



# Young Carers Festival Report 2022



**Luella Goold, Service Manager, The Children's Society**

# The Young Carers Festival

Every year, in partnership The Childrens Society and YMCA Fairthorne Manor, hold a festival for young carers aged between 11 and 17 who attend with their young carer's project or school group. The festival is part of the process of recognising, informing and consulting with young carers in order to better meet the needs of them and their families.

Since the first Young Carers Festival in 2000 when 600 young carers arrived at YMCA Fairthorne Manor in Hampshire, the festival has grown, with up to 1300 young carers now attending every year.

The festival provides the young people with the opportunity to have fun, relax, socialise and have their voices heard about issues that affect them. The outcomes from participatory consultations inform future work and are communicated to the government.

Over the years, we have consulted with young people on a range of issues including education, health, social care and whole family support.

The festival is broken down into zones with the consultations taking place in the Voice Zone. During consultations over the years, the young people requested areas for "chilling" and "relaxation" and this is covered in the Creative Zone and Chill out Zone with activities ranging from craft making to adult colouring as well as somewhere to just sit and relax with beanbags. Young Carers have the opportunity to try outdoor activities such as climbing, Jacob's ladder and water activities. There are also fairground rides, fireworks, a silent disco and much more.

We also have a "wish tree" which the young carers can hang their wishes on:

*"I wish that there would be no illness, and everyone would be happy"*

*"I wish I had more time with friends"*

Due to Covid-19, we were unfortunately unable to run the festival in 2020 and ran a smaller scale event in 2021. This year in 2022, we were pleased to be able to welcome over 800 young carers to the Young Carers Festival once again and also want to extend our thanks to NHS England who helped to fund the festival this year.

## Themes and Trends:

Each festival has a theme and in the Voice Zone this year, the focus was around well-being with the overall theme being 'Time to be me'. After the last two years with the pandemic, now more than ever young carers need to focus on their own well-being. Our aim was to create a space where they could be themselves and talk about well-being amongst other issues that affect them.



The young people decorated cupcakes, created tissue paper flowers, hand – painted rocks, added their comments to post – it notes, paper shapes, hung luggage tags on trees and had the opportunity for a quick selfie with friends in the photo booth. As well as this, there was plenty more activities and consultations for the young people to get involved with.

Each young person who entered the Voice Zone was given a 'Stamp card' and collected stamps throughout the different zones around the festival. They were then entered into a draw to win a prize for themselves

or their project as well as trying their luck in our lucky dip buckets.

## Young Carers' Rights

Great legislative steps have been taken to ensure young carers are not falling through the gaps and being given the support they needed. The key pieces of legislation – the Children and Families Act 2014 and the Care Act 2014 – led to better, more consolidated rights for young carers, young adult carers and their families, but local implementation is patchy and could be greatly improved. And most recently in July 2022 the Health and Care Act 2022 means rights for young carers have been strengthened pertaining to hospital discharge plans for the cared for person as well as engagement and consultation with Integrated care boards around services which affect them.



Legislation requires Local Authorities to proactively identify young carers and offer a young carers assessment to determine what support they need. However, some Local Authorities are currently not tracking assessments and central government are not monitoring delivery, making it challenging to determine whether compliance is being met.

We know that many young carers are having to reach out for support themselves and that many Local Authorities do not have strategies or plans in place to identify and assess potential young carers.

What we are seeing is a patchwork of support being delivered by Local Authorities with young carers facing varied level of assessment and support based not only on the-area they live, but

Children's Services capacity at the time of need. Without any consistent monitoring and guidance many Local Authorities could not meet their statutory duties.

Young carers themselves had the opportunity to tell us at the Young Carers Festival what is working well and what could be improved. Through the consultations in the Voice zone which are carried out in a fun and interactive way, we can gather their views and experiences to ensure that their rights are being upheld.

As well as The Children's Society, external organisations ran a range of consultation activities in the voice zone. This report outlines some of what was delivered, what was discovered and how this may be used to further support young carers in the future.

## Internal Consultations

### Well-being ripples

With the overall festival theme being 'Time to be me' it was important to capture how the young carers feel about their own well-being. Young carers had the opportunity to decorate a rock as well as answer several questions on paper 'ripples' creating a large pond. The main questions young people chose to answer were around what emotions they are feeling, what young carers need for positive well-being and what people need to know about young carers well-being.

### Key issues

We know from Carers Trust research<sup>1</sup> published in July 2020 that the pandemic has had a negative effect on the well-being of young carers with 40% of young carers and 59% of young adult carers saying their mental health is worse since Coronavirus.

From many of the comments received by young carers, these statistics correlate. Young carers mainly commented on how stressed they felt by their caring role. They felt overwhelmed and tired with little time for themselves.

*'The feeling I get most regularly is stress from being far from my mum because I want her to be safe'*

*'...I regularly feel overwhelmed and stressed.'*

Others mentioned about a lack of social life and missing out on time with friends.

*'Sometimes I feel a bit upset that I can't go out with my friends a lot like other kids because I have to look after my mum'*

On the flip side, some young carers talked about some emotions attached to their caring role with feelings of joy, happiness and pride where they felt they were caring for their family to benefit their family life not because that felt pressure to. These positive emotions were sparse though.

*'Some emotions that I feel regularly is joy, happiness...'*

Despite some of them feeling positive about their caring role, many talked about not feeling understood or listened to and wanted people to be aware that sometimes they are not ok and may need a bit more help and support.

*'People need to know that young carers wellbeing usually needs a lot of help since they care for the young person. Others need to know to be kind to young carers and help them as much as possible'*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://carers.org/what-we-do/our-survey-on-the-impact-of-coronavirus-on-young-carers-and-young-adult-carers->

*‘Other people need to know that young carers wellbeing could be bad sometimes and may need a little help.’*

Young carers could also identify what may help them and help others too when it comes to supporting their well-being. Many found that friendships, getting good sleep, having free time and a social life supported positive well-being.

*‘I think you need an active social life, you should have your own free time to relax and to exercise regularly and mentally’*



Throughout the voice zone young carers were given stamp cards to collect as they engaged with activities, as part of this they were asked what young carers need time for. Overwhelmingly, the responses included relax and chill, taking time for themselves.

*“Be themselves, as once they leave their situation they won’t know who they actually are besides a carer for a family member etc.”*

*“Relax and have a break. Chill with friends not involved with their caring role”*

*“To unwind, relax and actually be children“*

There was also some feedback around making sure they don’t miss out on opportunities and they enjoy themselves –

this is something that is often out of young carers control and something we need to ensure they are able to do.

*‘Enjoy themselves as life is short and unexpected if we are constantly providing and supporting family. We will miss out on educational and beneficial opportunities leading to stolen time. A life filled with regret.’*

## **Gender equality, and sexuality**

As part of this consultation, young people could also decorate a rock to add to the ripples and ‘pond’ This was completely free for young people to come up with their own designs and wasn’t a consultation activity to feedback on. However, there was a strong undercurrent theme of designs around gender equality, trans young people, and LGBTQ+ which is something that was also mentioned as part of feedback from project staff through other surveys as a consideration for the future. We need to ensure we are being inclusive in our practice and take this forward into future planning.



## Assumptions and impacts

Young Carers often face misunderstanding and lack of support due to lack of understanding and assumptions being made about them. We consulted with the young carers to find out what assumptions are being made about them and some of the impacts this has so we can try and unlock some of those barriers.

### Key Issues

The main assumptions that were portrayed through this consultation was around young carers not being able to live a full life and have time for anything else. Although this is sometimes the case some felt this was an assumption rather than checking in with individuals.

*‘That I don’t have time for my friends that I have special “priorities” ‘*

*‘That you have a hard life and you don’t have time to do anything’*

There were also assumptions around young carers being lazy as they may not complete homework, attend school or be late for school and this is due to their caring role rather than laziness. Whilst others believe that there is an assumption that young carers make up excuses.

*“That I am lazy because I don’t have time for homework!*

There was also concern some people don’t believe they are a young carer and make it up for attention and others that people don’t even know they are a young carer.

*“They assume that we do/say it for attention”*

*“People don’t always know/believe that I am a young carer”*

Some of the impact of these assumptions is having a negative impact on the young carers and we can see a correlation between some of the feelings here linking back to their well-being, feelings and emotions. Many young carers said how it can make them feel uncomfortable, overwhelmed and stressed and that again lack of understanding plays a part in this.

*“It can make you feel really isolated and unwelcome”*

*“Annoyed because they don’t understand how hard it can be”*

*“Makes me feel uncomfy – don’t speak”*

*“Being a young carer makes me feel overwhelmed a lot of the time”*

*“It is quite disappointing and they should be educated on what it is and its just sometimes irritating”*

Others commented on how these assumptions can make them upset and unheard.

*“Upset and unheard”*

### Encouraging words for other young carers:

As part of this consultation area, we wanted young carers to also feel encouraged by writing messages for one another and young carers in general. Many of these messages support the struggles young carers are facing and encourage them to stay strong and look after themselves first and foremost.

*“Being a young carer I’ve learnt not to keep it a secret as I’ve found people who are true and who are in the same situation and since starting I’ve made and been a lot happier (be proud)”*

*“You’re doing great, follow the road ahead and enjoy every step”*

*“Being a young carer may be hard and tiring but that’s why they put on fun activities to take your mind off it so remember to have fun”*

*“Prioritise yourself sometimes and never be afraid to ask for help from outside sources”*

*“You are not responsible for other people’s happiness. Looking after yourself is okay.”*



## External Consultations

### Young Carers Alliance

The Young Carers Alliance is a growing network of over 100 organisations and 200 individuals committed to improving the support available for young carers, young adult carers and their families.

They 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.

The chair of the Young Carers Alliance attended the festival to consult with young carers about their rights.

### Key Issues

The question was asked **“Did you know that young carers have legal rights?”**

- Nearly 90% of young carers either didn't know that they had rights (37%) or didn't know what their rights as young carers were (52%).
- Out of the 11% who said they thought they knew what their rights were, most of them referred to being entitled to a Young Carers Assessments.

Did you know that young carers have legal rights?	Number of responses	Percentage
Yes and I think I know what they are	17	11%
Yes but I don't know what they are	84	52%
No I didn't know we had legal rights	60	37%
<b>Total</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>100%</b>

This clearly shows that young carers do not know they have rights or what their rights are.

There was also a wish tree where they asked the young carers to write on a leaf, one thing they would wish to see for all young carers. There were about 184 responses in total with the 3 thematic areas being:

- **Recognition, awareness and understanding**

*‘I wish more people would attempt to understand and try to support us’*

*‘To be recognised by the government’*

- **Support for young carers and their families**

*‘We need more support with our mental health’*

*‘Have someone to talk to’*

*‘Everyone to have a safe space to go to be free and happy’*

Although there were lots of comments about general support for young carers, overwhelmingly most of them were about support in schools.

*'I want every young carer to get more support in school and easier access to support'*

*'Extra support in school'*

*'Someone in school to talk to'*

- **Outcomes for young carers**

*'Knowing our rights'*

*'Travel the world'*

*'Family to be happy'*

*'Never to be alone'*

## **Carers Trust**

Carers Trust were consulting about support for schools to inform the National Young Carers in Schools Programme. The questions were around what support young carers currently get and what support they would like to get.

## **Key Issues**

The main question asked was:

***What support do you currently get at school?***

The most common response given was that no support was given at school; some also receive support but it's limited.

A number of the responses were around receiving 1 to 1 support, being checked up on, having regular meetings, and staff knowing and understanding, particularly of difficult days.



In terms of the staff, this ranged from therapy from school/college counsellors, speaking with school nurses and a young carers champion, as well as young carers service coming into the school and speaking with CAMHS.

There were a range of specific clubs e.g. breakfast clubs, after school clubs, weekly young carers group, specific lessons catch ups – as well as being taken out of lessons for activities and to talk.

Further support included flexibility with homework and deadlines, a young carers card, and the school having student ambassadors to talk to instead of staff.

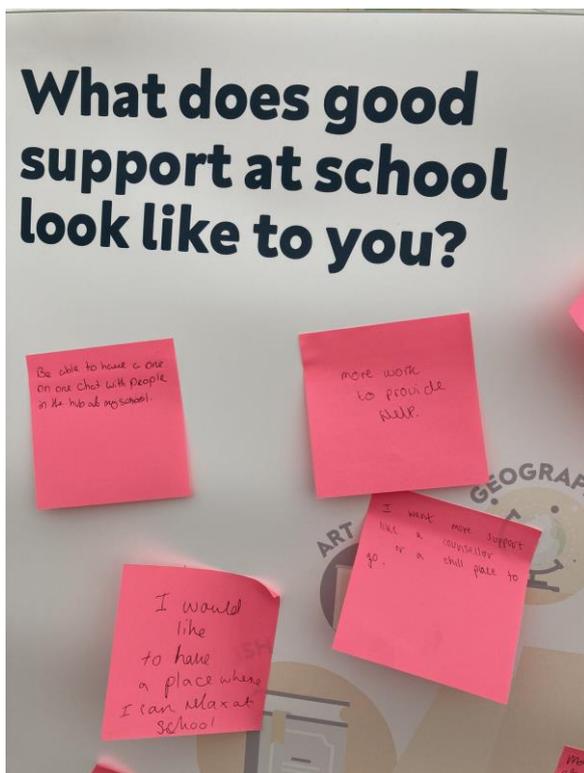
A follow up question we asked was:

***What does good support at school look like to you?***

The main responses were around the following:

- A greater level of understanding and awareness amongst school staff, as well as students, so they know what being a young carer means. This should include teacher training and would result in teachers being easier to approach e.g. knowing they will have bad days.

- Specific mental health support and someone to talk to.
- Young carer clubs e.g. breakfast clubs, but also support with specific lessons e.g. math clubs.
- 1:1 support from teachers.
- Provide flexibility e.g. to take time out of a lesson, to understand lateness, to make it easier to be excused for not being at school e.g. a doctor's appointment.
- Check in and ask how they are, but to balance this with not bringing it up all the time and not every teacher knowing their business.
- Support, leniency, or extra time with homework.
- A separate/safe place to go to e.g. game room, relaxing room, or swim passes to destress.
- To help the family.
- For colleges to be less strict.



## UK Parliament

UK Parliament Education and Engagement Outreach Team were gathering young carers views on a number of topics exploring what they wanted to happen or change within each area. The areas explored were: Education, housing, diversity and equality, economy, travel, crime, environment, and health and social care.

### Key Issues

Across each topic it is interesting to see that many of the suggestions were not always young carer specific and young people wanting change for others in general. It is very apparent that the young people who engaged with this consultation are acutely aware of the issues currently being faced by many other young people as well as families. The one area they did focus mostly on young carers specifically was in education with suggestions of what schools should do to help young carers.

#### Education:

*'Schools actually take action, not just around young carers, but all the students in their school, make everyone feel included as one, while celebrating differences.'*

*'Increase work deadlines for young carers who care full time and get no spare time'*

*'Young carers are given support all the time'*

*'Recognising young carers throughout the school system'*

#### Housing and Economy (grouped together as similar themes)

The cost of living crisis came through strongly through the housing and economy section, with young carers recognising the price of everything has gone up and houses are not affordable.

*'House people properly! Big sized bedrooms and a big garden! In a safe neighbourhood'*

*'To make bills cheaper for struggling families'*

*'...most housing is fairly overpriced and not accessible for many people, this hasn't only been a struggle for me but many others too.'*

*'Help people with issues from the cost of living crisis more'*

*'I think things are too expensive and have gone up a lot.'*

*'Make bills cheaper please'*

### **Diversity and equality:**

As we saw in the rock painting activity – this issue brought out many feelings about equality amount the trans community as well as gender issues.

*'Non-binary as a legally recognised gender'*

There was also an emphasis on those who are disabled having equal rights and accessibility being crucial.

*'Having more jobs for the disabled or those who have lack of time'*

*'Everyone should have the same rights for everything such as pay, rights, jobs'*

*'Make more places accessible to wheelchair users (more spaces in wheelchair toilets)'*



*'Stop claiming its wheelchair friendly if it's not'*

### **Travel:**

Young carers can often rely on public transport for them and their families. Many

of them linked travel to the cost of living and affordability with it being too expensive and also not accessible to all.

*'Travel not for pleasure and for hospital visits should be free or discounted'*

*'Under 18's should have travel discounts'*

*'Free travel for school.'*

*'Easily accessible'*

### **Crime:**

Unsurprisingly, young people said they wanted less crime and to feel safer

*'It would be nice for less crime'*

*'Less of racism and crimes just try and be yourself don't be peer pressure!'*

*'Less crime would be AMAZING'*

*'Stopping crime by helping people that are not safe'*

### **Environment:**

There weren't too many comments about the environment but those that did were calling for less pollution and us all doing our bit for the environment.

*'Stop global warming'*

*'More plants should be planted to help the environment'*

*'To cut down less trees and use other resources'*

*'To start to care for our planet more and figure out a way that we can make more of our stuff recyclable'*

## Health and social care:

Young carers comments around this were also limited and largely broad with a few comments about young carers needs as well as the cared for.

*'People understand that young carers have needs too because of what they go through. And that the people they care for has needs, maybe more than others.'*

*'Better treatments for people with special needs...'*

*'Better treatment during covid for jabs'*

*'Pay the NHS workers more! And doctors/surgeons 😊'*

*'Let people refer'*

*'Make it so everyone can get an appointment at the doctors/hospital'*

## Overarching key themes:

- **Well-being and lack of opportunity**

Throughout many of the consultations, young carers stated that they felt that their own well-being was suffering as well as not being able to find time for themselves due to their caring role. Local authorities have a duty of care to ensure that young carers are offered an assessment of their needs upon identification (Children and families Act 2014) as well as offered an assessment before they reach adulthood through a transitions assessment (Care Act 2014) Furthermore, with almost 90% of young carers participating in consultation activities at the Young Carers Festival telling us they do not know what their rights are, or they didn't know that they have any rights, it is vital that local authorities are doing more to ensure they know their rights. If these assessments are taking place, it would ensure that the young carers needs and the needs of the whole family are being taken into account to ensure that their caring role is not having a negative impact on their well-being.

- **Education**

Young Carers are not being supported in schools and they feel they have no one to speak to about their caring role and specific issues. They also reported there was a lack of understanding from staff in schools as well as trust.

Schools are required to record the number of young carers identified in their schools through the schools census from early 2023. This means schools will need to proactively identify young carers and should further support these young people in their schools.

Young Carers in Schools is a free initiative that makes it as easy as possible for schools to support young carers, and awards good practice.

Run jointly by Carers Trust and The Children's Society, the programme works with schools across England to share good practice, provide relevant tools and training, and to celebrate the great outcomes that many schools achieve for young carers.

Young Carers in Schools aims:

- All Young carers attend and enjoy school and reach their full potential.
- All Schools are enabled to identify and support young carers.
- Young carers have improved wellbeing and are better prepared for independent lives.
- Parents and carers are supported to enable their children to attend school.
- A school culture is created which is fully accessible, and understands and respects disability and caring.
- Young carers have the same life opportunities as other children.

- **Cost of living**

There were concerns about higher prices and the cost of living for young carers and their families which came through strongly in a number of consultations.

We believe it is important for there to be children centred solutions and more specifically considers the needs of young carers within this.