



If you are struggling to improve attendance and engagement in your school, it's definitely worth finding out what responsibilities students may be taking on at home, says Jayne Pearson...

# Who CARES?

**G**aribaldi College, where I am the attendance manager, is located in a deprived area of Mansfield, Nottinghamshire. I work as a part of the Support, Welfare and Attendance Team (SWAT). We support students in all year groups with behavioural or pastoral issues at home that might be impacting on their education. My role involves getting students into school as often as possible, monitoring attendance, encouraging punctuality, reporting to the Senior Leadership Team and governors, and monitoring legislation with regard to attendance. Supporting young carers is an important part of this; with figures suggesting that as many as one in twelve secondary school pupils could have caring responsibilities it is vital to ensure the right awareness and support is in place so members of this vulnerable group don't miss out on a good education that is the right of every young person.

Young carers are children and young people who are caring for parents with a long-term illness or disability, mental health issues, or problems with drug or alcohol abuse. Sometimes the parents' difficulties mean that young carers have to care for younger siblings or grandparents as well as their parent. They carry out a range of household tasks such as shopping, paying bills, reading letters for parents, and chores, as well as nursing tasks like administering medication or providing personal care. Many also provide emotional support to the person they care for.



## ABOUT THE EXPERT

JAYNE PEARSON HAS WORKED IN EDUCATION SINCE 2005 STARTING AS AN OFFICE ASSISTANT AT A LOCAL PRIMARY SCHOOL. SHE IS NOW ATTENDANCE MANAGER AT GARIBALDI COLLEGE, WORKING WITH INDIVIDUALS AND SMALL GROUPS, AND LEADING ASSEMBLIES FOR WHOLE YEAR GROUPS.

*"A young carer becomes vulnerable when the level of care-giving and responsibility to the person in need of care becomes excessive or inappropriate for that child risking impact on his or her emotional or physical well being or educational achievement and life chances."*  
(Working together to Support Young Carers, ADSS/ADCS Memorandum of Understanding, 2009)

Official statistics estimate that there are over 175,000 young carers in the UK ([carers.org/what-carer](http://carers.org/what-carer)). However, a BBC study by Professor Saul Becker at Nottingham University shows the number could be as high as 700,000 – or 8% of secondary school pupils.

Further research by Professor Becker shows the main educational difficulties young carers face, including punctuality, attendance and problems with homework/coursework. Additional problems include access to extra curricular activities, low attainment, anxiety and fatigue. Ofsted has highlighted that young carers are one group who are more likely to fall into the category of not being in education, employment or training (NEET).

## Spotting the signs

There are particular identifying factors related to being a young carer that school staff can look out for, which may include attendance concerns, underachievement, difficulties with homework, emotional health and wellbeing



indicators, lack of parental engagement with school and a reluctance to talk about home life.

My role monitoring attendance means that I'm able to pick up on patterns of absence. Attendance is one of the key ways to identify a young person with a caring role. For instance, if absence seems to be a bit more than a cold every couple of weeks, school should look into why this might be. I would usually arrange an attendance appointment with the student to talk about why he or she is missing school.

Part of my role at Garibaldi College is to have one-to-one sessions with students who are regularly absent from school. During one of these sessions I spoke to Amy (not her real name), who was in year 8 at the time. She was absent at least once a week and on the days that she did attend she would arrive late. Invariably she would get a telling off from my colleague on the reception desk. Amy never replied and would just write "overslept" on her sign in slip.

During the session I started to complete an Action Plan with her to try to give her strategies to help her arrive in school on time. This included going through her morning routine. It was at this point that she disclosed the need to get mum out of bed, to the toilet and ensure she had a flask of tea ready to last her the morning. I was taken aback that she had been doing all this without moaning about it and still trying to get into school on time.

## Extra support

Amy was the first young carer I had come across and I didn't know what could be done to help her. I discussed the situation with her year manager and was signposted to Family Action, a national charity providing services to disadvantaged and vulnerable families. They are commissioned by Nottinghamshire County Council to provide the local young carers service, which includes building partnerships with local schools so that young carers are supported in the classroom as well as at home. They were very helpful, telling me what information I needed to forward to them. Amy started to receive one to one support and invitations to group activities.

I was then approached by a member of the Senior Leadership Team and asked to be the lead professional for young carers at Garibaldi College and went on some training from Family Action. This helped me to identify ways of supporting Amy in school; she was no longer marked as late if she arrived within a certain time frame, which took pressure off her getting mum ready in the morning and also allowed her attendance record to look better (this was especially important during year 11 when there was a possibility that an employer would ask to see the record). Amy was given longer deadlines for completing homework if she was struggling; this was usually when her mum's illness was particularly bad. The fact we were aware of the situation and able to put these very simple strategies in place reduced the pressure on Amy at school.



FAMILY ACTION HAS BEEN A LEADING PROVIDER OF SERVICES TO DISADVANTAGED AND SOCIALLY ISOLATED FAMILIES SINCE 1869. THE ORGANISATION WORKS WITH OVER 45,000 CHILDREN AND FAMILIES A YEAR BY PROVIDING PRACTICAL, EMOTIONAL AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT THROUGH OVER 100 SERVICES BASED IN COMMUNITIES ACROSS ENGLAND. A FURTHER 150,000 PEOPLE BENEFIT FROM ITS EDUCATIONAL GRANTS AND INFORMATION SERVICE.

FAMILY ACTION IS CURRENTLY CAMPAIGNING FOR BETTER SUPPORT FOR YOUNG CARERS AT SCHOOL. YOU CAN FIND OUT MORE ABOUT ITS WORK IN SCHOOLS AND BE BOTHERED! CAMPAIGN AT FAMILY-ACTION.ORG.UK/BEBOHERED

After doing the initial training I was asked by Family Action to take part in the Young Carers Quality Standard – a programme to make Garibaldi and other schools and colleges a centre of excellence for supporting young carers.

Putting the right policies and procedures in place is really important to ensure that you can develop a whole school culture that cares about young carers. We have procedures in place for absence and lateness and it is about interrogating these to make sure they also allow us to flag up any potential pupils who have caring roles so they can be signposted to support from Family Action or referred to our school counsellor here, funded through the Pupil Premium. Provision at Garibaldi for young carers includes (but is not limited to):

- Access to a telephone during breaks and lunchtime, to phone home
- Negotiable deadlines for homework/coursework (when needed)
- Access to homework clubs (where these are available)
- Lunchtime detentions rather than after school detentions (where possible)
- Arrangements for schoolwork to be sent home (when there is a genuine crisis). Any approved absence for a young carer will be time limited.
- Access for parents with impaired mobility.
- Alternative communication options for parents who are sensory impaired or housebound.
- Advice to parents if there are difficulties in transporting a young carer to school.

We're also working on a Support Forum in school – having spoken to some of our young carers they are really up for it, saying they would feel more supported talking to someone their age in the same situation than just talking to me. I'm also going to include information in our Human Development Studies lessons so we can raise the issue with all students.

My top tips for anyone looking to improve support for this vulnerable group of young people would be to build links with local agencies providing young carers with support. Make sure you snap up any training local young carers services offer and build good links with these services. Working with parents is also key to building a culture of trust that is so important if hidden young carers are to disclose their role. Another key factor is the support of the Senior Leadership Team to ensure that the policy is embedded into school life, not just a piece of paper. There are also lots of online resources to help you set up support for young carers in your school or college.

At Garibaldi we recognise that young carers may need extra support to ensure they have equal access to education. That's why we're reaching out to pupils and parents to make sure our vision of a good education for all becomes a reality.

## WHAT'S THE IMPACT?

DUE TO HIS OR HER RESPONSIBILITIES AT HOME, A YOUNG CARER MIGHT EXPERIENCE:

- > Being late or absent due to responsibilities at home
- > Concentration problems, anxiety or worry in school
- > Emotional distress
- > Tiredness in school
- > Lack of time for homework
- > Poor attainment
- > Physical problems such as back pain from lifting
- > False signs of maturity, because of assuming adult roles
- > Behavioural problems (taking out anger or frustration)
- > Lack of time for participation in extra-curricular activities
- > Isolation, too embarrassed to take friends home
- > Limited social skills
- > Bullying
- > Feeling that no one understands and that no support is available
- > Low self-esteem