



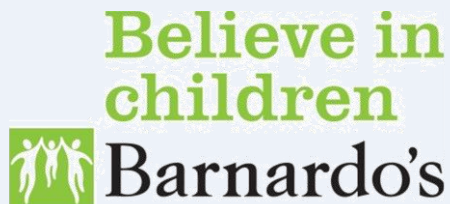
“Having people who really understand my responsibilities, that’s what matters...”

Involving Young Carers in the Commissioning of their Service

February 2021

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This project was completed in partnership with Barnardo's, further work is planned with Kirklees College and a group made up of independent young people who have responded to our recruitment via Social Media.

Thanks to these provisions for supporting the young people to participate.

Our Voice is Kirklees Children and Young People's participation programme.

We value young people's voices and see children and young people as experts in their own lives.

We want to say a **HUGE THANK YOU to all the young people who shared their time and thoughts with us. This will assist our decision makers understand their 'wish-list' for the Young Carer's Service tender and commission.**

The Our Voice team can be contacted at:

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What is a 'Young Carer' and why is it so important we involve children and young people with 'lived experience' in the service design?

A young carer is defined as a young person who offers emotional and or physical support to another person. This might their parent/carer or sibling ([Child Line](#) 2021).

Young Carers may not see themselves as anything other than a young person; therefore, understanding how they choose to define themselves is important.

Young Carers often help someone with:

- Chores like cleaning and washing
- Cooking
- Shopping
- Keeping someone company
- Helping the person they support with personal care, such as bathing and dressing.
- Providing reassurance and emotional support to the person they help
- Helping with medicines and appointments

Nationally, research indicates 195,000 young people have caring responsibilities. However, there is uncertainty around the overall scale of UK young carers, as families who experience alcohol or substance misuse may be hesitant to discuss these difficulties or seek support ([Banardo's-James](#) 2017).

The young persons caring responsibilities go beyond those of their peers.

Census data from 2011, suggested there were 953 young carers aged 15 and below in our local area. However, the census data did not identify those aged 16-18, with caring responsibilities; this group is often known as 'Young Adult Carers'. You can access this information [here](#).

As Young Carers spend time helping others, this can affect:

- School attendance, concentration, homework, and exam grades.
- The ability for those 16+ to find employment, which fits alongside their caring responsibilities.
- Mental health and wellbeing. It can be hard managing both your own and other people's needs. This can lead to sadness, low mood and worries.

"It can sometimes be really hard. People don't always understand how heavy the responsibilities I have are. They seem to worry about such small things..."

"It's not just about having someone to talk to-a place to go or a break, it's about knowing where to go for the help when I really need it and knowing the adults there will 'get it'"

Who took part and how were they involved?

A variety of approaches will be used to engage young people in the commissioning of the Young Carers Service.

This first stage was all about listening to children and young people's wishes and feelings to inform the tender- what do they need from a service. When reflecting on the support they have accessed, has there been anything they find useful or helpful do they have suggestions for change?

Therefore, 3 engagement sessions were completed with a total of 19 young people, who are currently being supported by our current Young Carers service provider. These included:

An 8-11's junior session with 5 young people

A 12-15's young people's session with 5 young people

A 16-22 young adult carers session with 9 young people

Of these 19 children and young people, 3 were 'new to service' and attended the engagement as their first session. Some of the young people had experienced attending the service which was commissioned prior to the current provider or attended additional support sessions in their schools or colleges. Therefore, they could compare and contrast experiences and models of support. The young people were assured their messages would be anonymised.

Alongside this, young people from a variety of other groups such as Colleges and Community organisations, were offered the opportunity to be part of the process. To engage these children and young people, there was an offer of virtual meetings, an anonymous online 'form' and 'text conversations'. Unfortunately, despite connections being made and sessions organised, these could not all be completed prior to the submission of this initial report. Therefore, any further information will be shared with the commissioner as it is secured.

All young people who have volunteered to date, have been offered the opportunity to move onto the 'next steps', where we will support them to create a question for the tender and be part of the evaluation panels, should they wish to do so.

Demographic data was not discussed in the sessions to uphold confidentiality and in line with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The group facilitators provided a summary of ages, ethnicities and gender information. The young people who participated included both male and female young people from North and South Kirklees, with BAME and White ethnicities. Monitoring data has been supplied to the Commissioner in regards to this engagement.

The Children and Young People's 'Wishlist'

The children we spoke with, aged between 8 and 11 years, very much focussed on activity provision as part of what they look for in a young carers service. They suggested:

- Arts and crafts
- Origami (as it's relaxing)
- Cooking
- Cycling
- Swimming
- Climbing
- Outdoor treasure hunts
- Camping

We did a 'show and tell' activity to prompt conversation. Two young people spoke about the love they had for their pets. This prompted discussion around sessions which might feature working with animals/therapy dogs. 4 of the 5 young people really liked this idea.

Although current covid restrictions mean most service delivery is virtual, the young people who participated preferred face to face services over virtual and looked forward to a time where they could once again meet. They preferred face to face contact and enjoyed the 'social aspect' of meeting with friends.

School holiday activity programmes were also raised as something the group would enjoy.

The young people we spoke with, aged between 12 and 15 years, also took an activity focus in their discussions. They suggested:

- Arts and crafts, however this group expanded the discussion and thought a 'class' type approach where someone shows you how was helpful.
- Cooking and baking
- Sports
- Den building/forestry

As activities that they would enjoy doing, as part of 'a young carers service'.

The groups liked the idea of weekly provision with younger members preferring twilight sessions-straight after school. The teens aged 12-15 were mixed, with a clear division in preference over twilight/early evening sessions.

Half of the children's group had family or friends who could transport them to sessions; but really appreciated it when the service was able to offer transport too.

The 12-15's group were all willing to travel on bus (not trains they "*are scary*") to a session, but the cost would be a barrier. Some group member would not be able to attend if they had to pay travel fares. Understanding the length of journeys and times to reach support, is something which requires further discussions.

Older Teens and Young Adult Carers' 'Wishlist'

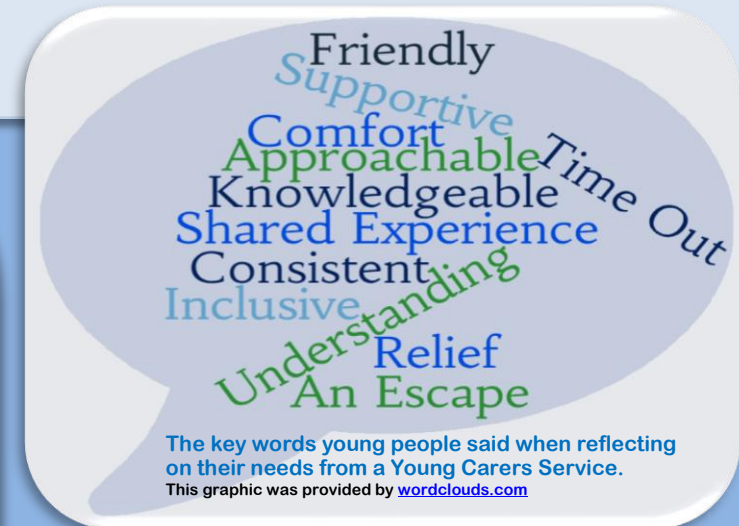
The older teens and young adults we spoke with (aged 16-22) were very clear they did not want the service offered to be 'activity focussed', like the younger group.

The emphasis of the group should, in their opinion be one of shared experiences, peer support and *"an escape or timeout"*. They wanted to be with others who understood them. In short, a casual and safe meeting space, without too much structure, where there was time to talk, listen and socialise. Food and refreshments were also mentioned as a great bonus!

Interestingly, they also highlighted that many of the independent living skills offered at young people's activity sessions*, were often things that they already would know *"I really don't want someone to show me how to cook a pizza, I can already do that"*. It appeared that being a young carer had meant these young people had already developed their 'day to day' independent living skills. *"What I do need is someone to help me overcome my worries and anxieties so I can move onto further education or find employment"*. This suggested that a co-created service where the young people can shape and tailor their support in a personalised way, would be useful. Therefore, a social group as part of the service offered was the key element, but also discussion focussed around bespoke 1:1 support and specialised information and guidance, tailored to individual need alongside this.

Emotional health and wellbeing were raised as a key focus. The young people discussed the challenges of managing their worries and feelings and the need for someone to be able to help them learn tools and useable techniques to do this. The need for all professionals to be trained to have a key understanding of the unique experiences of young carers and the specialist knowledge to offer mental health and wellbeing support was desirable.

Smooth transitions were raised as important, should there be 'changes' to a service provider or way a service is delivered. There was also passion about keeping consistent staff or at least ensuring a well-structured and thorough handover if staff changes must occur.



"I've been involved in the young carers' service for a long time. The people and places have changed over the years. The one thing I'd say is, is that if the service changes, there needs to be a way of making sure there isn't a 'gap'.

I went three years without support when that happened last time. The help is important, we need it..." young person (19)

"The one thing I really struggle with, when services change, is having to build relationship with another person: starting over again.

You know, having to re-tell your story, every time..." young person (15)

The key elements of a Young Carers Service

A service which is collaboratively created with the young people it supports.

The young people's suggestions for activities (younger service users) and ideas for useful information and guidance (young adult carers) are listened to and factored into the 'offer'. This is a 'live and ongoing' process.

The service should be welcoming (including allowing a friend/support to come along to the initial meeting if necessary). It should be non-judgemental, inclusive, and understanding of the young people's needs, with the staff being trained and knowledgeable about the challenges encountered by young people who care for others. It should be face to face, but also consider virtual options for children and young people who prefer these (online meetings/sessions/ phone/ apps etc).

For children and 'tweens' (those between childhood and adolescence) ...

A weekly twilight or early evening activity focussed session which includes a range of fun things to do, where we can socialise together. Please remember some of us have 'blended families' and so weekend activities might take us away from the family time we have with our non-resident parent/family.

Transport provision for those who are not able to reach the service otherwise, is really useful.

Holiday activities that are a 'break', social and fun are really important!

For teenagers and young adult carers...

A fortnightly/monthly peer support/ social group, which includes a range of opportunities to meet with other services and professionals who can offer specialist support and guidance.

The ability to work 1:1 on individualised support that addresses the challenges identified by the young person.

An ongoing focus on emotional health and wellbeing, with staff who are trained to offer mental health support/ interventions or strong working relationships with other professional agencies who can do this.

The service should know how to link young carers up with crisis support.

There should be a focus on making sure the important services in our lives are working together, to ensure our support needs are met.

The service should have a role in raising awareness about young carers and promoting inclusion across our community.



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The Our Voice webpage is here: <https://www.kirkleessafeguardingchildren.co.uk/young-peoples-voice/>
You can also follow us, on our Socials:



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