

Younger Young Carers (aged 0-8)

Support for young carers has evolved over a period of more than thirty years. Much of what is known about the lives of young carers is derived from researchers and voluntary organisations talking to these children and young people. Young adults have also contributed by talking about their experiences as children, when they were young carers.

The APPG for Young Carers and Young Adult Carers in the previous Parliament highlighted that there are all too often delays in identifying young carers; even delays of up to 10 years were reported.

We also also aware that:

- Our estimates of the numbers of young carers are based on children themselves reporting having caring responsibilities. This always shows far high numbers then when people ask adults about this. For example, research undertaken by Professor Saul Becker and others for the BBC, suggests that there are at least four times as many young carers as were identified in the previous Census.
- Much of what we know about the impact on their lives is derived from researchers' interviews with young carers and also when these children speak out through engagement processes.



Voices of the Youngest?

The ability of young carers to speak to their needs is though limited when they are very young and develops as they grow older and more mature. As a consequence, we know much about young carers aged eight and under, than for those in older age groups. There are far more very young carers than many realise but these younger children are often excluded from research. In all too many areas, there is no support for young carers under the age of 8, despite there being specific legal duties for councils to support them.

Our thoughts below are from two projects which have been developed to help address this gap in policy and research. The authors find it very concerning that what may be considered inappropriate care when undertaken by children of eight years and above can be ignored when falling to younger children.

The University of Plymouth has commenced a study on Young Carers in Early Childhood. This is looking at the circumstances and needs of young carers aged 0 to 8 which is the age range defined by the World Health organisation as being early childhood.

On hearing of this being planned, several individual supporters of the Young Carers Alliance began working as the Young Carers Illustrations Project and have been working very closely with the university.

We are finding that younger young carers are actually capable of expressing views and feelings about their caring situation if approached in an age appropriate way. There are also so many older young carers who commenced caring when they were little but were often not identified until they were older.





Some Early Conclusions

This short paper highlights some of our early conclusions and we are very grateful for the opportunity to share these thoughts about potential priorities for improvement:

- Practitioners in social care and health and also staff in schools need to be supported to identify where young children are impacted by caring situations and may be young carers. This seems crucial if we are to ensure consistent implementation of legislation in support of young carers of all ages, including the very young.
- There is a need develop training and guidance to all professionals working with families and children in early childhood.
- Inspections under taken by Ofsted and CQC need to ensure that there are no arbitrary lower age limits being set for identification and support for young carers.
- Similarly, Ofsted inspections of schools should not only look at the effectiveness of identification of young carers but ensure that this is operating effectively for those who are youngest. This includes in making effective use of the Pupil Premium to support young carers.
- We believe that similar conversations need to be happening with the early years sector as well as primary schools.
- At present, there is clarity about the need to focus on young carers transition to adulthood. There is an understanding of the need to ensure effective communication concerning young carers transition from primary to secondary education. There needs to be a similar approach in ensuring that early year services are identifying children who are young carers or likely to become so and in turn identifying these children to primary schools.

We thank you for your consideration of these issues and would be grateful for any suggestions and advice that the APPG are able to give about improving identification and support of the very youngest young carers.



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More information is available from our respective websites:

www.plymouth.ac.uk/research/psychology/young-carers-in-early-childhood-programme

www.youngcarersillustrations.com/