



Education

**BE BOTHERED!**

Making Education Count for Young Carers

supporting families since 1869

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**SEPTEMBER 2012**



## **Be Bothered!** **Making School Count for Young Carers**

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

Young carers are children and young people who are caring for parents with a long-term illness or disability, mental health issues, or problems with drug or alcohol abuse.<sup>1</sup> Sometimes the parents' difficulties mean that young carers have to care for younger siblings as well as their parent. Some young carers may also care for grandparents.

Life can be tough for young carers who often carry out a range of household tasks such as shopping, paying bills, reading letters for parents, cooking, cleaning and laundry, as well as nursing tasks such as administering medication or providing personal care such as washing or dressing. Many also provide emotional support and reassurance to the person they care for.

"A young carer becomes vulnerable when the level of care-giving and responsibility to the person in need of care becomes excessive or inappropriate for that child risking impact on his or her emotional or physical well being or educational achievement and life chances."<sup>2</sup>

Official statistics estimate that there are over 175,000 young carers in the UK caring for a sick or disabled relative, with 13,000 of these young people caring for more than 50 hours a week<sup>3</sup>. However, a recent survey for the BBC carried out by Professor Saul Becker, a leading expert on young carers, found that there are four times more young carers in the UK than are officially recognised by 2001 census data. One in 12 of the 4,029 schoolchildren asked by the BBC said they had caring responsibilities such as dressing, washing or bathing family members. The BBC estimates that there are about 700,000 young carers in the UK or roughly 8% of secondary school pupils<sup>4</sup>. However, this number could be higher still, given that there may be more young people who may hide their caring responsibilities or be unaware of the role they play.

As this report shows the caring role can often have a damaging effect on a young carer's education and prevent them from achieving their full potential. The young carers we work with told us they wanted us to campaign to raise awareness of young carers in school – with both teachers and other young people. This report aims to highlight some of the problems young carers face at school as well as offer some solutions that schools, Government and local authorities can take to improve outcomes for vulnerable pupils in their school. With young carers themselves highlighting problems with attendance and punctuality, behaviour and concentration in class, tackling these issues could form a key part of school attempts to improve behaviour

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.carers.org/what-carer>

<sup>2</sup> Working together to Support Young Carers, ADSS/ADCS Memorandum of Understanding, 2009

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.carers.org/key-facts-about-carers>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2010/nov/16/children-carers-survey>

and attendance for hard-to-reach groups. Providing more support for young carers in school could also be a key step to improving social mobility for the most vulnerable children and young people.

To tie in with publication of this report Family Action is launching a new Be Bothered campaign to raise awareness of young carers in school and to call for more support for vulnerable young people so that we can work together with schools, local authorities and Government to improve outcomes for some of the most vulnerable pupils and their families. Our young carers and their parents want people to be bothered about their education experience. It is time to make school count for young carers.

As a young carers worker, Family Action Manchester, tells us:

“Not only is the education that young carers receive from schools of vital importance for their futures (e.g. more awareness of their needs etc. will help them to attain better academic results etc), schools are also perhaps the best ‘frontline’ service to identify and support young carers needs, not just academically but also emotionally and socially (e.g. counselling/support services and social clubs/groups within schools). In our experience a supportive or non-supportive school can make a vast difference in a young carers’ life. Predominantly young carers want to go to school and achieve, but unless their school is understanding and supportive they may not be able to attend regularly, let alone achieve. Also, if there is more awareness of young carers in school this will also help to dispel a lot of ‘myths’ about young carers that are held by their peers and thus hopefully reduce levels of bullying and social isolation that some young carers experience.”

This report will look at some of the key academic research which highlights the problems young carers face in schools. We will then draw on qualitative and snapshot quantitative research to explore some of the problems young carers and their parents using our services face at school, as well as looking at the issue from the perspective of education and social care professionals. We will also look at some of the successful ways in which our Family Action services are engaging schools in supporting young carers and provide recommendations on what action can be taken to ensure schools, local authorities and Government are bothered about young carers education.

“I’m a teacher and in my form I’ve got a couple of young carers and I know that they really struggle to be able to come to school and be able to do all their homework and they get no extra help from us really. I didn’t know, and this guy was in my form and I didn’t know that he was a young carer for three years that I was his form tutor and I was supposed to know everything about him and I didn’t have a clue at all and I think whether that was a lack of communication on all of our parts but eventually when

we did find out and we tried to help him a little bit more but I think it was too late by then. He wasn't educated the way he should have been. He wasn't supported or valued as much as he should have been and we kinda lost him." Teacher interviewed by our Islington Young carers

### **About Family Action**

Family Action has been a leading provider of services to disadvantaged and socially isolated families since 1869. We work with over 45,000 children and families a year by providing practical, emotional and financial support through over 100 services based in communities across England. A further 150,000 people benefit from our educational grants and information service. We tackle some of the most complex and difficult issues facing families today – including domestic abuse, mental health problems, learning disabilities and severe financial hardship.

### **Family Action Young Carers Services**

Family Action delivers a number of Young Carers services across England including in areas such as Nottinghamshire, County Durham, the City of Manchester, Rochdale, Kensington and Chelsea, Islington and Camden, Lewisham, and Windsor and Maidenhead.

Each Young Carers service is commissioned by local authorities and health agencies and based on local need and priorities. Family Action Young Carers Services take a whole family approach combining respite activities for young carers with family support services to the whole family to reduce caring roles.

Family Action's Young Carers Services go beyond solely providing activities for young carers so that they can socialise with others and enjoy some respite: whilst we provide activities and help children have fun, we also work with the whole family, particularly parents, to help them seek resources and the help they need to manage the expectations placed on the young carers who support them and to reduce the negative impacts of their caring role.

In a number of services we run specific outreach and awareness raising work in schools in partnership with the local authority.

Family Action is also a member of the national Young Carers Coalition working with other organisations including the Carers Trust, the Children's Society and Barnardos to raise awareness of young carers issues.

### **Why We're Bothered About Campaigning for Improved Education Outcomes for Young Carers**

Family Action has a proud history of campaigning for change to improve the lives of vulnerable families and children. As part of our service user participation work we

empower the families we work with to share their experiences and use their life stories and views to influence policy makers.

Last Autumn we invited a group of young carers from our services in Islington and Kensington and Chelsea to take over our Central Office for Children's Commissioner Takeover Day. The young people who came to visit us that day took part in a number of activities. We asked them what they wanted us to focus our campaigning work on and the issue the young people raised was being a young carer in school. They asked us to look into the issues young carers face at school and campaign to raise awareness of young carers with teachers as well as pupils to increase understanding of their role, support for them in schools and to reduce poor education experiences.

This report and our Be Bothered campaign are the result of their request and we are very grateful to all the young carers, parents and professionals who have helped to shape our Be Bothered campaign so far.

### **Key Findings**

- 1 Young carers do not feel supported in school. This can impact on their attendance and behaviour as well as their concentration. Sometimes young carers are punished by teachers for issues relating to their caring role due to a lack of understanding amongst the teaching profession about the impact of caring on education.**
- 2 Young carers, parents and teachers all feel that if young carers are able to disclose their caring role to school then they will be more supported. However, they also feel that young carers may not disclose their caring responsibilities because of a lack of trust in teachers and the fear of agencies intervening negatively at home.**
- 3 Tackling problems young carers face in school is not only good for vulnerable young people and their families – it could also be good for schools, reducing unexplained absence, improving behaviour and disruption in the classroom.**
- 4 Where schools work with young carers services creative solutions can be found to increase the support young carers receive in school and improve their education experience.**
- 5 Schools need to work with the whole family, parents as well as pupils, to ensure that young carers and their families are properly supported and engaged in their education.**
- 6 Closed school cultures where schools do not engage with outside agencies or care about pupils' home lives can be a barrier to achieving more support for young carers and working effectively with external agencies such as young carers services.**

**Methodology for Be Bothered:**

This report contains both qualitative and quantitative data. The Family Action Policy and Campaigns Team have consulted with young carers themselves during this process to develop the campaign and the surveys we have used in focus groups, individual interviews and online and telephone surveys.

The research in this report consists of the following elements:

- 1 A literature review of academic and other literature into young carers and education;
- 2 Focus groups, telephone and individual face-to-face interviews with 122 education professionals, parents and young people using or linked to Family Action services around England gathering a range of information on their personal and professional circumstances including young people's caring roles, and views and experiences of education or of teaching or supporting vulnerable pupils in schools or colleges;
- 3 Questionnaires with young carers and their parents gathering a range of information on their personal circumstances including their caring roles, views and experiences of education;
- 4 Questionnaires with teachers and educational professionals gathering a range of information on their professional experience of teaching and supporting vulnerable pupils including young carers;
- 5 Interviews with Family Action staff working with young carers across England and working with education establishments to raise awareness and support young carers and their families in school or college.

The focus groups and interviews were held in different regions including Manchester, Nottinghamshire, County Durham and London and enabled young people, parents and education professionals to share their experiences of young carers and education including the problems that they might face and strategies to help better support young carers in school. Focus group participants also completed questionnaires which gathered a range of uniform information on their circumstances.

55% of the young carers that we have interviewed care for between 10 and 15 hours per week with 35% caring for over 20 hours per week. Some parents estimated that their children cared for them over 50 hours per week. The majority are in secondary school with a number of young carers in primary school as well. The age of the young carers we spoke to ranged from 9 to 17-years-old. 74% of the young carers we spoke to were on free school meals. They care for parents and siblings with a range of physical and mental health difficulties.

**“Q: What kind of things do you do for the person you care for?”**

**A: “Everything.” Young carer, London**

**A: “Get him [my brother] up, showered and dressed in the mornings. Make sure he has had his breakfast, putting him to bed and help him do his teeth,**

help him with cleaning his room or putting away laundry, looking after him whilst my mother is working and looking after him over the weekends. Helping him with his toilet problems, take him for a monthly treat, take him swimming, and take him to visit relatives.” Young carer, Nottinghamshire

A: “Make sure she [mother] has her tablets to take and anything else she wants me to do.” Young carer, London

A: “Cook, look after him [my brother], help my mum, get him to walk.” Young carer, London

A: “Put on her shoes, it saves her from bending, I cheer her up when she’s sad, helping her to do the washing.” Young carer, London

A: “All personal care, washing, bathing, clothing, dressing, undressing, cooking, paying bills, fix problems with the house, give her medication, phone people, help her move around, bring her round from blacking out, escort her everywhere.” Young carer, Manchester

## Chapter 2

### Research Review: The Impact of Caring Roles on Young Carers Education

In the last two decades there have been some key pieces of research about young carers, raising awareness of the issue and looking in detail at the impact of caring on young people and their families.

Early research into the impact of caring roles on young people highlighted caring as a real threat to the social mobility and future prospects of young carers. Research for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation by Chris Dearden and Saul Becker of Loughborough University in 2000<sup>5</sup> uncovered that a large proportion of young carers had educational problems and missed school. Many failed to attain qualifications with a quarter leaving school with no GCSE’s and half missing some school because of caring roles.

“Young people spend around a third of their waking lives in school so school is the most common place for any of their stresses and straights to manifest themselves. Lateness, absences, bullying and poor performance, can all be results of an excessive caring role at home. It is important to raise awareness about the issues that face young carers, how staff can identify them and also how to support them so their caring role doesn’t negatively

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/young-carers-transitions-adulthood>



## impact on the school work.” Project Manager, Family Action Nottinghamshire Young Carers

Further research by Deardon and Becker in 2002<sup>6</sup> highlighted the main educational difficulties young carers face including punctuality, attendance and problems with homework/coursework. Additional problems included access to extra curricular activities, low attainment, anxiety and fatigue. We will explore these issues in more detail based on the qualitative experiences of the young carers, parents and teachers we have interviewed as part of this report.

A literature review of available research shows that:

- 1 8% secondary school children have moderate or high levels of care responsibilities with a fifth of young carers having educational difficulties explained above<sup>7</sup>. However, more recent research by Professor Becker and the BBC suggests that 1 in 12 young people in secondary school could have a caring role<sup>8</sup>;
- 2 27% of young carers of secondary school age experience educational difficulties or miss school, and where pupils are caring for someone who misuses drugs or alcohol, 40% have educational difficulties;<sup>9</sup>
- 3 Most young carers are not known to be caring by school staff, so being a young carer can be a hidden cause of poor attendance, underachievement and bullying, with many young carers dropping out of school or achieving no qualifications;<sup>10</sup>
- 4 Much of the bullying experienced by young carers results from the stigma associated with some disabilities and health conditions such as mental ill health of substance misuse;<sup>11</sup>
- 5 A survey for the Princess Royal Trust for Young Carers in 2010 found that 68% of young carers experience bullying at school and 39% said that nobody at their school was aware of their caring role;<sup>12</sup>
- 6 A survey of young carers found that they considered themselves to be stigmatised by teachers and their peers, and felt that little support was forthcoming from schools;<sup>13</sup>

These findings are stark and highlight the barriers that young carers face to achieving

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<sup>6</sup><http://www.lut.ac.uk/departments/ss/centres/YCRG/youngCarersDownload/yceduc%5B1%5D.pdf>

<sup>7</sup><http://www.carersuk.org/professionals/resources/research-library/item/492-young-carers-in-the-uk>

<sup>8</sup>[http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2010/11\\_november/16/carers.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2010/11_november/16/carers.shtml)

<sup>9</sup><http://www.carersuk.org/professionals/resources/research-library/item/492-young-carers-in-the-uk>

<sup>10</sup><http://www.carersuk.org/professionals/resources/research-library/item/492-young-carers-in-the-uk>

<sup>11</sup><http://www.carersuk.org/professionals/resources/research-library/item/492-young-carers-in-the-uk>

<sup>12</sup> The Princess Royal Trust for Carers (2010), Supporting Young Carers – A School Resource Survey  
<http://professionals.carers.org/young-carers/articles/schools-resource-pack,6282,PR.html>

<sup>13</sup> Undertown A. (2002). “I’m growing up too fast”: messages from young carers. *Children and Society*, 16 (1), 57-60

their full potential. Becker and Becker in their 2008 *Young Adult Carers in the UK*<sup>14</sup> report highlight the difference between school as 'sanctuary' or 'misery'. Their report found that many support workers were concerned about the lack of awareness about the issues facing young carers amongst schools and the paucity of support available.

Large scale research by Dearden and Becker for their Young Carers in the UK 2004 report shows that in 2003 13% of 5-10 year olds and 27% of 11-15 year olds were missing school or experiencing educational difficulties. Whilst there is no further large scale research to compare this with more recently, from our interviews with young carers and their parents attendance and punctuality remain major barriers to young carers achieving their potential in school.

Ofsted have highlighted that young carers are one group who are more likely to fall into the category of not being in education, employment or training (NEET).<sup>15</sup> The Audit Commission found young people who were carers to be more than twice as likely as their peers to be NEET.<sup>16</sup>

## Chapter 3

### Views from Teachers and Other Education Professionals

One of the requests from the young carers who asked us to campaign about education was that we target the campaign on raising awareness amongst teachers. In this report we focus on the experiences of teachers, young carers and their parents trying to navigate the education system.

We carried out research with teachers and other education professionals through a mixture of a focus group, telephone interviews and an online survey. In total we have collected the views of 48 teachers and education professionals for this report.

The majority of these have been class teachers but we also have the views of form tutors, Heads of Year, Learning Mentors, Welfare Officers, Heads and Deputy Head Teachers. Sixty percent were teaching in secondary school, nearly thirty percent in primary and ten per cent in colleges. These professionals worked in a range of settings including community schools, Foundation or Trust schools, Academies, City Technology colleges, faith schools, a grammar school and independent school. Teaching experience ranged from a year to 33 years in the profession.

### Teacher Training

66% of the snapshot of teachers we spoke to said they their teacher training equipped

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<sup>14</sup> <http://professionals.carers.org/young-carers/articles/young-adult-carers-research,4382.PR.html>

<sup>15</sup> Ofsted (2010), 'Reducing the numbers of young people not in education, employment or training: what works and why'

<sup>16</sup> Audit Commission (2010), '*Against the Odds*'

them with knowledge about vulnerable pupils. However, a third said that they had received no training whatsoever about dealing with vulnerable pupils in general or young carers in particular. With only 16% of those who took part in our investigations saying that they were equipped with sound knowledge of how to identify and support young carers in school it seems that many teachers do not start off with knowledge of how to make sure that young carers are identified and supported in school.

"I came into teaching rather late so I've got a long history of doing other things and as part of it I was a teaching assistant in a special school for a long time and because we were working with sometimes dysfunctional families and things, I was very much aware of child protection and those sorts of issues and disclosures and everything and special needs children so I think my teachers training, I did a PGCE... this did not equip me at all for anything like that [working with vulnerable pupils] but my life experiences did." Teacher, Manchester

"I volunteered for Childline at uni. I was working indirectly with children and young people up to the age of 18. I felt that the skills that I learned there equipped me better than my degree." Parent Support Worker working in a school cluster, Manchester

"I am trained social worker so yes I think my training and my past experience helped... but I think just working in a school and realising what young carers have to go through that helps you to recognise who are the young carers." Student Counsellor, Durham

### **Policies and Practice to Support Young Carers in School**

One of the ways for schools to better support young carers is to have policies, procedures and support in place for when a young carer is identified. A third of the respondents to our surveys said that their schools had a Young Carers Lead staff member with 17% having a young carers policy. None of the teachers we spoke to said that their school had a Young Carers Governor Champion. As such, it seems there is a gap in awareness and recognition of the extra needs young carers experience at school and definite room for further awareness raising and support for schools to develop these policies and procedures and an ethos that supports vulnerable pupils.

Q: Do you have policies and procedures to support young carers?

A: "No nothing at all" Teacher Manchester

"We have those things loosely, but just because of my own experience. With regard to other staff, no. I never heard about young carers until I'd met [Family Action worker], it's just that, lack of knowledge really" Teacher, Manchester

Some schools used PSHE (Personal, Social and Health Education) classes to raise awareness of young carers. Over three quarters of respondents told us that their school offered support to vulnerable pupils more generally with a third saying that young carers in their schools received extra support in school.

"I work in four (schools) and there's only one school that I've heard of young carers...The other three, no." Parent Support Coordinator, Manchester

Extra support for young carers in school can take a variety of forms including special policies and referral procedures for extra support as well as welfare officers who could provide help for young carers, support groups, counsellors and the Common Assessment Framework. However, 72% of teachers said that they did not know the number of young carers in school and over 64% were unaware of the number of young carers in their classroom. 67% thought that there could be hidden young carers that teachers did not know about in their class and 22% did not know if there could be hidden young carers about in their class.

Understanding the home situation of young carers was recognised as a key way in which schools could support young carers more. However, whilst there is some recognition of the role young carers play, this does not necessarily translate to better support.

"Understanding is the biggest problem faced by young carers and their parents. Quite often schools or teachers only see the problems, not the causes of the problems. For example, we regularly hear from our young carers that they may have missed a homework deadline as the person that they help care for has been in hospital/had a turn for the worse/needed extra care than normal. Instead of showing understanding and a bit of compassion for the causes/circumstances in which the homework has not been completed, often young carers are punished with either more homework or detention which just compounds the problem." Young carers worker, Manchester

Extra services in school can make a difference for young carers. However, there seems to be a tension between these extra services and the drive to improve school standards. One teacher, referring to a support service which had recently been cut said:

"Everything in school is attainment driven. The attitude was like well, what are these children getting out of it [the service] attainment wise?" Teacher, Manchester

"Having to try to fit it (extra support) in, so it doesn't intervene with Maths or

English. Any intervention always has to be done in the afternoon and that's not always practical." Teacher, Manchester

64% of teachers thought that young people in their class did not understand what being a young carer was, with 27% saying their students knew about caring roles. 77% of teachers thought that young carers would be better supported in school if their peers knew more about caring.

44% of teachers said their school did an adequate or good job supporting young carers. However, 30% said their school could do a better job. 8% said their school did not have any young carers with the same percentage saying their school did nothing to support young carers in the school. 5% reported that their school did a poor job supporting young carers.

Two thirds of teachers had never identified a young carers in their class room with 40% saying this had been something they'd done in their teaching career.

"No, no idea not a clue." Teacher responding to online survey

"The teachers would only know if I go and say or I told them this child is a young carer." Teacher who is Inclusion Leader in school, North West

In line with the academic research, teachers identified a number of traits that they would associate with young carers which mirror the academic research and the issues expressed by our young carers and their parents.

Q: "If you have identified young carers in your class which traits would you class with young carers?"

A "Tired. Poor attendance, punctuality. Older in themselves, sometimes a very old head on them, taking on a lot of responsibility almost being a parent instead of a young child. They talk about their siblings as though they're parenting them instead of being on a par with them." Teacher. Manchester

"Although sometimes dissonant. Sometimes that but at other stages perhaps being below their age, they can lose that development because they've had to take that responsibility so early. Sometimes more childish, cause it's the time they can not be so responsible, and so they act out at school." Teacher, Manchester

"Very quiet, she just ticked along, we wouldn't have thought she'd be a young carer. Apart from her attendance. She's scared of people, being exposed, worried about what would happen as a consequence or getting into trouble. Children like her are 'Wallpaper Children' - they just try to blend

in. She doesn't make a fuss of anything. Even now the cat's out the bag, she's still a bit scared of saying anything, just says that she's fine and you can see that's not true really.' Teacher, Manchester

Teachers stated a number of practical things that they were doing in their classrooms to support young carers and other vulnerable pupils.

"I do not have young carers in my class, but in my school we have had young carers in the past and as the Deputy Head and SENCO (special educational needs co-ordinator)I have been proactive in seeking help and support for them and also liaised with other agencies on occasion where the role of young carer was identified prior to the child joining our school."  
Deputy Head Teacher, responding online

However, there may be a tension in school particularly that some young carers are not comfortable talking about their caring roles with teachers. We will explore this further when we explore the views of the young people we spoke to.

"Some schools said we should get young carers passes and I said no, no some young carers don't want to be identified to everyone, they have a right to that privacy." Student Support Worker

Some teachers directed young carers they had identified to support in school such as a school counsellor or nurse or to a special support group. Building trust with the young carer was also mentioned as key to ensuring they were willing to accept support for them and their family. Most teachers (60%) thought they had enough information from school management about vulnerable pupils so that they could support them in class, however, 40% did not.

"I don't think communication is as good as it could be but I also think that there are issues around confidentiality about how much information you give to teachers." School Counsellor, Durham

"It difficult, sometimes the information you have about the child is confidential and it's sometimes having the time to share it with the teacher and whether it's appropriate sharing that information." Teacher, Manchester

"Every time that I went into the school for parents evening or to meet with a teacher they were never aware of what was going on. Regardless of me ringing the school every week and updating them on my situation the teachers themselves were never aware of what was going on." Parent, Nottinghamshire

"They all knew (the teachers) when I went in for parent's evening because I

used to make it a point to explain it to them. However, when he changed teachers the information was never passed on again.” Parent, Manchester

Whilst some teachers wanted to do as much as they could to support vulnerable young people there was some resentment to carrying this role out:

“I do as much as I can and I want to do more however, there is little I feel I can do. I am trained as a teacher not a social worker and we receive no time or payment for doing social work. I will do more for someone in my form, however I resent the expectation that I will do it.” Online respondent to teachers survey

The view of teachers to whether the education outcomes of young carers were the same or worse than their peers was mixed with many teachers unsure of the impact of caring on attainment.

With identification of vulnerable pupils seemingly key to ensuring the right support for this group it is worrying that only a third of teachers saw the role of school as responsible for identifying and assessing the needs of vulnerable pupils.

Q: “Who should identify and assess the needs of young carers?”

A: “In many ways it should start off with health, as soon as that health officer knows that person has mental health, or disabilities it should be profiled somewhere so it should connect. It’s underestimated how many people are young carers because of this [lack of joining up].” Teacher, Manchester

“It relies on the young person to say I’m a young carer and that’s difficult because we’re putting a lot of pressure on vulnerable children, being a child is difficult enough as it is and there’s a lot of pressure anyway, especially secondary school. Even though we’re trying to find young carers we still rely on them and the only way we know is if they tell us and at the moment there’s so much stigma.” Young carers worker, Manchester

34% saw the identification and assessment of young carers as a job for social workers with 25% saying young carers services should carry out this work. 31% thought it was the role of schools to carry out this identification and assessment and 9% thought it was a job for health agencies and GPs. Some teachers agreed that a range of agencies should work together to support young carers with particular success envisaged if young carers services and schools worked effectively together.

“For me the strategy should be less stick more carrot. It would be better if there was a better social understanding and GP’s were more aware of identifying young carers earlier it would cost less in the long run, schools would realise, young people would be able to achieve better outcomes. Its

changing heart and minds. Law is one thing, there's a lot of legislation out there but the challenge is utilising personally what's out there, mainly encouraging people to change their behaviour." Teacher, Manchester

However, some education professionals were clear that school should play a primary role. Where schools have an open attitude to working with other agencies there can be positive results.

"I think primarily it's going to be schools because schools are the ones that have the daily contact with young people they should be able to recognise any signs of concern." School counsellor Durham

"All services need to be involved and work together." Respondent online to our teachers' survey

"One school that we worked in not only had us in to talk to their staff about young carers, they also included us in assemblies and then set up their own support group within school. This encouraged young carers to identify themselves, as the fear of negative repercussions had been reduced due to awareness raising in assemblies and they had somewhere where they could receive immediate support, both from peers and their school, they felt 'included'." Family Action Young carers worker Manchester

When teachers were asked what would best help them to respond to the needs of vulnerable pupils in their class support services in school, more training and better information sharing were cited as key ingredients to ensuring schools were bothered about vulnerable pupils including young carers.

"We've sort of thought a bit more about young carers since we've become involved [with Family Action young carers service] and we train our own staff in safeguarding so we're rewriting what we train in safeguarding and we're going to include different pockets and making our teachers more aware but I know that they don't receive any training about young carers at all. We're going to try and include that in our training so that they're aware what to look for in a young carer and how they need to deal with it and we're going to get Family Action to come along and maybe meet with staff so they get more awareness of what young carers is all about." Teacher, Manchester

"It's also about educating parents, some of the parents don't realise their children are carers, or even want people to know their business; so the child is forced to live that life." Teacher, Manchester

"School has the power to normalise things. There is something around stigma that they don't want people or their friends to know their parents



have mental health or substance misuse, if it was more the norm, if everyone knows about it and are on board it wouldn't seem weird to some kids. It's weird to say you're a young carer. It's that stigma we could reduce."  
Student Support Worker, Manchester

However, some schools have very rigid structures which penalise young people who do not fit the norm:

"Some schools have very rigid behaviour management policies, zero tolerance. I lock horns frequently with the head of behaviour in my school, on the young carers point, by being so fixed, you're discriminating against that young person that wouldn't be in that situation unless they're a carer. There are better ways, than just saying behave, or else." Student Support Worker

Some schools remain closed shops when external agencies try and engage with them to support vulnerable pupils in schools. This is why it is vital that more is done by councils and Government to challenge schools who lack the will to engage with this work.

"Q: Are there barriers to engaging with schools?"

A: "Where do you start!! We've had all sorts, from schools flatly refusing to acknowledge that they might/will have young carers in their school through to schools just not responding no matter how many times you contact them. We've even had supporting letters from the council informing schools that they should be involved in training that we are providing and we still can't get them in! These problems can be overcome, but it often takes the right person in the council to push it forward with schools who won't engage. This has to be coupled with a strong programme/offer for the schools re awareness raising from ourselves. We understand that time is often precious for schools/teachers, so we offer different levels of awareness raising i.e. coming along to staff training days, doing assemblies, having drop-ins or running a mix of awareness raising to suit that particular school." Family Action Young carers support worker, Manchester

"Sometimes it is hard to engage with schools where Heads say that 'we don't have young carers in our school, even though BBC research suggests that at every school, 1 in 12 young people have caring responsibilities at home. Teachers saying they are too busy or don't have time to take on additional responsibilities is also a problem. Peer mentoring between young carers could be used, or we could help schools set up groups which the young people can self manage. We try and highlight that support now can reduce work later if problems progress. It is important to work with governors or head teachers to get the message that supporting young

carers is important trickling down from the top.” Family Action  
Nottinghamshire Young Carers Project Manager

There is a role for local authorities in pushing schools to improve the support they offer to young carers in the classroom. As we will illustrate below our Nottinghamshire Young Carers service works effectively with Nottinghamshire County Council through their Young Carers strategy to work with schools.

Research carried out by Family Action shows that nationally only 38% of councils have a specific young carers strategy which focuses the Council and other local agencies on improving outcomes for this group. Council support for young carers services finding it difficult to engage with recalcitrant schools may be critical to starting to raise awareness of the issue and the particular needs of this group of pupils. As the table below shows, some regions are ahead of others in terms of local authorities which have specific young carers strategies. The possibility to use young carers strategies as a level to impress on schools the importance of supporting young carers is limited at this stage.

Regions	% of counties with young carers strategy
London	29%
Yorkshire and Humberside	14%
East Midlands	13%
West midlands	5%
South East	11%
South West	32%
North East	24%
North West	13%

Just under 80% of teachers did not know how the pupil premium was spent in their school. It may be that clearer publicity for this premium may help in ensuring that it reaches those it is meant to support. Teachers could be the champions of vulnerable pupils in their schools, calling for management to use the premium in ways which support young carers and other vulnerable pupils as well as the health and well being of the whole school.

## Chapter 4

### Be Bothered: Supporting Parents to Help their Children’s Learning

The views of parents are often missing from studies into the experiences of young carers. To ensure that children have a positive experience of education the role of parents is often vital – ensuring that young people get to school on time, that they are adequately fed and clothed for the school day and supporting young people to do their

homework and learn. However, for many young carers, their parent's disabilities mean that they may be unable to carry out some or all of these tasks. Whilst parents may take an interest in their children's education, some reported not feeling supported by school themselves.

80% of the parents we spoke to were on a low income. The majority of the children were in secondary school with 30% in primary school and 5% in college. Many parents felt that school was not doing enough to support their child and parents' experiences of communicating with school were mixed. Over half of parents we interviewed did not know what policies or procedures school had in place to support young carers and even if parents were aware that schools provided extra support they were not sure about what this actually entailed practically. Sometimes a school might know about a caring role but not about parents' difficulties or vice versa.

"I just think they should support young carers and who they're caring for a lot more. It's like because I'm not very well Sally goes to school, y'know she's very upset and very worried and all they do is send her to the school nurse to have a chat and then send her back to her lesson." Parent, Nottinghamshire

In many cases parents had approached the school themselves to explain absence or request support for their child with many parents saying they thought their child was more supported once the school knew the situation at home.

"I rang the school one day when I was poorly. When I came out of hospital and I knew I wasn't going to get any better and I knew I was going to be in a wheelchair or on a scooter so I told the school I'm not going to get any better and that Lucy is going to have to help. As the weeks went on, it wasn't very long before they rang me and asked to put Lucy forward for young carers. If it wasn't for me mentioning something to the school they still would not know until this day that Lucy cares for me." Parent, Nottinghamshire

"Family Action got in touch with the school on my behalf." Parent, Manchester

"From the time that he started the school I made them aware that I had cancer and would be poorly from time to time and the fact that his dad had died and as soon as I got diagnosed with the heart murmur I let them know within two days of me knowing. So they were aware from the very beginning." Parent, Nottinghamshire

However, a school knowing about a caring role does not mean that this will automatically improve things. Whilst some parents reported that their children's experience improved with the disclosure of their caring roles others were concerned

that this had not happened yet.

"I think basically, because it's an academy, y'know, I was actually told by the Head of Year, whatever's going off at home she leaves at home, she goes to school to learn." Parent, Nottinghamshire

"Sometimes they're more focused on Richard getting the right results than seeing the whole picture. Because his marks have dropped as his father's condition has got worse." Parent, Nottinghamshire

"They could be more supportive I think. They were very unsupportive. They didn't get where Ben was coming from, the pressure and the emotions that the youngsters feel from that role." Parent, Durham

"I think they could listen better, there seems to be no communication within the school. Even though I was telling the Head of Year the other teachers were never aware of his situation. They made efforts to help him in terms of attendance but that was in his last two years. I think that they should have a dedicated mentor for young carers, somebody who understands the situation that the pupils could go and speak to when they feel they needed to speak to somebody." Parent, Nottinghamshire

Like teachers, many parents thought that young carers may not disclose their caring role to teachers because of a fear that the authorities might intervene at home. Fear of bullying and concerns about being treated differently also rated highly.

"I haven't mentioned it to them. We've always been a private family we just got on with it. Even with their dad they just got on with it." Parent, Nottinghamshire

The majority of parents felt that their child's caring role impacted on their education, whether this manifested itself in the form of absence or lateness, problems with homework and coursework or behaviour, anxiety or concentration issues.

"If I was on my own and I was really poorly he wouldn't leave me until somebody else came. He wouldn't leave me on my own until I was with somebody." Parent, Manchester

Where schools knew about young carers there was some positive change and flexibility. Parents said that schools had adjusted their expectations of young carers on various occasions with teachers more flexible about punctuality or attendance and helping young people by referring them to support services in school or externally. However, most parents did not feel that teachers were sympathetic to the needs of young carers and their families, suggesting that more needs to be done to educate

teachers about the issue and ensure that more strategies are in place to communicate to parents and young people the extra support available in school for vulnerable pupils including young carers. This was backed up by the fact that parents thought that teachers and other young people did not understand what being a young carer meant.

“They should talk about it more. Something not hidden there are a lot of kids that do it but don’t know that they are a carer.” Parent, Nottinghamshire

“The teachers need that understanding that he may want just five minutes out of class to get his head sorted. It’s a lot of pressure and emotions for young kids that are going through so much anyway.” Parent, Durham

“He’s been given a couple of detentions for being late when I’ve been on my own but it’s only been half an hour. It’s not that I’ve kept him off the whole day it’s only been like assembly and the first bit of the lesson. When I have rung up to explain, the school said he was late and he’s doing the detention.” Parent, Manchester

Parents overwhelmingly felt that young carers would be better supported in school if teachers and their peers in school know more about caring roles. Parents also provided a number of suggestions where school could help parents to support their children’s learning including clearer communication and more support groups.

“It would have been easier if they had sent some of the work home with him and I could have worked with him here. I’m not completely stupid. I’m physically not mentally unable. In fact any work that he has done at home has been to a higher standard because he’s got one on one attention.” Parent, Manchester

Parents were also unambiguous in their belief that schools have a clear duty to assess the needs of vulnerable pupils with schools and Young Carers Services jointly responsible for identifying and assessing the needs of vulnerable pupils including young carers.

By working with and understanding the particular needs of parents of young carers schools could more effectively support vulnerable families and improve outcomes for young carers and school around attendance, behaviour and concentration.

## Chapter 5

## **Be Bothered about Young Carers in School: Barriers to Education Success**

A study by Becker and Becker in 2008<sup>17</sup> highlights the negative aspects of caring which include:

- 1 Missing school and poor educational performance;
- 2 Restricted educational and career opportunities;
- 3 Experiencing negative emotions (fed up, lonely, lost, frustrated, guilty);
- 4 Lack of recognition and feeling they are not being listened to.

As well as the direct implications on young carers of missing school, young carers often cite negative emotions and a lack of recognition and feeling they are not being listened to as part of the problem they face with teachers which can lead to poor behaviour or other difficulties at school. This is why it is important for schools to take a holistic approach when dealing with the issues young carers face in school.

The main issues young carers using Family Action services identified in schools include:

- 1 the lack of support and understanding amongst teachers leading to problems in class including unfair punishments;
- 2 absences or lateness due to having to take the person they care for to hospital or medical appointments or because young carers are too concerned to leave the person they care for at home if they are unwell;
- 3 problems with behaviour, tiredness and concentration in class;
- 4 problems getting homework in on time due to caring responsibilities;
- 5 concerns about the transition between primary and secondary school and college.

Young carers commented that these issues not only affect themselves and their families but other class members as well as teachers and the school reputation in terms of figures for attendance and punctuality. Young people thought that school authorities themselves had the power to change the problems they face. However, they were not confident that the authorities recognised the issue as often teachers may make wrong assumptions about the behaviour and difficulties they exhibit in class.

## **Be Bothered about Disclosing Caring Roles**

Young carers, parents and teachers all agreed that if a young person was able to disclose their caring role then the situation at school would hopefully improve due to an increase in understanding on the part of school and teachers. 74% of the young carers we interviewed said school knew about their caring role with 26% hiding their caring roles from school.

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<sup>17</sup> [static.carers.org/files/yac20report-final-241008-3787.pdf](https://static.carers.org/files/yac20report-final-241008-3787.pdf)

If schools are aware of caring roles then they can do things differently to improve the education experience of young carers.

“Q: What has the school done differently now they know you’re a young carer?”

A: “If I look sad, they will ask me if my brother has anything to do with me being sad and if I want to talk about it.” Young carer, Nottinghamshire

A: “Made mum feel welcomed and supported.” Young carer, London

A: “They help me when I’m stuck and if I think about mummy and feel sad they cheer me up.” Young carer, Rochdale

A: “Given me extra time to do my homework and one-to-ones to talk about it.” Young carer, London

However, there are concerns that a number of young people in school may hide their caring roles because they are concerned about the response they might get from teachers and other pupils. There is also the possibility that some young people might not be aware they care.

Q: “What are the reasons why young carers might not tell the school about their caring role?”

A: “They probably won’t care.” Young carer, London

A: “I don’t think it is relevant for them to know and does not concern my school.” Young carer, London

A: “Because they will give me special treatment and I won’t like it.” Young carer, London

A: “Too scared of how they would react and being treated differently.” Young carer, Rochdale

A: “I don’t trust school.” Young carer, Nottinghamshire

A: “They wouldn’t understand.” Young carer, Durham

The education professionals and parents who took part in our research echoed these remarks saying that there were a number of reasons why they thought young carers might not disclose their caring role to teachers particularly. Some of the reasons for this included loyalty to family, trust as a barrier to being open with teachers and the fact

that young people might not recognise that they had caring roles.

"It's not cool. It's embarrassing. There's the risk of social services will come and rip the family apart." Teacher Manchester

The main reason why teachers and parents thought that young carers might remain hidden was because of concerns about authorities intervening at home, concerns about being treated differently and fear of being identified as different to other pupils.

"If teachers know you're a young carer they treat you different. ☹️" Young carer, Nottinghamshire

"They don't realise they're a young carer, they probably don't associate what they do as with being a young carer. It's just normal for them." Teacher, Manchester

A large majority also thought that young people might not be open with teachers because they had concerns about teachers knowing their business with fear of bullying also potentially playing a role. They were clear however, that once a young person was able to disclose their caring role the school should be able to put support in place.

"School is bad because people don't understand and they (bullies) could pick on you." Young carer, Nottinghamshire

"If I had told my teacher last year [that I am a young carer] she would have laughed and it would have been the worst year ever." Young carer, Nottinghamshire

"When I told one of my teachers they told everyone else. I thought I was the gossip of the staff room." Young carer, Nottinghamshire

82% of the young carers we spoke to had approached the school about their caring role with only 18% saying school approached them.

"I think my tutor was going on about something and I got a little bit of air cos I couldn't take in a report or something like that because my mam couldn't fill it in and then he said 'Ah well anyone can fill a silly piece of paper in' so that's when I had to tell my tutor then about my mam, he asked my mam about it and she told him about it and then he told the school and the school was supposed to tell everyone else but they didn't they only told a couple of people." Young Carer, Durham

"I approached them because I had anger, and it kinda burst out, I had to tell someone and that's when mum started to get in touch with Family Action,



and Family Action told the school, and that's when they've been trying to do something, but they haven't really been that helpful. It was mostly me; I went to my form tutor.' Young Carer, Durham

The young people we spoke to talked about the importance of trusting someone at school as the first step to being able to be open about their caring role.

"I told them because my tutor like, I trust her so I can talk to her so I just like told her and she understands. I just had a feeling I could trust her." Young Carer, Durham

"A friend helped to support me to tell the school." Young carer, London

"Just be sympathetic because sometimes you just need like someone to just listen to you and understand even if they don't understand you just need them to kind of like say that they do so you feel like you're actually getting somewhere when you're talking to them." Young carer at college

Some young carers felt it was important to have the help of an advocate, someone who could tell the school on their behalf. Young carers can find conversations about their caring roles very difficult and the problem in school is the possibility that they might have to tell multiple teachers about their situation. This is where support services such as Young Carers services can come in and help young people and their parents explain the problems they face and negotiate solutions.

"I just hate talking about it it makes us cry all the time I don't know why I just burst out in tears all the time... I dunno I just, its just talking about it how everyone's so different to you it just proper makes us cry all the time." Young carer, Durham

"I don't think I'd tell them (the school) myself." Young carer Manchester

For some, the results of telling teachers about their caring role is mixed with some teachers having a better understanding than others. With 56% said they felt more supported after disclosing their role to school and 44% saying they do not feel supported results can be mixed if schools do not embrace holistic packages of support for young carers.

"My English teacher, she understands but knows that I can't get my homework in on time and says I understand but other teachers are like 'Rachel you've got a detention.' So it's like they don't know what's on the other side of you, what's going on outside of school and things." Young Carer, Durham

However, some young carers we spoke to remained silent about their caring role in school, meaning that they had a much tougher education experience and did not have the support they could have had to help them. It is clear that helping young carers to open up about their caring role could have a positive impact on school's ability to better support them.

"I just didn't want to be seen that I was like different, or like to be treated different or be given extra help or whatever, 'cos I'm just used, since primary school I'm used to just keeping that by myself, I've learnt to handle and deal with it, so I didn't want teachers or whatever stuff to look at me, like she's coming from this background blah blah, I didn't want to be seen like that...I just thought that's part of my private life it hasn't affected me in any way, I'm still the same person, I didn't think it was anything to tell anybody." Young Carer, London

Young carers suggested a number of things that schools and teachers could do more to help them be open with teachers about their caring role.

"Be nice, not intimidating." Young carer, London

"[Schools could] take you out of lessons for an hour to discuss problems each week." Young carer, London

"[Teachers could] appreciate the things I do for my mum outside of school." Young carer, Rochdale

"Let me have time out of my lessons if I don't feel up to it, or ease my workload." Young carer, Manchester

### **Be Bothered about Attendance and Punctuality**

49% of young carers said that their school work had been affected by issues relating to being a young carer with 44% saying it had made no difference at all and the remainder saying they did not know. Over half the young carers we interviewed had missed school and one family had been fined because of persistent absence.

Attendance and punctuality are key priorities for Government and schools. Charlie Taylor, the Government's Behaviour Tsar identified attendance as a key factor in his work and has proposed docking child benefit of parents whose children are persistent truants. School attendance is also among the Department for Communities and Local Government's payment-by-results criteria for working with Troubled Families. Young carers are a key group of vulnerable young people who may miss school persistently or periodically because of problems at home. Whilst many accept that they should be in school, some young carers see school as part of the problem, putting further

pressure on them.

"Sometimes school like just gets in the way of what you need to do like cos you have roles as a carer and everyone's is different but it all kind of comes out in the same way so school sometimes is just not, not the option really so you've got to like help out, you've got to do your bit as a carer." Young Carer Durham

"I usually like don't go for weeks. I go like once a week." Young Carer, Durham

Family Action is concerned about the Government's approach generally to fining parents of truants. Our research with young carers highlights the particular problems for this group and the danger of punishing some of the most vulnerable pupils for absence due to their caring roles. Young carers are often identified by the school through lack of attendance. When a young carer's role interferes with their attendance the young carer is more often that not punished with detentions which impact further on their caring roles. Some parents have been warned with court action due to poor attendance records.

"The school knew everything but they didn't make a very good job of it. They used to complain if he was off school even when I was very poorly in hospital. I spent nine weeks in hospital a couple of years ago and they thought they were going to lose me. Even in that period they were complaining if he was off of school for any reason". Parent, Manchester

Given the pressure on schools to improve attendance it is not a surprise that teachers place a lot of pressure on young carers to be in school. However, this pressure can colour the view of young carers towards school and teachers.

"School is bad because they hate me because I have time off because of my mum." Young carer, Nottinghamshire

52% of the young carers we spoke to had missed some school due to their caring roles with 60% having problems with punctuality as well.

"My head of year always rings my phone instead of ringing my mam's and then she just marks us absent. I normally tell her why I'm not going in and then she just writes it down...my attendance is 63.7%." Young Carer, Durham

"My attendance at school was 51%, my mam was bedridden for ages, and I was the only one at the time, I was late but if I said it was because of my mam they didn't mind, If I called and said I'd be in at this time" Young Carer

## Durham

As well as being a result of their caring roles for one of the families we spoke to absence was a way to get the school interested in the caring role the young person played as he knew it was likely to provoke a response.

"He started missing school because he was caring for me and they didn't understand. So he had to stop going to school for the school to get involved and then Family Action got involved because he thought if he misses school something might get done. And it did. His attendance went down... His attendance would go down and someone would investigate. And that's when Family Action got involved. We had a meeting at my house and everything came out then." Parent, Durham

Some young people complained that even though schools knew about their caring roles, there was little understanding and the pressure to improve attendance was still there. Indeed, some young carers have been punished by schools for issues relating to being a young carer.

"Awful... cos I'm caring for my mam and like my head of year says she knows what I'm going through but they don't understand at all. She just takes us as a normal average." Young carers, Durham

"I didn't have a sheet signed therefore I received a 20 minute detention after school each time it wasn't signed. The sheet wasn't signed because my mum was asleep because she was very ill." Young carer, Rochdale

"They tried to give me detention for always being late because of my mum, but it didn't happen because my mum called and told them I wasn't going to do it." Young carer, Durham

However, not all the young carers we spoke to missed school on a regular basis. Whilst for some young carers missing school was a fact of life, for others it was an exception.

"I have [missed school] once. My mam wasn't well and I wasn't well cos I stayed up and every time I heard something I thought something bad was going to happen so I didn't get any sleep." Young person, Durham

The young people we spoke to were very clear that they wanted to go to school, not only to learn but also to get a break from their caring roles.

"It bothers me when I'm not in school because I like being at school because then you can be like a normal person for once you don't have that

kind of responsibility but in the back of your head when you are at school you've got like I need to go home and do this I need to get this sorted out I need to help with this and then it's just that gets on top of you really so." Young Carer, Durham

"I love school. I really like school. I like going to school cos its like the different atmosphere and not in the house all the time especially with my dad we get no freedom whatsoever." Young Carer, Durham

It is vital that young carers are supported to get to school. In many cases this will rely on schools working effectively with other agencies such as young carers services to make sure that alternative arrangements are in place. However, simply getting a young carer through the school gates does not resolve the problems they face in school. Further holistic support and policies need to be in place to ensure they are not disadvantaged.

### **Be Bothered about Behaviour**

Young carers and teachers views were split as to whether a caring role contributed to poor behaviour in class with different scenarios played out due to different circumstances.

Many young carers recognised that their behaviour in school could sometimes be disruptive and poor.

"I'm mean at school. I think I'm like that cos I don't like people to know that I care because it makes you seem weak and I don't want them to know." Young carer, Nottinghamshire

This was down to varied reasons including not feeling supported, feeling frustrated by a lack of understanding of their predicament and as a way to shield themselves. However, this was not the case for all young people and many teachers and young carers said that young carers were often hidden from view, quietly struggling whilst other pupils took the attention of teachers.

"I never ever get wronged [told off]. I'm extra quiet at school. I don't even talk. I just sit there like. My old school sent a report to the one I'm at now saying I was horrible just because I left their school. They said I was like a proper horrible person and I had loads of after schools, loads of isolation and I was just like..." Young carer, Durham

"I would say the opposite, they tend not to be able to afford to get into trouble because of the commitments and they don't want to upset the person they are caring for because it has that domino effect. They tend to

want to be responsible or if they get in trouble they don't want home to know or getting anxious about the consequence." Teacher, Manchester

"A couple of young people in my school, one in particular was always getting conduct logs, constantly getting into detention, wouldn't go to detention because he had to go home and look after mum, got even more detentions, despite the fact we tried really hard. School tried to monitor his attendance and support and give him grace periods in the morning so he could sign in late, and despite all of that eventually he was sent to a specialist within the school, and last I heard he was on the verge of being permanently excluded. There are a shocking number of young carers in pupil referral units, offending and then going into the criminal justice system, a shocking number." Student Support Worker, Manchester

"We had a boy [young carer] that was getting into trouble, taking himself into town, this was when he was nine, he started to get into trouble." Primary School Teacher, Manchester

*Q: Did being a carer make you play up?*

*A:* 'Like when I used to get nervous I used to torment teachers real bad, I used to just sit there, say if I was sat like people, I'd like get a pen or something and just go like this and throw it constantly just to wind 'em up until they'd kick me out."

*Q: Why?*

*A:* 'I don't know, I don't know, it might have been anger and things with me I had a lot of anger and upset like its like, silence was my loudest cry. Even though I'm a carer and I went into school, even if I wanted to cry I'd still have a smile on my face like that's what all my mates say to me; you've always got a smile on your face, what's helping you do it, and its like you've got to do it its gotta be done." Young carer Manchester

The problems parents are having can impact on the mood and behaviour of young carers in school. For many, it is not possible to leave home behind when they enter the classroom.

*Q: Would you say you're well behaved at school?*

*"No. I'm not. I'm not bad, I'm not on report but I'm not good either."*

*Q: Why?*

*"Because they don't understand like when you're in a bad mood you're angry and they just tell you off even though you've not done anything. When you try to be happy at school like I was laughing and my tutor told me off and I got send out because I was laughing." Young carer, Durham*

*"My dad's schizophrenic and it means he can be in any mood so if he's in a*

bad mood he'll swear and shout and it doesn't make you very happy. He's normally asleep [in the morning] when I'm up but if he gets up and he's very grumpy and he shouts and so you get upset. Then if he's angry in a night time then you'll go to sleep upset and wake up upset and like you want to cry and then get blotches on your face." Young carer, Durham

"Like say if my mam's in hospital I'll go into school quite sad and just sit in my lesson and not talk or anything but then when she comes out I'm all happy and my teachers and my friends all wonder why I change my mood like that... but they don't understand that I'm a young carer and its just that way and whatever my mam's illness is like if it's bad I'll go to school angry and if it's good then I'll go to school happy." Young carer, Durham

Worryingly, some young people and teachers reported caring roles impacting negatively on the mental health and wellbeing of young carers.

"I just get very emotional. It's like you can't really judge what mood I'll be in cos when it all gets on top of you it depends what's happened really." Young carer

"In my experience, sometimes the lights going on, it's like ping ping, a lot of our children self harm to get that attention, and that's when we start to dig a bit deeper. I think it's a relief, sometimes for young carers that have self harmed, it's part of a thing of control. More so when you get into secondary school, the older ones, they've had no services at all, no one realises they have been struggling for ages, they think nothing can be able to help and there's nothing that can be done, its down them to make themselves feel better. They lose faith." Pastoral worker, employed by school? Manchester

### **Be Bothered about Tiredness, Lack of Concentration and Homework**

Young carers, parents and teachers all recognise that another of the issues facing young people in school is tiredness and poor concentration on school work. For the young people, this is a real concern because they are often punished for failing to concentrate in class. Where teachers might see a moody teenager or an insolent pupil uninterested in their subject, the reality may be far from this.

Carrying out caring roles before and after school mean that young people are often fatigued. Some of the young people we spoke to stayed up with parents if they were unwell or could not sleep, missing out on their own sleep and, making them tired the following day.

"It takes a long time for John (sibling) to get to bed and once he's in bed he'll want lots of different things from around the house so mam'll have to sit

with him while I go and get them and then in the morning he needs help getting dressed and stuff so it's like kind of going to bed late and getting up early then sorting him out, help my mam sort herself out and then getting yourself sorted out." Young Carer, Durham

"During classes, because obviously I wouldn't get a lot of sleep because my mum would be active, being awake, making noise, during night times it was hard to sleep, so during classes I'd start falling asleep, so I'd get, wake up wake up and keep your head off the table and with deadlines, not all the time but sometimes, I knew how to manage it, but sometimes I'd be late and I'd get marks taken off my work because I handed it in late and I'd get warnings and stuff." Young carer London

"When I was in hospital he wouldn't leave until he knew that there would be someone else there with me. They weren't very understanding and I used to ring the head of year and say can you please make sure Ben's teachers are aware of his situation because if he's distracted this is the reason why." Parent, Manchester

Q: "Is it difficult to concentrate?"

A: "Sometimes. It depends if I'm worrying about my mam. I've been told off [for not concentrating]. It makes me feel angry." Young Carer, Durham

"Well they just think that I'm like, I'm a normal moody teenager so don't really tend to take much notice when I've got like a problem that I need to talk to them about they just think I'm like one of the others but sometimes I've got like a reason behind it so." Young Carer in secondary school

For some the lack of concentration in the classroom is because they are planning the tasks they have to do as part of their caring roles when they get home.

"Look at your concentration as well, yeah, say if you're concentrating cos I don't concentrate at school, never do. I usually sit there and plan out what I have to do when I get home so then I'm gonna do this and I'm gonna do that and then I just don't even listen to what the teachers are saying." Young Carer, Durham

Some young carers suggested that being able to have a mobile phone on in class would be a way to reduce some of this worry. For the young people it would mean that they could keep in touch with parents via text message during breaks between lessons or at lunch time. However, with most schools operating very strict policies about mobile phones and teachers very reluctant to allow phones in class due to the disruption they can cause it is unclear whether this is a solution that schools would condone and promote to work for all young carers. However, in our view – and the views of the



young people and parents we spoke to - this is an option that school, in partnership with young carers and their parents, could negotiate to see if it made a difference and improved concentration in class.

"You're not allowed to keep your phone on so you can't keep in contact with them... I'm a slow writer and everything because I'm too concerned about other things...teachers don't understand. I get detention either break time, dinner time or after school. You can get afterschool [detention] and they're not bothered they'll just say your coming back then I can't go straight back to see my mam and that." Young carer, Durham

Problems with handing homework or coursework in on time were also often reported by the young carers that we spoke to. Caring responsibilities at home in the evening often got in the way of homework. Whilst the young people did not expect to be excused from doing homework completely, they did say that more leniency from schools with homework or coursework deadlines would be really helpful to enable them to better manage their time. Homework clubs were another possibility mentioned by our staff as a way to help young carers make time for this task and to take the pressure off young carers at home.

"I think when I don't have my homework and things I get wronged [told off]. If I don't do homework when I obviously don't have time cos I have to look after my brother and sister and my mam." Young carers, Durham

Exams are another area where young carers may find it hard.

"One thing that all carers have in common is the unpredictability of their caring situation. A carer's capacity to attend regularly, complete assignments and sit exams is not dependent on their own commitment and self-discipline but on the health of someone else, and the needs of the person they care for, which can change suddenly and dramatically."  
*Learning and Skills Council Report*<sup>18</sup>

## **Be Bothered about Bullying**

The picture of whether young carers were being bullied specifically because of their caring role is mixed based on the interviews we carried out for this report. 20% of the young carers spoke of being bullied because of their caring roles with 80% saying they had not been bullied for caring. As such it seems there is no widespread perception amongst young people and teachers that bullying is a common problem specifically relating to caring. Where young carers were being bullied this was often to do with the nature of the disability or illness of the person they were caring for. Whilst the

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<sup>18</sup> [http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/National/230709\\_Including\\_Carers\\_Report\\_final.pdf](http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/National/230709_Including_Carers_Report_final.pdf)

perception of being open to bullying was high the majority of parents thought that their children had not been bullied because of their caring roles.

"I was getting bullied so the teachers needed to know. My mum told them."  
Young Carer, Durham

"I've had rumours spread about me, people talking about me, being a carer and stuff, different things, they used to get me proper angry, I had a few fights because of it. But I don't know whether that's bullying, It wasn't quite bullying but it definitely wasn't an easy ride" Young carer, Durham

However, for young carers bullying comes on top of the pressures they face because of caring, causing particular problems that young carers could do without. Fear of bullying was also cited as a reason why some young carers might prefer to remain hidden in school.

"Like if you're getting bullied its easier for other people to cope with it because that's just one thing but like we have to put up with things at home and at school." Young carer, Durham

"Most schools say right they're totally non tolerant, they won't stand bullying and nearly every school who has carers who are getting bullied. I think its because like everyone's different and that's why they bully people because they think they're perfect and they think everyone has to be like them and I really don't like it. I really don't. I think it's all about (the) carer, yes that a bit of it but I think its all about your personality you should be allowed to be who you want." Young carer, Durham

Q: "Why do you want to keep your caring role hidden?"

A: "Because I could get bullied about it." Young carer, London

A Family Action support worker suggested that if young carers were known to teachers they might be more likely to crack down on any bullying of that young person that they saw.

"If the teachers know they can look out for them so if there is any bullying issues they're aware of the reason and can deal with the bullying as opposed to just saying its ok and I'll tell them off. I know in XXXX's situation she's been particularly bullied because of the illness of the person she's a carer for. If the teachers knew that she was being bullied for that they'd be able to put something in place to actually stop it happening as opposed to just having a quick word." Family Action support worker, Durham

## Be Bothered about School Transitions

Research by Becker and Dearden in 2004 found that as young carers age their caring role often increases, with young adult carers carrying out more personal care as well as taking on more household management tasks. Given the difficulties transition to secondary school can place on young people generally, and young carers in particular, these added caring responsibilities place further pressure on young people who are also worried about moving on to secondary school and a much more trying education environment.

From our research it is clear that support through the transition period for young carers is important to give them the best start and prepare them for the pressures of secondary education. Half of the young carers we interviewed were concerned about younger siblings who are carers having to go through transition between primary and secondary school.

"If there was someone there supporting me [through the transition], maybe it might have been a bit more open, but, the time between primary and secondary school that was so scary, all by myself, nobody to talk to and I didn't know anybody so I think partially that was why I kept it by myself, 'cos that's how I tend to start out keep myself to myself." Young carer, London

"There's probably a higher percentage in secondary schools, but sometimes Primary schools are better at supporting young carers it seems to be they have a bit more knowledge about the child's circumstances, time, or support, there's so many people in secondary school. We see the parents a lot more at primary schools, you have knowledge about the families, you get to know them, approach them, and you know siblings." Student Support Worker, Manchester

"It would be easier, to like, maybe, so it won't like, I won't have to like, thingy, tell them myself, I'd be able to like have help to tell them." Young Carer at primary school, Manchester

As well as the size of secondary schools and the possibility for increased anonymity in larger classes and year groups, perhaps for some young carers, secondary school is the stage when young carers realise that their caring role sets them apart from classmates.

"They would get to year 7/8 all of a sudden mixing with a lot of kids and there would be that realisation that my family is different to other families. You don't really get that at primary school. That's where you get that realisation. The children think what the norm is, this has been my life, and they don't know any different until it's that realisation. You get into that

change period.” Teacher, North West

“In secondary schools they’re a bit more scared to come forwards, they’re getting older, want to do their own thing, they’re not going to be able to because of the caring. But they don’t want to say that to some one cause that sounds selfish.” Student Support Worker, Manchester

As well as information sharing between primary and secondary schools and other agencies to improve the transition for young carers, some extra support and mentoring could be put in place to help them deal with the change and settle into their new schools. This support may also be helpful in bridging the gap between primary and secondary teaching and provide them with an advocate to help them disclose a caring role.

“I have just passed our girl. I have talked to their safeguarding lead as she’s only just been identified. It’s about remembering to highlight the profile.” Teacher, Manchester

Parents and young carers report some of the problems that their children have faced without help through the transition period.

“Quite difficult the first year, very very difficult, she didn’t want to go, said she didn’t fit, she couldn’t cope with the school, y’know the amount of school work.” Parent, Nottinghamshire

“Yes its different. Yeah cos mine was a really little one and there were only 5 teachers so they all knew.” Young carer talking about primary school, Durham

“If there was bullying it would get sorted because there were quite a few teachers to watch not a lot of kids but in secondary there’s not many teachers and lots of kids.” Young carer talking about primary school, Durham

“Cos it would save us explaining because in primary school there was only 5 teachers so I only had to tell five times and it saves you from telling because sometimes you get upset when you tell things but only five times but then you’ve got like twelve teachers and its quite hard to let all the teachers know especially when there’s someone in the class that’s like every time you talk to the teacher they’re like ‘what, what’ and I can’t really talk to the teachers.” Young carer, Durham

“Yeah I think they should like every like you know how like every year you get different teachers they should like have a folder on you that they can read

about you so first they have to read, like my friend he's got something wrong with his kidneys and at the end of the year teachers, by the end of the year teachers still didn't know about that." Young carer, Durham

77% of the children and parents in our research thought that schools should have a duty to assess the needs of vulnerable pupils. If schools were more proactive about identifying groups of vulnerable pupils including young carers then they could improve transitions and the problems young carers face in class.

## Chapter 6

### What Works: Supporting Young Carers and their Families in Education

Teachers, young people and their parents were all clear that increased awareness of young carers in school would improve education experiences for vulnerable young carers. 79% thought that young carers would be better supported in school if teachers and other young people were more aware of caring roles.

"Like I think it would be better if the teachers understood but I don't think the like students would. I don't think they'd be bothered. I don't think they'd care." Young carer, Durham

Young carers, teachers and parents all had suggestions about how schools and teachers could improve support for young people and resolve the problems we have set out in this report.

Q: What's your advice to new teachers who might have young carers in class?

A: "If they're feeling sad see what's wrong and try and help them."

A: "Like homework – we should still get it [homework] but get longer to do it." Young carers, Durham

"We do grace period. His attendance was appalling and that was because of his mum, know if they might come if their late to school or they need picking up we'll do that. We need to spread it out more to wider staff, telling them they're a young carer but without telling them too much, educating them." Pastoral worker in school, Manchester

The importance of schools working with young carers services and other professionals was also highlighted as a positive way forward to ensure that the right support was in place for young people and their parents.

"Within the school they would try and work out a support package. If a

vulnerable pupil needed support for whatever reason might be though it might involve a reduction in timetable, working with a mentor in school, or it may involve referring to an outside agency. It's hard to say what it would be because obviously it depends on the individual circumstances." School Counsellor, Durham

"We have an advantage that we have a multi disciplinary team, but we actually have a specific email that's called the safeguarding team, that would get that email, that to a specific designated person that highlights the profile and needs of that child that starts that level of dialogue" Pastoral Support Worker

"Having school drop ins first thing, breakfast club, they can come in subtly, have a debriefing, a sharing and caring type situation, not out of context that draws attention to themselves." Teacher, Manchester

"Early bird intervention at our school. I would often pick them up if necessary if they don't attend, quite happy to do it, but the staff think it's strange that I'm not allowed to." Teacher, Manchester

"Its about training though, it is hard because everyone has targets, or thinking your giving that one special treatment, but they just don't understand." Pastoral Support worker in school, Manchester

"Some schools take it on really well but some teachers think why are you giving that child that card to some and not others, it's about understanding for young carers, its not about special treatment it's they need that five minutes out." Pastoral Support Worker in school, Manchester

Young carers also spoke about how support services such as Family Action's young carers services helped with their education, not only be advocating on behalf of young carers and their parents but also by giving them time out and space to be listened to.

"[Young carers] helps me feel less sad and distracted." Young carer, Durham

"[Help from Family Action] makes me feel happier at school." Young carer, Durham

"Sometimes I get stressed at school, but then I go to young carers and I feel happier." Young carer Manchester

Below are two examples of how Family Action Young Carers services work successfully with schools to raise awareness of young carers in the classroom and integrate a

whole-school approach to supporting these vulnerable pupils.

## **Nottinghamshire Young Carers and Nottingham County Council Young Carers Quality Standard**

### **Young Carers Quality Standards Summary Nottinghamshire-**

In Nottinghamshire Family Action worked with the local council to develop a Quality Standard for schools to become centres of excellence for young carers. In April 2011, Nottinghamshire County Council cabinet agreed an additional revenue of £900,000 per year to support and improve the lives of young carers through personal budgets, direct payments to young carers and additional support provision for disabled parents to reduce the responsibility to care placed on the young person. In September 2011 the Young Carers Strategy for Nottinghamshire was approved by the Council. The strategy sets out a plan for the next two years of how best to provide this support to young carers and disabled parents.

The Young Carers Quality Standard has been trailed over the last year and completed by 5 schools and 2 colleges. In each of these schools and colleges the Quality Standard has been achieved when a school can evidence that they have systems in place to support young carers and their families, e.g. a Young Carer Lead; information available about support for young carers, disabled access for parents, and a way of identifying young carers.

Backed up by Nottinghamshire County Council's Young Carers Strategy the Quality Standard is a mechanism for our Nottinghamshire Young Carers Service to engage with schools and colleges and encourage them to be bothered about young carers in their schools by increased identification, more support and increased understanding of the issues faced by young carers. The completion of the Young Carers Quality Standard involves showing a significant improvement in targeting and supporting potentially vulnerable young carers, and presenting evidence that supports this.

Measures schools undertake to achieve the Quality Standard include:

- Taking responsibility in identifying young carers at an early age present within the school.
- Allocating a named member of staff that takes lead responsibility for young carers within the school. The named staff member must attend one of the Young Carers Service training days.
- The lead member of staff must make students/parents and other staff aware of their role.
- Developing a policy that actively ensures young carers have adequate support and adapting school arrangements to meet the needs of young carers including private discussions or tutoring.
- Ensuring information is passed on when moving from life transitions (primary to

- secondary schooling).
- The school are also 'inspected' by young carers – ideally from within their own school – to see how they are actually supporting young carers practically and who in the school is aware of the systems they have put in place.

The school/college is awarded the Young Carers Quality Standard when they can evidence that the support they have put in place has made a difference for young carers in their school to help young carers reach their full potential in education and further life. Evidence includes-

- Case studies of an individual young carer, demonstrating the difference the school has made in areas such as attendance and academic performance.
- Guidance/support in considering their options and overcoming barriers in further education and their desired career.
- Demonstrating effective care and resources that support vulnerable individuals that have shown particularly challenging behaviour/persistent absences.
- Developing particular steps/targets to encourage regular attendance with all pupils.
- Ensuring improvements in overall attitudes, behaviour, confidence and relationships of young carers.

The positive outcomes that can be achieved through the adoption and awarding of the Quality Standard for young carers include:

- Improvements in education - educational progress, attendance, in order to achieve their full potential and have positive further education/career options.
- Improvements in overall wellbeing and behaviour.
- Enhancement of school/ college profile.

The pilot has been successful and Family Action is working with Nottinghamshire County Council to roll out the Quality Standard to other schools across Nottinghamshire. Commenting on the Quality Standard Nottinghamshire County Council Education Committee Chairman Councillor Philip Owen highlights the importance of this work.

"We are extremely committed to supporting young people who have inappropriate caring roles, whether it be supporting a parent or any other member of their family. As part of this commitment, the council signed off its Young Carers Strategy last year and has pledged £1.8 million to make sure this plan is successful. The strategy includes helping schools across Nottinghamshire to support young carers more effectively. And as part of this work, the young carers service, which we commission Family Action to provide, has been working with a number of schools to achieve our 'Young Carers Quality Standard'. This awards them in recognition of their



commitment to ensure the young carers within their walls do not suffer academically due to the pressures they are facing at home."

### **"The Bridge" Young Carers Durham and Durham County Council Young Carers Charter**

Family Action Durham "The Bridge" Young Carers service runs across the county. As well as providing respite activities and family support work the service has a Young Carers Forum which informs the Steering Group overseeing the service made up of NHS and local authority commissioners. One aim of the service is to raise awareness of young carers with other organisations working across the county including schools.

#### **Young Carers Charter**

The Bridge uses a special Young Carers Charter that targets schools as well as other organisations and maps their organisational progress in meeting 13 specific pledges to better support young carers. Like the Quality Standard at our Nottinghamshire service the Charter is a mark of excellence for services supporting young carers. Our team in Durham are also working with young carers and school to pilot an ID card for young carers which allows special arrangements for young carers in school in order to aid and support caring responsibilities.

The 13 pledges in the Young Carers Charter young carers' particular needs and allow schools a roadmap to implement these through specific support and actions within a specific timeframe. It is a self assessed chart that maps organisational progress towards better supporting young carers.

Family Action's The Bridge Young Carers Project Young Carers Charter States:

1. We do not make assumptions about what young people need, but will listen to what young carers tell us about their lives and support them to play a full part in life, as well as support them in their caring role.
2. We encourage young people to tell us that they have a caring role and will support those who come forward.
3. We can identify young people in our organisation who have told us they are young carers.
4. We have identified member(s) of staff who are responsible for ensuring that young carers in our organisation are supported and able to access help.
5. Young people have helped us design a policy showing how our organisation will support young carers.
6. We are working to ensure that all other policies are designed taking into consideration and giving recognition to what young people do in their caring role.
7. We ensure that everything young people tell us about their caring responsibilities stays private and confidential unless we have their permission to share, they are unsafe or at risk of harm.

8. We make arrangements for all our staff, who may come into contact with young people who are carers, to be aware of the issues and also be aware of any special arrangements in place.
9. We try to make sure that young carers can be contacted or make contact with people they are caring for.
10. We agree arrangements with individual young people, based on their personal circumstances, which recognises that they may have to arrive late or leave early but also ensures that we know where they are and that they are safe.
11. When young carers need extra help and support we will help find this extra help and check with them how it has gone.
12. We will work with other organisations to support young carers and their family including contributing to assessments where appropriate.
13. We will speak on behalf of young carers to help people understand what young carers do.

The Charter addresses key issues to help schools and colleges to identify and encourage young carers to come forward whilst maintaining privacy and confidentiality. The ability of schools and colleges to make individual arrangements in order to meet individual carer needs is very important including the availability to call those they are caring for, leniency within late arrivals and leaving early to support their responsibilities whilst maintaining safety. Working with other organisations that support young carers and speaking on behalf of them to educate others on their demands and responsibilities.

Once the organisation have completed the process of achieving the Charter Family Action will hold a ceremony at the school and award the Charter.

### **Young Carers ID Cards**

Working with schools who have been awarded the Charter a group of young carers and staff from The Bridge are piloting an ID card to help better support young carers in school. Each young carer would be given an ID card holding information about them and specific allowances agreed by school to address their extra support needs. This card could include the ability to have a mobile phone in school to contact parents if necessary, occasionally being able to hand in homework late, leniency towards late arrival, ability to leave early for caring needs and being given time out periods if required. The ID card provides the young carer with an easy way to identify their needs to teachers that is discreet without having to explain their situation to every teacher and it is also recognition by the school that the young person has extra needs that they are fulfilling through this addition to the Young Carers Charter.

How to apply for a young carers card

Your school has a young carers champion.

Name: .....

Ask them about the young carers card scheme and how to support for young carers in your school.

**I'm a young carer:**

- ! I get wrong for not doing my homework - I feel upset - I fight \*
- ! I get detention for being late - It makes me angry - I don't like myself \*
- ! I'm not allowed my phone on in school - I worry - I can't listen \*
- ! I get bullied for being a carer - I often miss school - school don't know why \*

**I'm a young carer - and I carry a young carers card:**

- ✓ I get extra time to do my homework - I get good grades - I feel good \*
- ✓ I get an early warning when I have to stay back - I don't like it but it doesn't make me angry - I am okay with that \*
- ✓ I carry my mobile on silent - at lunch time I talk to mum and I know that she is okay - I worry less \*
- ✓ Everyone understands - I have a carers card - school know that I am a young carer, they listen. \*

information for you and your teachers

**Young Carer ID CARD**

Name: Joseph Bloggs  
Age: 14 D.O.B: 11/5/1998  
School: Wellfield Community School

**Allowances**

- ✓ Able to have phone in school to contact parents;
- ✓ Able to hand homework in late occasionally;
- ✓ Arrive late/leave early for caring needs; and
- ✓ Be given time out periods.

Expires: June 2013

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
registered charity no. 294713  
Minds & Computing

- \* Make sure your school understands this card's needs
- \* On this card you have a picture of yourself including family action logo
- \* You'd also have on the card your name, age and date of birth
- \* Make life for carers easier than it is
- \* On the back you have your school logo and allowances
- \* Make people aware of children in local schools that they are carers
- \* Help people understand more
- \* Let young carers have allowances of things at school
- \* If you're a freshman this card would be ideal for you
- \* Make sure you sign up for one after the old one expires

The service in Durham is working effectively with young carers, school and commissioners to improve outcomes for some of the most vulnerable pupils in school.

"The Young Carers charter is something that NHS County Durham & Darlington really value and support. The project which we jointly commission with Durham County Council - 'The Bridge' are taking the lead on this and promoting that all schools adopt the Charter and undertake the self-assessment on each of the pledges in order to improve the support they offer to young carers. I believe that all children and young people have the right to an education, regardless of what is happening at home. When a young person looks after someone in their family who has a disability, illness or substance misuse problem, they may need a little extra support to help them get the most out of school. The Charter and Card Scheme are a key tool for schools to use to ensure young carers are supported."

"The Charter is already making a considerable difference to young carers lives and helps to ensure that school is a supportive environment and may also help pupils to identify themselves as carers and receive appropriate support from school or The Bridge Service. It is really encouraging that schools are not only adopting the Charter but some are taking part in the School Card Pilot as well, this is testament to the close working relationships that The Bridge Service have forged with schools."

Ben Smith, Children's Commissioning Manager. NHS County Durham & Darlington

## Chapter 7

### Recommendations

To improve the education outcomes and social mobility of young carers schools, local authorities, Government and young carer services need to work together to be bothered about the experiences of young carers and their parents in school.

We have drawn up the following recommendations in partnership with the young people that we work with based on the problems that they have reported to us through our Be Bothered research.

#### Practical Recommendations for Schools to Identify Young Carers

- Schools should work with local young carers services to raise awareness of young carers amongst staff and pupils in school.
- Teachers should be particularly aware of some of the identifying factors related to being a young carer we have mentioned above including poor and erratic attendance, underachievement, poor homework or homework missing, aggression, lack of cooperation or withdrawn behaviour, lack of parental interaction with school and a reluctance to talk about home life.
- Schools could use questionnaires, invite all parents at key transition stages i.e start of secondary school, to help inform them of any special support needs that parents consider they or their children have.
- Given that schools receive the Pupil Premium based on Free School Meals and children and young people on free school meals are more likely to be vulnerable in some way i.e young carers or having special educational needs, schools need to actively use their knowledge about pupils on free school meals to proactively target and support children who are vulnerable.

#### Recommendations for Teacher Training and Schools

- University teacher training courses including PGCEs should make teachers aware of the circumstances which can make children vulnerable.
- Schools should adopt policies and procedures to identify and provide packages of support for young carers in school for example creating young carers champions in school, having counselling available, regular liaison with parents; intensive family support to address serious attendance and behaviour issues; support for young carer peer networks within school.
- Those taking over academies or setting up Free Schools should have to show how they will identify and support vulnerable children including young carers.
- School management should make time and resource available for teachers to increase their understanding of the issues young carers face in school. School management should increase the training available to teachers about young carers and encourage and support them to learn about this issue.

### **Recommendations to Local Authorities**

- Local authorities should develop, in conjunction with young carers, their families and young carers services Young Carers strategies to underpin and encourage activity to support young carers in and out of school.
- Local authorities and the young carers services they commission should work to improve partnership working with schools in their area to raise awareness of young carers and improve links so that young carers and their parents can be better supported in and outside the classroom;

### **Recommendations to Government**

- Government should strengthen guidance to ensure that all vulnerable pupils including young carers are supported in school;
- Government should introduce a duty in the forthcoming Children and Families Bill on schools to identify and assess vulnerable pupils in their school and provide adequate support for them;
- Schools should be encouraged to use the Pupil Premium to support young carers in school. Government should monitor this and ring-fence the Premium so that spending reaches those pupils who need it most.

### **Conclusion**

It is in the interest of schools, local authorities and Government to improve support for young carers and their families in school. Disruptive behaviour, poor attendance and the failure of many young carers to achieve their full potential mean that we have a duty to ensure this vulnerable group of pupils have the right support in place to achieve.

Our young carers and their parents have presented a compelling case for change – we will work with them to raise awareness of the problems they face and to champion their right to a good education.

We will also look to unlock further resources to explore some of the issues in this report and the possibilities to improve transitions for young carers so that outcomes for young carers and their families in school can be achieved.

**Thank you to all the professionals, parents and young people who helped us to put this report together and who shared their experiences to help us raise awareness of the plight of young carers in school.**