

## **Young Carers – Children as Caregivers Professional Information Sheet**

In the United Kingdom, Australia and United States, Young Carers is an organized, responsive movement ensuring the role of young carers is recognized and their needs are met. In Canada, a Young Carers group is active in Niagara ([www.youngcarers.ca](http://www.youngcarers.ca)) and research is being conducted in Nova Scotia and Ottawa ([www.healthyb.dal.ca/young.html](http://www.healthyb.dal.ca/young.html))

### **Who is a Young Carer?**

Young caregivers are defined as girls and boys under the age of 18 years who provide care to other children or adults.

### **What are the effects of being a carer at an early age?**

Being a young carer affects a young person's education:

- Many young carers take increasing amounts of time off school.
- Many young carers leave school without any qualifications.
- Bullying. One project found that almost every young carer it was supporting had been bullied.

And it affects their whole lives:

- Some protect vulnerable parents from their negative feelings at home but cannot keep them in at school. The real reasons for a young carer's behaviour are rarely discovered until it is too late to help them change.
- Physical ill health such as tiredness from caring during the night or back injuries from lifting an adult.
- Stress and worry. Young carers experience traumatic life changes such as bereavement, family break-up, loss of income and housing or seeing the effects of an illness or addiction affect their loved one.
- Mental health problems.

Young carers who only provide emotional support are just as vulnerable. They might:

- Stay in to be there for someone when others are going out and socialising.
- Deal with the aftermath of an overdose attempt or drinking binge.
- Worry about someone while at school or out of the house.

## Why are Young Carers hidden?

There are lots of services that could potentially help young carers, but most young carers remain unsupported throughout their childhoods. 75% of young carers in one area were not known by teachers to be carers.

All agencies that support adults can amend their assessment procedures to include some quick and simple questions:

1. Do you have children?
2. How does your health problem affect them?
3. How can we support you in your role as a parent?
4. What support do other members of your family need?

All agencies that support children can be aware of the signs that someone is a young carer and ensure their service is sensitive to young carers' needs.

## Resources

*Young Carers UK*

[www.youngcarers.net](http://www.youngcarers.net)

*Young Carers of Canada*

[www.youngcarers.ca](http://www.youngcarers.ca)

*Young Carers of Australia*

[www.carersaustralia.com.au](http://www.carersaustralia.com.au)

Thanks to Young Carers UK and Young Carers Niagara for allowing use of their materials.

## Young Carers Charter

*We are children and young people who are also carers. We believe we should have the same rights as other children and young people, including the rights to:*

- Be children as well as carers.
- Schools and colleges that give us the help we need to get an education.
- Fun, friends and time off from caring.
- Family life with well-supported parents.
- Practical help and support so that we don't have to do all of the caring in our homes.
- A safe environment and protection from harm, including any harm that caring activities could cause us.
- Services that value our different backgrounds, cultures, religions, races and sexualities.
- Be listened to and supported by the people who support our parents and siblings.
- An assessment of what we need as individuals, without any assumptions being made about us.
- Be listened to and involved when people make decisions which affect our lives.
- Information about the health problems that we see our family members experiencing.
- Advocacy and complaints procedures which we can understand and which work.
- Stop taking on caring roles when we wish to.
- Move on and become independent adults.