

THE COMMONWEALTH CHARTER FOR YOUNG CARERS



Young carers from across the Commonwealth have developed this Charter, grounded in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Young carers in every country look after someone in their family who has an illness or a disability or other condition. Sometimes they look after the whole family. Young carers are children and young people first and should be free to develop emotionally and physically and to take full advantage of opportunities for educational achievement and life success.

"It is important to involve young carers in all aspects of policy making and decision making. We have a voice - listen to us!"

AS YOUNG CARERS FROM AROUND THE COMMONWEALTH WE ASK THAT WE:

- Are listened to and our views and culture are respected.
- Do not face discrimination as a carer or for our family situation.
- Have our physical health and emotional needs acknowledged and assessed.
- Have a right to an assessment of our needs separate from the needs of the person we care for.
- Have the right support given to the person we care for, so we don't have to provide excessive care which impacts on our own health and wellbeing.
- Have practical support and help offered including respite care.
- Are protected from psychological and physical harm.
- Have the right to education, time to focus on our studies and be offered real choices in accessing further education and future aspirations.
- Have the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities.
- Have a home that is suitable and safe for us and our family.

Understand how we feel and what we need.

Young carers should be treated equally... no one should be judged because of their family situations.

Being a young carer can be challenging and sometimes we all need a little support and time out, just to be ourselves and relax.

It's hard ... trying to find a balance in life - juggling everything we have to do.

Adults who work with us should know about who we care for and how it might affect us.

We want schools to respect and understand the issues we have to deal with at home!

THERE ARE YOUNG CARERS ALL AROUND THE WORLD AND IN EVERY COUNTRY.

They look after someone in their family who has an illness or a disability or other conditions. Sometimes they look after the whole family. Young carers have told us that they may miss out on things that other children and young people get to do. Sometimes they may feel that nobody else understands what they have to do to look after their family.

In some countries there are support groups for young carers and professionals who understand their needs. We want to make sure that more people, including country leaders, all around the world, know about young carers and understand what they need and what would help them.

Young carers are usually children under 18 but will often need support as they transition to adulthood. Guidance and ages may vary according to each country's criteria.

YOUNG CARERS UNDER 18 AS CHILDREN AND CARERS HAVE ALL THE RIGHTS IN THE UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD, REGARDLESS OF THEIR PERSONAL OR FAMILY SITUATION.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) has been agreed by the United Nations (UN) which is a multinational organisation created to encourage countries to work together. It promotes peace and security and agrees people's human rights. The Convention outlines what rights children should have, and how countries should protect and support children. It is not like a national law, but it does provide guidance for best practice, and most countries have agreed to follow this. The UNCRC defines a child as anyone under the age of 18 – so everyone under the age of 18 can enjoy the rights in it, regardless of their personal situation or circumstances.

Find the UNCRC [here. Convention on the Rights of the Child | OHCHR](#)

YOUNG CARERS AROUND THE COMMONWEALTH TOLD US THAT THEY EXPERIENCE:

- Lack of access to education which impacts on qualifications and life chances/ aspirations
- Lack of support and understanding from teachers and health and social care professionals
- Emotional & social stigma
- Having to grow up quicker than they should have to
- Poor physical and mental health
- They also told us that they feel they often have skills that other young people do not have, and these are transferable for a successful independent life. They sometimes feel they are seen only as a young carer rather than young person with potential and a full life ahead of them.

With help from a number of young carers across the Commonwealth we have written a draft '**CHARTER FOR YOUNG CARERS**'. This is a list of their priorities and is grounded in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

CHARTER FOR YOUNG CARERS

Young carers from around the Commonwealth ask that we:

- **Are listened to and our views and culture are respected**

Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously. As young carers, we need to be heard, listened to, believed and consulted and to have self-determination and choice - to be children, carers, or both. We usually have the best insight and experience in the cared-for person's needs, therefore our voice should be heard and taken into consideration when professionals are assessing health and needs of the person we care for. All too often we are not consulted.

- **Do not face discrimination as a carer or for our family situation**

Young carers must be treated fairly... we shouldn't be judged because of our family situations. Governments must do all they can to make sure every child who is a young carer can still enjoy their rights by creating systems and passing laws that promote and protect our rights

- **Have our physical health and emotional needs acknowledged and assessed**

Every child has the right to the best possible health. Health agencies need to ensure that training and information are given to all relevant practitioners so that they can identify us as young carers and offer or signpost our family to appropriate support.

- **Have a right to an assessment of our needs separate from the needs of the person we care for**

Our own needs should be acknowledged and assessed. Practical support and help is often required.

- **Have the right support given to the person we care for, so we don't have to provide excessive care which impacts on our own health and wellbeing**

An assessment also needs to identify what appropriate or additional support is needed for the cared-for person. If the cared-for person often doesn't meet the high thresholds for support/care in some countries, this leaves us in an inappropriate or excessive and demanding caring role.

- **Have practical support and help offered including respite care**

This should include those of us who care for our siblings.

- **Are protected from psychological and physical harm.**

All organisations that work with or for young people should do what is best for young carers as well and to protect us from psychological and physical harm.

- **Have the right to education, time to focus on our studies and be offered real choices in accessing further education and future aspirations**

We have the right to education. It is not always realised that we need time to focus on our studies and our future and young carers over 16 need to be offered real choices in accessing further education. We want schools to respect and understand the issues we have to deal with at home and to promote more awareness and tolerance of disability and illness.

- **Have the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities.**

Every child has the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities. Young carers should not have to lose our childhoods. We should be informed and given choices about whether we wish to care and how we wish to be identified and supported.

- **Have a home that is suitable and safe for us and our family.**

Young carers, like all children, have the right to a standard of living that is good enough to meet our needs. Families need help to provide this, including government help where possible.

“ABOVE ALL ASK US WHAT WE NEED AND LISTEN TO US!”

The Commonwealth Organisation for Social Work (COSW), working with others has been supporting young carer programmes for almost 20 years and sponsored a consultation with young people in several countries to develop this Commonwealth Charter. They want more people, including country leaders to know about young carers and understand what they need and what would help them. This draft Charter is being promoted in the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 2022 in Rwanda. Please distribute the Charter widely and send comments to:- www.cosw.info/contact/

Find out more at: - www.cosw.info