

Young Adult Carers Engagement

June 2026

Introduction

In September 2025, Healthwatch Southampton (HWS) began to explore the identification and support of young adult carers in the city. Our staff team have current or previous experience of supporting young carers and have been heavily involved in the development of Adult Carer and Young Carers Strategies and the local Carers Partnership Board and Carers Steering Group over the last few years. HWS identified a need for a review of existing support for young adult carers with a particular focus on the transition between young carer and adult carer services.

HWS organised and facilitated three stakeholder meetings with Southampton organisations who support young people and young adults. The aim was to establish what support provisions are currently available to carers (children and adults), with a particular focus on the transition support between young carers and adult carers services. Through discussion, it emerged that improvements in services could be made for young adult carers and the transition period between children and adult services for people with a caring responsibility. The stakeholder meetings were the first stepping stone to building on relationships between stakeholders to highlight the need for further work.

The definition of a young adult carer is a young person aged 16–25 who cares for a family member or friend with an illness or disability, mental health condition or an addiction (Carers Trust.org). Young Adult Carers may care for one or multiple family members and the support they give could be practical e.g. shopping, cleaning, cooking, personal care or they could provide emotional support. Being an unpaid carer can have a negative impact on a young person's health and wellbeing and affect their own lives. It is important to identify young adult carers and provide appropriate support to help reduce the impact of the caring role on their lives.

The time when a young carer approaches adulthood can be difficult. If they have been supported with their caring role by pastoral support within education or a local young

carers service this may change as they turn 18. The Care Act 2014 places a duty on local authorities to provide young carers with a transition assessment before they turn 18 [The Children's Society.org. uk]. All young carers should receive a transition assessment whether they currently receive support or not. The assessment should review the young person's current needs as well as their future needs and aspirations in preparation for a change of circumstances as they become 18.

Young Adult Carers Engagement

Through Southampton City Council's Carers Engagement Fund, Healthwatch Southampton was able to engage with young carers and young adult carers in the city to ensure their views were included in the review of the Carers Strategy. Although traditionally young adult carers are recognised as being aged 16–25, HWS decided to widen the age bracket (13–30) to maximise opportunities for engagement.

Firstly, HWS developed a social media campaign informing the public of the engagement exercise and inviting young adult carers to get involved. Facebook and Instagram posts were created and resources along with posters, email/text templates were shared with Southampton stakeholders who already engage with young people and young adults to distribute. Participants were invited to engage with HWS in numerous ways including:

- Individual survey regarding identification as a carer, their caring role and what good support looks like for a young adult carer
- Online focus group with other young carers/young adult carers
- Face to face focus group with other young carers/young adult carers
- 1:1 interview with HWS staff either online, on the phone or face to face

HWS wanted to ensure that there were many options for engagement to suit individual needs and preferences. HWS tried to reduce any barriers individuals may face by including the choice of group engagement and one to one interviews. Prior to any engagement, all participants were aware of what the sessions would entail in terms of content covered and what was expected from them as a participant. All participants were offered reimbursements for any expenses occurred, such as travel/mileage costs.

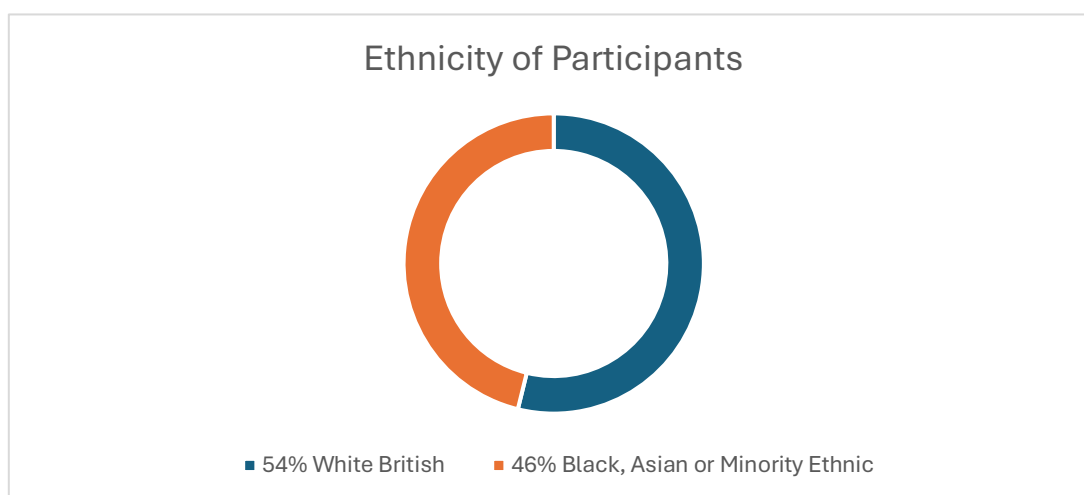
HWS developed two group engagement plans – one to be used online for people 18–30 years and one for a face-to-face engagement exercise for young carers aged 13–17. Both

engagement plans had similar themes to capture participants experiences of being an unpaid carer but were tailored to accommodate the differences of the groups (e.g. age, caring role journey, known/unknown to unpaid carers support, etc). Interviews conducted were informal but again consisted of gaining insight about identification as a carer and views on what carers support could look like for young adults.

Overall, 17 individuals initially agreed to engage with the project. Several participants engaged in more than one exercise as broken down below:

- Five 18+ year olds participated in the online focus group
- Seven 13–17 years olds participated in the face-to-face group
- Seven 13–17-year-olds completed a survey
- Five 18+ year olds completed a survey
- Four 18+ years olds engaged in a 1:1 interview
- **In total 13 individuals engaged**
- Four 18+ young people did not engage with any activities despite initial interest

Every participant who engaged with the project received a shopping voucher as a thank you for their time and commitment.



From the six BAME participants in this study, only one had been identified by a professional as a Young Carer. None of the BAME Young Adult Young Carers had been identified.

HWS are grateful to all the participants who took the time to engage and share their views and stories.

Limitations

HWS acknowledges that there are some limitations to the findings in this report:

- Despite an extensive social media campaign, there was a low response.
- Before planning the engagement exercise, HWS understood the challenges of meaningful engagement with young people.
- This is a small sample size, so further exploration may be needed.
- Limited capacity to engage with education settings, schools, colleges and universities.
- Engagement may be more successful with and via professionals who have pre-existing relationship with young people

Feedback from Young Adult Carers

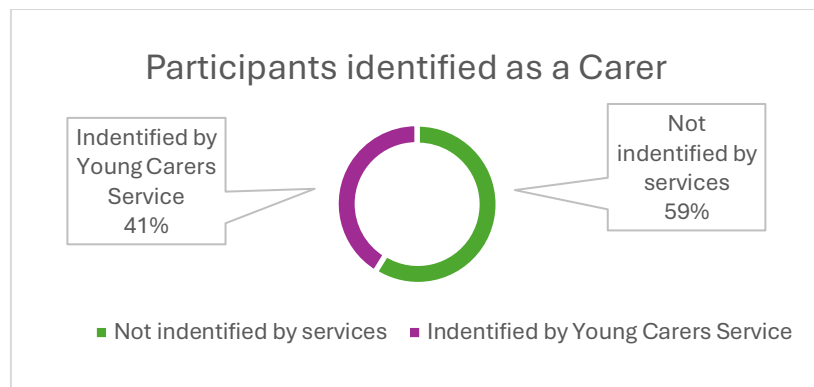
We asked young people what it felt like to be a carer for a family member:

Attention & Care	Stressful
Loving	Bored
Patience	Anxious
Attention	Hate it
Responsible	Taxing
It's chill	Don't want to do it

Feedback about the Identification of Young Adult Carers

All participants aged 18+ had been an unpaid carer for more than 5 years. Most had started caring for a family member as a child (under 18), and were not identified as young carers at any stage by their education provider, GP Service, Health or Social Care services.

All participants aged 13-17 were already identified as unpaid carers and engaged in existing Southampton City Council's Young Carers service.



Insights about barriers to identification

Six participants were from an ethnic minority community. Five had not been identified as a young adult carer by a health or social care service. They shared with us how coming from an ethnic minority community and that they thought this had impacted on their identification as a young carer or young adult carer.

- Culturally expected to care for family- it is seen as a family duty and responsibility.
- Lack of information and awareness about caring assessments and support available in communities.
- Caring for a family member is an invisible role.
- The system is difficult for people to understand and navigate.
- There is a lack of resources with relevant information and support staff to be able to talk to.
- There is a lack of cultural awareness of professionals working in education, health and social care and a fear of asking questions.

"Caring for a family member in the Asian community is very hidden. It is seen as your duty to care for your family member".

"Others see me as someone that gives support not receives support".

"As I young carer I was not identified by anyone even though we had care agency staff, and community nurses regularly visit the home".

"Caring is a sacrifice, and no one sees what I am doing and there is a lot expected of me".

Case Study



Shazia was an unidentified young carer from aged 10 for multiple family members. Her responsibilities included household tasks including cleaning, cooking, finances, form filling etc, managing medication, insulin and glucose testing, supporting mobility including lifting, getting dressed, bringing food and drinks, and interpreting for the family with health professionals. Her and her sister would care for family members 24/7 including during the night.

She said that her and her sister were not identified as young carers by anyone, despite having health professionals in the family home. No one at school knew about her situation at home or her caring role. She had asked for help, but no one helped them. Despite opposition from her family, she enrolled on a social care course at college but eventually dropped out. She was able to access some counselling in college but kept this hidden from her family.

She was not allowed to go out with friends or have a mobile phone and was not even allowed to do a driving test. She did not know any other young carers but was isolated at home with her sister. She explained that it was expected in the Asian community that young girls would take on the responsibility of household tasks and caring at a young age.

“Caring for a family member in the Asian community is very hidden. It is seen as your duty to care for your family member”



We asked young adult carers what would help in increase identification of young adult carers in all communities. Here are some of their ideas:

- Training for professionals: Cultural barriers for unpaid carers.
- Raise awareness about unpaid carers rights and support (including transition assessments).
- Improved support available to young people to help them navigate access to services.

Carers Assessments

Carers Assessments: None of the participants aged 18+ were aware of being offered either a young carer assessment or an adult carers assessment.

Transition Assessments: All participants aged 13–17 were not aware of Young Carers Transition Assessments and said they had not been offered or completed one.

Adult Social Care Assessments: All participants aged 18+ said they were not aware of adult social care assessments or support that may be available from Southampton City Council for the person they care for.

Case Study



Debbie cares for her aunt who lives within the family home with her husband and 3 year old child. Aunt has mobility issues and is a wheelchair user. She supports with cooking, shopping, household tasks and personal care such as helping to use the shower and toilet. She has never had a carers assessment and was unaware of this provision.

Debbie sometimes struggles to juggle her caring responsibilities with other aspects of her life including caring from her 3-year-old. She does not get any support as a carer and is seen from others, including her family, as the one giving the support.

Debbie would like more support as a carer especially respite breaks but is unaware of the appropriate services available to her and potentially her aunt. She had never heard about the Unpaid Carers Service in Southampton and what this could offer her as a carer. She feels isolated in her community and is unaware of what is available locally.

“I would like a safe space just for myself for emotional support where I can express how it feels to be a carer without fear of judgement”.



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Support for Young Adult Carers

- All participants aged 18+ did not know about the support available in the city for adult carers.
- All participants aged 13–17 did not know about the support available in the city for adult carers.
- All aged 18+ participants said they would like to access the existing support service.

We asked young carers how they felt about the future, they told us:

- “I feel incompetent”.
- “I don’t want to do it”.
- “I hate thinking about it”.
- “I hope the future stays far away”.
- “It makes me anxious”.

6 out of 7 young carers (aged 13–17) stated that they think their caring role will impact their future goals and aspirations

Their worries about the future included: housing, finances, education, lack of support, and mental health

Young Adult Carers Vision for Future Support

We asked all participants for their ideas about support they would like to see available for young adult carers in the future. Here are some of their ideas:

Training for young adult carers: Coping with their caring role, practical tasks like lifting, managing finances, life skills, understanding about their cared for person's condition.

Access to professional Support: counselling, therapists, doctors, one to one support for emotional wellbeing.

Support in Education: Drop –in service at schools, colleges/universities where young people would feel safe to share their experiences

Raising Awareness: There should be more posters and social media promotion on young carer and young adult carer issues and support

Peer Support: Young carers and young adult carers would benefit from mentoring, peer support sessions, What’s App chats and even to opportunity to arrange their own meet up outside of a group e.g. at a coffee shop

Transition Support: Young Carers need more support to achieve goals and aspirations e.g. to be able to finish their studies.

We asked Young Carers (13-17) about their vision of appropriate young adult carers support. Here are some of their ideas:

- ❖ Carers Peer Support group for Young Adult Carers
- ❖ Facilitated by professional (admin only) but not attending groups
- ❖ Professional available remotely for emergencies and arising issues
- ❖ Support Group should be a break from the caring role
- ❖ Ideas for Groups: Meet in pub, café, involving food, activities
- ❖ Support with issues relating to a move to independence:
housing, driving lessons, finances, life skills, cooking.
- ❖ One to One Support available with a professional