



**I'M
LISTENING
TO YOUNG
CARERS**

**YOUNG CARER VOICE:
CONSULTATION EVENT**

**CARERS
TRUST**

SCOTLAND

YOUNG CARER VOICE: CONSULTATION EVENT

INTRODUCTION

The Scottish Young Carers Festival is an annual event that bring young carers across Scotland together. The event provides an opportunity for young carers to meet other young people in similar situations, share new experiences and of course, have fun!

An important part of the Scottish Young Carers Festival is providing an opportunity for young carers to have their voice heard by key decision makers.

In 2021, Carers Trust Scotland hosted an online Young Carer Voice: Consultation Event. This event provided a platform for young carers to share their views on a range of topics, take part in meaningful consultation in an interactive way and speak directly with decision makers.

129 attendees joined this event, including MSPs, councillors, third sector organisations, Scottish Government officials and young carer services.

50 young carers across **30 young carer services** attended the consultation workshops, sharing their views on themes chosen by young people to explore.

A huge thank you to everyone who attended our event and listened to the young carers' views. Below you will find a summary of the issues raised by young carers, and how you can support young carers in your role.

ABOUT YOUNG CARERS

A young carer is someone aged under 18, or 18 at school, who cares for a friend or family member who, due to illness, disability, a mental health problem or an addiction, cannot cope without their support.

SHORT BREAKS AND RESPITE

The aim of this session, co-facilitated by Carers Trust Scotland and Shared Care Scotland, was to explore what is important to young carers and what breaks they would like for the future. Young carers prioritised "giving me time to be with friends", followed by "giving me time to rest and relax" as the key benefits of having a break.

What words describe how you feel after you've had a break from your caring role?

less stressed
refreshed relaxed
calm
happy



Attendees felt that anxiety around leaving the person they care for or meeting new people were some of the key barriers to getting a break. Other barriers included their busy schedule and wanting to help other family members who also need a break.

“ I have to help Mum and Dad as they also need a break. ”
Young carer

Young carers also discussed what has helped them take a break in the past. This included formal care such as respite and hospice at home charities and informal care, such as other family members offering support. Young carer services and trusted support workers were also praised in providing short breaks. Offering different types of activities to cater for everyone’s tastes was important, as was flexibility to allow young carers to call home whenever they want. Knowing about breaks in advance is also key.

EDUCATION

The aim of the Education Workshop, co-facilitated by Carers Trust Scotland, Education Scotland and a young carer, was to discuss some of the challenges young carers may face in school, support available, and explore ideas that could improve the school experience for young carers.

Attendees identified support which included help with homework, greater awareness and understanding in school and supportive teachers. Young carer services were also mentioned as young carer groups provide fun and an opportunity to engage with peers. Transport after school or access to a quiet zone to do homework was also suggested. Alternative education was also raised, as not all young people can be in class.

Attendees discussed what made or makes the difference when sharing with their school that they are a young carer. Points raised included having a Young Carers Card, informed guidance teachers, anonymous forms and giving consent for young carer services to pass on information to schools. Information being passed securely from primary to secondary school also helps. Some young carers noted that their secondary school was aware of their caring role and so they felt comfortable speaking about this.

“ Young carer services coming into school and talking to teachers to make them more understanding. They also let the school know on my behalf which was a lot easier. ”
Young carer

Some also noted that they only shared their caring situations when applying for college or university. This process involved ticking a box on a form which some felt more comfortable doing than having a conversation. A suggestion was made to make a similar form available in schools.

3. As a young carer how supported do you feel in school?



“ When me and my brother were in the same primary, I was taken out of lessons to help teachers with my disabled brother. That school knew but it didn't really help. ”

Young carer

Some young carers also favoured young carer services coming into school and talking to teachers to raise their awareness or letting the school know on the young person's behalf that they are a young carer.

RURAL VOICE

The aim of this workshop, facilitated by Carers Trust Scotland, was to discover the key challenges faced by young carers living in a rural area.

Young carers expressed their concern over public transport – buses don't always show up, they don't cover certain areas and the times that they run are limited (stopping around 5pm in some places). This means it can be a struggle to attend school and young carer service events. Young carers mentioned that some could get their parent(s) to give them lifts, but their parent(s) aren't always available. They felt that before the pandemic they could get taxis, but they are harder to access now and the cost of taxis is also a barrier.

Young carers also mentioned that Wi-Fi connection can be poor and unreliable in a rural area. This makes it a struggle to attend Zoom calls for carer support. Likewise, it is harder to take a break from caring and to relax and have fun by watching Netflix or YouTube. As the Scottish Young Carers Festival was entirely online in 2021, and all workshops were uploaded to the Carers Trust YouTube channel – poor Wi-Fi may have been a barrier to young carers participating.

There was also concern over being able to access the benefits of the **Young Scot Young Carers Package**. This Package includes digital vouchers, access to subscriptions and exclusive opportunities available to young carers, aged 11–18, in Scotland. This aims to support young carers to make the most of their free time and support them in their caring role. Young carers can't access discounts offered by larger companies as there are mostly small/independent businesses in rural areas. It was mentioned that including discounts for local leisure centres would be good. However, Young Scot does provide a lot of benefits which can be accessed digitally, which are useful for young carers in rural areas.

YOUNG CARERS' RIGHTS

This workshop, co-facilitated by Carers Trust Scotland, Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland Office and a young carer, explored what young carers' rights are and how we can ensure young carers are more aware of their rights.

Young carers' ideas on how to raise awareness of their rights included young carer sessions in schools, campaigns targeted at young carers, young carer services visiting schools to facilitate discussions about being a young carer with friends, and mainstreaming rights information into all information.

There was also great discussion among young carers of their rights under The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and how important these are in supporting young carers too. Going forward, young carers should be supported to understand how their rights under the Carers (Scotland) Act support their rights within the UNCRC.

MENTAL HEALTH

The aim of this workshop, co-facilitated by Carers Trust Scotland and Children and Young People's Mental Health Engagement Officer at Scottish Government, was to explore the main issues impacting young carers' mental health, what help and support young people access and whether accessing support digitally would be beneficial.

During the workshop, the impact education had on young people's mental health was highlighted, particularly the uncertainty around online or face-to-face learning and exam results. Online learning meant that some support was removed, including formal counselling sessions and informal catch ups with friends. One young carer noted that Google Classroom meant you could not speak in confidence to friends the way you would at school.

“ My counselling session went down and that made me shrink into myself. ”
Young carer

Transition from school to college was also noted as impacting young carers' mental health, including anxiety over leaving the person they cared for while attending college. One young carer did note that they were getting support from both the college and young carer service.

COVID-19 restrictions also impacted on young carers' mental health, including issues with hospital visits and restricting young carers from seeing their relatives. Travel restrictions also created anxiety for those caring for someone living in a different local authority or accessing health services.

Young carers also raised that Carer Awareness training is needed for all health and social care staff, with greater acknowledgement and recognition of hidden disabilities and health conditions.

Other issues were raised around accessing the Young Carer Grant. The **Young Carer Grant** is a yearly payment of £308.15 for young carers, aged 16 to 18, in Scotland. One young carer noted it was extremely stressful applying for this, especially where there was more than one young carer in the family caring for the same person. This could lead to family tensions. Another young carer stated that an issue was caring for someone who does not get a specific disability benefit. Additional barriers included seeking permission from the person being cared for, or their appointee, for the application and the difficulty when families do not recognise a young person as a young carer. Young people also queried why the grant is not available for under 16s.

A young carer worker also noted that as services withdrew, young carer services were becoming a substitute for social services. There was an issue raised about a 16-year-old young carer who was suicidal and was refused a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) referral due to their age, but adult mental health services also would not work with them. This highlights the important role young carer services play in providing advocacy for young carers.



Young carers also expressed their support for an online mental health service for young people. They would like to talk to trained professionals and perhaps someone who has had experience being an unpaid carer. Young carers would like this service to be anonymous and confidential. Others also felt there should be options to keep this open so that in a crisis young carers would know that staff could reach out to them.

Young carers also fed into the topics they would like to see in an online mental health service. These included school and exam anxiety and dealing with difficult behaviour of the person being cared for.

“ I’m not sure about peer support. I think I would be worried me telling them about my feelings would cause them to become stressed. I think that is when you need a professional who has been trained. ”

Young carer

Despite the majority being in favour of online support, the group raised the issue of some young carers struggling with face-to-face contact due to an over reliance on online platforms. Additional support for young carers returning to more traditional ways of accessing support is also needed.

MEDIA AMBASSADORS

A group of young carers created a short film in 2021 about the issues young carers are experiencing. Filming this remotely, the group conducted peer led interviews with young carers across Scotland. Their film focuses on the themes of our Young Carer Voice event, including education, respite and loneliness. We encourage everyone to hear directly from young carers by watching the film at www.youtube.com/watch?v=KMqjBclitJM.

“ We would really like the film to reach a wide range of individuals, such as health professionals, educational institutions, youth groups, decision makers and young carers themselves. We would really like the film to educate them on the lives of young carers and help them better understand what support is needed to help young carers reach their full potential. If this works, we would hope to see them taking action and implementing positive changes to be seen in present and future young carers’ lives. ”

Megan Martin, Media Ambassador

KEY PRIORITY AREAS

Having listened to the views of young carers at this event, Carers Trust Scotland have identified six priority areas:

- Young carer services must be supported and adequately funded to support young carers and continue delivering crucial support. This includes breaking down barriers young carers face in getting a break, informing young carers of their rights and supporting these rights to be upheld, liaising with schools to ensure support is maintained, and providing mental health support when formal services are at maximum capacity.
- Young carers must feel comfortable in making their schools aware of their caring role. It is vital that all school staff have the appropriate knowledge and skills to support young carers in schools.
- Rural young carers face specific challenges that must be addressed. Transport and Wi-Fi issues impact young carers having a break or accessing their young carer services. Young Scot Young Carers Package should continue digital benefits but also continue to explore discounts with local, independent businesses.
- Greater financial support is needed for young carers. The Young Carer Grant should be made available to young carers caring for the same person, to ensure all young people are receiving this financial support. Greater awareness of the flexibility of the **Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA)** is needed to ensure young carers are aware of their individual Learner's Agreement and the consideration that is given to absences of young carers.
- Carer Awareness training is needed for all school staff, and staff involved in health and social care services.
- An online mental health service is welcomed by young carers and should include opportunities to speak with trained professionals. It is important that all mental health resources for young people are shared with young carers and young carer services. Greater links will raise awareness and ensure that such resources are accessed by young carers.

WHAT YOU CAN DO IN YOUR ROLE

Following our Young Carer Voice: Consultation Event, we invite all decision makers to:

- Act on priority areas identified at the Young Carer Voice: Consultation Event.
- Identify the actions and work with young carers to find solutions, involving young people in early consultation phases whenever possible.
- Communicate and be transparent about progress.
- Reflect on your own personal goal or pledge in your role to help all young carers feel supported.

ABOUT CARERS TRUST SCOTLAND

Carers Trust Scotland is part of Carers Trust, a major charity for, with and about carers. We work to improve support, services and recognition for anyone living with the challenges of caring, unpaid, for a family member or friend who is ill, frail, disabled or has mental health or addiction problems.

With locally based Network Partners we are able to support unpaid carers in the community with information, advice, emotional support, hands on practical help and access to much needed breaks. We offer specialist services for unpaid carers of people of all ages and conditions and a range of individually tailored support and group activities.

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