



SCOTCH WHISKY  
ACTION FUND

MANAGED BY



Edinburgh Young  
Carers (EYC)



@ScotchWhiskySWA

Organisation: **Edinburgh Young Carers**  
Date of Award: **2018, 2019, 2020**  
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Project Name: **Young Carers Support**

EDINBURGH  
**YOUNG  
CARERS**

Edinburgh Young Carers (EYC) was formed to address the, often hidden, issue of engaging with young people and children who act as carers. It has grown into a charity with a network of support for those who have caring responsibilities for parents, siblings and/or other relatives.

Living with, and caring for, a parent or sibling who is unwell can be highly distressing for children and young people. Some young carers face extra challenges, particularly those caring for a parent with mental health or drug and alcohol problems which make up around one third of the young people EYC work with. These young carers are often 'hidden' due to the stigma around mental illness, drugs, and alcohol. They may face particularly chaotic, unsafe, home lives and have had traumatic experiences such as a parent being dangerously inebriated. 69% of young carers supporting a parent with problematic addiction issues use have a registered child protection concern providing an indication of the increased risk of abuse or neglect this group face. These young carers are at risk of developing negative coping strategies such as self-harm or their own alcohol misuse. Therefore, the more support that can be offered to them the less likely they are to turn to alcohol themselves as a coping strategy.

### **Funding Year One: Activity Support Project**

In 2018 Edinburgh Young Carers (EYC) received a grant of £15,669 from The Scotch Whisky Action Fund (SWAF) to cover the cost of providing a two-night residential, core skills and learning activities, family events and safety sessions, specifically for young carers who look after a family member who misuses alcohol. The project was designed to deliver the following outcomes: young carers are safer; better able to cope at home; and to lower the risk of them using alcohol as a coping mechanism.

EYC provided support to seventy-one young carers and received thirty-four new referrals to the service during the grant period and achieved the following:

## Residential breaks and Holiday Activities

It is upsetting for young people when key events, such as holidays, summer activities and Christmas - seen to be normal for others - are missed out. Therefore, EYC provided residential breaks of 2-5 days, with outdoor activities, and days out during the holidays as well as seasonal activities to ensure the young carers have the same opportunities to make great memories.



EYC delivered the following residentials:

- 4 x Pilton Retreats - 5 to 9 years old – a total of 8 young people attended\*
- Carers festival – 5 young people attended\*
- Overnight stay in office – 5 to 9 years – 4 young people attended\*
- Christmas Weekend in Glasgow – 9 young people attended\*
- London – 5 to 12 years - 12 young people attended\*
- Residential break – 26 carers\*

\*specifically carers of parents with addiction issues (other carers were also in attendance)

## Core Skills

Life skills of young carers are poor due to their up-bringing and home environment putting them at a serious disadvantage to their peers as they progress in life. For example, poor reading skills, poor co-ordination, and motor skills, unable to swim or ride a bike. The life skills model was piloted which was proven to be effective in preparing young carers to cope better with their life circumstances. Many of the young carers who had never read a book other than at school are now avid readers thanks to attending the literacy group.

Young carers took part in the following core skills activities:

- Swimming session - 21 young carers attended 19 sessions
- Literacy sessions - 17 young carers attended 14 sessions
- Co-ordination sessions - 21 young carers attended 8 sessions
- Cycling - 5 sessions were delivered with 9 young people attending

## Family Events

Five family days and outings, including a trip to Craigmillar Castle, Edinburgh Castle, coffee mornings, and a Christmas day out at Orcadia Trampoline Centre were organised with twenty young carers attending. This involved all family members in a fun activity, helping breakdown barriers between parent/s and staff, enabling families to build peer support networks, and establishing EYC as a community.



## Safety Sessions



Through individual support, group work and EYC's assessment model, the young carers were able to access support and information on how best to deal with situations that arise when caring for a family member with addiction issues. This gives them more confidence to contact emergency services or get help where appropriate. It also gives them the confidence to leave the home when the situation is unsafe and know where they can go or who to contact for help.

Of the forty-two young people receiving individual support either from their Key Worker or the professional Counsellor, twenty-nine young carers felt better able to cope with situations at home when caring for a family member with addiction issues following one to one support.

The importance of positive relationships and open communication with young carers family members is an important aspect of the work at EYC. Supporting families to have positive relationships with other agencies such as schools and social services enables the young carer to access the best support available to them and provide a secure environment for the young carer to flourish.

Over the period of the grant, EYC worked with fifteen families. These families were linked with relevant services which included social services, Circle, The Junction, Sunflower, Stepping Stones and other recovery support agencies to provide relevant family support, finding effective ways to support young carers and their families through difficult times. Twelve out of the fifteen families reported they were able to get long term support.

## Case Study

Ellie, aged 12 years, helps care for her mum who has problematic alcohol use and mental health issues and has ongoing issues with the criminal justice system, was able to access support at Edinburgh Young Carers for a period of 7 months.

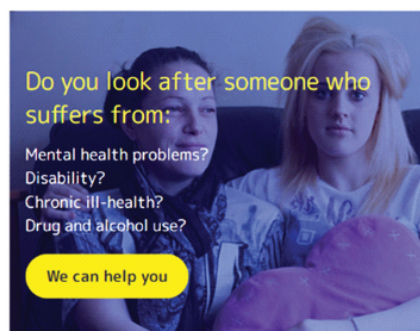
Ellie felt very isolated and overwhelmed with the caring role she was undertaking with her mum and found it difficult to ask for help. She was also experiencing bullying in the community due to a dispute with one of the neighbours relating to her mum's alcohol use. This led to Ellie becoming increasingly isolated and was not leaving the house.

A plan was put in place for individual support for her, so she was able to openly discuss her home life, access support on an emotional as well as practical level. Ellie attended a core skills group programme which targeted the specific needs of young carers caring for a parent with problematic drug/alcohol use to access support, make links with peers, build confidence and learn core skills. Ellie also attended a book group which enabled her to improve her learning and literacy, building confidence for her transition to high school. She also attended a swimming group to help her improve her swimming skills which were at a very basic level. The swimming group provides a small, safe environment where young carers have a swimming pool to themselves and have individual support from instructors, Ellie was able to build her self-esteem, feel included, build positive relationships with her peers and achieve her own goals. She is now able to swim unaided and is beginning to develop her diving skills. The groups have given Ellie the opportunity to increase her confidence and achieve her potential. As a result she has felt able to become involved with an after school sports club which has helped alleviate her isolation and make positive links with peers in her community.

Child planning meetings are regularly happening at school to ensure Ellie is being provided with the best supports from school, social services and young carers. This has led to extra supports being put in place in school to ensure Ellie is meeting her potential and is able to access education successfully. Social services are working effectively with mum to look at effective support for her to help alleviate Ellie's caring role. Ellie continues to access support at young carers which is reviewed every 6 months with ongoing goals agreed with her and her key worker.

## Funding Year Two: It's Ok Not To Be Ok

Following the success of the funding between 2018/19, EYC wanted to develop a Social Education Group to engage young carers by providing early intervention support and counselling. SWAF therefore awarded a further grant of £12,833 in late 2019 to contribute to the cost of social education workshop days, transport, and counsellor fees.



The Social Education group ran for sixteen weeks; 1 day a week for 11 to 14 year olds and half day per week for 9 to 10 year olds. This was delivered in conjunction with an external agency, Health Opportunities Team (HOT) who work to improve the health and wellbeing of young people by providing a variety of learning and development opportunities. Once completed, the carers could then receive follow up support from Edinburgh Young Carers' Turnaround project, which provides one-to-one support and individual counselling sessions if required. By receiving support from the Social Education group work sessions and Turnaround's one to one support and counselling, young carers are better able to cope at home and have lower risk of developing alcohol misuse issues themselves.

Unfortunately, lockdown in 2020 caused challenges for delivering the group work and they had to adapt by providing support online. The pandemic negatively impacted the young carers and their families significantly. The levels of caring increased greatly when schools were closed and put the young carers further into isolation, and they didn't get any respite from their caring responsibilities which school would normally provide for them. Some young carers didn't have access to technology or a confidential space at home to engage with the service.

The main presenting issues seen during the grant period were:

- Mood disorders such as stress, anxiety, panic, and depression
- Issues related to caring roles such as increased mental health problems and reduced support networks
- Fear of Covid19 for themselves and other family members
- Isolation and loneliness including social isolation from friends and family
- Unable to access physical activities that help with mood disorders
- Self-harm
- Abuse of all types
- Lack of confidence/low self-esteem
- News and social media anxieties around Covid19 situation

Prior to lockdown and once restrictions eased four blocks of the “It’s Ok Not To Be Ok” group work were delivered in total, and achieved the following:

- Block 1 = 4 group sessions with 11 young people aged 9-10yrs old
- Block 2 = 5 group sessions with 11 young people aged 11-14yrs old
- Block 3 = 4 group sessions with 13 young people 9-10yrs old
- Block 4 = 1 group session with 8 young people 11-14yrs old

Twenty-eight young people responded to the evaluation and nineteen rated the sessions a ten which equalled ‘brilliant’ on the scale provided.

In addition, the half day counselling service achieved the following:

- 67 counselling sessions attended
- 13 young carers engaged in counselling
- 7 new referrals accessed counselling

## Case Study

Hayley was referred for Counselling during lockdown as she was struggling to manage her emotions and her Development Worker was concerned she was becoming isolated from her school friends as her mental health deteriorated. Hayley is 14 years old and a carer for her sibling who has a complex developmental condition that requires 24hr support. The family relationships are fractured with her parents staying together solely to look after her sibling. One of Hayley’s parents is alcohol dependent, and this has increased since lockdown began, resulting in Hayley’s caring role also increasing.

At assessment, the Psychlops teen pre-therapy form highlighted Hayley’s presenting issues were-Covid19 and its effect on studying, and the future of Covid19 and its effect on her family. Hayley’s functioning and wellbeing was being impacted by concerns about her dwindling relationships with friends since lockdown, family conflict, growing anxiety and being unable to express genuine thoughts. Hayley scored highly on the form across all areas: functioning, problems, and wellbeing.

The first few sessions offered Hayley an opportunity to discuss her current concerns since the Covid19 situation began and share her worries about school, family and her increasing anxiety and panic. She is spending all her time at home and with increased alcohol use from one parent and the other parent going out to work, Hayley is overwhelmed with the whole situation. She had no access to her usual outlets of school, social activities with friends and sport activities that help her to maintain some balance in her life.

We explored her situation together and looked at the main issues that were causing her the most distress. On the back of this we also discussed the loss of her usual coping strategies since lockdown and started to explore alternative ways to cope with her increased anxiety.

Using CBT style tools, we started a programme of strategies for reducing anxiety and panic that covers: Understanding the problem; How to control the bodily feelings of anxiety; How do my thoughts make me anxious; How to change your behaviour; Panic attacks and over-breathing.

We used examples relating to her own issues and practiced a combination of practical strategies, exploring alternative approaches to her thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. Hayley has been pro-active in viewing her anxiety from different perspectives and trying out new ideas. Understanding what motivates her thoughts and actions and using a solution focused approach has helped Hayley to begin making positive changes and feel more in control of her anxiety. We are continuing to work through the programme together and Hayley is encouraged by the results she has experienced so far. It is hoped that by the end of the programme, Hayley will be able to manage her anxiety and have increased self-awareness and understanding of self.

Once Hayley feels more in control we can then look at other issues such as reconnecting with friends in a safe way and exploring alternative ways to enjoy physical and social activities. It is vital that Haley maintains positive relationships with people outside her home both with friends and support such as EYC as her home life is very challenging.

Hayley can't change the home environment she lives in. However, with continued support she will hopefully learn to change how she reacts to situations and family in the future. Having therapy has been invaluable for Hayley during this period and helped to pull her back from slipping into a much darker place. She has acknowledged having someone listen to her and being able to talk about her worries and fears without judgement is really helping her.

## Final Year of Funding

EYC approached SWAF for a third and final year of funding for £9,600 which was successful in August 2020 to deliver an eight-week group programme following the success of the Social Education group work the previous year.

The challenges of the pandemic and lockdown continued throughout 2020/2021 and between March and September 2021 EYC's priority was restore face-to-face activities but retaining online support where and when needed. The funded project was delayed initially due to the pandemic, then further delayed by the closure of the proposed partner agency, Health Opportunities Team in February 2021. After securing a new partnership with The Junction, they were able to start delivering the project in March 2021.

The programme was designed to run in eight-week blocks, four weeks of group support, followed by four weeks one-to-one support for those identified as most vulnerable.

In 2021, the 8-week blocks were delivered as follows:

Block 1 (aged 9-11): June 2021

Block 2 (aged 12-14): August 2021

Block 3 (aged 9-10): October 2021

Block 4 (aged 10-14): December 2021 (completed January 2022)

The Groupwork element of the programme was delivered jointly by EYC and the Junction and took place at EYC's premises which are already familiar to many of the young people.

Group Sessions included:

- Identify anxiety and stress within the body
- An introduction to self-esteem
- Mindfulness activities
- Exploring the value of sleep
- Identifying and developing coping strategies

One-to-one sessions were delivered by the Junction and took place at their Leith premises, in a purpose-built space.



### One-to-one Sessions included:

- An opportunity to further explore themes and activities from group work
- Space to explore their own support needs and aspirations
- Individually bespoke activities, e.g., painting projects, lyric writing, singing
- Learning about the health benefits of engaging in creativity
- Evolving a conscious Weekly Wellbeing Routine
- Constructing an Emotional Support Plan for times of need

Transport was provided where needed, and at the end of their one-to-one sessions each young person was given a 'creative bundle' of arts materials to take away from the programme. In addition to this The Junction also gifted each young person with a small self-care gift bag, containing a variety of stress relief, sleep enhancing and self-care products.

The new partnership with the Junction was very successful. A range of light touch tools were used to encourage the young people to reflect on their experience and learning, including space to draw and discuss. For one-to-one evaluation five key questions from The Junction's "Theory for Change" evaluation suite were identified pre-programme as markers for change, and overall, the forty-six young people who benefited agreed with the statements:

- "I feel listened to"
- "I am more able to identify how I am feeling"
- "I am more able to understand my own health, well-being and self-care needs"
- "I am more aware about information and tools that can help me, either from The Junction, EYC or elsewhere"
- "I feel more able to think about my life choices in different ways".

### Case Study

Bella is 10 years old and lives with her mother and two younger brothers. Bella helps care for her Mum who was diagnosed with PTSD from childhood trauma and has multiple health issues which can range from being manageable to very difficult to deal with and can prevent her from leaving the house. Bella also struggles at home because one of her brothers has autism, and he can present with difficult behaviour towards her. Bella told her Development Worker at EYC she sometimes gets annoyed or angry when asked to do things she doesn't want to, or if she is doing something else she'd rather be doing.

She is aware of her mother's illnesses and worries about Mum being ill or getting worse and she worries about what would happen if she can't look after her mum and brother anymore as she doesn't want to live with Dad.

Due to Bella's caring role, she really struggles with her self-esteem and confidence and being able to make friends. EYC were able to offer Bella counselling sessions to discuss her feelings and look at introducing coping techniques and then move onto the "It's Ok Not To Be Ok" programme which allowed her to build on her coping techniques but now within a group setting where she felt safe and nurtured and was able to make friendships with peers, some of whom had the same worries and difficulties as herself. This made Bella feel better about herself and her situation, feeling less isolated and alone. Bella now regularly attends fortnightly EYC group respite and has made lovely friendships and is growing in confidence. Her mum has echoed that she now comes home from group happy and looks forward to the next session, and she is able to socialise and feel more comfortable within school due to the tailored support she has received from EYC.

*"Thanks to this funding we were able to support young carers in Edinburgh affected by parental alcohol and substance use. They have demonstrated improved mental health and developed strategies to manage the challenges of their caring responsibilities." - Margaret Murphy, CEO of EYC*

\*all names have been changed throughout this report to protect the identities of the individuals and their families