

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales

Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg | Children, Young People and Education Committee

Ymchwiliad i Gwella Iechyd Emosiynol ac Iechyd Meddwl Plant a Phobl Ifanc | Inquiry into The Emotional and Mental Health of Children and Young People EMH 02

Ymateb gan: Ymddiriedolaeth Gofalwyr Cymru

Response from: Carers Trust Wales

Inquiry into the emotional and mental health of children and young people

Carers Trust Wales exists to improve support, services and recognition for unpaid carers in Wales. With our Network Partners – local services that deliver support to carers – we work to ensure that information, advice and practical support is available to carers across the country.

Carers Trust Wales delivers practical support and information to carers and to those who work with them including: schools, social workers, nurses, pharmacists and physiotherapists. We also seek to influence decision-makers, the media and the public to promote, protect and recognise the contribution carers make, and the support they deserve.

We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the Children, Young People and Education Committee's inquiry into the emotional and mental health of children and young people and thank our Young Adult Carers Council for their support in developing this response.

Young carers face a unique set of challenges compared to their peers and their mental health will inevitably be impacted.

There is very little academic research on the impact caring has on the mental health and wellbeing of young carers or data to help quantify concerns that have been shared with us anecdotally. This is a problem in and of itself. It is important to be mindful of the limitations created when trying to develop services in an evidence-based way when pockets of evidence are missing. It is our view that some responsibility must be placed on public sector bodies to capture the information needed to enable evidence-based policy making. We are concerned that an ongoing lack of evidence can act as a block to change rather than a motivator for it.

The resilience of young carers is something often mentioned as a positive outcome of caring. However, we can find little evidence to support this claim. Given that resilience is very hard to test there is a risk that the resilience of young carers may be over-estimated and that this may have a negative impact on identifying and providing the support that they need.

Fundamentally, we know that young carers are more likely to have periods of mental ill health and that the young carers we work with often report a lack of support both in terms of health-based interventions and those within the education environment.

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You can find some more detailed information about the mental health of young carers on our website: <https://professionals.carers.org/young-adult-carer-mental-health> <https://carers.org/article/young-carers-and-mental-health>.

Key statistics:

- The 2011 Census found that young carers providing 50+ hours of care a week were up to five times more likely to report their general health as 'Not good'.
- A survey of 350 young carers found 48% said being a young carer made them feel stressed and 44% said it made them feel tired.
- A survey of 61 young carers in school found that 38% had mental health problems.
- Young adults with caring roles report higher rates of anxiety and depression. The GP Patient Survey finds that a third more young adult carers report anxiety or depression than other young people- 39% for young adult carers, in contrast with 28% of young people without caring responsibilities.
- A Carers Trust survey of young adult carers found that 45% reported mental health problems.

Areas the committee may wish to consider:

- Identification and recognition of young carers is inconsistent within healthcare and education. More needs to be done to identify young carers and to proactively offer appropriate support before they reach a crisis point.
- Funding cuts to schools has meant counselling services are increasingly limited and/or are self-funded out of school budgets due to increasing demand. Feedback from pilot schools within our Young Carers in Schools project suggest that school counselling services are increasingly under pressure because CAMHS isn't accessible to many of their pupils. Where it is available waiting lists are often too long.
- Funding for appropriate services is a commonly raised issue at a local level. We would encourage the committee to consider whether Welsh Government should be working with Regional Partnership Boards to ensure that young carers projects are sustainably funded within every Partnership Board area.

Additionally, we've received the following views from young adult carers:

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CAMHS as a service works extremely well I find, however the waiting lists are too long and there are often times where the issue resolves itself during the time you are waiting. School, in my opinion, is very inconsistent across the county as I've heard that some of my friends in similar positions to myself had a lot of help and counselling for their issues, whereas myself and other friends received either very little help or inadequate help for our issues.

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To be honest if it wasn't for the support of charitable organisations like The Carers Trust Wales, Action for Children and The Rotary Young Carers Interact Club, I'd have been screwed. School was an awful experience for me, the G.P was great, hospital appointments were positive experiences with regards to the respect I received. However DWP treated me like I was an uninformed child and my opinion wasn't valid.

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CAMHS are appalling in all respects. Communication, support, continuity of care. They dish out their opinion and then leave you to suffer without any further support. Not only that, but there is no area of care between child and adult transition. Just a gaping hole. Not everyone needs to be sectioned, most just need some support to continue living their lives.

Schools are even worse. I was once told that I'd be depressed like my Mother before age 14 by a school nurse, who also took great pleasure in reminding me that if I didn't lose weight I'd die young. School councilors judge you without knowing you, and all they care about is making sure they tick their precious little boxes. Confidentiality is a word they are unfamiliar too aswell. Oh, and schools don't care if you have Anxiety, Depression or anything along those lines. To them it's a pure inconvenience and means nothing in the greater scheme of things. Taking time off of school for your mental health warrants an unauthorised absence, and the vast majority of staff will look down on you for it.

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Generally school nurses are good! Mine was until we got a new one, who I couldn't speak to. I did school based counselling! It helped me a lot, had to stop it because the women wasn't really helping but I guess that's me! It was discrete, and that just helped even better