

**Forces Children Scotland supports children and young people from serving personnel, reservist and veteran families to reach their potential and thrive. We achieve this by working collaboratively across sectors to drive improvements which reflect and support the unique challenges they face. We amplify their voices, ensuring they are heard and influence the development of policy and practice**

**Young Carers - There are around one million young carers in the UK.<sup>i</sup>** A young carer is anyone under 18 who provides care for someone with a physical, mental illness, or disability, including addictions.<sup>ii</sup> They may care for a parent, sibling, or grandparent, helping with tasks like cooking, cleaning, finances, or emotional support.

Research shows that **young carers are more likely to experience mental health problems**, such as anxiety and depression, and face poorer academic, health and social outcomes.<sup>iii</sup>

Carers Trust identifies the **need for young carers to have time out** from their caring responsibilities to rest, recharge and focus on themselves.<sup>iv</sup>

**Young Carers in Armed Forces Families** – In Scotland, **over 13,000 children** have a parent in the armed forces or who is a veteran. Young people from forces families are **less likely to be identified as young carers**, and as a result **may receive less support** than young carers from civilian families.<sup>v</sup> **The challenges of being a young carer are amplified in armed forces families**, where moves and deployments can change the carer's role unexpectedly. They may suddenly become a young carer if their parent is injured in service.

*"It's hard being a young carer."*

As with many challenges relating to children and young people from armed forces and veteran families, **not enough is known about this group's experiences and daily lives**. We do not even know the number of young carers in armed forces and veteran families<sup>vi</sup>.

**Identifying Forces Young Carers**– Forces families can relocate a lot, sometimes as frequently as every two years. As a young carer, this may mean it is **difficult to find support** in a new area **or for professionals to identify** these young carers in time. Some young carers may not even realise what they are doing for their family member is considered care.

*"A lot of young carers in forces families don't even know that they are one and they don't have the support out there." Marie*

Adults, such as those in schools, need to **understand what it means to be a forces young carer** and recognise and support them.

*"The school is not sure how to handle when I say I need to go home because mums in seizure"*

## Forces children Scotland Young carers from Forces Families



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*"If you miss school, you won't know everything. My dad had cancer, so I missed school seeing him or taking him to the hospital"*

*"My current friends don't always understand why I can't go out or why I'm feeling down"*

**Deployment** – When a parent is deployed, young people can take on additional caring responsibilities. For many, these additional responsibilities are seen as a positive aspect of forces life but it could mean added stress for some young people, impacting schoolwork. They can experience increased isolation and difficulties maintaining social connections.

*"Since I was born, my dad has been in the Navy. Although I love what my dad does, this has an effect on my caring roles and my family as a whole. Sometimes it is difficult as I don't have the support from my dad to help my mum, brothers and me. If my mum is working or isn't feeling well, it's on me to make dinner, look after my brothers and help my mum." Gracie-jo*

Caring responsibilities can change significantly during and between deployments, meaning that support needs to be responsive and flexible.

**Staying in contact** with the deployed parent and with the person they are caring for is particularly important for forces young carers. Children and young people's experience of separation from an early age can build their problem-solving skills and resilience but it can make some children hypervigilant. For these children, **access to a mobile phone** at all times, including school, **can help improve their wellbeing and reduce their anxieties**. Consideration needs to be given to the unique experiences of forces young carers during the debate on mobile phones in schools. **A blanket ban could be unintentionally detrimental** for this group of children and young people.

*"I think that if the mobile phone ban was made law in school, it would impact forces children as they wouldn't know what was going on until they arrived home! This is already be a scared and worried time but plus the stress of not knowing what's going on could impact that child further and distract them from focusing on their work!"- Isla*

**Impact on wellbeing** – Being in a forces family can offer positive mental health aspects, such as a strong community, sense of identity and new experiences. These can sometimes help share some of the caring load. The pressures of being a forces young carer can also **lead to stress, isolation, and poor mental health**.

Young carers often say how stressed and tired they are, as they find it hard to juggle their home lives with school, college or a job.<sup>vii</sup> Forces young carers may experience other life changes such as family breakups, bereavements, and uncertainty due to forces life, which add to the constant pressures they face. They can **often feel alone and isolated**.

**Respite Breaks** – It can be more **difficult to access respite breaks** when a parent is deployed or working away from home for extended periods of time for training or a posting. At these times, their

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Registered Address: C/O The Melting Pot, 15 Calton Road, Edinburgh, EH8 8DL



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**caring responsibilities may significantly increase,** making respite more needed but harder to create the space to access it.

*“Not a lot of time for myself as I make sure mum is ok, look after my 4-year-old sister, school and exams and doing household things to keep it tidy”*

**Accessing support** - Due to frequent moves, young carers may not be close to extended family, and **local support can be hard to find.** In areas like Moray and Helensburgh, **the lack of sufficient early years, before and after school and holiday care** can add caring for younger siblings to their responsibilities. **Poor transport links** in rural and remote communities can also make it difficult for forces young carers to access in-person groups. The young people tell us that this **has an impact on their ability to socialise, take part in community activities and find the time for schoolwork.**

*“If I had gotten [the support] sooner a lot of the stress that I felt would have been dealt with.” Erin*

**Support from third-sector organisations is often more accessible than MOD support,** which can be limited to deployment periods, making forward planning difficult. When moving, families may face **delays in securing statutory support,** and the different processes and eligibility for state support across the home nations can present additional challenges for young carers.

Some families who are happy with the support and services in place, may choose to stay in one place and for the serving parent to travel home when they can. While this means a continuation of support, it also means that the young carer may have additional caring responsibilities due to the absence of the service person.

**Transitions – When moving, families may lose support** from health and social services and links to a supportive and active young carers network. **Getting the right support put in place quickly** can be difficult due to a lack of information, different local authority processes, eligibility criteria, or waiting lists for services. **Local support services may not know that they have moved into the area<sup>viii</sup>.** The break in support and lack of informal support can mean that the caring responsibilities increase for the young person at a time when they are managing several other transitions, such as starting at a new school.

When a serving person **leaves the forces** through a medical discharge, some young people may become a young carer, at the same time that they and their parent makes the transition to veteran life. This can **impact their identity and wellbeing.** They are **harder again to identify** and ensure they have the appropriate support.

**Forces Children Scotland support** - We offer a **Young Carers Fund** to support young carers in armed forces families. Our **Ignite Campaign** raises awareness and provides resources, while our services ensure young carers are **connected to local services** quickly.

### **Calls to action:**

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- The Scottish Government and MOD must collaborate to **identify the number of forces young carers and their needs** so that better interventions and measures can be put in place to improve their health, wellbeing and access to support.
- MSPs should ensure forces young carers are **signposted to services at key transition points**, including moves, deployments, and medical discharges.
- **Appropriate, independent family support needs to be in place** to ensure these families thrive. **Childcare must be in place** to reduce additional caring responsibilities for forces young carers. **Transport links are strengthened** in rural and remote areas near forces bases.
- The Scottish Government should **ensure forces young carers are assessed for a Young Carers Statement** and **support is easily transferred** between local authorities.
- The Scottish Government must work with Local Authorities to **uphold the duties under the Armed Forces Covenant** and improve **support for forces young carers**.

<sup>i</sup> [The Young Carers Covenant - Carers Trust](#)

<sup>ii</sup> The Children's Society, Evidencing the Need: Young Carers in Armed Forces Families (September 2017), page 8. [young-carers-armed-forces-families.pdf \(childrenssociety.org.uk\)](#)

<sup>iii</sup> The Children's Society, Evidencing the Need: Young Carers in Armed Forces Families (September 2017), page 8-9. [young-carers-armed-forces-families.pdf \(childrenssociety.org.uk\)](#)

<sup>iv</sup> [Young Carers Action Day 2025: Resources](#)

<sup>v</sup> The Children's Society, Young Carers in Armed Forces Families [young-carers-armed-forces-families.pdf](#)

<sup>vi</sup> Andrew Selous, Professor Janet Walker, Dr Gabriela Misca. Living in our Shoes: Understanding the needs of UK Armed Forces families, (2020), page 78. [Living in our shoes: understanding the needs of UK Armed Forces families - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>vii</sup> [young-carers-wellbeing.pdf](#)

<sup>viii</sup> Young Carers in Armed Forces Families: Evidencing the Need, The Children's Society (September 2017) [young-carers-armed-forces-families.pdf \(childrenssociety.org.uk\)](#), page 8.

