Young Carers

“It’s hard to care for someone when I can’t even care for myself” Young carer.

Background
This paper draws on available evidence to highlight issues to be considered within the formulation of the forthcoming National Strategy for Unpaid Carers in Scotland. It is one of a series of papers prepared by the National Carer Organisations. This paper takes a holistic focus on young carers.

Evidence of the impact of young caring
No definitive data currently exists on the number of young carers in Scotland. Scottish Government recognises that there are at least 29,000 young carers in Scotland. Further extensive survey work by young carer services and Carers Trust shows that as many as one in ten children in a class in Scotland has a caring role. However, an England based study\(^1\) completed by the University of Nottingham suggests that as many as one in five secondary schoolchildren may be a young carer. It would be reasonable to assume that as more people become unpaid carers during the pandemic\(^2\), the number of children and young people with caring responsibilities will have also increased.

There remains to be a scarcity of data and research about young caring in Scotland and therefore the overall picture of the impact for children and young people with caring responsibilities is incomplete. Some research\(^3\) illuminates some of the impact the pandemic has had on young carers in Scotland. This report highlights the steep decline in mental health and wellbeing for young carers, increased feelings isolation, heightened concerns for their future, lack of opportunities to have a break and the negative impact on education.

“It’s too much pressure and responsibility for something I didn't choose” Young carer.

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3 Carers Trust, 2020, 2020 Vision: Hear Me, See Me, Support Me and don’t Forget Me: https://carers.org/resources/all-resources/109-2020-vision-hear-me-see-me-support-me-and-donat-forget-me
Further research\(^4\) highlights the worsening economic circumstance for young carers in Scotland during the pandemic, including that half of young carers that participated were forced to turn to food banks due to rising pandemic poverty.

“Sometimes you look in the cupboard and you’re like ‘oh, there’s not much food in today’. But I’d feel bad asking my mum ‘cause she’s got other worries, and she tries her best, it’s just we go through food so quick. So, you’re just like ‘okay, well, I’ll just make do with this for now, and try to save some stuff for lunches tomorrow’” Young Carer.

Even before the pandemic, young carers were all too often spending significant amounts of time caring in addition to the time they needed to spend on education, work and time for themselves. Financial worries are also not new for a lot of young carers and some studies\(^5\) indicate that half of all people in poverty are disabled or unpaid carers. Coronavirus has significantly increased these pressures.

However, we also know the great benefits young carers experience when they do receive the right support they need at the right time.

“I don’t know how I would have got through the last two years without carers centre help as not seen teachers or friends that much but they [carers centre] always keep in touch” Young Carer.

However, a recent Freedom of Information Request\(^6\) indicates a significant decline in Young Carer Statements being completed over the pandemic and suggests that only a small proportion of young carers in Scotland actually have a Young Carer Statement. Under the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016, all young carers are entitled to a Young Carer Statement and “If a responsible authority identifies a person as a young carer, the responsible authority must offer the person a young carer statement”. However, many young carers remain unidentified and hidden.

“I’m more stressed and anxious and I just feel like I need a break” Young Carer.

Prior to the introduction of the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016, Scottish Government introduced the Getting It Right for Young Carers: The Young Carers Strategy for Scotland: 2010-2015. This cross cutting innovative strategy helped create a vision for young carers support in all aspects of their lives in Scotland. However, an equivalent strategy or national action plan


has not been developed or revisited since to provide a strategic future vision for improving support for young carers in Scotland.

**Recommendations**

To help young carers in recovery from the pandemic, existing and future recovery plans must articulate the impacts of the pandemic on young carers and have measurable actions to address these. New support provisions should be developed to ensure that these children and young people do not miss out on the opportunities afforded to their peers and do not face additional inequality because of their caring role.

Young carers are children and young people first and foremost. An integrated and cross-cutting approach is required to ensure young carers are best supported. Policy directly impacting young carers lives is complex, including - but not limited to - carers policy, health policy, education policy and children and young people policy. A joined-up approach is paramount to ensure the best outcomes for young carers.

As policy progresses that will impact unpaid carers of all ages, such as a proposed National Care Service or introducing a ‘right to a break’ for unpaid carers, it is vital that young carers do not become forgotten or an afterthought. Young carers should receive the best possible support that meets their needs and allows them to pursue their own aspirations in life. Equally, young carers should be represented in wider policy impacting all children and young people, such as the proposed UNCRC incorporation into domestic law in Scotland. Young carers have a right to be involved in decisions that will impact on their lives and should be at the forefront of policy development that will directly affect them.

**Phase 1 (COVID Recovery)**

- Increase funding for young carer services to ensure there are age-appropriate young carer services readily available regardless of where a young carer lives in Scotland, which are designed to meet their needs and desired outcomes.
- Develop specific guidance around using Pupil Equity Funding to include young carers to help close the poverty related gap that young carers may experience. This action should also support achieving attainment goals.
- Seek to expand free access to “Out of School Care” services and activities for young carers. Young carers providing care for a person in receipt of/or eligible for a disability benefit should be exempt from being charged for “Out of School Care” services and activities that they may access. As well as funding support to remove additional financial barriers for young carers to take part in activities and services; for example, sports/club kits, musical instrument hire, equipment or materials required etc.
- Introduce free access to local authority leisure centres/services for young carers to help break down financial barriers, improve overall health and wellbeing and help to tackle social isolation of young carers.
- Amend Young Carer Grant regulations to allow multiple young people to be eligible for the grant when providing care for the same cared-for person.
Phase 2 (Carers Strategy)

- Invest in young carer specific research to better understand prevalence of young carers, their experiences, the impact of caring and to improve support.
- Develop a national cross cutting action plan/strategy for children and young people with caring responsibilities, with clear actions that can be delivered at pace. This may form part of a forthcoming National Strategy for Unpaid Carers in Scotland or be a national action plan that sits alongside this.
- Introduce a national Young Carers ID card for improved identification and recognition of young carers, similar to what has already been introduced in Wales by Welsh Government.
- Introduce compulsory Young Carers’ Awareness training for all teachers and education professionals as part of Professional Learning.
- Introduce compulsory Young Carers’ Awareness training for all practitioners who undertake a professional responsibility role for children, such as a named person, lead professional or social worker who may contribute to an assessment of a child’s wellbeing or involved with Young Carer Statements.
- Require all colleges and universities receiving public funding to become Going Further/Going Higher for Student Carer Recognition Award institutions and develop Student carer support policies to ensure they are following good practice models that holistically support student carers to succeed to the best of their ability.
- Develop a specific employability programme to support older young carers who may experience additional disadvantage in accessing employment and who are at higher risk of not being in education, employment or training (NEET).

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