



# Experience of Young Carers

Gloucestershire County Council

Pupil Wellbeing  
Survey 2024

## Introduction

A young carer is a person under 18 who helps to look after a relative with a disability, illness, mental health condition, or drug or alcohol problem.

Young carers, often look after one of their parents or care for a brother or sister.

They may do extra jobs in and around the home, such as cooking, cleaning or helping someone get dressed and move around. They may also give a lot of physical help to a parent, brother or sister who's disabled or ill.

Along with doing things to help their brother or sister, they may be giving them and their parents emotional support, too.

Young carers may miss out on opportunities to play and spend time with their friends and classmates. They may feel isolated from their friends because they do not have as much free time and they may often be thinking about the person they look after.

Action for Children<sup>1</sup> detail some of the impacts of being a young carer such as missing more education than their peers, and not being able to spend as much time on their school work. They also report young carers often feel isolated, lonely and have difficulties making friends.

They also highlighted the additional strain on young carers mental wellbeing.

## The Pupil Wellbeing Survey

The Pupil Wellbeing Survey (PWS) and Online Pupil Survey™(OPS) is a biennial survey that has been undertaken with Gloucestershire school children since 2006. Children and young people participate in years 4, 5 and 6 in Primary schools; years 8 and 10 in Secondary schools; and year 12 in Post 16 settings such as Sixth Forms and Colleges. A large proportion of mainstream, special and independent schools, colleges and educational establishments take part – representing 57.2% of pupils in participating year groups in 2024. The PWS asks a wide variety of questions about children's characteristics, behaviours and lived experience that could have an impact on their overall wellbeing. The 2024 PWS was undertaken between January and April 2024.

## Limitations and caveats of the survey

Not all children and young people who are resident in Gloucestershire attend educational establishments in the county and similarly not all children and young people attending educational establishments in Gloucestershire are residents in the county. It is therefore important to remember this analysis is based on the pupil population not the resident population.

Gloucestershire is a grammar authority, has a number of notable independent schools and several mainstream schools very close to the county's boundary these all attract young people from out of county. This results in the school population (particularly at secondary phase) having slightly different characteristics, especially ethnicity, to the resident young people's population. 12.3% of Gloucestershire's resident population (2021 Census) were estimated to be from minority ethnic groups however 21.0% of Gloucestershire's school population were pupils from minority ethnic groups in January 2024 and 21.7% of the PWS cohort were pupils from minority ethnic groups in the 2024 survey.

Although a large proportion of the county's educational establishments took part in the survey some only had low numbers of students completing the survey in contrast others had high numbers. Although this doesn't impact the overall county analysis as demographics are represented as expected at this geography, analysis by district and education phase might only have certain demographic groups represented due to numbers of pupil take up (for example low numbers completing the survey in Tewkesbury at FE level), where FE provision is situated also impacts the survey as older students travel further to access FE provision.

## Analysis of deprivation

Schools can be categorised into statistical neighbour groups which cluster schools with pupils of a similar social profile within the same type of school (a similar level of deprivation, affluence or personal/family characteristics).

We use Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) to determine the relative

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/blog/young-carers-who-are-they-and-how-are-they-impacted>

deprivation of pupils. The IMD is based on the home postcode of pupils (collected in the school census). This is aggregated to give an overall IMD score for the school, reflecting the deprivation levels experienced by pupils. The schools are then split into quintiles based on their scores: quintile 1 is the most deprived and quintile 5 is the least deprived in Gloucestershire.

In addition:

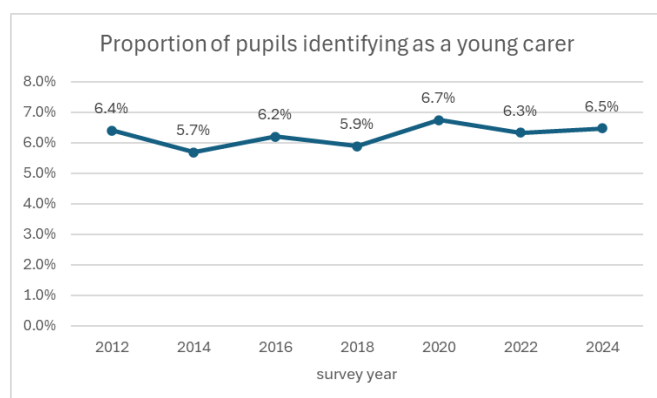
- Grammar/selective schools are compared to other grammar/selective schools in their phase without reference to the IMD.
- Independent schools are compared to other independent schools in their phase without reference to the IMD.
- Post-16 only/Further Education (FE) colleges are compared to all other Post-16 only colleges without reference to the IMD.
- Special and alternative schools are compared to all other schools of this type in the same phase without reference to the IMD.



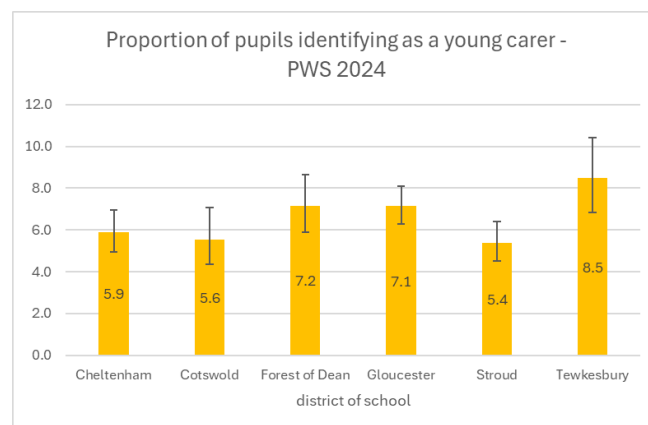
## Prevalence of young carers

Questions about being a young carer are only asked to pupils in secondary and post-16 settings, as such this may slightly under-estimate the level of young carers in Gloucestershire. However, it's usually only when they reach secondary school that young carers realise their home life is different from their friends'.

In 2024 6.5% (712) of Gloucestershire pupils identified as a young carer. This is in line with the previous 6 surveys. Research<sup>2</sup> suggests as many as 1 in 5 young people in England are young carers.

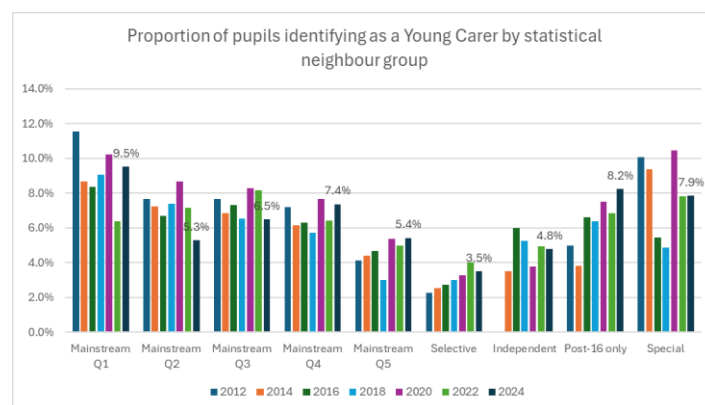


Pupils in schools and colleges in Tewkesbury were the most likely to identify as being a young carer however, this wasn't significantly higher than most other districts. Stroud had the lowest proportion of pupils identifying as a young carer.



Historically, pupils at schools in Tewkesbury have reported the highest levels of young carers, with an average of 7.6% since 2012. There has been a steady increase in pupils in Gloucester schools identifying as being a young carer since 2016.

Generally, the proportion pupils identifying as a young carer decreases as deprivation decreases.

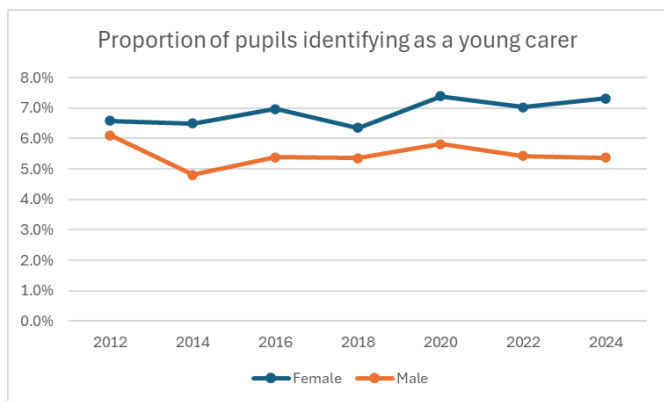


The chart above shows whilst consistently having the lowest proportion of pupils identifying as a young carers there has been an increase in pupils at the least deprived schools (those in quintile 5 schools, selective and independent schools) and those in Post-16 settings identifying as a young carer since 2012.

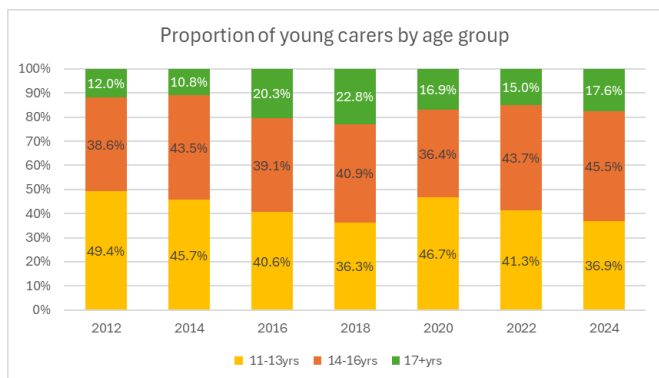
Female pupils were more likely to identify being a young carer than male pupils in 2024 (7.3% vs. 5.4%) this was in line with the historical trend.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/education/news/news-items/news1718/child-carers.aspx>





Historically, the highest proportion of young carers were aged 11-13 years however this has gradually changed and now older pupils aged 14-16 years represent the largest proportion of the cohort.



LGBTQ+ pupils were significantly more likely to identify as a young carer than Cis gendered<sup>3</sup> pupils (Trans, gender fluid or non-binary 14.1% vs. 5.7% Cis) and heterosexual pupils (LGB 11.1% vs. heterosexual 5.4%). It is important to consider this intersectionality when working with young carers.

There was no significant difference by broad ethnic group in pupils identifying as a young carer in 2024. However, pupils from Gypsy/Roma (21.8%), Traveller (20.7%) and Mixed White and Black African (12.1%) were all significantly more likely to identify as a young carer compared to White British pupils (6.2%).

## School experience, including absence and exclusion

In 2024 40.7% of young carers said they enjoyed school, this was significantly lower than non-carers (49.1%). Young carers were also significantly less likely to say they tried their best at school (68.3% vs. 73.4%), they learnt a lot at school (52.8% vs.

63.8%), or usually got high grades at school (32.2% vs. 36.7%) compared to non-carers.

In terms of feeling supported at school, unfortunately, young carers were significantly less likely to report they got enough help at school with learning (40.6% vs. 54.1%), said teachers told them how they were doing at school (43.7% vs. 48.7%) or saying they felt school was giving them useful skills and knowledge (47.2% vs. 57.3%) compared to their non-carer peers.



Young carers also report they are more likely to be in trouble often (14.6% vs. 8.7%), be aggressive or violent at school (11.8% vs. 5.6%) and significantly more young carers said they were stressed by school (59.1% vs. 52.9%) and worried about going to school (39.0% vs. 25.3%) than non-carers.

Young carers were significantly more likely to report missing 10% or more of sessions from school (45.8%) than non-carers (34.0%), they were also more than twice as likely to be absent for more than 16 days in the previous autumn term than non-carers (17.7% vs. 8.2%).



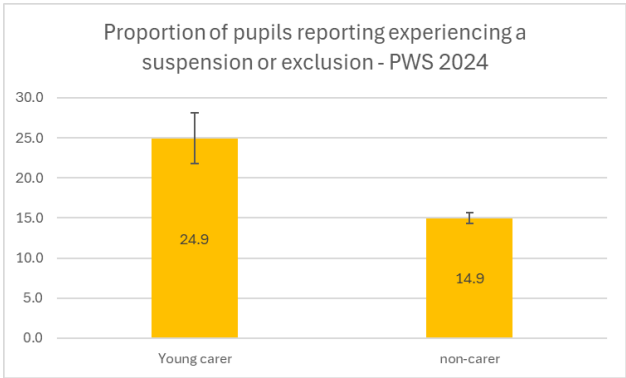
Pupils reporting they had missed any school were asked why, and as with non-carers, illness was the most common reason given for missing school by young carers (8 in 10 pupils).

Around 1 in 10 carers said their home situation prevented them going to school (9.2%) and that

<sup>3</sup> Cis gendered – those whose gender aligns with their biological sex

they were off school to look after a relative (9.4%). Over a quarter of young carers (27.3%) reported missing school because they were too tired compared to 1 in 6 non-carers (15.2%). Young carers were 3 times more likely to say they missed school to avoid bullying than non-carers (11.9% vs. 4.2%).

A quarter of young carers reported experiencing an isolation, suspension or exclusion from school. This was significantly higher than non-carers and in conjunction with other intelligence around their behaviour at school earlier in the report, may suggest a lower understanding of the difficulties with their home life and the impact this has on their ability to cope in school.

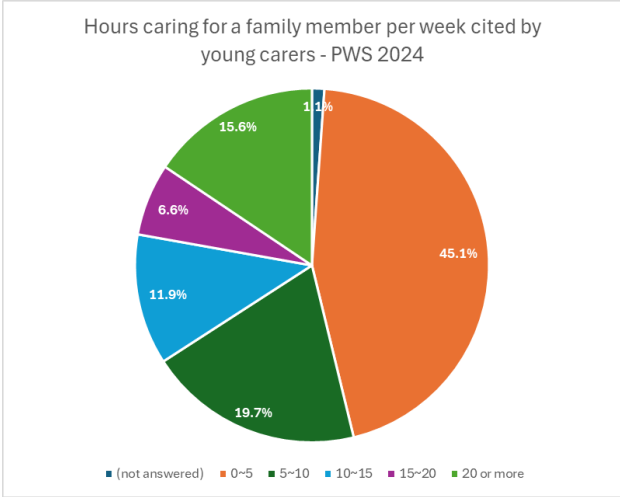


Whilst not significantly different a lower proportion of young carers who and experienced an isolation, suspension or exclusion said they were listened to in the process than non-carers. Young carers were also more likely to say things had got worse after their isolation, suspension or exclusion than non-carers (21.5% vs. 14.9%).

Less than a third of young carers (30.2%) said they felt happy at school most of the time in the previous week compared to almost half (42.7%) of non-carers.

## Home life

Just under half of young carers said they spent up to 5 hours caring for a family member per week, 1 in 6 (over 100 pupils) said they spent more than 20 hours a week caring for a family member in 2024.



Historically, the highest proportion of young carers said they did between 5 and 10 hours caring per week, but this has gradually reduced since 2018. The proportion saying they do over 20 hours caring per week has remained in line since 2012 when it was 14.1%.

Young carers were significantly more likely to say they lived in a single parent family than non-carers. This could indicate more pressure on the finances of the household, especially if they are caring for a parent/carer who is unable to work.



1 in 3 young carers (35.8%) reported they were eligible for Free School Meals (FSM), three times more than non-carers (12.5%). A quarter of young carers said they had a family social worker compared to 7.0% of non-carers.

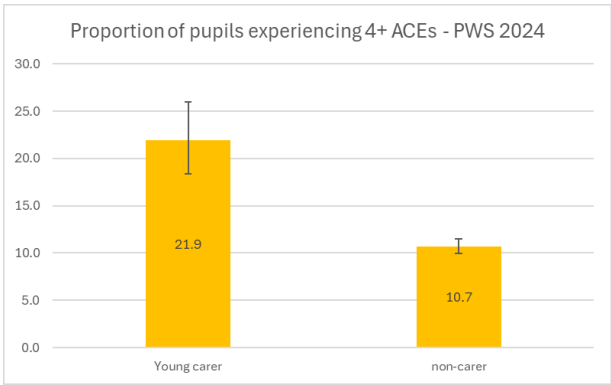
Young carers were significantly less likely to say they ate breakfast regularly (39.5%) than non-carers (57.0%) which may be attributable to having less time. Young carers were also significantly less likely to say the food on offer at home allowed them to eat healthily compared to non-carers.

8 in 10 of non-carers said they got enough help with homework from their parent/carers, however only 6 in 10 young carers felt they got enough help at home with homework.

Despite their caring responsibilities, young carers were significantly less likely to report they felt safe at home than non-carers and 3.5% said they felt very unsafe at home. Just under half (46.7%) reported they had witnessed domestic abuse and 7.9% said they had been a victim of domestic abuse. This suggests the stress of having a family member who has a significant physical or mental health condition or significant drug or alcohol addiction, can have serious and wide-ranging impacts on the whole family.

1 in 10 young carers said they had run away from home in the last 6 months, significantly more than non-carers (3.0%).

Pupils in Y10 and Y12 are asked about Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) in the PWS. Experiencing more than 4 ACEs has been linked to experiencing worse health and socio-economic outcomes in adulthood. In 2024 twice as many young carers reported experiencing 4+ ACEs than non-carers.



The most frequent cited ACE experienced by all pupils was that *parents or guardians were separated or divorced* however, for young carers the most commonly cited ACE, reported by a third (33.2%) of young carers, was they *lived with a household member who was depressed, mentally unwell or attempted suicide*.

Almost 1 in 5 (18.1%) of young carers reported they *lived with someone who had a problem with drinking or using drugs* this was more than twice as many as non-carers. A significantly higher proportion reported they *often felt unsupported, unloved and/or unprotected* (17.7% vs. 10.1% of non-carers).



### Healthy living

Young carers were less likely to report they did the recommended exercise per week (43.3% vs. 49.8%). Young carers were also significantly less likely to say they got the recommended sleep (39.0% vs. 48.9%).



1 in 6 pupils said they ate 5 or more portions of fruit and veg a day, '5 a day'. This was the same for both young carers and non-carers.

Young carers were significantly less likely to say they ate snacks such as sweets, chocolate, crisps or biscuits daily than non-carers (51.7% vs. 61.5%).

However, they were significantly more likely to report they drank energy drinks daily (9.6% vs. 4.2%). The physical effects from over-consumption of energy drinks are mostly related to caffeine. Increased caffeine consumption in children and adolescents results in increased blood pressure, sleep disturbances, headaches and stomach aches. A review of evidence<sup>4</sup> published in 2024 also highlighted links to more risks than previously found, such as anxiety, stress and suicidal thoughts.

<sup>4</sup> Consumption of energy drinks by children and young people: a systematic review examining evidence of physical effects and consumer attitudes



## Health harming behaviours

Generally young carers are more likely to engage in health harming behaviours than non-carers. This may be part of a coping mechanism for the adversity they face.

Young carers were significantly more likely to report:

- Smoking cigarettes regularly (6.3% vs. 2.8%)
- Vaping regularly (14.7% vs. 8.4%)
- Under-age drinking (12.2% vs. 8.2%)
- Regularly being drunk (8.0% vs. 3.6%)
- Trying drugs (16.6% vs. 11.7%)
- Early sexual debut (8.6% vs. 6.2%)
- Excessive screentime (44.8% vs. 32.4%)
- Having an eating disorder (22.9% vs. 9.8%)

Young carers were also more likely to say one of their top three activities online was gambling (3.7%) than non-carers (2.4%) although not significantly.

## Mental wellbeing

Friendships are vital in terms of emotional wellbeing and development, providing children and young people with a sense of purpose and belonging, and can be the defining reason whether they feel happy and able to cope in school or with their learning.

Young carers were significantly less likely to say they found making and keeping friends easy (40.0%) than non-carers (51.6%)

Generally, incidence of bullying reduces as children and young people age and is highest in Y4 where 10.8% of pupils report being bullied regularly. Young carers are significantly more likely to report being bullied regularly (10.5%) than non-carers (4.7%) of the same age.

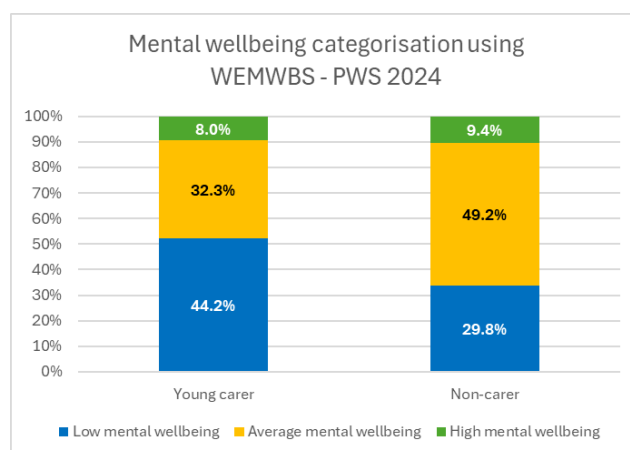
1 in 3 young carers say it's *Pretty tough being me* compared to 1 in 4 of non-carers.

The proportion of young carers reporting they woke in the night due to worry was twice that of non-carers (11.9% vs. 5.0%).

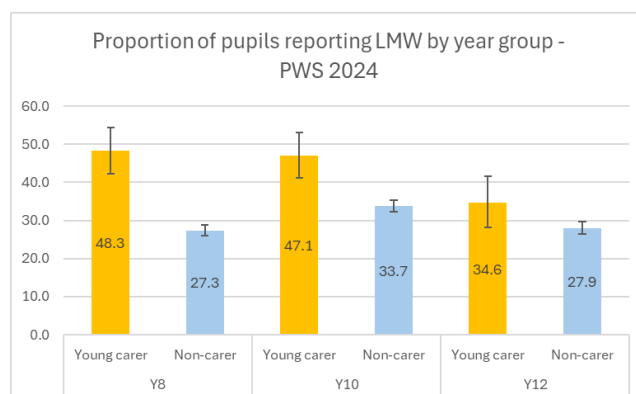


The PWS uses the WEMWBS survey to measure mental wellbeing of pupils. Scores from WEMWBS are then categorised into low, average and high mental wellbeing, low mental wellbeing (LMW) has been aligned with a probable diagnosis of anxiety and/or depression. Generally, incidence of LMW increases as pupils age, and peaks in Y10 before reducing post-16.

Young carers were significantly more likely to report LMW than non-carers (44.2% vs. 29.8%).



Mental wellbeing of young carers appears to deteriorate earlier than non-carers, with almost 1 in 2 reporting LMW in Y8 compared to 1 in 4 non-carers.



Young carers were significantly more likely to say they had ever self-harmed than non-carers (38.9% vs. 18.9%) and three times as likely to say they self-harmed regularly (14.2% vs. 4.3%). A quarter



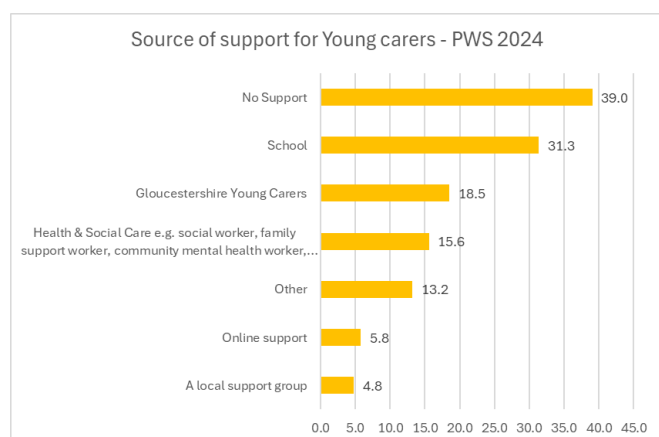
(26.7%) of young carers who had self-harmed said they had first self-harmed aged 10 or younger, significantly higher than non-carers (16.4%).

## Getting help and feeling supported

It is important for all young people to receive help and support when needed but it is particularly important for young carers.

Young carers were asked where they got support specifically for being a young carer and the difficulties associated with it.

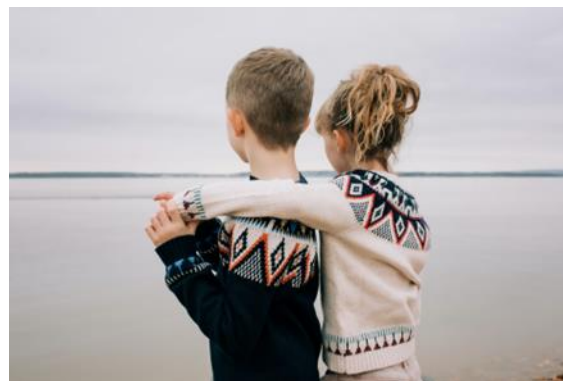
Just over a third of young carers said they received no support (as shown in the chart below), it is unclear if this was due to their choice or a lack of access. A third of carers and half of those who received help received it from their school. Almost 1 in 5 had received support via Gloucestershire Young Carers.



27.4% of young carers reported they felt like they needed more support, this was slightly higher in those who were receiving some support than no support but not significantly.

Two thirds (66.6%) of young carers said they had a trusted adult to go to if they were worried about something, significantly fewer than non-carers (77.6%).

A third (33.8%) of young carers had received mental health support from a professional, significantly more than non-carers (20.1%). A quarter of young carers who have had professional mental health support said they found it difficult to access the support, significantly higher than non-carers (18.7%). Where they had not received professional mental health support 27.0% of young carers said they felt they would have benefited from it.



## Aspirations and the future

Less than half of young carers (41.9%) felt they have control over their life, 40.3% said they were satisfied with their life and only 28.7% said they felt optimistic about the future.



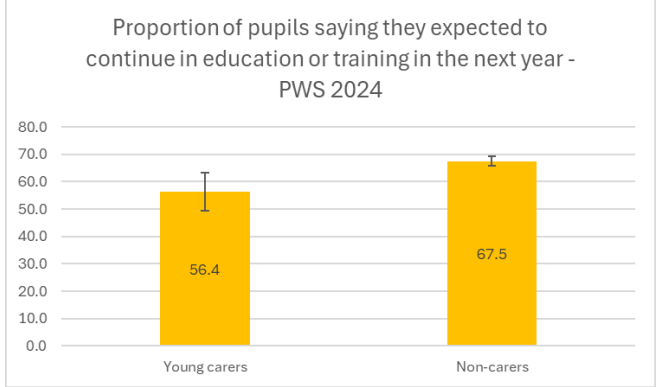
58.4% of young carers said they were confident about their future, significantly less than non-carers (69.6%). Over half (53.0%) of non-carers said they felt proud of their previous achievements, sadly only 41.2% of young carers felt the same.

Half of young carers said the careers advice they had received had been useful, this was significantly lower than non-carers.

Pupils in post-16 settings are asked about the support they received to make the right choices for them after GCSEs and about their plans post 18.

Just under two thirds of pupils said they had been able to get all the information you needed to give a picture of the range of choices available to you after year 11. This was the same for both young carers and non-carers.

Only just over half of young carers said they expected to stay in education or training the following year vs. two thirds of non-carers.



A higher proportion of young carers said in the future it was likely they would be Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) than non-carers although not significantly so (8.0% vs 6.6%).

Young carers were significantly less likely to have or be planning to apply to university through UCAS (30.3% vs. 40.8%).



Areas young carers have expressed they would like more support and knowledge in varied slightly to non-carers. The most commonly requested topic for young carers was Money management.

