



SUTTON COLDFIELD

IMPACT REPORT

YOUNG (ADULT) CARERS PROJECT

01

RESEARCH SUMMARY

ABOUT RELEASE YOUNG CARERS PROJECT

Our Release Young Carers Project supports young people aged 5–18 who are carers for family members with physical disabilities, long-term illnesses, mental health challenges, or substance misuse issues. This support includes: Weekly mentoring, respite activities, and collaborations with schools to raise awareness and aid in identifying “hidden” young carers. Our parallel Young Adult Carers Service provides similar support to young adults aged 17–25, to support them with their transition into adulthood.

Through both programmes, we aim to provide all carers with resources, skill-building opportunities, and social engagement to foster resilience and support their growth.

SERVICE USERS

Our Young Carer programme was designed to support young and young adult carers in the Sutton Coldfield area who balance school or work with their caregiving responsibilities. Given that the majority of young carers can face social isolation, academic challenges, and mental health struggles.

OBJECTIVES OF RESEARCH

The aim of this research project was to evaluate the impact of our support on young carers' well-being, academic and social lives, plus their ability to manage caregiving alongside other responsibilities. As a team, we were also keen to see how well the programme is aligned with our wider organisational outcomes.

RESEARCH QUESTION

How effective is our Young Carers programme in improving young carers' quality of life, resilience, and future outlook?

METHODOLOGY

The research project utilised a mixed-methods approach, gathering quantitative data through surveys and qualitative insights via focus groups. Survey responses were collected from young carers engaged with our services, with additional insights gathered through focus groups involving both young carers and our programme staff.

In total:

- 3x staff members were interviewed (in person) by an external consultant.
- 8x young carers were interviewed (also) in-person by an external consultant)
- 11x survey responses were recorded (from young carers)

Regarding the questions used for the (service user) surveys and focus group discussions. All questions came from an Outcome Framework which was produced via:

1. A review of several of our grants related to our young carers programme - Multiple grants were analysed by an external consultant to identify the intended impact and outcomes for local young carers-
2. Consultations with staff to gather their perspectives on the programme's impact on young carers.

By creating questions based on our outcome framework, it was easier to determine how in alignment our Young Carer's programme is with our wider impact aspirations.

OUTCOMES OF RESEARCH

Our Young Carers Project has demonstrated a massive impact on the lives of our young carers with 54.55% of them sharing that our support has been instrumental in balancing their caregiving responsibilities with school or college. Through structured workshops, peer groups, and one-on-one mentoring, we've helped young carers manage being both a young person and a young carer.

Social support also emerged as a significant benefit, with 90.91% of our young carers reporting new friendships and connections within our community. One young carer said, "YMCA has been my main place of socialisation," emphasising that the bonds young carers from within our programme often become a reliable source of support beyond school-based friendships. This sense of community also provides a consistent space where young carers feel understood and valued.

Feedback from both our young carers and staff emphasises the essential role we play in their lives. One young carer shared, "Coming to YMCA means I have personal me time that I wouldn't get otherwise." This time away from caregiving responsibilities provides much-needed relief to all of our young carers, supporting both their mental well-being and sense of self.

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YOUNG CARERS

Our Release Young Carers Project works with young people aged 5 – 18 years old. The majority of these young people are carers, meaning they live with or care for a family member who has a physical disability, long-term illness, poor mental health, or suffers from substance misuse. YMCA Sutton Coldfield supports these young people by offering weekly mentoring sessions, respite activities, and the chance to be young and have fun e.g. In July 2022 we took a group of carers to the Young Carers Festival for the first time since before the pandemic

The Release Young Carers Project works closely with schools to up-skill teachers, identify ‘hidden’ carers in the classroom, and raise awareness within education of young carers and their daily challenges. We also support schools

to achieve the 'Young Carers in Schools Award'. All of this allows the young carers we work with to feel recognised, understood and supported.

In the community, our project workers arrange weekly youth clubs, activities and trips during school holidays, residential breaks, and one-to-one mentoring support. They provide a tailored support package to meet the individual needs of each young person, helping them identify positive education and career goals they can work to achieve.

Our Upbeat Teens Project provides intensive 1:1 mentoring support to young carers aged 14-18 years old. It's grown from strength to strength and this year we've seen some of our longtime service users move onto our Young Adult Carers Service. As a final farewell to some of our Upbeat Teens, some with us since they were 10 years old, we invited 10 young carers to attend a weekend residential break in York.

Lastly, we focus in particular on helping young carers during their final years of secondary school; supporting them into further education and ultimately a smooth transition into adulthood.

YOUNG ADULT CARERS

Our Young Adult Carers Service provides support to young people aged 17 – 25 years old who help care for someone they live with. Our support programme focuses on their overall wellbeing, helping them to achieve their full potential, especially during the important transitional period of their lives as they become adults.

We aim to:

- Improve how young adult carers are identified and supported
- Raise awareness of carers and their needs
- Work in partnership with other organisations

Many young adult carers have less opportunities than their peers take for granted.

Caring responsibilities can have negative impacts on their lives. As they move into adulthood, aspirations, ambitions, and achievements are often affected. Young people who are carers may struggle with poor attendance and attainment at college or university, and in the workplace. Restricted social contact and interaction can also affect confidence, self-belief and self-esteem. Physical and mental health is often affected as well.

At times, many young adult carers feel down, isolated and unsupported. Our team provide mentoring and coaching to develop wellbeing, life skills and resilience.

We also run practical workshops for groups of carers and create opportunities for them to improve their wellbeing through social interaction, openness and honesty. From informal drop-in sessions where carers can talk about their concerns, to events and residential trips where carers can socialise away from their caring roles, our service is tailored and flexible and centred around positive change.

Each month during term time, our key workers visit nine college campuses across Birmingham to support young adult carers. They work closely with student support staff to make sure young people can get all they can from college life. We also visit secondary schools across the city to identify and connect with young carers who will soon be 18 years old.

YMCA Sutton Coldfield helps young adult carers with training, college and university applications, letters of support for employment opportunities, and workshops to improve skills like CV writing. We support carers' families as well, using our networking links to help them get financial support, IT equipment and food parcels.

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Our Impact 20__ - 20__

196

Young carers accessed our support services in 2022-2023.

154

Young Carers received one-to-one mentoring, or training.

94

Young Carers received respite.



107

Young Adult Carers used our services over the year (2022/23).



50

Young Adult Carers received a statutory, or well-being assessment.



95

Young Adult Carers were supported at college or university.



49

Partnerships and referral pathways were developed.

LEANNE'S STORY

Leanne* is 20 years old and was referred to us by Spurgeons who were helping her younger siblings. She helps care for her father who has a long-term health condition; a chronic illness and a physical disability. She supports her mother with her caring role and looks after her siblings.

Leanne's doing an IT course and studying maths at college but when we first met her she had no friends and felt very isolated. Leanne didn't have time for herself, she just went to college then came home to provide care for her family. She didn't have a computer, or IT device and found it difficult to complete college work. Money was a problem for her family and she had very little support.

When we met Leanne, we explained how we could help her and completed an assessment of her needs. We did a welfare benefits check and, with our help, Leanne got funding to help pay for her



college books, and a computer so she could complete her course work. She also attended our transition workshop, for young adult carers becoming 18 years old, where she met other young adult carers.

Leanne can continue to visit our support staff during drop-in sessions at her college, or sign up to any of our workshops. As she begins to think about what to do when she leaves college, we've given her details of jobs fairs and vacancies we hear about. And to help her family, Leanne and her mum have had details from us about the financial support and food banks available to help the family in the current cost of living crisis.

* NB Leanne is not their real name.

WHAT OUR STAFF SAY ...

At YMCA, we're privileged to work alongside some of the most resilient young people in our local community—Young carers who balance immense responsibilities at home while striving to live their own lives. Our team is 100% dedicated to creating a space where these young carers can feel safe and supported. Here's what some of our team had to say:

"Our goal is to keep them busy and entertained" says Dom, one of our youth workers. "Whether it's playing football, doing crafts, or going on trips, we try to have something on for them at all times. It's about giving them a break from their daily challenges and letting them have fun."

The importance of providing a safe and welcoming environment is echoed by Tim, another member of our team. "Many of these young carers don't get the chance to relax and socialise like other kids their age" He explains. "Here, they can be around others who understand what they're going through. It's a place where they can just be themselves."

For Charlotte, a youth worker who's seen firsthand the impact of their work since joining YMCA several years ago, it's the small victories that make the job worthwhile. "Seeing our young carers try new experiences, like making new friends, gives me a massive boost," she says. "We want them to leave each session feeling uplifted, with a smile on their face."

However, the journey is not without its challenges. Charlotte highlights how funding constraints previously limited what we could offer. "There were times we couldn't do as much as we wanted because of a lack of funding. But this summer (2024) we received support that allowed us to organise more activities and trips—experiences that many of our young carers would not have been able to afford otherwise."

Despite these obstacles, our staff remain deeply committed to our mission. "I love watching these young people grow," says Tim. "I've seen kids who struggled

at the start of our engagement, like a mentee I worked with in Year 7 who was having a tough time at school. But by the end of the year, he'd achieved all the goals we set together. Moments like these make all the paperwork and challenges worth it."

The impact of our Young Carers Programme however is felt far beyond the actual activities themselves. "We're giving these young carers a space to be themselves, to make friends, and to build skills that will serve them for life," Tim reflects. "Some of them have kept friendships they made here from the age of nine."

Charlotte adds, "They always leave happy and smiling, asking when the next club or trip is. As for many this is their only chance to try

something new and to take a break from their responsibilities at home."

Parents, too, are grateful, often expressing their thanks to us for providing their children with a much-needed respite.

Through the dedication of our team, we're not just offering activities; we're creating a lifeline for young carers, helping them to feel seen, supported, and hopeful for their futures. As Tim puts it, "We do as much as we can with what we've got, and every bit of support makes a difference."



BALANCING CARING COMMITMENTS WITH COLLEGE AND SCHOOL

Young carers often face the dual pressures of caregiving and managing their personal lives; from having an active social life to keeping up with schoolwork, the challenges they face can significantly impact their mental health, education, and future prospects. Many of our young carers (54.55%) have shared how we've helped them balance their caring commitments with college or school. Something we achieve by providing tailored support through our; workshops, peer groups, and one-on-one mentoring.

“Attending YMCA SC has definitely helped me balance my caring commitments alongside other responsibilities” shared one of our young carers. “I’ve become more empathetic, kind, and compassionate towards the family member I care for and have a better understanding of their needs.” Evidence that the supportive environment we've created here at YMCA SC also encourages our young carers to embrace their roles, making the balancing act more manageable.

Another of our young carers noted how instrumental we've been in helping them manage their commitments to both college and caregiving. “Attending YMCA SC has been really helpful. I feel like I can talk to people—friends and staff—about how to best manage my caring responsibilities and school,” he said before adding “It’s also helped me get out of the house more, which has definitely been a good thing.”

Another of our young carers agreed with the above sentiment stating: “Yes - Coming here has definitely helped me balance my caring and school commitments as it gives me personal 'Me Time'. Otherwise, I'd spend even more of my time caring, so coming here gives me that break”

Through our holistic approach, we not only help young carers juggle their responsibilities; we empower them to build resilience, maintain their education, and foster a healthier balance in their lives. The impact of this support extends far beyond day-to-day activities, equipping our young carers with the skills and confidence to look towards a brighter future.

DAVID'S STORY

David* is now 18 years old and has been part of our Release Young Carers project for 6 years.

David's mom reached out to the project to support her two sons when she was diagnosed with cancer, as David was 12 and his brother was only 8 years old at the time. When we first met David, he was extremely quiet and withdrawn and didn't have many friends his own age. He was also self-harming and had very poor mental health. He was quickly welcomed into our weekly youth club by the other young carers and he began attending respite sessions and having one-to-one mentoring support from our staff.

Over time, David made many friends on the project, his confidence and self-esteem grew, and his overall mental health drastically improved. David's mom was eventually in remission, and he felt his life had turned around

completely from when he first joined the project. (Mom is still healthy and gets regular check-ups.)

David continued to receive respite from us and whilst he no longer needed one-to-one support, he would often fill in staff on what had happened during his week and ask for advice. We always keep in touch with each young person who's been supported by the project in case situations change. For David, this happened 18 months ago when dad was diagnosed with heart problems.

Dad spent a period of time in hospital and unfortunately David's mental health began to deteriorate again. We offered David one-to-one support again, which he quickly accepted, meeting with a staff member each week before youth club. David's dad was discharged from hospital and, whilst he still struggles with heart problems, his overall health is much better.

David's mental health has once again improved and he has stopped self-harming.

David has now joined our Why Teens Podcast project, as he wants to help other young people, give himself a voice and challenge himself by pushing himself out of his comfort zone – not something he would have considered doing when he first joined the Release Young Carers project! He's completed his first year at college and hopes to go to university. And he's now moving over to our Young Adult Carers service, so he'll continue to be supported as he applies for and attends university.

** NB David is not their real name.*



COMMUNITY VIBES

In the past year, over XXX of local young carers have engaged with our services, finding a supportive community that understands their unique struggles. “I definitely feel like I’m a part of a community here as I feel very included,” shared one of our young carers. “I’d only have school friends if it weren’t for here” This sense of inclusion is a common sentiment amongst all of our young carers, highlighting the massive impact of having a space where they feel truly seen and valued.

Another of our young carers when asked if he feels part of our community responded by saying: “Yes! I love my people here... YMCA has been my main place of socialisation during these six-week holidays since I haven’t been meeting my school friends much.” With his friend agreeing by saying “Same, I haven’t seen my school friends much either as School friends come and go, but my YMCA friends are always here. Because the building is always here, we can hang out, support each other and we’re even planning to go on holiday next year.”

However, despite the long-lasting bonds formed within the group. The community aspect of our young carers programme extends beyond just friendships.

Many of our young carers appreciate the different social dynamics they experience. “I like that I have different groups—my school friends, after school club, and then my YMCA friends,” One young person explained. “It’s nice to have a place where people understand me and where I can just be myself.” Such a variety not only enriches their social lives, but also helps them develop valuable life skills. Another young person echoed the above by saying how he enjoys coming to our sessions as it feels not only like a community here, but also like a “fresh social setting” where he gets to be around people he wouldn’t normally be around.

Our team also play a crucial role in fostering this sense of community. “Everyone knows each other here, and the staff make sure we feel included” one person noted. Such a welcoming atmosphere also encourages even some of the shyest of our young carers to open up. “I used to be so shy and would wait for people to approach me,” shared one young person. “Since coming to YMCA, I’m much more social and less shy.” With another young woman agreeing by saying: “I feel comfortable talking to new people that come here and making them feel welcome too.”

04



Survey Results

45.5%

Of our young carers feel they can adequately talk about their feelings

Over half of our young carers feel we've helped them to balance their caring commitments with college/school

54.55%

36.36%

Of our young carers feel fairly confident in their ability to manage negative feelings

45.45%

Of our young carers feel confident about their future

Of our young carers have set goals regarding further education, or employment

54.55%

90.91%

Of our young carers have formed new friendships, or relationships with other young carers at YMCA.

THANK YOU!

We'd like to say a huge thank you to our funders and other supporters - it was because of you that our work this year has been possible.

We'd also like to thank our partners for their teamwork and expertise.

Finally, thank you to our amazing beneficiaries for their commitment and determination to continue being a part of our community.



Support Us

- £5** Youth club snacks for a child who might otherwise go without an after-school snack.
- £10** A respite session for a young carer giving them valuable time and space to be young.
- £20** A place for a young person to go on one of our aspirational day trips.
- £30** Minibus costs to take a group of inner-city young people to see the beach for the first time.
- £50** Helps deliver our weekly drama group for people with learning disabilities.
- £80** Sports sessions over a school term for young people experiencing disadvantage.
- £100** A memorable evening out with friends for a group of young people with disabilities.



APPENDIX

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