

Time to be Heard for Young Adult Carers in Scotland



GOING HIGHER IN SCOTLAND

Supporting student carers in
higher education

Supporters' Campaign Guide 2015

Going Higher in Scotland Supporters' Campaign Guide

Thank you for downloading this campaign pack.

In it you will find out about:

- **who** young adult carers are
- **why** it's student carers' Time to be Heard and better supported in university
- some simple steps on **how** you can **add your support**.



Who are young adult carers?

Young adult carers are aged 14-25 and care, unpaid, for a family member or friend who, due to illness, disability, a mental health problem or an addiction, cannot cope without their support. There are at least 30,000 young adult carers in Scotland but we don't know exactly how many. Some may keep their caring role hidden or they may not even realise they are a carer so they don't seek help.

It is highly likely that there are young adult carers in every university, trying to complete their course to the best of their ability, just like their peers. However, they often experience additional challenges.

My name is Matthew and I am studying politics and sociology in my second year at university and I am a member of the university football team. There are heavy pressures in the life of a student, be it from the workload, meeting deadlines or limited finance. However another aspect hinders me as it does for many others across the UK.



Matthew's experience

I am also a young adult carer for my mother and father and have been for around 8 years now. They live back at home, away from university. The stress of worrying for their health and trying to be there for them whilst balancing university life hinders my ability to perform to the level I know I can.

I have higher levels of stress than others because of the constant worry for those back home. In particular, managing workload when I can't predict when they will need me. I also worry about finance, meaning I am often faced with saddening trade-offs.

On one occasion I received a call informing me that my father was due to be taken into theatre for a very risky operation. However the lack of emergency finance and the need to meet an essay deadline meant I could not even go to see my dad - potentially for the last time.

Knowing that I wouldn't get the emergency loan in the time needed I had no option but to sit and worry.

Fortunately he was ok but the stress of not being able to even see him whilst completing my essay really lowered the quality of work I submitted which, in the long run, really takes its toll on both myself and my degree.

I have also had to enquire about an emergency loan at a time when I couldn't even afford food until my pay cheque came in but I was referred to come back in another two days' time.

I feel my university could have helped me out by a quicker response rate and by providing emergency finance and flexible deadlines to stop the stress. This will ultimately improve my grades.

If a scheme was implemented regarding additional funding for student carers, I would have known that there were emergency funds so I could have seen my father.

A check on applications asking if the student is a carer would vastly improve the support provided from the outset, including counselling, finance options or other support. This would stop the need for the carer to approach staff, especially those feeling cautious or pessimistic.

I feel that universities have the potential to improve the lives of student and young adult carers by listening to Going Higher in Scotland and implementing strategies as a result. They need to learn more about the daily lives of student carers to really improve their mental and physical wellbeing as well as their standard of work.

The overall message I want universities to hear is to include a carer check on applications and the automatic offer of increased support from the start to the end of the student's degree.

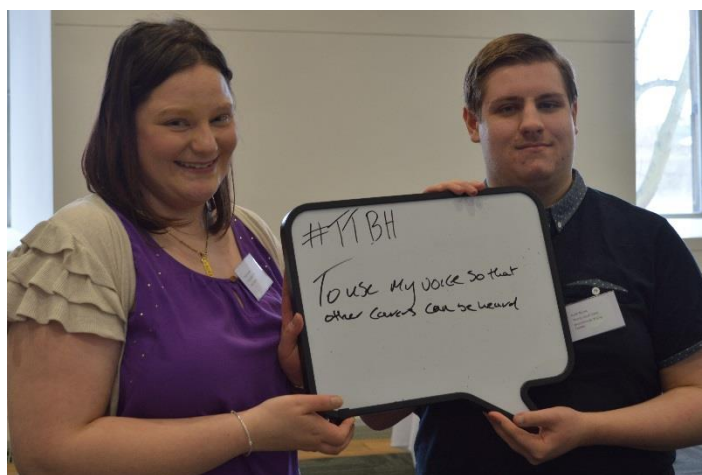
Campaign overview

On 4 July 2015 Carers Trust Scotland launched the national campaign, **Going Higher in Scotland**, at the Time to be Heard for Young Adult Carers in Scotland Summit at the University of Stirling.

Following research undertaken by Carers Trust, we found that student carers were four times more likely to drop out of Higher Education than those without caring responsibilities, The [*Bridging the Gap: Young Adult Carers in Scotland*](#) report highlighted recommendations for improved identification and support for student carers. This campaign was selected as an area of focus by Young Adult Carer Voice for Scotland, a peer elected national representative forum of young adult carers from across Scotland.

This campaign aims to raise awareness of young adult carers and the issues they experience. It will highlight the extremely challenging conditions endured by student carers that is negatively impacting on them being able to enter, sustain and meet their true potentials in Higher Education in Scotland. Carers provide an invaluable service to their cared for person/s, but also to their local community and to Scotland. It is Student Carers' Time to be Heard in Scotland.

As with all campaigns, the key success of Going Higher in Scotland relies on its supporters! Student and young adult carers across Scotland and their supporters are truly our strongest campaigning asset. With your help, we can make a very positive impact to the lives and experiences of student carers in Scotland.



This guide provides a range of different tools you can use to get involved with Going Higher in Scotland. We welcome you using your imagination to promote and support Going Higher in Scotland. But in order to run a strong campaign it is important that we are all are using the same key messages.

Key messages

There are estimated to be more than 375,000 young adult carers across the UK and over 30,000 young adult carers in Scotland. Carers of all ages, as providers of services, save the health and social care system in Scotland an estimated £10bn each year. Many student and young adult carers live on low incomes. Many student carers are juggling study, work and their caring responsibilities. They can rarely afford items beyond necessities and seldom have the opportunity to engage in student social life, unlike many of their peers.

Research undertaken by Carers Trust Scotlandⁱ found that student carers were generally providing a very high level of care and that:

- 39% rated their physical health as either 'just ok' or 'poor'
- 45% reported having mental health problems
- 56% were experiencing difficulties because of their caring role
- 16% were concerned that they might have to drop out of university
- 75% of respondents informed university staff of their caring role
- 45% said there was no-one at university who recognised them as a carer and helped them.

Forthcoming carers' legislation in Scotland should provide more formal rights and support options for carers of all ages. The Scottish Government is also currently undertaking a Commission on Widening Access in Higher Education.

Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning Angela Constance recently said:

*'The Scottish Government has been very clear that we want every child, whatever their background, to have an equal chance of benefiting from higher education.'*ⁱⁱ

This is an excellent time to raise awareness of student carers nationally and campaign for them to be better supported at university.

Campaign plan

This campaign is asking all universities to include student and young adult carers when they look at different groups that may need extra support to reach their potential.

We are asking universities to take three simple steps:

- **Identify** the number of student carers attending their university
- **Support** all student carers throughout their education to ensure they maintain good mental health, complete their course and achieve the best grades possible
- **Report** on the progress students are making in their university so that they can deliver appropriate support and showcase student carers' achievements.

Identify – what should be done?

- Student carers should become a prioritised group in Widening Access Strategies
- Ask students if they have unpaid caring responsibilities as part of the universities' annual admissions process
- Universities to reach out to young adult carers and promote their institution as a good place to study for carers.

Support – what should be done?

- Scottish Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS) extended the criteria of the Dependents Grant and Lone Parent Grant, which means some student carers may be entitled to additional grants. But many student carers have told us that this hasn't been promoted well to them. Universities and SAAS should promote this better to carers – both prospective and existing students
- Education staff and support staff at universities should undertake carer awareness training as standard or as part of their continued professional development
- Universities should develop their own student carer support policy
- Offer additional support for student carers who may be struggling to keep up with their studies.

Report – what should be done?

- Universities should report on the outcomes of student carers in their institutions
- Scottish Government should include student carer data in the information collected by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) to report on outcomes and destinations of students carers
- Share good practice with Carers Trust Scotland, so we can share this with young adult carers across Scotland and the UK.

What can I do to support Going Higher in Scotland?

Student and young adult carers and their supporters are our biggest strength to make Going Higher in Scotland a success. Below is a list of options of what you could do to promote and support Going Higher in Scotland:

- Post our campaign message on your social network communities:
"I'm supporting Going Higher in Scotland to unlock student carer potential #TTBH @CarersTrustScot"
- Use our Time to be Heard for Young Adult Carers hashtag **#TTBH** when sharing your campaign work on social media
- Tell your family and friends about Going Higher in Scotland and ask them to show their support too
- Write letters to your local MSP about the campaign and ask them to support Going Higher in Scotland
- Write letters to, and meet with, your local university about additional support for student carers
- Submit blog posts to Carers Trust Scotland about your campaign efforts
- Publicise these campaign efforts to local media sources
- Speak to carers groups and services in your local area about Going Higher in Scotland and encourage them to support the campaign too
- Keep Carers Trust Scotland updated on what you have been doing to promote and support Going Higher in Scotland. The campaign will be stronger if we can share practice and demonstrate widespread support.

Specific campaign packs

- **If you are the Students' Union Welfare Officer**, please take a look at the Students' Union Welfare Officers Going Higher in Scotland [campaign pack](#) to see how you could make student carers a priority for your university.
- **If you are a current student**, read [our tips](#) on how to get a meeting with your Students' Union Welfare Officer and how to make it productive.
- **If you are a carers' service**, please take a look at the Carers' Services Going Higher in Scotland [campaign pack](#) to see how you could make student carers a priority for your university.

Glossary

Students' Union Welfare Officer

Almost all universities will have a Students' Union. It is their job to ensure the university is aware of the issues that affect students and take action to address them by raising their concerns, for groups and for individuals.

If you want to add support for your campaign they will be a great place to start as they have the resources to spread the word about student carers. The Welfare Officer has a particular interest in the health and wellbeing of all students so talk to them first to see what they can do.

Sometimes their job title will be different so you might need to read their job descriptions and decide who you think is best to approach.

Widening Participation/Access Team

This is the team in each university which ensures that everyone is able to apply, attend and thrive at their university no matter what their family background is or their personal situation. It is important that they know how to attract young adult carers and support them throughout their time at university.

Student Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS)

This is an agency of the Scottish Government giving financial support to eligible students doing a course of Higher Education in the UK.

Student Support

Each university has a team to help with practical things like student finance and health and wellbeing. They need to be aware of how best to support student carers and the way their circumstances can differ from other students.

Student Advice Centre

If you are facing challenges at university, you should go to your Student Advice Centre. They are the one stop shop to find out where you can get the best support to improve your personal circumstances.

Vice Chancellor

This is the person with a lot of power within a university. They decide the priorities for the university and ensure that all the teams are working as well as they can. It is very important that every university's Vice Chancellor understands who student and young adult carers are and how important it is to support them from when they apply to when they graduate.

Student Liaison Committee

If you feel that your Students' Union is too big to go to then you can try your Student Liaison Committee. Most university departments will have them to link between students and the academic department – a bit like Students' Unions but just for subjects rather than the whole university.

You can ask if they want to show support for student and young adult carers in their department by supporting Going Higher in Scotland.

The details for your course staff liaison committee representative should be available on your university website.

Matter

This is a safe, online space for young adult carers aged 16-25 to share experiences with each other and receive one to one support from professionals. You can visit and join [here](#).

If you have any questions or concerns about the Going Higher in Scotland campaign or are looking for ideas on what else you could do to promote the campaign, please get in touch with Carers Trust Scotland and we will help you.

Just call 0141 285 7929 and ask for Paul Traynor (Young Adult Carer Policy and Campaigns Officer) or email: ptraynor@carers.org

ⁱ Sempik, J and Becker, S (2014) *Young Adult Carers at College and University* (London, Carers Trust)

ⁱⁱ <http://news.scotland.gov.uk/News/Commission-on-Widening-Access-188c.aspx>