



# **BEING A YOUNG CARER IS NOT A CHOICE**

## **IT'S JUST WHAT WE DO**

**SUMMARY: THE VOICES AND EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG  
CARERS AND YOUNG ADULT CARERS FROM ACROSS  
SCOTLAND**

**March 2023**

**CARERS  
TRUST**  
**SCOTLAND**

# INTRODUCTION

**A young carer is someone aged 18 or under who cares for a friend or family member who, due to illness, disability, mental health problems or an addiction, cannot cope without their support. Older young carers, aged 16-25, are also known as young adult carers and may have different support needs to younger carers.**

In early 2023, Carers Trust conducted a UK-wide survey of how young carers and young adult carers felt about their education and work, mental health, their lives alongside or outside of caring, and what support they get and need.

In our research, we heard from 1,109 young carers and young adult carers across the UK, including 181 living in Scotland. This report explores the experiences and needs of young carers in Scotland. It includes statistics for the young carers and young adult carers living in Scotland in our sample and direct quotes from them.

We found that more than half (59%) of young carers and young adult carers care for more than 20 hours each week, with 12% spending 50 hours or more providing unpaid care every week. Over half (54%) of young carers and young adult carers said that the amount of time they spend caring has increased in the last year, and over a third (36%) now care for more people than they used to.



## KEY FINDINGS FROM RESPONDENTS:



**66%**

SAID THE COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS IS 'ALWAYS' OR 'USUALLY' AFFECTING THEM AND THEIR FAMILY



**36%**

'ALWAYS' OR 'USUALLY' FACE ADDITIONAL COSTS BECAUSE THEY ARE A YOUNG CARER OR YOUNG ADULT CARER



**52%**

'ALWAYS' OR 'USUALLY' FEEL STRESSED BECAUSE OF BEING A YOUNG CARER OR YOUNG ADULT CARER



**25%**

EITHER 'NEVER' OR 'NOT OFTEN' FEEL THEY GET ENOUGH SLEEP



**43%**

OF YOUNG CARERS AND YOUNG ADULT CARERS SAID CARING 'ALWAYS' OR 'USUALLY' AFFECTS HOW MUCH TIME THEY CAN SPEND WITH THEIR FRIENDS



**51%**

OVER A HALF OF YOUNG CARERS OR YOUNG ADULT CARERS "ALWAYS" OR "USUALLY" FEEL WORRIED ABOUT THEIR FUTURE



**49%**

OF YOUNG CARERS OR YOUNG ADULT CARERS "NEVER" OR "NOT OFTEN" GET HELP IN SCHOOL, COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY TO BALANCE CARING WITH THEIR EDUCATION



**50%**

WHO WORK 'ALWAYS' OR 'USUALLY' STRUGGLE TO BALANCE CARING WITH PAID WORK

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## Recommendations for Scottish Government and local decision makers:

### 1. Prioritise financial support for young carers and young adult carers due to the extra costs of caring and the challenges they experience in supplementing their income through paid work. We ask that the:

- Scottish Government extends eligibility of Carer Support Payment (currently Carer's Allowance) and removes the full time study rule to ensure student carers get the financial support they need and deserve.
- Scottish Government amends Young Carer Grant regulations to allow for multiple young people being eligible for the grant for providing care for the same cared-for person.
- Scottish Government extends eligibility of Job Start Payment to include Carer Support Payment (currently Carer's Allowance) as a qualifying benefit.

### 2. Ensure young carers and young adult carers' physical and mental health and wellbeing is at the fore of planning and decision making at local and national levels. We ask that:

- The Scottish Government increases the level of funding for young carer and young adult carer support and ring-fences it.
- The Scottish Government urgently introduces a Right to a Break from Caring, which meets the varied needs of young carers and young adult carers to ensure this right is implemented and upheld.
- All local authorities review their 'Short Breaks Services Statement' to ensure they clearly reference support for young carers and develop local Young Carer Action Plans.

### 3. Invest in young carers and young adult carers so they can reach their full potential and aspirations in education and employment. We ask that:

- All schools, colleges and universities appoint a Young Carers Champion or Student Carers Champion with strategic responsibility and oversight for identifying and implementing appropriate support for young carers and student carers.
- The Scottish Government commits to fund the development and roll out of a National Schools Award to help primary and secondary schools develop proactive policies, practice and undertake training to support young carers and young adult carers better.
- The Scottish Government provides funding to re-establish the Going Further/Going Higher for Student Carers Recognition Award to help colleges and universities to develop their policies, practices and training to support student carers.
- The Scottish Government develops specific employability and apprenticeship programmes to support young adult carers who experience additional disadvantage in accessing employment.



**Prioritise financial support for young carers and young adult carers due to the extra costs of caring and the challenges they experience in supplementing their income through paid work.**

Extending access to Carer Support Payment (currently Carer's Allowance) to unpaid carers in full-time education will help to reduce the financial challenges many unpaid carers experience when trying to progress and be successful in their education. This will also help to reduce the pressures for unpaid carers to find paid employment and not pursuing with their educational aspirations.

Amending Young Carer Grant regulations to allow for multiple young people being eligible for the grant for providing care for the same cared-for person will address the unfairness experienced when more than one young carer meets all of the required eligibility requirements for the grant. They are currently penalised from receiving Young Carer Grant as another young carer has received the grant for providing care for the same cared-for person.

By extending Job Start Payment to include Carer Support Payment (currently Carer's Allowance) as a qualifying benefit will help young carers and young adult carers with the additional costs associated with the transition into paid employment.



The voices and experiences of young carers and young adult carers:

**“Getting public transport isn’t possible due to the person I care for not being able to use it, so we rely on taxis and Ubers to go to appointments or go anywhere, and it’s so expensive and now with the cost of living we don’t have much spare so can’t go out as much unless needed.”**

**“I worry about making sure my dad has everything he needs for his diabetes and to keep him warm through winter and make sure he’s fed properly. The cost of food, heating and electricity is going through the roof.”**

**“Not being able to afford the basic things such as shower gel or toilet roll and not being able to afford heating.”**

**“Most of the things my friends like to do are expensive, and with the amount carer families are given, it is hard to do these things.”**



## **Ensure young carers and young adult carers' physical and mental health and wellbeing is at the fore of planning and decision making at local and national levels.**

Respondents told us that dedicated young carer and young adult carer support services are vital for maintaining positive wellbeing. The ever-diminishing pot of available funding means that local authorities consistently have to make impossible decisions about what they can and cannot fund. Increasing and ring-fencing funding for young carer and young adult carer support will ensure these children and young people will be guaranteed that the support they need is available.

Young carers have repeatedly told us that getting regular breaks from caring is important. We know that breaks can be very beneficial for young carers, giving them time to recharge and do things they enjoy. A fully resourced Right to a Break from Caring must be introduced with meaningful consultation and involvement of young carers and young adult carers being vital to ensure its success.



It is paramount that young carers and young adult carers get the support they need locally. Local Short Break Services Statements must clearly highlight the provision available for children and young people with caring responsibilities. Local Young Carer Action Plans will also help local authorities to evidence how they are implementing young carer and young adult carer support, fulfilling their young carer duties under the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016 and upholding young carers' rights.

The voices and experiences of young carers and young adult carers:

**“It’s not fun; being a young carer has so much impact on your life, but sometimes you feel like your life isn’t yours anymore and it’s very impacting on your mental health.”**

**“I don’t like being a young carer. I just want to be a brother and a son. But there is very little support for disabled people, so I have to do what I can.”**

**“Friends are sometimes not very understanding. I have lost a lot of friends.”**

**“Being a carer is very hard and there are a lot of dark times.”**

**“Struggle to sleep due to the stress and I struggle with being away from the cared for person when I’m away for a day out in case anything was to happen and I wasn’t there to help.”**

**“I don’t want time to myself, I want to be socialising with my friends.”**

**“Sometimes I don’t feel safe because thoughts of self-harming come back to me often, and it scares me.”**



## **Invest in young carers and young adult carers so that they can reach their full potential and aspirations in education and employment.**

It is extremely important that education professionals undertake training to better identify, support and refer young carers, young adult carers and student carers to the support they are entitled to. This requires a coordinated approach and all schools, colleges and universities should appoint Young Carer and Student Carer Champions within their staff teams to oversee this work. Implementing a National Schools Award and further/higher education awards would help these educational institutions to develop their young carer, young adult carer and student carer policies and practice. These awards would also help to celebrate good practice throughout Scotland, raise further awareness of unpaid carers and ensure education professionals are equipped to support them.

The introduction of a specific employability programme and apprenticeship pathways for young adult carers would help to combat the additional disadvantage experienced by these young people in accessing employment and who are at higher risk of not being in education, employment or training (NEET) compared with their peers who do not have caring responsibilities.



The voices and experiences of young carers and young adult carers:

**“ I did get a lot of help while at school, and there was always someone who understood. It’s just that now at college, no one understands or really cares.”**

**“ I love school, but sometimes it’s hard caring, schooling and working part time.”**

**“ In school, there’s not enough done for young carers and raising awareness of what they do.”**

**“ I’m hoping I can go onto further education while helping care for my mum. My school has helped me get recognised as a young carer, and I should get more support in the new year!”**

**“ Even if I were to reach out, I’m not sure who it is I would speak to at the university, as the label of young carer I feel has slipped from me once I became an adult, and I have fallen under the radar - even though I am still taking on considerably more of a caring role than any of my classmates and trying to balance home life and my studies.”**

**“ I’m almost having to give up work due to my caring role, as I have become unreliable due to caring.”**



# METHODOLOGY

**The survey ran from 21 November 2022 to 15 January 2023 and 181 young carers and young adult carers aged between 12 and 25 responded from across Scotland. We promoted the survey via local carer organisations, other charities and external organisations we work in partnership with and on our social media channels.**

The survey was anonymous; no identifying data is held about any of these children and young people. Young carers and young adult carers could choose which questions they did and did not answer and could stop completing the survey at any time. Young carers aged 16 and under were encouraged to talk to their parent, guardian, or young carers support worker before completing the survey.

While the survey results are not nationally representative, they are nevertheless intended to provide an invaluable snapshot of young carers' and young adult carers' experiences and views across Scotland.



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## Thank you to:

- To the young carers and young adult carers who gave their time to complete our survey.
- To the committed and skilled young carer and young adult carer support workers within Carers Trust's network of local carer organisations and our partners in the wider sector who continue to provide invaluable support.

# ABOUT CARERS TRUST

Carers Trust works to transform the lives of unpaid carers. It partners with its UK-wide network of local carer organisations to provide funding and support, deliver innovative and evidence-based programmes, raise awareness, and influence policy. Carers Trust's vision is that unpaid carers are heard and valued, with access to support, advice and resources to enable them to live fulfilled lives.

# CARERS TRUST

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