



Young Carers

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INTRODUCTION

- The purpose of this presentation is to provide an overview of young carers both in an overseas context and the implications of this for children and young people in New Zealand who are providing care for family members.
- The hope for the presentation is that it will extend curiosity about young carers and invite questions about how we respond to the needs of families where children and young people are caring.

Young Carers – A Definition

- Young carers are children and young people under 18 who provide or intend to provide care, assistance or support to another family member. They carry out, often on a regular basis, significant and substantial caring tasks and assume a level of responsibility which would usually be associated with an adult. The person receiving care is often a parent but can be a sibling, grandparent or other relative who is disabled, has some chronic illness, mental health problem or other condition connected with a need for care, support or supervision. (Becker, 2000)

A History of Young Carers

- Initial research about young carers took place in the UK in the late 80's and early 90's. Ongoing research has resulted in legislation and support systems being established for young carers in the UK.
- Australia has followed a UK lead and has undertaken their own studies regarding young carers. They also have established systems that actively support the need of young carers and their families.
- Other countries, including New Zealand, are now looking at the issue of young carers in their own cultural context.

What Do Young Carers Do?

- Young Carers may perform tasks that are typical for most children and young people in families. They are however engaged in exaggerated levels of care and undertake other tasks that set them aside from what could be the norm. Their tasks may include:
 - Domestic duties such as cleaning and preparing meals
 - Intimate care such as bathing, showering and toileting
 - Caring for their siblings
 - Interpreting for the person they are caring for and accompanying them to doctors and hospital appointments
 - Managing finances
 - Providing emotional support
- The nature of these care tasks is dependant on the illness or disability of the care recipient.

What are the Impacts of Caring

- Caring roles for children can take on both positive and negative meaning for them.
- Positive effects are that caring at an early age can promote maturity, develop life skills and build strong relationships. Young carers can have sense of pride and self worth in their care role.
- Negative effects of caring can be:
 - poor physical health arising from increased stress, physical care tasks such as inappropriate or incorrect lifting and limited sleep
 - vulnerable mental health and impaired psychosocial development because of stress, isolation and low self esteem.
 - limited social participation as a result of being alienated and isolated due to the physical and emotional demands of the caring role
 - disrupted participation and under-achievement at school.
 - Poor transition to the workforce due to educational underachievement, delayed career choices, problems in finding appropriate work and in combining caring with paid employment

Constraints to Identifying Young Carers

- Systems are not set up to easily recognise or respond to young carers.
- Children are often socialized into their care role and do not identify with the term young carer.
- Families are fearful of the involvement of care and protection agencies.
- Parents are often silenced by guilt that children and young people are providing care.
- Children and young people worry they will experience bullying and harassment from their peers if they disclose their care role.
- Families have beliefs and values that caring is a family responsibility. Family pride can limit a willingness or acceptance of help.

Rights of Young Carers

- Young carers rights to information, assistance, protection and full participation in the opportunities in childhood and youth are enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. (UNCROC). New Zealand was a signatory to this in 2000.
- Young Carers also have the right to self determination and choice (to be a child, a carer or both). They have the right to stop physically caring. (Dearden and Becker, 1993)

Young Carers in the Context of Their Families

- Early research of young carers had a child centred focus. More recent research has taken a holistic family focus.
- Young carers are inextricably linked with their families so therefore need to be supported in the family context.
- Positive interventions with children and families by professionals can make a significant difference to the well being of all family members and can prevent children and young people from having to be placed in unpaid caring roles.

Supporting Young Carers

What do they need?

- Personal and peer support including having the opportunity to spend time with other young carers.
- Information about the illness or disability of the care recipient and having the opportunity to take part in care plans.
- Awareness in the community of illness and disability. Awareness about the young carers role and how it is important to them.
- Better understanding in the school system about young caring.
- Time out.
- Availability of individual counselling if it is required. Also the chance for family counselling and mediation to deal with potential conflicts in the home.

Young Carers in a NZ Context.

How do we respond to the issue of young carers?

- Relevant Ministries and NGO's need to work together to raise awareness of young carers.
- A national survey should be conducted to establish the numbers of children caring in New Zealand and to understand what domestic and caring roles they undertake.
- Funded research should be supported to enable a broad understanding of the impact on families where young caring is involved. This research should acknowledge the diversity of cultures, including tangata whenua, in New Zealand.
- Organisations need to take a closer look at the whole of family needs during their assessment processes particularly where there is an illness or disability present.
- An interagency response to young carers should be encouraged.
- Young carers need to be recognised as a group of children and young people in their own right, with rights.