

BACKGROUND

Previous research conducted by the Carers Trust and The Children's Society, indicates that young carers' attendance at school can be affected by their caring responsibilities with an average of 48 school days missed or cut short per year. (1) This research also highlights that young carers have significantly lower educational attainment at GCSE level. (2)

However, we recognise that that data is now outdated, and we wanted to learn how being a young carer in 2023 has an impact on a child's education. Therefore, we conducted a new study to examine this issue and provide insights for educators on how to better support young carers in their educational journey.

METHODOLOGY

We collected attainment and attendance data from 5 local secondary schools. This sample represents 171 young carers out of 4497 students (4%) in some of MYTIME's partner schools.

WHO ARE YOUNG CARERS?

A young carer is a child, just like any other. The only difference is that young carers are responsible for the care of at least one member of their family, though they may be as young as five years old themselves. These children work incredibly hard to care for loved ones, yet they represent a largely forgotten community, and often face enormous disadvantage as a result.

WHAT IS LEVEL UP?

The Level Up Programme aims to address the issues young carers face in education and ensure that these incredible young people receive the support they need to fulfil their potential in education and beyond. We provide training and resources to school staff to equip them with the knowledge, tools, and strategies to effectively support young carers, both academically and emotionally.

YOUNG CARERS HAVE DOUBLE THE PERSISTENT ABSENCE (19.7% VS 41.6%)

KEY FINDINGS

FINDING 1: RATE OF ABSENCE

Young carers have double the rate of absence (14.1%) to non-young carers (7.7%). This results in young carers missing an average of 27 days each academic year. This equates to 135 days of secondary school, almost 70% of an academic year.

Missing school can mean that young carers miss out on important academic content and fall behind their peers. This can make it harder for them to achieve their academic potential and may limit their future opportunities.

When young carers miss school, they may miss out on opportunities to socialise with peers and develop friendships. This can lead to social isolation and feelings of loneliness.

FINDING 2: ATTAINMENT

Young carers are twice as likely (11.2% vs 22.6%) to leave primary school below ARE (Age Related Expectations - average student) and twice as unlikely (23.5% vs 12.5%) to meet GDS (Greater Depth Student - working above average).

The evidence suggests that young carers may struggle in essential subjects like reading, writing, and mathematics, putting them at a disadvantage compared to their peers when they start secondary school. Therefore, it is crucial young carers are provided with extra resources and support in school to help them reach their full potential.

Young carers who are falling behind academically may compare their abilities to their peers which can lead to feelings of low self-esteem and self-worth. It can also lead to feelings of anxiety if a young carer feels like they are not meeting their teachers' expectations.

FINDING 3: PUPIL PREMIUM

In comparison to the whole cohort, young carers are almost three times as likely to be eligible for Pupil Premium Funding. 70% of young carers are Pupil Premium compared to 26% of non-young carers.

This means that school staff could seek to identify young carers through their Pupil Premium lists. School leaders can also use this information to direct resources and funding towards supporting young carers, such as providing additional academic support, mentoring, and emotional support.

This also tells us that young carers face multiple barriers outside of school, that can have a negative impact on their ability to engage with education. These barriers include accessing resources such as textbooks and technology. It is imperative that schools address these barriers to help young carers achieve their potential.



“Feedback from the students has been overwhelmingly positive; they have highlighted that previously they had not felt that the school knew who they were or was effectively supporting them.”

Assistant Principle at Glenmoor and Winton Academies

CASE STUDY

Layla (name changed to protect identity) supports her Mum at home. Her Mum has a spinal injury, which means she uses a wheelchair. Layla helps her Mum in the morning, which sometimes makes her late for school. However, her school has a policy that penalises late students with after-school detention to make up for the time missed.

Layla has admitted that if she knows she's going to be late, it causes her anxiety because she doesn't want to be told off at school or be late home to support her Mum. This anxiety often leads to her staying at home and having persistent absences because she becomes anxious about the work she needs to catch up on. Unfortunately, this becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Recently, Layla's school has put in place a policy to support her attending school without being punished for arriving late. This has helped ease her anxiety, and her attendance has started to improve.

RECOMMENDATIONS



- Schools should have a process in place that helps identify young carers.
- Schools should have a Young Carers Policy that outlines the strategies in place to support young carers in school.
- Schools should have a Young Carer Champion that is a trusted member of staff for young carers to talk to as and when needed.
- MYTIME plan on collecting this data again in the new academic year with the same schools, with the addition of five primary schools.
- MYTIME will pilot Young Carer Champion Training in the upcoming academic year, aiming to empower champions in schools to enhance support and identification systems for young carers, creating a more inclusive environment.

REFERENCES

- (1) Carers Trust & The Children's Society, *Young Carers in School*, 2020
- (2) The Children's Society, *Hidden from View: The Experiences of Young Carers in England*, 2013