

Football and Young Carers

Discussion paper by John Bangs – OBE
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The Young Carers Alliance is a growing network of organisations and individuals committed to changing this and improving the support available for young carers, young adult carers and their families. We bring together representatives from research, policy and practice, all of whom are committed to bringing about improved outcomes for all young carers.

The Young Carers Alliance provides opportunities for collaboration, sharing best practice and a strong, collective voice for young carers.

This paper was prepared by John Bangs OBE, Independent Carers Policy Adviser and Community Liaison Officer, Kingstonian FC. It is hoped to collect further information on both these and other initiatives. If you have details of other similar activities or would like to discuss initiating one, please do let John know and contact him at jbangsuk@icloud.com or @JohnBangs15 (Twitter)

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Who is a Young Carer?

A young carer is someone aged under 18 who cares for a family member or friend who, due to illness, disability, a mental health problem or an addiction, cannot cope without their support. Although young carers have rights at law, including a right to a young carer needs assessment, in reality their needs are all too often overlooked. This paper highlights how partnerships between football clubs and young carers services can help address this.

Some of the projects described in this note also include targeting support at young adult carers (carers aged 18 to 24).

Research studies undertaken for the BBC estimate that there are between 700,000 to 800,000 young carers in the UK. These figures suggest that there are typically 2 or 3 young carers in any classroom. In Britain there are around 11 million children. Of these, 3 million live in households where there are chronic physical or mental health problems, illness, or disability. While not all of these children are young carers, the figures do point to there possibly being even higher numbers of young carers in our schools.

There are also more than 10 million adult carers in Britain. There are young carers in almost any youth teams set up or in any playground where a ball is being kicked.

There will also be many other young carers who would love a chance to play or watch football; but cannot do so without support because of their caring responsibilities.

What might a young carer do?

- Practical tasks, like doing more cooking, housework and shopping than might normally be expected from someone their age
- Personal care, such as helping someone out of bed or in getting dressed
- Emotional support, including talking to someone who is distressed.
- Helping manage the family budget.
- Helping to give medicine and collecting prescriptions
- Helping someone to communicate.
- Looking after brothers and sisters.

Young carers are likely to have lower educational attainment than their peers and this has been made even worse during the pandemic, when many have missed out on more school than before. Caring can also be an isolating experience but having the right support in place can give young carers a far better chance of succeeding in life.

Football and Community

In many places football clubs or are a key part of the local community. Most football clubs seek to engage with their local communities and often offer support to local groups. There are a growing number of examples of this now including support for young carers and sometimes adult carers. Most commonly, this provided is through a partnership with a local young carers service and sometimes also with the involvement of the local council or health service.

For professional clubs, this work is normally undertaken through a charitable trust or foundation attached to the football club. As many football clubs are key parts of their community, they are therefore potentially key partners in identifying and supporting young carers.

There has been considerable success in awareness raising through football about a wide range of social issues, including campaigns around mental health and fighting both racism and homophobia. There appears to be an important opportunity to do something similar for young carers and carers more generally.

This paper collates some information about where support for young carers is being offered through football. This has been obtained through an initial trawl for information via the Young Carers Alliance and through web searches.

So far information has been found on 24 Clubs, including examples from each of the top seven tiers of English football. However, it is now hoped that others will add to this with details of work in their area; either current activities or plans for the future.



Young Carer Mascots at Woking FC

Carers and Sport

It is also worth noting that there is a national sports work-stream for “Social Prescribing” and that this includes a specific focus on football. Several young carers services, from areas other than those referred to, mention football as an activity provided by their service. It seems important to check that social prescribing services are aware of and refer to services for carers and young carers, including football initiatives.

<https://socialprescribingacademy.org.uk/social-prescribing-brings-football-home-to-communities/>

Sports England and Carers UK

In a project funded by Sport England with money from the National Lottery, Carers UK has been looking at ways to support adult carers in England to take part in more physical activity as a way to reduce loneliness and improve their wellbeing. This has included the development of a carers active hub. This is a new resource to help carers to increase activity levels and improve their health and wellbeing.

<https://www.carersuk.org/news-and-campaigns/campaigns/carers-and-physical-activity>

Similar issues, of course, apply to carers of all ages and caring responsibilities often limit the ability of young carers to participate in sports or make enough time for physical activity. The Sports England Website says *‘As part of our current strategy, Uniting the Movement, we’re continuing to focus on developing positive experiences of sport and physical activity for children and young people, with a focus on families in lower socio-economic groups as several research studies show that children from these families are less active than those from higher socio-economic groups.’*

There is, unfortunately though, currently no apparent recognition of young carers; even though there are many young carers in the cohort described.

From discussions with Carers UK, there appears to be considerable scope for collaboration to help ensure that the needs of carers of all ages, including young carers are addressed. Approaches to football and other sports clubs may be most effectively made on an all age, whole family basis rather than through separate approaches about adult carers and young carers.

Research

Young carers often struggle to find time to exercise or participate in organised sporting activities. Research provides plenty of evidence that enabling children and young people to be physically active promotes their wellbeing and likely future life chances. There is though very little published that specifically acknowledges the role of young carers or the additional barriers to being active that they experience. However, there was an article from the Open University 'Young carers, COVID-19 and physical activity' (July 2020) which might yet help initiate a national conversation and an important new area for research.

<https://www.open.edu/openlearn/health-sports-psychology/social-care-social-work/young-carers-covid-19-and-physical-activity>

Opportunities for Development

The opportunities for further development are quite simply massive. We can already see a range of highly effective, low cost, high impact initiatives that promote young carers' emotional and physical wellbeing. These initiatives are also valuable in helping raise awareness in the community. Many of the activities being delivered enhance young carers fitness and promote their social inclusion. It seems clear that there is considerable benefit to young carers being supported in this way. All of this could be built on by encouraging the Football Association and various football leagues to take up issues around caring in a similar way to mental health. There also seems to be an opportunity to increase identification and support for young carers by encouraging other clubs to emulate some of the most active initiatives described here.

It seems important to ensure that football clubs' safeguarding officers and those overseeing youth team structures are aware of young carers issues. They should be given some pointers about how to identify young carers and how to sign post them to sources of help.

During discussions with some of those providing information, a number of suggestions have also been made about building on existing work and encouraging others to take similar initiatives. These include that:

- The Young Carers Alliance should develop a young carers and football work stream - to be launched through an online conference/workshop
- We should encourage football organisations to become members
- Youth football needs to be young carer aware and the Young Carers Alliance should consider how to support footballing organisations to become young carer friendly
- We need to see young carers issues become embedded in safeguarding training
- The Football Association should be asked to take up young carers issues and encourage action by clubs; both nationally and at county FA level
- Academics within the network could encourage researchers interested in young people and sports to be better aware of the needs of young carers and young adult carers

- Ensure that organisations such as Sports England and the Football Foundation have young carers and young adult carers on their agenda
- Groups of clubs from a particular region or league might consider taking action together, potentially including joint funding bids and shared activities
- The Alliance should coordinate football activities on and around Young Carers Action Day (potentially on the day and also the preceding and following Saturdays)
- Liaise with Carers UK's Carers Active project and others about how football and sports in general can help promote the wellbeing of carers of all ages, including young carers
- Work with NHS England and the NHS locally to ensure that social prescribing services are aware of, and refer to services for carers and young carers, including footballing initiatives.

Initiatives by Football Clubs

These notes provide a brief description of some initiatives in clubs throughout the football "pyramid" in England. This is drawn from a mixture of information supplied by members of the Young Carers Alliance and web searches made via Google. There are doubtless examples of similar work in all four nations within the UK and also in other sports but we will leave to others to capture details of these.

It is striking that the initiatives have been developed without any apparent coordination; with similar ideas evolving quite separately in various parts of the country.

The activities described might be seen as falling into two categories:

- Young carer specific initiatives
- Targeting activities provided for young people as a whole at young carers

From what has learned so far, both approaches seem very effective. There does however, appear to be scope for research to examine the efficacy of the outcomes being achieved.

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In Manchester



At Manchester City's Young Carers Christmas Party

The local authority in Manchester coordinate the offer for young carers through Manchester's Young Carer partnership which includes local football clubs. Football giants Manchester City are key members of the partnership, making a fantastic contribution to support for Manchester's young carers through the inclusion of young carers in 'City in the Community' youth community activities. In a number of locations, school champions also have the Manchester United Foundation in their schools and their young carers access the support through this. Manchester Young Carers also work with Sale Sharks Rugby Union club.

Their work with City in the Community has been particularly successful and has recently helped raise over £30k, with a large amount of playing strips being provided as well as free match tickets and coaching sessions. City in the Community are also members of the Manchester Young Carers Partnership.

Manchester Young Carers commented on what City in the Community have done for young carers .

- Ensured all the staff in their Kicks in the Community Programme are young carer aware.
- Take a flexible approach; and so work with young carers in getting to sessions or if they need a listening ear during sessions etc.
- Hosted a young carers Christmas party and all the children got the latest strip, photos with trophies and sports activities.
- On numerous occasions over the past 3 years have donated books, easter eggs, massive amounts of kit from the youth teams (distributed via school champions).
- Raised a high amount of funding to secure technology for young carers who were digitally isolated during lockdown – all young carers who the young carers service knew of needed tech, got the tech. Laptops, phones, data etc.
- Offer match day tickets for young carers when they are available.
- During lockdown supported young carers online sessions – joint facilitation and contributions via the Proud Trust.

- Donate and run an appeal each Christmas donating toys, toiletries, clothing
- Provided free tickets to young carers for the City Blue Fun Run.
- Always on hand to support, happy to help when approached i.e to help secure transport, or provide videos, attend, and support our events.

Brentford FC and Brentford Community Trust

Brentford Community Trust have an ongoing young carers project with a dedicated support worker and provide time out for hundreds of young carers a year. The Community Trust started their work with young carers back in 2011 and appear to have been one of the first footballing organisations to offer support to them. Their young carers work was initially focussed on the London Borough of Ealing but in 2019 it was expanded to include the neighbouring Hounslow Borough.

The Community Trust employs their own part time young carers worker and organise youth clubs for young carers, activities to provide time out from caring and help with employability issues. During the “lockdowns” the youth clubs went online and there were weekly call ins, with many activity packs being distributed. Computer equipment was obtained for young carers who needed this for undertaking their school work during the lockdowns.

<https://www.brentfordfc.com/news/2020/may/young-carer-podcast/>



Young Carers visiting Brentford FC

Southampton FC

The Honeypot Children's Charity have tweeted about a Memory Making Day for young carers held at Southampton's St. Mary's Stadium in April 2022. The photo below is of young carers at the event.



AFC Bournemouth Community Trust.

This is a recent post lockdowns initiative where young carers charity MYTIME are the Trust's charity partner for the second year running and they are working closely on opportunities to build on work done to date - helped by AFC Bournemouth's promotion to the Premier League. As part of the current programme, on the first Friday of every month they take 28 young carers from 4 partner schools to the Vitality Stadium. Six of the young carers are from secondary-aged and the rest are primary school pupils. The initiative also includes some work based around healthy living but they also do team games as well and promote young carers' social inclusion. This program has been running since November 2021 and initially continues to July 2022. Through this partnership MYTIME have also been able to provide young carers and their families with tickets to home games.



Young Carers at AFC Bournemouth

Blackpool FC

Blackpool FC Community Trust have an established relationship with Blackpool Carers Centre and offer support for both adult and young carers. For young carers, they have provided stadium tours and enabled groups of young carers to attend matches. They have endeavoured to recognise young carers in other programmes such as Kick Start and have been able to identify some carers and make referrals for support to the Blackpool Carers Centre.

<https://www.bfcct.co.uk/supporting-young-carers-action-day/>

Bristol City

The Bristol and South Gloucestershire Young Carers support service have reported online having been able to take a group of young carers for a stadium tour and also receiving free tickets from Bristol City.



Young Carers visiting Bristol City

@CaringTogether with Peterborough United, Cambridge United and Norwich City

The carers charity Caring Together have undertaken work with Peterborough United, Cambridge United and Norwich City - mostly through the club's respective community foundation arms.

Norwich City have provided tickets for games and twice had a young carer as a mascot. "Norwich partnered with Aviva around loneliness and so we were able to provide tickets for carers" – as part of "Aviva's Friendliest Friendlies" <https://vimeo.com/351485897>

Norwich have also organised a stadium tour for young carers and their families. <https://www.norfolkscb.org/opportunity-for-young-carers-only-from-norwich-city-community-sports-foundation/>



Carers visiting Norwich FC

Peterborough United have achieved a local carer awareness accreditation which includes carers of all ages. For young carers, free tickets have been provided and the club will shortly be offering coaching sessions for young carers.

<https://theposhfoundation.com/2022/03/14/young-carers-enjoy-a-day-out-at-the-posh/>

"Freddie is 12 and helps care for his mum who has mobility issues because of various health issues. He is a really keen goalkeeper and plays as goalkeeper for his local team, but until yesterday has never had the opportunity to go and watch a match. Freddie asked me to say "Thank you for the opportunity - I had a great time and really enjoyed it. I really liked the atmosphere – it was louder than I thought it would be. My favourite player was definitely Jones."



Freddie age 12 at "the Posh"

Cambridge United have done some work to support adult carers benefit adult carers, through their disability sport programme which features 12 different targeted sessions. They have also run a monthly "United by Memories" sports cafe for people living with dementia and their carers. They have also agreed to shortly extend this to include young carers.

<https://www.cuctrust.co.uk/wellbeing/dementia-sports-cafe/#:~:text=On%20the%20third%20Wednesday%20of,and%20chatting%20over%20tea%2Fcoffee.>

Burnley FC in the Community

Burnley FC have supported Young Carers Action Day through their social media channels and they have also run specific programmes for young carers.

In 2018, they received funding to deliver a healthy cooking programme to young carers living in Burnley and the surrounding area. They have also arranged outings for young carers as well as a tour of the training centre where the young carers got to have lunch with the club's manager.

<https://www.burnleyfccommunity.org/young-carers-enjoy-cooking-course/>

Wycombe Wanderers

The Bucks Free Press reported that as early as March 2006, a squad of 25 youngsters from Bucks Carers were given a tour of the ground, visited the dressing room area and met some of the players before “the Chairboys” took on Torquay United. This is the first recorded example discovered so far of a football club supporting young carers.

Wycombe Wanders Sports and Education Trust currently have information on their website about support available from Bucks Young Carers.

<https://www.wwset.co.uk/uncategorized/young-carers/>



Young Carers at Wycombe Wanderers

AFC Wimbledon

In 2019, AFC Wimbledon linked with Carers Support Merton to secure a young carer a place on the club's summer programme. On the back of this the club's foundation helped the young carer to get a place on his local Sunday league youth team, paying his fees and also buying him a pair of football boots. Since then, the club have continued to sponsor the young carer so he can continue to be part of his team.

<https://afcwimbledonfoundation.com/news/how-we-help-young-carers-follow-their-football-dreams>

Barrow AFC

Furness Carers have developed an ongoing relationship with Barrow AFC had support from them; mainly in the form of free tickets and gifts for young carers. This work has included jointly promoting World Mental Health Day and a Young Carers VIP day is planned for summer 2022.

<https://www.barrowafc.com/news/2021/october/111021-barrow-afc-offer-tickets-to-furness-carers-as-part-of-mind-and-eft-do-one-thing-campaign-for-world-mental-health-awareness-day-2021/>

Furness Carers have also developed a good relationship with Barrow Raiders RLFC through their Advantage Community.

Mansfield Town

Mansfield Town in the Community have been awarded a carer friendly organisation accreditation by Nottinghamshire Carers Association.

<https://mansfieldtownfc.net/mansfield-town-football-in-the-community-recognised-with-award/>

Nottinghamshire Carers Association



Collaboration via Surrey FA and others

Aldershot Town and Woking FC from the National League have both run successful young carers days with 11 young carer mascots. This was organised through work supported by Guildford Diocese and Action for Carers Surrey.

As a spin off, in Surrey there has been wider work around carers and sport with Surrey FA and Surrey County Cricket Club.

<https://news.surreycc.gov.uk/2019/12/17/helping-surreys-carers-get-into-sport/>

Wrexham AFC

AFC Wrexham are actively engaged with the young carers agenda and this has included undertaking fundraising and providing free tickets for young carers. The club have also hosted the launch and supported the promotion of a new North Wales young carers ID Card. The club have also tweeted in support of Young Carers Action Day in 2021 and 2022.

<https://www.wrexhamafc.co.uk/news/2022/march/community--young-carers-action-day-2022/>

Chesterfield FC

Chesterfield FC worked with the CO-OP and Derbyshire Carers Association to arrange a young carers day that was held at the club. This included a stadium tour and other fun activities. Free tickets for young carers are also provided.

<https://derbyshirecarers.co.uk/blog/young-carers-at-chesterfield-fc>



Young Carers visit Chesterfield FC

Be Free Young Carers with Oxford City and Oxford United

The Oxford based charity Be Free Young Carers are working with two football clubs. Work with Oxford City has been running for a while and has included providing free tickets for groups of young carers and their families. There have also been matches dedicated to young carers, where fundraising has been undertaken to help support them.

More recently, links have been made with Oxford United who are organising a pizza making evening for young carers who will also have the chance there to meet the players.

Kingstonian FC

“As you know, I am a single parent family and don't get out together much, so we appreciated the effort the Kingstonian team went to arrange this for young carers and their families and that the hot food was included. We really felt part of the community.”

Kingstonian FC are a non-league club playing in the Isthmian Premier Division and have had a community partnership with Kingston Carers Network for five years. The partnership focuses primarily on support for young carers but also includes adult carers who are able to have concessionary tickets and also some free admissions. Activities include having Young Carers Days at first team matches that have 11 young carer mascots coming on with the team. There are also football fun sessions in school holidays.

<https://www.kingstonian.com/kcn>

Here is also a news item from K's TV

<https://www.kingstonian.com/news/ktv-kingstonian-in-the-community--kingston-carers->



Young Carer Mascots at Kingstonian FC Photos by Simon Roe

Margate FC

Also from the Isthmian League, Margate FC have developed a partnership with the local young carers service run by the charity Imago and launched this in 2019. Margate's charitable foundation obtained 2-year funding that enabled them to have young carers and their families as guests at every home Saturday match. This period was extended due to the national lockdowns.

The young carers attending are able to join in with youth team players practice in the morning, join the club for lunch, be a mascot and be featured in the match day programme

and can choose some or all of these options. Margate FC are currently sourcing funding to enable the continuation of this work.

<https://www.margate-fc.co.uk/news/26-aug-2019/Young-Carers-Programme-Launches>



Thatcham Tornadoes FC

This is an example of a real grassroots club helping support young carers through fundraising and awareness raising. Their club provide local youth football for boys and girls as well as Inclusive/disabled football and walking football.

<https://www.newburytoday.co.uk/news/football-club-scores-for-young-carers-9186833/>



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