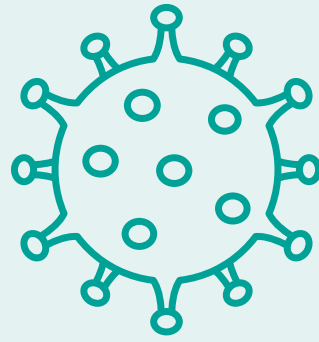


The impact of Covid-19 on unpaid young and young adult carers in Aberdeenshire



Navigating challenges, building resilience

Highlighting the shared experiences of 110 young carers and young adult carers in Aberdeenshire



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Terminologies

Who are young carers and young adult carers? And what do they do?

- According to Carers Trust, a young carer is someone aged 18 and under who cares for a friend or family member who, due to illness, disability, a mental health problem or an addiction, cannot cope without their support. Older young carers, aged 16-25, are known as young adult carers, and they may have different support needs to younger carers.
- Young carers and young adult carers undertake a range of tasks to support family members or friends. This might include shopping, cooking, cleaning, managing medicines or money, providing personal care, helping people get out of the house, keeping an eye on someone or providing emotional support.

Methodology

- We asked young carers and young adult carers registered with Quarriers to complete a survey to obtain the qualitative and quantitative data used in this report. One hundred young carers and young adult carers, aged 8-25 across Aberdeenshire, completed the survey on our invitation. The survey was anonymous and no identifying data is held about any of these children and young people. Young carers and young adult carers were able to choose which questions they did and did not answer, including any free text, and to stop completing the survey at any time. Carers who participated in the survey were entered into a prize draw to win a £100 gift voucher.
- Ten young carers and young adult carers participated in semi-structured interviews that were conducted online and in person. All participants were rewarded with a £50 gift voucher for taking time out and sharing their experiences with Quarriers.



Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on young carers (YCs) and young adult carers (YACs) in Aberdeenshire, with many facing increased responsibilities and stress. Quarriers conducted research that shows that young and young adult carers have been affected by the pandemic in several ways.



I got Covid, I was very ill, my back hurt and I couldn't help my mum. It was so difficult. I wore two face masks because I was always worried about my mum's safety.

Young carer, 14



Key findings

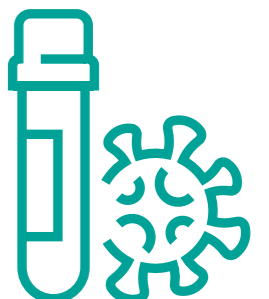
1. **Caring responsibility** - YCs have had to take on additional care responsibilities due to the increased need for support caused by the pandemic. This has resulted in increased stress and burnout for young carers. They were afraid and concerned about their cared-for's health, as they were dealing with the decline in their cared-for's mental health as well.
2. **Financial strain** - YCs felt stressed and helpless as they spent more money on food and medication during lockdown but had difficulty accessing **the same** due to unemployment. They also faced additional financial pressures such as lost income due to unpaid leave or reduced hours at work.
3. **Respite** - Disruption of the routine and respite provided by school. Inability to access respite breaks or day care services, which have traditionally been used by many families as lifelines for both children and parents, as these were cancelled or postponed due to social distancing requirements.
4. **Education** - The closure of schools and educational institutions has had a negative impact on young carers' education and future prospects. They have struggled to balance their care responsibilities with their studies, leading to reduced educational attainment. Balancing demands of home learning with caring responsibilities. Difficulty in finding a quiet space to study.
5. **Impact on mental health and wellbeing** - Young carers have reported increased social isolation and disadvantage compared to other young people, intensified by school closures during the pandemic, which has compounded the difficulties they already face in their lives. This has had a negative impact on their mental health and wellbeing. They also felt lonely and isolated and less connected to others, and their mental health had worsened during lockdown. They feared of losing their friends, parents and grandparents. YCs

THE SAME WHAT?

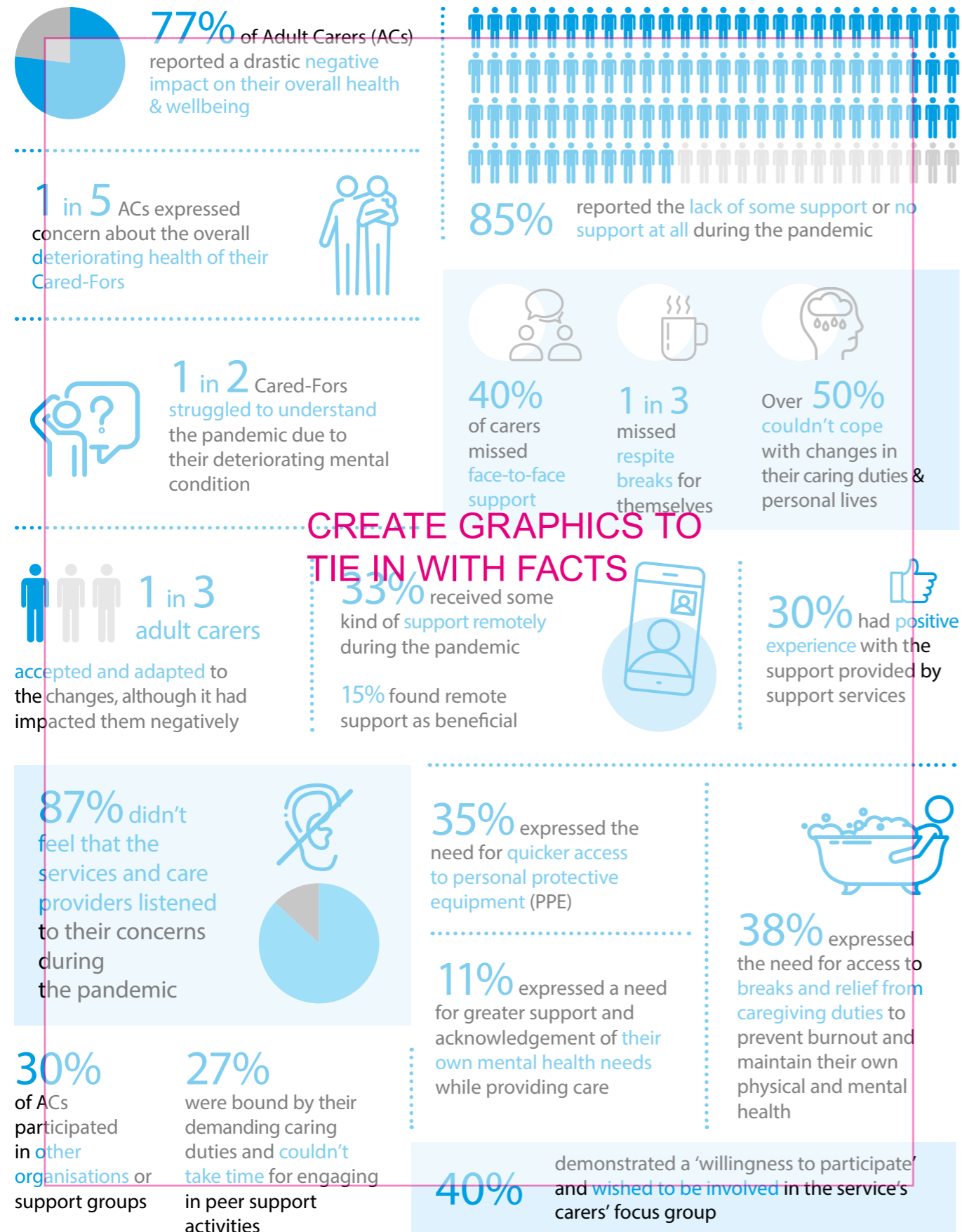
were happy staying home, playing video games and protecting their cared-for from coronavirus. They chose an online approach to stay connected to the world.

6. **Support** - A lack of support available through remote means, including online courses not being fully adapted or accessible given their technical knowledge, or internet speed/access being a potential obstacle. They had very few support systems from the outer world due to lack of staffing/redundancy, frustration of retelling their story and problems repeatedly to newer staff members, and withdrawal of support by other organisations.
7. **Support at schools** - Support systems were distinct at school levels, where few schools had fully fledged support system in place - guidance teacher, subject teachers aware of YCs in their class, head teacher being very supportive to schools lacking a guidance teacher, and no recognition of YCs in their classes.

In conclusion, the research highlights how Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on young carers in Aberdeenshire, exacerbating the challenges they already faced and leading to increased stress, reduced educational attainment, and negative impacts on their mental health and wellbeing, in their own words. This report makes recommendations for the stakeholders to ensure that YCs are well recognised and adequately supported during and after the pandemic to not just help them manage their caring responsibilities but to pursue a healthy and successful life.



Key findings



CREATE GRAPHICS TO TIE IN WITH FACTS

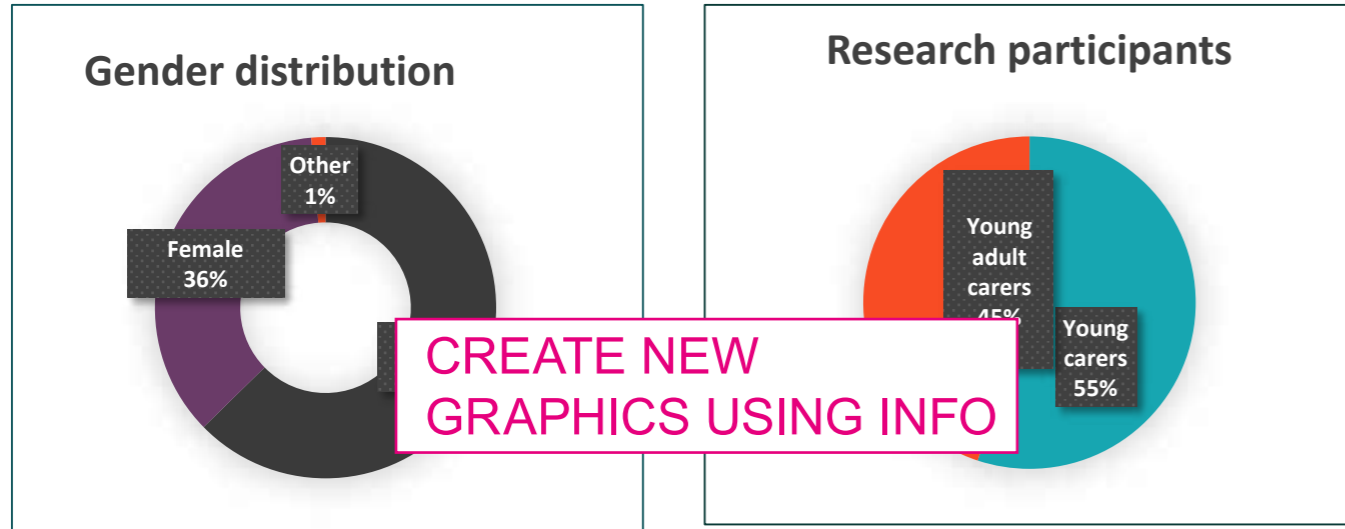
Recommendations

- Awareness/Recognition** - Continue raising awareness of YCs and YACs, particularly within educational settings like schools and universities.
- Every voice matters** - YCs' voices should be central to understanding the impact on their lives.
- Identification** - It is recommended to formalise the identification of young carers within the school system through the inclusion of data within the school census. This should also continue at college and university levels.
- Support**
 - More support via carer support organisations:
 - More staff
 - More recognition
 - More funding
 - Improving accessibility to YC support
 - Flexible support according to needs
 - Improved quality of formal support
- Local authorities**
 - Provide financial assistance
 - Support from school
 - Support with academic needs at all levels
 - Mental health support
 - Anti-bullying measures to safeguard YCs



Participant characteristics

Gender, age, geographical distribution of YCs and YACs across Aberdeenshire along with number of years spent providing care.

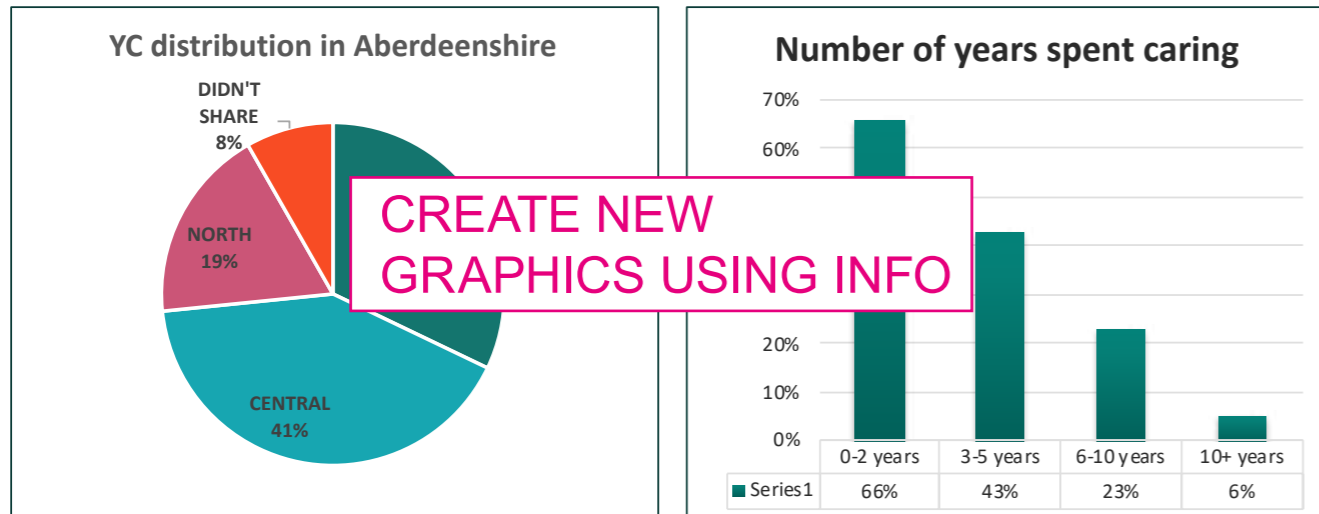


“

My mum was the frontline worker and she hurt her back severely during the pandemic, so we care for her now.
- Young carers, 12 and 15

“

My worst fear is I wouldn't know what to do with my future, as I actually do not know what to do.
XXXXX



Care before Covid

1. Family dynamics
2. Education
3. Support
4. Recognition and awareness



1. Family dynamics

Young carers and young adult carers are tasked with duties that are typically assigned to adult professionals, such as domestic tasks and personal care. The reasons for providing care can be intricate and may stem from the absence of other informal support systems, inadequate formal care options, or love and natural family relationships to the cared-for. It can be less burdensome for a young carer if there are multiple adults present in the household.



I supervise my older brother as he's got additional needs. He doesn't have an awareness of danger, so I must always keep an eye on him. I provide one-to-one supervision most of the time.
- Young carer, 10



There's a lot of times where I know what my sister likes more than my mum does.
- Young carer, 15

2. Education

YCs mentioned that school provides stability and a break from their caring responsibility. They reported that schools are crucial in spotting and helping vulnerable students and those who require emotional care. They help identify YCs with caregiving responsibilities, provide referrals and sources of support, and involve families in pastoral care and safeguarding. According to young carers, there are many other types of support that schools provide, including designated safeguarding leads, lunchtime clubs, awareness-raising activities and counselling services. Academic concerns (being able to balance education and care) and stress related to social interactions (such as being accepted, forming and maintaining friendships, and dealing with social exclusion)

were among YCs' main concerns found in the survey.



My friends don't know about my caring responsibilities. I have to take care of my mum, and it feels like no one understands what I'm going through.
- Young carer, 16



Before Covid, I was in primary school. I wasn't very well supported by my teachers, though my mum supported me. I don't think they could have helped me in my situation.
- Young carer, 16



It was OK because my school has a carer group, where I go regularly.
- Young carer, 13

3. Support

Many of the YCs and YACs mentioned that they were well supported by their guidance teachers or other support networks. 30% mentioned that they were not familiar with any support system before the pandemic, other than their schools or social workers.



I relied on my school and social worker for help, but it was tough. I wish I knew about other support systems earlier.
- Young carer, 13



The school introduced my daughter to her support teacher when they found out she was a young carer. Quarriers' Family Wellbeing Worker often visited her in school before the pandemic. It's been a huge help.
- Parent of eight-year-old young carer



Quarriers is really good and I went to quite a few events. However, I didn't really make any friends, but I'm quite shy, honestly. But yeah, it was fun.
- Young carer, 13

4. Recognition and awareness

YCs felt the need for raising awareness about YCs in schools and communities. They mentioned that lack of awareness has affected their education and their social relationships with their school mates. YCs felt raising awareness in schools and the community supports them in the way they deserve, and it helps to create an inclusive and supportive environment that caters to the unique needs of young carers and their families. YACs mentioned that by recognising and addressing the challenges faced by young carers at a younger age, it helps ensure that they receive the support they need to thrive both academically and socially.



I wish there was more awareness in my academy, and I was supported in the way I deserved - it would have helped me to continue my career in sports.
- Young adult carer, 21



Most of my teachers know what a young carer is and how to help me. But a lot of my classmates, you could say to them 'Oh, I'm a young carer' and they would go 'What is that? I never knew that existed.'
- Young carer, 13



I suppose my classmates are not really aware that I do care, but they can definitely tell that like something's up because like everyone else will hand in something for schoolwork and then I don't. And then I don't get in trouble for it. So they definitely know that like something's

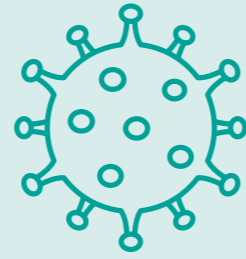
there and it definitely makes them have opinions, not necessarily good ones, but it doesn't bother me much.
- Young carer, 15



I take care of my younger brother because my parents work and we can't get any help. I love him and I want to make sure he's safe, but sometimes it feels like a lot of responsibility for someone my age. I wish we had more support from our extended family or community.
- Young carer, 11



I don't know how to tell my friends about my caregiving responsibilities. I think they won't understand or accept me. But my guidance teacher is very supportive and understanding, so I am quite close to her.
- Young carer, 15



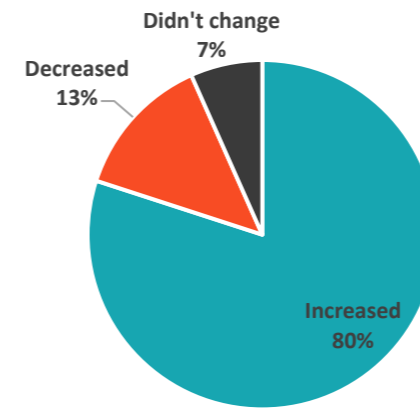
Care during Covid-19 lockdown

Challenges faced by young carers in Covid-19



Care during Covid

The amount of time spent caring during the pandemic



YCs mentioned that their caring responsibilities had increased exponentially during lockdown. They were also worried about greater responsibility on the older carer or younger sibling carer. The older young carers found it very challenging when they were looking after both their younger siblings and also the cared-for, where they had to provide additional care and support to the siblings with specific needs. YCs who belonged to a single parent household reported carrying a greater level of responsibility.

The varied and complex nature of young carers' responsibilities

Each young carer is unique in terms of their varied and complex levels of caring responsibilities and the support they need. Few YCs had to care for more than one family member before the pandemic, and some YCs saw that the number of cared-for increased. YCs mentioned that each cared-for in the same household had diverse physical or mental health needs. This led to juggling the complex care needs of both parents and siblings. The range of tasks they undertook were also diverse, including practical tasks such as cooking, cleaning, managing bills and medication, as well as less tangible tasks

such as providing emotional support, keeping family members calm, anticipating crisis points and ensuring the safety of their loved ones.

Family dynamics

Whole-family relationships

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, young carers often carried out caregiving tasks independently, with the idea of taking turns to manage life's demands. However, during the pandemic, most of the family members that stayed home started to share caregiving responsibilities more evenly, reducing the overall tension experienced by young carers and their families. This not only lightened the load on young carers' relationships with those they cared for, but also allowed families to engage in new activities together, such as having meals together, watching TV and gardening, which improved their overall relationships.



Me and my brother were taking turns to help Mum with her daily routine. He used to help her with cleaning and washing while I was doing my classes and I helped her later with cooking and other stuff.

- Young carer, 12



I used to do my classes while my mum was engaging with my older brother with additional needs, and later I engage with my brother and help him with his schoolwork and play with him while mum was working.

- Young carer, 10



I was helping my mum with shopping, cooking and walking the dog when she was helping my brother. We used to watch TV together in the evening.

- Young carer, 10

However, some YCs felt that it got difficult when they were home and it was impacting their familial bonds negatively. They experienced more stressful situations at home as the older carers were stressed out due to many other Covid-related difficulties.

“

I could see my mother was more stressed with three kids in the house. It was her time to relax when we were at school. But we could clearly see she was very stressed.

- Young carer, 14

“

We were more fighting than bonding - we never stayed indoors for this long - not knowing what to do. I think that impacted us.

- Young carer, 16

“

It was definitely more difficult at the beginning obviously because no one really knew what was going on. You couldn't go out and being in our house with like six people was rather difficult. No one was working unless they are keyworkers, and we were all in the same space.

- Young carer, 15

Young carer/cared-for relationships

Lockdown and Covid impacted family relationships, but specifically the impact it had on the relationship between YCs and cared-fors was mostly positive rather than negative.

“

I was able to play board games with my sister during lockdown, which was new for us.

- Young carer, 14

“

I bonded with my sister very well. She always knows how to brighten up the room.

- Young carer, 13

“

There was no space. There were frustrations between the kids. I think it was as we were struggling to make a new routine that worked.

- Mum of eight-year-old young carer

“

I was closer to my mum and was able to know what she needed. I missed spending time with her when I was away to school, or when I was home playing online games.

- Young carer, 19

“

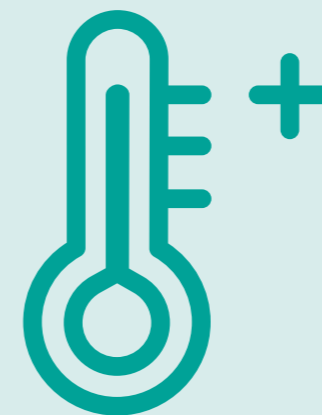
I supervised and cooked with my older brother. I think we bonded during lockdown, got a bit closer.

- Young carer, 10

“

We were fighting a lot.

- Young carer, 8



Challenges during Covid

Challenges faced by young carers during Covid

1. Lockdown-specific challenges
2. Caring-specific challenges
3. Finding balance
4. Lack of respite
5. Education

Challenges during Covid

Lockdown-specific challenges

Apart from the challenges specific to caring, YCs were also impacted by the other Covid-related challenges that everyone was facing, like changes in Covid-19 regulations, shopping crisis, social distancing, financial difficulties, etc.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

Technical issues



My internet was slow. Sometimes we had Wi-Fi issues as mum was working too.

- Young carer, 14



We live in the middle of the countryside. Our Wi-Fi is really bad, or at least it was. It's gotten better now, but like 2020-2021 was really bad.

- Young carer, 15



Internet has been always bad here if it's more than three people tried to be on it. It would just not work.

- Young carer, 12



My older brother was also in high school in 2020. He didn't have a laptop at that time, he had to use our stepdad's one, which doesn't really work that well, or he had to use my one. It was frustrating when we both needed it.

- Young carer, 13



Living in a rural area means we don't have internet and we had to rely on 4G, which is expensive and stressful. We had to buy 4G plans and a new router to improve the signal, which was over £100, but it's still difficult to get a good connection. The school gave us a dongle, but it didn't work due to poor signal. It was a good gesture, but didn't help.

- Mum of eight-year-old young carer

Procurement of groceries, medicines

YCs shed light on the challenges they and their families faced procuring groceries and medicines. The unavailability of medications and the need to make multiple trips to the pharmacy was physically and mentally exhausting for YCs. Few YCs reported that their remote locations and lack of support from neighbours and extended family exacerbated the situation. Standing in long queues to collect prescriptions was found to be stressful, especially for those who are anxious or have additional needs. YCs and their parents felt that online food shopping was expensive, and in such cases, the support of local community groups such as churches can be a great help. These challenges highlighted the need for more accessible and supportive services for young carers and their families.



Getting medications like melatonin to help my sister (with additional needs) sleep was challenging because they weren't always available, leading to multiple trips to the pharmacy.

- Young carer, 15



Collecting prescriptions and medications was very stressful. I knew they offer a service to the elderly, and they'll drop their medications off. But there wasn't a service for people like us. The queue was massive and you'd have to stand around people. It just wasn't really a nice experience at all.

- Mum of eight-year-old young carer



The local church offered food parcels that they sent to the door weekly, was very helpful.

- Mum of eight-year-old young carer



We stayed in a remote place, and our extended family stayed down in England, so we couldn't get any help from neighbours.

- Young carer, 13



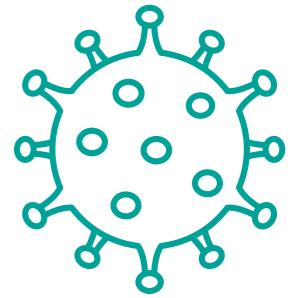
We newly moved into the house, we didn't really know many of our neighbours. There's no extended family.

- Young carer, 15

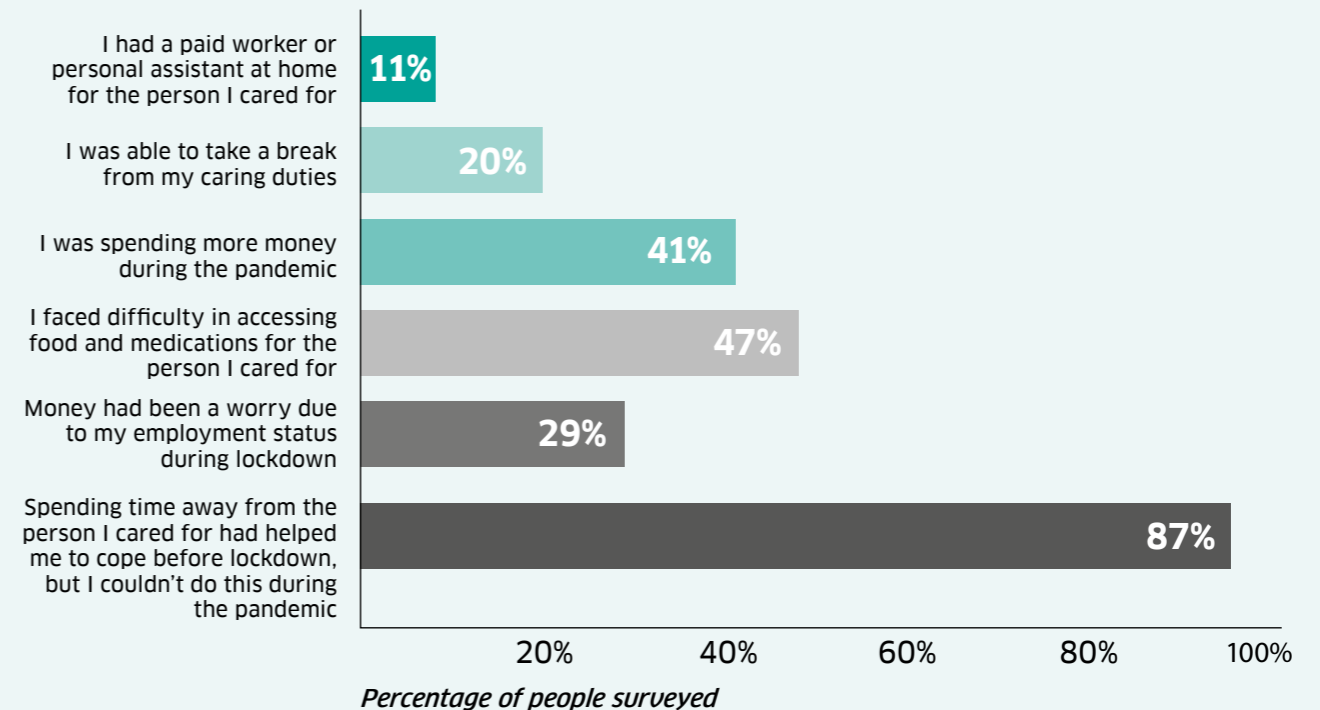


I didn't go out to the shops at all because I suffer from anxiety myself.

- Young carer, 15



Factors that impacted cared-for during lockdown



Caring challenges

Routine

Some YCs caring for family members who had a routine mentioned that the disruption of the routine affected their cared-for, which was challenging for the whole family.



Before Covid, I would come back from school and see what Mum needed, help her, go out for about half an hour or more in the park - I love going out in my bike -, meet my pals and come back, and do my schoolwork. But during Covid, my routine was inconsistent. I woke up and went downstairs, opened MS teams for my classes, helped my mum all day, and go upstairs for a workout, and then get back to helping Mum. We bonded well. I can't complain because I was scared for my mum's safety.

- Young carer, 14



It definitely got worse than before because my younger sister has autism, and she thrives on routine and stuff. And since there was no school, there was no routine, and it was very difficult.

- Young carer, 13

Cared-for's health



It was very hard and difficult. I wouldn't know what to do as he was getting difficult. We would always fight. He used to calm down on swings, but we couldn't go due to Covid-19 restrictions.

- Young carer, 14



He's really into gaming, but sometimes he can't get Wi-Fi or if all of us are online. He wasn't really happy. It just adds to the tension in the house. So yeah, that wasn't easy.

- Young carer, 8



I think it was the second lockdown my sister came down with a fever and since it was during Covid and it got quite bad, she had to go to the hospital. I was very scared at that point.

- Young carer, 13



He didn't like online school.

- Young carer, 8



The problem was trying to make a new routine that worked, but obviously not having any reassurance to when the kids were going back to school. Constantly staying in limbo, we all became really frustrated with the situation. My son with autism and ADHD struggled as online schooling was a really hard thing for him to do. In the end, we just didn't do anything after a few weeks of trying because it was too stressful for him and it was too stressful on the household.

- Mum of eight-year-old young carer



She was in the hospital for a while for her fever. I was quite scared at that point.

- Young carer, 13



I was scared about Mum's safety as I got Covid and I was very ill, and I couldn't help my mum either. We struggled a lot. I wore two face masks.

- Young carer, 14



It was the second lockdown when my sister came down with a fever and it got quite bad. She had to go to the hospital. I was very scared at that point.

- Young carer, 13

Finding balance

YCs reported struggling to balance caring responsibilities, education and personal activities. They faced additional challenges of helping their siblings or parents who were tackling their own set of challenges brought up by Covid-19.



My sister struggled with online learning as it was different from classroom learning, and she didn't respond well to it. It was challenging to get her to complete her online work, which often required my help instead of her listening to others. This affected my own learning as well.

- Young carer, 15



I mean, since my birthday was coming up, I was a bit sad, so that's when I got to Facetime (video call) my friends, but I had to be a bigger help with my brother, so that Mum feels a bit less stressed."

- Young carer, 11

Whereas some YCs managed to balance their education and their caring responsibilities and were able to get a lot of time to themselves.



I did have a lot of free time because there was no six hours at school or anything. Basically, I was drawing a lot during lockdown.

- Young carer, 13



It just felt like a holiday to me, I had too much time for myself.

- Young carer, 15



My other hobbies are singing and dancing, and because we can't go in person, my dance teacher found a new way to do it, which was posting videos online, and I'm posting the dance back so we can follow along to it.

- Young carer, 14

Activities that helped young people cope



49%
Listening to music



60%
Talking to friends and family



33%
Exercise



60%
Computer games



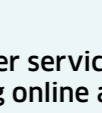
49%
Studying for schoolwork



33%
Reading books



44%
Local carer services (including online and remote)



12%
Other



I was into gaming. I didn't miss going out. I was on the leaderboard for the online game that I played.

- Young carer, 19



Me and brother used to play a lot of online games like Roblox.

- Young carer, 11



We have Nintendo Switch that we would play on together.

- Young carer, 13

Lack of respite

YCs were largely impacted by the lack of respite during the pandemic. They expressed feelings of burnout, loss of personal time and not being able to do the things they enjoy. The closure of activities such as horse riding and the inability to meet with friends in person further worsened the situation. The young carers had to sacrifice their personal interests and hobbies to provide care for their loved ones, which took a toll on their mental and emotional wellbeing.

“

When you spend a lot of time with someone, you can get burned out and just want to be on your own for a bit.

- Young carer, 15

“

I would meet my friends in Aberdeen or I would have them here, but now I text, Facetime, or just see them in online classes. I lost the time that I had to myself.

- Young carer, 15

“

I got my about my own time, but at the cost of my sleep.

- Young carer, 15



“

I stopped having time to do what I liked, and it became time to do things that my sister liked.

- Young carer, 15

“

I didn't get a lot of time to myself, or even to just breathe.

- Young carer, 14

“

I definitely missed doing my horse riding every Saturday.

- Young carer, 14

“

I love reading. But most of my time was spent caring because when I read, I get really into it. You need to be committed. I really get focused and obviously if I'm supposed to be caring while I'm doing that. Plus I can't multitask, so I have to put all my focus onto looking after my sister.

- Young carer, 14

Finance

Most of the YCs mentioned their parents would keep the family's financial difficulties to themselves and not share with them, however they knew about their parents' financial struggles. Layoffs, reduction in pay and removal of grants further added to stress as families struggled to meet new demands brought by the pandemic like purchasing laptops or improving Wi-Fi.

“

We couldn't afford a new laptop for my brother due to our financial struggles.

- Young carer, 14

“

Our mum would try to keep any financial struggles from us, but then obviously, we were old enough to know that there were definitely problems.

- Young carer, 14

Some YCs reported the economic impact of the pandemic meant they had to take on paid work to support their families, further intensifying their caring responsibilities and reducing the time available for education and their own personal time.

“

I can relate to the struggles. I had to take on paid work to support Mum, which made caring from my mum more challenging. I have had little time left for my own education or for myself.

- Young adult carer, 21

“

At first it's a little bit exciting because no school for what they thought was two to three weeks. Then it turned out to be months. We then realised this is going to be longer term than we thought and it did get a bit stressful.

- Young carer, 15

“

I struggled my whole year with the introduction to S1 because we were in P7 and we didn't get half as much support as any other year had gotten when going into this one. That was hard. I didn't really see much of my classmates' faces, so I didn't know how they looked or who they were really.

- Young carer, 13

“

Online classes - well it was kinda switch on and sleep next to the laptop. There were maths tutoring lessons and everyone said it was really, really boring and most people skipped the entire thing after one lesson. It wasn't mandatory, but you were encouraged to join, so a lot of people didn't do that. There were also some people who accidentally left their microphone on and they were eating behind the camera. I think this was funny but concerning too, as I knew I was not understating what's being taught.

- Young carer, 15

“

My teachers didn't really know that much back then. I only started telling them when I got into Academy cause I knew it would be useful to help me learn. But in P7 when I went down to a meeting, the teacher would just say 'All right, here's what you missed. You didn't miss that much, but can you please write this down? I can give you extra time if you want.' And yeah, that was all the support I really got. But I got on quite well.

- Young carer, 13



Education

Over half of YCs surveyed reported not having enough time to spend on schoolwork during the pandemic, and nearly half felt that their education was suffering. The transition to online learning was particularly challenging, with YCs struggling to focus and understand lessons, especially with poor internet connections. Many expressed frustrations with the lack of structure and support in online learning compared to traditional classroom settings. Some YCs felt that they couldn't find a balance between schoolwork and home as they felt schoolwork should be confined to school, and that home should be reserved for relaxation and caregiving duties. The absence of in-person support from teachers and classmates compounded the difficulties faced by young carers during the pandemic.

I was away for education but had to move back to my family home	11%
My education was suffering	47%
I didn't have enough time to spend on schoolwork	53%
As a carer, I was supported by my school or individual teacher	35%

STYLE UP/ADD
ICONS

“

It impacted my education I fell really behind my maths. I didn't really understand any space lessons. I started falling down the hill, however now I'm climbing back again.

- Young carer, 14

“

Having my dyslexia didn't help at all with my online classes. I couldn't decide or understand what was needed.

- Young carer, 14

“

We can't do certain things on computer and we can do only in schools. No one really knew what they were doing. My teacher got it covered but it was really hard to understand what they are saying, especially with bad internet.

- Young carer, 14

“

I hated online learning. I couldn't bring myself to focus on them. In a classroom you have the teacher trying to keep you on track and you're given things, but with online learning you just get thrown all the stuff for the week and then just get told to do it.

- Young carer, 14

“

Lockdown classes were bit hard as my brother (with additional needs) and I didn't understand what was happening.

- Young carer, 14

“

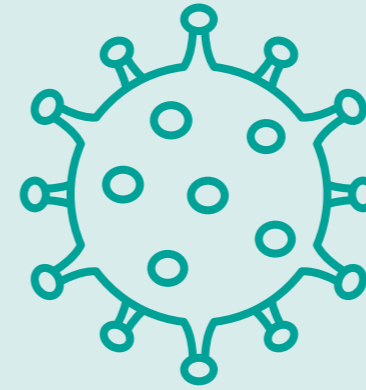
It was pretty fun to be at school. You need to have time breaks and stuff. But I mean, with home schooling, I never got anything done.

- Young carer, 11

“

My mental health definitely went downhill cause I wasn't seeing people at school and meeting up with them outside school because we couldn't do it. My optimism went down a bit as well.

- Young carer, 13



Impact of the lockdown challenges on young carers

1. **Effect on physical health and mental health**
 - a. **Stress and anxiety**
 - b. **Self-Isolation**



Effect on physical health and mental health

The survey data and interviews clearly suggested that the Covid-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on the mental health and wellbeing of most of the young carers. 88% of YCs reported feeling overwhelmed by their full-time caring duties, keeping themselves well, participating in education and having time for themselves and pursuing personal interests. Similarly, 67% of YCs reported of feeling lonely, isolated and less connected to others during lockdown, and a significant number struggled to stay in touch with friends and family.

During the interviews, YCs described the impact of lockdown on their social lives and mental health, with most of them reporting feelings of isolation, stress and anxiety. Additionally, some young carers also reported physical symptoms such as sleepless nights and migraines, which were linked to increased screen time and stress.

Felt overwhelmed by the pressures of full-time caring, staying well, participating in education and doing things that matter to me	88%
Felt more stressed	75%
My mental health worsened during lockdown	31%
Struggled to look after myself	21%
I felt lonely and isolated	64%
I felt less connected to others than I did before the pandemic	67%
I couldn't stay in touch with my friends	40%



My main routine revolved around caring for my sister. I share my room with someone, and I used to have time to myself when everyone goes to bed. But then I wouldn't get a lot of sleep. And then I'd have to be up again the next day. I got my own time, but at the cost of my sleep.

- Young carer, 15



I felt lonely during lockdown as I wasn't seeing my friends. Well, some days, people wouldn't message me back and some people I just stopped messaging because they would never respond, but it was hard. But we all got through it.

- Young carer, 15



Basing my entire day around looking after my sister definitely mentally impacted me quite a lot.

- Young carer, 15



I used to have sleepovers with my friends but couldn't see them anymore. I wasn't allowed to meet my Nana nor my family members, which impacted my mental health.

- Young carer, 15



I used to work out indoors on a regular basis because I could see it was impacting my physical health as I wasn't going to school or gym. I was really stressed.

- Young carer, 14



Sometimes I had sleepless nights and I used to develop migraine attacks because of more screen time. I used to get eye pain and I used to avoid computers. This affected my education.

- Young carer, 14

Stress and anxiety

YCs highlighted stress and anxiety as their primary mental health challenges during the pandemic. They faced multiple difficulties in balancing caring duties for their siblings with their own personal time, which often resulted in a lack of sleep. Social isolation and anxiety about the health of family members were also significant issues. YCs emphasised the need for increased support for young carers to address the negative impact of the pandemic on their mental health and wellbeing.



There were times that it wasn't that bad, but then there was times when it was really stressful for me. I just sat in my bedroom and didn't do anything.

- Young carer, 13



I was getting more and more anxious. My panic attacks were increasing especially when I saw shops were running out of food.

- Young carer, 14



I had super anxiety that once Covid ended my friends wouldn't be my friends and I won't be able to see my dad ever again as he's old.

- Young carer, 14

Self-isolation

As mentioned above, the pandemic had a significant impact on more than 60% of YCs' social and personal lives, where they found it challenging to stay connected with their peers, which in turn led to loneliness and self-isolation. Keeping their cared-for's safety in mind, some YCs avoided meeting or communicating with their friends regularly, and that led to fear of isolation. However, some young carers reported no impact on their social life, although they sometimes wished they could see their friends. The responses underscore the importance of

social connections for young carers and the need for support to help them maintain social ties during difficult times.



I felt really lonely as I couldn't go to the gym, couldn't go and meet friends.

- Young carer, 14



I had a phone but my friends didn't. However, we connected on Teams. I used to love hanging out with them, but I didn't get to see friends and it impacted my social life.

- Young carer, 12

No impact

Few YCs mentioned that lockdown didn't have any significant impact on their mental health and wellbeing. This pattern was widely seen in teenage YCs.



Social life was not affected - I just used to text them.

- Young carer, 14



Sometimes I wish I could see them, sometimes I thought I have an excuse not to see them.

- Young carer, 14



We're still aware that it's around, like we're not hugging as much, we're still doing elbow bumps and everything.

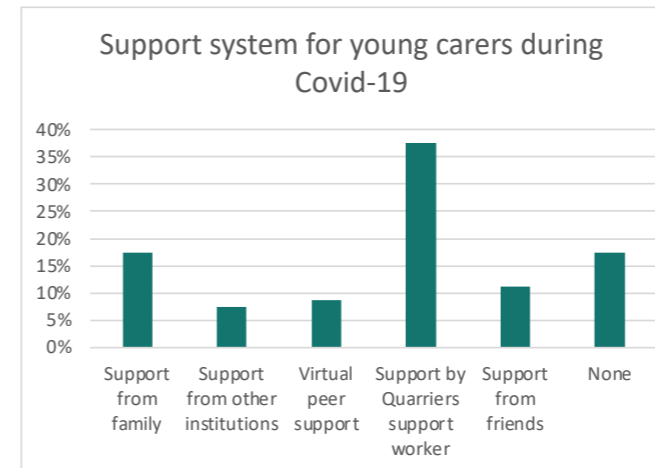
- Young carer, 13



Support systems during lockdown

1. **Support from family**
2. **Support from friends**
3. **Support from the other support systems**
4. **Virtual peer support**
5. **Quarriers**

Support systems



Support from family

YCs mentioned receiving support from their families during the Covid-19 pandemic. The support ranged from emotional support to coping mechanisms. YCs mentioned how their family members were involved in each other's lives and tried their best to get through the pandemic as a family.

“

My mum used to help me to ease my panic attacks. I would cope with shopping list game, alphabet games or some mindful colouring. We would talk to each other about problems, which would calm us down.

- Young carer, 14

Support from friends

YCs mentioned the importance of connecting with friends during the pandemic, as they found solace in sharing their emotions and experiences with peers who could relate to their struggles. They were able to divert their attention from the hardships at home with the help of their friends. Some YCs mentioned how valuable their friends were in enabling them to return to their school, which had a significant effect on their mental health. Technology played a key role in facilitating communication between friends, with video calls on laptops or parents' phones being a preferred option for those who lacked access

to phones. Despite living in rural or remote areas, YCs were able to maintain social connections with friends through virtual communication, which proved to be a vital source of support during difficult times.

“

Me and my mum did a few video calls with my friends through her phone. We're quite rural. We've not got any neighbours, friends or anything. We just used to video call and I would just play with my friends as if they were in the room. And that was the best option that we could think of, really.

- Young carer, 14

“

Talking to my friends during lockdown was definitely better and especially about emotions and how you feel because they can relate to that and even if it's just talking to them, because both of you need a distraction from what's going on in your house. It helps.

- Young carer, 13

“

I used to connect with my friends on Teams as they didn't have phones.

- Young carer, 12

“

I was playing online games with my friends.

- Young carer, 13

Support from other support systems

YCs reported their experience with Quarriers during lockdown broadly into two themes:

Support received by Quarriers

YCs highlighted the positive impact of support received from Quarriers. Support received (in the form of regular check-ins, gift vouchers, creative break funding and one-on-one online support for dealing with personal and familial issues) was much appreciated. Additionally, YCs highlighted the importance of talking to and sharing their experiences and challenges with someone who wasn't a family member during lockdown.

“

Once a week, I would get a call from someone from Quarriers and they'll be checking up on me, asking how it is going. Mainly some company that wasn't in the house.

- Young carer, 15

“

I was supported by Kirsty over online video calls. I would tell her what was going on every two to three weeks. I felt better and de-stressed.

- Young carer, 13

“

Later, after the easing of travel restrictions, we were given Creative Break funding when we drove down to England to see my family. It was really good to see everyone.

- Young carer, 8

“

I really liked the gesture of my Quarriers Family Wellbeing Worker and also I loved the £35 Tesco card.

- Young carer, 15

“

I never really signed up for anything because I'd have to schedule it and with my previous anxiety and the stress that Covid had created, I felt that I couldn't message someone and have a conversation with them because I didn't know them. It just made my anxiety really bad. But from what the emails I get and

the newsletter that we got sent, I could tell that there was some really good opportunities, I suppose, and support that was put out.

- Young carer, 15

“

My mum will get texts from our Family Wellbeing Worker seeing if I wanted to have a chat. It helped. I did talk to my Family Wellbeing Worker one-on-one quite a bit, but I'd say group meetings I didn't join as much. I think that helped me a lot.

- Young carer, 15

“

I am talking to someone who wasn't family - that was actually really beneficial because it was a different voice than I'd been hearing all week stuck inside the house.

- Young carer, 15

Challenges while accessing support

However, few YCs preferred face-to-face support and faced challenges in accessing online support in the form of online meetups and video calls. They reported feeling either shy or anxious, or faced difficulty with scheduling their online meetings as they were interrupting either school or caring responsibilities.

Overall, while YCs valued the support provided by Quarriers, there is a need for more tailored and accessible forms of support that can accommodate the unique needs and circumstances of each individual.

“

I really missed the one-on-one support and I wish face-to-face support was given to me as I'm not a pro-video caller.

- Young carer, 13

“

I have been very shy and antisocial. I messaged quite a few of my friends and lockdown, but I struggle with speaking to people I don't know and sharing experiences with them. I didn't join some of the meetings and there were school meetings at the time of Quarriers meetings, so I had to say I can't do that. I've got school to do as well.

- Young carer, 13

Virtual peer support

YCs were reluctant to participate in virtual peer support with other carers due to various reasons such as social anxiety, shyness and the instability of their caring responsibilities. Where most YCs found it challenging to share their experiences with unfamiliar people, some prefer texting over video calls. This led to establishing new ways of supporting YCs who are socially anxious and want to do activities by themselves or with a smaller group of peers.

“

I have social anxiety and I don't really like talking to new people. I wouldn't sign up for online carer meet ups. And then there's also the unpredictability of when my little sister would need help.

- Young carer, 15

“

I'm pretty antisocial. I usually message people. I struggle with speaking to people I don't know and sharing experiences with people I don't know.

- Young carer, 13

“

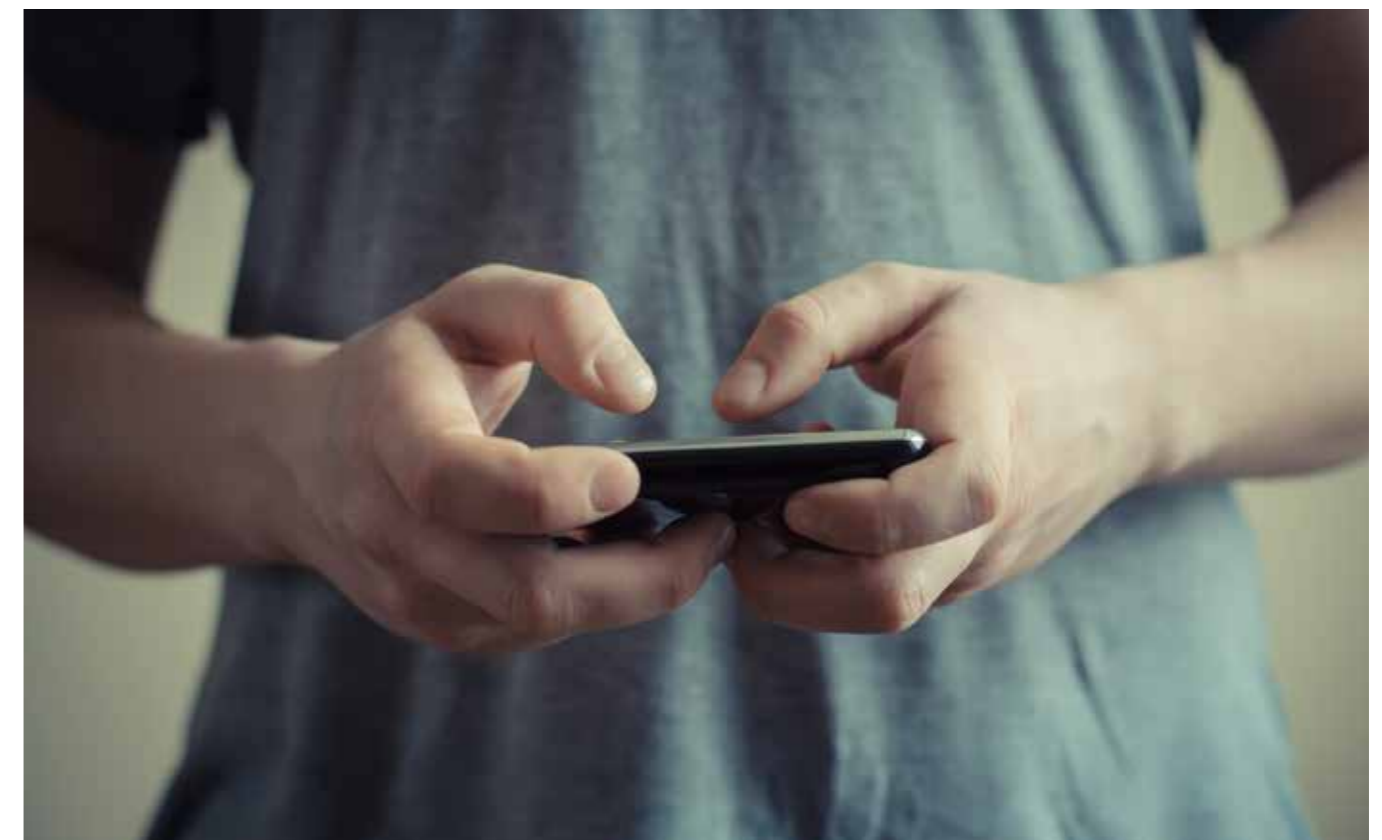
I couldn't reach for online support as I'm very shy and I struggled with panic attacks.

- Young carer, 14

“

I'm better seeing people face-to-face, especially if it's in real life because I feel like if I can see their face, I can really let that stuff out.

- Young carer, 14



Support from other support services or organisations: psychological support/GP/school

YCs reported varying experiences with support services and organisations during the pandemic. Most of the YCs reported that the only support that they received other than carers support services was from their teachers, but very few YCs mentioned that they were only supported by other personnel like social workers or other organisations via their cared-for.



I think my guidance teacher was the only person I really talked to about how I am feeling, especially because she could obviously tell teachers that I may not hand in work, or if a certain assignment comes in a couple days late, then to not be too upset about it.

- Young carer, 15

Support from schools

Many YCs in the Academy found excellent support from their guidance teacher and appreciated their understanding of their situation whereas not many YCs reported effective communication from their primary schools. Many YCs had mixed experiences regarding the support provided by their teachers, especially with their online learning and any other additional support needed in terms of their physical and mental health struggles. However, only a few YCs appreciated the effective support in primary school ranging from the access to monthly sessions for young carers to providing printed copies of work to reduce screen time.

YCs mentioned the importance of teacher support in helping young carers cope with the challenges of remote learning. They appreciated teachers who were aware of a YC's caregiving responsibilities and were able to provide accommodations such as reduced homework and leniency with deadlines. The role of school guidance teachers and additional needs teachers was also emphasised, with their support being crucial in helping YCs manage their workload

and prioritise their responsibilities. It was found that YCs in primary schools had very few support systems in place when compared to YCs in secondary and Academy. Overall, teacher understanding and flexibility were key in supporting the academic success of young carers during the pandemic.



Internet was bad and trying to get onto the school when they were meeting up as a class on Microsoft Teams was difficult. They're trying to just do their best, but everything became too much and I did speak to the school. I spoke to my son's teacher and she just said 'Look, just do what you can.' And I think that was a really good advice because I did sort of relax a bit into it more then, as initially I was just trying to do everything and it's really stressful.

- Mum of eight-year-old young carer



I really started to like Mackie's as the guidance teacher was really supportive. Some of my teachers would know I am a young carer because I used to get panic attacks in class.

- Young carer, 14



Since I had migraine attacks due to increased screen time, I was supported by my teachers as I was given printed copies of the classes, which me and my mum went through after the class is finished. I was given just a day's work.

- Young carer, 14



You didn't have to be on the internet all the time, that made sense. You could go off or look up what you need and download it and then just work away at it.

- Young carer, 11



I couldn't finish my work, and they knew why. They asked me when I went back to school and I told them then and they were quite understanding.

- Young carer, 14



I was well supported by my teachers. I got a laptop from school but sometimes MS Teams used to crash and I missed a lot of what was going on. I had to request paper copies of what was going on in the class. I was well supported when it comes to assignments depending upon what it was.

- Young carer, 14



My teachers are quite good with it because my guidance teacher knows that I'm a young carer, so if anything doesn't get done or things have been especially difficult looking after my sister then my guidance teacher will tell my teachers and let them know that things have been a bit difficult and I won't be able to complete all the homework or school or just stuff that I've been given to do.

- Young carer, 14



We got a weekly grid, had some maths jobs and some literacy and some reading and then spelling, and then there was like an art. So there was a good variety and there was a PE challenge every week. Basically, we tried to get through most things but you could kind of pick and choose.

- Young carer, 11



If I'm just trying to get some of my maths or something done and I'm stuck on a bit then my two options were leave it and most likely get in trouble for it or email my teacher and have to wait hours or even a couple days for them to respond.

- Young carer, 14

On the other hand, YCs reflected on the challenges they faced in receiving support from their teachers during remote learning. Some YCs didn't appreciate the freedom to keep their cameras off during virtual classes as it made it harder for them to get help with difficult tasks and prevented them from seeing their friends or classmates. The lack of real-time support from teachers also meant that some YCs had to wait for extended periods to receive feedback or assistance

with their work. Furthermore, some YCs felt that they were not well supported by their teachers, but their parents or family helped them instead. YCs also acknowledged that these difficulties were likely compounded by the increased workload that teachers faced during the pandemic.



Our teachers always told us to keep our cameras off. We were kind of free to do whatever we like. If we were stuck on something, then they couldn't help us as much as they did in person, but I know it was quite challenging for teachers.

- Young carer, 14



Support from teachers was definitely difficult and if you needed help then you had to private message a teacher and then wait for them to check it and respond, which could take ages.

- Young carer, 15



I was in P7. I wasn't very well-supported by my teachers. My mum would support me though and I don't think they could have helped me in my situation.

- Young carer, 14



It was definitely difficult. My teachers obviously have a lot of classes and they needed to talk to a lot of students. They needed to help.

- Young carer, 15



Since there's been a new head teacher, I don't really communicate with the school well, like I used to. I feel like you can phone and email and leave messages, but nothing really gets passed on.

- Mum of eight-year-old young carer



I wasn't supported for my problem. There was this list of work and I had to pick - it was very hard.

- Young carer, 14



Positives from lockdown

1. **Closeness to family**
2. **Spending more time with family**
3. **Increased focus**
4. **Reduced feeling of loneliness**
5. **None**



Positives from lockdown

Spent more time with my family	31%
Close to family	28%
Increased focus on work	23%
Reduced feeling of loneliness	78%
None	36%

The most commonly cited positive is the reduced feeling of loneliness, with 78% of young carers expressing this sentiment. This is likely because of spending more time with family members, which is also cited as a positive by 31% of YCs. Spending more time with family members has allowed them to develop closer bonds and get to know each other better, as well as provide more care and support for the cared-for individuals.

Other positives cited by YCs include an increased focus on work (23%) and the opportunity to do things differently, such as finding new activities to do at home or being more organised (36%). Some young carers also appreciated the support and advice available to them during this time.

Overall, YCs demonstrated that even amidst the challenges and difficulties of the pandemic, there have been some positive outcomes for them and their families.

Closeness to family

The closeness to family is a prominent theme in the responses, with many young carers talking about spending more time with their families, which has allowed them to bond and get to know each other better. Some young carers mentioned how they spoke to their grandparents more frequently or were happy that their mother could work from home.



We always arranged a time to phone each other and called my granny and my other grandparents every day.

- Mum of eight-year-old young carer

Spending more time with family

Spending more time with their cared-for has also been a positive experience for some YCs. They have been able to find new and creative ways to keep their cared-for entertained during lockdown, which has allowed them to get to know them better and learn about their interests and preferences.



I've been caring for my sister already, but with the lockdown none of us were in school anymore. There was only so much that you could do. So we were trying to find ways to keep her entertained... So that's the positive of spending a lot of time with her and getting to know her... learning more about her and how her mind works.

- Young carer, 14



I am happy that Mum got to work from home, and I don't have to worry that she will be home too late, especially on bad weather days.

- Young carer, 14

Increased focus

Increased focus on work was another positive aspect of lockdown for some young carers. They mentioned how being at home allowed them to concentrate better on their schoolwork and other responsibilities.

Reduced feeling of loneliness

Reduced feeling of loneliness was a significant positive outcome of the pandemic for young carers, with many mentioning how they felt less lonely during lockdown because they had more time to spend with their families.

None

While some young carers did not mention any positive outcomes of lockdown, others talked about wanting to do things differently, like being more organised and taking support and advice on board, which can be seen as positive steps towards personal growth and development.

Recovering from the pandemic

As the pandemic recovery began, YCs have expressed anxiety and stress while returning to school and socialising with their peers and others. Despite the lifting of restrictions, some YCs continue to practice caution by avoiding hugging and using masks to keep themselves and cared-for protected. YCs are still feeling the impact of Covid-19 in their lives and they are still struggling with adjusting to the new normal, balancing their social life and caregiving responsibilities.



When I went back and there were loads of people in the school, which I wasn't used to that anymore. So it was stressful and most of the kids I didn't know, unless they're either in the year below me or juniors.

- Young carer, 13



I feel free now and some days out can be a great success. We've had some good successes in the holidays. Every day, I'm finding a new friend! Got my mum's old phone.

- Young carer, 13

Resilience

Young carers have shown resilience in adapting to the pandemic situation. They express optimism and determination to maintain their friendships despite the challenges faced during lockdown. Most of the young carers have prepared themselves in case similar circumstances occur in the future and have also found new ways to cope with their responsibilities, such as going shopping alone, staying in touch with friends more often or doing more activities outdoors. If there was another lockdown, some young carers wished to have more flexibility in their routines in regards with home-schooling. Overall, young carers have shown an ability to adapt and find new ways to overcome the challenges they face.

If this happens again?

Worries about future

Where YCs showed their resilience while adapting to the new normal, they were equally worried about the possibility of something similar happening, and how it can impact their education or their family's finances.



I'm glad it's better now with the grocery shopping and getting medicines for my mum, and I know I can do much better if this happens again.

- Young carer, 11



After the lockdown, I have realised the importance of friends in my life. I message my friends more than usual.

- Young carer, 13



I understood that no two days are alike so whenever you get time to meet your pals, just go for it.

- Young carer, 14

Covid-19

YCs are concerned about the future with regards to another lockdown. They expressed concerns about the spread of Covid-19, the effectiveness of the vaccine, and the potential for mutations. **The use of masks, frequent hand washing and social distancing is still prevalent and may continue to be a part of everyday life.** On a positive note, spending time with family during lockdown was a highlight for some young carers. However, the fear of not having support during a future lockdown is also a concern.



I feel the idea that Covid gets really serious again and everything gets shut down again is definitely always going to be in the back of our heads. I'm still always carrying a mask in my bag just in case.

- Young carer, 15

THIS ISN'T ACCURATE ANYMORE (MASKS AND DISTANCING).



Seeing my mum getting worried while seeing what is happening in the world and how much Covid was spreading and her being over exhausted, it was worrying me.

- Young carer, 15



I do worry sometimes that there might be another quarantine that there might be another variant of Covid. That the vaccine or the virus will mutate to one that the vaccines don't work on.

- Young carer, 13



You must have to do more activities in the house. I think maybe be more organised. Because I don't think anything could have prepared us for going into lockdown.

- Young carer, 8



One positive thing is that I got to spend a lot of time with my family. I'm glad I wouldn't really have with them otherwise. I am worried if this happens again and I don't have any support.

- Young carer, 13



Although my optimism went down about it, I still knew that my friends were going to be my friends at the end of this, and that they're all that. I'll be there for them and they'll be there for me.

- Young carer, 13



I was so scared that we would lose touch and we won't remember each other, but we are getting so much better now.

- Young carer, 14



Regards to caring, if this happens again, I will want to go alone to the shops instead of my mum driving me to the shops as she was very anxious to catch Covid.

- Young carer, 12

Education worries

YCs are worried about the impact of potential future lockdowns on their education and career aspirations.



I suppose education's my main focus. I worry that we end up with another lockdown and we have to start doing online school or exams. My main worries are to do with my education and what will happen of my career as I'm in S5 so I still have another two years of this. So there's always the worry, at least in the back of my head, of what happens if.

- Young carer, 12



I think some of the aspect of going back into school after lockdown was worrying me.

- Young carer, 14



I feel worried about schools shutting down again and this might affect my career and my dream job.

- Young carer, 14

Financial worries

Many YCs expressed financial concerns due to their parents or family members not working or being made redundant, which caused worry for the whole family. The experience of financial crisis and redundancy in the pandemic has left a lasting impact on YCs, who still worry about the possibility of a similar situation occurring in the future. These experiences highlight the concerns and anxieties that can persist even after the situation has improved, which calls for more support for young carers who experienced or are experiencing financial difficulties.



I was worried as Dad didn't work for seven weeks, which was worrying for all of us and I still worry about what if it happened again.

- Young carer, 14

What do young carers want?

Awareness

YCs highlighted the lack of the awareness and recognition of young carers in schools and public places. YCs express the need for more information and support to be provided to them in schools and public places. They feel that schools could do more to raise awareness about the existence and needs of young carers. They also mention the importance of events like the Carers Festival in bringing young carers together and providing them with a sense of community and understanding.

“

If there's another lockdown, I think young carers should be allowed to go to school - it will give us a break.

- Young carer, 14

“

There could definitely be more about awareness, especially in high schools, because we just have our guidance teachers and in the name of awareness, we have just a couple of posters. But apart from that, nothing, and my previous schools have had like nothing.

- Young carer, 15

“

My older sibling was in Quarriers before me, so I already knew about it and that's how I got into it. But for lots of other people they don't have that. So if they're a young carer and they don't know about Quarriers in their area, then it's difficult.

- Young carer, 15

“

We definitely need it, so I suppose just more. More things in schools, I suppose. Unlike public places in general.

- Young carer, 15

“

My school doesn't really advertise young carers and things. It's not really one of the things that they do.

- Young carer, 13

“

I think that is enough awareness in Mackie's Academy, however I wasn't well supported in the primary school.

- Young carer, 13

Mental health support

Some young carers note that their schools have mental health support, but they believe that more recognition of young carers is needed. They suggest that schools should have separate mental health counselling for young carers as they have unique needs and experiences that may not be adequately addressed by general mental health support.

“

I think there's a pretty good mental support in the school, but it just needs more recognition for young carers.

- Young carer, 13

“

No, I don't think there's anything at all.

- Young carer, 13

“

I don't think there's much awareness regarding young carers. I would say more mental health support is needed in school. I would want a separate person for mental health counselling.

- Young carer, [age]

“

I really wish there was more mental health support because I think mental health support doesn't exactly exist in school.

- Young carer, 12

“

I think schools should have more mental health support, or we should be able to share are stressful situations with the house leaders at schools.

- Young carer, 13

Overall, this feedback indicates that there is a need for increased awareness and recognition of young carers in schools and public places, as well as more specialised support and resources to meet their unique needs.

“

Young Carers Festival is really good for that I suppose because I'm out with a lot of people who are in the same or similar situations to me who understood, like my friends from school don't.

- Young carer, 15

“

Anyone can say 'I understand'. But if you're talking to people who are young carers as well, they know exactly what you're going through.

- Young carer, 15

Virtual peer support

YCs highlighted the lack of the awareness and recognition of young carers in schools and public places. YCs express the need for more information and support to be provided to them.

Ideas for things to do at home	47%
Information and practical advice to help me cope	59%
Virtual peer support	47%
None	20%

The kind of support provided

I am happy with the kind of support I was provided	20%
The virtual (online) support that I received was good or satisfactory	33%
I am happy to take part in online activities	40%
I am happy to have a hybrid (a mix of online and face to face support) in the future	40%
None of the above	7%

PHOTO HERE

What do carers want?

1. Awareness:

Continue raising awareness of young carers (YCs) and young adult carers (YACs), particularly within educational settings, which can act as a sanctuary and a safeguard for YCs and YACs.

2. Every voice matters:

Young carers' voices are central to understanding the impact of caring on their lives. They should be fully involved in all aspects of research, as well as policy and service development.

3. Identification:

Formalise the identification of young carers within the school system through the inclusion of data within the school census. This inclusion of data could ensure that appropriate funding is allocated to schools to enable them to meet the specific needs of young carers.

4. Support:

Young carers in Aberdeenshire are a hidden and vulnerable population who appear to suffer in silence. The lack of societal recognition has impeded the development of support systems for young carers. This report makes the following recommendations:

- a. **Provide more support via carer support organisations.** Health and social care agencies must be compelled to meet their statutory duties to identify, assess and support YCs, YACs and their families using a whole family approach, where the needs and views of young carers are considered alongside the needs of the cared-for, and the parenting needs of an individual forms part of the assessment. This support should be provided with more staff, more recognition and more funding.
- b. **Improve accessibility** to YC support and provide flexible support according to needs. This will enable them to respond to young carers' needs in a flexible and proactive manner without bureaucratic barriers and potential stigma.

3. Recommendations

- c. **Improve the quality of formal support and foster a sense of community** by providing opportunities for young carers to connect with each other. This could involve organising events like the Carers Festival or creating online support groups for young carers.
- d. **Provide financial assistance** for YCs and their families who have experienced financial hardship due to the pandemic.
- e. **Support from school:** Young carers must be central in creating an individualised plan for young carers in schools. Schools, colleges and universities could work with local young carers, student unions and YAC groups to ensure that they have appropriate policies and networks to meet the carers' needs.
 - i. **Support with academic needs:** recognise young carers within the safeguarding procedures in schools and to provide more support and training for school staff and leaders to better support YCs. Approaches that include awareness raising and providing focused peer support are effective in identifying YCs and creating a community of support and trust.
 - ii. **Mental health support:** provide mental health support for young carers to address the psychological impact of caring. Young carers may have unique needs and experiences that require specialised mental health support. Schools should consider offering separate counselling sessions for young carers to help them deal with the stress and anxiety associated with their caregiving responsibilities.
 - iii. **Anti-bullying:** address bullying and stigma faced by young carers in schools and other settings to create a safe and supportive environment for young carers.





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