



# **Evaluation Report of Young Carers in Focus Champions – what have we found out?**

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## **Young Carers in Focus Champions**

Young Carers in Focus (YCiF) is a four-year programme (2012-2016) giving young carers a chance to get their voices heard, share their stories and advocate for the things that matter most to them.

Funded by a Youth in Focus grant from the BIG Lottery Fund, YCiF is a national network led by 180 young carer 'champions' aged 10-25. The Champions receive training and skills which will improve their confidence, skills and knowledge. It is hoped this will increase their well-being and resilience which will positively impact their future employment, training and education as they move towards independence.

YCIF works with Champions to raise public awareness and promote positive attitudes towards young carers, family illness and disability and to influence local and national systems to deliver support for young carers.

## **The evaluation - what have we done?**

Practical Participation worked with young carers, Champions and Champion evaluators (recruited from the Champions) to design an evaluation framework focusing on what they regard as key to developing with the Champion evaluators means of evaluating the work of the project and to support the Champion Evaluators to disseminate their findings. Short reports of all Practical Participation work with the Champions are available on the YCiF Evaluators page of [makewav.es](http://makewav.es).

Practical Participation met with YCiF Champions on a number of occasions. Firstly, we introduced the evaluation to young people at a Champions' induction training in 2013; we then ran two sessions for Champions in the same year to help set the parameters of the evaluation in Kendal. We attended the Young Carers Festival (YCF 2014) where young carers and Champions contributed their thoughts to the evaluation where we spoke with Champions and young carers about the work of the Champions so far and produced a short report of what people said, this is available on the YCiF Evaluators page of [makewav.es](http://makewav.es).

In the summer of 2014 Champions from the local young carers' projects in Cambridge/Peterborough, Southend, Stockton-on-Tees, Gateshead, London, Kent, Sheffield and Warwickshire attended 2 workshops, one in the north and one in the south of England, for Champions who were interested in being Champion Evaluators and being actively involved in the evaluation.

At these workshops the Champion evaluators contributed to the evaluation focus, framework and questions where they agreed the aspects of the Champions' work they wanted to focus on and created plans for the evaluation of different aspects of their work with each one allocated to a local project to lead on, as outlined below:

- CHILL in Southend - impact on teachers
- Carers Trust in Cambridge/Peterborough - School nurses
- Eastern Ravens Trust in Stockton-on-Tees – Health: GPs and Clinical Commissioning groups.
- Crossroads in Gateshead - makewav.es and then support for young carers in school
- Brixton Young Carers in London - Impact of identifying as carer and starting to access services
- VAWK in Kent - General awareness amongst peers
- VOYCE in Sheffield - Communication amongst Champions and training preparation for role.

After these workshops Practical Participation stayed in touch with the Champion evaluators via email and telephone calls with their local project workers. Some projects successfully collected information from a wider group of young carers relating to their topic whereas some struggled with the additional commitment to the evaluation in addition to the work they were doing as Champions and of course the on-going support to young carers in their project. Young people often lead very busy lives with many commitments with young carers having the additional responsibilities involved in their caring roles, and for many the evaluation was yet another additional commitment. Also young people are in transition and so many of the Champions who attended the evaluation workshops, had moved on to other things, are taking exams, starting work or having babies and so do not have the time available that they had anticipated. For all these reasons the involvement of the Champion evaluators dropped off and Practical Participation continued with the evaluation tasks as set out in the evaluation plan created with young people.

Champion evaluators from Sheffield (the project leading this strand) created questions to ask Champions about their experience of being a Champion; unfortunately no young carers from Sheffield were able to attend the YCF 2015 so two people from Practical Participation asked the Champions these questions instead. Champions were also asked these questions via telephone interviews. At the festivals of 2015 and 2016 we asked young carers generally if they were aware of, or had noticed any improvements in support for young carers in their area. All the questions were informed by the work of the Champion evaluators who have been part of discussions and workshops. We also created a survey from the questions developed by Champion evaluators for School Nurses, however we received no responses.

## **This report**

This final report brings together the information gathered by the Champion evaluators and also information collected by Practical Participation at YCF 2015 and 2016 and in telephone interviews with Champions.

At YCF 2015, 22 young carers from 13 projects were interviewed about what they knew about the Champions, makewav.es and if they had noticed improvements locally for young carers. The Champion evaluators also collected the views of more than 40 young carers in their local areas.

At YCF 2016 we spoke with 48 young carers from 23 projects about any improvements they had noticed in their support locally. We also undertook a big group exercise exploring change with young carers aged between 10-19 years old.

At YCF 2015 and via telephone interviews we spoke with 26 Champions aged between 12 and 18 years old (18 being female and 8 male) from 15 projects about the experience of being a Champion using the questions created by Champion evaluators from Sheffield.

This report solely draws on information collected by Champion evaluators and Practical Participation, not from any other sources.

## **Support for young carers**

All the Champions and young carers we have spoken with have emphasised the importance of improvements in support for young carers. Both Champions and young carers alike think this should be the focus of Champions' work.

Champion evaluators had specifically collected information about change for young carers in terms of recognising themselves as young carers, contacting a young carers' local project and support in school. Champion evaluators asked 11 young carers about the support they got as young carers with most saying they only got support from the project, even if they knew of other sources of support. Many they said they preferred coming to the young carers project, as *'it is a smaller group and it is where you get answers and it is more interactive'* whereas another young carer said other agencies *'would not understand HIV, and also will tell everyone and then I will be treated differently'*. Other young people also talked about anxiety in sharing information about their situation with others, *'scared of how we are going to be treated if we asked for support'*. For some young carers the fact they were caring for someone with HIV added to this anxiety, *'people's perception of HIV is negative from the media, compared to other conditions such as diabetes'*.

All three of the groups of Champions evaluators asked young people about their experiences in school. When asked what issues they faced as a young carer, the young people spoke of issues with school pointing out that looking after siblings makes doing homework hard and means they cannot attend after school activities or extra-curricular activities and that worrying about things at home was very distracting.

*I cannot attend extra activities at school and cannot participate as I need to rush home and look after my siblings.*

*I focus more on home responsibilities and this as a result distracts me from my school work.*

Another young carer said they had to have time off school to look after siblings when they were sick, or missed hospital appointments as they did not want to tell school they needed to go to the hospital.

Champion evaluators asked young carers if they had told school about being a young carer. This varied, but most said they had not, mainly because they were worried who else they would tell or they felt this would change how the school saw them – particularly for young carers in families with HIV.

*If school knew then they would tell everyone else and I would be discriminated, it is for my benefit otherwise I will be faced with issues of stigma.*

Others pointed out it could depend on the school with some being better than others.

*My primary school could be better; they barely know about young carers. I'd like it if they included young carers more and know about us and took a bit of time to think about how they could help us a bit more. Things would be better at school if they looked after me and helped young carers and other children together. I'd like to ask my head teacher if I could do an assembly to discuss what being a young carer is.*

Gateshead Champion evaluators asked 21 young carers about their support in school and over ¾ said they had not told school. Of those that had, only one said it had led to more support. They suggested that they appreciate support by having somewhere where they could be alone at times, having someone to talk to, extra support with school work and extended deadlines. However, 6 of these said they did not need additional support and others said they did get the support they needed.

Peterborough Champion evaluators asked 8 young carers if they had received support from a school nurse. 5 knew there was a school nurse in their school, 3 did not. Of those who did know about their school nurse they knew they could go to the school nurse with health concerns, 'things like depression and self-harm', 'emotionally, if we need a hand with things'. Only one had been to the school nurse for support and in this case they had not found it useful, 'I was sent to the school nurse, but she talked down to me and was very patronising'. They were also asked if they felt the school nurse was the best person for young carers to go to for support and there was a strong feeling that young carers should have someone identified in school for this but that they should be able to go to who they 'felt most comfortable with'.

*I am happy with the support I get from the young carers' group, but the school nurse has said if I have any problems I can go and talk to her.*

Once again a young carer showed their reluctance to talk at school about their life,

*I don't really want support from school, but I do know where to get it if I need it.*

## What the champions have done to promote change for young carers

The Champions we have spoken with have taken part in activities that relate to the issues prioritised by the Champion evaluators. They told us about being involved in the following:

- Meetings with MPs and the Children's Commissioner
- Meetings with local politicians
- Being part of the NHS call to action
- Taking part in conferences e.g. with school nurses
- Development of Top Tips for School nurses
- Being part of the Schools Awards
- Running training for schools about support for young carers
- Being part of a consultation with Psychiatrists
- Raising awareness of young carers for example as below;
  - o on national and local TV and local radio programmes speaking about young carers
  - o making videos and recordings that are put online
- Written blogs and articles
- Contributed to the Hidden exhibition

## What have you done as a Champion?

All Champions had taken part in the initial training and most had done quite a lot more in addition to this.

*Media, leadership, other things too – everything that has been offered.*

All commented that they had enjoyed the training and they felt it had prepared them for the other activities they had gone on to do. The Champions spoken with have varying levels of skills, as they had been involved in the programme for different lengths of time. Some had just undertaken some of the training (mostly those who have been involved as a Champion for just 6 months) but most had been involved in a range of other activities locally and nationally as described in their own words below:

*I met MPs in London twice, to talk about the age we can do things, like I cannot collect my mum's prescriptions because I am too young. We talked about a young carer's card that would mean we could. I also met the Children's Commissioner and was on the radio with her at the last festival. I have been on local radio too*

*NHS Call to Action – I spoke with head of NHS and how they are going to help us. We did interviews with people there. We made a video about the school standards that is on makewav.es and did an interview with the Suffolk young carers lead. I have done other things, but I can't remember what.*

*I met the mayor in my town, went to London to see the Hidden exhibition and gave out leaflets.*

*I went to a conference with the school nurses where we did the 10 top tips and spoke with a powerpoint presentation. I went to the Hidden exhibition and had pictures taken for it.*

*I recently did the Schools Awards where we met up with other Champions in London and were given forms to read and said what we thought of them and what sort of award we would give them. It was quite interesting to get to see what the schools are doing to support young carers. Locally we are going into schools to give training to teachers about recognising and supporting young carers.*

*I have made a video for makwav.es, and met with the council who then helped with trips and coming to this festival.*

*Making sure people are more aware of young carers, making sure young carers' voices are heard. I have also written poems for makwav.es and raised money for my local project.*

*I made a video about me – not sure what happened to that.*

Some young people really welcomed the range of opportunities for them to be involved in promoting change for young carers.

*I've done lots! Consultation with CAMHs, an art festival and I went to the Royal Society of Psychiatrists. There were Champions at each table with questions for them and they had questions for us too. We did interviews that are on makwav.es and they signed pledges – but I have not heard anything more about that, but do understand some of them have acted on them. Here at YCF this year some of us are talking with young people about makwav.es and what can Champions do to help. I went to the NHS Call to Action event and locally I am doing a lot of work with schools, media interviews for young carers week and setting up a young adults carers group.*

*I met the Children's Commissioner, I've done loads of speeches like with the School Nurses and other professionals, I can't remember them all. I have a photo in the Hidden exhibition and I went to that. I made a video for School Nurses and have written a piece for Rethink about caring for family members with mental health issues and the stresses of being a young carer - it has had over 41,000 views. I have been to YCF and done things there.*

*So much! I interviewed Edward Timpson the MP, and Margaret Atkinson when she was the Children's Commissioner a couple of times. Also I was interviewed a few times on local radio and things like that to raise awareness about young carers. I was Chair of the Young Carers in Schools launch meeting and did work on that project. I went to YCF. It was really good to be able to do so much and so many different things.*

## Change for young carers

Young carers and Champions were asked if they felt things had changed recently for young carers on the issues YCiF and Champions are working on. At both YCF in 2015 and 2016 young carers were asked if they had noticed any improvements at school, in health provision, whole family support and general awareness.

### Changes at school

School was the area that most young people spoke about and so we did a big group exercise at YCF 2016 around changes in school. Most young carers had noticed 'a lot' of improvement, however, some said they noticed only a little and some none at all. The young carers' more detailed responses to the questions gave a similar picture with some finding things very difficult at school, highlighting a lack of understanding and interest from teachers to their situation.

*When I'm late for school after helping my mum in the morning, my teacher gets a bit angry and does not pay attention to what I have been doing.*

*Nothing has changed, I still get teased about my mum, people take the p\*\*\* out of me about my mum and when I get cross and maybe lash out I get into trouble – there is no understanding or support at school.*

*I have not noticed any changes, I get bullied all the time at school because of my mum and nothing happens about it. I have been put down a year at school because of how much I have missed. There is no recognition from school I am a carer.*

*The school are not so good; it would help if the form tutor or head of year knew and took an interest.*

*I do not get support from school, if I am having a bad day I get treated like a trouble maker.*

Young carers pointed out that in many schools there was not consistency of understanding or adjustments for their needs.

*It is really variable – if my science homework is late I get detention – she doesn't listen to what I say. But my French teacher will give me more time.*

One young carer made the observation, 'It must be so frustrating for some teachers who really want to help but can't because people higher up won't let them'.

Young carers pointed out that information was not shared appropriately, with confidentiality being an issue.

*Information about me is not transferred to my next teacher; it would be good if the head of year knew. I know the school system has let me down as a young carer – I live it.*



*The school is not good on confidentiality either. I have heard them talking about my business in the school corridor and then they go quiet when they see me. You see how people are treated for being different. I get it that a teacher has to tell another teacher but not in the corridor. A teacher should tell us who they are telling. And don't promise confidentiality when you are not going to keep it. It's not even to teachers who need to know.*

However many did feel there had been **improvements in school**, pointing to changes at school that helped them such as being allowed to have their phone with them, a young carers' group in the school time, being able to go and chill out if things got too much and negotiating extra time for homework.

*Schools are more understanding, key people who know are the counsellor, my form tutor and senior tutor.*

*The senior leadership team know and my teachers are more lenient with me knowing I get stressed and angry.*

*Things have got better at school. Teachers will give me more time with homework if I need it, I can explain if I am late, why I am late and they understand more about what happens at home.*

Some young people mentioned that links between their local young carers' project and other support services and school helped, with some schools referring young people to projects and others welcoming young carers' project workers into school.

*The Crossroads worker comes into school and is known in school.*

*We've had personal support from a counsellor coming into school and I can tell her anything. She was a young carer herself and understands, I can relate to her.*

Some young carers identified that things had improved locally due to their own and their local project's efforts. One young carer said things had improved in his school after he had delivered assemblies about being a young carer.

*Things have got better at school because I did a week of assemblies and so people understand more. I asked school if I could do this – it was nerve wracking but got easier throughout the week. I explained to the pastoral care what was happening and now they are more understanding.*

Young carers from one local project spoke of how things had improved in many areas since they had introduced a Young Carers' card. This had taken a number of years to develop as it involved negotiations with the local Clinical Commissioning Group, schools and other agencies.

*A lot has changed recently, we have worked to develop the Young Carers' card that is recognised by doctors and at school. We worked for 3 years with the CCG (Clinical Commissioning Group) to get it recognised by health services. At school the Young Carers*

*Steering Group put together a schools pack and that has improved things too. I was getting bullied, but after we did some young carers' awareness assemblies and the students asked us questions; that has improved. Teachers understand more too, we can have some time out if we are stressed about things at home, we can have our phones with us and we can have extra time for work.*

Some Champions also said they thought things were better in schools for young carers. One pointed out there was better communication between schools and other support services and another highlighted the impact of the Schools Awards.

*Schools are signing up to be part of the programme. My school signed up because I gave a speech in school. Many schools in the area have signed up.*

One Champion had done a lot of work with schools in his area and offered workshops for schools and encouraged them to apply for the Schools Awards. He had undertaken before and after evaluation sheets and all 20 of those who had completed both evaluation sheets, reported that after the workshop they had a greater understanding of the issues faced by young carers and their needs.

*I have a greater understanding of the responsibilities of young carers*

*Greater insight into the struggles and isolation of young carers.*

They all identified actions they could take to support young carers in school and made pledges to take specific actions; these included to create a register of young carers in the school, start drop-in sessions for young carers, display publicity about young carers in the school, be available for support, not to make assumptions and to listen to them more.

*Recognise young carers in my class and make sure I have a conversation with them at least once a week to check if everything is OK. Make sure they know I know they are a young carer.*

A number of participants expressed a commitment to signing up for the Schools Awards. Whilst not perhaps yet translated into positive change for young carers in the schools concerned, such awareness raising and the creation of pledges to action is likely to have a positive effect on young carers' lives.

Some young people at the YCF events felt that the support they had at school was already good and so change was not such an issue for them. Some young people spoke of having people at school they could talk to, support groups and understanding that events at home would affect them at school (albeit not always from everybody).

*No, I have not noticed any changes, but at school things are not that bad anyway. At school we have a young carers group, and get support when we need it.*

*School is OK. I see the school nurse once a term. I have got a card that lets me out when I am stressed. At home my brother is very loud and it is hard to concentrate and then I get homework in late and I get told off. Sometimes the young carer's card helps; some teachers still give me a detention; others negotiate and talk to me.*

*School knows. They'll let me off school to do things I need to do at home. The head and the Special Needs teacher support us. They are really helpful. The head is discreet and does not talk about it amidst my friends. You don't want that. School is a place I want to get on with my mates and not have to think about my mum all the time.*

*School is good already. If I have difficulties at home that affect me at school I have someone to talk to and we sort out homework and things like that.*

### **What difference support in school makes to young carers**

We asked young carers what difference having recognition and support at school made to them. They spoke of reduced stress, helping them cope, increase in wellbeing and feeling listened to. Even the smallest changes were seen to have a profound impact by the young people as the quotes below indicate.

*For me I am stress free and calmer because of the better support at school and the support group.*

*More understanding has opened my mind to what is possible, and to what I can achieve. I am doing better at school.*

*I have stopped panicking about school work. I enjoy school a lot more now and worry less. It makes a big difference.*

*I am more happy.*

*It is good, it makes me feel more able to cope.*

*I can get on with my learning, I don't get into trouble and don't kick off like I used to. I feel listened to and taken seriously.*

*It makes such a difference, I feel so much better at school, I am not anxious all the time and worried about school work and worried about home – I can talk to someone and we can sort things out. I like school now – it helps they understand.*

*It makes a lot of difference – knowing that people understand things that are going off, they are not going to let you off without doing homework, but we can talk about it and agree how it can be done. It calms me down and has made a very big difference to everything.*

*Knowing I am not alone, knowing there are other young carers in school who have similar experiences.*

*A big difference! Having someone to talk to at school helps me both at home and at school. The young carers group at school means we can talk and get rid of our worries.*

*It is a relief to be able to manage both as a young carer and at college.*

### **Health support**

Not many young carers we spoke to at the two YCF events talked about support from health services. In the big group exercise it was the aspect of support where young carers identified the least improvement. Champions had been part of a number of events with health professionals – GP events, NHS call for action and a conference with Psychiatrists. They felt such events must have raised awareness of young carers, ‘NHS event in London definitely helped GPs know more about young carers’, but as yet no young carers we spoke to had noticed an improvement in their health services.

Unlike school only a few of the young carers we spoke to had regular contact with health professionals and for some the help, support and service they and their families received was good.

*Sometimes when mum is not feeling very well, she goes to the GP. Sometimes I go with her. I normally sit outside and that’s ok. I feel I know what I need to know.*

*My GP knows I am a young carer and treats me like a normal person, I like that.*

However, others did feel that they and their families were not receiving the support they needed. One young person spoke of constantly being referred to mental health services which she did not find helpful – but there appeared to be no alternative. Another young person told of numerous failings of health services that profoundly affected the whole family.

### **Whole family support**

Champions were aware of campaigns to change things for young carers nationally as a result of having been actively involved in them. They spoke of changes in legislation – The Carers’ Act being specifically mentioned by some (in April 2015, the Care Act came into Law in the UK; this entitles young carers to an assessment, meaning the local authority has a duty to consider the impact these responsibilities have on them). Whilst recognising they as yet had no evidence of this, the Champions felt it must be leading to improvements in support for young carers and were proud of young carers’ involvement in making it happen.

Again not so many young carers spoke of whole family support, though for those that did where it was working well, it was seen as very supportive. Some young people spoke of regular meetings to discuss the needs within the family and develop a package of care which addressed the needs of the young person and who they were involved in caring for.

*We have a family assessment and I see the social worker every week.*

*We get a yearly visit where we agree what support there will be.*

Both these young people said that this had a profound positive impact on their lives, as it brought more support into the family and also ensured they had some time for themselves.

*It makes such a big difference, we make sure I have some 'me time' every week to do stuff for myself - usually I read. It means there is more support coming in to the family – it is not just me doing everything. It means I can do more things for me and know my mum is OK.*

*It makes me feel listened to and helps to know people understand and want to help. I can get a break and so feel less stressed and better in myself.*

*It makes me feel happy – it is good to know there is a person who understands and I can talk to if I need to.*

We also spoke with young carers who had undergone no assessment of their needs and as a consequence were carrying out very high levels of caring to the detriment of their education and wellbeing. One young carer told of how the Flexible Breaks funding had been cut and this meant they were no longer able to get away.

#### **Changes in general awareness of young carers**

A few young carers thought that people were more aware of young carers and said they felt more able to share about their lives with friends, and the challenges they face. Champions too felt there was more awareness from both the public, policy makers and service providers.

*In my area there is definitely more awareness, it seems to be the case nationally as well. Other Champions say they notice greater awareness in their areas too. In Carers' Week we had a stall and were leafleting and people's response was not, 'so what is this', as it has been before, but 'oh you are part of that'.*

*Local council knows more about young carers and who to contact when they want to check things out. They ask, 'if we do this, how will it impact on young carers?'*

Again this was not universal with other young carers saying they thought awareness of the lives of young carers was still very low. Some young carers were not sure that greater awareness led to any changes for young carers.

*There is more understanding of our situation and what it means, but I am not sure whether this makes a difference to us.*

*It would be great to have support, rather than sympathy.*

The Champions also had mixed views on whether there was greater awareness of young carers as a group in society, with some thinking maybe there was more awareness – mentioning Carers' Week and the publicity for young carers around that, or referring to there being more about young carers on TV and radio, or specific events they had been part of. Others were not so sure there was

greater awareness and all definitely thought there needs to be even more awareness of young carers as a group in society. Some Champions felt strongly that there definitely was greater awareness of young carers lives as a result of their work.

*It is a lot easier to talk about being a young carer. At school more young people have come out as carers. More people know about it and so they are not so scared to talk about it, they see that there is more support and more understanding. After I was on Newsround I did a talk at school.*

*We have had the opportunity to speak to people of influence – people who can change things, like the Children’s Commissioner or the top person of the NHS and all the events Champions have been part of with all the publicity. People are listening and coming to young carers asking for advice and information. I spoke at the event about School Nurses and the NHS and they heard what lots of young carers had to say.*

*People speak out more about being a young carer and more people know about young carers as a result. We think things can change. We do not have to cope on our own as we might have thought before; we can support each other and expect to be understood by others.*

*A lot more people know about young carers, when I mention I am one, people know what it means; before they never did. There is more support in school for young carers, definitely. I saw it in my school, and then with the Schools Awards – things are getting better for young carers. There is more awareness in the media, I was at the BBC the other week (Open News Room) and they knew about young carers, and asked relevant questions.*

Some young carers who felt there was greater awareness said this impacted positively on them and their lives.

*I feel proud of what I do now more than ashamed like I did, and it helps me think about what I am going to do in the future.*

*So much difference! We feel confident to say we are young carers in all sorts of situations now and can expect support. It makes us all feel so much better, less stressed and more able to do what we need to do.*

### **Support from local projects**

Many of the young carers we spoke with identified the crucial role of support from their local projects. They identified it as important both in getting some space and respite from responsibilities at home, an opportunity to meet with other young carers who understood and shared similar experiences as well as for some a place they could campaign for change and improvements in services locally.

*We are one big family; we can speak to anyone about anything; you can talk and relax. We trust each other. The project links with secondary schools and supports lunch time drop-ins.*

*I go to Young Carers every week, and if I can't make it for some reason I find it hard.*

*I go to Young Carers every week – that is where I get my support. We talk and can get rid of our worries.*

Some had noticed increase in provision.

*Things are better in the project – there is more funding now from the council to do activities.*

*Project trips are paid for now, they get us out and make us happy and joyful instead of being stuck, enclosed and uncomfortable.*

However others said that their local provision was having funding reduced.

## **The Champions**

Champions are at the heart of YCiF and an integral part of campaigning on all the issues discussed above. They have been key to taking action on the issues and ensuring the voice of young carers is central to the work of YCiF, so it is important to look at what they have done and, as well as the impact of their work for young carers generally, to consider what its impact has been on them personally.

Practical Participation spoke with a total of 26 Champions made up of 19 young women and 7 young men, aged between 12 and 19, specifically about their experiences as a Champion; 15 at YCF 2015, and 11 in telephone interviews. The shortest length of time one had been a Champion was 6 months, and the longest 3 years.

Most of the Champions said they had been '*picked*' or asked by a worker if they were interested in becoming a Champion,

*The support worker suggested it; I am always up for anything so thought I would give it a try.*

*I have always been active in my project and worked hard at things and the worker suggested it.*

A few had heard about the opportunity (e.g. at YCF) and volunteered.

*I was keen as I wanted to make a change and speak up for young carers.*

For many the opportunity to make a difference for others was very appealing.

*I was interested in making things better for other young carers, things had really improved for me at school, and I wanted other people to have the same opportunity. I wanted to make things better for all young carers.*

*I wanted to raise awareness about young carers nationally – it wasn't really getting anywhere locally and so I thought nationally might be better*

Only four of the 22 young carers we spoke to at YCF 2015 had heard of the Champions and young carers from projects with Champions did not always know that the role existed. Those who did know about the Champions understood their role to be supporting young carers who are struggling and campaigning for change.

*They go to meetings and influence things locally, for example they went to the Civic Centre to talk about what it is like to be a young carer and try and influence change in schools so they will support us better.*

One young carer who had heard of the Champions commented,

*I don't like the idea of special Champions, we are all champions. We are all in the same boat; we all work to improve things for young carers.*

### **What knowledge and skills have you developed as Champions?**

All the Champions spoken to said they had learnt skills and gained knowledge as a result of being a Champion through the training and the opportunities it had given them. They most often identified having developed communication skills, interviewing techniques, public speaking, leadership and media skills.

*It is hard to pin down, there is so much - interviewing, communication skills, media training.*

*Public speaking, I am able to communicate more and communicate my ideas to others more clearly and effectively. How I present myself – it makes a difference to how people see you, and how seriously they take you.*

*Confidence, leadership, media skills, team work.*

*Media skills (in front of and behind the camera), team work, debating skills, confidence and communication.*

*I have learnt how to create concise and useful resource (audio, video, written word). Public speaking, school assemblies, interviews. How to navigate the beurocracy of local councils, identify where change is needed and helped to make it happen. I couldn't have done any of this without the training and what I learnt as a Champion.*

*I leant how to speak with professional people in the smart words they use and will understand.*



Many Champions also pointed out they had gained confidence from being a Champion and how this helped them in speaking out more. This in turn brought benefits such as feeling proud of being a young carer, losing a stutter and them being able to take on new activities that they might not have considered before.

*I've learnt how gobby I can be, I thought I was quiet, but I don't have to be. . . . People listen to me more and I have more authority they are more willing to listen to me when they see the work I put in.*

*How to talk to people and introducing yourself, team work, confidence, know what to do and say to support people.*

*More confident, used to be very shy and now am more outgoing. I will go up and speak with people. I am proud to be a young carer now; I used to think it was a secret. I know it is OK to be a young carer.*

*Speaking out and being more confident. I used to have stutter and I don't any more. I am buddying a Year 7 young carer. Being a Champion gave me a step up to go on and be more active.*

*It has given me a lot more confidence to work with other people, I am more organised and I think I have more empathy – I understand more about other people's points of view.*

Some Champions said they had gained a greater awareness of other people's situations.

*I am more understanding of other people's position, I am better at getting everyone's voice heard, I know how to put things on a website, make a movie things like that.*

*I care more about other people, like younger young carers who I can perhaps help by talking to them about what is going on in their lives.*

They had learnt about how to both campaign for and support other young carers.

*I talk to people better, and understand people better. I have learnt how to talk to important people in a way they will listen to what you have to say. How to speak politely and correctly, so they will listen and then influence things to be better for young carers. Training on media helped my confidence and helps you think clearly about the message you want to get across. I have realised how many different sorts of young carers there are – they are not all doing what I am doing, some are caring for parents who are depressed, some siblings with autism. There is no one way of being a young carer.*

*I understand more about what more needs to be done to support young carers to help them be themselves and have a school life, a social life and a caring life and cope with all that. Support needs to be tailored to the needs of young people and help in the areas they are*

*struggling. Also through the mental health training I have learnt more about what my Mum goes through and how to care for her.*

*I learnt so much about the wider world of young carers generally. I knew a lot from my own experience and from the local project, but I learnt so much about things happening across the country and young carers. I learnt more about public awareness and how things should change for young carers. I learnt how to focus the conversation, write things clearly. How to talk to all sorts of people I might have been too nervous to speak to before.*

*I have more information about other young carers and information about things that could support them and I can share that with other young carers.*

### ***Using skills and knowledge to influence change for young carers***

Most of the Champions spoken to said they used the skills and knowledge they developed through being Champions to influence things for young carers. Those who had not yet used their new skills and knowledge to influence change for young carers, were new to the role and had not yet had the opportunity to so. Most gave concrete examples of how they had done this. They spoke of using their improved communication skills in both being interviewed and interviewing others, speaking out, making publicity, sharing knowledge, experiences and seeking funding.

*I have used the Media skills in interviewing – both being interviewed and interviewing. I interviewed Head of Children’s Services about what he could do more to support us. I am better at highlighting issues. I have been on local radio describing what it is like to be a young carer and what my day is like.*

*I am in the middle of making a poster for schools to increase awareness about the issues. I do talks at the lunch club at school*

*In our region we help our group and tell them about the things we are doing; like we teach them about makewav.es.*

*I spoke at the Rotary Club in our area and asked for funding and we got the funding for young carers to come to the festival. And I spoke to another company for funding for more activities for the local group.*

*Definitely; I have persuaded schools to take part in the Schools Awards; I used materials from TCS and YCiF and asked my own college to start. I have run training for schools about the awards and used videos from young carers, and very quickly people were interested and now have a designated staff member and they give advice and information. Once one school has done it, then start on the next one.*

*I recorded a film for doctors and nurses to recognise young carers’ situation more.*

*I am running a group session and doing peer mentoring.*

*I interviewed an MP locally – the training was very useful when interviewing him. The interview is up on the council website, and hopefully he will help us with change for young carers.*

Champions were asked if they felt more empowered to influence change for young carers as a result of being a Champion. Almost all felt they were more empowered and gave examples of how they thought this showed itself. They felt they had greater insight into others' problems, more understanding of how things worked, better organisation and greater sense of identity.

*Slightly more empowered, I can talk better and listen more. I think as young carers we mature earlier than others anyway.*

*Definitely, it has given me more of an insight; I can be more understanding of how to answer young carers without upsetting them.*

*Yes – I am better at planning things, better at organising things, better at giving presentations – I gave one at school about young carers.*

*Oh yes! Definitely! Like I used the media skills in the interviews I did; both when I was the interviewer and being interviewed. I worked on the Schools awards, and having the confidence to voice my opinion, to say what I thought about things. Talking to the teachers at workshops . . . it has all helped me be part of raising awareness and making support better for young carers.*

*Being a Champion I have used the presentation skills to talk with young people at my group, or to tell people at residential about what we are doing locally. I feel able to stand up and tell people things in a way I didn't before. I have spoken to professionals locally about being a young carer and I think they understand better what we are trying to say because I have had the training. I can get things across in a way that helps them understand.*

*Definitely. I feel able to talk out loud about what young carers' lives are like and what they need to support them in their caring. Now I would go and see people before something becomes a big problem, before I would have let things build up and build up – but not anymore. I am not afraid to speak out loud about myself and other young carers.*

*Yes, being able to talk to the people in charge in a way they will listen.*

*I know what I am talking about and I think that makes people understand it better and maybe that makes them more likely to do something about it.*

### ***Using the skills and knowledge in everyday life***

Champions also identified how they had used the skills and knowledge developed as a Champion in their everyday life. Once again confidence was seen to be one of the major things that then lead to a number of further positive outcomes such as better results in meetings, gaining apprenticeships and being about to talk to people more easily.

*Confidence is the biggest thing.*

*More confidence, I am able to talk to people more easily.*

*I think it is the being more confident, taking opportunities, getting new experiences, not holding myself back because I am not so shy anymore.*

*I am more confident around people, open up more about problems at home and more inclined to talk to teachers about things.*

*I got an apprenticeship in childcare, I wouldn't have been able to do this without having been a Champion, I would never have been able to speak at the interview.*

*More confident, it is easier when I meet new people, I find it easier to be friendly to people I don't know. I have a lot more confidence in myself.*

*Yes. I am much more confident and more able to speak with all different sorts of people. I challenge things more – like I saw some people bullying a young person with autism and I felt able to intervene and explained to the people bullying why it was wrong and help the boy get some support. I would not have done that before I don't think*

A number of Champions said the skills and knowledge gained had helped with their academic work, particularly the media skills aiding them with presentations,

*Presenting college work in multi-media fashion, I had learnt enough to be able to do this. I have been helping family member set up a charity – I have helped them with presentations, networking, music mixing. Also I am now running a young adult carers group locally.*

*I have used them in meetings at school when making subject choices as I knew more what I wanted to say and how to get it across in a good way.*

*I used the Media skills in my A level project.*

*The confidence helps in all sorts of ways. The media training and experience helped me get into uni to study journalism. I find it easier to talk to people. I won the Point of Light award from David Cameron – that looked good on my applications, and it was a real boost to my confidence.*

*Yes of course, like when I have to do a presentation for college work, I am much more confident to do it.*

Another said the team work and communication skills they had learnt as a Champion had helped them in work.

*I have used the team work a lot. I work in a kitchen so it is really important with communication and team work. I used to be really nervous talking to people and I am not anymore.*

### **Highlights of being a Champion**

Champions were asked about the good things about being a Champion and what had been the highlight of being a Champion. Most frequently mentioned was being part of making change for young carers.

*Being involved in more stuff like being part of this festival, it is fun to do something different.*

*Being able to speak out and make change.*

*It has been an incredible experience, young carers say we need these things, and then to be part of making it happen, and to see their reactions – it is uplifting.*

*Everywhere all over the UK there are young carers who are under 18 and they shouldn't be doing it, so making a change for young carers - even just the slightest bit.*

*So far getting schools and services in my area to try and work together and sharing information and increasing the support for young carers. GPs referring to support services.*

*Getting involved and trying to make a difference.*

*Meeting everyone – I have met young carers from all round the country. Talking with them about their experiences and learning about what is going on in their areas. Helping things get better for young carers has been a highlight.*

*The photo exhibition, it was good to do, spread the word in a more attractive way. Shows how different young carers are.*

Many Champions talked about the new friends they had made and the things they had done and places they had been.

*Making new friends. Knowing there are other young carers who are going through the same as me.*

*The opportunities I have had.*

*It is hard to put my finger on any one thing. As a Champion getting to know each other, bonding, supporting each other with Champions issues or just things happening in life. Help each other solve issues.*

*Travelling around and meeting good people. The training and getting our voice across.*

*So many different things – it is hard to pick just one best thing. I guess meeting a lot of people – nice people. I have never met a rude or disrespectful young carer.*

*Meeting other Champions and young carers around the country, getting to know more about different people's perspectives – not just my own or the local project. Working together on things that are important to us. Going away and not having to worry about my Mum. I had not left my mum for years, but they were reassuring and comforting about that and I felt able to do it. It has given me a safe way of having new experiences, going to new places and doing things I never would have thought I could do*

For others it was their personal development and how they themselves had changed.

*Having the guts to do it. I owned it and was not nervous or scared.*

*Learning new skills and teaching others how to make change.*

*My personal achievements, opening up and talking to people, getting recognition for what I am doing. Like when I talked at assembly in school about being a young carer.*

*My speech and talking in front of school. Before I couldn't say my name without stuttering, I had had speech therapy but nothing had helped, but meeting with this group of people who understand what was happening in my life – it just got better.*

*Feeling better about myself, feeling I am a bigger person than I was, I am more confident.*

A few of the Champions had also gained badges, recognising the skills they had gained.

*I have done a few badges, and put them on my CV – it looks good.*

*Yes I have a few – social media, presentation producers and more but I can't remember. I thought they would help me with my future, you can put them on your profile for jobs to show an employer and maybe they will help me stand out*

*I have a few – can't remember which ones. It gives me a sense of achievement to complete something like that and have it as recognition of what I have learnt.*

But the badges were not for everybody.

*I know about them, but I am not doing any – it is not my sort of thing really.*

*I think I have some, but I got them as part of other things. Like when we were on the media weekend, I think we got one – but I don't know. I didn't see the point of them really.*

## What could be better about being a Champion?

When asked what could be better about being a Champion the main ones mentioned were opportunities to do more and more information about what other Champions were doing and the outcomes of events they had been part of.

*We need more opportunities, more targeted opportunities to talk with people who can make a difference.*

*There is definitely more to do that is for sure, a lot more to do. We need more chances for engaging nationally and locally. We can't stop until everything is how it needs to be for young carers.*

*We need more information about the opportunities there are to do things as a Champion. And to know more about what other people are doing –there is lots more going on than I know about. Also when we have done something – like the NHS event we never hear any more about it, what happened with the pledges people made?*

For much of the time the YCiF makewav.es site was the major ways of informing Champions and young carers about what is happening, though other methods developed throughout the project. From questions asked at YCF 2015 and 2014 it seems many young carers did not use the site. Only 3 of the young carers spoken with at YCF15 had heard of makewav.es, one of these had just heard that day and planned to visit the site again, another whilst they knew about it, had not got a computer and so did not use it and the third was active on makewav.es and had earned some badges via contributions to the site. Even the Champions we spoke to, did not use the site much.

*I don't go on makewav.es; do have an account, but don't use it much. I talk with young carers on Face Book more than makewav.es.*

Some Champions said they had used it regularly, though most no longer did.

*Yes, I have used it in the past. I actually went on it the other day to see what was there and what is happening. But I have never used it much. I don't do things like blogging. I tend to go to it to see what is there, rather than to put things there myself.*

*I have forgotten my log in, I've not visited it for ages – I did post stories and photos at the beginning.*

Another suggested improvement came from a number of Champions who wanted to meet up more frequently, and share experiences more.

*We need to meet up more and discuss what we are all doing as Champions. We could take others ideas back to our areas and try them as we could all be making the same mistakes and not know. We need to get ideas from other Champions to try in our areas we need to know what works and what doesn't.*

*More meetings, knowing more about what is happening and more change and improvement for young carers.*

A few Champions were aware the funding for YCiF would be coming to an end soon and were concerned both that more young carers would not get the opportunities they had and also that any progress made for young carers could be lost.

*If there were more funding for more Champions and things available for all young carers. We are the last Champions so it is important to fight for more funding*

*It is a great experience and more should be able to do it, such a shame it will be stopping.*

*Funding for longer period. I am very anxious about the funding ending. We have done so much so far, will things stagnate or even back track?*

## **Conclusion**

The points in this section are the thoughts of Practical Participation.

Children and young people are often invited by adults to take part in events and activities on issues they identify. However within the work of YCiF it seems that the participation of young carers has developed beyond this to having integrity and be driven by young carers themselves.

The aims of YCiF are that:

- young carers are enabled to get their voices heard at England wide level in order to inform the future national and local sector policy.
- young carers have improved confidence, skills and knowledge particularly at key transition points for education, training and improving employability.
- public awareness opportunities are generated to improve public understanding and positive attitudes towards young carers.
- national and local systems are influenced to deliver support via standardised identification, assessment and whole family joined up support.

From this evaluation it seems that the first two of these objectives have been well met. Each year learning from and building on the achievements of the previous year. Whilst as always more can be done, the Champions feel that their participation is not an end in itself, but lies at the heart of moving forward for young carers to improve their lives and make a difference in ways that are important to them. Champions also feel that they have been supported in developing the skills to equip them to get their voices heard as young carers and that the confidence, knowledge and skills they have gained also help them in their lives overall. Whilst it is not possible to show a direct link between the work of the Champions, some young carers, though not all, do feel that there has



been an increase in public awareness and improvements in their support in their schools – the areas the Champions are active.

With regard to the objectives about public awareness and support systems, there is evidence from young carers that there have been improvements in these areas. YCiF has worked extensively with the Champions, young carers and the professionals that work with them and this report should be considered, alongside other evaluation and evidence of impact, such as the evaluation of the Hidden exhibition, follow up on the NHS 'Pinky Pledges', the schools awards and all other aspects of work associated with YCiF.

### **The last word**

The final stage of the evaluation was sharing a summary of this report with a group of 5 young carers (2 of whom were champions) and asking them to consider what they thought were the key points from the evaluation. The young people then made a short video about the evaluation, the key points and their thoughts for next steps. The video can be seen at:

Drawing on the findings, the group made the following recommendations:

- Organisations need to take note and implement the law.
- Maintain the skills the Champions have learnt and teach other young carers these skills.
- Spread the word and create a wider community of Champions for young carers.
- Share what we have learnt with young people and professionals to increase awareness
- Make sure people keep their promises.

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August 2016