

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb i ymgynghoriad y [Pwyllgor Iechyd a Gofal Cymdeithasol](#) ar [Gwella mynediad at gymorth i ofalwyr di-dâl](#)

This response was submitted to the [Health and Social Care Committee](#) consultation on [Improving access to support for unpaid carers.](#)

UC20 : Ymateb gan: Barnardo's Cymru | Response from: Barnardo's Cymru



Unpaid Carers Consultation:

About Barnardo's Cymru

At Barnardo's Cymru, our purpose is clear - changing childhoods and changing lives, so that children, young people, and families are safe, happy, healthy, and hopeful. Last year, we provided essential support to over 10,000 children, young people, parents and carers through 45 services and partnerships across Wales. For over 150 years, we've been here for the children and young people who need us most – bringing love, care and hope into their lives and giving them a place where they feel they belong.

Barnardo's has a long history of working alongside local authorities to support young carers providing them with 1-1 support and assessment, groups, activities, respite and opportunities.

The main barriers faced by unpaid carers in accessing the support they need; including any specific challenges for carers based on factors such as age, ethnicity or where they live:

- **Funding insecurity is the biggest barrier:** services live under constant threat of losing funding or contracts not being renewed, limiting capacity to plan long-term. Third sector providers such as Barnardo's Cymru are pleased to work alongside local authorities to provide young carers support, but we face the same financial challenges and limitations as our commissioners. The third sector brings a unique approach to young carers support; by attracting grant funding and using charitable funds we enhance the support on offer by providing additional activities, trips, grants and resources. There is significant power in harnessing the expertise of both the local authority and third sector providers in working with young carers to provide truly trauma-informed, person-centred support. This is constantly at risk with ongoing financial instability across Wales.
- **Shrinking provision:** where multiple independent services once operated outside local authorities, only two now remain.
- **Age restrictions:** services often cannot support very young carers (e.g. under 7) despite receiving referrals for children as young as 7.
- **Identification challenges:** many young carers do not recognise themselves as such due to "normalisation" of their role. Most identifications come via schools or GPs; self-referrals almost always come from parents, not the young people themselves.
- **One-size-fits-all services fail:** young people's needs differ from adult carers, but services are often modelled on adult provision and/or are commissioned as part of one tender process, not separating the budget or unique needs of child carers.

- **Reluctance to be labelled:** some young carers reject ID cards or formal identification because they do not want to be seen as different to their peers.

Recommendations

- Address the chronic instability of young carers support services by offering longer funding settlements, investing in services to support young carers of all ages beyond the statutory requirements to undertake an assessment of need. Within the Families First flexible funding provision and within local needs assessments for C&YP and families, require all local authorities to explicitly state how they are meeting the needs of their young carers, and ensuring this is adequate to meet their needs and numbers.
- Raise awareness of what a young carer looks like, work with children with lived experience to develop this, and ensure that young carers feel able to come forwards and access the support they need.

The current availability of respite care across Wales, including levels of variation across regions:

- **Young Carers Festival is highly valued** and should continue; other respite options have often been lost due to the high costs to service providers, and the restricted ability for staff to attend trips due to day-to-day pressures (e.g. trips outside Wales such as Plymouth).
- **Cost barriers:** young carers cannot travel alone and require staff to accompany them, increasing costs. Travel logistics (e.g. not using public buses for young children and not having a child of any age using the bus too late or after dark, staff unable to collect across boroughs) reduce access.
- **Funding gaps:** “Bridging the Gap” funds can help pay for respite activities or in-home care while the young carer is away, but families are often uncomfortable with in-home replacement care.
- **Timing:** activities are usually in school holidays; term-time respite is possible but rare. Residential trips have ceased in some areas due to staffing shortages.
- **Confidence and skills:** young carers often lack the confidence and are anxious to take part in residential or stay away from home — confidence-building and support should be part of respite provision.

Recommendations

- Maintain investment in the Young Carer’s Festival, recognising the role this plays in children and young people’s lives
- Consult with young carers and their families about what realistic, achievable respite looks like to them, and how Welsh Government and local authorities can offer this.

The extent to which the demand for carers support services is being assessed and addressed, and current levels of unmet needs:

- **Demand significantly exceeds current capacity.** Increased school referrals will further stretch services without additional staff and resources.
- **Complex cases:** services are supporting children with child protection concerns and complex family situations in addition to their caring role. There is nuance around young carers and the extent to which they are taking up a caring role or experiencing neglect, or whether both are at play together. With family situations under intense pressure in recent years, young carer's support services are increasingly faced with difficult decisions about whether children are adequately supported by young carers services or should be under child protection. There is another dynamic of poverty often experienced by families with a young carer, due to the wider family members situation e.g disabled and out of work parents, which should never be confused with intentional neglect.
- **Overstretched teams:** some services support more than double their formal caseload (e.g. 140 young people per quarter instead of 60) due to one-to-one support needs.
- **Recruitment & retention issues:** low salaries compared to local authority roles make it hard to retain experienced staff, especially when working with high-risk and complex young people.
- **Third sector value:** commissioned third sector providers add significant extra value (e.g. funding trips and activities), but contracts often only cover salaries.

Recommendations

- Invest in young carer's support services in the long-term. Services and professionals make significant commitments to families; Welsh Government should be prepared to match that with a commitment to adequate funding over the long-term. Without this, any other pledge we make to young carers is undermined.
- Invest in the social care workforce so that young carers support roles – alongside many others in the social care sector – are valued, well-paid and secure jobs which highly skilled professionals are both attracted to and want to remain in.

The role of Regional Partnership Boards in the provision of support for unpaid carers, and the effectiveness of current commissioning practices for services:

- **Adult-centric focus:** Practitioners feel that RPB action plans can prioritise adult carers at times (e.g. hospital discharge) with little focus on young carers.
- **Life after caring:** while adult carers' transition after caring is considered, young carers' equivalent transitions (e.g. to university or work) are overlooked. Barnardo's Cymru and Newport City Council previously delivered 'Life Beyond

Caring' for young adult carers in Newport who were offered support with accessing further education and life skills. Young people had sessions with FE providers, money advice services, benefits advisors and many other professionals to help them discover their ambitions and begin working towards this. Despite unanimously positive feedback, this offer could not continue for other young adult carers because funding was time limited.

In this case, Barnardo's was grateful to have Life Beyond Caring funded by First Campus through the University of South Wales, and Newport City Council allowed us to expand our remit to the age of 25 to deliver this.

- **Gaps in life skills:** many young carers lack broader life experience and basic life skills because they are effectively parenting themselves and siblings, without typical parental oversight.
- **Vulnerability:** young carers should be formally recognised as a vulnerable group in housing and other policy areas.

Recommendations

- Young carers told us that they know they make a huge contribution to society and our economy by carrying out vital, unpaid work as carers. But they do not see this reflected back to them with recognition from services and agencies around them. Welsh Government should take action to demonstrate this understanding and awareness.
- Regional Partnership Boards should lead the way in developing and funding the services that young carers tell us they need. This should include planning for transitions in their lives where they may no longer be living at home or continuing with their education outside of school. The voices of young people should be central to how we develop this.

The actions required to improve the implementation of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 provisions for unpaid carers (including Carers Assessments and support plans):

- **Wider statutory duties:** provisions for young carers should be broadened, with dedicated services that group them with peers in similar situations.
- **Counselling:** specific counselling services for young carers should be available across Wales — this is a direct ask from young people themselves.
- **Assessment gaps:** young carers' assessments currently lead to little tangible support in some cases; the process should guarantee meaningful follow-on help.
- **Preventative focus:** early, tailored support would reduce later crisis interventions and long-term impacts on health, education, and wellbeing.
- **Consistency:** assessments and services should be consistent across Wales, with a "team around the family" approach.

Other recommendations:

Develop a **Young Carers Covenant**, similar to the Corporate Parenting Charter, which all local authorities and public bodies sign up to, committing to a higher standard of support. The work undertaken in Newport to implement the Young Carers Charter, making a series of promises and commitments to young carers in the authority is promising. This was undertaken publicly so that young people knew the level of support that the authority was committing to.

Previous Barnardo's work on young carers:

- We have been concerned about identification of young carers. We worked on the UK Parliament Health and Care Bill (now Act) to ensure young carers were identified and consulted when the person they care for is being discharged from hospital. More detail here [Barnardo's Briefing - H&C Bill -Report Stage HoL.pdf](#)
- We support, through the UK children's charities coalition, the calls for a unique child identifier - which is currently going through the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill. Young carers need to be identified and that an identifier would allow for their status and needs as a carer to be shared without them telling their story multiple times.