

YOUNG CARERS: LEVEL UP PROGRAMME EXPERIENCES

MYTIME

YOUNG CARERS

WHO ARE YOUNG CARERS?

Young carers are responsible for the care of at least one member of their family, and 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 overlooked community and often face enormous educational and emotional disadvantage as a result.

WHAT IS THE LEVEL UP PROGRAMME?

The Level Up Programme (LUP) aims to address the issues young carers face in education. MYTIME provides training and resources to school staff to equip them with the knowledge, tools, and strategies to effectively support young carers, both academically and emotionally.

METHODOLOGY

This report presents the findings of a comparative study, conducted to assess the impact of the Level Up Programme. MYTIME surveyed* 31 young carers attending schools about to start the Level Up journey with MYTIME. The charity later surveyed 233 young carers attending schools at different stages of the Level Up journey. MYTIME then compared the results to demonstrate the impact the Level Up Programme is having on young carers. The key areas examined in this study include raising awareness, staff understanding, knowing who to talk to and access to regular support groups.

*Wording changed between the first and second survey; however, the essence of the questions remained the same.

KEY FINDINGS

159

SCHOOLS ON THE LEVEL UP JOURNEY

375%

INCREASE IN YOUNG CARERS IDENTIFIED IN SCHOOLS

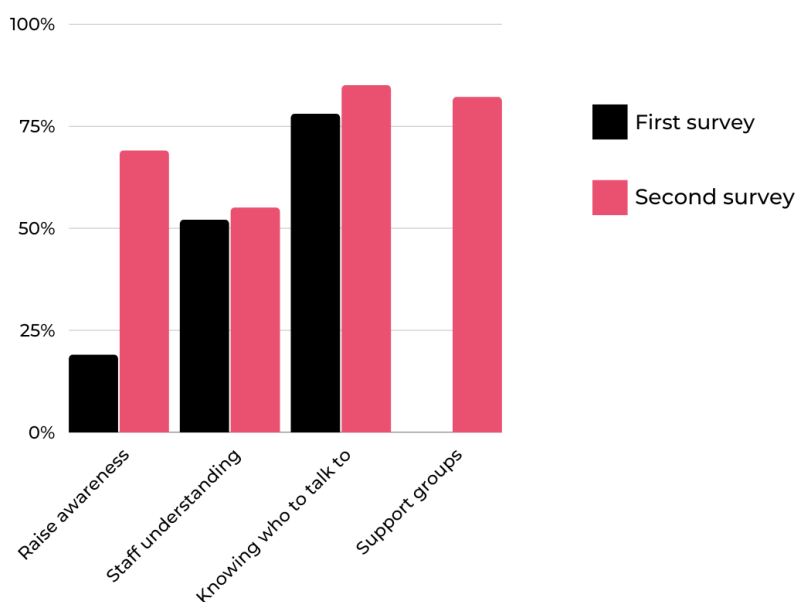
1000

SCHOOL STAFF ATTENDED TRAINING

28000

STUDENTS HAVE ATTENDED ASSEMBLIES

YOUNG CARERS' EXPERIENCES IN SCHOOLS: FIRST VS SECOND SURVEYS



FINDING 1: RAISING AWARENESS

In the first survey, only 19% of respondents believed their school had effectively raised awareness of young carers. After intervention, there was a significant increase to 80%, with 52% of respondents stating that their school had raised awareness either 'extremely well' or 'very well,' indicating a positive shift in perception.

These findings suggest efforts to raise awareness have proven effective in enhancing young carers' understanding of their situation.

The importance of raising awareness of young carers in schools cannot be overstated. It can help reduce the stigma and shame associated with having caring responsibilities, while also making support services more visible and accessible to these individuals. (1)

There are several effective ways schools can raise awareness: through assemblies, guest speakers, notices, and incorporating relevant topics into PSHE lessons.

FINDING 2: STAFF UNDERSTANDING

51% of young carers felt that school staff understood the role of young carers, with just 6% feeling 'very well' understood (First Survey). However, this score increased to 55% and an impressive 35% of young carers expressing 'extremely well' or 'very well' (Second survey). Although MYTIME hoped for a larger increase, given that 99% of staff felt more confident after Level Up training, it is very encouraging to see a 29% increase in young carers feeling understood. Moving forward, MYTIME and schools must collaborate to disseminate staff training widely and foster a culture of understanding for young carers.

Young carers need school staff to comprehend the impact of a caring role on education and well-being. This understanding supports young carers, reduces isolation, and ensures they receive the necessary accommodations to fully engage in their education, such as extra time for homework, access to a phone, and understanding regarding lateness. By acknowledging and addressing young carers' challenges, schools create an inclusive environment that promotes well-being and academic success.



The Level Up team presenting a staff training session.

FINDING 3: KNOWING WHO TO TALK TO

The first survey revealed 78% of young carers knew who to approach for support. In the second survey, this question was modified*, resulting in increased awareness (85%).

It is possible the change in wording has revealed the importance of perception in young carers' views of adult figures, highlighting the need for a trustworthy support network.

It is vital for young carers to be aware of a designated person to approach in school, creating a safe and supportive environment where they can seek guidance, express concerns, and access necessary assistance. This support helps them effectively cope with challenges, ensuring overall well-being and academic success. MYTIME strongly recommends appointing a Young Carer Champion in every school. Raising awareness of this staff member among students, families and school personnel is equally crucial in fostering a cohesive support system for young carers.

*First survey: Do you know who you can talk to? Second survey: Do you have someone you trust that you can talk to when needed?

FINDING 4: PEER SUPPORT GROUPS

Before any of the schools started on their Level Up journey, no regular, organised groups were available. However, in the second survey, it was found that 82% of young carers now have access to a regular group. This positive outcome indicates that the efforts have been successful in establishing consistent peer support groups, providing young carers with a valuable space for interaction and shared experiences.

By forming friendships with fellow young carers, we see improved social skills and reduced feelings of isolation. (2) MYTIME strongly recommends that schools facilitate a young carer peer support group, and it is essential to involve the young carers themselves in deciding the purpose and agenda of these groups. This could involve hanging out, playing games, engaging in activities such as arts and crafts, or having open discussions about young carer-related issues. Empowering young carers to take ownership of these groups enhances their engagement and ensures that the support provided aligns with their specific needs and preferences.

CASE STUDY

Hannah, a 16-year-old who cares for her younger brother with Cerebral Palsy, has been involved with MYTIME for three years. Previously, her teachers were unaware of her home life. Her former teacher admits, "I had no idea that Hannah was a young carer. Looking back, the signs were all there, but I didn't connect the dots or consider how it might impact her education. I can remember giving Hannah detentions when her homework was late, completely failing to realise that there were probably very valid reasons for that or that she might need additional support." Today, Hannah's teachers have all received training from MYTIME and are now aware of the impact that her caring responsibilities can have on her. According to Hannah, they take an understanding and supportive approach, extending deadlines for her where necessary rather than punishing her for missing assignments. As a result, Hannah feels more comfortable in her educational setting.



Hannah at one of MYTIME's Making Memory days

RECOMMENDATIONS

- In the future MYTIME would like to conduct this evaluation of the Level Up Programme again with more robust baseline evidence. This would include ensuring the continuity of the questions in the surveys and ensuring that there was a similar number of respondents for each survey.
- Schools should ensure that all staff receive training on how to identify and support young carers as this will allow necessary accommodations to ensure young carers can fully engage in their education.
- Schools should raise awareness of young carers to the whole student cohort through assemblies and PSHE lessons as this will reduce stigma around caring responsibilities.
- Schools should have a Young Carer Champion - a trusted member of staff for young carers to talk to as and when needed.

REFERENCES

- (1) Barnardos, *Still Hidden, Still Ignored: Who Cares for Young Carers?*, 2017
- (2) Phelps, Daniel, *What Changes for Young Carers? A Qualitative Evaluation of the Impact of Dedicated Support Provision for Young Carers*, 2021