

Young Carers Strategy

2024–2028



FOR YOUNG CARERS
**SUPPORT
NOT
SYMPATHY**
FOR YOUNG CARERS

Early Help
Manchester.



Our Manchester

 MANCHESTER
CITY COUNCIL



Foreword

I am delighted to introduce the refreshed Young Carers Strategy for 2024-2028. Since the introduction of the 2017 strategy, refreshed 2020, we have seen significant improvements in both recognition and support for Young Carers in Manchester.

The challenge of national and local lockdowns in 2020 highlighted the importance of a coordinated response and reinforced what our Young Carers had told us through their 'Be Bothered Campaign' - that no single agency should be relied upon for support, and a collective partnership approach was needed.

“There are many people who we would like to help us...who could help young carers to reduce stress and lead better lives” Manchester Young Carers, Be Bothered.

Our Young Carers Partnership continues to grow and develop. During the uncertainty of the Covid 19 pandemic, we witnessed a collective effort from our partners providing essential support and creating opportunities for young carers to contribute to the development of Manchester-specific tools and resources.

Our commitment to a partnership approach and investment in resources to support this continues to have a significant impact, with increased awareness and understanding of Young Carers across the system. We have a growing number of Young Carer Champions in schools, colleges, health settings, Early Help hubs, and youth and play providers across the city.

We are seeing new and exciting offers that allow our Young Carers the opportunity to explore activities beyond their caring roles, meet new friends and importantly give them access to the same opportunities as their peers.

We are proud of our young carers and recognise the huge contribution they make to their families and our city. Whilst we have seen significant improvements in the identification of our Young Carers, we still have a long way to go. We know that there are still too many children and young people with caring responsibilities that we do not know about yet.

Young Carers continue to hold a significant voice in our city. The Support Not Sympathy Campaign and award-winning music project have been positive drivers for change. As we progress towards becoming a UNICEF-recognised Child Friendly City, Young Carers will play an active role in supporting the journey. We all remain committed to making sure that all our Young Carers get support NOT sympathy, access to new opportunities, and receive the recognition they deserve.

Councillor Julie Reid, Executive Member for Early Years, Children and Young People

Introduction

Manchester's Young Carers Strategy 2017 (and the 2020 refresh) was co-produced with Young Carers and informed by their previous work, specifically, their 'Be Bothered Campaign' 2017 and the Young Carers Transition Report 2018. The challenges of the 2020 pandemic brought new insights from Young Carers, who felt that although professionals were engaged, they were sometimes uncertain about how they could support them.

In 2020 Young Carers launched their 'Support Not Sympathy' campaign, highlighting to professionals through open letters the practical ways they can support them with a call to action. During the national lockdown, over 100 Young Carers collaborated on the Young Carers Music Project, and later created a music video as part of their campaign. This led to the production of a powerful awareness tool achieving recognition through winning the Made in Manchester category at the Manchester Culture Awards.

Our refreshed 2024 strategy sets out the current situation and the aspirations in Manchester for Young Carers. It reflects on the successes and the challenges in achieving these aspirations.

The key aims of the strategy are to:

- improve the identification of Young Carers and their families,
- prevent inappropriate caring roles from impacting on children and young people's wellbeing,
- continue to embed the offer for Young Carers into Early Help, developing services which are responsive and flexible,
- promote the responsibility of all agencies for improving outcomes for young carers and their families,
- promote Young Carers' rights to assessment and support, including their right to a statutory needs assessment,
- ensure all Young Carers have a plan for support (My Plan),
- ensure the voices of Young Carers are heard and responded to, adopting a children's rights-based approach that provides Young Carers with meaningful opportunities to influence decisions about their lives,
- ensure Young Carers are supported to achieve their aspirations.

Delivery of the strategy will be through the Young Carers Partnership which includes Young Carers, schools, and representatives from a wide range of partners.

1. Highlights from our collaborative achievements

Our key aims will continue to build on the successes of our previous strategy from 2020-2024, to ensure continuity and positive changes for Young Carers.

Whilst we recognise there is still much work to be done, it is important that we reflect on, and highlight some of the collaborative achievements from the past four years. This is in no small part owed to our ongoing commitment to collaborating with our Young Carers and the professionals who support them.

Over the past four years, we have developed a wide range of tools and resources, all of which have been and will continue to be coproduced with OUR Young Carers and the professionals who support them. These include, but are not limited, to:

Working with partners at the Manchester charity 42nd Street, Young Carers have co-produced a Young Ambassador Award, to ensure that Young Carers have the skills to represent themselves and other Young Carers. The award, aligned with the Skills for Life programme, adopts a children's rights-based approach and supports us to capture even the quietest of voices.

Through Young Carer Champions in schools, Young Carers have worked with us to produce the Young Carer Guides to Support and the Young Carer My Plans.

In response to the open letters from their Support Not Sympathy campaign, Young Carers are working in partnership with Health Watch Manchester, and the wider Young Carers Partnership group to develop a Health Care Practitioners Tool Kit, for summer 2024. The tool kit adopts a children's rights approach and aims to build on the Young Carer Champion model in schools and settings. It will promote a consistent response and support early identification of Young Carers.

In March 2023, Young Carers codesigned Manchester's first ever Young Carers Festival, which over 257 young carers attended. The event raised awareness of who our Young Carers are, strengthened partnership opportunities, and celebrated Young Carers in our city. We hope to replicate this event in future years.

Through the Young Carers Animation 2024 project, Manchester primary school aged Young Carers have worked with an animator (and former Young Carer) to produce a short film. The film will be included in the Young Carers in Schools Award resources for widespread use in primary schools. This will be a key resource in helping us to identify hidden Young Carers as well as provide young children with an understanding of what it means to be Young Carer and, importantly, know their rights and who they can turn to.

Senses Film (Age 13+) A Young Carers Play focussing on the aspirations and futures of our young Adult Carers. Working in partnership with schools we intend to develop a free toolkit for all Manchester settings. Early pilots of the play have received high praise and generated helpful discussions. We anticipate that this resource will strengthen collaboration between adult's and children's social care. It will help us to identify young-adult carers sooner and plan and consider their career aspirations beyond their caring roles.

Our refreshed strategy will ensure these, and other key messages, are shared with partner agencies and inform communications. The importance of all agencies engaging and listening to Young Carers will continue to be emphasised and supported.

2. Voice of Young Carers

The voice of Young Carers in Manchester informs our approach and continues to direct our priorities. Engaging Young Carers through their Young Carer Champions has broadened our reach. This model ensures that all Young Carers, regardless of confidence or ability, have a mechanism to express their wishes, feelings, and experiences.

Young Carers have told us that they value their caring role and are proud of their contribution to their families. They want their views to be recognised and reflected in services that support them.

The 'Be Bothered' Campaign 2017, highlighted some of the key challenges Young Carers in Manchester are facing. These include financial, educational and recreational. However, the Young Carers also pointed out that one of the biggest challenges they face in their day-to-day lives is a lack of awareness and understanding of their caring role.

“One of the biggest things we as young carers face is that no one understands what we do in our caring roles.”

'Dear Professional': Through their 2020 Support Not Sympathy campaign, through a series of open letters, Young Carers told us that all professionals had a role to play and could help them.

“Help us to feel acknowledged and not forgotten about. So that when we do need support and someone to talk to, we always have it. Give us support, help us to not feel ashamed to be a Young Carer.”

The Covid 19 pandemic and national lockdowns reinforced the need for a whole-city approach in the identification and response to the needs of Young Carers. Working together, Manchester Young Carers and the Young Carers Partnership have developed resources to compliment the Early Help Assessment Framework and allow for a consistent and approach to assessment and planning for Young Carers.

3. Our Vision

Manchester's Children and Young People's Plan describes the city's vision for all children and young people.

“Our Manchester – building a safe, happy, healthy, and successful future for children and young people.”

For our Young Carers this means having access to the same opportunities as their peers. Being protected from inappropriate caring and having access to any additional support they may need to ensure they are safe, healthy, aspiring and achieving. We will achieve this through effective partnership working and the delivery of timely and high-quality services.

Manchester is striving to become a Child Friendly City, working with children's charity UNICEF UK. Together, we aim to create a city where children and young people have a meaningful say in, and benefit from local decisions, services and spaces that shape their lives.

For our Young Carers, this means including them in discussions on support pathways, creating representative materials and a platform for their voices. A commitment to equal access to all provision and a focus on future aspirations to prevent any disadvantage due to their caring responsibilities.

5. Our Principles

The development of a joined-up approach which helps all agencies recognise and respond to Young Carers in the right way requires a way of working, which includes:

- There being 'no wrong doors' and Young Carers being identified and assessed, and their families receiving support to prevent inappropriate levels of caring, (regardless of which service comes into contact with them first),
- A memorandum of understanding to help promote working together between Adult's and Children's social care services and developing stronger partnership working with health and third-sector partners,
- Listening to Young Carers and their families, using person-centred approaches and holistic assessments embedded into everyday practice,
- Young Carers and their families being identified and supported earlier to prevent inappropriate levels of caring,
- The voice of Young Carers and their families informing strategic developments and commissioning,
- Young Carers and their families having access to community resources through effective information, advice, and support.

6. Our Definition of a Young Carer

The definition of a Young Carer is taken from section 96 of the Children and Families Act 2014:

“...a person under 18 who provides or intends to provide care for another person (of any age, except where that care is provided for payment, pursuant to a contract or as voluntary work).”

In Manchester we recognise that the impact on children and young people may be related to additional duties such as housework, shopping and caring for siblings rather than actual caring duties. Therefore, our definition includes a person under 18 who provides or intends to provide care for another person (of any age, except where that care is provided for payment, pursuant to a contract or as voluntary work). This relates to care, or additional duties related to having a family member who has a physical disability, mental health needs or learning disability, or who is affected by drug, alcohol, or other substance misuse.

7. Drivers for Change

National Context

The Children and Families Act (2014) requires Local Authorities to take reasonable steps to:

- identify Young Carers in their area,
- provide assessments for Young Carers under the age of 18,
- and to identify whether caring responsibilities are appropriate.

The Care Act (2014) requires Local Authorities to put in place a transition plan for Young Carers aged 16-18. This key legislation refocuses the law around the person, rather than the provision of a service strengthening the need for a more integrated approach.

The revised Working Together (2023) guidance strengthens the emphasis on early identification, assessment, and intervention. This reinforces the need for agencies to work effectively together to support families with Young Carers, developing a whole-family approach.

The establishment of the all-party parliamentary group (APPG) for Young Carers and their subsequent first parliamentary inquiry (November 2023) into the lives of Young Carers, found that time spent on caring can impact on life outcomes due to a lack of support. It found that Young Carers miss on average 27 days of school a year and that Young-Adult Carers are 38 per cent less likely to achieve a university degree.

The recommendations of the enquiry include across-government National Carers Strategy with a dedicated section and resourced action plan relating to Young and Young-Adult Carers. It also recommends government support for the development and the implementation of the first UK-wide Covenant for Young Carers and Young-Adult Carers.

The Young Carers Covenant - launched in March 2024 - sets out 10 key goals as well as actions to help Young Carers reach their full potential. The goals range from ensuring Young Carers are identified at the earliest possible opportunity, to making sure they can access training and employment opportunities. The Covenant draws on the UN Rights of the Child, aligning well with both our strategic aims for Young Carers,

and our ambition to achieve the UNICEF Child Friendly City status. Our Senior Leadership Members from Children and Education, and Adult Services have signed their commitment to the covenant. We will continue to combine our efforts to ensure the covenant is promoted across the council.

Manchester Young Carers Partnership are members of the Young Carers Alliance. Founded in March 2022 by the charity Carers Trust, the alliance brings together representatives from research, policy, and practice, and provides opportunities for collaboration, sharing best practice and a strong, collective voice for Young Carers.

As a direct result of collaborative working there have been national changes for Young Carers, notably in the inclusion of Young Carer identification in the school census data. Information on whether a child has been identified as a Young Carer will be collected annually through the school census as of January 2023. Schools do not need to obtain parental or pupil consent to provide this information for the purposes of the census but should respect the wishes and feelings of both children and their parent (Working Together 2023, p63.)

Local Context

The 2021 National Census identified 1111 Young Carers between the ages of 5-17 years in Manchester. This is slightly less than the 2011 census which identified 1138 Young Carers aged 5-17 years.

Manchester Young Carers are significantly more likely than the total Manchester school population to be eligible for Free School Meals, to be White-British, female and to have English as their first language. The majority of Young Carers identified through the 2023 census were in year 8 in secondary school.

The findings of the first Young Carers in the Schools Census published in July 2023, found 601 Young Carers had been identified by Manchester schools. This figure is significantly lower than we had anticipated.

'Young Carers' on the school census are identified in two ways:

1. Identified as a Young Carer by parent or guardian
2. Identified as a Young Carer by school – including where the pupil self declares

It has been nationally recognised that the 2023 Schools Census data showed that there was significant under-reporting of the number of Young Carers in schools (both when compared to the estimated number of Young Carers in schools, and the numbers known to local Young Carer services. Even across areas with similar pupil population sizes, there was a marked difference in the number of Young Carers recorded on the school census.

Census data published for March 2024 has shown a marked increase in identification finding 1351 Young Carers identified through Manchester Schools. Of significance, the data highlights that over 1000 of those Young Carers were identified by their schools and not by parent or guardians.

This data indicates that our approach is having a positive impact on the early identification and awareness of Manchester Young Carers. Further work with colleagues in PRI (Performance, Research and Intelligence) will provide insights into Young Carers indicators, such as attendance and attainment. This will enable us to develop predictors and gain a better understanding of local need and develop responsive and flexible approaches to addressing emerging needs and challenges.

We are confident that we will see an increase in numbers in future years, we have implemented a Manchester Young Carers in Schools and Settings Award, providing tailored guidance on census data capture for Young Carer Champions.

Additionally, our communications plan has been revised to include timely bulletins to schools through various channels. We have also engaged with senior education leaders and education business managers to raise awareness of the importance of recording and reporting data on Young Carers.

Though we recognize there is more to do, when we compared with national and neighbouring Local Authorities of similar demographics and scale, our efforts in Manchester appear to be making an impact (**see Appendix 1**)

8. Partnership Working

The Young Carers Operational Working Group is well established and will implement the refresh and delivery of the strategy with the aim to increase the identification and support for Young Carers and improve the offer and pathways. An action plan has been agreed and work streams delivered by representatives from Young Carers, Schools, Manchester Health Care and Commissioning, Early Help, Children's Social Care, Adult Services, Voluntary Sector Partners including the Carers Network, Young Manchester, Youth Strategy Team, and School Nursing.

Young Carers have repeatedly told us that they want their support to be delivered through schools and settings. In response to this, since June 2019 a dedicated resource within Children's and Education Services has been in place to support the implementation of the strategy through:

- Working with schools and Youth and Play providers to support Young Carers to access youth provision and other appropriate universal services and to remain in education, employment and training which are appropriate to their specific needs and will contribute to improved outcomes,

- Ensuring the voice of Young Carers is captured and influences service design, delivery, and improvement,
- Working closely with voluntary sector partners, linking into the current development of a single point of contact for all carers ensuring effective pathways for Young Carers.

This work has had a significant impact with 180 schools and colleges developing their offer for Young Carers and new opportunities for partnership working being identified since 2020.

We have Introduced a Young Carers Champion Annual Award, which acknowledges the dedication of school and community Young Carer Champions. This model recognises the dedication and commitment of our young carer champions, provides an opportunity for sharing good practice and supports a sustainable model of delivery.

Robust commissioning arrangements via youth and play providers applying for funding from the city council must evidence they are Young Carer Aware or have a commitment to gaining Young Carer Aware status.

9. Our Delivery Model

Improving identification and prevention through Early Help.

“Early Help is intervening early and as soon as possible to tackle problems emerging for children, young people, and their families or with a population most at risk of developing problems. Effective intervention may occur at any point in a child or young person’s life.”

Manchester’s approach to Early Help is delivered through its Early Help Strategy which was launched in 2015 and refreshed in 2021. The ambition is that families, children and young people will have access to co-ordinated Early Help in accordance with need as soon as difficulties are identified. The offer is personalised multi-agency and embedded within a whole-family approach.

Embedding Young Carers into the Early Help offer presents an opportunity to strengthen the working relationships between Children’s and Adult’s Services. Developing a shared protocol to ensure smooth pathways to information, advice and support for Young Carers and their families underpinned by partnership working.

The roll out of Family Hubs in Manchester during 2023 provides an opportunity to strengthen awareness and support for Young Carers and their families within their local communities. Family Hubs bring together services for families with children of all ages (0-19) or up to 25 with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). At the core of the offer is an enhanced Start for Life offer which provides support to parents and carers from a child’s conception until their second birthday.

All our Early Help hubs have Young Carers Leads who receive regular training and support. They deliver training and awareness to colleagues embedding a sustainable model of support for Young Carers. We will work to replicate this model in each of the Family Hubs to ensure that we maintain a consistent approach. The Family Hubs will be a key area of focus leading to summer 2024, as we recognise the nature of their core offer presents us with a unique opportunity to reach families earlier and identify Young Carers as themes emerge.

Integrated Pathways and Safeguarding

Young Carers and their families should be supported regardless of which service is contacted first. There should be no 'wrong doors' as children's and adult's social services are required to work together to fulfil their duties in law. We will ensure that all practitioners are aware of local safeguarding policy and practice and accept a joint responsibility to work in partnership to identify and respond to any young carers who are suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm. Whole-family approaches will enable all agencies to support the early identification and assessment of the needs of Young Carers by:

- Encouraging and raising awareness of information, advice and support available, including the use of digital resources,
- Using the Early Help assessment tools to support strengths-based conversations and outcome-focused planning with the Young Carer and their family at the centre,
- Ensuring a timely response for those Young Carers who need a targeted or specialist intervention.

To be effective we need to continue to develop an integrated model that enables Young Carers to be identified and supported to access opportunities and this requires all partners to work collectively.

A refreshed memorandum of understanding (MOU) is being developed with the partnership and will be published in 2024.

The Young Carer Pathway will enable all practitioners to navigate support available to Young Carers. The sooner Young Carers are recognised, the easier it is to prevent them from taking on inappropriate levels of care.

9. Priority areas for development.

Peer support

Our Young Carers Strategy was developed and delivered in co-production with Young Carers and continues to reflect the views, thoughts and wishes of Manchester Young Carers.

Through our partnership approach working with Young Carers, schools, settings, voluntary sector, youth providers and commissioners we are developing a sustainable model of peer support.

The voice and experience of Young Carers continues to influence the development of the strategy through representation at the Young Carers Working Group and co-production of tools and resources.

Performance and Quality Assurance: Reporting and Recording

Transition Planning

The Care Act (2014) introduced new obligations to Young Carers in transition to adulthood including the requirement on adult services to provide transition planning for Young Carers who are likely to need support after turning 18 years old.

In December 2018, the Manchester Young Carers Group produced a research project on Young Carer's experiences of transition. Through this research Young Carers told us that we needed to do more to support Young Carers at all key transitional stages.

In response to the Young Carers research findings, transition planning has been included in the Young Carers My Plan. A co-produced resource which is designed to create a sustainable model that addresses key transitions from day one of intervention. The My Plan is aspirational with a person-centred approach to effective transition planning and pathways for Young Carers.

This approach requires a collaborative approach between Adult and Children's Social Care Services, this will be a key priority for the refreshed memo of understanding (MOU) for 2024 to help promote working together between Adult's and Children's social care services and continue to develop strong partnership working with health and third-sector partners.

10. How we will achieve this

Having identified the key areas for improvement a refreshed operational Working Group has agreed an action plan. The Young Carers strategic action plan is a two-year plan encompassing seven areas of action:

1. Pathways - to improve the pathways and offer to Young Carers
2. Transition - to ensure effective transition for Young Carers

3. Voice of Young Carers - engagement and peer-support/influencing strategic commissioning and decision making
4. Performance and Quality Assurance: Reporting and recording Young Carers are identified, recorded and robust data informs strategic decision making,
5. Governance and Leadership - A strong strategic oversight and governance,
6. Health and Wellbeing - Services/Pathways/Activities'
7. Communications and Engagement - Communications and engagement plan.

These seven areas of action will be monitored and reviewed at the Young Carers Working Group which takes place each school term. This group reports into the Our Manchester Children's Board.

11. Measures of success

We will be successful when we are confident that all Manchester Young Carers are able to access support to enable them to have the same opportunities as their peers, are protected from inappropriate caring roles, and are safe, happy, successful, and healthy.

We will measure success through the following outcomes:

- Increasing number of schools and settings in Manchester with an identified Young Carers Champion and an offer of peer support,
- An increasing number of Young Carers being offered appropriate assessments and have a plan of support,
- Improved transition pathways and offer for Young Carers,
- Improved education attendance and attainment of Young Carers through better support in schools,
- Partners, Young Carers, and their families are aware of the pathways and offer for Young Carers in Manchester,
- The voice of Young Carers continues to influence strategic decision making.

Acknowledgements:

Thank you to everyone involved for their continuing commitment and support for Young Carers in Manchester and to the former Young Carers Group whose work remains at the heart of this strategy.

Young Carers will continue to influence the ongoing development and delivery of the strategy through representation on the Young Carers Working Group and through the ongoing development of peer support.

Early Help
Manchester.

