



PACYP 19

Ymchwiliad i weithgarwch corfforol ymhlith plant a phobl ifanc

Inquiry into physical activity of children and young people

Ymateb gan Ymddiriedolaeth Gofalwyr Cymru

Response from Carers Trust Wales

Health, Social Care and Sport Committee  
National Assembly for Wales

SeneddHealth@assembly.wales

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## **Inquiry into the physical activity of 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 Health, Social Care and Sport Committee's inquiry into the physical activity of young people and thank our Young Adult Carers Council for their support in developing this response.

Having considered the terms of reference for this inquiry, we believe that we have specific insight and expertise in the particular barriers to young and young adult carers undertaking regular physical activity. We acknowledge that there is a distinct lack of robust evidence regarding physical activity rates amongst young carers. However, we receive consistent anecdotal reports that young carers are less likely than their peers to undertake regular physical activity and that there are specific, caring-related reasons for this. Young and young adult carers are a marginalised group with numerous restrictions on their ability to engage in exercise and we believe that more research needs to be undertaken to fully understand these barriers and how best they might be overcome.

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We urge the committee to ensure that any recommendations resulting from this inquiry adequately reflect the needs of thousands of young and young adult carers in Wales.

Wales has the highest percentage of young carers in the UK with **21,611** young adults (aged 16-24) and **7,544** young people (aged under 16) providing unpaid care every year.

The 2011 Census shows that for young carers doing more than 50 hours of care a week they are five times more likely to report that their health is 'not good' and there is evidence that they are significantly more likely to have mental health needs.

It is our belief that young carers and young adult carers have an even greater need to be able to access regular activity than their peers to ensure their physical health and wellbeing. However, through our engagement with young carers and young adult carers, we understand that they are less likely to access regular physical activity. More needs to be done to ensure that appropriate opportunities for exercise are made available to young and young adult carers, that they are encouraged to access them and that barriers to doing so are fully understood and addressed where possible.

Children and young people are often caring for relatives without the knowledge of education and health professionals, even though their caring role creates demands that impact on their capacity to achieve at school and their health and wellbeing more generally. Whilst the Social Services and Wellbeing Act places a legal duty on Local Authorities to undertake carers needs assessments, it is our understanding that many young carers remain unidentified and are therefore unable to access the support that they need. More needs to be done to support individuals and professionals to identify young carers and to ensure that they are encouraged to have a carers needs assessment.

Additionally, it is important that those undertaking carers needs assessments understand that access to physical activity is both a need and a right for all children and young people. Under Article 6 (Survival and development) of the UNCRC, Children have the right to live and Governments should ensure that children survive and develop healthily. Article 31 (Leisure, play and culture): provides that children have the right to relax and play, and to join in a wide range of cultural, artistic and other recreational activities. We believe that carers needs assessments are an important opportunity to promote good health, wellbeing and development. Those undertaking these assessments must be encouraged to be ambitious for the life outcomes of the child or young person they are completing the assessment with.

With a diverse range of ways in which carers needs assessments are undertaken across Wales, we believe that there is a risk that in some areas they may focus on mitigating risk and reducing harm rather than on ensuring that all young carers are

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given positive opportunities and support to undertake physical activity. It is essential that carers needs assessments always reflect the importance of access to regular physical activity and that barriers to this are understood and proactively addressed. Our Young Adult Carer Council, which represents young carers from across Wales, has identified 5 main barriers young carers face to accessing regular physical activity:

- Time away from caring. This can be broken down into two different barriers: the first being that it is too difficult to have any time away from the person that they care for and the second being that having regular time away to attend a specific class or to join a team is impossible to accommodate, even if respite care is in place.
- The needs of the person they care for come first. Many young carers recognise the importance of regular exercise. However, they do not view its importance as being greater than undertaking their caring role.
- Financial constraints. Many young and young adult carers report that they do not have the money for either appropriate sports equipment (including clothes) or to join a gym or team. This includes school based teams where money is needed to go to away games.
- A lack of appropriate / interesting activities available at convenient times in accessible locations;
- Confidence. Evidence shows that a quarter of young carers report being bullied at school because of their caring roles. Many young carers and young adult carers lack the confidence to participate in physical activities.

### **Recommendations:**

Considering the importance of ensuring that more young carers and young adult carers undertake regular physical activity alongside the barriers they themselves have identified, Carers Trust Wales would make the following recommendations to the committee:

- There needs to be a range of interventions to maximise participation from young and young adult carers. Noting pressures on their time, we would suggest priority needs to be given to increasing the amount of school based exercise, providing universal opportunities for children and young people to stay fit and well. The daily mile programmes have had particular success in primary and secondary schools and we believe that these are the types of opportunities which would enable young carers and young adult carers to build physical activity into their often time pressured days.
- All young carers and young adult carers should be offered appropriate respite care to enable them to attend regular exercise classes or to join a sports team if they would like to. It is essential that carers needs assessments encourage carers to prioritise their own health and wellbeing and that the support needs associated with enabling them to do so are fully met.
- To combat financial barriers, consideration should be given to allowing free gym membership to young and young adult carers. We are aware that these

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types of schemes have been piloted within some Local Authorities and it is important that learning from these pilot projects is shared and built upon at a national level. Although we acknowledge it would be complex to administer, it is important that thought is given as to how young and young adult carers could access funding to join sports teams and to purchase appropriate clothing for exercise.

- To combat time constraints, more facilities for physical activity should be available for young and young adult carers. Outdoor gyms can provide good opportunities for exercise which young carers and young adult carers can use as and when they have the time to. Schools, youth clubs and local authorities could be encouraged to allow open access to playing fields, sports halls and outdoor spaces enabling young carers to exercise in safe environments at times to fit with their caring responsibilities.
- More needs to be done to help young carers and young adult carers to recognise the importance of looking after their own health and wellbeing. It is important that schools and healthcare professionals are appropriately trained and supported to identify young carers and to signpost them onwards for appropriate assessment of their support needs. Those undertaking Carers needs assessments must be ambitious for the outcomes of the young carer and young adult carer, listening to their needs and supporting them to identify needs that they may not be aware of.
- Bullying and confidence issues need to be addressed if young carers and young adult carers are to be enabled to participate in physical activity. Carers Trust Wales' Young Carers in Schools Wales programme is one way in which some schools in Wales are already being supported to help their learners who are young carers. Part of this programme has included the development of a Wales edition of a Step-by-step Guide for Leaders, Teachers and Non-teaching Staff, developed in cooperation with the Children's Society, which includes a 10-step toolkit to help school staff identify young carers and to support them in creative and ambitious ways. All schools in Wales should build awareness amongst staff and pupils of what it is to be a young carer and proactively working with young carers within their school to build resilience, self esteem and confidence.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues with the committee in more detail. If it would be helpful, we would be delighted to arrange a meeting with our Young Adult Carers Council who would be happy to share their views with you.

Best wishes,



Simon Hatch  
**Director, Carers Trust Wales**