

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Kingston Carers' Network (KCN) is an independent organisation providing information, advice, advocacy and support to unpaid carers of all ages who are caring for someone who cannot cope without their help due to illness, mental ill health, disability or substance misuse problem.

Research by Carers UK and the University of Sheffield (2021) estimated the value of care provided by unpaid carers in our borough is £336 million per annum.

Our aim is to improve their lives by offering a comprehensive range of evidence-based services that meet the needs of all local carers and is aligned to the Carers Hub model. This approach is designed to achieve the five key outcomes of the National Carers' Strategy, one of which states children and young people will be protected from inappropriate caring and have the support they need to learn, develop and thrive and to enjoy positive childhoods.

We are the strategic lead for carers in our borough, using this position to ensure carers' voices are heard, whilst we drive innovation, best practice, efficiency and effectiveness. Carer participation and co-production is at the centre of our organisation as our beneficiaries design, lead and develop our services to ensure KCN is responsive and inclusive.

Demand is ever increasing, particularly as we lead partners in coming together to meet our joint responsibilities to identify and support young carers. We are supporting eight times as many young carers now than we were ten years ago. Whilst we work hard to meet need, to be creative with the resources available, the current financial environment is very challenging.



CASE STUDY

YC1 is an 11 year old boy, caring for both his parents. One has cancer and one is incapacitated with rheumatoid arthritis. Care workers provide practical support to both parents. YC1 was extremely shy, quiet and reserved, and rarely left home as his parents are unable to go out.

YC1 was matched with a mentor, A. YC1 had never ridden a bike before but had found a broken abandoned bike. A has a background in engineering and YC1 loves fixing/building things. Together they repaired the bike, and YC1 has learned to ride. As well as increased confidence, YC1 is beginning to use the bike for independent travel and A is supporting him. YC1 is learning about road sense, how to get about, to use a bike for leisure and fun and his wellbeing, physical and mental, is improving.

Most of the activities they have chosen have been firsts for YC1, such as bowling, mini-golf, cinema, going to Richmond Park. His horizons, his aspirations and happiness have increased remarkably. Trust has formed in their relationship and YC1 has grown to confide in A. YC1 started secondary school in September, often a difficult transition. With A's support, attending our transition programme and with other young carer friends also starting this school, YC1 is thriving.

6 years ago I joined a youth group called "young carers", a term I didn't know. We take part in fun activities and it helps young people facing a difficult time at home take their mind off their daily lives and do something they really deserve: relax, make friends and just enjoy the world. I've made many friends along the way with whom I relish spending time. The activities I have been privileged to enjoy have helped me understand that there are people out there just like me, and has helped me experience things that will last with me forever.



THE NEED FOR SUPPORT

Young carers are among the most disadvantaged children in our community with many experiencing poverty, poor physical and mental health and lower academic attainment, particularly in the aftermath of Covid-19, the cost-of-living crisis and limited resources in local authority and health budgets leading to less support.

Poverty

Young carers are living in households where there is illness or disability, which often has a financial impact on the family because of attributed high costs and the restricted employment opportunities for parents. Hidden from View (Children's Society, 2013) found that young carers are over four times more likely to live in a household where no adults are in work. We have seen growing levels of need with many young carers and their families now relying on food and energy bank vouchers and charity food parcels.

Health

The GP Patient Survey 2023 found that the physical and mental health and psychosocial outcomes were significantly poorer for young carers. One third of young carers reported having a mental health problem, including higher levels of depression and lower levels of self-esteem and happiness. The incidence is particularly high for those caring for parents with severe and unstable mental health problems. Young carers, who are missing out on extracurricular sports and exercise, may also be less fit and more likely to have weight problems.



Education

Identifying young carers is extremely important to ensure they are protected from inappropriate or excessive caring responsibilities, and are able to learn. For the first time, the Schools' Census (June 2023) recognised young carers, but 79% of schools counted zero. As approximately 121,000 were identified in the 2021 National Census, and this is widely considered to be significant under-reporting, it is worrying that schools are so unaware. MYTIME reported this year that young carers miss an average of 27 school days per year as a direct consequence of their caring roles.

Low attendance leads to poorer educational achievements. The Hidden from View report showed that young carers achieve an average of one GCSE grade below their peers in all subjects. Many young carers tell us that they worry about the person they care for when they are away from home, particularly whilst they are at school. Young carers may find it difficult to concentrate, be tired, anxious and worrying about the person they care for. It impacts their self-esteem, their belief in the future, limits their opportunities as well as their social skills and friendship circles. 16–19-year-olds are considerably more likely not to be in education, employment or training (NEET) than non-caring peers, with this year's UK Youth Voice Census suggesting that 32.9% are NEET, compared with 5.3% of those without a caring role.

HOW KCN SUPPORTS YOUNG CARERS

Young carers receive a holistic and bespoke service that is developed around the child and their own needs, goals and aspirations, whilst they lead the way in co-production, being clear what they need and how they want to achieve that. The team encourages and embraces the young carer voice and works with them through regular focus and steering groups. Young carers' support includes:

- Youth group weekly for ages 11-16 (transport provided by minibus)
- Primary term time drop-ins twice a week in different locations
- Young adult carer social group fortnightly for ages 17-23
- Activity programme of respite activities and outings all year
- One-to-one and small targeted group work
- In-school outreach support-monthly lunch clubs in 5 schools
- Whole family support award winning mentoring programme offering 12 months support to 35 young carers annually
- Advice and advocacy such as financial advice, advocacy in child protection conferences.

The weekly sessions all embody the 5 Ways to Wellbeing Programme, and include a varied programme, designed to be fun whilst helping young carers learn healthy coping strategies and develop more resilience. We will also run small, bespoke, targeted interventions for young carers providing personalised and flexible support.



**Last year, we provided
2,609 individual respite breaks at 214 activities.**

Targeted, whole family support ensures that families access the services and advice they need to prevent the risk of harmful caring. Training and information sessions are delivered to schools, health professionals and social care teams

IMPACT AND ACHIEVEMENTS

As the only organisation in our borough providing dedicated and specialist support to young and adult carers, we are well placed to serve our community. We are the strategic lead for carers and have strong links with both statutory and voluntary/community organisations, evidenced by the high number of referrals into the project. Last year, our Mentoring Project for young carers was awarded a quality mark, designated outstanding.



I have seen a real difference in my daughter, she has something else to focus on and look forward to. Gradually she has improved her behaviour at school, her punctuality and general attitude to learning and is much happier when she's at home.

Parent of young carer after accessing mentoring



The needs of Kingston's carers drive our work and future strategy to ensure that we have a shared vision for the organisation. Recently, we have facilitated the draft, launch and early implementation of the new All Age Kingston Carers' Strategy, written by carers for carers, in partnership with KCN, the local authority and multi-agency partners. Young carers engaged significantly and have given us a very clear steer on what needs to happen to improve their lives.

Taking a targeted look at evidence, our weekly youth group is lively and a very special place, with extremely positive outcomes. 40+ unique young carers attend regularly.

100% reported having fun at youth group

91% had made friends (i.e. reduced isolation)

76% felt less anxious



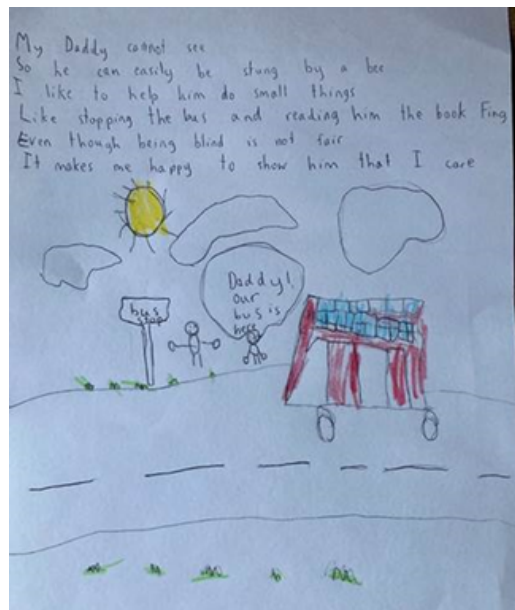
Respite breaks are very important for young carers, to have time away from their caring responsibilities, but they also provide “reachable, teachable moments” to ensure they have the skills and tools they need for positive life outcomes. YCP takes these opportunities to effect beneficial change.

Of 312 young carers assessed, the following was evidenced

64% had increased life aspirations

81% had reduced anxiety and stress

91% had improved wellbeing



“
My Daddy cannot see
So he can easily be stung by a bee
I like to help him do small things
Like stopping the bus and reading him the
book Fing
Even though being blind is not fair
It makes me happy to show him that I care
”
Young carer, aged 5

MEASURING SUCCESS

Success can be measured by the smiles and the regular attendance, but to ensure we continue to learn and understand how we could do more, our robust monitoring and evaluation process incorporates a range of methods to demonstrate the differences we make. It has evolved slightly over time, as we learn what works well for young carers.

These measure outcomes of social connections, friendships, emotional wellbeing and positive relationships. We use academically validated tools, developed by Professor Saul Becker then of the University of Nottingham, the Multidimensional Assessment of Caring Activities (MACA), the Positive and Negative Outcomes of Caring (PANOC) and the Post-Intervention Self Assessment scales to measure positive and negative outcomes of caring and to monitor the amount of caring provided where there is risk of excessive caring. Resilience is measured using the Child and Youth Resilience Measure.

Alongside these, we have bespoke tools and use a variety of methods, best suited to young carers and the situation. We have annual surveys, for young carers, their families and professionals to complete, alongside specific surveys for targeted interventions, such as youth groups, school clubs and the transitions’ programme. Our mentoring project uses the Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale, Brief Resilience Scale BRS, Revised Youth Loneliness Scale and GAD 7 to measure anxiety.

Together, these tools ensure we know our work is achieving lasting change. For some, this is significant, for others it will be small steps. It is also invaluable for us to reflect on what is working well, and how we can learn, be creative, adapt as we strive to reach more young carers and make more positive differences to their lives. Monitoring, evaluating and acting on evidence is essential to ensure we are achieving the best outcomes for young carers

USING OUR MONITORING AND EVALUATION TOOLS, WE CAN SEE THAT THE NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF CARING HAVE BEEN REDUCED IN 91% OF THE YOUNG CARERS WE REACH.



98%
have reduced
isolation



86%
have improved
social skills



75%
have increased their
resilience

Our whole family programme provides holistic support, from targeted sessions (e.g. managing conflict, sibling rivalries, healthy cooking), to addressing complex needs within families and providing supported activities to allow families to explore and develop their relationships.



73% of young carers feel happier about their family relationships, whilst **79%** of parents reported improvements.

BEING A YOUNG CARER IS NOT A CHOICE: IT'S JUST WHAT WE DO

Carers Trust Report, 2023

40% of young carers responded that caring always/usually affects how much time they spend with friends
57% said they always or usually worry about the cost of living
44% always/usually feel stressed
38% are always/usually worried
27% never/not often have enough sleep

Carers Trust Report, 2023

On November 14th, 2023, the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Young Carers and Young Adult Carers published their inquiry into their life opportunities, and concluded that “Our inquiry has highlighted the urgent need for cross-government action to improve the life chances for all young carers and young adult carers”

EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Carers are disadvantaged by poverty, isolation, poorer physical and mental health, lower educational attainment and they have fewer life chances. Our organisational aim is to improve the lives of carers and we are committed to ensuring that all carers experience equity of service, have the same opportunities to access support and have the same life chances.

We also recognise that there are groups of carers who are less likely to access services or experience greater barriers in doing so. Older carers, young carers, male carers, BAME carers and LGBT carers are also less likely to seek help and our services need to ensure support is available to them.

Our commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion is demonstrated through our actions, including:

- Ensuring that young carers and their families who may need our support are aware of our services by focusing on partnership work with local stakeholders
- Membership of the Active and Supportive Community Network has enabled us to strengthen our links with many groups, including Multi Ethnic and LGBT communities.
- Targeted support to some harder to reach groups eg young, older, mental health carers.
- Relevant Carers' Board sub groups
- Dedicated funding stream to provide transport to activities if this is a barrier.
- Website can be read in over 100 languages, use of interpreters
- Focus on our borough's significant Korean and Tamil communities to break down the barriers of stigma, culture and language.

KCN has a detailed Inclusive Practice Framework ensuring we are respectful of and responsive to all carers.

CASE STUDY

YC2 is a very quiet 9 year old. His dad has bipolar and was recently diagnosed with ADHD. Dad's mental health deteriorated over the summer and he disclosed that he was self-harming to a staff member on a family seaside trip. Dad asked for advice on explaining this, and his scars to his son. Mum works full time and as Dad had to give up work because of his health, the family income has decreased significantly.

YC2 was attending after school drop ins, but Dad was no longer well enough to bring him. Our targeted worker began to pick up YC2 from school to bring to drop in and provided Parental Mental Health pairs work, a bespoke programme to support this young carer and one more, to understand more about his dad's mental illness, and to increase his resilience.

YC2 and his parents now openly discuss his dad's health, he recognises he is a young carer and why. He has made friends, especially with the other young carer in his pair, and they offer each other peer support. YC2 is better able to understand and cope with his caring role.

The project takes a whole family approach, and the targeted worker arranged a statutory Carers' assessment for Mum, who was awarded a discretionary payment and relief care payments. Dad has been supported to attend Hestia and join the National Self Harm Network. His feedback has been that the support from our project has been so much more helpful than all his time spent with mental health services.

OUR TEAM

Our Senior Management Team have many years' experience in both the commercial and the voluntary sector. KCN holds the chair of the Carers' Board, with seats on the Local Safeguarding Partnership Group, the Kingston Partnership Board and the ICS Place Based Committee, ensuring a high profile with key stakeholders and other services. The manager of our Young Carers' Project has been with the organisation for 12+ years and has worked with children and young people for over 25 years. Our Board of Trustees is extremely committed and stable. Our Chair has 20 years' experience working in the charity sector for one of the world's largest foundations, plus 15 years' experience as an academic research scientist. He currently works in the field of arts and preventative mental health. The trustee skill sets include a strong accounting focus, risk management and very importantly, lived experience of being carers, including service users. Our staff and volunteers are experienced, highly skilled and deeply committed to improving the lives of carers. Recently we were re-awarded the local authority's adult carer support contract for the next 5 years, following a rigorous competitive tendering process. Our commissioner said:

“their motivation and innovation has promoted and progressed comprehensive support for carers in Kingston”.

There is no such contract for young carer support.

I continue to support my daughter. She herself has become a carer for her boyfriend who has become part of our family. I now have a dual role, I care for and peer support my daughter as a mental health survivor and I also use my carer experience to mentor her in her caring role.

It makes me very proud that I can pass on the kindness and understanding that helped me to support her look after someone else. It's not just that KCN improved my life as a carer. I would say KCN saved my life and enabled me to save the lives of my daughter, her boyfriend and our whole family. I feel so grateful and passionate about this that I have become an advocate for mental health survivors, their carers and neurodivergent people in crisis so that I can reflect back something of what I received.

OUR PARTNERSHIPS

We are committed to working with all partners, young carers are everyone's responsibility and a joined up, "no wrong doors" is essential. The Children and Families Act 2014, and especially the Health and Care Act 2022 have made responsibilities very clear to statutory partners. In the past year, the new Integrated Care Systems approach to health and partnership work has been transformative, as we have been able to share our knowledge and expertise with Kingston Hospital and the borough's GPs, creating real change for good. We supported the hospital to open their own young carers' awareness project, where they identify potential young carers, provide immediate support, then refer to our service. The work undertaken for the All Age Kingston Carers' Strategy has also highlighted the need and the commitment for a shared approach as the local authority, children's services, education, voluntary sector organisations and the local community are working together better than ever before. Our relationship with the borough's schools is particularly strong and vital. We will seek additional funding to increase capacity in this area.

“

I have been a part of the Kingston young carers project for roughly ten years now and I can honestly say it has changed my life. Being a young carer means having to grow up a lot quicker than the people around you and it meant missing out on a lot of the small things all my other friends could do, but that was just part of my life and the role I had to do for my family. I am so grateful to YCP, it opened me up to a world of other young carers that I could relate to and adults whose main priority was me and other young carers, which I wasn't used to. When I attend the activities and youth clubs I arrive knowing there are no expectations of me other than to have fun, socialise and be myself. They have given me so many opportunities and experiences, but most importantly I have met the most amazing people and I have created friends for life, and I am so thankful for that.

”

CASE STUDY

YC3 is a nine year old girl who began to attend the after school drop in. Peer mentoring is a skillset that is highly encouraged at YCP, and one of the youth leaders had asked YC3 if she would consider becoming a peer mentor. However, she was reluctant as she was very shy.

At the same time, a new girl arrived at the group, who was introduced to YC3. YC3 then took responsibility for her, showing her round, introducing her, helping her out, and unknowingly acting as an exemplary peer mentor. Attending the group had increased her confidence without her realising. She was now sufficiently confident to take on responsibility, help others, put them at their ease and overcome her shyness to form new and rewarding friendships.