

INTRODUCTION

In 2022, Carers Trust ran a UK wide young carer and young adult carer survey. This survey asked young people about the pandemic, their education and work, their feelings and mental health, their lives alongside or outside of caring, and what support they get and need.

Young carers are children and young people under 18 years old who provide unpaid care to a family member or friend who is disabled, physically or mentally ill, or misuses substances. Young adult carers are transitioning into adulthood and are aged 16-25.

Young carers and young adult carers undertake a range of tasks to support family members or friends who could not cope without their support. This might include shopping, cooking, cleaning, managing medicines or money, providing personal care, helping people get out of the house, keeping an eye on someone or giving emotional support.

METHODOLOGY

To obtain the qualitative and quantitative data used in this report, we asked young carers and young adult carers to complete a survey. We received 571 responses from young carers and young adult carers across the UK. 171 of these responses were from young people in Scotland.

The majority of these respondents are aged 12 – 17 (68%) with 31% between the ages of 18 – 25. These young people have shared the pressures and challenges faced as a young or young adult carer, including the impact caring roles have on schoolwork, wellbeing, and friendships. This summary reflects the findings collected from young carers in Scotland.

SCHOOL, COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY

The pressures of balancing school, college or university work with caring are demonstrated clearly in these results.

31% of respondents ‘always’ or ‘usually’ struggle to balance caring with school, college or university work, whilst 35% of respondents ‘sometimes’ struggle with this balance.

In terms of support, almost half (47%) of respondents ‘never’ or ‘not often’ get help from school, college or university to balance caring with their work. 31% of young carers and young adult carers who responded feel that their school, college or university ‘never’ or ‘not often’ understand their caring role. This pattern is reflected in the UK wide results.

These results indicate that further action is required across Scotland to ensure all educational institutions are providing adequate support, and staff can identify and understand the impact caring roles can have.





'I get to speak to a carer support worker who comes into my school every few months but aside from that my school doesn't have anything in place, nor does it advertise being a young carer so a lot of people may be young carers but unaware of it.'

'Universities don't have enough support in place for young adult carers, my caring responsibilities aren't taken into account with marking and timing of assignments and assessments.'

'Having a designated teacher for young carers in school for support would help so much.'

PAID WORK

For those young carers and young adult carers who work, 66% 'never' or 'not often' get help from work to balance caring with their life. Similarly, 66% of respondents also feel they 'never' or 'not often' have someone at work to talk to about being a young carer or young adult carer.

It is vital that employers consider the support they can provide to young carers and young adult carers to help them to balance caring responsibilities and sustain their employment.

SUPPORT

The results indicate that the majority of young carers and young adult carers who responded in Scotland are receiving support.

58% 'always' or 'usually' get help easily as a young carer or young adult carer, with 56% 'always' or 'usually' getting enough support from young carer or young adult carer services. These results are reflected in the UK wide findings. However, 25% noted that they 'never' or 'not often' receive enough support from their service, with 21% 'never' or 'not often' receiving support easily.

Whilst we welcome the high numbers of young carers and young adult carers receiving adequate support, 1 in 4 not receiving enough support is far too many. Young carer and young adult carer services must be adequately funded to provide the vital support needed.



'I think my caring role has a big impact on my mental health and I wish that support would reach out to me more rather than me trying to find support myself whilst balancing caring.'

'The stress and anxiety isn't a 9-5 weekday thing, unlike the services that are designed to support me.'

FRIENDSHIPS

When thinking about being a young carer or young adult carer, 29% of respondents feel caring affects how much time they spend with friends. 33% of respondents 'never' or 'not often' feel included with all the things their friends do. These findings are reflected across the UK by young carers and young adult carers.



These figures are concerning as they evidence the impact caring roles have on maintaining friendships and having those connections with peers. A crucial part of life for young people. These results demonstrate that Young Carers Action Day (YCAD) 2022 call to action to reduce isolation and loneliness is never more needed.



'Sometimes its feels like my childhood has been taken away and I have to be an adult. Sometimes I wish I could be a normal child and be able to go out and play with my friends. Although my mum tries to help me do this often, I am too tired after helping with my caring responsibilities.'

'I feel like being a young carer since I was 6/7 I have grown up not really feeling the need to be around people my age. So now I prefer to be in the company of my family rather than friends. Which sometimes makes me feel sad or lonely.'

WELLBEING

The above challenges and pressures are ultimately impacting on the wider wellbeing of young carers and young adult carers in Scotland. Worryingly, 31% of young carers and young adult carers who responded in Scotland, feel they 'never' or 'not often' get enough rest, or get enough time to themselves. Unsurprisingly, the greatest calls for support from respondents include mental health support and support to stay healthy.



'I usually have to stay up at night to complete homework or chores, and sometimes when I'm sleeping the cared for will wake me up too, so I wish I could get a bit more sleep as waking up early for school is a bit of a struggle!!'

CORONAVIRUS, YOUNG CARERS AND YOUNG ADULT CARERS

While we are no longer in the acute stages of the pandemic, it continues to impact on young carers' and young adult carers' lives in different ways to their peers who don't have caring responsibilities.

More than half (54%) of the young carers and young adult carers who responded to our survey said that the amount of time they spend caring had increased in the last year.

52% of young carers and young adult carers who responded in Scotland feel less connected to others, and more than a fifth (22%) feel they are unable to take a break from caring.



'Coronavirus has isolated me from a lot of my support networks and also made my caring job more difficult.'

'I never got a break in almost 2 years, I worked hard to keep mum out of hospital as I was scared what would happen if she went in. I never get any thanks or praise for what I do, and my bank account was the real victim.'



Young people have been clear about what would help them as a young carer or young adult carer. Majority of young people who responded felt that having a break from being a young carer would help (54%). Listening to music (73%) and talking to family and friends (46%) were also clear ways to help young people with their caring roles.

These findings indicate that the pandemic continues to impact on young carers' lives, including the intensity of their caring roles and feelings of social isolation. Providing these young people with a break from their caring and an opportunity to reconnect with others must be a priority as we look ahead.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. More commissioned breaks and time outside of caring.
2. Governments should monitor how local authorities are meeting their statutory duties to identify and support young carers and young adult carers.
3. Education providers need to take an integrated approach to support.
4. Prioritise access to mental health support for young carers and young adult carers.
5. Free or discounted leisure and transport.
6. More financial support for young adult carers.
7. Sustainably fund the wider social care system.

More information and detail around these recommendations can be found in the full "It's harder than anyone understands": The experiences and thoughts of young carers and young adult carers report.

CONCLUSION

Young carers and young adult carers have shared their experiences with us. The majority are struggling to balance caring with school, university, college or work and do not feel understood. Whilst we welcome the majority of young carers and young adult carers receiving enough support from their local carers service, these results reveal that 1 in 4 are still not receiving enough support. Many young carers and young adult carers struggle to spend time with friends or feel included in the things their peers do. This ultimately affects their wellbeing and has been exacerbated further by the pandemic and lockdowns, with caring roles intensifying and the majority feeling less connected to others. Young people have been clear that having a break from caring and talking with family and friends would help.

Scottish Government and local authorities should commit to ensuring young carers and young adult carers can access the breaks they need to support positive wellbeing, reduce social isolation, and live a fulfilled life alongside caring.

We know that breaks can be very beneficial for young carers and young adult carers, giving them time to recharge and do things they enjoy. Young carers and young adult carers are, and must be seen as, children and young people first and foremost and their rights must be upheld.