About Carers Trust Scotland

Carers Trust’s vision is a world where the role and contribution of unpaid carers of all ages is recognised and that they have access to the quality support services they need to live their own lives.

Carers Trust provides a wide range of core services to carers’ centres, young carers’ services and carers of all ages, including:

- Support through training, meetings, learning exchanges, and access to information and quality evaluation.
- Distributing grants and funding to carers and Network Partners.
- Lobbying the Scottish Government on behalf of carers and young carers.
- Raising awareness of carers, young carers, young adult carers and the work of the Network Partners.
- Contributing towards research and campaigning work.

We also support carers of all ages through our dedicated websites:

- carers.org – we provide advice and access to 24-hour information and peer support for carers wherever they live in the UK.
- babble.carers.org – is the only dedicated website and online support services for children and young people aged 18 and under who help to look after someone. Babble has an online support team who are on hand to provide help, support and advice and to ensure a safe and secure online environment where young carers can chat to other young people in the same situation.
- matter.carers.org – this is a new site launched to support as many young adult carers as possible. The site offers a user-friendly space which provides access to information, allows young adult carers to share problems and successes and provides peer support.

Young carers and social isolation

When young people are required to take on too many caring responsibilities, or carry out caring roles that are not appropriate, this can have an adverse effect on their health, well-being, safety and development.¹ Young carers can be very isolated due to their caring role, or issues that are compounded by caring responsibilities:

- Young carers are often unable to meet friends or participate in activities after school because of the demands of their caring role, which can affect friendships and may result in isolation, loneliness and even bullying. Many young carers are also affected by poverty, which can limit their opportunities to be involved in social activities, see friends or have a life outside of caring.

Those young carers who are able to maintain friendships may feel unable to talk to friends about their caring responsibilities, and even if there are other young carers they can speak to, their own experiences may be quite different from their peers. A family member's disability, illness or addiction may also make them reluctant to bring friends home. It is important for young carers to have opportunities to speak to young carer support workers for advice as well as interact with their peers – whether this is in person or online.

Young carers who are living in a family where a parent misuses alcohol or drugs may lack positive parental support and guidance and may have to fend for themselves, which may result in a poor diet, health and hygiene. Young people in this situation may also be exposed to criminality and to risks to their safety from unknown adults visiting their home. These factors contribute to social isolation as young carers in this situation may be even more reluctant to seek help due to fear of statutory involvement in their family life.

In short, young carers' lives are very different from their friends and peers who do not have caring responsibilities and this can contribute to feeling lonely or isolated.

Carers Trust research from 2014 has found that 27 per cent of young carers felt lonely and 28 per cent said they would like to talk to other young carers online. For young carers, using the internet and social media or accessing online support can be a chance to get a break from caring that doesn't impact too much on their caring role – they can get support, advice and a break in their own home without the time, travel and expense of activities outside of the home. Young carers' groups and support services remain extremely important, but support online can fill in the gaps between young carers’ group meetings, as well as provide a great deal of support to young people who cannot or do not want to visit a group.

Taking regular breaks from caring can help protect carers' health and well-being, and many carers find that going online can be a good way to take a break. One in five carers say they like to surf the net just to pass the time, and one in ten like to play online games. Social networking, blogging and keeping up with current events are also used by many carers as a break from their caring responsibilities, and these activities in particular can combat social isolation and loneliness.

“The internet stops me thinking about caring.”

“When I get stressed, I go into my room and surf the net for a bit, which helps calm me down.”

The Scottish Young Carers Festival, which has taken place every summer since 2008, is an opportunity for young carers to take part in consultation as well as have a break from caring, relax and make friends. Young carers have often stated that they find it difficult to make

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2 Ibid.
3 Carers sample – conducted via Survey Monkey and hard copies with Carers Trust Network Partners and young carers groups around the country. Fieldwork between 1 Dec-14 Jan. Total of 349: 8-10 = 54; 11-15 = 149; 16-18 = 143.
friends, or confide in the ones they do have about the reality and practicalities of being a young carer – 95 per cent of young carers who attended the Festival in 2014 said that caring affected the time they were able to spend with friends. Having an opportunity to socialise and make friends with a group of people who can understand what they are experiencing is hugely important to the young people.

**Babble**

Babble was launched in January 2015 and is a space where young carers can find others in a similar position, chat to each other, share their stories and hear about each other’s experiences in a safe environment. It has been shaped by talking to young carers about what they want, with emphasis on the content being provided by other young carers.

As well as the support and friendship young carers can find with each other, they also have access to help and advice, email and chat sessions with the Carers Trust Online Support Team who are all qualified youth and community workers or professionally qualified social workers.

Carers Trust has been providing online support to young carers for over ten years in order to combat the risk of isolation and to make sure that young carers are as happy and supported as they can be.

“It was my sanctuary in the midst of a very difficult time. It was a safe heaven. A place where I could be me and not be judged. It was my lifeline to help/support/friendships and reality - just because it’s online it doesn't mean friendships aren't made.”

“I think it has helped me develop conversation skills and a lot of confidence. I’ve find (sic) it easier to get along with new people. It’s also nice to know other young carers because I don't know anyone who's one outside the site. I like the fact everyone tries to help each other. It has a really nice atmosphere and honestly I love everyone there so much!”

In the 4 weeks since Babble has launched, the new site has received over 6,000 visits and a total of 60 young carers, with an age range of 9 to 17, have signed up to use the site, alongside 24 people who work with young carers (all of the adults are verified by our online support team before they have access to the community). The online support team has received 70 emails since the launch of the new site (whereas the average monthly figure for 2014 was 42).

Although Babble is quite clear about being a place for young carers, one of its strengths is that it lends itself very well to cheerful, low-key conversations about fun subjects. Like an offline young carers’ service, the chance to escape from the details of caring, but in a place in which it’s understood that people know what each other is going through, is of great value.

**Young adult carers**

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5 *Report of the Scottish Young Carers Festival 2014; Carers Trust Scotland/Scottish Young Carers Services Alliance*

6 YCNet originally launched in 2004. Babble is a rebranded version of YCNet and was funded by a grant from The Queen’s Trust.
When young carers reach 18, they are no longer able to attend young carers’ groups and services but may struggle to transition straight into adult carer support if this is mainly aimed at older adults or people who are in different caring roles. Support for young adult carers aged 18-25 is extremely important, as they are managing caring roles alongside a period of transition themselves; coming to the end of their time at school, moving to further or higher education, starting their working lives and taking their first steps on the pathway to adulthood. All of these transitions can be affected by maintaining a caring role and young adults can feel extremely isolated and lonely if they do not have the right support.

“I am the main carer for my mum so my life at the moment revolves around her, so I will not be able to leave for university until full-time care has been put in place for her.”

“I think I would find it easier to get a job if I wasn’t a carer. My family don’t have the time to help me apply for jobs, it would be really good to get help.”

Matter
As well as Babble for young carers aged under 18, Carers Trust also maintains Matter (https://matter.carers.org/), a website and online community launched in 2014 specifically for young adult carers aged 16-25. Matter was created following YouGov research that revealed only 11 per cent of people thought of carers as being 25 or under – the group of carers who are so easily overlooked and who can become isolated. The YouGov survey also showed how important the social aspects of life are to people – the very thing that young adult carers aged 16-25 can find hard to maintain. The poll of 369 adults in Scotland found that 21 per cent of respondents were most prepared to give up their social life – second only to those most prepared to give up travelling or going on holiday (25 per cent).

Digital exclusion
Despite the known benefits of using the internet to reduce social isolation and loneliness, digital exclusion is also an issue for carers and must be taken into consideration. This may be more likely to affect older carers who are not used to using the internet but can also be a reality for young carers – in families where money is tight due to caring responsibilities, the equipment to access the internet may not be available. There can also be problems with accessibility of technology, particularly for people with physical or learning disabilities. Young carers may be able to use the internet through a shared family computer or laptop but may not have access to smartphones or tablet computers, which can limit their use of social media and contribute to feeling lonely or isolated in comparison to their peers if they cannot participate in the same networks.

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8 Ibid.
9 All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 2,400 GB adults (aged 16+), of which 369 were from Scotland. Fieldwork was undertaken between the 27th and 31th March 2014. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 16+).