

Caring for Equality



**An Overview of Barnardo's
Young Carer Event**



Changing childhoods. Changing lives.

Introduction

On June 26th, Barnardo's Young Carer Champions hosted an event at Stormont to celebrate their achievements and present their key asks to the Minister of Health, MLAs, and other key stakeholders. The young people shared their experiences as young carers and the challenges they face, as well as highlighting the ways that everyone can support young carers.

The purpose of this event was to celebrate the young people's achievements- both personal and as part of the Young Carers Service- but also to raise awareness of the challenges of being a young carer and how we can all play a part in providing better support for young carers.



(Young Carer Champions pictured with Minister Mike Nesbitt MLA, Andy McGowan (Carers Trust), and Michele Janes (Barnardo's))

Caring for Equality: A Celebration of Barnardo's Young Carers

Agenda

Welcome and Reflections

Mike Nesbitt MLA, Minister of Health

One Year On

Reflections from the Barnardo's Young Carer Champions

Equality for Young Carers in Law

Meg Stith, Policy and Public Affairs Officer

What can we do to improve support for young carers

Andy McGowan, Policy and Practise Manager

Closing Remarks

Michele Janes, Director of Children's Services

Barnardo's Young Carer Champions spoke in front of over 40 attendees, including the Minister of Health, Mike Nesbitt MLA, Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs), officials from the Department of Health and the Department of Education and the Education Authority, representatives from several Health and Social Care Trusts, and representatives from various charities such as Action for Children, the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Young People (NICCY), the British Association of Social Worker NI (BASW NI), Include Youth, Crossroads Care, Cause, and the Ardmonagh Family and Community Group (ARDCOMM).



(Young Carer Champions from the Northern Health & Social Care Trust pictured with Claire Campbell (Carers Co-ordinator) and Lousie Feeney (Carer Support Worker)



(Pictured left to right: Lisa Corey, Young Carers Project Workers; Carina, Young Carers Champion; Diana Armstrong, DUP MLA for Fermanagh and South Tyrone; James, Young Carer Champion)

Attendees



(Janna and Eli listening to a pre-event briefing with the other Young Carers)



(Minister Nesbitt MLA pictured in conversation with George, Nicole, and Emily)



(Pictured left to right: Young Carer Champions Jack, Maddie, and Rebecca)

Welcome and Reflections



The Minister of Health, Mike Nesbitt MLA, opened the event with some reflections from last year's meeting. The Minister also congratulated the young people on their achievements, especially to Jack and Maddie for being accepted into university. Minister Nesbitt MLA emphasised his desire to push for legislative changes, and he also highlighted that support goes beyond legislation and that his Department is committed to supporting young carers.

(Minister Nesbitt MLA welcomes attendees and shares his reflections on meeting the Young Carers)

One Year On

12 amazing Young Carer Champions stood in front of the audience and used their platform to share their experiences as Young Carers, including the systemic barriers and challenges to their lives as carers and as young people.



(Young Carer Champions each address the audience)



Janna

told us that many young carers don't see themselves as young carers, so we can only estimate how many young carers are in Northern Ireland. Janna also shared how important it was to receive support from Barnardo's.

emotional support, and managing appointments, often balancing these duties with their own education and social activities. Young carers may face challenges such as emotional strain, social isolation, and the need for additional support services



George

presented "Our Personal Definition" of a young carer:

A child/young person who supports/ looks after someone else they live with like a family member on top of their own needs and commitments. We help the person we care for to meet their needs and can often put their needs above our own which can negatively impact our own health, social life and education. We can be challenged with many different tasks day to day depending on our situation. We might do the washing, dishes, cleaning the house, cooking, collect and manage medication as well as care for siblings. This could be making sure they get to school and are up and dressed in the mornings. These tasks can be very time consuming which can impact our own lives dramatically. We may miss out on opportunities that others our age get to experience such as after school activities or going out with friends as we simply do not have enough time or may feel anxious or guilty about not being home. School life can be impacted maybe by being late from making sure our parent is



Natalie

gave us the "Book" definition of a young carer - A young carer is someone under the age of 18, who provides care and support to a family member or loved one with a long-term illness, disability, mental health issue, or addiction. Their responsibilities can include a wide range of tasks such as personal care, household chores,

up in the morning and has taken their medication or that our sibling has got to school. We might not have the same time as others to do schoolwork at home, or we worry while in school that we are needed at home. We might be losing out on our childhood because we care.



James

told the audience that earlier support for himself and his family would have enabled him to focus on his education, hobbies, and his future.



Katie

highlighted the failures of the health system and expressed a wish for "the system to carry the same level of

empathy and care that we as young carers do"



Jack

told us how Barnardo's has supported him: "Barnardo's to me is more than just a service, to me it is a lifeline in a way that I feel it changed my life for the better, enabling me to develop my own self-discipline and boosting my self-esteem in a massive way. Barnardos have been integral in supporting me access and continue attending university"



Maddie

shared her experiences as a young carer, and she shared some of her achievements, including making deputy head girl, getting all of her GCSEs, and completing her first year at Stirling University.



Eli

told us that all carers, but especially young carers, are in desperate need of help and support.

Rebecca

shared what the Young Carer Champions have achieved so far:

- Met with the Department of Health NI and Carers NI to input into unpaid caring research in NI
- Continue to meet with the Chair, Chief Executive and senior leaders of the Northern Health and Social Care Trust on a 6 monthly basis
- Met with other Young Carers across the UK via the Carers Trust to help develop and launch The Young Carers Covenant (scan here to find out how to sign up!)
- Taken part in the Barnardo's SEEN project photographing 'My life through my lens' and have become SEEN ambassadors
- Assisted Dr Michelle Templeton to deliver training on Child Human Rights Defenders
- Met with the Health Minister of Northern Ireland last August to ask for a review of legislation, specific policy for young carers to align Northern Ireland with the rest of the UK.
- Have been involved in the review of the Department of Health caring for carers strategy 2006
- Taking Part in the Youth Summit in Birmingham
- Involvement with the Children and young people's charter
- Attended and participated in the Caring about equality event Northern Health & Social Care Trust 2025



Legislation

As part of their presentation, the Young Carer Champions presented their Key Asks for the Minister, the Department of Health, MLAs, and all support services:

1. Legislation reform to bring Northern Ireland in line with the rest of the UK for better support, protection, and rights for young carers
2. Commitment to government funding for a Young Carers Festival in Northern Ireland, as in line with the rest of the UK
3. Better support, awareness, and engagement with young carers across all statutory services



Jack

told us that specific legislation for young carers would enable professionals across health, social care, and education to receive training and increase awareness of the specific needs of young carers.

Eli

highlighted the fact that the only legislation in Northern Ireland that briefly mentions young carers is from 1995!

Maddie

said that legislation for young carers would have recognised her role as a carer and provided support services specifically for young carers.

Young Carer Festivals



Nicole

Nicole described what a Young Carer Festival is: “A young carer festival is a celebration and recognition of the efforts and contributions of young carers. The festival typically includes a range of activities, workshops, and performances that cater to the needs and interests of young carers, providing them with an opportunity to connect with others who share similar experiences, build friendships, and have fun.”

George

George told us that Wales and Scotland both fund 3-day festivals to recognise the hard work of young carers, providing fun activities like art, music, and sports and giving the young carers a break from their caring responsibilities.



Emily

And Emily told us that England has been running a Young Carer Festival since 2000 for over 800 young carers to try new activities like kayaking and paddle boarding as well as the opportunity to influence political changes.

Better Support



Carina described the need for better representation and support for young carers, including her experience trying to raise awareness in her school:

“We need schools to recognise what a young carer is, and that they may need extra support. In September of 2024, I asked my school if I could do a presentation for staff on Young Carers. Eventually, in April 2025, I explained to teaching staff all about what a young carer is and how being a young carer impacts us. Most of the staff didn’t know what a young carer is! I am proud that I took the initiative to raise awareness for young carers. But what about the schools where there isn’t someone?”

In the words of Elvis....

**A little less
conversation, a little
more Action!**

Equality for Young Carers in Law

Meg Stith, Policy and Public Affairs Officer at Barnardo's, presented a review of legislation for young carers, highlighting the gaps in Northern Ireland's laws and how the rest of the UK legislates to protect young carers.



How Our Laws Define Young Carers

Northern Ireland	England	Wales	Scotland
A child who provides or intends to provide a substantial amount of care on a regular basis for a person aged 18 or over (The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995)	"Young carer" means a person under 18 who provides or intends to provide care for an adult (The Care Act 2014)	"Child" means a person who is aged under 18. "Carer" means a person who provides or intends to provide care for an adult or disabled child. (Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014)	"Carer" means an individual who provides or intends to provide care for another individual. "Young Carer" means a carer who is under 18 years old, or has turned 18 and is still a school (Carers (Scotland) Act 2016)

What are the Differences in our Laws?

Northern Ireland	England	Wales	Scotland
Right to a needs assessment <i>The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995</i>	Right to a needs assessment, including what impact the caring responsibilities might have on the young carer Support for young carers after they turn 18 years old Promotion of services, advice, and information NHS must involve young carers in decisions on care and policy changes <i>The Children Act 1989, The Care Act 2014, The Health and Care Act 2022</i>	Must develop preventative and wellbeing services to support young carers Must engage with young carers to discuss key issues in the social care sector Right to a needs assessment, including if the young carer is willing and able to provide care, if it is appropriate for the young person to provide care, and any future transitions the young carer is likely to make as they get older <i>Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014</i>	Right to a young carer statement, including the impact of caring on the young carer's wellbeing and daily life Must consider if the care being provided is appropriate for the young carer UNCRC Principles of non-discrimination, best interest of the child, the right to life, survival, and development, and the right to be heard. <i>Children (Scotland) Act 1995, The Carers (Scotland) Act 2016, UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024</i>

What we need in our legislation:

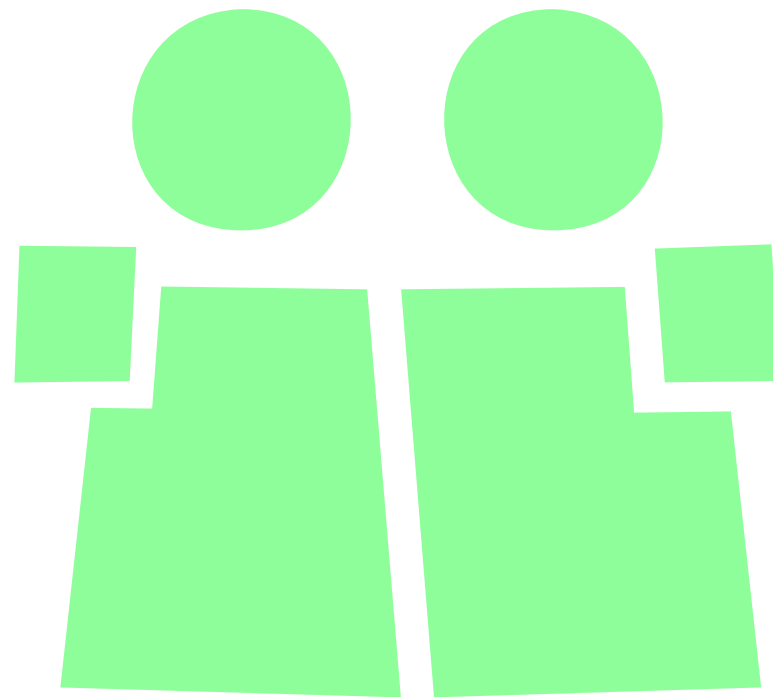
1. Emphasis on the willingness and ability of young carers to provide or continue to provide care
2. Recognition of the impact of caring responsibilities on young carers, including the impact on their aspirations and development
3. Commitment to commissioning services- informational, supportive, and preventative- for young carers
4. Involvement of young carers in decision making across statutory services
5. Support and services for young carers transitioning into young adult carers

What can we do to improve support for young carers

Andy McGowan, Policy and Practise Manager at Carers Trust, presented a range of fantastic initiatives that councils, schools, and other statutory services can take to better support young carers alongside legislative reform.

The presentation was themed around 3 workstreams:

1. Improving Support in Education
2. Improving Support across Health and Social Care
3. Politicians and Government-focused Initiatives



A Message of Support

Michele Janes, Director of Children's Services at Barnardo's, reflected on the event:

“

“Young carers are incredible. Sitting in the room today, listening to their stories, their achievements, and their passion for creating change was truly inspiring. They're speaking up not just for themselves, but for thousands of others who remain unheard.”

“These children are putting their childhoods on hold to shoulder responsibilities no child should have to bear. Every child deserves the right to a childhood. That's why we urgently need legislation that puts children and young people at the heart of support services, ensuring there is a system wrapped around them, not the other way around.”

“We've heard from our young carers what they need, we've heard from the experts, now let's take this opportunity to implement change to support young carers.”



”

Katie and James take to the air waves!

Two Barnardo's young carers Katie and James, supported by Emma Greer, manager of Barnardo's NI Young Carers service, were interviewed on BBC Evening Extra Radio. Katie and James shared their personal experiences of life as a young carer, their own personal struggles and what they think needs to be put in place for young carers in Northern Ireland. Emma spoke about the young carers meeting Health Minister Mike Nesbitt to call for greater recognition and support for young carers in Northern Ireland, urging the Northern Ireland Government to listen and act.



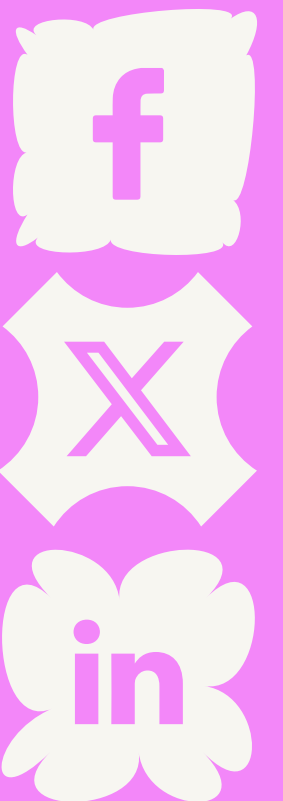
(Michele Janes pictured with Katie and James)

Katie highlighted that there needs to be a whole-systems approach to support and care that includes the family unit and all services for the carer and the person(s) who receive the care. Schools, teachers, and the general public are unaware of young carers and their needs.

James also pointed out that the legislation in Northern Ireland is not only out of date, but that the definition of a young carer in legislation as it stands now excludes young carers who provide care for someone under the age of 18.

Young Carers Coverage

The event was shared across Barnardo's NI platforms, including X and Facebook. Michele Janes also shared a post on her LinkedIn account.

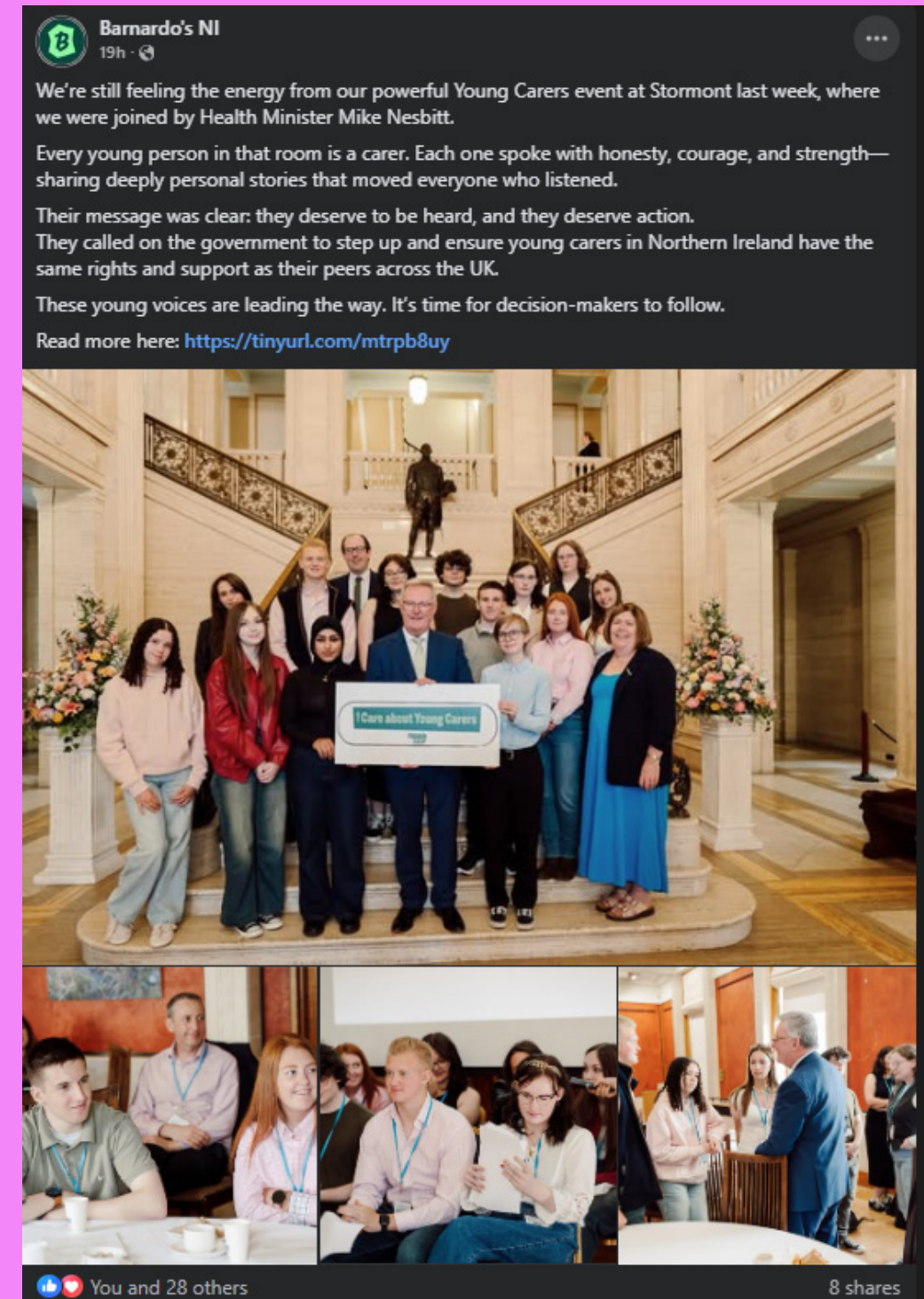




Young Carers Coverage





Young Carers Coverage





Young Carers Coverage



Michele Janes • Following
Director of Barnardo's Northern Ireland
2w • Edited • 

Yesterday our Young Carer Champions met with Health Minister Mike Nesbitt at Stormont. Rebecca (young carer) described the group like this: "We are young carers and we advocate for young carers, we champion for young carer rights and issues".


Their asks were clear - they want the same legislation, opportunities and support for young carers here in Northern Ireland, as their peers have in England, Scotland & Wales. Jack (young carer) said: "We want our rights to be equal to the rest of the UK. We don't want more rights. We just want equality. We want professionals to listen to us, we want to be heard and we want to feel valued."


Sitting in the room today, listening to their stories, their achievements, and their passion for creating change was truly inspiring. They're speaking up not just for themselves, but for thousands of others who remain unheard.

A more collaborative approach between organisations and departments is essential to ensure these children and young people receive the support they need.

Katie (young carer) summed it up perfectly: "In the Words of Elvis... a little less conversation a little more action please!"

Katie and James, and Emma who is the manager of our Young Carers service spoke to BBC Radio Ulster last night about what it's like to be a young carer and the changes that need to be made for young carers in NI. Click the link and listen from 43:20 - <https://lnkd.in/e5gUPAit>



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1 comment • 2 reposts

Young Carers Coverage

"Childhood on hold" as young carers are getting even younger, warns Barnardo's NI

[Home](#) > [News](#)

Published on 26 June 2025

"I was always thinking if I should go to things, is my mum well enough for me to leave. Things that no child should really have to think about."

Barnardo's NI is raising the alarm about the growing number of very young children across Northern Ireland who are missing out on their childhoods due to caring responsibilities at home - some as young as eight, and others even younger.



Today, a group of young carers gathered at Stormont for a special celebration event to mark their achievements and to speak directly with Health Minister Mike Nesbitt. They shared their personal experiences and called for greater recognition and support for young carers, urging government to listen and act.

Michele Janes, Director of Barnardo's NI, said: "Young carers are incredible. Sitting in the room today, listening to their stories, their achievements, and their passion for creating change was truly inspiring. They're speaking up not just for themselves, but for

thousands of others who remain unheard.

"We don't know the exact number of young carers in Northern Ireland, but the Carer Poverty Commission NI estimates there are over 17,500. Many of these children and young people don't even realise they are carers, they're caring in silence, without recognition, support, or the chance to simply be children."

Event Feedback

100% of respondents said that the event was “Excellent” and “Very Good”

When asked what they enjoyed most about the event, respondents overwhelmingly shared that “hearing directly from the young carers” and “the voice of the lived experience”. Respondents commented that the young carers were “So very powerful” and they wanted to hear from the young people about “their experiences and need for change”.



(The Young Carer Champions received a standing ovation)

“What is something that you will take away from today and implement in your own work to better support young carers?”

- “Raising even more awareness”
- “How invaluable my support can be for these young people to grow, develop and succeed, not only the support for them but also their families”
- “How behind we are compared

to the rest of the UK regarding supporting our young carers”

- “I have already sent a written question in to the Minister to ask for an update on the Young Carers Festival - and I think from hearing how some young people don’t even realise they’re carers, I’ve realised I could be doing more to use my platform to highlight the challenges young carers face”



(Jacqueline Davidson (Young Carers Project Worker) chatting with Maddie and guests)

- “Listening to our young carers and trying to implement their needs”

As a result of the event and engagement with MLAs, there have been several written questions submitted to the Minister of Health, Minister of Education, and the First and Deputy First Ministers regarding young carers and their key asks:

around the role of young carers, the challenges they face, and the support available. The Department and the Education Authority’s (EA) Education Welfare Service (EWS) supported Action for Children and Barnardo’s Northern Ireland with the launch of a Young Carers in Education Digital Awareness Pack. The pack, which was circulated to all schools in 2024, included:

Kellie Armstrong (APNI, Strangford)

1. **To ask the Minister of Education to outline (i) what actions he and his Department are taking to identify and provide support for young carers who attend school; and (ii) how is he ensuring every school sector is providing equitable access for young carers to meet his objectives.**

Departmental officials work closely on an ongoing basis with Action for Children and Barnardo’s Northern Ireland, both of which provide support for young carers throughout Northern Ireland, in order to help raise awareness and facilitate a better understanding within schools

- a letter from the Permanent Secretary to all education settings;
- a digital poster designed by Young Carers;
- EA and Health and Social Care Board (HSC) Guidance - Supporting Young Carers in School; and
- Young Carers’ Education Research by Action for Children.

In August 2025, the Department will be supporting the launch of Action for Children’s Young Carers’ video, “Teach the Teachers”, which is designed to help raise awareness of the role of young carers among teachers. It shows how to identify young carers in their classroom and what support they can offer to a Young Carer. The EA has agreed to share this video at School Principal events, with the intention that it will be shared further and throughout schools in Northern Ireland.

The EA is introducing a new specialist post to support Young Carers regionally. The postholder, who is expected to be appointed in July 2025, will aim to ensure consistency of approach and positive outcomes for Young Carers in our educational settings.

2. To ask the Minister of Health to detail (i) the role of young carers in developing and updating regulations and legislation on the provision of support for carers; and (ii) what new regulations or legislation (a) has been introduced; and (b) is planned to be introduced as a direct result of this involvement, before the end of the 2022-27 Assembly mandate.

The Social Care Collaborative Forum has been established to take forward a number of key priorities including a review of carers legislation (inclusive of young carers) to be carried out by 2028.

Young carers interests are fully embedded in this work through the participation of Barnardos and Action for Children in the Forum's Supporting Carers workstream, however no new carers legislation, or changes to existing carers legislation, will be brought through in the remainder of this mandate.

3. To ask the Minister of Health to outline what support and interventions are available for young carers in each Health and Social Care Trust.

The Department provides funding to commission and deliver a Regional Young Carers Service. this is currently provided by Action for Children and Barnardo's who as part of their service delivery undertake assessments of Young Carers on behalf of HSC Trusts. Barnardo's operate in the Western and Northern Trust areas, Action for Children operates in Belfast, Southern and South Eastern Trust areas. The following services are

commissioned across all five HSC Trusts –

- Day short breaks- this is a large group activity designed to offer young carers a short break with a focus on fun and socialising with peers.
- 1-1 therapeutic work – this is 1-1 face time with a young carer. It may take place as part of their assessment, review or ongoing service delivery (including 1-1 therapeutic work or a 1-1 short break session)
- Group work – this includes 2 or more young carers attending a group where there is a specific focus in response to identified need e.g. mental health group, sibling group.

Action for Children also offer Overnight short breaks in Belfast, Southern and South Eastern Trust areas. This is a residential activity that includes an overnight away from home designed to offer a short break with fun and socialising with peers. This may also include focussed group work.

4. To ask the Minister of Health whether they will commit to the introduction of a Young Carers Covenant that agrees to deliver a fair future for all young carers and young adult carers, in line with Carers Trust ten outcomes and as adopted by the Scottish Government, Department for Work and Pensions and Department of Health and Social Care.

My Department fully recognises the vital role of young carers and remains committed to supporting young carers wherever possible. However, many of the challenges faced by young carers extend beyond the remit of health and social care. A Covenant of the kind proposed would involve cross-departmental consideration and require the input and agreement of other Executive Ministers.

Whilst my Department cannot solely commit to introducing a Young Carers Covenant, I have asked my officials to raise this matter for discussion at the next Supporting Carers Senior Officials Cross Departmental Group, with appropriate involvement of young carers.

5. To ask the Minister of Health to detail the number of child carers that have been assessed for support in the 2024-25 financial

year, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust.

Young carer assessments can be completed by the Trusts or the commissioned Regional Young Carers Service. The number of young carer assessments completed during the 2024-25 financial year as reported by each Health and Social Care Trust and the regionally commissioned young carers services as follows:

	BHSCT	NHSCT	SEHSCT	SHSCT	WHSCT
Number of Young carers assessments completed as reported by Trusts in Statutory Function Report	83	N/A	29	60	4
Number of Young Carers assessments completed as reported by Action for Children or Barnardo's	43	8	23	60	3

Work is ongoing to differentiate the number of assessments conducted by the contracted regional service providers (Action for Children and Barnardo's) and those by the Trusts. My officials are working with Northern Trust on their data.

Last year the contracted regional service providers delivered direct support for **605 Young Carers:**



Sian Mulholland (APNI, North Antrim)

1. To ask the Minister of Health for an update on a Young Carers Festival in Northern Ireland.

I recognise the immense contribution that young carers make to their

families and communities, often balancing their caring duties with education and other aspects of their childhood.

Regrettably due to current financial pressures we are not in a position to offer additional funding for a festival at this time however should funding become available in the future I would be keen to revisit the proposal for a Young Carers Festival.



Carina speaks with Minister Nesbitt MLA alongside James and Monica McCann (Assistant Director)

A BIG THANK YOU



A BIG THANK YOU



We would like to take this time to thank some very special people who not only made this event a success, but who inspire us daily:

The Barnardo's Young Carers team- Emma, Jacqueline, Lisa, Kerry, Rachel, Angela and Eileen - for their dedication and amazing work, not just today but every day.

The Young Carers Champions

Janna, Natalie, Katie, James, Jack, Maddie, Eli, Rebecca, Carina, Emily- for their passion and dedication as young carers but also as changemakers through their work to deliver training, participating in high-level research, and advocating for young carers across Northern Ireland

(Lisa Corey (Young Carers Project Worker) gives the Young Carer Champions a big thumbs up)

To learn more about our Young Carers Services, please scan here!



Northern Area



Western Area

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