

Young carers (young people under the age of 18 who take on responsibilities for looking after someone in their family) are particularly likely to be affected by alcohol misuse. Many young carers are in a caring role for a parent who misuses alcohol. Young Carers Projects are the specialist service for this group, providing breaks, clubs, mentoring and family support, but they are able to work most effectively where they have a good relationship with their local substance misuse support agencies. Unfortunately, many agencies which support adults with drinking problems are better at focusing on their clients as individuals than on their clients as parents and family members. Alcohol support workers will often be unaware of the caring role being taken on by their client's children, which can begin at ages as young as 5 and can involve emotional support, clearing up after binges, looking after younger siblings and all the household chores. The effects on young carers can include isolation, social exclusion, failure at school, bullying and ill health. As a result, young carers can grow up to be socially excluded adults at risk of substance misuse themselves.

Most Young Carers Projects take a whole-family approach to supporting young carers; it is essential that other agencies adopt this approach as well.

My organisation is a network of 61 Young Carers Projects UK-wide. If you would like examples of where joint-working has been effective and where it has not, I would be happy to help.

Yours,

Alex Fox, Young Carers Development Co-ordinator  
The Princess Royal Trust for Carers