

From caring to support – we still need to close the gap for young carers

Key findings

As part of efforts to increase the recognition and rights of young carers within the Health and Care Bill, a Caring Together snapshot survey of 59 young carers highlighted the continued need for earlier identification and improved consistency in relation to assessments for young carers.

Amongst this group, they had, on average, started caring at the age of seven. It took on average three years for them to be linked into support, with some young people going more than 10 years before being identified.

Despite young carers having had a statutory right to a young carer's needs assessment since 2015, only 54% of young carers believed they had received one. This highlights the need for greater scrutiny of whether local authorities are complying with their statutory duties towards young carers under the Children Act 1989 and Care Act 2014.

The findings of a snapshot poll of young carers

Ahead of a meeting between young carers and peers to raise awareness of the needs of young carers, Caring Together arranged a snapshot survey to gain additional insights into the experiences of young carers.

The poll asked young carers:

1. How old were they when they started caring (became a young carer)?
2. How old were they when they were linked into young carers support (e.g. young carers assessment, or young carers group/organisation)?
3. Who first talked to them/their family about young carers?
4. Have they had a young carers' assessment?
5. What difference has being linked into young carers support made?

The survey was distributed via local and national young carers organisations including Caring Together, Barnardo's, Carers Trust and members of Young Carers National Voice¹. It was shared on various social media platforms.

Gap between the start of caring and support

The average age when the young carers first took on caring responsibilities was seven. Some respondents were unable to put a figure on when they started caring because they felt they were '*born into the role*'.

There were young people who began caring during every education stage, from infant school up to college; this highlights the need for awareness-raising not just in secondary schools, but primary and post-16 provision also.

¹ This is a network of around 20 young carer organisations across England which run young carer involvement projects

On average, the young carers were 10 years old when they were linked into support, with a gap of three years between taking on caring responsibilities and being identified. These findings are similar to previous studies to examine the gap the start of caring and identification,² Shockingly, there were young carers who had been caring for more than 10 years before being identified.

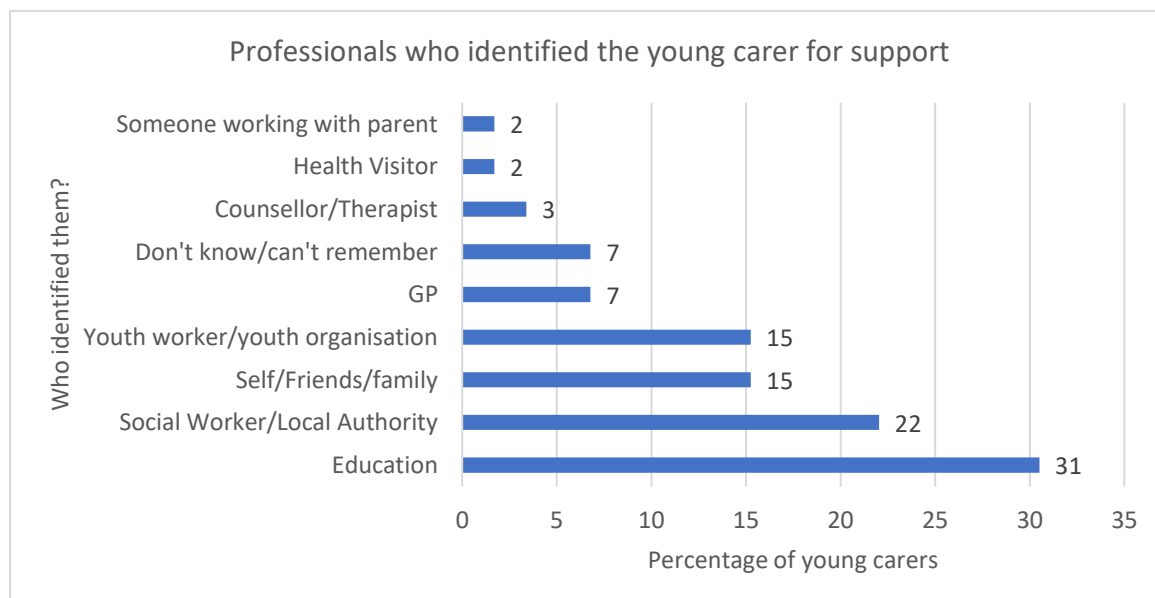
Who identified them as young carers?

The poll provided young carers with a free text box to list who had identified them or linked them into support.

Given the amount of focus on increasing awareness amongst school staff, with initiatives such as the Young Carers in Schools Programme³ and other local variants⁴, it is not surprising that education staff were the top identifiers, but the gap between start of caring to identification shows there are still significant opportunities for earlier identification within schools.

More than one in five young carers were identified by a social worker; whilst some of these may have been social workers working with the person the young carer is caring for, there is also the potential risk that a number of these young carers will have only been identified as a result of safeguarding concerns.

The NHS England Health Champions programme has aimed to raise awareness of young carers with GPs,⁵ so it is positive to see some young carers identified through primary care. However, there is an urgent need to improve identification within hospitals, and mental health services.



² Which found that on average young carers were caring for four years before they were identified for support 'Hidden Lives, Unidentified Young Carers in the UK', Barnardo's, 2006

³ <https://youngcarersinschools.com/>

⁴ Like Caring Together's Carer Friendly Tick Award -

<https://www.caringtogether.org/professionals/carers-friendly-tick-award>

⁵ <https://www.england.nhs.uk/blog/today-on-young-carers-awareness-day-how-can-you-help-a-young-carer-in-just-5-minutes/>

Assessment and support

We are approaching seven years since the legal rights for young carers and young adult carers to young carer's needs assessments and transitions assessments came into force. Previous studies have highlighted concerns around the implementation of transitions assessments for young adult carers⁶, but this poll focused specifically on young carer's assessments.

Only 32 respondents (54%) reported having received a young carer's assessment. Whilst 12% said they hadn't had an assessment, more than a third did not know if they had received one or not. This suggests more still needs to be done to ensure that not only are assessments consistently happening, but that they are involving young carers and that the young person gets a copy of it so that they know the outcome.⁷

Young carers were also asked what difference being linked into young carers support had made for them. All but two of the respondents provided positive responses. One young adult carer highlighted the potential variance between the support for young carers prior to turning 18, and that available after they become an 'adult carer': *"Until I was 18 made a huge difference. After 18 I felt a little forgotten about."* Common themes that emerged were:

- Being able to talk to someone
- Feeling better supported, improved mental wellbeing and confidence
- Feeling like they were not alone
- Having a break from their caring role
- Learning new skills
- Providing opportunities.

No young carers reported that being linked into support had led to improved support for the person they care for, or reduced the amount of care they were needing to provide. Given that the aim is to prevent or reduce *'inappropriate or excessive'* levels of caring⁸, the role that young carers' organisations have to play in helping achieve this (as opposed to mitigating the impact of it) is an area that is worthy of further exploration.

Limitations of this survey

This survey was designed to provide a snapshot illustration of the experiences of young carers in relation to identification and support, and so did not capture other information about the young carers which could add additional context to the findings. It was only open for a week ahead of the meeting with peers, and so the sample size is small. The methodology also did not allow further exploration of responses (e.g. what did a young carer mean when they said they felt *'more supported'*?)

⁶ 'Improving Assessment and Support for Young Carers' Transition into Adulthood', The Children's Society, 2018

⁷ Both of which are requirements under s17ZA (9) and (10) of the Children Act 1989.

⁸ Care Act care and support statutory guidance, section 2.50 Department of Health & Social Care

However, it does provide insight into a range of experiences of young carers from across the country. It also raises concerns that young carers are still providing care and support for a number of years without proper support.

Recommendations

1. The Health and Care Bill should be amended so as to ensure that hospitals have a duty to identify any potential young carers before a patient is discharged.
 - Given that no young carers were identified through hospitals, there are still clear opportunities to ensure potential young carers are identified within hospitals at the earliest opportunity.
2. The commitment in the adult social care reform white paper to '*amend the school census, at the earliest opportunity, to include young carers*'⁹ is one which is highly welcomed but needs to be implemented as a priority.
 - This change would result in annual data around the educational performance of young carers and would encourage all schools to ensure they have systems for monitoring who their young carers within their school are.
3. Ofsted should ensure:
 - that local authority children's services are complying with their statutory duties towards young carers,
 - that school and college staff, and particularly designated safeguarding leads are '*alert to the needs of*' young carers.¹⁰
4. CQC also need to play a key role in ensuring that health and care services have systems in place to pro-actively identify potential young carers.

References

Care Act care and support statutory guidance, Department of Health & Social Care

Hidden Lives, Unidentified Young Carers in the UK, Barnardo's, 2006

Improving Assessment and Support for Young Carers' Transition into Adulthood, The Children's Society, 2018

Keeping children safe in education 2021 – Statutory guidance for schools and colleges, Department of Education, 2021

People at the Heart of Care: Adult Social Care Reform White paper, Department of Health & Social Care, 2021

⁹ 'People at the Heart of Care: Adult Social Care Reform White paper', p61 Department of Health & Social Care, 2021

¹⁰ 'Keeping children safe in education 2021 – Statutory guidance for schools and colleges', p10 and p147, Department of Education, 2021.