


Young Adult Carers at School: Experiences and Perceptions of Caring and Education

Executive Summary

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I Want My friends
and School to
understand what
I do!

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Summary



Young adult carers between the ages of 14–25 can be described as in transition – facing many changes, challenges and opportunities, whether that be leaving school, moving out of home, thinking about higher or further education, or getting a job. Little is known about the barriers that these young adults face in their personal development or access to life opportunities due to caring responsibilities. As The Co-operative’s Charity of the Year for 2013, Carers Trust aims to transform the lives of young adult carers by addressing the barriers which prevent them achieving their potential in their lives.

In 2013, Carers Trust commissioned the University of Nottingham to undertake research to find out the experiences and aspirations of young adult carers in relation to school, further and higher education and work. A total of 362 people viewed the survey from which the responses of 295 young adult carers aged 14–25 have been analysed. This is the first of a series of reports to be published across 2013 and 2014 looking at school, college and university, employment, those not in work or education, and gender.

In this report we explore the experiences and perceptions of school by young adult carers who are *still at school* ($n=61$).

Summary findings

- A survey of young adult carers (average age 15.5 years) who were still at school shows that two thirds were providing a high or very high level of care.
- Almost a third (29%) reported that their own physical health was ‘just OK’, and 38% reported having a mental health problem.
- Only half had received additional support from a member of staff at school. 42% said there was not a particular person at school who recognised them as a carer and helped them.
- Less than half (46%) thought they had received good careers advice and only 19% of the total sample thought that it took their caring role into account.
- The majority of young adult carers (78%) considered they were doing well at school but less than half (48%) actually said they enjoyed school.
- The majority (84%) said they intended to go to university or college. However, 24% thought they could not afford to go, and 41% were ‘unsure’ whether they could afford it.
- Most (67%) young people informed school staff that they were a carer but the majority of those who did not felt that ‘there was no point’ in telling anyone.

- A quarter (26%) were bullied at school because of their caring role.
- Few (15%) had received a formal review or assessment of their needs, and only half felt that their family received good support and services.

The majority of respondents who attended a young carers project or a young adult carers project (65%) felt that it had improved their confidence, and 54% thought that they had more friends as a result. 39% felt they had performed better at school because of the project.

Recommendations



Schools:

1. Schools should establish a clear framework of support for young adult carers, which is embedded into the school's policies and communicated to parents.
2. Schools should appoint named carer leads to assist young adult carers so that they can achieve their true potential.
3. Schools need better systems in place to identify young adult carers and review the impact of caring on their educational performance and attendance, leading to appropriate personalised support. They should record 'absence due to caring role' as a specific category so that data can be collected and statistics can be analysed.
4. There is a need for schools to develop and implement a policy and strategy for dealing with the bullying of young adult carers.
5. Each young adult carer should receive a regular review of their own needs. Appropriate services and support should be provided to ensure that their physical and mental health and wellbeing are maintained so that they can achieve their true potential in all aspects of their lives. Schools should be proactive in ensuring that reviews are conducted and that appropriate action is taken.

GPs, health and social care:

6. Given the high level of reported mental ill health and other difficulties, GPs, health and social care professionals need to be fully aware of the other difficulties related to health or disability faced by some young adult carers. This requires greater identification of young adult carers by GPs and health professionals; and systems to be put in place that enable them to refer on to appropriate services or to provide support directly as appropriate.
7. GPs and other health professionals need to establish systems to identify and assess the healthcare needs of children and young people in families where parents or family members are experiencing ill health or disability.
8. Each young adult carer and their family should receive a regular assessment of their needs and those of the family. Information about assessments should be easily available so that young adult carers know what to ask for, who to ask and what they should receive. Those working with young adult carers should be aware of any statutory requirements and guidance placed upon local authorities to carry out assessments and provide services.

Young and young adult carer support services:

9. Projects for young carers and young adult carers should seek ways to reduce the amount of care provided by children and young people. This may take the form of helping young people access services and information, facilitating contacts with local authorities and service providers, and enabling young people to access relevant training to help them in their caring roles. It will also mean working with adult service providers to ensure that disabled and other parents receive adequate support so reducing the need for children and young people to provide care.

Information and advice for young adult carers:

10. Careers advice services should be reviewed to ensure that advice adequately addresses and takes account of caring responsibilities.
11. There is a need to provide clear information about the financial support that exists for young adult carers going to college and university. This information should be provided at an early stage so that the young people are able to plan their futures without the uncertainty that currently exists.
12. Services and support for young adult carers should be clearly visible and seen to be effective. Procedures should be in place so that young adult carers know who to tell, how to access services and support, and are aware of the nature of the support they can receive.
13. There is a need to examine the accessibility and usefulness of online support materials for young adult carers and update and improve these as appropriate in order to make them relevant to this group of young people.



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