

Hidden lives

Unidentified young carers in the UK



Washing up
Shopping
Home work
mummy's tablets
Bath brother
Wash uniform
take dog for a walk



Barnardo's

BELIEVE IN CHILDREN

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Who are young carers?

There are times when a parent may want to do the very best they can for their family, but find they have no choice but to turn to their children for help.

Young carers are children and young people under the age of 18 who provide care for a relative (usually a parent) which we would normally expect to be undertaken by an adult. Their parent may be seriously ill or disabled, have mental health problems, or may misuse alcohol or drugs.

This extra responsibility can last for a short time or can go on for years. Some children help with intimate tasks such as washing, showering or toileting; and others take on domestic chores like cleaning, laundry and cooking. Some also help administer medication or offer considerable emotional support to the person they are looking after.



'Before I went to my Barnardo's young carers project I found it hard to let my feelings out. I felt I didn't have any one to talk to. It's made me feel less embarrassed because of my brother, and it's made me feel I have true friends here because we all have the same problems. When I come to Young Carers it gives me time to do what I like, and makes me feel like a normal eleven year old.'

Young carer, aged 11, Indigo Young Carers' Project

Studies have suggested that young carers can:

- miss out on friendships because they have less free time than other children or may not feel able to bring friends home
- be bullied for having a 'different' kind of family life
- do less well at school than they might because of poor attendance, lateness, tiredness and difficulties in doing homework
- find that their own health is affected.

How does Barnardo's help young carers?

Barnardo's runs 14 projects that support young carers and their families. These projects work with nearly 2,000 children and young people who help care for a family member. They provide emotional support and practical help to make sure that the young carers do not lose out on their childhood.



'The workers at my young carer project have been there when I needed someone to talk to, and have helped me to understand my mum's illness. I now don't let my worries build up inside me. I know I can always talk to my project worker about my problems.'

Rebecca Moore, aged 11, Young Carers' Service

Introduction – unidentified young carers

Whilst the official figure for young carers in the UK is 175,000, Barnardo's has long been concerned that there may be many young carers in the UK who are not captured in official statistics. Many of these 'hidden carers' cope alone with a disturbing range of social, educational and emotional issues without receiving the vital support that they need.

When young people arrive at Barnardo's projects for support, it appears that many have been waiting a long time to get help, or to summon up the courage to ask for it.

As a leading children's charity working in this area, Barnardo's commissioned two surveys to investigate the extent of the problem, and to discover the reasons why such vulnerable children and young people are slipping through the net.



The research

Barnardo's commissioned two surveys to identify hidden young carers:

1. YouGov survey of teachers

YouGov asked a sample of 1,000 primary and secondary school teachers about their views of young carers, based on their own experiences at work. Schools have direct contact with young carers and are well placed to offer support and signpost young carers to other services in the community. In particular, we asked them how their school identified and helped young carers, and how effective they thought the systems for doing this were.

2. Survey of young carers

Barnardo's talked to 83 young people between the ages of 6 and 19. All are supported by Barnardo's young carers' projects. They told us about their lives at home, their experiences at school and how easy they had found it to get help.

Most carers fell between the ages of 13 and 15 and they cared for an average of 17 hours a week, with 17 young people caring between 20–30 hours a week. There were six young carers whose caring duties were between 30–40 hours per week.

The survey asked about the conditions affecting the person being cared for. The most common three conditions were a physical disability, mental health problems and poor physical health.

REPORT FINDINGS

Report findings

1. Are there unidentified young carers?

Teachers' views

More than nine out of ten teachers (91 per cent) were concerned that some young carers might be 'falling through the net' and remain unidentified and unsupported.

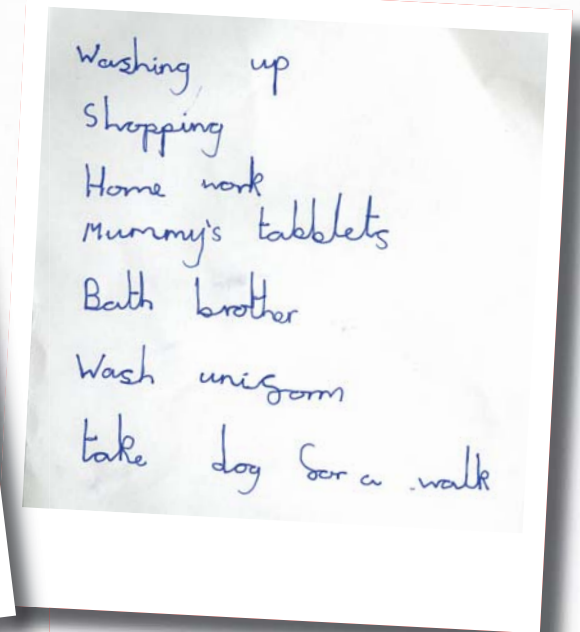
Almost half the teachers (44 per cent) were not aware if the young carers they encountered were known to the wider teaching staff and senior management team. Twenty seven per cent said they were not aware if the young carers they encountered had been identified by social services.

Two thirds (66 per cent) were not aware if the young carers they encountered were being supported by local young carer projects.

Young carers' views

Whilst the young carers surveyed were all currently receiving support from a Barnardo's project, many admitted that it had been years before their problem was spotted and acted on.

On average each young carer had spent four years looking after a relative or parent before they received any support. (Five had been caring for people for over 10 years before receiving help.)



REPORT FINDINGS



2. Why do so many children and young people care in secret?

A) A culture of secrecy

Our findings indicated that a 'culture of secrecy' is often adopted by the families of young carers, and the young carers themselves, for different reasons.

Teachers' views

A large proportion of teachers (78 per cent) believed that the families of young carers who do not request support have deliberately taken the decision not to inform social services. This is because they fear that the department might get involved in an unwelcome way (for example by breaking the family up).

Most of the teachers surveyed believed that young carers also choose to keep their situation a secret from those around them, including teachers, classmates and even close friends (because of the potential stigma attached to the condition suffered by their family member).

- 72 per cent of teachers thought young carers hide their situation from teachers.
- 75 per cent thought that young carers hide their situation from other school children.
- 66 per cent thought that young carers hide their situation from figures of authority.

The majority of teachers had encountered young carers who had been caring for people with physical disabilities, mental health problems and alcohol addictions. A significant number (58 per cent) thought young carers do not confide in their friends about the problems they face.

Eighty six per cent of teachers thought that more should be done to raise awareness amongst other pupils of young carers.

Young carers' views

Our young carers agree.

- 27 young carers (33 per cent) said that they do not talk to friends about their problems.
- 72 young carers (87 per cent) thought schools should do more to inform other pupils about caring issues.
- 41 young carers (49 per cent) were looking after people affected by mental health and alcohol/drug addictions.

REPORT FINDINGS

B) Lack of awareness within families about the support that exists for young carers

Teachers' views

A high proportion of teachers surveyed (65 per cent) held the view that some families are not accessing support for their young carers because they are unaware that support is available. They therefore remain unidentified by support services.

Young carers' views

- 24 young carers (29 per cent) said they were informed about possible sources of help by social services.
- 8 young carers (10 per cent) said they were informed about support possibilities by their school.

C) A lack of awareness by teachers about the issues that face young carers

Teachers' views

The teachers surveyed were at varying stages of their career. Most teachers said that now they would associate young carers with tiredness, persistent lateness and absence, and problems with completing homework. However, a significant proportion indicated that in the past, possibly in the early stages of their career, they were less in tune with the difficulties faced by young carers.

A significant number (60 per cent) said they believe that, with hindsight, there may have been pupils they encountered who were likely to have been young carers but that at the time they did not pick up on this fact.

Seventy per cent thought there should be increased training for teachers.

Young carers' views

- 35 young carers (42 per cent) said teachers did not take an interest in their home responsibilities.
- 48 young carers (58 per cent) said teachers and pupils did not have an understanding of young carers' issues.
- 36 young carers (43 per cent) said their school work was affected by issues related to being a young carer.
- 35 young carers (42 per cent) said they were punished by teachers at times when their school work had been affected as a direct result of their young carer responsibilities.



REPORT FINDINGS

D) A lack of knowledge amongst teachers about external services

Whilst many of the teachers said that they would alert school services of the existence of a young carer, 61 per cent of the teachers would not have been able to advise young carers directly about any local young carer projects in their catchment area.

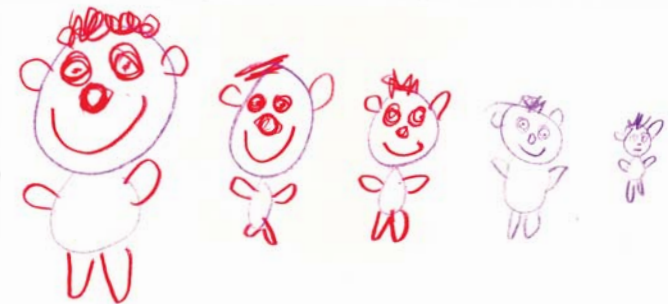
E) Teaching staff being unaware of procedures that exist in their school and inadequate procedures in place

- 59 per cent of the teachers admitted that they had no knowledge of a designated link person at their school with responsibility for looking after the needs of young carers.
- 50 per cent of the teachers thought that the mechanism in schools to identify and support individual young carers was not effective enough.

3. Do teachers think that schools should be mainly responsible for identifying young carers?

As part of the survey, teachers were asked which bodies they believe are currently responsible for identifying young carers. School came out on top followed by GPs and parents, who were thought to be equally important.

However, when asked who they thought **should** be mainly responsible for identifying young carers, they listed the same options but in the following order: parents followed by GPs, then schools.



Conclusion

The challenges that young carers face are beginning to be recognised. But our findings show that it is still difficult for them to talk openly about their situation and to seek help.

The culture of secrecy is strong amongst young carers and their families, and many young carers are invisible to the agencies which are there to help them. Some families are unaware of the fact that support exists.

Schools vary in the level of support they offer to young carers and the efforts they make to identify undiscovered young carers in their student population. Teachers are generally not aware of the support services that do exist inside their school – if in fact they do exist – or of those in the wider community.

Both teachers and pupils are not sufficiently aware of the realities of what it means to be a young carer.

For a number of reasons, the needs of a significant number of children and young people across the UK who act as young carers are not being met. Many spend years unidentified, unsupported and isolated in their caring responsibilities.





Recommendations

To improve the support given to young carers and their families:

- all schools should have a strategy for supporting young carers. This should include:
 - a designated member of staff with responsibility for supporting young carers within the school and putting them in touch with relevant community services
 - training for teachers
 - information packs that outline the signs that may indicate that a pupil is a young carer and details of the issues they face
 - encouraging a culture where young carers can ask for help without fear of bullying or stigma and where other pupils are aware of the issues they face.
- social services departments, health services and schools should work together to:
 - convey the message that the aim of their involvement is to offer the most appropriate support so that families can stay together
 - encourage families to come forward early
 - encourage their staff to pass on information about local services for young carers and their families.
- all local authorities should:
 - review their strategies for meeting the needs of young carers and their families
 - ensure a multi-agency approach that includes adult and children's services and health authorities
 - make provision for publicity materials to be produced that advertise local support services and set about distributing these to schools, doctors' surgeries and hospitals.

Further information

Barnardo's 14 services across the UK work with nearly 2,000 young carers and their families to:

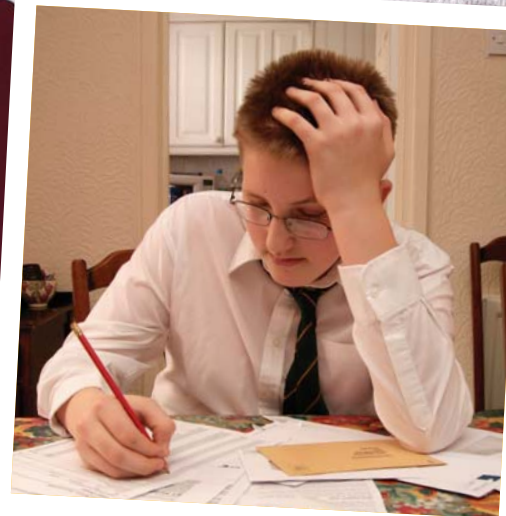
- make sure that parents are getting the support they are entitled to
- protect children and young people from the potential damage caused by long-term caring
- give young carers a break from their caring responsibilities.


We organise activities so that young carers can meet and make friends with others in similar situations. We also provide one-to-one support.

We work to promote the rights of young carers and raise awareness among professionals who work with children. We visit local schools to talk about young carers, encourage young people to go to a member of staff if they need support and help teachers spot when a young person is doing a lot of caring at home.

'I didn't know that there were other children in the same situation as me, and I thought my caring duties were part of normal life. Now I realise I'm a 'young carer'. The Barnardo's young carers project I go to has helped me make some new friends and given me people to discuss my problems with. I've grown in confidence and feel more secure because of the support I've received from the project worker and the young people in the groups.'

Shireen McCrea aged 13, Young Carers' Service



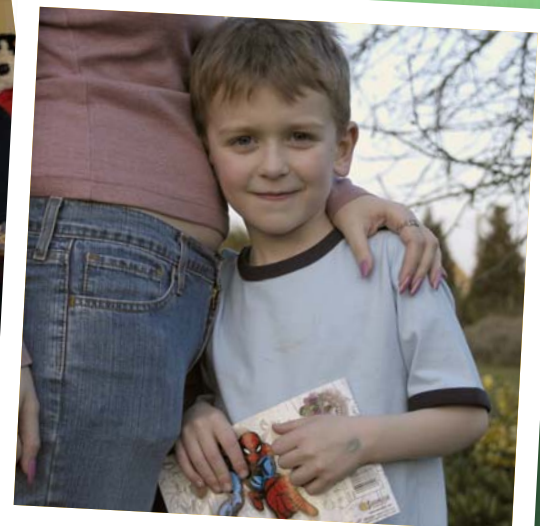


Background information

- There are an estimated 175,000 children and young people in the UK helping to care for a sick or disabled member of the family.² (However, as indicated in this report, there may also be a number of unmonitored young carers in the UK.)
- Some of these youngsters provide a great deal of care. We know from the 2001 census that in that year, 18,000 children aged between 5 and 15 provided 20 hours of care or more a week – that is nearly three hours a day. Nearly 9,000 provided at least 50 hours – more than seven hours a day.³
- Most young carers look after a relative with a health problem or disability. More than one in four cares for someone with a mental health problem and nearly one in five for someone with learning difficulties.⁴
- Nearly a quarter of young carers have no other support in addition to that offered by a young carers' project.⁵
- Young carers are aged between 3 and 18 with an average age of 12.⁶
- Over 50 per cent of young carers live in one parent families.⁷
- Forty per cent of former young carers said their mental health had been directly affected. Emotional traumas, depression, stress and low self-esteem were not uncommon. Around 50 per cent had felt counselling was necessary because the stresses of their caring years had left unresolved needs.⁸
- Most children and young people are expected to help out round the house, but young carers often take on tasks which would usually be done by an adult. For example they may have to:
 - give a mentally ill parent a huge amount of emotional support
 - help a disabled parent wash, dress or use the toilet
 - look after other children in the family
 - sort out paying household bills.
- Many young carers take on these extra responsibilities willingly and lovingly and want to carry on caring. They feel proud of what they are contributing to their families and get a sense of purpose and value. However they can also be adversely affected.
- One main reason why children and young people find themselves taking on these caring responsibilities is that the parents do not get the assessments and help from local authorities to which they are entitled.

References

- 1, 2, 3, 4 UK 2001, Census of Population, Office of National Statistics. London.
- 5, 6, 7 Dearden, C and Becker, S (2004) *Young Carers in the UK: the 2004 report*. Carers National Association: London. The report was based on a survey of young carers in touch with young carers projects across the UK.
- 8 Frank, J et al (1999) *On Small Shoulders: learning from the experiences of former young carers*. The Children's Society: London.



Contacts

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Support advertising

Barnardo's is launching an advertising campaign on 7 November 2006 to raise awareness of young carers. As part of this, we are asking members of the public to 'give their permission for a young carer to have a break'.

The aim is to collect 175,000 'permissions' – one for every known young carer in the UK.

To give your permission, visit www.barnardos.org.uk

Barnardo's, Tanners Lane, Barkingside, Ilford IG6 1QG Reg. Charity No. 216250



CAN CHLOE PLEASE COME TO SCHOOL TODAY AS SHE'S FEELING VERY, VERY TIRED?

PERMISSION SLIP.

I understand that there are 175,000 children in the UK classified as 'young carers'. These children look after parents or loved ones who, through serious illness or disability, need help looking after themselves. I give permission for these children to attend one of Barnardo's young carers projects. These allow young carers to get out of the house, socialise and, for a few hours a week, just be a child.

By signing this slip and including a donation I understand that I am giving my consent for a young carer to have a break.

Signed Name & Address

Permission slips should be sent to Barnardo's, FREEPOST ANG11453, Ilford, IG6 1YS. Cheques made payable to Barnardo's. Alternatively, text Break to 84862 or visit www.barnardos.org.uk

Standard text message costs apply. You must be over 18.





CAN AMY BE ABSENT FROM HOME AS SHE'S SUFFERING FROM A LACK OF FRIENDS?

PERMISSION SLIP.

I understand that there are 175,000 children in the UK classified as 'young carers'. These children look after parents or loved ones who, through serious illness or disability, need help looking after themselves. I give permission for these children to attend one of Barnardo's young carers projects. These allow young carers to get out of the house, socialise and, for a few hours a week, just be a child.

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Standard text message costs apply. You must be over 18.

'My young carers' project helps with taking me out, as my dad has lost his legs and can't do activities with me.'

Young carer aged 10, Young Carers' service, Caerphilly.

'Going to a young carers' project has shown me there are people out there who care.'

Young carer aged 14, Young Carers' service, Caerphilly.

'Going to the project gives me a break from my responsibilities at home.'

Young carer aged 13, Young Carers' service, Caerphilly.

'I've got more of a social life now because of the young carers' project and more friends.'

Ashley Baines aged 14, Flintshire Young Carers

'Without the project I would get stressed because I wouldn't get a break from home.'

Charlotte Stanley, Wakefield District Young Carers

'If I didn't go to the young carers' project I would always be tired, bored, and lonely with no-one to talk too.'

Nadina Farr aged 16, Merthy Partnership

'The project gives me time out and has helped me learn how to cope with different situations.'

Young carer aged 13, Wakefield District Young Carer

'I feel better after starting at the young carers' project - I don't feel alone anymore.'

Young carer aged 14, Wakefield District Young Carers

'Without the project I wouldn't be able to go out or have friends. Now I have something to look forward to.'

Megan Fowler aged 13, Carefree

'When there are problems I can get out for a bit and forget about what's happening.'

Young carer aged 15, Young Carers' Service



PLEASE CAN CARL BE EXCUSED FROM HOME SO THAT HE CAN ATTEND P.E.?

PERMISSION SLIP.

I understand that there are 175,000 children in the UK classified as 'young carers'. These children look after parents or loved ones who, through serious illness or disability, need help looking after themselves. I give permission for these children to attend one of Barnardo's young carers projects. These allow young carers to get out of the house, socialise and, for a few hours a week, just be a child.

By signing this slip and including a donation I understand that I am giving my consent for a young carer to have a break.

Signed Name & Address

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