

Swindon Young Carers gather at biggest ever national festival to enjoy a break from caring



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Young carers from **Swindon** joined thousands of others from across England at the biggest festival of its kind in Hampshire from 28–30 June, to enjoy a weekend of music, arts, activities and a rare chance to take a break from their caring responsibilities.

Just last month, shocking new Census data was published revealing that a staggering 166,000 children in England are caring for their parents, siblings and family members.

Despite this being the first official statistic to be published in ten years, it is likely to massively underrepresent the true picture. Many young carers remain [hidden from the view](#) of authorities, according to the Young Carers in Focus (YCiF) partnership, led by The Children’s Society and funded by the Big Lottery Fund.

YMCA Fairthorne Manor and The Children’s Society held the 14th annual Young Carer’s Festival, attracting more than 1700 children this year, to give young carers the chance to enjoy some down time, have fun, relax, socialise and forget their responsibilities for the weekend.

The festival also provided young carers with the opportunity to meet and create a powerful, united voice about the issues they face. This year’s festival came just as Edward Timpson MP announced that the government will be developing greater support in law for young carers and their entire families*.

One of the young carers that came along said “This weekend for me has been amazing! I have really enjoyed spending time with others that have similar difficulties. Over the weekend there have been loads to do! The fireworks were so beautiful and were on time with the music. Everybody got on well with each other which was lovely, I’ve so many memories over this weekend and those memories will stay with me forever. So thankful for everyone that has made this weekend away amazing”.

The Children’s Society’s Chief Executive, Matthew Reed, says: “We know from our years of experience that caring can cost children dearly. It is vital that young carers are given the support they desperately need and the chance to enjoy a break from their responsibilities at home.

“It’s great to have joined this year’s festival and met many young carers from across England, to listen to their stories about the issues they face. We are delighted that government is giving a very clear signal that young carers and their families need greater support in law to prevent them from caring in the first place. All children must be allowed to thrive and enjoy their childhoods.”

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Edward Timpson MP, Minister for Children and Families, says: “Young carers do an incredible job of looking after their families and that deserves recognition and respect. But more than that they are entitled to enjoy the same opportunities as other young people, to get a good education, to be healthy, and get a chance to socialise and relax. Our aim is to make sure that we do all we can to make their lives easier and remove any barriers that may be stopping young carers and their families from getting the life-changing support they need. We’ll be looking at how the law for young carers might be changed and how we can make sure that children’s law works properly with adults’ law to support the ‘whole family’ approach.”

Dr Maggie Atkinson, The Children’s Commissioner for England, says: “I was delighted to have been invited to this year’s festival and enjoyed meeting and listening to young carers. We must thank and support young carers for the selfless work they do, day in and day out, but as a society we must make sure that we do not let their contribution absolve us of responsibility for providing support to the adults they care for. Ideally, we would like to see a society in which enough support is provided to adults so that young carers are free not to have to care should they not wish to do so.”

Claire Percival, Community Projects Manager, YMCA Fairthorne Manor, says: “The festival is now in its 14th year and continues to grow in popularity. The recent Census results highlight the need to continue the Young Carers Festival and help to ensure even more young people get the chance to relax, have fun and enjoy a break from their caring responsibilities.”

The Children’s Society argues that 2013 provides a once-in-a-generation opportunity for the government to consolidate key adult and children’s legislation to make sure children are prevented from taking on inappropriate caring.

Young carers at the festival were consulted to find out how legislation could be improved, to give them a voice and a platform to influence national policy and guidance for young carers and their families.

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Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you would like photographs from the festival, to arrange case study material or set up interviews with our spokespeople or young carers.

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Notes to editors

- The introduction of the Children and Families Bill and the Care Bill represent significant opportunities to improve the long-term outcomes for young carers, by offering greater support in law for young carers and their families. Both of these Bills are currently passing through parliament
- The Young Carers Festival was established in 2000, when 600 young carers attended the very first gathering. Now in its 14th year, the festival attracts more than 1600 children every year. The weekend is organised by The Children's Society and YMCA Fairthorne Manor. The festival is for young carers – by invitation only – no general public access
- YMCA Fairthorne Manor offers residential outdoor adventure and team-building programmes to schools and community groups from across the UK throughout the year. YMCA Fairthorne Manor actively engages with children and young people, providing positive experiences that will assist them into adulthood
- The Young Carers in Focus (YCiF) programme, led by The Children's Society, brings partners together from YMCA Fairthorne Manor, DigitalMe, Rethink Mental Illness and The Fatherhood Institute. The four-year programme, running until 2016, is funded by the Big Lottery Fund
- YCiF aims to give young carers a voice so they can share their experiences and improve public understanding about the issues they face. More than 200 children are being recruited as "champions" to help raise awareness. Messages from YCiF will reach 450,000 young people in over 9,000 schools over four years, through the www.makewav.es/ycif site
- The Children's Society's [Hidden from View](#) report analyses government data tracking 15,000 children across England. It reveals the significant long-term impact that caring has on a child's life, confirming The Children's Society's experience of working with young carers and their families throughout England
- Swindon Carers Centre is part of the national network of the Carers Trust with 144 such centres across the UK
- It offers help and support to people in Swindon who have caring responsibilities
- There are approximately 17,000 carers of all ages (including children and young people) in the Borough of Swindon and Swindon Carers Centre is available to provide them with much needed support, help and information
- Swindon Carers Centre has been awarded the PQASSO Quality Mark Level 2 and the Carers Trust Level 2 Centre of Excellence Award
- For more information: www.swindoncarers.org.uk www.facebook.com/swindoncarerscentre or follow us on Twitter @swindoncarers

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