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Definition

In Southampton, a young carer is someone under the age of 18 who looks after a relative with an illness, disability, mental health condition, a drug or alcohol problem. Young carers often take on practical and/or emotional caring roles. What young carers do to help will be different for each person. Some will have a big family with lots of people helping, while others may have a small family or possibly no-one else to help. Why the relative needs help will also make a difference to what a young carer does.

Young carers take on caring responsibilities not just occasionally but as part of their everyday lives, often over a long period of time, meaning they also often miss out on opportunities that other children have, to play, learn and be young.

Young Carer Statistics:

- New research (2019) has found that there are approximately 800,000 young carers in secondary schools in England, 6 in every secondary school classroom.
- Young carers are 1.5 times more likely than their peers to have a special educational need or disability.
- Young carers are 1.5 times more likely than their peers to be from black, Asian, or minority ethnic communities and are twice as likely to not speak English as their first language. (Becker 2013)
- 27% of young carers of secondary school age in England experience educational difficulties or miss school. This rises to 40% if they care for somebody with a drug or alcohol issue. (Dearden and Becker, 2004)
- If left unsupported, young carers can continue to struggle with school and have significantly lower educational attainment at the GCSE level—the difference between the nine Cs and the nine Ds (The Children's Society, 2013).
- Young carers are more likely than the national average not to be in education, employment, or training (NEET) between 16 and 19. Of these, 75% had been NEET at least once (compared with 25% of all young people), and 42% had been NEET for six months or more (compared with 10% of all young people) (The Children's Society, 2013).
- 40% of young carers report mental health problems linked to their caring responsibilities (NHS Long-Term term plan 2019)
- 46% of young carers between the age of 5 and 7 get up through the night to care for loved ones (Carers Trust 2018)

Background

The Young Carers provision was previously commissioned externally between 2018 and 2024, but the decision was to bring the service in house in May 2024 following an 18-month review, involving all stakeholders.

The decision to move the young carers project back in-house to the local authority is grounded in the strategic aim of leveraging the authority's extensive data collection capabilities and established relationships with schools and wider networks. By managing the project internally, the local authority can ensure a more integrated approach to identifying and supporting young

carers through access to comprehensive data systems, which enable accurate tracking and early intervention.

Additionally, the authority's strong engagement with schools provides a unique opportunity to raise awareness, improve referral pathways, and foster a more coordinated network of support. This was also to bring it in line with the new DfE remit of an annual data collection through the school's census. This approach not only enhances the project's reach but also ensures alignment with broader local strategies and meeting our commitment to the city's Young Carer Strategy.

Statutory Responsibilities

Councils are under a legal duty to perform two main roles in supporting Young Carers. To identify young carers and to ensure that they have the right to a 'carer's assessment'. The assessed needs of Young Carers are covered by the Children and Families Act 2014 and this assesses the effect on the young carers' wellbeing, health, education or friendships – and whether they should continue carrying out that level of care.

In 2018, the Government published the Carers Action Plan 2018-2020 that set out a range of actions to support young carers. The actions aim to do this by focusing on improving the identification of young carers; improving their educational opportunities and outcomes; providing support to young carers, particularly to vulnerable children; and improving access to services.

Other areas of focus local authorities should be looking at are:

- local authorities must arrange preventative services.
- ensure a diverse range of quality providers of care and support in their local area.
- plan an effective and timely transition to adult care and support.
- have a protocol for identifying and assessing young carers.
- consider the care that a Young Carer plans to or may carry out in the future.
- consider the impact of caring on the carer.
- consider other important issues, such as whether the carer works or wants to work, and whether they want to study or do more socially.

Identification

In recent years Young Carers in Southampton has identified between 140 and 170 Young carers within our schools, predominantly within the secondary phase. The Children's Society suggests that there could be up to 1 in 11 pupils in school, who are young carers or have caring roles. This suggests that our identification of Young Carers was significantly underrepresented.

Since 2024, the service has been working closely with schools and partners to improve our identification of Young Carers. In the last 2 years the team and partners have increased the identification of Young Carers by 400%. We now have nearly 700 young carers identified within the city. We have done this by:

- Ensured that all schools have a nominated Young Carers Champion within schools. Currently 80%
- Established network meetings with all champions for both the primary and secondary phase.
- Provided training for schools on establishing groups and support pathways.
- Led training on completing national census.
- Providing eLearning and training with key school staff such as DSL

- School assemblies, coffee mornings for parents
- Staff training on awareness and identification within SCC
- Working with the city's GPs to ensure a new identification and referral process is in place to ensure we capture every opportunity for identification is possible.
- Training NQTs and 3rd year students at the University of Southampton
- Observation of school group sessions
- Parent Carer event
- Set up self-referral forms and revamp of the authority's website.
- Primary Care Safeguarding forum – training for GPs on awareness and identification.
- Worked closely with colleges and Post 16,
- 1:1 case discussion with School Champions
- Introduced Young Carers Cards, designed by them.

Risk Management

Being a young carer means that in their daily lives, they are at greater risk of missing out on opportunities and potential negative impacts to their wellbeing, life changes and statutory rights such as education. The service has focussed initially on the identification element with strong links with Health, Adult Services, schools, colleagues and professionals.

Through effective identification, there is a greater chance of recognising and identifying those potential risks and establishing correct pathways to support and engage with them and their families. Risk is managed through the assessment and referral basis and follows a triage system that looks at referring to the relevant support or opportunities.

Assessment

The service has recently reviewed the effectiveness of the previous assessment tool and we decided that it required a new approach. Working closely with the Children's Society and their national forum as well as several highly recommended local authorities for centre of excellence, we made the decision to rewrite a new process.

The previous approach left gaps in the identification process, as many young carers were not being recognised or adequately supported. Recognising this challenge, a two-tier system was developed to distribute responsibility more effectively, with schools and professionals taking a pivotal role in the initial stages of identification and assessment. This not only worked in parity with the increase in schools' responsibilities, but they are uniquely positioned to notice signs that a pupil may be a Young Carer due to their daily interactions and familiarity with pupil's behaviours, attendance and academic performance.

By empowering schools and professionals to take on this role, the new system facilitates earlier identification and intervention, ensuring that young carers receive the necessary support before challenges escalate. Moreover, involving schools fosters a sense of shared accountability and aligns their existing pastoral responsibilities with the broader goal of supporting vulnerable children.

The assessment is then triaged by the Young Carers service and decisions as to whether further assessment is required due to risk or whether referring to the local offer is appropriate. These recommendations are reported back to the referring school. A further assessment revolves around an escalation to Tier 2, or the most relevant assessment tool, depending on the professionals around the young carer. Outcomes of this can simply be suggestions of

support, referring the Young Carer to our activity groups or whether it requires an escalation for a wider family approach with professionals or referrals to statutory services.

Currently we are working to establish a wider professional group to aid the facilitation of Tier 2 assessments to improve the response time. These will be in the form of champions within social care teams, family hubs and wider professionals. As a peer group this will meet regularly to support the development of the system and form an ongoing peer review. Tier 2 is a more in-depth assessment that focusses on a whole family approach, linking professionals and gathering the voice of the Young Carer and their families.

So far this year, we have seen over 100 tier 1 assessments completed by Southampton Schools, with around 10% being escalated to a tier 2 assessment. Within our action plan for assessments, we have also:

- Provided training for Young Carer Champions on completing tier 1 assessments as well as awareness of how the 2-tier process works. This is a 50% increase from the same period the previous year.
- 54% increase in YC open to the service
- Worked closely with Manchester, Torbay, Leeds local authorities as part of a centre of excellence, to support the development of the assessment tool.
- The process was also developed further in with the national Children's Society Young Carers Forum. This was with 17 other authorities and provided a robust peer support group to share good practice. Since the funding for the work the Children's Society were doing was cut, Southampton has been asked to lead and chair this national forum going forward.

Current Provision

Providing activities and dedicated spaces for Young Carers is essential to ensuring they have opportunities to experience childhood, free from the responsibilities of their caregiving roles. These activities create a safe and supportive environment where Young Carers can relax, socialize, and engage in activities that foster personal growth, creativity, and fun. One ethos that we were keen to change, was the focus of the weekly sessions from being around them being Young Carers, to be children and young people first.

Such opportunities are critical for their emotional and social development, helping them build friendships, explore interests, and develop a sense of identity beyond their caregiving responsibilities. By participating in recreational and skill-building activities, young carers can momentarily step away from their roles and focus on being children, which is crucial for their mental health and well-being. Additionally, these spaces can serve as hubs for peer support, allowing young carers to connect with others who share similar experiences, reducing feelings of isolation, and reinforcing that they are not alone in their challenges.

A parent of a Young Carer, who works in a school recently wrote in a feedback session

I wanted to write to highlight that incredible work that both Emma and Clare are doing to support our Young Carers in schools as well as our staff team. Emma has lead training for our Young Carers leads as well as visiting school to carry out assemblies with the children and coffee mornings with parents. It has really supported the children, their families and our staff.

Thank you so much to both of them for their continued support.

Working in partnership with two charities in the city, we have developed two sites that offer regular groups for young carers to engage with. In our first 6 months, over 105 Young Carers have accessed our weekly drop ins and activity sessions. An increase of 54% compared to the previous 6 months. As well as the weekly sessions, the service also offers evening and holiday activities and programmes to give the Young Carers' opportunities to try and experience new things. The programmes, designed in partnership with the Young Carers, offered opportunities such as climbing, sailing, bowling, outdoor education, nutritional activities and many more. Often with a focus for the older group to look at employability skills and opportunities.

As well as these activities, we have also been able to offer a residential programme. These are vital for young carers as they provide a much-needed break from the demands of their caregiving roles, offering them time and space to focus on themselves and their personal development. These experiences allow young carers to fully immerse themselves in environments where their primary identity is that of a child or teenager, not a caregiver.



Young Carers Festival

The Young Carers Festival (YCF) is the biggest gathering of Young Carers in the world. It is an annual event for young carers to have fun, unwind, make new friends and try new things. It's also a political platform for young carers to be heard and influence change. Event highlights include, fairground rides, live music, outdoor movies, fireworks and the legendary silent disco. The impact of young carers coming together in this way has created a powerful and united voice about the issues they face and has provided a political platform to influence and inform national and local policy.

This year, the team took 17 Young Carers from Southampton to the festival over the 3 days. This was a perfect introduction for the new service to engage with the group and meet other groups from around the country.



Data

Accurate data recording for young carers is crucial in understanding their needs and the impact of their caregiving responsibilities on their education. Bringing the service back into the local authority and the Inclusion Team has allowed for us to be able to cross interrogate data for the first time and ensure that wider data sharing across the directorate. A key development has been utilising the Capita ONE system as well as linking the assessment process with Care Director.

Currently we have been working with ICT to develop wider data reports to enable us to not only report on a regular basis, but also to identify those Young Carers who may be experiencing negative educational experiences such as exclusions and poor attendance.

We are also working closely with our HAF (Holiday Activity and Food) programme to explore the opportunities of developing the commissioned platform to enable Young Carers and their families to register to an online platform. This will expand our ability to book Young Carers onto activities, track attendance, communicate with families more effectively and improve the offer available to families. This is currently being negotiated with the commissioned service provider.

Key Priorities

Over the next 6 months, the service has identified its key priorities. These are in line with the Young Carers Strategy, as well as our improvement plan. These are:

- **Data:** Improving the ability of our reporting, including establishing a corporate steering group to have strategic oversight of the service
- **Referrals:** Through the work with health colleagues and the GP network groups we are expanding the opportunities for professionals to notify us if they believe a young person is a young carer. We are also working well with the Police to explore e-learning opportunities for all Police and support staff as part of their induction and looking at how we can utilise opportunities for colleagues to ask questions about a young person's caring role, at every opportunity.
- **Tier 2 Assessment Expansion:** The current capacity within the service to increase the number of Tier 2 assessments is limited. We are currently working as a service to expand the number of professionals who are able to carry out these assessments and create a peer support group for designated professionals.
- **Increase Offer for Young Carers:** Through links with the community, the voluntary sector and utilising the influence of the local authority, we hope to increase the number of organisations to increase their support for Young Carers, increase the public awareness and potentially fund raise. This could include discounted offers, free taster session, support for travel or opportunities for employment.
- **Next Young Carers Strategy:** The current strategy for the city runs out in 2025. The service has begun working with key stakeholders and Young Carers to develop the next 5-year strategy.
- **Young Carers Awards:** We are aiming to have a city-wide celebration event for Young Carers in March 2026. Focussing on raising awareness, whilst also recognising the incredible work and resilience the Young Carers do. We are working closely with the Communication team to also, for the first time include a public nomination for resident who has supported Young Carers in the community.
- **Transition to Adulthood:** We have been working with Adult Services to build pathways for those Young Carers who will be transitioning to adulthood. We have established 2 engagement opportunities to speak directly to Young Carers. Further development will also include future commissioning and engagement with colleges and our Post 16 teams.

- **Increase Primary School Young Carers Champion programme:** Whilst we have seen a huge uptake in the number of schools commit to having a school Young Carers Champion, we wish to support more primary schools to engage with the programme.
- **Develop a Community Mentor Programme:** Working closely with the London Borough of Redbridge, we have identified a mentor-based programme that we feel would dramatically increase the support for our Young Carers.
- **Continue development with health:** Whilst partnership work with colleagues in health has been positive, there is an opportunity to develop this further both in terms of training and awareness, sharing of data and referral pathways for health professionals.

Recommendation

- That scrutiny panel consider meeting a group of young carers to talk about their experiences, how the service is benefitting them, and improvements for the future.