young Adult Carer) asked how can we get services that are going to help us with our caring role to be more accessible? Currently on a gap year because need the year to work out how to go to university. They have been denied PIP and access to financial support.

4.16 Hephzibah (Young Carer) asked aboutgiven this obvious disparity in grades – is there anything being done to ensure young carers aren’t falling behind academically? What more can be done?

4.17 Robyn(Young Adult Carer)asked whether there is anything that could be done to educate the public more? If their mum were to have a seizure in the street, lots of people would automatically call an ambulance, even though they know what to do and know an ambulance may well not be necessary – they wouldn’t listen to them because they’re a child.

4.18 Lily (Young Carer)asked how can we work with schools to promote who young carers are to help with friendship during the school journey?

4.19 Dame Rachel said that to answer these questions, it’simportant to ask you what you need. She speaks to lots of directors of children’s services whose duty it is to provide these services who say they are providing the support, so it is heart-breaking and infuriating when she hears this support is not being provided.

4.20 The government has really got behind the need for early support for families – there is a Children’s Social Care implementation plan set to come out in about a week. We need to make sure that young carers and adults who need support are part of the discussion. Dame Rachel said she is going to speak to the minister and minister’s team to ensure young carers are part of this children’s social care reform and said that she wants to fight young carers’ corner and fight the battle for them.

4.21 On catch-up/academic support, lots of resources has been put into OAK National Academy and the idea is that all lessons you need are on there to support if you cannot be at school. We need to look at that through the lens of young carers – could this help them to catch up? Dame Rachel will speak to OAK Academy about that.

4.22 The Government has put a lot of money has been put into tutoring. Dame Rachel said she will also check that young carers are recognised within that so can access the tutoring through the National Tutoring Scheme.

4.23 With regards to educating the public, thinks it’s a good idea and would be popular with journalists. There is a lot of appetite for a public campaign, including media and other organisations.

4.24 Dame Rachel asked the young carers if they would want their school/teachers to be explaining in lessons/assemblies about young carers, or would they prefer for all pupils to have lessons on it? Or is it something quieter, so if teachers knew they could set up things quietly?

4.25 Lily responded by saying that covering it in PSHE and assemblies would be useful. Other young carers said that it would be useful, but it needs to be done carefully so as not to alienate young carers

4.26 Dame Rachelsaid she felt it would be good to work with young carers and young carer organisations to create a really good assembly and lesson plan with resources (if they don’t already exist) to share with every headteacher to get them to commit to do it.

4.27Paul Blomfield thanked the young carers for raising so many important points and thanked Dame Rachel for her ideas. He said that the APPG will be taking up these issues.

4.28 Dame Rachel thanked all of the young carers for sharing their experiences and said that she wants to ensure they are supported.

4.29 Ruby (young carer) thanked Dame Rachel and the MPs - appreciate them taking the time to listen to young carers and answer their questions. Also wanted to thank Andy McGowan for coordinating the event and young carer support workers for giving the opportunity and all of the support they provide to young carers. Look forward to seeing what is next for young carers.

**Appendix 1 – Young Carers’ Experiences (names have been changed)**

**Lilli**

I started caring for my dad from around the age of 6 due to autism and extreme mental health issues. It can affect his mood and outlook generally on life and how he has day to day interactions with people. Can also make him to struggle to do basic tasks to look after himself like feeding himself, remembering to drink and other things necessary so I have to keep reminding himself constantly to feed/drink and help him to do things.

This can have quite an emotional toll as having to care for myself and also him. I also care for him emotionally – calming him down when he has heightened mental health issues – so if out in public and triggered by something I help to get his head out of that situation.

Sometimes my caring role means I can’t go out with my friends, and we can’t always go out as a whole family, and it can affect my attendance at school because either I’ve had a hectic night of caring so I’m so exhausted from that, or because I’m so anxious it can cause me to be physically and mentally ill.

School only knows my caring role to an extent so it can be difficult to explain to them that I’ve had a difficult night, because overall I’m fine so it’s difficult with my academic side and also helping my dad at home.

I am also someone who is academically advanced so staff don't believe that I could be struggling from a lower attendance as my grades are good. However, I have to catch up with my friends work and work extra hard. The response staff give is that I should spend more time in school even when I have no control over it.

**Alicia**

I care for my mum – I have done since I was able to walk, I think. She has paralysis in one of her legs and epilepsy. She also has different chronic pain disorders. Around 2 or 3 years ago – just before COVID she had a bad accident which caused a brain bleed so now she’s even more restricted than she was before – so this has heightened what I have to do as a young a carer. To be honest – I don’t mind doing it, because I’ve done it for as long as I can remember but it restricts what I’m able to do – I can’t go out with my friends, or do normal things that teenagers do – because even if I’m not physically caring for her, I’m mentally worrying about her, thinking if she is ok.

It worries me especially at school and so I can struggle to concentrate on my work. Recently, it has got better at school because I’m on different advisory boards to help young carers, so I’ve been talking to different teachers about my caring role and they’re starting to understand – but there’s still restriction about their understanding.

I also think that health professionals could have had better awareness of young carers.

**Charlie**

I am 14 years old; I care for my mum who suffers from health disabilities like Fibromyalgia, and physical difficulties like not being able walk much as a result of having a serious car accident when I was 4 years old. So, I’ve been a young carer for 10 years.

As it is just the 2 of us, I help my mum with tasks around the house. An example of what I do is anything from the washing, hoovering, to cooking. I help my mum with her medication and sometimes I have helped with personal care and getting dressed. I also help my mum if she needs anything else.

Being a young carer does affect my life. It limits me being able to join group activities in the evenings. This is because it leaves my mum alone and she is known to have falls in the house, both when I’m there and when I’m not. So, I can’t go out as much as my friends do, as I worry about what will happen to my mum.

I struggle to be able to go and meet up with my friends too. The number of calls, texts, and knocks at the door from my friends inviting me to join them has nearly stopped. Some of my friends understand and come to my house instead but others don't understand and just leave me out.

Being a young carer affects my school attendance. This is because if my mum’s carer doesn't turn up then I must stay until my Granny can get over to help.

I think some teachers understand my role of a young carer, but other teachers do not accept or believe that I am a young carer. Even though I have a Young Carers ID Passport.

I'm always thinking of my mum when at school which can distract me from completing schoolwork, I’m not allowed to phone my mum to see how she is doing which makes me anxious.

The knock-on effect of all of this is that I don’t want to go to school, and my education and grades suffer.

I used to go to my grandparents when I was younger to stay over on a Saturday night. Now I'm older and my mum needs more support I don't go to stay anymore. I meet up with my Grandad on a Saturday or Sunday morning and we go to golf for a few hours. In the time I'm away I am checking on my mum to make sure she is ok and taken her medication. I do panic when she is on her own whilst I'm enjoying time with my Grandad.

I feel guilty. Why? Because I can't be there for my mum all the time. I wake up thinking is my mum ok and not been poorly through the night. I love my mum and will do anything for her. Even though she is always telling me to go with my friends and be a teenager.

I go to a young carers group on a Monday night. I can go there to meet other young carers who live close to me. I prefer being with the youth workers though. We do different activities each week from baking to arts and crafts. I enjoy the random conversations we have on everything from school to favourite sweets!!

I attend a young carers fortnightly online. This group is young carers from different parts of the county who meet up and share opinions and ideas. We discuss topics to help improve the young carers service. We have produced information for GP's. We have done a presentation at a service meeting, and we have won an award for being the best Volunteer Team.

Young Carers groups have helped me meet other people in same situation and understand how I'm feeling, without both young carer’s groups I wouldn't have had the support, help and guidance that I needed.

Being a young Carer affects every aspect of my life.

**Oliwia**

I care for my dad and my grandma – my grandma lives with us and has my whole life. My dad was in a car accident and so was paralysed from the spine down. He also has crushed discs and a crushed spine. Doctors didn’t believe him at first so he was untreated for a few years before he got the help he needed – so he now suffers pain every day and some days he can walk, other days he can’t. My grandma has got diabetes and terminal lung cancer and a few other things – she only speaks Polish – I speak fluent Polish so I go to medical appointments or operations with her when my mum can’t. My dad and other family members can’t go, because they don’t speak Polish. I help care for her every day and make sure she takes her morphine every day and help her out of bed and check she is still breathing in the night. It really stresses me out and my whole family out. Being a young carer limits my ability to go out because I have to take her to appointments, or I’m just stressed about if anything happens when I’m out. I prefer being at home because I can keep an eye on them. It also limits my school attendance because of appointments or stress. The teachers don’t understand and think I’m being lazy or just an excuse. Lots of them don’t know anything about young carers. I do young carer zoom meetings every two weeks, and I do clubs/outings – it keeps me happy when I get to go out and know my family is safe.

**Shazia**

I’m 18 and care for my older brother who is autistic, but has a night-time job. So, my caring role is a bit different – I’m working to help him be as independent as possible – so in my typical day, quite late at night I’ll make sure he’s eaten, showered, shaved, cut his nails – all before he goes to work. When he comes back in the morning, I always make him breakfast and make sure he’s in bed before I go to school. If he goes to bed too late, then he’ll just be exhausted so it’s really important.

The hardest period for me was going through lockdown – particularly the first one – he was doing an internship which just stopped completely. It was really hard to explain why he just couldn’t go out anymore or go to work anymore and had to stay at home. It was really hard to balance studying for GCSEs and caring for him all day because my mum was an essential worker.

I’m really grateful I had my carers centre to support me – they ran online weekly sessions, aimed to give us a break and I was really grateful – it gave me a chance to breath, have a laugh and speak to someone when I needed it. They’ve given me lots of opportunities outside of that – I did an accredited project that I could put on my UCAS application and which gave me lots of transferrable skills that I could bring with me into higher education. They do lots of outings and sessions which allow me to meet other people just like me – made me feel I wasn’t alone and gave me a chance to just speak with people who were like me.

I applied for university this year for a STEM course, and found it was much harder and stressful to apply for the top universities because I just did not have the same amount of time as my peers to study for the admission tests that I needed to pass to have a chance at getting in. It's also hard to explain this because many people will just say that everyone "has something going on" and "you just need to manage your time better", so support and understanding for young carers from universities, especially those who have a passion for more competitive subjects, but are at a time disadvantage compared to other students is an issue.

**Maria**

I’m 18 and I care for my mum, my mum was diagnosed with diabetes when she was pregnant with me. The doctors told her that she would not have diabetes after she had given birth to me, but complications happened and she still as diabetes. when I was younger (around 2) I was able to put the dosage on the insulin pens because my mother was diagnosed with arthritis shortly after I was born so it was and still is hard for her to use her hands. as I grew up more complications happened and i had to start caring for her more, with her being diagnosed with gout and carpel tunnel.

When I was younger while in school, teachers didn't know what a young carer was, they told me that "you have to be 18 to be a carer" which upset me a lot. I started feeling like I was very different to other people as I had to help my mum in and out the bath, help her eat, do her hair etc and other children were out deciding which park they were going to.

It scares me mostly because I don't know what’s happening at home which was hard while I was learning; I didn’t want to go to school because we weren’t allowed our phones, so I was constantly worrying about my mum. Now I’m in work I’m able to use my phone when needed which is a sigh of relief.

**Stevie**

I'm 15 years old. I look after my dad who has an IBD and my mum who has brittle bones disease, gluten ataxia and suffers from complications from a brain haemorrhage among other issues.I provide a lot of mental and emotional support to my parents as well as physical, like helping my mum after nightmares and trying to help us plan for our week as my mum forgets a lot and my dad is often very stressed. I also clean and cook often, but my dad is trying to take some of these responsibilities as I focus on my GCSE's.I find one of the most difficult issues is probably a lack of support as apart from my young carer support organisation, I have no other support, especially for my mental health. I suffer a lot from stress of caring for my family, as well as my own mental health issues caused by the traumatic circumstances my family has gone through in relation to illness (e.g., my mum’s haemorrhage when I was 3).

**Timothy**

Hi, I'm 11 and I help care for my Mum. I am lucky to have a younger brother and my dad to help me care for her. She is waiting for a double hip replacement and struggles to bend over and complete simple tasks. She struggles to get down the stairs. I help her with simple tasks like the washing the pots etc. I am very emotional and worry in school and this makes me struggle with work. I have to hide this as others don't understand. Luckily, I do have teachers who understand. I think we need to spread awareness across social media and physically to help others understand.

**Hayley**

I am a sibling carer. When I am not at uni, I am quite involved in emotional support, encouraging my sister to do her physio exercises and take her epilepsy medication. I help her with some personal care too. Having support from carers charities growing up was life changing for me - their support and encouragement in advocating for my needs, meeting other young carers, and not giving up my dream of going to university was huge.

**Stevie**

I care for my mum who suffers from trigeminal autonomic seizures, repeating chest infections and mental health problems. This includes helping her with her tablets and general movement daily and doing some shopping and basic chores/errands when needed. However sometimes this can include giving her injections and making sure she cannot hurt herself during her seizure attacks.

Due to my mum's conditions, I do become anxious and sadly don't hang out with my friends as much as i would like to. Fortunately, I am able to attend school regularly and I love school, but it does mean I am away from my mum and worry about her wellbeing. In my school we cannot have our phones on us, which does make me very anxious sometimes. I have quite high grades, but teachers do comment on how I act out due to my anxiety and restlessness surrounding issues with my mum