

Carers Rights Day Blog Post

It's Carers Rights Day this week and I feel, in a year where we've all had the time to reflect on the huge role that carers play in our society, this is a good moment to think about two particular groups of unpaid carers: young carers and young adult carers.

According to Carers UK, there are 6.5 million carers in the UK. These carers provide unpaid care to someone who couldn't cope without their support. The cared-for may need help because of an illness, disability, mental health issue or may suffer from substance misuse and the care provided is sometimes physical in nature (like helping someone get up or dressed), but can also include practical care (like collecting prescriptions), emotional care (such as listening to the cared-for person if they're upset) or indirect care (in the case of young carers and young adult carers, this could include looking after younger siblings).

Young carers are unpaid carers under the age of 16 and young adult carers are aged 16-25. Both groups may take on similar caring responsibilities to adult carers and the Carers Trust estimates that there are over 700,000 young carers and 376,000 young adult carers in the UK today. When I first heard this statistic, I was shocked. I couldn't imagine how any young person would be able to juggle the pressures of school, their kid/teenage life and their caring responsibilities. Yet so many do this on a daily basis.

After learning this, I started to think a bit about when I was at school. I remember one friend in my form whose brother needed 24 hour care. I'd often see her helping her mum to take her brother to bed or to the living room and she was always there to support her mum from a practical and emotional perspective when times were particularly hard. I didn't really think too much about it at the time and I doubt my friend did either. It was just part of her normal, everyday routine. In reality, many young carers and young adult carers don't think of themselves as 'providing care'. They're just doing what they can to help their families.

For many young carers and young adult carers, the role they play to support the person they care for can be very rewarding, but there can sometimes be challenges along the way and the purpose of Carers Rights Day on 26th November is for every person with caring responsibilities to know their rights and be able to seek support if they need it.

Every young person – with or without caring responsibilities – has the right to fulfil their potential and follow their dreams, whether that be to go to university, for example, or to start a business, work in their dream job or anything else they'd like to achieve. Though it might sometimes feel like they're on their own in this, there is a lot of support out there for young carers and young adult carers so if you're reading this and you know a student/friend/family member who you think could identify as a young carer or a young adult carer, please do consider having a look through the support pages below and share the information with them so they know where to get some help if they need it.

I'll just finish with another statistic that shocked me. In 2015, Carers UK and The University of Sheffield published a report. In it, they estimated that the 6+ million unpaid carers in the UK save the state £132 billion a year. That's almost another NHS. Young carers and young adult carers are significant contributors to this and they deserve to be acknowledged, thanked and supported on Carers Rights Day 2020.

Emily Cannon (Widening Participation Officer) – *Please feel free to contact Emily if you would like more information about supporting young carers and young adult carers. Her email address is emily.cannon@warwick.ac.uk.*

Where to access support if you're a young carer or young adult carer:

School/college/university

If you have caring responsibilities, then it's a good idea to speak to someone at your school, college or university even if you think things are fine at the moment. Your school, college or university might be in touch with local services and might have a member of staff responsible for supporting young carers/young adult carers. If you know who this is, then they're probably the best person to talk to.

If you aren't sure whether someone at your school, college or university has this responsibility, then try to speak to another member of staff. This could be a teacher/tutor, personal tutor or staff member who you feel you can talk to. If you're a little anxious about speaking about your caring responsibilities, remember that your school, college or university is there to help you and they can't offer support if they don't know.

Local young carers centres

One of the best places to find support is through a young carers support service. All young carers are entitled to support from their council and this is usually done through a support service.

The help on offer from support services vary a little from place to place, but your local service may provide:

- Someone who you can talk to about any challenges or concerns
- Help with accessing other useful services and agencies
- Support with carers assessments
- Opportunities to meet other young carers and have a break from your caring responsibilities
- Help with future plans or goals (e.g. going to college or university)
- Support for your family

At Warwick, we have two brilliant young carers support services on our doorstep: [Young Carers Coventry](#) and [Warwickshire Young Carers](#). To find your local service, [the Carers Trust website](#) is a good place to start but you could also try Googling 'young carers service' followed by your town or local authority area, for example: 'young carers service Burnley' or 'young carers service Wiltshire'.

Other useful websites

- [Carers Trust](#) – there are lots of resources on this website for young carers and young adult carers, including Covid-19-specific advice and support.
- [MeWe Young Carers Booklet](#) – an online booklet written for young carers by young carers. There's lots of information about your rights, the support you can access and the experiences of other young carers.
- [YAC book](#) – an online platform that has been developed by young adult carers for other young adult carers. This website is linked to Carer Support Wiltshire but the blog posts, myth busting and advice could be helpful for young adult carers across the country.