



Journey of a Young Carer to Young Adult Carer

March 2026

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Healthwatch Essex

Healthwatch Essex is an independent charity which gathers and represents views about health and social care services in Essex. Our aim is to influence decision makers so that services are fit for purpose, effective and accessible, ultimately improving service user experience.

One of the functions of a local Healthwatch under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 is the provision of an advice and information service to the public about accessing, understanding, and navigating health and social care services and their choices in relation to aspects of those services. This document was revised in July 2022 and the role of Healthwatch was further strengthened as a voice of the public with a role in ensuring lived experience was heard at the highest level.

The Healthwatch Essex Information and Guidance team is dedicated to capturing the health and social care experiences people in Essex are encountering daily. The team responds to enquiries relating to health and social care and are equipped through training to offer specific information to the public or other professionals. The team are well placed to listen, reflect on and support people to share difficult experiences such as those shared in this report.

1.2 Topic Background

We were asked by Essex County Council to gather, analyse and present feedback from Young and Young Adult Carers, in order to shape and inform continuous improvement.

1.3 Acknowledgements

Healthwatch Essex would like to thank all the Young and Young Adult Carers who took part in this survey.

1.4 Disclaimer

Please note that this report relates to findings and observations carried out on specific dates and times, representing the views of those who contributed anonymously during the engagement period. This report summarises themes from

the responses collected and puts forward recommendations based on the experiences shared with Healthwatch Essex during this time.

2.0 Purpose

This report presents the findings from a survey exploring the experiences of young carers as they transition into young adult carers. The survey aimed to better understand how caring responsibilities change during this period, the challenges individuals face, and the types of support that may help them navigate this transition. Participants were divided into two groups depending on where they were in their caring journey: those currently transitioning from young carer to young adult carer, and those who had already experienced this transition and could reflect on it retrospectively.

A total of fifteen individuals took part in the survey. Seven participants were currently transitioning to the role of young adult carer and completed Section 1 of the survey. Eight participants who had already made the transition completed Section 2, which focused on reflections and experiences after becoming a young adult carer. The survey included a mixture of closed and open-ended questions, allowing participants to share both quantitative responses and personal insights into their caring roles, responsibilities, and support needs.

The findings presented in this section highlight several key areas, including the nature and duration of participants' caring responsibilities, their awareness of changes in their role during the transition to adulthood, the emotional and practical challenges they experience, and the types of support they feel would be most beneficial. The results also capture reflections from those who have already made the transition, providing valuable insight into the long-term impact of caring responsibilities and the adequacy of available support services.

2.1 Engagement methods



Survey

A survey was created in partnership with Experts by Experience Ambassadors and partner organisations. It was distributed across the county, receiving 15 responses.

2.2 The Survey

A survey was launched and ran for a period of six weeks. It was hosted online with printed versions made available upon request, as well as at a wide range of community events attended by the Healthwatch Essex team.

Young and young adult carers play a vital role in supporting their loved ones and face significant challenges. The transition into adult caring is one and it is essential for them to access the support and resources they need for a smooth transition that helps them manage their responsibilities, pursue their own goals and manage their physical and mental wellbeing. Our survey questions were designed to gather the insights of both:

1. Young carers transitioning to adult carers
2. Carers who have already completed the transition

The questions aim to explore their experiences, needs, and the support that has helped or could help them.

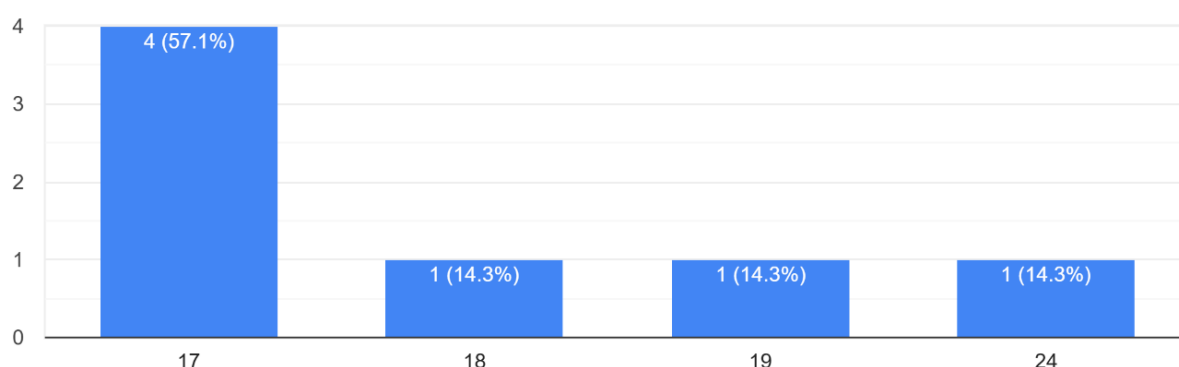
This survey was split into different sections depending on where participants were in their transition from young carers to young adult carers. Seven participants took part in Section 1, which was dedicated to young carers currently transitioning. An additional eight individuals took part in Section 2, which focused on people's reflections after making the transition from young carer to young adult carer. Results of the survey were as follows.

Section 1 – Young carers currently transitioning

The first section featured questions tailored to young carers currently transitioning to young adult carers.

1. What is your age?

Seven participants responded to this question. Most participants (four individuals or 57.1% of the sample) were aged 17. The remaining three participants were aged 18, 19, and 24 respectively.



2. What is your current caring role?

Seven participants responded to this question.

Two participants (28.5%) defined their current role as caring for their mother.

Three participants (42.9%) caring roles involved supporting two or more relatives:

'I care for my dad who is physically disabled so mainly when my mother isn't around, I cook, clean and help with any things he needs, socks, shopping, drinks etc. Then just emotional support for my mother.'

'Mum & Grandad.'

'My brother, support my family when my parents are looking after him, or when he's at the hospital, I take care of my siblings.'

One participant (14.2%) cared for their sister.

An additional participant (14.2%) responded 'Don't know' to this question.

3. How long have you been a carer?

This question was completed by seven participants. An overview of responses can be found in the table below:

Number of years	Number of participants (% of sample)
3	1 (14.2%)
5	1 (14.2%)
7	2 (28.4%)
17	1 (14.2%)
Don't know	1 (14.2%)

One participant (who was 17) highlighted that they had always been a carer:

'My whole life.'

Four participants indicated the number of years they had been in a caring role. These ranged from 3-8 years:

'3 years.'

'5 years.'

'7 years.'

'About 7 years.'

One participant determined that they had been a carer since the age of 8. They were now 17, meaning that they had been in a caring role for nine years.

An additional participant responded 'Don't know' to this question.

4. Thinking about your journey from young carer to young adult carer what changes are you aware of in your caring role?

Seven people responded to this question.

One participant (14.2% of the sample) who had been a carer for their whole life found it difficult to determine any changes to their role. This was because being a carer had always been the 'norm' for them:

'I'm not too sure to be honest because it's always felt pretty "normal" to me, but I suppose doing more practical things like cooking and shopping.'

Two participants (28.4%) felt that their role was becoming more complex or involved increasing responsibilities:

'More complex responsibilities.'

'How many different things there are to it.'

One participant (14.2%) shared that they were aware that their caring role would have an increasing impact on their life as they became a young adult carer, resulting in personal sacrifice:

'That I may have to sacrifice my ambitions for my family caring role.'

An additional participant (14.2%) indicated that they had not been informed of any changes that were likely to occur as they went through this transition:

Not been made aware of changes.'

Two participants (28.4%) responded 'Don't know' or 'Not sure' to this question.

5. How are you feeling about this journey? Is someone helping you with this?

Seven people responded to this question and offered varied responses.

Two participants (28.4%) were either yet to experience significant changes as part of their journey or had not been informed of relevant support:

'Not much change to before.'

'Not what I'm aware of as of yet.'

One participant (14.2%) indicated that they were not receiving support and dealing with the impact of their journey on their own:

'I just power through by myself.'

Another participant (14.2%) felt positive about their journey:

'Happy.'

Other participants (two individuals or 28.4% of the sample) indicated that they were less positive or had concerns as they made the transition.

'I feel ok, I have people.'

'It worries me about finances.'

Of the seven who responded, only two participants (28.4%) indicated that they were receiving support during their transition, either through the people around them or via community-based services:

'I attend a youth group and have spoken to the leader.'

6. Is caring affecting school, work or your plans for the future? Do you feel that you don't have a choice to do what you would like to do?

Seven participants responded to this question.

The majority of participants (four or 57.1%) did not feel as though caring was affecting their school, work, or future plans.

'No it's fine.'

'Not particularly.'

'Not really.'

'I can do things.'

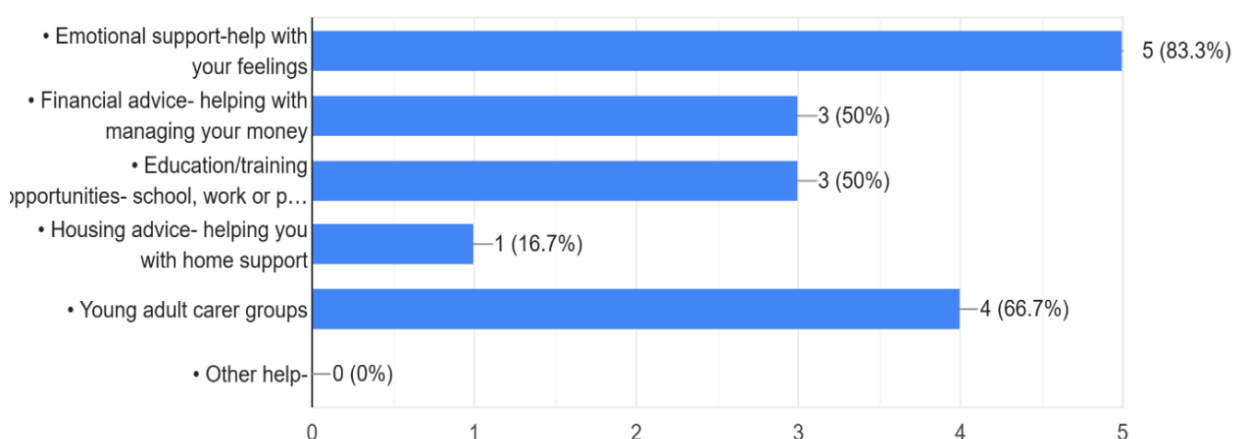
Three participants (42.9% of the sample) highlighted the ways in which their school, work, or future plans were being affected. They described how it was difficult to balance caring, schooling and making plans.

'I am trying my best having a healthy balance currently between my studies and caring throughout this tough time my family is going through.'

'My plans will be on hold until I'm no longer needed to provide care.'

'It does as I have to provide care so that my parent can go to work.'

7. What kind of support do you feel you need most right now



Six people responded to this question.

A large majority of the sample (five participants or 83.3%) indicated that they would like emotional support.

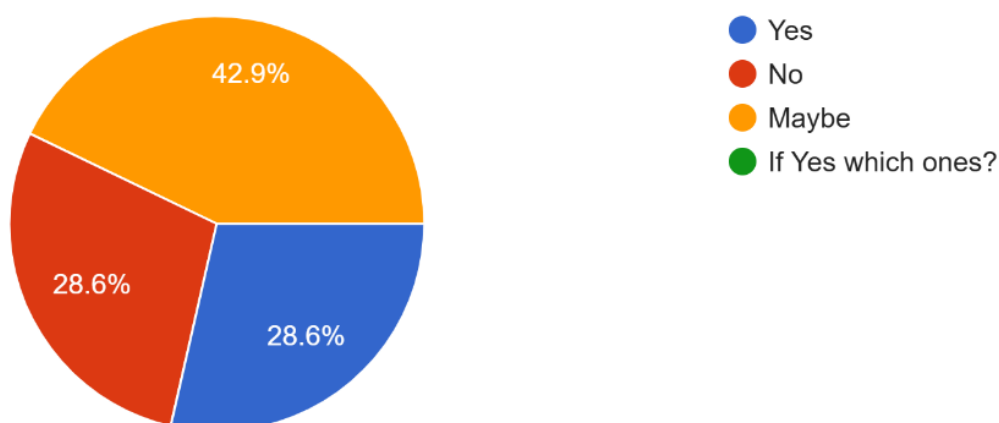
Four participants (66.6%) requested young adult carer groups.

Three respondents (50%) selected financial advice.

An additional three respondents (50%) chose education/training.

One participant (16.6%) picked housing advice.

8. Are you aware of any services or help that support young adult carers?



Seven individuals responded to this question.

Two participants (just over a quarter of the sample or 28.4%) responded that they were aware of services or help for young adult carers. They did not indicate which services they already knew about.

An additional two participants (28.4%) were not aware of services and support.

Three participants (42.9%) selected 'Maybe' in response to this question.

9. What help would make the journey easier for you?

Seven people answered this question.

Four participants provided suggestions for what would make their journey easier. Three participants (42.9%) focused on the need for additional support where they could share their experiences and feel less isolated:

'More support whilst I'm away at uni, away from my family.'

'Someone to go to with my worries.'

'Having others who understand me.'

Another participant (14.2% of the sample) requested a care plan for their sister to help to alleviate some of their caring responsibilities:

‘A plan for my sister so that I could do other things.’

Three people (42.9%) responded ‘Don’t know’ or ‘I’m not sure’ to this question.

Section 2 – For carers who have already transitioned

The second section of the survey captured the experiences of those who had already made the transition from young carers to young adult carers.

1. What is your age?

Eight people responded to this question. Six respondents were of different ages - 16, 19, 20, 23, 24, and 28 (12.5% of the sample each). An additional two respondents (25%) responded that this question was not applicable.

2. What is your current caring role (e.g., who do you care for and what kind of support do you provide)?

Six individuals answered this question.

Half of respondents (three or 50%) were caring for either one or both of their parents.

‘Parent – day to day support, assisting with medication, taking to appointments.’

‘Mum (getting medication to help her conditions).’

A quarter of respondents (two or 25% of the sample) cared for a sibling:

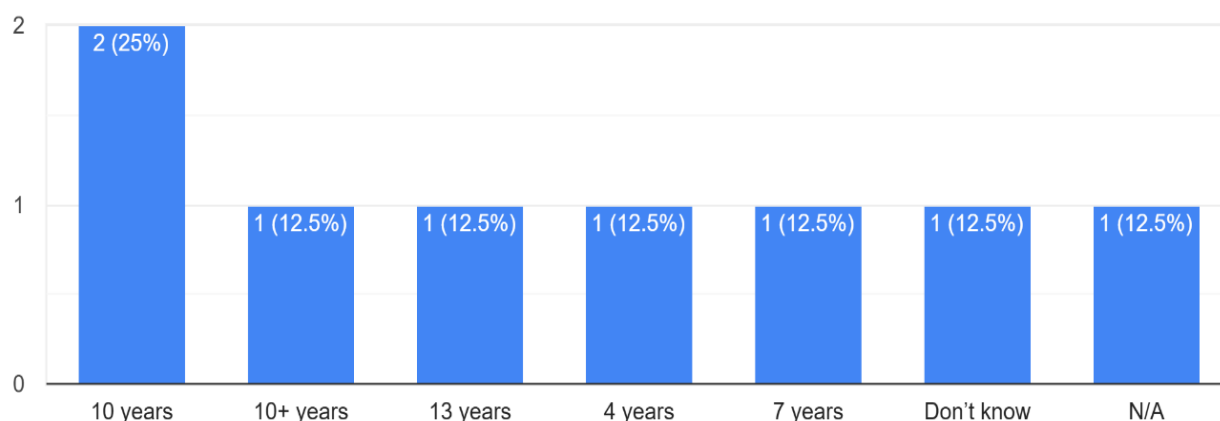
‘Helping care for and supervision for my brother.’

One participant (12.5%) cared for both their parents and their siblings:

‘I care for my siblings and my parents by going out to the shop, sorting food for my siblings out, reminding my parents to take their tablets, doing the washing, looking after my siblings when my mum isn’t very well or feeling over stimulated.’

An additional participant (12.5%) responded that they did not know how to respond to this question.

3. How long have you been a carer?



Eight participants responded to this question.

A quarter of participants (two individuals or 25%) had been a carer for 10 years.

An additional 25% of respondents (two individuals) had been a carer for over 10 years, with one indicating they had been a carer for 13 years in total.

One participant (12.5%) had been a carer for four years, whilst another (12.5%) had held caring responsibilities for 7 years.

Two respondents selected 'Don't know' or 'N/A' for this question.

4. When you think back to the time you were moving from being a young carer to a young adult carer, what stands out most to you?

Eight people answered this question. They offered a range of perspectives on what their transition from a young carer to a young adult carer had been like.

Two respondents (25%) indicated that their caring role had become more complex since transitioning to a young adult carer. Their responsibilities increased or they were increasingly mindful of caring for themselves as well as their loved ones:

'As I am a young adult carer, I would say that the biggest change for me is that when you become a young adult carer there's a lot more adult-related care that has to be provided and you have to remember to care about

yourself too. The transition was very different from when I first started being a young carer as there's a lot more that you need to focus on whenever you are caring for a loved one.'

'More complex responsibilities.'

One participant (12.5%) described their difficulties in fulfilling a caring role whilst negotiating the external pressures of becoming an adult:

'Trying to navigate moving into being a young adult whilst also having care responsibilities.'

Another respondent (12.5%) described how support declined when they became a young adult carer:

'Less support when you become a young adult carer. We used to regularly attend groups as a young carer and once we reached teenage years, the support stopped.'

One participant (12.5%) responded to this question with the answer 'Speaking'.

A further respondent (12.5%) stated that nothing had stood out to them about their transition.

Two participants (25%) also responded that they either were not sure or that the question was not applicable.

5. What support or guidance did you receive that was most helpful?

Eight people answered this question, sharing different examples of support (if any) they received during their transition.

Two participants (25%) indicated the value of community-based support groups:

'Young carers groups were helpful; there was always someone to talk to if we needed any help.'

'Support groups.'

One participant (12.5% of the sample) shared the importance of support they had received at school and college:

'I have people at college that help and there's meetings for young carers to come down and see someone from safeguarding if and when we need to. I also had help from teachers in school and my friends.'

Another participant (12.5%) shared that they felt supported.

'Knowing that there are others I can talk to'.

One participant (12.5%) discussed the support they had received from a parent:

'I got support from my mum, and I found that very helpful.'

One participant (12.5%) responded that they had received no support:

None, navigated myself, although badly.'

An additional two participants responded that they did not know or that this question was not applicable.

6. Did you ever feel torn between caring responsibilities and wanting to do things other young adults are doing?

Eight people answered this question.

Over a third of respondents (three individuals or 37.5% of the sample) stated that they did feel torn between their caring responsibilities and doing the things that other young adults were doing:

'Yeah, I felt like there was stuff the younger carers were more interested in than I was as I'm 16 and I feel like maybe there should be more clubs for young adult carers too.'

An additional three participants (37.5%) highlighted that they sometimes felt torn between being a carer and a young adult. One participant described co-ordinating caring responsibilities with their family members to allow themselves time to take part in young adult activities:

'Sometimes but there were a few of us in our family that were also carers so we could always work something out to enable each other to do what we wanted to (if possible).'

'Sometimes, not super often though.'

'Sometimes, but I could vary.'

Two respondents answered 'Don't know' or 'N/A' to this question.

7. What advice would you give to young carers who are about to transition?

Eight individuals responded to this question. Six participants provided advice. They all encouraged other young carers to reach out for support and make sure they were taking care of themselves too:

'Make sure you talk to someone you trust & take any support offered to you.'

'Reach out for support.'

'Don't be afraid to tell your friends about your responsibilities.'

'Don't be afraid to reach out if you need help, you matter too.'

'Reach out for help, even if you think you don't need it, there will come a time when you do.'

'Remember to focus on yourself too and remember to always ask for help when you are overwhelmed by the jobs caring brings.'

Two respondents answered 'Don't know' or 'N/A' to this question.

8. What improvements would you suggest for services supporting young carers to adult carers during their transition?

Eight people answered this question. Six respondents suggested improvements to support.

Three participants (37.5% of the sample) indicated a need for increased signposting for young carers transitioning to young adult carers. Signposting could be to resources and services.

'Clearer signposting on where they can find support or services.'

'Giving advice on how to find others who understand them.'

'More resources to aid young carers in their mental wellbeing.'

Two respondents (25%) cited the value of support clubs and groups:

'Having some support clubs for them and having young adult carers come in and speak to them.'

'More support when transitioning into young adult carers, e.g. support groups, offering guidance on juggling caring and young adult life.'

One participant (12.5%) highlighted the need for young carers to be identified and supported in school for the duration of their transition:

'Recognising carers while in school (or meant to be) and supporting them.'

Two respondents answered 'Don't know' or 'N/A' to this question.

9. Do you still feel supported in your role as a young adult carer?

Eight people responded to this question.

Half of participants (four individuals or 37.5% of the sample) indicated that they did feel supported, with one participant citing the continued support of a parent:

'I am still supported by my mum.'

Three participants (37.4%) stated that they felt 'okay' or 'sometimes' felt supported:

'I'm ok with where I am at the moment, on reflection things could have been very different to what they currently are.'

One participant said that this question was not applicable.

10. What ongoing support do you think young adult carers need that is currently lacking?

Eight participants answered this question. Five put forward ideas for additional support young adult carers.

Two respondents (25% of the sample) emphasised the need for support groups tailored to the needs of young adult carers:

'Having a place to go one day a week in the evening to get me away from the noise at home like a youth group for older kids or for all young adult carers.'

'Support groups or someone to talk to that understands their role and how difficult it can be.'

One participant (12.5%) highlighted the need for young adult carers to have someone to talk that understands their situation:

'Having others to communicate the struggles with. And finding those who they can open up to.'

Another (12.5%) indicated the value of person-centred support for young adult carers:

'Tailored support for their circumstances.'

An additional participant (12.5%) called for enhanced support at a national level:

'Young carers need more overall support from the government, so that more things are put in place to aid them..'

Three participants (37.4%) stated that they were unsure or that the question was not applicable to them.

3.0 Key Findings and Recommendations

Key Findings

- Early and long-term caring roles: Many participants had been carers for several years, with some reporting that caring had been part of their lives since childhood.
- Increasing responsibilities during transition: Both current and former young carers highlighted that caring responsibilities often become more complex as they move into young adulthood.
- Limited awareness of transition changes: Several participants currently transitioning reported uncertainty about what changes to expect when becoming a young adult carer.
- Emotional support as the greatest need: The majority of participants identified emotional support as the most important form of support during this transition.

- Impact on personal opportunities: Some participants reported that caring responsibilities affected their education, career plans, or ability to pursue personal goals.
- Value of peer support groups: Young carer and support groups were frequently highlighted as helpful spaces where participants could talk to others who understood their experiences.
- Need for better signposting and continued support: Participants suggested clearer information about available services and more support specifically designed for young adult carers.

4.0 Conclusion

The survey findings provide important insight into the experiences of young carers as they move into the role of young adult carers. Across both sections of the survey, participants described a range of caring responsibilities, often supporting parents, siblings, or multiple family members with practical, emotional, and supervisory tasks. Many respondents had been in a caring role for several years, with some indicating that caring had been a part of their lives for most or all of their childhood.

For those currently transitioning, the findings suggest that awareness of the changes associated with becoming a young adult carer is limited. Several participants reported uncertainty about how their responsibilities might develop, while others recognised that their roles were becoming more complex or that they may need to make personal sacrifices in the future. Emotional support was identified as the most significant need, alongside opportunities to connect with other young adult carers and access guidance relating to education, training, and finances.

Reflections from participants who had already transitioned highlight similar themes. Many described increased responsibilities and the challenge of balancing caring duties with the expectations and pressures associated with becoming an adult. Some respondents also indicated that support services had reduced as they grew older, particularly when moving beyond traditional young carer programmes. Despite these challenges, support groups, educational institutions, and trusted individuals were identified as valuable sources of support.

Overall, the findings emphasise the importance of improved awareness, clearer signposting to services, and tailored support for young carers transitioning into adulthood. Strengthening support networks, ensuring continuity of services, and providing opportunities for young adult carers to share their experiences may help reduce isolation and enable them to balance their caring responsibilities with their own personal development and future aspirations.

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