Supporting the Educational Experiences and Well-being of Young Carers (YCs) –
Perspectives from School Designated Young Carer Leads

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Summary

This thesis comprises of three parts: a review of the literature on young caregiving, an empirical paper, and a reflective account. The literature review situates the current study within the existing body of knowledge related to young caregiving and culminates by identifying a gap for research. Next, the empirical paper details the qualitative study undertaken with six Designated Young Carer Leads (DYCLs). Semi-structured interviews were utilised to explore participants' perspectives of identifying and supporting Young Carers (YCs) in schools and their accounts were analysed through conducting reflexive thematic analysis (TA). The final reflective chapter provides a reflexive account of the research process, including the identification of an area of interest, the process of conducting the literature review and key decisions made about research design. This chapter concludes with a discussion around how the findings from the research will be disseminated and the contribution that conducting the research has made to personal and professional development.

Access Condition and Agreement

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Glossary of Terms

BPS	British Psychological Society
CYP	Children and Young People
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
CR	Critical realism/ realist
DfE	Department for Education
DoH	Department of Health
DHSC	Department of Health and Social Care
DYCL(s)	Designated Young Carer Lead(s)
EP(s)	Educational Psychologist(s)
HCPC	Health and Care Professions Council
LA	Local Authority
NatCen	National Centre for Social Research
NHS	National Health Service
RQ	Research Questions
SEMH	Social Emotional and Mental Health
SCIE	Social Care Institute for Excellence
TA	Thematic Analysis
TEP	Trainee Educational Psychologist
UEA	University of East Anglia
UK	United Kingdom
YC(s)	Young Carer(s)

Chapter One: Literature Review

1.1 Introduction

This thesis explores how the educational experiences and wellbeing of YCs can be supported in schools. This introductory section will begin by exploring the multiple definitions which have been developed within research, YC organisations and government policy to define a YC. The definition selected for the current study will be highlighted. Next, the prevalence of YCs within the United Kingdom (UK) will be discussed, whilst providing a critical reflection upon the challenges in identifying the exact number of YCs. Policy and legislation relevant to YCs and the current study will then be explored. This introductory section will conclude by summarising the characteristics of YCs as identified in government-commissioned research; including the age of YCs, who YCs care for, the type of care they provide, and the time spent caring.

1.2 Defining 'Young Carers'

Aldridge and Becker (1993) first identified in research that some children and young people (CYP) were providing primary care for a sick or disabled relative at home, establishing the term 'young carer'. YCs were then legally acknowledged in the Carers (Recognition and Services) Act 1995 and defined as CYP (under 18) who provide or intend to provide a substantial amount of care on a regular basis. Within the caregiving literature, multiple definitions for 'YC' have developed, based upon the age of the caregiver; the nature of the care recipient's illness or disability (Thomas et al., 2003); the level of caring responsibilities; the absence of professional support or the impact of young caregiving (Aldridge & Becker, 1993). Definitional variation of the term 'YC' highlights how YCs are not a homogenous population; the term represents CYP from a variety of backgrounds with diverse experiences (Doutre et al., 2013). For the purposes of this research, the following definition will be adhered to 'a person under 18 who provides or intends to provide care for another person (of any age, except where that care is provided for payment, pursuant to contract or as voluntary work)' (Section 96, Children and Families Act, 2014).

1.3 Prevalence of YCs

According to the most recent census (Office for National Statistics, 2011), there were 166,000 YCs in England aged 5-17 years. However, as noted by Gowen et al. (2021), this data may be limited because the census relies upon the self-identification by families, and some families may not identify or recognise their children(s) caring roles nor the term 'Young Carer'. Moreover, as cited by Barnardo's (2017), the census did not include children who care for family members with drug and alcohol difficulties within their estimate. CYP who care for family members with drug and alcohol difficulties have been included in many other available definitions of 'Young Carer', including those from the Carer's Trust (2022) and the National Health Service (NHS, 2021).

A more recent national survey estimates that, if the findings were extrapolated across England, it would correspond to more than 800,000 YCs, or one in five pupils in secondary schools (Joseph et al., 2019). Whilst such surveys offer an estimation of the prevalence of YCs, Aldridge (2018) notes that caution should be exerted when reading 'broad claims' and 'generalisations about numbers.' Aldridge (2018) also questions the reliability of data generated through anonymised questionnaire surveys as an indication of prevalence. Consequently, the lack of reliable and consistent statistics (Gowen et al., 2021), compounded by the variable methodologies utilised in studies, presents a challenge in identifying the number of YCs in the UK. The differing definitions of the term 'Young Carer' as aforementioned, also contributes to this, as the data obtained depends on a study's methodology as to who is included and counted (Joseph et al., 2020). Overall, as articulated by Blake-Holmes and McGowan (2022), the varying methodologies and definitions makes the exact numbers of YCs difficult to quantify.

1.4 Policy and Legislation

Since the early 1990's, when YCs were first acknowledged in research and in legislation, there has been a growth in the awareness and identification of YCs, alongside an increase in the number of specialist YCs services and projects. This growth has been initiated and maintained by several factors:

- A growing body of literature on YCs and their families
- The work of charitable organisations who have raised public, political and professional awareness (for example The Children's Society, Barnardo's)
- Changes in legislation, guidance and policy initiatives

Within the UK, key policies and legislation such as the Children and Families Act (2014) and the Care Act (2014) have significantly strengthened the rights for YCs. This legislation placed new duties on professionals to identify and support YCs and their families (Aldridge, 2018). The Children and Families Act (2014) gives YCs in England a right to a 'carer's assessment' and placed a legal duty on local authorities (LA) to identify YCs and carry out an assessment to consider the impact on the child and the whole family. It states that the LA must consider whether the care being provided by the CYP is 'excessive' or 'inappropriate' and how their caring responsibilities impact upon their wellbeing, education and development (The Children's Society, 2020). It also introduced 'whole family' approaches to assessment and support, through highlighting the importance of considering the views and wishes of the YC and their family. Changes in legislation, guidance and policy initiatives have resulted in greater recognition of children's need for identification and support as caregivers.

The Children and Families Act (2014) and the Care Act (2014) placed the onus of identification onto all professionals, services and organisations who work with a YC and their family through education, social care and health. Despite this, Aldridge (2018) states that YC's needs assessments are "inconsistently applied" and "lack rigorous screening procedures" (p.163). This is exemplified in the Children's Commissioner for England's report (2016), which highlighted that 94% of children who were referred to the LA as a potential YC, but who were deemed not to require support, had not received a YCs needs assessment at all. This was also echoed in a Department for Education (DfE) funded study, which highlighted that fewer than one in five (19%) parents of YCs helping within the household reported that their child had received an assessment of their needs by the LA (Aldridge et al., 2017). This research also found that YCs had particularly low levels of engagement with health and social services. Aldridge (2018) suggests that the legislation pertaining to the

YCs Needs Assessment has led to a degree of uncertainty amongst professionals, with some not considering it as part of their professional purview.

1.5 Characteristics of YCs

The Department for Education (DfE) commissioned a suite of research that comprised of both qualitative and quantitative methods to elucidate the characteristics of YCs and their families, the nature of care they provided and the implications of young caregiving across England (Clay et al., 2016; Aldridge et al., 2017). This suite of research aimed to serve as a baseline study to help measure the effectiveness of legislative changes in improving the identification and support for YCs and their families.

The quantitative study surveyed parents of YCs aged 5 to 17 and where possible, YCs themselves aged 11 to 17 (Aldridge et al., 2017). Through the survey, 375 YCs were identified as caring within the home. Findings revealed that 55% of the YCs were caring for their mother, 25% were caring for a sibling, 19% were caring for their father and 5% were caring for a grandparent or other relative. This was also mirrored in the qualitative study, which also found that YCs were more likely to care for a mother or a sibling than a father or other family member. This finding aligns with previous research within the literature base on young caregiving (Abraham & Aldridge, 2010; Dearden & Becker, 2004; Joseph et al., 2019). The qualitative research also found that lone-parent families were over-represented in the sample, which is consistent with research (Becker et al., 2000).

Research that preceded the survey has highlighted the wide range of caring roles and responsibilities that YCs undertake, such as practical help, personal and nursing care and emotional support (The Children's Society, 2013). Findings from the DfE 2017 survey revealed that 78% of YCs were providing practical help as part of their caring responsibilities (e.g., cooking, cleaning, shopping), 57% were providing emotional support, 26% were providing nursing care (e.g., giving medication) and 4% were providing other types of care (not defined). Within the research, a comparison survey of families not containing a YC was also conducted. Researchers asked the parents of CYP without caring responsibilities about the jobs that their

CYP undertook around the home, such as cleaning, food shopping, sorting bills etc. Findings revealed that YCs were providing substantially more help around the home than their peers in the comparison survey. For example, for YCs aged 16 to 17, 34% looked after siblings without an adult present compared to 14% of non YCs, and 17% of YCs dealt with financial matters, compared to 0% of non-YCs.

The quantitative research also examined the time CYP spent caring. Findings revealed that most YCs spent more time caring at the weekends and during holidays than during the school week. However, at least one in seven (14%) of all YCs were providing care for more than four hours a day on top of their studies, rising to over one in four YCs (26%) at weekends and holidays. The qualitative research also elucidated the amount of time YCs dedicated to caring weekly, and this ranged from less than 1 hour to 40 hours (Clay et al., 2016). As these research studies exemplify, there is a wide range of caring tasks that YCs undertake, and a common finding is that YCs provide support that is often over and above what other CYP would provide to family members, which is reflected throughout the caregiving literature (Joseph et al., 2019; Warren, 2007).

1.6 Overview of the Literature Review

A literature review was conducted to situate the researcher's study within the existing body of knowledge related to young caregiving. A thematic literature review was selected as an appropriate approach because the empirical research literature on young caregiving could be synthesised, to collate existing research findings and discuss distinct themes that emerge (Kiteley & Stogdon, 2013). Themed subheadings will be used to organise the existing literature and as a structure for the body discussion. The overall aim of the review was to organise the literature around key themes and trends and to culminate by identifying a gap for research. This will subsequently inform the formulation of the research questions (RQ). To enhance transparency and rigour, a detailed account of the review methodology that was undertaken within the thematic literature review is presented (Kiteley & Stogdon, 2013). This includes information regarding search terms and inclusion/exclusion criteria which are stated within Table 1.

The literature review will begin by exploring the importance of timely identification for YCs, alongside the challenges with identifying YCs. Given the focus of this research, the literature review will then concentrate upon the role of schools in identifying YCs and will highlight the wider systemic changes which are likely to impact the number of YCs identified.

Within the literature, YCs have been empirically and anecdotally identified as a group of CYP more vulnerable to negative outcomes in their psychological, social and physical wellbeing. Therefore, the impact of young caregiving will be explored, through the discussion of three key themes which arose from reviewing the literature, 'psychological wellbeing', 'social wellbeing' and 'physical health'. There is a predominant body of literature which has discussed the impacts of young caregiving on psychological wellbeing, social wellbeing and physical health from a negative perspective. However, within the literature, this focus upon a deficit and risk saturated narrative has been criticised by several authors (e.g., Banks et al., 2001; Doutre et al., 2013; Newman, 2002), which has promoted a shift towards also exploring more positive aspects of the caregiving role. Within the reviewed research there are studies which have elucidated the resilience of YCs and the positive aspects derived from caregiving. Thus, this constitutes two further themes that will be explored in the literature review, 'resilience and coping' and 'positive effects'.

The literature review will then focus upon YC's educational experiences and will be organised around the themes of 'attainment', 'attendance' and 'bullying and stigmatisation' which emerged during a review of the research. Particular emphasis will then be placed on reviewing the literature which has explored the role of schools and professionals who work within them as they have been identified as a valuable avenue for support for YCs. Detail on the methodologies employed to research the multiple viewpoints of YC's perspectives of school-based support, parent and professionals' perspectives will also be explored. The literature review will conclude by reflecting upon the importance of extending the research on YCs, with the identified need for further research in relation to the role of schools in identifying YCs and supporting YC's educational experiences and social and emotional wellbeing.

1.6.1 Search Strategy

Searches included electronic databases such as EBSCO, JSTOR and internet searches including Google Scholar. The search terms used included the term 'young carers' or 'young caregiving' along with 'identification' 'education' 'attendance' 'attainment' 'educational support' 'mental health' 'wellbeing' 'physical health' 'social wellbeing' 'perspectives' 'professional perspectives' 'parent perspectives' 'teachers' 'perspectives' 'school'. The reference lists of articles attained were also surveyed for further literature related to the current research. A search across civil and third sector institutions supporting YCs was also conducted, such as Barnardo's, The Children's Society, The Carer's Trust and the DfE. Internet searchers were conducted to look at information provided on their websites.

Studies were assessed against the inclusion/exclusion criteria which can be found in Table 1. Studies were discounted if they were not based in the UK and were published outside of the years 2000-2022. This is so that the research included is relevant to the context of the research (being undertaken in the UK) and because peer reviewed literature began to emerge from the year 2000. Studies were also discounted if they were not written in English due to accessibility issues.

Table 1

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria	Rationale
Research between 2000-2022	Research before the year 2000	Peer reviewed literature began to emerge from the year 2000
Research conducted in the UK	Research conducted in other countries	To be relevant to the context of the research
Impacts of young caregiving	Main focus of the study does not relate to the impacts of young caregiving	Study to be relevant to the research
Supporting YCs within schools/educational settings	Main focus of the study does not relate to YC's experiences of education	Study to be relevant to the research

Peer reviewed	Non peer reviewed	Credible, peer reviewed research
Article in English	Non-English text	Accessibility

1.7 Identifying YCs

The wide range of estimates for the prevalence of YCs highlights the difficulties in identifying CYP with caregiving responsibilities (Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), 2019). Gowen et al. (2021) note that the lack of reliable and consistent statistics emphasises the need for improved methods of identifying YCs. As noted by the Carers Trust and the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) (2019), early or timely identification is a crucial first step in ensuring YCs receive the necessary support. Recent BBC News analysis has suggested that nearly 180,000 children in England who care for a relative may be missing out on support because they are not known to their LA (BBC, 2021). Possible explanations for this discussed in the caregiving literature include reluctance to discuss their caregiving roles, fear of bullying (Banks et al., 2002), fear of stigma and fear of being separated from their families and taken into care (Bolas et al., 2007; Clay et al., 2016; Rose & Cohen, 2010, Thomas et al., 2003).

To further elucidate some of the difficulties with identifying YCs, the DHSC commissioned a review which aimed to study the current practice in the UK when identifying YCs (Carers Trust & NatCen, 2019). This review identified numerous factors which can have implications for the identification of YC. Findings revealed that there was an element of 'perceived normality', whereby many CYP who looked after someone considered their caring tasks to be 'normal' and 'ordinary' and therefore did not recognise themselves to be carers. This 'perceived normality' has also been articulated by other researchers, who posit that YCs may not self-identify through lack of awareness of their position or because they often view their activities as part of a regular familial relationship with reciprocal and loving bonds (Smyth et al., 2011). Professionals working within YC services who participated in the review conducted by the Carers Trust and NatCen (2019) also stated that caring tasks are embedded within familial or cultural norms in some families, which reinforces YCs' beliefs that caring is a normal part of life.

Within the qualitative research base, schools have been recognised as an important context where YCs can be identified and supported (Clay et al., 2016; Smyth et al., 2011; Warren, 2007). Moreover, statutory guidance such as Keeping Children Safe in Education (DfE, 2022), specifically outlines the role of Designated Safeguarding Leads (who have lead responsibility for child protection issues in school) in being alert to YCs and the need to provide early support. As highlighted by Hebden (2021), YCs, like many CYP, spend the majority of their time within a school setting, and therefore it is essential that schools are at the forefront of identifying and providing support for YCs. Despite this recognition, schools have not had a statutory duty to identify YCs. However, as a result of contextual factors, such as the coronavirus pandemic, the increased pressures YCs faced emphasised the need to improve formal identification of this cohort in schools. Consequently, the DfE has added a 'YC Indicator' to the school census requirements, whereby schools must report on the number of pupils who have been identified as a YC, and if so, by who (parent/guardian or school); which came into effect in January 2023. As highlighted by the Children's Commissioner (2022), knowing the prevalence of YCs in schools will fundamentally increase the visibility of this often-hidden group of CYP. Moreover, the Children's Commissioner also notes that through gathering and analysing this data over time, it will be possible to gather a "longitudinal picture" of YCs, their educational attendance and outcomes.

1.8 The Challenges Faced by YCs

YCs are not a homogenous population; the term represents CYP from a vast range of backgrounds with diverse experiences (Doutre et al., 2013). Factors such as the nature of the care recipients' illness or disability, the level, frequency and duration of care and the type of tasks undertaken all contribute to the differing experiences of YCs. However, a shared commonality is that YCs often taken on practical and/or emotional caring responsibilities that would normally be expected of an adult and provide support that is often over and above what other CYP would provide to family members (Warren, 2007).

The general consensus within the literature is that young caregiving has been associated with a variety of negative consequences, including anxiety, stress, tiredness, strain in family relationships, restrictions in social activities and relationships, and under-engagement in education (Clay et al., 2016). Ultimately, the cumulative stress of caregiving responsibilities can result in absenteeism from education (Carer's Trust, 2020), self-harm, depression, and even thoughts of suicide for some YCs (Cree, 2003). Thus, in order to support this potentially vulnerable group of CYP, it is important to understand both the impacts of young caregiving, alongside the factors which can contribute to positive psychological well-being outcomes for YCs.

1.9 Psychological Wellbeing

As previously mentioned, the psychological well-being and mental health impacts for YCs is generally regarded from a negative perspective within the literature. The children's charity, Barnardo's (2017), for example, utilised qualitative methods and noted that emotional health and wellbeing was an issue consistently raised in their YC focus groups. Many of the YCs reported that being a YC made them feel anxious or worried and like they couldn't cope. This is echoed by the voices of 22 YC and parent dyads who were interviewed as part of a qualitative study undertaken on behalf of the DfE (Clay et al., 2016). The DfE commissioned the research to elucidate the impact of caring responsibilities on the CYP's lives, who were aged 5-17 years old. The children and parent dyads reported that having a caring role had a negative impact on children's emotional wellbeing, in particular being associated with tiredness, stress, depression and anxiety. Cree (2003) explored the problems and worries of 61 YCs through questionnaires and follow-up interviews. The impetus for this research originated from project staff who support YCs through the Edinburgh YC's Project, as they were concerned that some of the YCs using their project may be experiencing mental health problems. The YCs in this study reported difficulties which may be seen as associated with mental health problems, including difficulty in sleeping and eating, and experiencing panic attacks. Moreover, some YCs reported difficulties such as self-harm and thoughts of suicide.

Within the literature, concerns regarding the mental well-being of YCs has also been articulated by other professionals, such as the Manchester Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service in Abraham and Aldridge's (2010) research. Professionals from this service expressed concerns about the possible effects that disproportionate levels of care were having on the well-being of YCs. This led to quantitative research utilising a psychological measure, the Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale, to assess the mental wellbeing of 50 YCs (Abraham & Aldridge, 2010). Within this research, YCs were asked to respond to 14 different statements, such as 'I've been feeling optimistic about the future', with the following options 'none of the time', 'rarely', 'some of the time', 'often' or 'all of the time'. Findings revealed that, older YCs, aged 14-17 years old, who had been caring on average for twice as long as the younger children in the study, "felt less optimistic about the future, had poorer views of themselves, depleted levels of interest in new things and did not feel as close to others in their lives" (p.4). This accords with other research within the YC literature, which has also highlighted that the length of time that a CYP has been caring for can impact on their mental wellbeing (Doutre et al., 2013). However, a limitation of this study was that it did not have a control group, so comparisons with other CYP who did not have caring responsibilities were not made.

Within the young caregiving quantitative literature, a small number of researchers have utilised control-group designs to elucidate the link between caregiving with changes to mental health and wellbeing. Banks et al. (2001), for example, utilised a questionnaire including the Global Depression Scale, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, and questions relating to self-concept and overall quality of life, to investigate the mental health and wellbeing of young people who cared for a disabled relative, in comparison to non-carers. Analysis revealed that CYP who reported that they looked after a disabled relative were significantly more depressed and had lower self-esteem than non-carers. Other researchers have also compared mental health outcomes for pupils with caring responsibilities and non-carers, through completing secondary analysis of a representative secondary school survey (Robison et al., 2020). In one such study, data was collected through the 2014-2015 survey of Glasgow city schools, which was completed by 11,215 secondary school pupils (aged 11-18 years). Overall, one in eight (12%) of the school pupils surveyed were

identified as a YC. Findings revealed that YCs' mental health and psychosocial outcomes were significantly poorer than for young people who did not provide care.

A common theme which has emerged in the literature relates to the daily anxiety and worry which consumes many YCs. For example, in Thomas et al. (2003) study, most of the YC's who were individually interviewed or participated in focus groups reported feelings of sadness, alongside worry and fear. The YCs were worried about the person for whom they were caring for; that they might fall, be taken to hospital, or even die. This is echoed in the findings of another study, out of 61 YC respondents to a questionnaire, 81% worried about the health of the person they care for; 67% worried about their own health; 58% worried about the behaviour of the person they care for (Cree, 2003). This was termed 'anticipatory anxiety' regarding the care recipients' welfare in Earley et al. (2007) research. YCs in Earley et al. (2007) focus group study also voiced concerns over the difficulty with switching off from their responsibilities and their perceived need to be vigilant. Clay et al. (2016) highlighted that this can be even more of a significant issue in lone parent families, particularly if the YC was the eldest sibling and the main carer within the household. Within this study, YCs felt anxious about the cared-for person and their siblings in their absence. The authors noted that it was evident that in the YC's free time, they often felt unable to fully relax. Worryingly, a high number of YC participants who responded to a questionnaire in Cree's (2003) study reported that they self-harm (34%), have thoughts about suicide (36%) and take drugs or alcohol to 'switch off' (12%). Based on these findings, one may infer that such behaviours are being used as coping mechanisms in an attempt to manage stress (Baqutayan, 2015). YCs have reported that being a YC made them feel like they could not cope (Barnardo's, 2017).

Utilising interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), Bolas et al. (2007) sought to explore the lived experiences and wellbeing of YCs further. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 5 young people who attended YCs groups. For YC's in this research, caring was seen as 'overwhelming' and 'relentless' and something that they had no choice over, alongside a source of frustration and anger. As highlighted by Bolas et al. (2007), participants in this study were not considered as being representative of all YCs, meaning that the results are not indicative of all YC's

experiences. However, the research provided detailed examples of the psychological experience of caring when young and accords with the experiences of YCs within other research in the literature and adds depth to the existing quantitative literature.

It is important to note that there has been an overall general increase in the prevalence of mental health difficulties amongst CYP within the UK. Recent statistics provided by The Children's Society (2022), has indicated that in the last three years, the likelihood of CYP having a mental health problem has increased by 50%. There have been a number of government initiatives in response to the increased prevalence of mental health difficulties, including the 'Transforming children and young people's mental health provision: a green paper' (DfE & DoH, 2017). However, as Cree (2003) has identified, the significant worries and problems YCs have in relation to their well-being, are over and above any 'normal' adolescent difficulties. Moreover, Warren (2007) argues that the high emotional investment made by YCs is often over and above what other CYP provide to family members. When the care recipient's disability is attributed to mental health difficulties, YCs are more likely to provide care of an emotional nature (Dearden & Becker, 2004), which can subsequently heighten their own risk of negative psychological outcomes.

This is exemplified by YC's who support parents with mental illness who participated in McGibbon et al. (2019) study. When interviewed, YC's spoke of the difficulties they encountered when they tried to discuss issues which had a profound effect on their lives e.g., family breakdown or the loss of a parent through separation or death, citing that care recipients would become tearful and feel unable to offer them reassurance or meet their emotional needs. This had a significant impact on the YC's, and for some, culminated in referrals to Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services, self-harm as a means of coping with stress, or attempted suicide. Given the juxtaposition of trying to provide emotional support to the care recipient, whilst social barriers prevent their own emotional needs being met, McAndrew et al. (2012) argue that is it not surprising that YCs are vulnerable to compromised mental health. However, as Stenner (2014) has highlighted, it is important to note that other factors such as social-environmental factors, genetic vulnerability and family dynamics also contribute to a heightened risk of negative psychological outcomes for

children who care for a parent with a mental illness, regardless of care responsibilities.

As articulated by Robison et al. (2020), the relationship between being a YC and the impact on mental health and well-being is not straightforward. YCs are not a homogenous group with clearly defined or uniform responsibilities (Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE), 2005). The type of illness or disability, the frequency and duration of care, and the type of tasks undertaken, as well as the family's socioeconomic situation and the type and frequency of social support received, can all have a differing impact (Robinson et al., 2020). This is echoed by Banks et al. (2001) who have criticised the labelling of children as YCs as it represents only one aspect of a child's identity, yet it is often used as a total characterisation. They highlight that this can obscure other salient aspects such as social class, gender, and ethnicity, alongside being a sibling. Moreover, many of the CYP who were interviewed in Cree's (2003) study discussed histories of family violence, poverty, homelessness, drug abuse and loss irrespective of their experiences of being YCs.

Within the literature, few studies have been conducted to date that focus upon other specific dimensions or characteristics of YC populations such as social class or ethnicity. Research has elucidated that YCs are 1.5 times more likely than their peers to be from black, Asian or minority ethnic (BAME) communities, and are twice as likely to not speak English as their first language (Hounsell, 2013). As noted by James (2019), BAME YCs often face additional issues such as stigma and consequently have difficulties with accessing and receiving support, both financially and practically. Moreover, Hounsell (2013) found that the average annual income for families with a YC was £5,000 less than for families who do not have a YC. According to research, YCs are more common in families with unemployed parents or low incomes, and this is reflected in census data (Scottish Government, 2017). Fives et al. (2013) also noted that socio-economic disadvantage was a factor influencing the impact of caring upon YCs. A number of families within their research were 'heavily dependent' on the income support they received from the state. Children in families living with at least one disabled member are also more likely to be living in poverty (21%); compared to children in families with no disabled family member (16%) (Scottish Government, 2017).

Several studies have highlighted that financial concerns can be an added source of stress for YCs, which can impact upon their emotional wellbeing. YC's in Butler and Astbury (2005) research for example, described the strain they felt of having to contribute to the family finances, with some mentioning that they felt responsible for paying the mortgage and household bills. One YC articulated their concern: "We have to switch off all the lights; otherwise, we can't afford the electricity" (p. 299, Butler & Astbury, 2005). Financial concerns were also prevalent in Dearden and Becker's (2000) examination of 60 YCs. Findings revealed that poverty was common in families where there is a long-term illness or disability. The authors note that YCs may be required to provide support and care in the absence of adequate external support services. A report by the BBC (2020) has estimated that YCs unpaid work is equivalent to £12,000 a year. In Cree's (2003) study, 48% of YC respondents to the questionnaire reported that they worried about money.

The recent coronavirus pandemic has led to an increased focus upon contextual factors and their implications for the lives and well-being of YCs in the UK and this has been reflected in emerging research. Blake-Holmes and McGowan (2022) for example, distributed a survey to YCs during the pandemic and then interviewed an additional 20 YCs. The findings revealed that as external agency support for their families was withdrawn, the level of care that YCs were required to provide had increased. This, coupled with school closures and home school learning, had a 'significant impact on every aspect of their lives'. (p.1, Blake-Holmes & McGowan, 2022). With regards to their mental health and wellbeing, 78% of respondents to the survey reported feeling lonely/ isolated and 74% felt that their mental health had been negatively affected by the pandemic. Several YC's described how supporting their parents' deteriorating mental ill health had affected their own mental health. One YC stated that her mother's need for emotional support was relentless, stating that "I cannot get a break, I cannot even get 5 minutes" (p.26, Blake-Holmes & McGowan, 2022). The Carers Trust (2020) also utilised survey methodology to investigate the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on YCs aged 12 to 17 in Scotland. Findings revealed that 40% of YCs said their mental health was worse since Coronavirus, 66% of YCs were feeling more stressed, 69% felt less connected to others and 67% were more worried about the future.

1.10 Social Wellbeing

The COVID pandemic in particular brought to light the isolation that many YCs experience and therefore contributes to a growing body of literature that draws attention to some of the difficulties faced by YCs regarding their social wellbeing. These difficulties appear to relate to the practical barriers YCs experience (Banks et al., 2001; Butler & Astbury, 2005), alongside the perceptions of others, particularly with regards to their understanding of what it means to be a YC (Bolas et al., 2007).

A key theme within the literature is that many CYP feel isolated due to their caring responsibility within the home (Bolas et al., 2007; Butler & Astbury, 2005; O'dell et al., 2010). This theme of social isolation has been articulated in the qualitative research that was commissioned by the DfE to investigate the lives of YCs aged 5 to 17 in England (Clay et al., 2016). In this research, many of the YCs interviewed expressed that their caring responsibilities limited their ability to engage in an active social life or pursue their own interests outside the home. Reasons cited for this included a lack of free time available or the need to cancel plans with friends or leisure activities due to concern over the care recipient at home. YCs also reported that this feeling of isolation can be exacerbated as friends do not understand their circumstances of young caregiving. YCs voice in several studies that that their friends do not understand what it means to be a YC (Butler & Astbury, 2005; Cree, 2003). Moreover, YCs' accounts in Bolas' et al. (2007) exploratory research also indicated that fear or misunderstanding and stigmatisation can place restrictions in forming peer relationships. This can lead to tension for YCs, as having a caregiving identity can relate to feeling different to their 'normal' peers (Doutre et al., 2013). This is further highlighted in a survey and interview study conducted by O'Dell et al. (2010), with 46 young people aged 15 to 18, 9 of whom were YCs. When analysing the interview data, the authors noted that a key theme related to "the construction of a series of normative assumptions about 'normal' childhood through which YCs and their disabled parent are viewed as non-normative and deficient" (p.2).

Some researchers have explored the views and experiences of YCs from a social capital perspective (exploring how YCs experience and negotiate their family, school and social lives). In one such study, Barry (2011) conducted one-to-one semi-structured interviews with 20 YCs about their social networks and experiences of relationships with others, such as their family, friends and teachers. YC's in Barry's (2011) research described the 'balancing act' of maintaining their commitment and responsibilities to their families whilst also maintaining strong links with friends. YCs explained how they felt torn between their family commitments and their desire to be out with friends, which could sometimes result in emotional tension and feelings of guilt. Moreover, some YCs spoke of their unease about inviting friends into the family home due to embarrassment or wishing to protect the privacy of other family members. This is also articulated by YCs in Banks et al. (2002) research, who participated in either focus groups or individual interviews. YCs spoke about being unable to bring friends home and wanting to keep their family life private. Several young people stated that they did not disclose details of their family life to others, even those they considered their 'best friends'. This study is limited due to having a relatively small number of respondents and therefore cannot be taken to generalise the experiences of all YCs. However, as the authors note, the narratives obtained through the research shed light on some of the issues and challenges in understanding social capital in relation to YCs.

Much of the literature which has elucidated the impact of young caregiving on social wellbeing has utilised qualitative methods, such as interviews. However, as noted by Aldridge and Sharpe (2007), interview research methods are not adequate or appropriate in every case to capture the views of vulnerable children. Therefore, Aldridge and Sharpe (2007) utilised a visual methodological approach, which included photographic participation and elicitation techniques. Twenty children who were caring for a parent with a serious mental health problem were given a disposable camera, to create a visual diary over the space of 2 weeks. The elicitation stage involved the researchers talking with the YCs, using the visual images the YCs had taken to stimulate discussion. An interesting finding that emerged was participants active negotiation of (two-tier) relationships with friends. This included the intentional formation of 'inner circle' friendships (those who knew participants were caregivers) and 'outer circle' friends who were unaware of their caregiving role.

Within the literature, there has also been a focus upon obtaining the views and perspectives of parents and professionals, who have also recognised the difficulties associated with socialising for YCs. When participants were interviewed from health, social care and voluntary sectors on their views about YCs who provide care for adults with mental health problems, they perceived that the greatest challenge for the YCs was social and peer group isolation (Gray et al., 2008). Moreover, when parents were interviewed in the Banks et al. (2001) research, they reported adverse effects on CYP's opportunities to meet friends outside of school, and to participate in social and sporting activities. This was often attributable to difficulty with transport when accompanying a disabled sibling or parent. This has also been raised as a significant difficulty for YCs that live in rural areas, such as Cornwall (Butler & Astbury, 2005). The rural context, coupled with transportation difficulties, meant that some of the YCs needed to travel for more than an hour to attend social activities and access services. This rural isolation resulted in YCs feeling socially and physically excluded and impinged on the ability of CYP to have a social life.

1.11 Physical Health

There is less research within the body of literature which explores the physical health impacts of caregiving on YCs. Overall, there is a lack of quantitative studies, however some researchers have utilised survey methodologies and analysed the data to elucidate the self-reported health outcomes from YCs, in comparison to their non-caregiving peers. Robison et al. (2020), took a population approach to YC research, investigating the differences in their health and wellbeing. The researchers conducted secondary analysis of a representative Scottish secondary school survey. Overall, 1341 pupils (12%) of the sample were identified as having caring responsibilities within the home. Findings revealed that YCs were more likely to report physical health problems than their peers. However, a limitation, as noted by the researchers, is that the measures utilised did not assess the type of care provided by the YCs, which could be important effect modifiers of the association between carer status. Research commissioned by the DfE also found that YCs were considerably less likely to report their health as 'very good' (37%) than those in the comparison survey (47%), and, while the numbers were small, there was a higher

proportion reporting 'bad' health (7%) than their non-caregiving peers (1%) (Clay et al., 2016).

Other research which has utilised quantitative approaches was conducted by Lloyd (2013). Lloyd (2013) sought to explore a significant gap in research, by specifically looking at younger carers, aged 10-11 years. Lloyd (2013) analysed data from Kids' Life and Times (KLT), which is an annual online survey of children carried out in schools in Northern Ireland. In particular, the researcher was interested in the children's responses to survey items which related to caring responsibilities, health and wellbeing and happiness. Findings revealed that children who were carers had poorer health and wellbeing and reported less happiness with their lives in comparison to their peers who were not carers.

Whilst quantitative studies have indicated that YCs report poorer self-rated physical health, the research is limited in that further exploration of these impacts is not investigated. Therefore, researchers have used qualitative methodologies to examine YC's experiences and perceptions of their own state of physical health and wellbeing. In Banks et al. (2002) study, all the YCs who were individually interviewed or participated in focus groups reported tiredness as a physical impact of their caregiving role. Moreover, In McAndrew et al. (2012) study, YCs who were part of a forum for YCs, presented at a World Café event, to describe the impact of caring on their physical health. This included 'being too busy to go to the Doctors' 'coughs and colds that linger', and feelings of guilt about passing these ailments on to those they care for.

1.12 Resilience and Coping

Although often faced with challenging circumstances, the body of literature draws attention to the high degree of resilience and coping mechanisms that YCs demonstrate to protect themselves, their families, and close friendships (Barry, 2011; Cassidy et al., 2014). The authors in Thomas et al.'s (2003) study reported being struck by the conscientious attitude to school and homework demonstrated by many of the YCs and their resourcefulness when faced with difficult situations. The different coping mechanisms developed by YCs to lessen the impact of their caring

responsibilities has also been identified in the research commissioned by the DfE report by Clay et al. (2016). YCs who were older benefited particularly from social relationships and younger carers benefitted from discussing their feelings openly with parents. Others had developed their own coping strategies to manage their emotions and levels of stress, which included using a worry book, writing a diary, drawing, or pursuing leisure activities such as art and football. To minimise the impact upon their education, some YCs cited coping strategies which included doing their homework at lunch/break times, so that they had less to do at home.

Research which utilised the aforementioned Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale, also highlighted that many of the YCs who participated in the study responded positively to the well-being statements and demonstrated resilience and coping skills (Abraham & Aldridge, 2010). Statements to which the YCs responded most positively to were feeling loved (82% said they felt loved often or all the time); interest in new things (68% said they were interested in new things often or all the time); making their mind up and thinking clearly. As noted by the authors, caring can be a positive and rewarding experience, which can support positive self-esteem as CYP feel good about themselves and the caring contributions they make.

Through utilising a stress-coping model, Cassidy et al. (2014) explored the role of benefit finding and resilience on the impact of caregiving. A questionnaire which included measures of social support, coping styles, psychological distress, resilience, caregiver burden, perceived impact of caring, and benefit finding was completed by 442 YCs, aged between 12 and 16. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to investigate the relationships between these variables. Findings revealed that young caregivers exhibit resilience and find benefit in their role despite the potential burden that caregiving places on them. Moreover, when YCs reported benefit from their role, where the role was recognised and valued, and when they reported higher levels of resilience and support, they were more likely to report better mental health. This highlights the importance of social recognition of their role and the presence of support, where caring responsibilities are recognised, and support services are in place to support YCs and their parents (Dearden & Becker, 2000).

1.13 Positive Effects

A criticism raised by several authors (Banks et al., 2001; Doutre et al., 2013; Newman, 2002) is that research within the caregiving literature has predominately focused upon the negative impacts of caring. Moreover, Joseph et al. (2020), who after conducting a narrative review on YCs research, concluded that there is a certain degree of saturation that seems to have been reached in the qualitative literature in describing the range of difficulties encountered by YCs. Therefore, this has promoted a move away from a deficit and risk saturated narrative towards looking at more positive aspects of the caregiving role. Within multiple qualitative studies, YCs have reported the positive aspects of caregiving, such as developing responsibility, maturity, life skills and a closer family relationship (Fives et al., 2013; Gough & Gulliford, 2020; Rose & Cohen, 2010; Thomas et al., 2003). YCs report that their role has promoted positive affect, such as feeling useful and good about themselves (Abraham & Aldridge, 2010). Bolas et al. (2007) noted within their IPA study that YCs actively sought to integrate caring into their merging sense of self and identity and derived a sense of pride and self-esteem from caring. The creation of a positive self-identity has also been communicated by YC's who were interviewed in Wadey's (2015) research, as they see themselves as helpful, confident and caring.

Data collected from surveys has further elucidated the benefits attributable to being a YC. A particularly clear example of this was from Banks et al. (2001) research. Banks et al. (2001) distributed a questionnaire to pupils aged 11-17, that was designed to investigate how many CYP fulfil a caring role, and to gain insight into the impact of caring on CYP with a caring role. Of the 506 respondents to the questionnaire, 117 (23%) were identified are YCs because they reported that they helped to look after another family member. Findings revealed that over half (54%) of those YCs reported that it made them feel grown up and one-third (32%) that it made them happy. This is echoed in another study by Barnardo's (2017), 63% said they were proud and happy to help their families with caregiving.

Banks et al. (2001) also conducted focus group and one to one interviews with CYP identified as YCs, to further explore their views on caregiving. One YC explained that

helping his mother made life less stressful for her, and this, for him, was the "ultimate positive reward" (p. 808). When asked about the positive effects of caring for a disabled family member, YCs reported an increased understanding of disability, closer family relationships, enhanced maturity and practical skills. As part of their research, Banks et al. (2001) also conducted a survey with parents/carers for their views on the ways in which having a disabled family member affected children in the family. Parents drew attention to their children having greater sensitivity, empathy, and independence. Similarly, nearly all the YCs interviewed in research conducted by Fives et al. (2013) reported feeling more mature than their peers. The authors noted that greater maturity often meant greater awareness of issues pertaining to illness and disability. YC's interviewed in Doutre et al. (2013) research also identified positives relating to their caring role, including the opportunity to develop a relationship with the care recipient and make friends with other YCs who were in similar situations.

Other positive aspects related to the caregiving role which have been noted in the literature include acquiring skills, such as interpersonal and organisational skills (Barnardo's, 2017; Scottish Government, 2017). Participants' accounts in Bolas et al. (2007) research demonstrated how acquiring these skills had contributed to a sense of achievement and positive self-esteem. Moreover, as a result of their caring responsibilities, one YC in Thomas et al.'s (2003) research stated that they felt much more prepared for living away from home when they go to college in comparison to their peers. YCs in Barnardo's focus groups (2017) also explained how caring had 'matured them to a level beyond their peers and gave them a sense of responsibility that other young people had not experienced' (p.37). They also cited that their experience of caring was a major factor in helping them decide what sort of job they wanted to do. This has also been recognised by YCs in other pieces of research. In Bolas et al. (2007) exploratory study, some YCs described positively the potential job opportunities that their caring experience may provide them in the future.

1.14 Educational Experiences

The literature cites multiple findings in relation to the educational outcomes for YCs as a result of their caring responsibilities. The literature draws attention to some of

the difficulties faced by YCs with regards to their educational engagement and attainment. Bullying and stigmatisation within the school context are further difficulties faced by YCs.

1.14.1 Attainment

Longitudinal research has been conducted to elucidate the impact of young caregiving on educational outcomes. In one particularly influential study, Hounsell (2013) utilised government commissioned data on over 15,000 pupils aged 13 and 14, to examine the prevalence of young caregiving, YC's educational attainment, and the likelihood of them being in education, employment or training. The data was analysed from the Longitudinal Survey of Young People in England, which was commissioned by the former Department for Children, Schools and Families. Findings indicated that YCs had significantly lower attainment at GCSE level (the equivalent to nine grades lower overall than their peers); and were more likely than the national average to not be in education, employment or training at age 16–19 (Hounsell, 2013). As noted by the author, the size of the sample can give confidence in the findings and clearly highlights the differential impact that caring has on YCs in comparison to their non-caregiving peers, including limiting their educational attainment, and the subsequent impact that this can have on employment opportunities and careers. This increased recognition of the potential adverse impact of caregiving on educational outcomes in research such as this has led to government initiatives (Children and Families Act, 2014, Care Act, 2014), which aim to assess and support CYP from taking on excessive or inappropriate care. It has also led to the emergence of free initiatives set up by charities, such as the 'Young Carers in Schools', which is run jointly by the Carers Trust and The Children's Society. This supports schools with identifying and supporting YCs, and awards good practice (Children's Society, 2022).

A number of qualitative studies have illuminated the reasons why YCs are at a greater risk of lower educational attainment. YCs report experiencing numerous educational difficulties such as keeping up with homework and schoolwork (Aldridge et al., 2017; Thomas et al., 2003) and problems with concentration and tiredness (Banks et al., 2001; Cree, 2003; Dearden & Becker, 2004). YCs in Thomas et al.

(2003) study reported that caring responsibilities frequently took precedence over homework. YCs who were interviewed in Eley's (2004) research reported that balancing attendance, homework, and caring obligations was tiring. Fatigue was so significant for one YC in the study, that they sometimes slept in the school toilets if they had been looking after a parent during the night (Eley, 2004). For some YCs, tiredness was a major concern as it led to difficulties concentrating in class, which could result in them being told off by teachers (Family Action, 2012), or falling asleep in class (Cree, 2003).

Research evidence in this area is quite inconsistent however, with varying numbers of YCs stating that their caring responsibilities are negatively impacting their education (Scottish Government, 2017). School experiences vary considerably amongst YCs, as they do for many CYP, with some reporting feeling motivated and enjoying their education while others reporting feeling less positive (Clay et al., 2016). This is exemplified in a study by Family Action (2012) where 49% of YCs reported that their schoolwork had been affected by issues relating to their caregiving role, however 44% stated that it had made no difference at all and the remainder saying they did not know. Moreover, in Eley's (2004) qualitative study, the author noted that schoolwork did not appear to suffer unduly from caring responsibilities. For the YCs who were interviewed by Fives et al. (2013), some YCs reported that they were doing well in school, however others stated that they were distracted when in school whenever there were care-related concerns at home. Clay et al. (2016) have postulated the factors which may minimise the impact of caring on academic engagement and performance. This included families who are receiving sufficient external support, or where parents actively tried to minimise their children's caring responsibilities to reduce the impact of caring on their education.

1.14.2 Attendance

The body of literature draws attention to the impact that caregiving can have upon school attendance. Research by the Carers Trust (2020) for example, found that, on average, 48 school days were missed or cut short per year. In the quantitative research commissioned by the DfE, 10% of YCs (aged 11-17) reported being late for school or college more than once a week in the last 12 months compared to only 1%

in the comparison survey (Clay et al., 2016). Research by Barnardo's (2017) has also indicated that '27% of YCs aged 11- 16 experience educational difficulties or miss school because of their caring responsibilities, rising to 40% for YCs with parental mental ill health/substance misuse' (p. 32). This research concurs with previous findings; The Children's Society (2013) found that 40% of CYP aged 13 or 14 who were caring for a parent with drug or alcohol misuse reported that they had missed school because of their caring responsibilities. As emphasised in the Children's Commissioner report (2022), researchers have outlined the key role of schools and other educational settings in considering whether a child is severely or persistently absent or missing from education, as this may indicate that they are a YC in need of support.

Whilst acknowledging that caring circumstances may be contributing towards school absences, Newman (2002) argues that other factors, such as the family's socio-economic status, should not be overlooked. The author notes that school absences are more common amongst young people who have a low socio-economic status. He therefore argues that research which controls for this variable is needed before asserting that caring is directly impacting upon educational attendance. However, as previously mentioned, there is a consensus within the literature that YCs are more likely to live in a deprived area, have a low socio-economic status and be affected by poverty (Scottish Government, 2017). Therefore, one may infer that the risk of YCs being absent from education may actually be two-fold. Despite this perceived increased risk, not all research has indicated that young caregiving adversely impacts upon educational attendance. Warren (2007) conducted structured interviews with YCs and found that a large majority of CYP identified as YCs did not miss school because of their caring roles and were not more likely to be late for school than their peers. As noted by the Scottish Government (2017), for many YCs, this highlights the unique and varied circumstances of YCs, as the difficulties they face and the impacts that they experience are multi-faceted.

1.14.3 Bullying and Stigmatisation

The body of caregiving literature has highlighted that bullying, isolation, social exclusion and stigmatisation are issues faced by YCs, particularly within the school context (Butler & Astbury, 2005; Cree, 2003; Warren, 2007). One study that is

representative of this body of literature is that by Earley and colleagues (2007). One of the primary stressors mentioned by YCs in Earley et al. (2007) study was being made to feel different because of other people's reactions to their caring and/or association with illness and disability. This stigmatisation took the form of bullying and name calling directed either at the care recipient or YC. Studies utilising survey methodology has also quantified the incidence of bullying experienced by YCs. In a survey of 700 YCs, over two thirds (68%) reported that they had been bullied in school (The Princess Royal Trust for Carers, 2009). Moreover, research commissioned by the DfE utilised a comparison design, to compare the experience of bullying for YCs in comparison with same aged, non-caregiving peers (Clay et al., 2016). Findings revealed that YCs were significantly more likely to report being bullied (16%) compared to their non-caregiving peers (3%). This finding was also echoed by the parents who completed a survey, a higher rate of experiencing bullying was reported by parents of YCs in comparison to parents who did not have children with caregiving responsibilities. YCs responses in McAndrew et al. (2012) also highlighted an additional vulnerability with regards to bullying. They reported that they were often bullied in school, however, were not able to rely upon their parents for support in dealing with this. This highlights an essential role schools have in tackling bullying issues.

Butler and Astbury (2005) posited that YCs may avoid school because they are afraid of being scrutinised by other students and fear that they may act in a way to embarrass or humiliate them. This was found to be the case for YCs in Bolas et al. (2007) research. The perceived stigma associated with caring, as well as others' lack of understanding, made the participants feel vulnerable to being misjudged or rejected. This fear of negative reaction and judgement from others led to them viewing their social words as threatening and hostile and led to secrecy and withdrawal. For YCs interviewed in research by the charity Family Action (2012), this fear of bullying was cited as a reason why some YCs prefer to remain hidden in school, choosing not to reveal their responsibilities to peers. This therefore may have implications upon the support they can receive from schools.

1.15 Educational Support and School-based Interventions

1.15.1 YC's Perspectives of Support at School

Research exploring YC's educational experiences and the support they receive
within it from professionals has yielded a mixture of positive and negative viewpoints
(Clay et al., 2016; Gough & Gulliford, 2020; Plummer, 2012, Stenner, 2014). Some
YCs have reported positive experiences, such as having someone at school who
they could talk to regularly (Choudhury & Williams, 2020; Thomas et al., 2003;
Williams, 2016). Of those YC's who reported that they enjoyed school in Thomas et
al. (2003) study, most suggested that it was a particular teacher or the ambience of a
particular school that supported them. Barry (2011) also noted a similar finding, as
some of the YCs interviewed singled out specific teachers who were understanding,
supportive and provided an extension for homework if the YC had a change in home
circumstances which prevented them from completing the work. YCs in Clay et al.
(2016) research also noted that support from teachers to complete their studies,
particularly during stressful times e.g., exams and transitions, was the main way in
which schools could support them. Having a trusted adult at school has also been
highlighted by YCs as an important first step to being able to be open about their
caring role (Family Action, 2012).

Qualitative research exploring YC's educational experiences has highlighted the
benefits of being in school. In Hebden's (2021) study for example, the YC's
interviewed described school as a positive space where they want to spend time, as
it is a place separate to home and their caring role. A YC in Blake-Holmes and
McGowan (2022) research explained that 'school has always been a place away that
I can feel safe' (p.26). This resonated across the YCs who frequently described
school as a respite, and an opportunity to take a break from their caring role. This
echoes the suggestion that schools can provide a 'safe haven' 'sanctuary' or 'refuge'
for some YCs (Becker & Becker, 2008; Cree, 2003). This has been particularly
emphasised in research undertaken during the coronavirus pandemic. A strong
desire for the routine and respite of school during school closures was prominent
throughout the YC interviews in Blake-Holmes and McGowan's (2022) research.
Alongside school being seen as a respite, YCs have also identified that school

provides a space for socialising and being with friends. YC's interviewed in Barry's (2011) research highlighted that school provides an ideal opportunity for meeting friends during the school day, as YCs were often unable to visit their friends in the evenings and on weekends due to caring responsibilities. Maintaining relationships is important to YCs and research frequently refers to school being an ideal place where YCs can socialise.

On the contrary, other qualitative research within the caregiving literature has highlighted that some YCs feel there is a lack of understanding and support in schools. Rose and Cohen (2010) conducted a meta-synthesis to explore YC's accounts of caregiving, with the aim of promoting a phenomenological understanding of their experiences. Rose and Cohen (2010) found that YCs have expressed anger at others' lack of awareness of their situation and lack of support at school. This is echoed by the voices of YCs who were interviewed in Eley's (2004) study. YCs felt that teachers lacked 'humility' about the experience of being a YC and the balancing act of caring and schooling. They voiced concerns that their confidences to teachers were often perceived as 'stories' or 'excuses'. YCs within this study felt that schools need to have a greater awareness about their exceptional circumstances and how young caregiving may affect school attendance and their ability to meet coursework deadlines. This view was shared amongst YCs in Barry's study (2011) who also felt that teachers were not supportive enough of pupils who were behind on schoolwork. One YC in Eley's (2004) research expressed his anger regarding the rigidity of deadlines for coursework that he had personally experienced. In research commissioned by the DfE, YCs expressed that support and flexibility was not provided consistently by all teachers, and for some, this was due to only a specific teacher being aware of their caring role at home (Clay et al., 2016). This highlighted that a lack of shared information/understanding between teachers was a barrier to receiving support. Some YCs also expressed that the timing of support was inconvenient, as it meant they missed important lessons or unstructured times (e.g., break and lunchtimes) when they could socialise with their friends. This limited the extent to which they confided in teachers and accessed support.

The perceptions of authority figures within school contexts were problematic to YCs in Butler and Astbury's (2005) research. YCs who participated in the focus groups

felt that there was a lack of interest regarding their plight, which contributed to the stress they were experiencing as a result of their caregiving responsibilities at home. This perceived lack of interest was voiced by the YCs in the study, citing that 'teachers don't know about YCs and 'teachers don't care' (p.298, Butler & Astbury, 2005). Moreover, in Eley's (2004) study, YCs claimed in frustration that 'they must know' when talking about teachers. In Barry et al. (2011) research many YC's expressed criticism at the attitudes of teachers, feeling that there was little justification for the aggressive or authoritarian approach of some teachers. This is mirrored in the voices of YC's in Eley's (2004) study, who felt that some teachers were, at times, 'insensitive' or 'hard' on them.

1.15.2 School-based Support

Several studies within the literature have highlighted that schools could be an important protective factor in the lives of YCs (Barry, 2010; Becker & Becker, 2008; Gough & Gulliford, 2020; Roberts, 2008). Research has highlighted how school-based interventions have the highest likelihood of reaching and supporting vulnerable children, such as YCs (Kern et al. 2017). Therefore, given that YCs spend the majority of time within a school setting it is essential they are at the forefront of identifying and providing support for YCs (Hebden, 2021). Gough and Gulliford (2020) conducted an exploratory study to investigate YCs' perceptions of factors contributing to their adjustment and benefit finding within their caregiving role through utilising a mixed methods design (focus group and then a survey). Findings revealed positive associations between school connectedness (defined as the student's relationship with school) and adjustment for YCs in their study, highlighting the protective role school can play in the lives of children who experience adversity. The authors note that the role of school can be to mitigate the effects of a difficult home situation.

Numerous guidance documents and toolkits have been developed to support schools identify and support YCs (The Carer's Trust, 2017, The Children's Society, 2020). However, despite the publication of these documents, there appears to be little research that provides any insight into whether, and how, these are being incorporated into practice in schools on a day-to-day basis. This is echoed by the

concluding remarks of research commissioned by the Scottish Government (2017), who noted that the evidence on effective support and interventions in schools in undeveloped, despite schools being seen as a valuable avenue for support. Therefore, there remains a need for research further exploring school-based provision for YCs.

1.15.3 Professionals' Perspectives

Several pieces of research within the literature have utilised questionnaires to gather the perspectives from educational professionals, with regards to identifying and supporting YCs. A large-scale study by Barnardo's, in partnership with YouGov (2017), obtained 800 responses to a questionnaire from teachers working in primary and secondary schools. Findings revealed that 45% of secondary school teachers reported they did not feel confident they would recognise a YC. Moreover, only 26% of respondents reported that there was a mechanism for identifying YCs at their schools and only 19% stated that their school provides training on YCs to teachers. This is mirrored in another study utilising a questionnaire methodology. In the 'Be Bothered' study (2012), 72% of teachers said that they did not know the number of YCs in school and over 64% were unaware of the number of YCs in their classroom. Moreover, the authors stated that it was 'worrying' that only a third of teachers saw the role of school as responsible for identifying and assessing the needs of vulnerable pupils. Instead, teachers felt that this is a job for social workers, YCs groups, health agencies and General Practitioners. Barnardo's (2017) highlight that when identifying YCs, no agency can have sole responsibility, as any frontline professional could be the first point of contact for YCs and their families.

Responses from the aforementioned questionnaires (Barnardo's, 2017; Family Action, 2012) therefore highlight a need for developing the identification systems for YCs with schools. Warren (2007) draws attention to the clear role that teachers, pastoral staff, learning mentors and other educational professionals have in the early identification of YCs. The author states that educational staff are well placed to recognise and monitor behaviour indicators (absenteeism, difficulties with concentrating, challenges with friendships) which may be indicative of a child's caregiving role at home. In the survey of Barnardo's practitioners (2017), there was

also overwhelming support for schools being enabled to identify YCs. Over 95% of respondents cited schools as key in helping with the identification of YCs as well as providing a means for engagement with their families. A recent announcement made in the Adult Social Care Reform white paper (2021) stated that the DfE will amend the school census to include a category on YCs. Therefore, by knowing the number of YCs in schools, this will raise awareness of this often 'hidden' group of CYP (Children's Commissioner, 2022).

Regarding the support in place for YCs in educational settings, only 12% of teachers that participated in the survey conducted by Barnardo's (2017) reported that there was a YCs policy, and just 1% reported that their school had identification cards so YCs could explain their circumstances to teachers quickly. Moreover, 41% of head / deputy head teachers and 26% of teachers stated that there was an identified person in their school for YCs. For educational professionals surveyed in the Family Action (2012) study, a third of respondents reported that their schools had a YC Lead staff member, with 17% having a YCs' policy. Some teachers directed YCs they had identified to support in school such as a school counsellor, nurse or to a special support group. Another quantitative study which sought to elucidate the systems in place to support YCs in schools was undertaken by Boddy (2016), who analysed the responses of 39 school staff. A structured questionnaire with dichotomous, multiple-choice, ratio scaling, and open-ended questions was developed for school staff to identify the support provided by the school and sourced through outside agencies. Findings revealed that half the respondents offered some form of internal support for YCs in schools. This took the form of provision relating to education, social clubs and opportunities, supportive members of staff and opportunities to meet with other YCs. The most common form of external support accessed was referrals to external services, such as YC Services.

Within these quantitative studies, school staff have reported that they could be more effective in meeting and supporting the needs of the YCs in their setting (Boddy, 2016), and have articulated that far more needs to be done to support YCs in schools (Barnardo's, 2017). For educational professionals in the Family Action (2012) study, 44% of teachers said their school did an adequate or good job supporting YCs, however, 30% said their school could do a better job. These

responses highlight the paucity of support for YCs and the need for more research into the reasons why educational professionals feel support for YCs in schools is lacking, and whether there are any barriers to supporting YCs.

Whilst providing valuable insights into the perspectives of professionals when identifying and supporting YCs in schools, the questionnaire methodology utilised by Barnardo's (2017) and Boddy (2016) is limited in that participants could not elaborate further upon their answers. Thus, there were limited opportunities to explore more in-depth about what support has been implemented, how effective it has been and to discuss what the barriers to support may be. Having reviewed the literature, there appears to be very few studies which have utilised qualitative methods to gather the views of school professionals. An exception was one study which was conducted by Family Action (2012); a charity which provides practical, emotional, and financial support to those who are experiencing poverty, disadvantage, and social isolation across the country. Family Action (2012) utilised interviews and focus groups alongside a questionnaire to gather the views of teachers and other educational professionals. However, this was published in 2012, prior to the emergence of key policies and legislation which significantly strengthened the rights of YCs, such as the Children and Families Act (2014) and the Care Act (2014). This legislation placed new duties on professionals to identify and support YCs and their families (Aldridge, 2018).

A recent qualitative study was conducted to explore teacher's perceptions of supporting YCs in schools (Warhurst et al., 2022). Within this study, teachers perceived many difficulties identifying YCs who did not volunteer this information, and subsequently, the main enabler of identification was the relationships and trust between the school, the CYP and parents. Once YCs had been identified, teachers perceived the main areas of need that they could support were the emotional well-being of the pupils and additional academic support. The narratives from the teachers also elucidated the difficulties of balancing this extra support within the constraints of the school context, in terms of the school day and also the competing priorities relating to social-emotional and academic needs. This research therefore offers insight into teachers' awareness of YCs and identifies both good practice alongside challenges when identifying and supporting YCs in schools.

A key recommendation within guidance developed for schools is to appoint a staff member as a DYCL with oversight of the school's provision for YCs (Carers Trust, 2017; Caring Together, 2022). The DYCL role can be held by a member of the school's Senior Leadership Team or another member of staff such as the Pastoral Lead, Learning Mentor, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Coordinator (SENDCo) or another member of staff with a specific interest in supporting YCs (Carers Trust & The Children's Society, 2022). The guidance states that the DYCL needs to understand the challenges that YCs can face and be clearly identifiable to pupils, families and staff. The role of the DYCL has been defined by the Carers Trust and The Children's Society (2022), to include the following responsibilities:

- To manage the school's provision for YCs and their families on a day-to-day basis.
- Act as the main point of contact for YCs and their families in school.
- Advise and support school staff about how to identify and support YCs.
- Be the contact point for external agencies, such as the school nurse and local YCs service, and feeder/linked schools, supporting effective inter-agency working to meet the needs of YCs and their families.

Studies exploring the perspectives of DYCLs has not been conducted to date and therefore is an avenue for further research. Moreover, a recent announcement made in the Adult Social Care Reform White Paper (2021) stated that the DfE will amend the school census to include a category on YCs, which will have a significant impact on the identification of 'hidden' YCs and the role of schools in supporting them. Therefore, there is a continued need for more up-to-date qualitative research to elucidate what support is being provided to YCs in schools considering these wider systemic changes.

1.16 Relevance to Educational Psychology

As noted by Gough and Gulliford (2020) "the prevalence of YCs, and the known associated risks with educational disadvantage, suggests it is highly likely that Educational Psychologists (EPs) could be involved in supporting this population of CYP" (p.15). Researchers have highlighted how EPs are situated in a prime position

to work collaboratively with educational staff in schools to aid the identification and support systems for YCs (Hebden, 2021), and to build capacity of schools, families, and other professionals through training and systemic work from a psychological strength-based perspective (Doutre et al., 2013). Doutre et al. (2013) also highlight that despite educational psychology having the potential to contribute to the understanding of the needs of YCs, there is very little reference to YCs in core professional journals for educational psychology. For example, in the Educational Psychology in Practice journal only two research studies have been published regarding YCs to date (Gough & Gulliford, 2020; Choudhury & Williams, 2020). It is therefore hoped that this research will add to the literature base on young caregiving and have useful implications for the practice of EPs.

1.17 Future Research Directions

This review of the literature on young caregiving has considered the broad range of methodologies employed to understand the lives of YCs. This has revealed the discourse that has shaped modern-day understanding and practice and the ongoing debates regarding the definition and prevalence of YCs (Cree, 2003; Gowen et al., 2021). There is a significant body of literature which has predominately discussed the impacts of young caregiving on psychological wellbeing, social wellbeing, physical health and educational experiences and outcomes from a negative perspective. This current literature review therefore algins with the findings by Joseph et al. (2020), who after conducting a narrative review on YCs research, concluded that there is a certain degree of saturation that seems to have been reached in the qualitative literature in describing the range of difficulties encountered by YCs. This overall dominant discourse of risk in YCs have been criticised by several authors (Banks et al., 2001; Doutre et al., 2013; Newman, 2002) and has been coupled with the increased recognition that not all YCs are adversely affected by their role (Cassidy et al., 2014; Thomas et al. 2003). This has promoted a shift within the literature, with emerging research exploring more positive aspects of the caregiving role, resilience (Cassidy et al., 2014; Williams, 2016) and the protective factors that YCs perceive as supporting them to adjust to their caregiving role (Gough & Gulliford, 2020). In line with this shifting narrative, there is a sustained

need for further research to examine what supports positive educational and psychological well-being outcomes for YCs.

Within the literature, there are multiple studies which have explored the educational experiences of YCs. Listening to the voices of YCs themselves, some YCs have reported positive school experiences (Barry, 2011; Thomas et al., 2003), whereas others have indicated a lack of understanding and support (Eley, 2004; Rose & Cohen, 2010). Therefore, as noted by Hebden (2021), it is unclear exactly how supportive schools can be to YCs. Schools have been recognised as an important avenue whereby YCs can be identified and supported (Gough & Gulliford, 2020; Hebden, 2021), however, research gathering school-based professionals' views thus far has indicated a lack of confidence in identifying YCs and a paucity of support for YCs in schools (Barnardo's, 2017).

Only a few studies to date have investigated school professionals' awareness of YCs. Within quantitative studies, school-based professionals have indicated that they did not feel confident they would recognise a YC and have cited that they do not know the number of YCs in school or in their classroom (Barnardo's, 2017; Family Action, 2012). Moreover, education professionals have reported that, in some schools, there is no mechanism for identifying YCs, no YCs policy and that they have not yet received training from their school regarding supporting YCs. A recent qualitative study has provided further insight into teachers' perceptions of supporting YCs in schools (Warhurst et al., 2022). Teachers highlighted that once CYP had been identified as a YC, the main areas of need that they could provide support for were the emotional well-being of CYP and additional academic opportunities. This aligned with the responses gathered from school-based professionals in Boddy's (2016) research, who also cited additional academic and emotional well-being support that could be provided to YCs in schools. This took the form of provision relating to education, social clubs and opportunities, supportive members of staff, opportunities to meet with other YCs and support from external services, such as YC Organisations.

Overall, the limited number of studies that have included the voice of school-based professionals have predominately been in the context of survey methodology

(Barnardo's, 2017; Boddy, 2016). Qualitative research has also been conducted with school-based professionals, however, this focused specifically on YCs with additional needs (Choudhury, 2018), has gathered teachers' perspectives (Warhurst et al., 2022) or was conducted prior to the introduction of key legislation, such as the Children and Families Act (2014) and the Care Act (2014) which significantly strengthened the rights of YCs (Family Action, 2012). Consequently, there is scope for more up-to-date qualitative research, which may provide a richer picture of school-based professionals' experiences of supporting YCs in schools. A key recommendation within guidance developed for schools is to appoint a staff member as a DYCL to oversee effective intervention (Carers Trust, 2017; Caring Together, 2022). However, there have been no studies to date exploring the perspectives of school DYCLs in relation to their knowledge and experience working with YCs. There is therefore an identified need for research to investigate the perspectives of DYCLs, both to elucidate good practice and to identify challenges when identifying and supporting YCs in schools.

Chapter Two: Empirical Paper

2.1 Abstract

This study explored the perspectives of Designated Young Carer Leads (DYCLs) with regards to their practice in identifying and supporting YCs. The purpose of the study was to provide insight into the current practice of DYCLs, with the aim of identifying good practice, as well as highlighting what the potential barriers may be to supporting YCs. Data was gathered using semi-structured interviews and analysed using reflexive Thematic Analysis (TA) (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Three themes were identified through this process: 'Knowledge and Awareness of Young Caregiving', 'A Family-centred Approach' and 'Promoting YC's Sense of Belonging'. The findings highlighted the importance of raising awareness of YCs across CYP, families and school staff, to support the identification of YCs. The findings also emphasised the need to work collaboratively with YCs and their families, through adopting a person-centred approach, and the need to promote YC's sense of belonging within school settings through acknowledging YCs in school and through a relational and nurturing approach. This study adds to the current evidence-base which indicates that schools are situated in a prime position to identify and support YCs. The need for more schools to identify and support YCs is emphasised within participants narratives. Recommendations for future research are discussed, alongside the implications and potential of the EP role in supporting schools and YCs.

2.2 Introduction

Recognition of the role of YCs in the UK has steadily increased since the early 1990's, when young caregiving was first acknowledged in research and legislation (Aldridge & Becker, 1993). This early research focused upon defining the tasks and responsibilities undertaken by YCs, and the impact that such caregiving responsibilities can have on CYP's emotional wellbeing and development (Warren, 2007). Commensurate with the rise in the public profile YCs, research into the experiences of YCs has expanded, including large scale studies commissioned by the DfE (Aldridge et al., 2017; Clay et al., 2016). As a result, the visibility and awareness regarding some of the challenges that YCs face daily has been amplified. The recent coronavirus pandemic has also led to an increased focus upon contextual factors and their implications for the lives and well-being of YCs in the UK. Within the

literature, YCs have been identified as a group of CYP who are more vulnerable to negative outcomes in their psychological, physical, and social wellbeing (Barry, 2011; Bolas et al., 2007; Clay et al., 2016; Cree, 2003; Robison et al., 2020). Although YCs are often faced with challenging circumstances, there is a body of literature that draws attention to positive aspects related to the caregiving role (Fives et al., 2013; Rose & Cohen, 2010; Thomas et al., 2003,) and the high degree of resilience and coping mechanisms that YCs demonstrate (Cassidy et al., 2014).

YC's school experiences have been a focal point within the young caregiving literature, and research studies have drawn attention to some of the difficulties faced by YCs with regards to their educational engagement and attainment (Barnardo's, 2017; Carers Trust, 2020; Hounsell, 2013; Lloyd, 2013) and their experiences of bullying and stigmatisation (Banks et al., 2002; Earley et al., 2007; Warren, 2007). This has resulted in increased awareness of the need for YCs to be acknowledged and supported in schools. YCs were specifically referred to in the Ofsted Common Inspection Framework as a vulnerable group of CYP, who schools must support to make progress and fulfil their potential (Ofsted, 2015). Schools have also been recognised by the UK Government, charities and within research as having a vital role to play in identifying and initiating support for YCs (e.g., Clay et al. 2016, Gough & Gulliford, 2020; Warren, 2007).

The following section will begin by placing the current study within the existing literature on young caregiving, to explore how YCs are currently identified, and the role that schools may have in this. It will then present a rationale for the current research and why the role of schools in supporting YC's educational experiences and social, emotional, and mental health warrants further exploration through research. It will also highlight how the perspective of school DYCLs is a useful avenue to explore this further. It will conclude with the RQs that have been framed through the literature review process.

2.3 Identifying YCs in Schools

According to the most recent census data, there were over 166,000 YCs in England and Wales (Office for National Statistics, 2011). However, it is widely acknowledged

within the literature that the exact figure is likely to be much higher, with YCs being described as a "hidden population" (Doutre et al., 2013). Understanding the true prevalence of young caregiving has been complicated by differing definitions of what a YC is and a lack of reliable and consistent statistics. This has been further compounded by the fact that data collected often relies upon the self-identification by families, and some families may not recognise the term 'Young Carer' (Gowen et al., 2021) or may choose not to disclose caregiving responsibilities. Thus, research within the caregiving literature primarily offers findings based upon the experiences of YCs who see themselves as such, and who seek help and support (SCIE, 2005). Consequently, a notable methodological limitation cited by many authors within the literature base is that many of the studies only examine the experiences of YCs who are in touch, or receive support from, YC Projects (Bolas et al., 2007; Lloyd, 2013; SCIE, 2005). Therefore, research has not reported the views of "hard to reach" YCs who are not in touch with either services or projects. The experiences and needs of this "hard-to reach population" are not well reflected in research studies. Barnardo's (2017) argue that when identifying YCs, no agency can have sole responsibility, as any frontline professional could be the first point of contact for YCs and their families. Therefore, it is possible that school professionals may be the first to identify YCs, who are not yet known to YC projects and other services. Indeed, children who begin caring at a young age, such as in primary school, are most frequently identified by their teachers or support staff (Barnardo's, 2017). Whilst this research will not be able to gather the views of this "hard to reach population" of YCs directly, through gathering the perspectives of school-based professionals, it is hoped that a degree of insight into identifying and supporting this "hidden population" via the group of professionals who are often first to identify them as such.

Although schools may be one of the first places in which YCs are identified, the literature has also acknowledged a wide range of professionals who have front-line contact with CYP and so may be the first to identify and support YCs (Barnardo's, 2017). This is also echoed by the DfE (2016) and The Children's Society (2020), who note the role of social care, health services and educational services, statutory and the voluntary sector in providing support for YCs. Therefore, it is argued that the field of young caregiving demands a multi-disciplinary and multi-agency approach (Joseph et al., 2020). The importance of YC's interactions with people and

environments around them, both directly and indirectly, is a recurring theme in the caregiving literature (Barry, 2011; Choudhury, 2018; Doutre et al., 2013). Subsequently, recent literature has promoted a more 'systemic' framework to understanding young caregivers' experiences, recognising the influence of context, multiple systems, and multiple professional groups in supporting YCs (Choudhury, 2018, Manwaring, 2022). Drawing upon 'Ecological Systems Theory' (Bronfenbrenner, 1992), this approach takes into account the environments and systems within which individuals live, the relationship between individuals and these systems, and the relationships between systems themselves (Hayes et al., 2017). Attention is also given to the wider sociocultural context and emphasises that child development cannot be understood in isolation from the wider social, cultural and political contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). Therefore, the current research project aims to build upon the research conducted by Choudhury (2018) and Manwaring (2022) by looking at the potential partnerships and collaborative working arrangements that schools may have with other organisations, as well as identifying what facilitates or restricts multi-agency collaboration when supporting YCs. Using an ecological lens, the research aims to focus upon not only on the interaction between the YC and school, but also on the relationships between schools, families, support services and the wider community.

2.4 Supporting YC's Educational Experiences and Wellbeing in schools

Within the existing literature on young caregiving there were accounts of potential challenges or negative outcomes, including impacts on YC's psychological, social and physical wellbeing (Banks et al., 2001, Bolas et al., 2007; Butler & Astbury, 2005; Earley et al., 2007; Thomas et al., 2003), reduced educational attainment (Hounsell, 2013) and lower school attendance (Barnardo's, 2017; Carer's Trust, 2020). Subsequently, schools have been recognised as a valuable avenue for support for YCs. There is a body of literature which draws attention to the benefits of being at school for YC's and the potential support it can offer e.g., understanding, and supportive teachers, opportunities to socialise with friends (Barry, 2011), spaces to meet up with other YCs (Boddy, 2016; Choudhury, 2018) and personalised teaching/pastoral support (Clay et al., 2016). However, this is not representative of all YC's experiences. Despite schools being identified as a potential avenue of

support, anecdotal studies have revealed that YC's educational experiences and the support they receive within it from professionals has yielded a mixture of positive and negative viewpoints (Clay et al., 2016; Plummer, 2012). YCs have attributed this variation to some educational professionals' lack of awareness about the realities of caring (Roberts et al., 2008).

A limited number of studies within the literature have included the voice of school professionals, but this has been within the context of survey methodology (Barnardo's 2017; Boddy, 2016), conducted with YCs with additional needs (Choudhury, 2018) or conducted prior to the introduction of key legislation such as the Children and Families Act (2014) and the Care Act (2014) which strengthened the rights of YCs (Family Action, 2012). Subsequently, there is an identified need for qualitative research to focus upon schools who are providing support to YCs, to elucidate good practice and to share this more widely, and to also identify potential challenges. This echoes the suggestion from the Children's Commissioner (2022) who stated that more needs to be done, to share and build on best practice in creating greater school-wide awareness of YCs. A key recommendation within guidance developed for schools is to appoint a staff member as a DYCL to oversee effective intervention (Carers Trust, 2017, Caring Together, 2022). However, to the researcher's knowledge, there have been no studies to date exploring the perspectives of school's DYCLs in relation to their knowledge and experience working with YCs. There is therefore an identified need for research to investigate the perspectives of DYCLs, both to elucidate good practice and to also identify challenges when identifying and supporting YCs in schools.

As noted within the concluding remarks of research commissioned by the Scottish Government (2017), the current evidence on effective support and interventions in schools for YCs is underdeveloped. It has been suggested that research looking into the reasons for YC's in education could be further explored to see what, if any effective strategies or interventions are in place (Hebden, 2021). Researchers have also advocated for studies to focus increasingly on YC's wellbeing and the development of emotional well-being support (Boddy, 2016), with positive psychological and positive educational interventions being more prominent (Joseph et al. 2020). Therefore, this forms the basis of the current research, which aims to

investigate the specific contributions made by schools to support YC's educational experiences, attainment, and psychological well-being, through gathering the perspectives of DYCLs.

2.5 Research Aims and Research Questions

The current research has the primary aim of gaining an insight into how YCs are identified and supported within schools, through focusing upon the experiences of DYCLs. The second objective is to explore DYCLs' understanding of the relationships between the YC's, their families, schools, support services and the wider community. As the current study takes a qualitative approach, it is hoped that the detailed accounts of DYCLs' experiences of supporting YCs will elucidate both aspects of good practice and potential challenges, to contribute to the body of literature on young caregiving and potentially inform future practice in education.

The central RQ and sub-questions were guided by the review of the existing literature, alongside the researcher's ontological and epistemological position. They were devised to elicit and obtain the multiple viewpoints of DYCL. The central questions provide an overarching framework, to address the study's focus of enquiry i.e., DYCLs' experience of identifying and supporting YCs. A review of the literature highlighted that YCs have an increased risk of experiencing difficulties with their emotional wellbeing and their ability to engage with education. Therefore, the two sub-questions help refine one of the central questions and focus specifically upon exploring the educational, social and emotional support YCs receive in school.

The RQs were:
- How are YCs identified in schools, from the perspective of DYCLs?
- How are YCs supported in the school environment from the perspective of DYCLs?
  - How are YC's educational experiences and attainment supported in the school environment from the perspective of DYCLs?

  - How are YC's social, emotional, and mental health needs supported in the school environment from the perspective of DYCLs?

2.6 Methodology

This section outlines the methodology utilised for the current study, including a discussion of the ontological and epistemological position adopted by the researcher and how this influenced the design of the study. The process of data collection and data analysis that was adopted to address the RQs will be discussed, followed by a concluding discussion of the ethical considerations.

2.6.1 Research Design

2.6.1.1 Epistemological Position

This research is underpinned by a critical realist (CR) stance, which was first developed and popularised by Bhaskar in the 1970s and 1980s (Bhaskar, 1978). CR is a contemporary uptake of the realist ontological perspective (Levers, 2013). This is because the central tenet underpinning CR is the belief that there is a world/reality that exists independently of the human mind, our perceptions, theories, and constructions (Maxwell, 2012; Williams, 2018). CR combines this ontological realism ('belief in an independent reality') with epistemological relativism (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Epistemological relativism posits that truth cannot be accessed in its entirety, rather only in glimpses or partial fragments (Levers, 2013). Therefore, CR "combines the realist ambition to gain a better understanding of what is 'really' going on in the world with the acknowledgement that the data the researcher gathers may not provide direct access to this reality or a clear and direct reflection of reality" (Willig, 2013, p.11). This is described as "a mediated reflection of reality" by Braun and Clarke (2021). Therefore, the researcher's primary hope in the current study is to gather DYCLs' experiences as a 'reality' to be explored (e.g., their experiences of identifying and supporting YCs within schools). CR argues that ontologically, this reality is not accessible to direct observation (Lawani, 2021), nor can it be identified objectively. Therefore, CR acknowledges that all knowledge is partial, incomplete, interpretative, and provisional (Maxwell, 2012). All explanations of reality are treated as fallible (Bhaskar,1978; Fryer, 2022; Maxwell, 2012), including the explanations provided by research participants, theorists, scientists, and researchers. Therefore, it is acknowledged that the perspectives discussed by the DYCLs within this current

study are subjective in that they offer participant's unique experiences regarding supporting YCs in schools.

CR acknowledges that reality has been shaped by numerous 'underlying structures' (Willig, 2012) such as individual perceptions and social, cultural, and historical factors. CR theorises that experiences and understandings of reality are mediated by language and culture (Braun & Clarke, 2021), and can therefore be described as "socially located" (Pilgrim, 2014). Consequently, Willig (2013) states that what a researcher accesses are participants' perceptions of their reality, which is shaped and embedded within their social and cultural context, or a particular representation of reality. This critical realist stance accords well with the aims of the current research as it recognises that the participants share the 'reality' of working in an educational setting that supports YCs, whilst also acknowledging that participants' experiences will be shaped by contextual and societal factors. This is because pre-existing broader social structures and realities exist and have an influence (e.g., the school system, the LA, government policy and initiatives). CR also guides and facilitates "highly reasoned, reflective and coherent actions in bringing about positive change" (Kelly et al., 2016, p.22). Therefore, it is pertinent to the intended outcomes of this study and offers scope to consider implications for the practice of schools and EP practice more widely.

Alternative epistemological paradigms were considered and could have been utilised as an approach for this research, however, they did not fully align with the researcher's beliefs. An alternative paradigm could have been social constructionism. The key tenet of social constructionism is that "our knowledge of the world, including our understanding of human beings, is a product of human thought rather than grounded in an observable, external reality" (Burr, 2015, p.222). Thus, social constructionism focuses upon the importance of language in the construction of human social phenomena (Burr, 2015). Whilst the researcher believes that a certain level of knowledge is constructed, they also believe that there is an objective 'truth' and 'reality' that exists. Therefore, CR aligned more with the researcher's views about truth and knowledge and was deemed a good fit.

As noted by Lawani (2021), CR conceives a description of the real world through an analysis of participant's experiences and can be achieved through qualitative methods. Therefore, due to the researcher's CR perspective and interest in supporting YCs in schools, a qualitative research design was compatible.

2.6.2 Participants

The participants for this study were recruited using a purposive, criterion sampling strategy. As highlighted by Patton (2002), purposive sampling is a widely used technique within qualitative research for the selection of information-rich cases, which can provide an in-depth understanding for the purpose of the inquiry.

The selection criteria were that participants:
- Held the role of 'Designated YC Lead' within their school and
- Worked in a school that was within a LA that is allied to UEA's Educational Psychology Doctorate course

There is existing research within the caregiving literature that has been conducted with school-based professionals to elucidate how schools support YCs. However, to the researcher's knowledge, there have been no studies to date exploring the perspectives of school-based professionals who have a named and identified DYCL role. Therefore, this formed an essential part of the selection criteria for the current study. Moreover, there has been little research within the caregiving literature which has specifically looked at the East of England region in the UK (the area in which the UEA's Educational Psychology Doctorate course covers). It was therefore intended that the research findings may have useful implications for schools within this region.

Participants were recruited via the following process:
1. Researcher conducted a website search of schools within the LAs in the East of England region
2. Presence of DYCL at school indicated on website
3. Initial telephone contact with DYCL, discussed research aims and purposes. Researcher asked if they would like to participate in the research and the Participant Information Sheet was shared (Appendix 1).

4. If interested in participating in the research, a date was arranged for an initial meeting at the school to clarify research aims, ethical issues and methods. Participants were offered the opportunity to ask any questions they had regarding the research.

5. Participant was asked to sign a consent form if they agreed to participate (Appendix 2). The data collection interview proceeded.

This resulted in the recruitment of 6 participants. Recruitment was a challenging and time-consuming process and therefore provides an explanation for the sample size. However, within the methodological literature, a minimum of 6 participants has been identified as a recommended number for conducting TA within research (Fugard & Potts, 2015). Moreover, all participants were from schools who had received a form of award for their good practice and support that they provide for YCs in school. Therefore, it is likely that there was some form of self-selection bias (Robison, 2014), as potential participants may have felt more inclined to participate in the research than professionals who felt less confident in their role in identifying and supporting YCs.

Initial questions within the interview involved gathering background information. All participants held roles in school in addition to being the DYCL. An overview of participant characteristics can be found in Table 2.

Table 2

Participant Information

Participant number	Local Authority	School	Roles in school (in addition to Designated YC Lead)	Length of time in role(s)	Length of time as Designated YC Lead
1	A	Secondary	Student Support Officer, Designated Safeguarding Officer	14 years	5-6 years

2	B	Primary	Parent Support Advisor	15 years	15 years
3	B	Secondary	Year 8 and 9 Pastoral Officer, Designated Safeguarding Lead	11 months	11 months
4	C	Secondary	Student Support Manager	15 years	12 years
5	C	Primary	Family Support Mentor, Senior Mental Health Lead, Children's University Coordinator	17 years	5 years
6	C	Primary	Pastoral Lead, Deputy Safeguarding Lead, Healthy Schools Lead, Learning Behaviour Lead, ELSA	7 years	2 years

To provide school context, participants were also asked a small number of questions regarding the YCs known to them. This was to elucidate further details regarding the variety of YCs that the DYCLs had supported. This information is presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Participant Information Relating to YCs in their Schools

Number of YCs identified in each school	Age range of YCs
54	Year 7 – Year 13 (ages 11 -18)

36	Year 1 – Year 6 (ages 6 – 11 years old)
65	Year 7 – Year 11 (ages 11 - 16 years old)
36	Year 7 - Year 11 (ages 11- 16 years old)
8	Year 3 – Year 6 (ages 7 - 11)
2	Year 4 – Year 5 (ages 8 - 10)

2.6.3 Data Collection

Consistent with qualitative research, semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore DYCLs' experiences of identifying and supporting YCs in school. Interviews provided an important basis for gaining access to "richly textured accounts of events, experiences and underlying conditions or processes, which represent different facets of a complex and multi-layered social reality" (Smith & Elger, 2014, p.14), and were therefore congruent with a critical realist epistemology. Interviewing is necessary for accessing human thought, meaning and experience and has the potential for providing "rich and highly illuminating material" (Robson & McCartan, 2016, p.286). Therefore, critical realists strive to explain social world phenomena through using detailed information collected from qualitative interview methods (Brönnimann, 2022). As the current study took a qualitative approach, it was hoped that detailed accounts of DYCLs' experiences of supporting YCs would be obtained.

Semi-structured interviews provided a 'checklist' of topics to be covered and a proposed order of questioning, whilst allowing for the wording and order of questions to be modified based upon the flow of the interview (Robson, 2011). Therefore, the researcher was guided by the interview schedule, but not dictated by it. Advantages of utilising open-ended questions in interviews included the opportunity for misunderstandings to be cleared and to provide clarification, to support the development of rapport between interviewer and interviewee, and to provide the space for unexpected or unanticipated answers to be given (Robson, 2011). Interviews also "offered the possibility of modifying one's line of enquiry, following up interesting responses and investigating underlying motives in a way that self-

administered questionnaires and other quantitative approaches cannot" (Robson & McCartan, 2016, p.286).

An interview schedule was created by the researcher (Appendix 3), and the content of the questions were guided by the review of the literature on young caregiving, including areas that have been identified as gaps in the literature base. The questions developed in the interview schedule mirrored the research aims and questions, in particular the emphasis on understanding how schools identify and support YCs. The first question which asked participants about their role(s) in school was intended to help the participant feel at ease when talking about themselves, to be person-centred and to gain an insight into the school context. The final open question at the end of the interview ensured that participants had the opportunity to share any additional information that they wanted to, in line with the inductive approach of the research. Open questions were used throughout the interview to elicit unstructured responses and encourage participants to speak freely and descriptively about their experiences of identifying and supporting YCs. Probes were also utilised throughout all interviews to follow up on what the interviewee said and to provide the interviewee with the opportunity to expand upon their responses (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Probes were improvisational and arose from the dialogue between the participant and researcher (McIntosh & Morse, 2015).

All participants chose for the interviews to be in-person, and an appropriate date and time was negotiated between participant and researcher. As noted by Robson (2011), face-to-face interviews optimise communication, as both verbal and non-verbal communication is possible. Non-verbal cues may give messages which help in understanding the verbal response (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

The researcher visited the participants' school to conduct the interview at a convenient time. It was anticipated that the duration of interviews would be approximately 45 minutes, however these varied in length between 35 and 70 minutes. Interviews were recorded using an audio-recording device and were transcribed verbatim following each one.

2.6.4 Data Analysis

As highlighted by Trainor and Bundon (2021), paradigmatic, epistemological, and ontological assumptions inescapably inform analysis. Willig (2013) states that a CR approach to research assumes that data is informative of reality but does not directly mirror it, rather it needs to be interpreted to provide access to the underlying structures of the data. TA, broadly speaking, is a "method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke 2006, p. 79), and is located within a qualitative paradigm. Since the publication of Braun and Clarke's seminal and oft-cited paper 'Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology' (2006), the variety of TA approaches have expanded, and there are many different versions of, and approaches to, TA (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Braun and Clarke (2019) have published reflexive commentaries to outline how their thinking has evolved, which has included a 'rebrand' of TA to 'reflexive thematic analysis' (Trainor & Bundon, 2021), with the intent of reinforcing the importance of acknowledging the researcher's subjectivity as analytic resource. This is in-keeping with a CR ontological and epistemological position, as the researcher cannot be separated from what is being researched (Ekers, 2020; Fryer, 2022).

CR theorises that experiences and understandings of reality are shaped by numerous 'underlying structures' (Willig, 2012), such as the researcher's individual perceptions and social, cultural, and historical factors. Reflexive TA highlights the active role of the researcher when coding and developing themes and the importance of the researcher reflecting on their assumptions, perceptions, and practices (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Reflexive TA was therefore selected as an appropriate analytical approach for this research. This is also affirmed by Braun and Clarke (2013), who stated that Reflexive TA can be suited to experiential (e.g., critical realist) framings of language, data and meaning, whereby analysis focuses upon reporting an assumed reality evident in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Reflexive TA also provides the opportunity to identify shared themes/patterns of meaning across a dataset, and thus, the experiences across schools, rather than focusing upon individual professionals' experiences alone. Therefore, reflexive TA

was selected due to the researcher's aims of furthering understanding around how schools identify and support YCs.

2.6.4.1 Approaches to Analysis

Reflexive TA requires the researcher to make a series of active choices regarding how they engage with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021, 2022). Therefore, Braun and Clarke (2022) note that it is important for researchers to explain and justify the choices that were made around reflexive TA. For the current research, reflexive TA was approached in the following ways, presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Approach to Reflexive TA

Title	Approach	Description	Rationale
Orientation to data	Inductive	Coding and theme development strives to be grounded in the data. There is no attempt to fit the data into an existing theory.	An inductive, data-driven approach was taken to the analysis, working with the data from the bottom up. This was because the research aimed to explore new themes regarding DYCLs' subjective thoughts and experiences regarding identifying and supporting YCs in educational settings.
Qualitative framework	Experiential	Where the analysis seeks to explore participant's own perspectives and understandings	The aim of the current research was to explore DYCL's perspectives of identifying and supporting YCs.
Focus of meaning	Captured both semantic and latent meanings	Semantic (where the analysis explores meaning at the more surface and explicit level). Latent (where the analysis explores meaning at the implicit level).	The majority of the analysis captured a semantic meaning (aligning closely to the participants understanding of their own experiences). Some latent meanings were also explored.

2.6.4.2 Stages of Analysis

After the interviews had been transcribed, a six-phase reflexive TA was undertaken to explore patterns across the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Braun and Clarke (2022) note that the process of reflexive TA is "not strictly linear" and is better understood as a "progressive but recursive process" (p.36). Therefore, conducting a quality reflexive TA is not about working through a series of steps, but the researcher's reflective and thoughtful engagement with the data and analysis (Trainor & Bundon, 2021). Braun and Clarke (2022) note that researchers should explain how they approach analysis, and is therefore captured by the 'researcher action' heading in Table 5.

Table 5

Six Phases of Reflexive TA (Braun & Clarke, 2022)

Phase of Analysis	Researcher Action
1. Familiarisation with the dataset	Immersion in the dataset through reading and re-reading the transcripts several times and listening to audio-recordings. Making individual notes on individual data and whole data. Familiarisation notes were typed into Microsoft Word documents (see Appendix 4).
2. Coding the dataset	Systematically worked through the transcripts and generated 'codes' that captured important features of the data that were of analytic interest and deemed to be relevant to addressing the RQs. This process was conducted through using the 'comment feature' on Microsoft Word, to highlight relevant text and write codes in a column alongside the transcript (see Appendix 4). Each time data of analytic interest was selected, consideration was made as to whether there was an existing code that applied or whether a new code needed to be generated. This involved a process of moving back and forth between interviews. The entire dataset

	was coded through two rounds of coding. Following the recommendation of Braun and Clark (2022), the second time round, the data was coded in different way, through starting with a transcript in the middle of the dataset and then moving outwards. All codes and relevant data extracts were collated into a table. Each code was considered regarding it's relevance to the RQs.
3. Generating initial themes	All codes were printed onto paper and then cut out individually. This was to ensure flexibility and so that codes could be freely moved around by hand and collated together to develop broader patterns of meaning and initial themes / subthemes. Codes were provisionally placed under potential theme names with bullet-point lists in Microsoft Word (see Appendix 4). Thematic maps were drawn to visually display potential themes.
4. Developing and reviewing themes	Potential candidate themes were checked against the coded data (on the transcripts) and the entire dataset.
5. Refining, defining and naming themes	Informative names for each theme were decided. Writing theme definitions supported this process ("outlining the scope, boundaries and core concept of the theme") (p.108, Braun & Clarke, 2022). Creation of final thematic map.
6. Writing up the analysis	The results of the analysis were written up through weaving together the analytic narrative and data extracts from the transcripts. Data extracts that were pertinent to the theme were carefully selected and extracts were taken across all participants. The analytic narrative and data extracts were presented under each theme within the findings and discussion section.

2.6.5 Research Quality and Researcher Reflexivity

One of the advantages of reflexive TA is its theoretical flexibility; it can be used within a range of theoretical frameworks to address different types of RQs (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Trainor & Bundon, 2021). However, as noted by Braun and Clarke (2021), "it is the diversity and plurality of TA – that TA ranges from positivist to critical qualitative paradigms – that presents a key challenge for the qualitative research community in demarcating quality standards for TA research" (p. 9). Therefore, to ensure the quality of reflexive TA, Braun and Clarke (2021) encourage researchers to "reflect on the relationship between analytic practices, including quality practices, and the ontological and epistemological foundations of their research, and to use TA knowingly, deliberatively and reflexively" (p. 19). Moreover, as noted by Fryer (2022), from a critical realist perspective; rigour, validity, trustworthiness, and integrity come from researcher reflexivity.

To support the researcher with this reflexive process, reflective diaries were kept throughout the research journey (which will be discussed further in the 'Reflexive Account' chapter of this thesis). This links to the CR epistemology and ontology of the research, as this position notes the researcher's subjectivity as an analytic resource. Consideration was given to personal reflexivity (how the researcher's values shaped their research and the knowledge produced) and functional reflexivity (the methods and other aspects of research design) as well as reflexivity around the specific topic for research (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Moreover, the researcher frequently referred to the '20 questions to guide assessment of TA research quality' outlined in Braun and Clarke's (2021) paper and the '15-point checklist for good reflexive TA – version 2022' (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

2.6.6 Ethical Considerations

This research was given ethical approval by the UEA Ethics Committee (Appendix 5). An amendment to the research was submitted and approved (Appendix 6). Throughout all stages of the research, the British Psychological Society (BPS) Code of Ethics and Conduct (2018) and Human Research Ethics (2021) were adhered to. There are several ethical considerations in qualitative research: informed consent;

the right to withdraw, confidentiality/anonymity and debriefing, which were upheld during the current study.

2.6.6.1 Informed Consent and Right to Withdraw

Participant Information Sheets were shared with participants, so participants were fully informed of the research interests, aims and methods. Time was given for participants to ask the researcher any questions they had about the research. Written informed consent was gained from all participants prior to data collection (Appendix 2). Additional verbal consent around use of audio recording was also sought prior to recording. It was reiterated to participants that being in the study was completely voluntary and that their decision to participate will not affect their current or future relationships with the researcher or anyone else at the UEA or their LA. Participants were informed that they have a right to withdraw at any point during the interview; that they can stop the interview at any time, and that they can refuse to answer any questions they do not wish to answer. It was explained that once the data had been analysed, their responses could not be withdrawn as they are anonymous and so it would not be possible to identify individual responses. Participants were offered the opportunity to review their transcripts and the information generated. Two participants chose to review their transcripts. No amendments were made to the transcripts by these participants.

2.6.6.2 Confidentiality, Anonymity and Data Protection

Participants were informed that their personal data and information will only be used as outlined in the Participant Information Sheet, unless they consent otherwise. The management of the data collected from the interviews followed the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA, 2018) and UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), and the UEA's Research Data Management Policy. All data records were stored securely, on a password protected laptop. Each interview was anonymised at the point of transcription, as each participant was given a number. This ensured that the participant's identity was kept strictly confidential and meant that participants will not be identified if the study findings are published. Any identifying information relating to their schools, LA and other organisations was redacted in the transcripts.

2.6.6.3 Risk/ Distress and Debriefing

It was anticipated that there was minimal risk of distress for participants taking part in the interviews. However, it was possible that participants may have been a YC themselves, have had experience of caring for a relative as an adult, or have had experience supporting a YC which may evoke an emotional response. Therefore, if participants had become distressed during the interview, the researcher would have asked participants if they would like to take a break or finish the discussion. McIntosh and Morse (2015) note that face-to-face interviews may be a more ethical way to conduct research (as opposed to remote interviews), as the physical presence of the interviewer may allow them to discern any discomfort or unease on the part of the respondent and offer a break or emotional support. At the end of the interview, participants were reminded that their copy of the Participant Information Sheet contained the researcher's and research supervisor's contact details should they have required a debrief or experience any concerns, or psychological distress, following their participation in the research. The researcher also had a list of external support organisations and agencies, such as Carers UK and Mind, that would have been sign-posted too, should the participant have required.

2.7 Findings

Three themes were identified through completing reflexive TA:

1. 'Knowledge and Awareness of YCs'
2. 'A Family-Centred Approach'
3. 'Promoting YC's Sense of Belonging'

Theme 1 has five subthemes nested within it, and themes 2 and 3 comprise of three related subthemes. These themes and subthemes are shown within a thematic map in Figure 1. The following section will discuss each theme and its corresponding subthemes in turn. Although themes have been presented separately within this thematic map, it is important to emphasise their interconnectedness throughout the participant's narratives.

Figure 1

Thematic Map illustrating Themes and Subthemes

Knowledge and Awareness of Young Carers	A Family Centred Approach	Promoting Young Carers' Sense of Belonging
Conceptualising Young Caregiving	Understanding CYP & their Families Unique Circumstances	Acknolweding Young Carers in School
Raising Awareness of Young Carers in CYP, Families and School Staff	Information Sharing and Facilitating choice	Facilitating Connections between Young Carers in School
Professionals' Understanding of the Impact of Caregiving Responsbilites	Personalised Support for Young Carers	Nurturing and Relational Approach to ensure Young Carers' needs met
School Professionals' Communication and Collaboration		
Multi-agency Working		

2.7.1 Theme One: Knowledge and Awareness of Young Caregiving

The theme 'Knowledge and Awareness of Young Caregiving' encompassed participants' affirmation of the importance of having knowledge and awareness of young caregiving across systems. This theme captures the ways in which young caregiving was conceptualised by participants, alongside the ways in which participants viewed awareness being raised in school staff, pupils, families, and wider professionals. Participants' understanding of the need for school professionals to understand that YC's strengths and needs are multifaceted and the subsequent impacts that their caregiving responsibilities can have on their ability to engage with education is captured within the subtheme 'Professionals' Understanding of the Impact of Caregiving Responsibilities'. The penultimate subtheme encapsulated the participants' perspectives on collaborative working with other colleagues within their schools, and the need for a whole school approach to identify and support YCs. The final subtheme related to participant's narratives around multi-agency working and the need for a collaborative, coordinated approach with external agencies and professionals to support YCs.

2.7.1.1 Subtheme: Conceptualising Young Caregiving

The analysis of the data provided an insight into participants' conceptualisation of "young caregiving". Participants emphasised the heterogeneity of the term YC, owing to the diverse range of caring roles and responsibilities that CYP have. This is exemplified in the following extract, *"…so, there's lots of differences, none of them are the same*" (P3). Participants reported variety in the caring responsibilities of the CYP known to them, and that the person receiving care is often a parent or sibling but could also be a grandparent or other relative. The type of care giving was also varied, with come CYP caring for those with a range of needs e.g., a disability, mental health condition, illness, special educational need and disability (SEND), or affected by alcohol misuse / substance misuse. One participant also included child language brokering in their definition of a YC: *"… it also includes EAL children obviously if children, if families come from abroad and their parents can't speak English, but the children can in, if they, translate, they will, also obviously come under as a young carer"* (P5). This extract suggests that children who communicate on behalf of their family members were considered by at least one participant to be YCs, due to the role that they have in supporting their family.

Participants' conceptualisations of young caregiving also highlighted a caregiving continuum, expressing that the levels of caring responsibilities can vary substantially. For some CYP, they were identified as YCs by participants due to the impact of their home circumstances, rather than a direct caring role or caring responsibility:

"…it can be from nursery, not because they are caring for people in nursery but if their lives are really impacted, we wanna know about it" (P2)

"…then I've got another one who's got a sibling with ADHD, so it's sort of living in that environment and… sleep could be quite disruptive and stuff depending on how he's feeling…" (P5)

"…sometimes friends stay there or I've had other young carers who don't live with the person being cared for, but whose parent is constantly having to go and look

after a bedbound parent or, we got one boy here whose mum literally used to pick him up from school and then would then go around the grandparents, both grandparents are in bed, she's doing all the jobs for them…" (P2).

These extracts highlight that participants' conceptualisations of young caregiving included the impact of a home situation. The first extract suggests that this participant believes that acknowledging a difficult home situation as early as possible is important, so that schools are aware of the impact it may be having on CYPs lives. The other two extracts highlight participants' view of the impact of family circumstances upon CYP; whether this is tiredness due to living in an environment with a sibling who has additional needs, or due to the indirect impact that can happen as a result of parents providing support to family members who do not live within the home but require a high level of support (e.g., grandparents). This therefore does not indicate a direct caregiving role but highlights how participants included CYP who were impacted by a home environment within their definitions and subsequent YC identification systems within school.

Participants also distinguished between CYP who may be involved in some caring as part of their routine family lives: "*if they are having to help, even with silly things like, making pack lunches for younger siblings… all of it is still caring"* (P4), to CYP who may be involved in more significant, substantial and regular care, including intimate personal care: "*they will do like hygiene…they'll do cooking, cleaning, shopping anything that they really need to be called upon to do really"* (P3). A couple of participants also highlighted how some YCs had responsibilities regarding family members medical conditions: "*we've got parents that have medical conditions, maybe like epilepsy or something where they may have a fit, and the children have to make someone aware"* (P5), and the subsequent need for some YCs to recognise when medication may be required: "*She mentioned that actually she has to recognise when her mum needs to take her tablet and she's getting very good at knowing the signs of mum needing to take her meds"* (P6). As these extracts exemplify, the nature of care work undertaken by the CYP known to participants ranges along a continuum and varies depending upon the nature of the care recipient's illness or disability, and the level and frequency of need for care. One participant expressed that it was the extent of the caring responsibilities that

influenced the decision as to whether a child was considered to be a YC or not, "*it came down to it that her brother had asthma and sometimes she passed him his inhaler… he was in school and we did have an inhaler… that was gathering cobwebs, cause he very rarely needed it so we regretfully and I did it very tactfully had to explain that you're probably not a young carer*" (P2).

Several participants conceptualised young caregiving through making comparisons between YCs and their peers, as exemplified in the following extract: "*Children that are going over and above at home and doing more than what your average young person would be doing*" (P1). This highlights that a CYP may be identified by participants as a YC due to having increased responsibilities at home, which is more than what is considered 'typical' for a CYP. As a result of their caregiving responsibilities, participants felt that YCs were more mature than their peers: "*… cause even at sort of the age of 11/12 she was very mature for age because of what she'd witnessed and the responsibility that she had probably from the age of about 5*" (P1). "*I think because they have so much, that they already do, sort of ahead of their time… they've sort of grown up in a way, before, they had to*" (P3). These extracts suggest that participants' view is that YCs have an enhanced maturity due to having a sense of responsibility that other CYP their age had not experienced. One participant stated that YCs can also assume adult responsibilities: "*… she also had a situation where, she was very much used as another adult in the household because she had a severely disabled sister, but I think mum relied on her almost like being the other adult in the house…*" (P6). This extract suggests parentification; a type of role reversal that can occur when children take on the roles and responsibilities of an adult, which can include looking after siblings within the family home.

2.7.1.2 Subtheme: Raising Awareness of YCs in CYP, Families and School Staff

All participants emphasised the importance of raising awareness of YCs in school. As one participant succinctly stated, "*It's all about raising that awareness*" (P6). This subtheme reflects the views of participants regarding the need to raise awareness of young caregiving in pupils, parents and families, and school staff. Participants

narratives highlighted that this was promoted through a variety of ways within school and included collaboration with external YC organisations.

Within this theme, several participants made reference to the contextual factors, such as the COVID pandemic, citing that it increased the visibility and awareness of YCs: *"I took on the young carers probably about 12 years ago and it wasn't as big as it is now…and the last couple of years, since covid, I suppose, it's got more and more, out there, so we've taken it a lot more onboard and taking a lot more onus on it"* (P4). *"I think people are more aware because after… the pandemic, put families into situations where anybody, who normally struggles, they were probably struggling a great deal more and we're still mopping up from that…"* (P2). These extracts suggest that the increased pressures and difficulties that some CYP and their families faced because of the pandemic became more apparent to participants. One participant expressed that the children's behaviour was a form of communication that there had been difficulties at home: *"…we were then able to see from the behaviour of the children coming back into school that all had not been well..."* (P2). This participant also highlighted that there was an increase in families self-identifying a YC role as a result of the pandemic: *"because… if you're at home with a sibling who has lots of other challenges in life and they can't get to the school that meets their needs, that behaviours coming out at home, so I think there was then, more of a willingness to identify themselves in the family"* (P2).

Other participants referred to the role of external YC Organisations in supporting the increased awareness of YCs within school with Participant 1 for example stating: *"…we were always aware of, obviously there are young carers, but…it definitely became more apparent… since we were working with the* (Young Carers) *service…"* (P1), highlighting the role of YCs Organisations in working with schools to raise awareness and to increase the support for CYP with caring responsibilities in schools. Several participants also highlighted the role of YC Organisations in raising awareness, through providing assemblies to staff and pupils, as exemplified: *"…we've had speakers, we've had X from young carers* (organisation), *and she's done an assembly for the whole school, interactively, so that the children can ask her questions, it's been really good fun actually"* (P6). This quote is indicative of all participants in that the support provided by the external YC Organisations was

valued by them, particularly as it supports children's curiosity and encourages open dialogue around young caregiving. Several participants highlighted how raising awareness was important because it supported pupils with self-identifying as a YC. This is exemplified in the following extract: "*sometimes an assembly is really good because you then say… if you think this may be something that is affecting you, then you can go and see your Student Support officer and quite often after an assembly you get this influx of students like am I? aren't I? like sort of questioning, are not quite sure and I'd say probably 90% of the ones that question it probably are*" (P1).

Raising pupils' awareness was also considered to be important by the participants as CYP did not always recognise themselves as carers, as they considered their caring tasks to be 'normal':

"*…when I sort of say…do you realise you're a young carer and they'll be like, no I just help because that's what I do*" (P5).

"*…they've probably done it since… they were a small child… and it's not actually until you have an assembly that their ears kind of prick up and am I? Is that what you would categorise me as? and yeah can I get this extra support because I didn't even realise I could, this is just what I do…*" (P1).

These extracts highlight a 'perceived normality' within participants' narratives, with participants' perspectives suggesting that CYP view their caring tasks and responsibilities as part of a regular familiar familial relationship. Participants also felt that YCs may not self-identify due to a lack of awareness of their position. This may provide an insight into why some YCs may be seen as 'hidden' within schools. Several participants commented upon the presence of these 'hidden' YCs within the school setting:

"*…and they were the ones that we knew of… I'm pretty sure there were probably ones that we weren't aware of or didn't even identify themselves as a young carer*" (P1)

"We have, I think its 36 identified YCs in the school… and we are in a school of just under 900, they're the only ones we know about. I would say there would be another good 10% there that aren't recognised" (P4).

In addition to whole school assemblies, participants discussed delivering lessons around young caregiving as part of the PSHE curriculum, to raise awareness in pupils and to incorporate positive messages around the young caregiving role. This is illustrated in the following extract:

"we…have lessons where we talk about young carers and who they might be… and our SMILE lessons are all…delivered so that they show progress throughout the school, so down in key stage one it might just be recognising that some people are young carers and the sorts of things they might do whereas as you progress up the school it might be more about thinking not just about that role, the benefits of it, but also the difficulties of it, so if you're sitting next to someone who might be a young carer, it might be that actually they're the person who can't go to a club after school, cos they are needed at home at that time or they might be the person that hasn't done their homework because, they haven't had the support with it or whatever, so it's just understanding that, what it might be like really, to be somebody in that role" (P6). This extract is illustrative of several participants' views which suggested that through raising awareness of YCs with CYP, it promotes understanding of what a caregiving role may involve and what the impact can be. Through increased understanding, participants felt that this may reduce stigma and support YCs with talking about their caring roles with their peers and staff members, to facilitate an open dialogue around caregiving, as exemplified: *"…we've got a big board up where it says about young carers, what they do, what they like about being a young carer, so trying to look at the positives as well, we don't like it to be stigmatised at school, so we try and make lots of awareness of it is just an everyday thing for the students…"* (P3). This participant's narrative suggests that through promoting positive information around YCs this encourages a positive whole school ethos.

Participants also highlighted how display boards supported raising parent awareness of YCs when they visited the school: *"…we've got a display board in our hallway, so obviously during open evenings the parents can see… it's for the parents and for the*

children" (P5). Other participants raised parent's awareness by sending letters to families, "*…we're sending out letters… explaining what a young carer is and then saying you may feel that somebody in your house, falls... into that category and if so, please let us know and then we will have a conversation, so quite a lot of families identified themselves that…maybe previously they wouldn't have themselves thought of it..."* (P2).

All participants highlighted that raising staff awareness was essential and for one participant, this was considered the most important group to raise awareness in: "*I think that would be the biggest thing, raising awareness in the staff"* (P4). A whole school approach was frequently emphasised in participants' narratives, as exemplified in the following extract: "*making sure all your teachers are on board, that your teachers are aware, and they are absolutely comfortable with what a young carer might be, how to identify them… it's just all about that, communicating it, isn't it really, making sure everybody knows, everybody, in your workplace"* (P6). Participants discussed that awareness raising activities educated school staff on the signs and potential indicators of a young caregiving role: "*… quite a lot of the time, they are quite tired, there could be an issue with attendance, there could be an issue around, even basic things like food and hygiene… and it's just looking out for those little signs…"* (P4). A couple of participants highlighted that school staff members have conversations with CYP frequently throughout the school day and, therefore may hear indications that CYP have responsibilities at home which are over and above what would be considered 'typical'. For example: "*…they'll say… I had to pick my brother up from school last night, I had to cook dinner, you know, my mum didn't get out of bed yesterday and you're like right ok…"* (P1).

Within this theme, participants discussed how raising awareness of YCs formed part of staff continuous professional development. This took the form of staff inset days, staff meetings, twilight sessions and noticeboards in the staff room. Several participants expressed that it was important for new staff to be aware of the school's systems and processes for YCs, to ensure a continued whole school approach, as exemplified by Participant 6: "*I've also done like the odd CPD about it, so new staff would be aware of like, if you think that you might have a young carer in your class*

or whatever, you've got some ideas about scripts, just to keep that profile you know, up there really, keep that awareness going" (P6).

2.7.1.3 Subtheme: Professionals' Understanding of the Impact of Caregiving Responsibilities

Participants articulated that once school staff have an awareness of YCs, they then needed to understand the impact that caregiving responsibilities can have on CYP and their ability to engage with education and their wellbeing. Participants expressed that through this increased understanding, staff can ensure flexibility in their approach, be lenient, and provide support to ensure that YCs' needs are met effectively in school.

Participants described YCs strengths and needs as multifaceted. Several participants highlighted resilience as a key strength of YCs, as demonstrated in the following extracts: *"I think they've got to be resilient, to deal with what some of them have to deal with at home and then come to school and do a full day …. and then go home and have to face it all again and they're just so strong and you've gotta admire them for that"* (P4). *"They are very resilient, the children… and I mean we've got one family, we've got three siblings in a family and like I say, mum, is quite ill at times and they're always smiling, they always get just get on with it really…"* (P5). Another participant also made reference to the positive aspects derived from caregiving, such as recognising other's needs and developing life skills: *"they understand the needs of others so… they're used to thinking about what other people might need as well as their own needs and that's definitely a strength, I guess some of the skills they pick up in terms of like…managing their own organisation of things and that stands them in good stead for life I guess really, doesn't it,…they can plan things, some of them, do a little bit of cooking, some of them know how to do cleaning, some of them just know about things like recognising who needs medication and when…."* (P6).

Although participants were keen to highlight YCs' resilience and their admiration for them coping with challenging home circumstances, participants also drew attention to the emotional impact of their role:

"I sort of try to say to them, you're doing a really good job … but obviously you need to look after yourself as well because I think that… it must be worrying and scary for them" (P5).

"I think one of the things we identified was that they really do worry about the people that they care for..." (P1)

As these extracts demonstrate, worry is a key emotional need that participants identified, particularly worry about the care-recipient. One participant stated that the emotional toll of their caregiving responsibilities and cumulation of stress could result in moments whereby some of the YCs known to them have *"a complete emotional breakdown"* (P4). Therefore, participants drew attention to the emotional impact that caregiving circumstances can subsequently have on the YC's ability to engage with learning:

"Understanding that sometimes they are really not OK, and they can't relate to… what's been put in front of them to learn" (P2).

"…so for her she was coming into school, in the, I suppose, hypervigilant state, most days really, because you can't expect a child with all that background going on…to come into school and sit down and get on with their early morning work, because nobody has going to have brushed her hair for her, she might not even have had a uniform where she spent the night before, probably hasn't had her breakfast, she's going to be worried…" (P6).

These extracts highlight participants' views that emotions can have a substantial influence on cognitive processes, therefore leaving limited cognitive resources available for YCs to access learning situations. Participants' narratives suggested a key role of the school setting in ensuring that appropriate psychological and wellbeing support is provided to YCs, as discussed further under the 'Nurturing and Relational Approach to Ensuring YC's Needs Met' subtheme.

Several participants also acknowledged that YC's home circumstances could impact upon their ability to complete homework: *"… depending on what the home*

environment is like, it could be, that they don't necessarily get their homework done, so it's just about staff being aware… of the reasons behind that" (P5). Participants highlighted a need for further exploration as to why homework may not have been handed in: *"But the staff's really good here, they're really aware, so they will pick up on, even if, they haven't had the homework handed in, instead of being, sort of, you've got a detention all the time, look, why, why is your homework not been handed in time…"* (P3). This extract illustrates participants' overall narrative that a supportive, not punitive approach is needed, whereby staff are understanding and flexible. Participants voiced that they were keen to support YC's academic needs, and so were lenient with deadlines, ran homework clubs or provided additional tutoring sessions to provide support:

"Adjustments to homework at times… maybe we would offer them homework club coz sometimes that is invite only…so we definitely encourage that the homework is done in school rather than relying on them to do at home because there isn't the space or the time…so just making some allowances really" (P1).

"…if they're struggling with anything, we have a great team of teachers here… they do work really hard, they can have extra support, we have after-school classes for the older group, so year ten and especially year eleven, we have a period six, so we finish at three, but they have a period six, extra support to go to for that, we have homework club that young carers can use where there's people in there to support them until half-past four, if they need any support after school… we have lots of support and homework club, after-school lessons and lunchtime things that go on" (P4).

"…we ask all our children to read at home, that doesn't happen in some families obviously, but certainly with young carers, it may well not have happened, so you would make sure that they get the opportunities to read to an adult in school…" (P6).

Within this theme, participants expressed that YC's attendance at school can be affected by their caring responsibilities, therefore there was a need for professionals to be understanding and to further explore the reasons why there was a difficulty: *"…we'd look at things like attendance and we screen that very carefully… we'd*

always try and get to, what's behind a problem with attendance and then put in the supportive side of it" (P6). A flexible approach was highlighted by participants: "*I'm not saying we shouldn't bust a gut to get that child in on time, but if it's not possible let's be realistic and let's say what needs to happen...* (P2). However, not all participants suggested that attendance was adversely impacted by YC's caregiving role, "*…our attendance for our young carers is actually pretty good, it actually surprised me when I first started analysing it, because I thought oh it was going to be absolutely rubbish, but it's actually fairly good*" (P4). This extract highlights the participant's surprise that attendance was not something YCs had difficulties with and is therefore indicative of the heterogeneity of the YC role and the subsequent differential impact it can have on attendance.

Some participants commented upon the impact that caregiving responsibilities can have on social opportunities, as exemplified in the following extract: "*Absolutely, what is your social access outside of school? Is this your only social life? Yes, for a lot of them….*" (P2). Another participant highlighted the difficulties that YCs may have with attending after-school clubs: "*…because they do tend to be our children that can't necessarily stay for a club... maybe they miss out on that*" (P6). Another participant recalled a YC they supported: "*I will always remember one of my young carers… I said oh, we've got the Christmas Fete can she stay on, we were doing a stall for the creative care rangers anyway … and then we walked into the hall and the others had set up the stall everything and she said 'Oh my goodness! how often does this happen? Is this what they call a fete?' And I said, and she was ten, I said yeah, this is the Christmas Fete and she said 'It's amazing! I've never seen one before' and then I realised, you know, she literally had been going home since she was four, she'd been going home, at the end of school, no after school clubs, no nothing, so and then you're indoors, with some families, you know, no garden*" (P2). As these extracts highlight, participants voiced that some YCs may have limited opportunities to experience social events and socialise with peers outside of school. Therefore, several participants articulated that it was important to understand that school could offer a respite from caregiving responsibilities, as well as a place to socialise and meet up with friends: "*…this is a bit like a respite isn't it, so they come to school, yeah fine they've gotta work, but…they see their friends, they socialise, they have got eight hours, six hours, whatever it is… away from home…*" (P4).

Participants emphasised that it was important to support YCs with accessing social activities, and therefore made adjustments to ensure that every opportunity was provided for them to access them. For example, this included prioritising YCs for clubs: "…*the office manager sends me the list of the after-school clubs and then I will… speak to my young carers and say which club would you like, because obviously there's normally a waiting list for clubs and its, first come first serve…and they get priority to the after-school clubs…"* (P5). Another participant also discussed how they created passes so that YCs could skip the lunch queue to access the YCs club: "*they can use that to skip the lunch queue, so they're not waiting around for ages trying to get their lunch and then they miss out on the club, so they can print that off, use that at the canteen and then they can get their food straight away and come down"* (P3).

2.7.1.4 Subtheme: School Professionals' Communication and Collaboration

This subtheme encapsulated the participants' perspectives on collaborative working with other colleagues within their schools and with other local schools to identify and meet the needs of YCs. Effective communication was highlighted by participants as being integral to this collaborative working. All participants emphasised the importance of a whole school approach and working as a team to identify and support YCs in school.

Several participants referred to their collaboration with members of the school's Senior Leadership Team. Two participants explicitly stated that the Deputy/Vice Principal had responsibility in leading and having oversight of the school's provision for YC and that they, as the DYCL, were the 'Operational Lead', responsible for the day-to-day implementation of support in school. One participant stated that having a supportive Headteacher was positive as it gave them autonomy to set up the processes and systems in school, including a YC's club:*"… I think it's been a revelation to him, the main thing he's done cause he has got enough to do, is let us get on with it and then he's just looking and thinking, wow, yeah he was looking at the activities we were doing on Tuesday, he just had the biggest grin on his face"* (P2).

Within this theme, all participants highlighted that a collaborative, whole-school approach was needed to identify YCs, as exemplified in the following extract: *"they're trained to pick up on little things like that and they will figure out as well, so it's not sort of all down to just me, with the whole school, so yeah we all work together"* (P3). This participant reiterated that it is a collective responsibility of all those working within school to be alert to the potential signs of a CYP who may have caregiving responsibilities at home. A whole school approach was further emphasised by Participant 2: "…*this is why I think we've got to a point where it works, so well, is you have to take out of it any reliance on a personality or a person, it's got to be something that works as a model… we find the right person for the child and don't worry about what their title is, could be the Headteacher…"* (P2). This extract highlights participants' narratives that any member of staff within the school may be the first point of contact for a CYP to open up about their caregiving experiences, therefore there was a need for all members of staff to be alert and be ready to have those conversations with CYP. Some participants also highlighted that YCs were also identified through the schools' safeguarding processes and through team around the family meetings.

All participants expressed that communication between themselves (as the school's DYCL), with staff members was important for identifying YCs within the school. This communication could take various forms such as emails or in-person discussions:

 "…*if a class teacher decided that the child might be having young carers responsibilities, they'd come and see me, and I would then be the one that would make the contact with parents*" (P6).

"… *it could be recognised by the tutors or just by having meetings with parents they will sort of mention things and then staff will e-mail through, oh I think this student is a young carer and we just meet up and see what's going on or have the parents in…*" (P3).

Several participants commented upon the attendance monitoring and systems used to identify and support YCs within school. One participant spoke about their

collaboration with the school's attendance officer, another avenue in which YCs were identified, and through conversations with parents: "… *I do attendance meetings as well…which has brought up recently a few new carers…because obviously I get the parents and I do it with our attendance officer and we had those meetings and then sometimes the parents will say 'oh cause I suffer with my mental health' or whatever and then I can do a referral to young carers for that person, so that's brought up quite a few, so that's quite interesting… some families I'm aware of and I know what the need is, but then obviously others, sometimes it filters through that way"* (P5).

Once YCs had been identified in school, participants highlighted that, after gaining appropriate consent from CYP and their families, there was a need for communication regarding which CYP have caregiving responsibilities at home. Several participants stated that ICT systems were useful for communicating this information, to ensure that school staff were aware and could access information if needed, as the following extract exemplifies:

"*…where we record all our attendance, behaviour and everything, it actually has a note that they are young carers on it, we also have a separate sheet on that system, that identifies every single one of them in the school, we also have another in our safeguarding folder, all the young carers listed and so we have identified them, everywhere*" (P4).

As well as communicating within school who has been identified as a YC, participants highlighted that effective communication was important to help professionals provide appropriate support, as stated by Participant 1: "*…I could e-mail the teachers of that student to not give them too much information, but make them aware that home is very difficult and challenging at times and sometimes could there be some flexibility or allowances made with regards to kind of homework or those sorts of things*" (P1). This participant highlighted that this information should be shared on a need-to-know basis, respecting the family's privacy by not revealing all the details, "*they don't have to know the really big things, the ins and the outs and what's going on at home necessarily but just that it is quite challenging*" (P1). This participant further suggested that it may be beneficial to communicate this information so that the young person does not need to repeat their circumstances to

every teacher, particularly in a secondary school where CYP have multiple lessons throughout the day: "*… because it might be very embarrassing for that young person to bring that up with the teacher, so it's sometimes easier for us to have that communication rather than them*" (P1). Another participant also stated that effective communication with staff members was needed, particularly to ensure leniency with the school's no phone policy: "*not everybody is allowed to use their phone, but if there's something going on, like a parents gone into to have an operation or something, then I will send out an e-mail saying, this student is allowed to, and everyone is aware that they are a young carer, because it's tagged on their thing…*" (P4).

Participants also drew attention to the need for communication and collaboration between schools, to support the identification of YCs between educational settings. This included transferring information from feeder schools, as exemplified in the following extract: "*…when they come in from primary, we actually have on our form, the question, are they a young carer, so we know immediately if they are coming up, so we can, for transition and then moving on to college, along with their safeguarding files and stuff like that, that we send over the college, we also send over things that say that they are a young carer…*" (P4). Participants stated that communication between educational settings also supported understanding of the YC's needs and what support might need to be put in place to facilitate continued support: "*…from a transition point of view, that when they move on from us, I would make sure that wherever their new setting was going to be, that I had spoken to somebody there so that they were aware that this child is young carer and…what needs they've had here, so that we can make sure they continue to be supported to wherever they're going next…*" (P6).

Several participants spoke about networking with DYCLs from other schools; citing that this was helpful to share ideas and resources: "*…you learn so much from other people don't you, it's like any training you go to isn't it, it's the conversations you can have face to face and you can go, what do you do about…and they say well I've tried this… those are the little golden nuggets aren't they*" (P6). Participants also noted that discussions with other DYCLs were useful as they were working towards the next level of awards and accreditations for their support with YCs in school.

2.7.1.5 Subtheme: Multi-agency Working

The final subtheme 'Multi-agency Working' reflects the views of participants regarding multi-agency working and relationships. In addition to collaboration and communication within and between schools, participants also discussed collaborative working with external organisations and professionals. This multi-agency working was considered very important, as articulated by the following participant: "*you should never stand alone with stuff really*" (P2). Participants noted a variety of professionals they work with, such as local YCs organisations, school nurses, local supermarkets like Morrisons 'Local Champions scheme, and local universities. Participants' narratives emphasised that through creating intrinsic links between school, external services and professionals, and the wider community, this facilitated support to meet the needs of YCs and their families.

Several participants stated that external professionals may be the first to identify YCs and therefore liaised with school to make them aware, highlighting a multi-agency approach to identification. This is exemplified in the following extracts:

 "*…and then you get other agencies that might contact us and say oh you know we're working with so and so and we think...a young carers referral needs to go in, so other services, whether that will that be family support practitioners or social workers…*" (P1).

"*...the first thing I will hear will be from the young carers (organisation) who have said that social care have referred this person, am I aware that they're a young carer, yay or neigh…*" (P4).

Several participants highlighted close working relationships with external agencies, citing that they felt part of the team. For one participant this included a close working relationship with someone from an external YC Organisation: "*she's a recognisable face around here pretty much, she's like part of the team as such*" (P3) and for another participant it was another service that was available to YCs within the community: "*…so, I've really close association with the X and the inclusion team,*

know them really well so it's almost like an extra bit of the team to me, they are, and we liaise about whether the kids are getting on well in the classes and so on" (P2). These extracts emphasise that participants value a multi-agency, collaborative approach to support YCs, highlighting the importance and accessibility of the specialist knowledge, support and advice external organisations provide: "*and so yeah, they're always available if I need to chat to (name), she'd always get back to me as soon as she can, she's brilliant, so yeah we've always got their support, so that's good*" (P3).

All participants cited that they had received some support from their local external YC organisation. This took the form of assemblies, one-to-one or group sessions with the YCs in school, or longer initiatives, as exemplified:

"*…if they're at the lunch meeting, they'll say can I speak to (X from the YCs Organisation) afterwards, I'm like yes, that's absolutely fine, I'll then mark on the register that they're with her and they can have that one-on-one time so then they know they've got that every other week if they need it as well*". (P3)

"*it was called be your own best friend and it was… building in young carers the confidence to…to stand up for themselves and be confident, be self-assured, and to feel good about themselves and actually for them to identify their role and actually you know what a good person they are…that was, a really good course and the students would come away with a…workbook and they would've worked through it over a number of weeks and think we did it during PSHE, so those students would have been identified, they would come out of PSHE and they would do this course for kind of 3-4 weeks…that was really good…that was something tangible, that they could kind of use*" (P1).

One participant cited that the COVID pandemic was a barrier to multi-agency working to support YCs, as there continues to be less support from the external YC organisation as a result: "*so we work alongside erm (LA) Young Carers, so we have a school link who comes in regularly, where I say regularly, probably once a month and again that has adapted and changed because their services changed, so they were coming in once a month but to be honest with you, I've probably seen them*

once this year, like academic year, so…that is something that needs to kinda of be tightened up a little bit really" (P1) and highlighted their desire for more support: "…*I wish it was more regularly, yeah I must admit…but again, that would be resources and staff and what have you…*" (P1).

Two participants commented that working within a multi-agency approach with the external YC organisation supported YCs with making links and connections with the wider community, as illustrated by the following extracts:

"*and then they have that opportunity if they don't want to speak to me, they can speak to (name), who comes in from X Carers, so they've got that support that way, so, we've always got that tie with the X Carers…so they've got that support then outside of school if they wish to go to the meetings outside of school they've got that connection already there as well and she's always on call if we ever needed, I don't know, if a student wants to speak to her, we can ring her, send her an email and she'll come in when she can and speak to them as well, and we can arrange meeting rooms*" (P3).

"*…but I do think it's better to have somebody from the service coming in to do that, so they can identify that there is a lead in school but there is also this service outside of school, there's this bigger picture*" (P1).

2.7.2 Theme Two: A Family-Centred Approach

All participants highlighted the importance of adopting a family-centred approach, to support YCs in the context of their families. This included building rapport with families to encourage open dialogue and to understand CYP's unique family circumstances. Participants noted that a key part of their role as the DYCL was sharing information around the available support both in school and externally. The importance of promoting pupils' and their families' autonomy and choice as well as their input in decision making was articulated by participants. A personalised approach to supporting YCs within their family context was emphasised by participants.

2.7.2.1 Subtheme: Understanding YC and their Families' Unique Circumstances

This subtheme referred to participants' articulations of the need to further understand CYP and their families' unique home circumstances so that effective and personalised support can be put in place. Building relationships with pupils and their families was highlighted by participants as an important first step to promote an open dialogue with families about a potential caring relationship and accessing support: "…*little steps and building good rapport so that we can kind of be in a position of, that they are prepared to have some support*" (P6). This participant described the home-school relationship as "*crucial*" (P6).

Participants highlighted the need for a relational approach to build positive connections with families, alongside the need for the visibility and accessibility of school staff, particularly as their role as the DYCL. Participants stated several ways in which they developed familiarity with parents and families, such as through coffee mornings, sharing flyers and staff members being available at key times:

"…*you have a chat with the parent wherever you can, and we're always on the gate here*" (P2).

"…*so, I mean that's why we have our coffee mornings…every last Wednesday of the month during term time and we are always available, at the beginning of school, there is always SLT available in the morning and after school, so we try to get out there as much as we can, so we're familiar with the parents…*" (P5).

Participants noted that meetings with parents were also important, particularly as families do not always realise that their child may have a potential YC role: "*Normally they don't sort of really realise, so I think this term, I've had two or three meetings with parents where they've just been talking about, they've come in about behaviour or something like that and then they've been talking about home and how their suffering with XYZ and then how their son/daughter helps them or their sibling, we had one with a sibling and he had severe autism and how her daughter helps her with her son, so normally it sort of comes about*" (P3). This extract highlights that

through conversations with family members, it was possible for this participant to gather further information regarding the home context and support them with understanding what young caring potentially looks like and the impact it could be having.

Within this theme, building relationships with pupils was also identified by participants as being an important precursor to ascertaining further details about CYP's home circumstances. This is exemplified in the following extract: "…*it's having that trust isn't it, we talk to our children right from Reception about trusted adults and who trusted adults are and how to recognise them so that they build up these relationships*" (P6). Participants felt that building these relationships and trust supported pupils to open up about their potential caregiving circumstances at home: "*… it's just having conversations with these kids…if they're coming in tired or whatever, and you say, oh, you not got much sleep? you know, and just having open questions with them really and then coming in and we can go from there…*" (P4).

Gaining a clear understanding of CYP's home circumstances was discussed by participants as a prominent factor in identifying a potential YC role: *"…if I pick up, staff pick up on those little things, we'll then get a bit more information, like…do they do that a lot, is this something that is just one occasion et cetera and figure out what is they do…"* (P3). Through getting to know the student and their unique circumstances, participants stated that this opened avenues to provide appropriate support: *"…it is tracking backwards, you've got the arrival at school, but it's then what's happened before…what are the challenges to getting here on time, and how can we help, it's asking the questions isn't it, you've gotta be curious and ask the questions"* (P2). Participants suggested that the information shared by CYP could be triangulated with other available information, such as attendance data, to gain a holistic picture of caregiving responsibilities at home, as exemplified by Participant 6: "*…because we have these sort of issues and things around attendance and so on, it is various little bits that need to come together in a supportive way for the family…*" (P6).

Several participants cited that assessment tools and scripts were useful to support conversations with pupils around caregiving, as exemplified: *"…all our teachers are*

given an actual young carers script, giving you some suggested questions that you could ask if you're thinking that somebody might be a young carer so, we have some suggested questions that you can use as prompts to initiate that conversation" (P6). As this extract suggests, participants noted that any member of staff may have this initial conversation with a CYP, therefore it was crucial to ensure all school staff were equipped and prepared. One participant created their own resources to use in school: *"… I devised a set of questions to use with them, now we didn't sit and run through the questions, I asked the members of staff that were doing the assessment to do it in a, like having a chat, but cover each question, because…you don't want to sit down with a piece of paper, start ticking boxes with children that are talking about family life and difficulty, but they had to cover each area"* (P2). This participant also articulated that formal assessment tools were required, as they ensured that all CYP were given an assessment of a potential young caregiving role at home: "*there's some big surprises…oh I've learnt from this big time and everything about her life you could not see it …and then I said well we've gotta give her an assessment, this is why we would have this tool, as this is showing equality right across the board and when I did that, it turned out her Dad was quite severely epileptic and she was petrified that, if he went into a seizure while mum was out, that he might die in front of her, she actually told me all of this and dad went to work and came in to collect the kids and put himself across, quite correctly, as a well person, …so yeah, now we're talking… but I wouldn't have guessed that…we should never rely on guesswork"* (P2).

Given the potential sensitivity of the conversation around home circumstances, participants highlighted that it was important that the most appropriate adult within school had this conversation with the CYP:

"…because we're a small school we all know the children really well so everybody comes into contact with everybody all the time, so it would just be whoever the child felt sort of comfortable with really" (P6).

"It would be whoever was closest to that child so it could be me, but it wouldn't necessarily be because, who am I if they don't know me, just this woman asking,

whereas they, if it was somebody in, who worked in their classroom, got on really well with them" (P2).

Several participants drew attention to the fact that these were sensitive conversations to be having with CYP, therefore a careful, considered, and respectful approach was essential. This is exemplified by the following extracts:

"…Yes, with the girl that's here, so I do a weekly check in with her to see how things are going and because obviously she's been experiencing all sorts of things, like having been in hospital, dads now on palliative care…, but she mentioned a couple of things that, that when she goes to see dad at his flat and things like that, sometimes she does some things for him, like she might to a bit of tidying up or whatever, so I'm kind of thinking, while she's ticking some of the boxes up, as I say because he's so poorly, it's a very sensitive issue, so we are treading very carefully on that one…" (P6)

"…one of my very earliest young carers… mum was an alcoholic, also had very severe mental health problems and life at home was very, very, very difficult…there were all sorts of other things going on…and then brother moved back home and he…was addicted to other substances… but that wasn't the conversation to have with her, the conversation was is there anybody at home that feels a bit sad sometimes… is there a family member that you need to help… I can't remember the exact words, they're very, very carefully worded" (P2).

As these extracts highlight, participants' view was that conversations needed to be adapted based upon the age of the CYP, to ensure that it was developmentally appropriate for the CYP. Participants also reflected upon the need to be cognisant of individual CYP's personalities and the amount of information that they wanted to disclose. This included considering that some CYP are open to speaking about their caregiving responsibilities, as highlighted by Participant 4: *"…two of my people in the intervention are young carers, and one of them, we were talking about anger issues, and she put mum's illnesses, and I said why have you put mums' illnesses and she said because it's just so unfair...she's very open about it"* (P4).

However, participants stated that there was a degree of reluctance in some CYP to disclose caring responsibilities and home circumstances: "*…some of them just, are not ashamed of it, but are very introverted about it, they don't want you to know that they've got things going on at home and stuff like that, which is quite sad*" (P4). Participants also highlighted that families can be reserved and reluctant to share information: "*… some children and parents will come in and tell you everything and other ones, you can sort of see that, they are just a little bit resistant…*" (P5).

2.7.2.2 Subtheme: Personalised Support for YCs

Once an understanding of a CYP and their families' unique circumstances had been gained, participants stated that an individualised and bespoke package of support could be put into place. This links to the subtheme 'Conceptualising Young Caregiving' and the heterogeneity of YCs, as participants' narratives highlighted that what worked well to support the YC was unique to the individual, therefore requiring a tailored approach instead of a 'one size fits all'.

This subtheme reflected the shared conclusion that listening to the voice of the YCs and adopting a person-centred, child-led approach was paramount to the participants. This was because it ensured that CYP were supported with following their interests. For example, one participant facilitated a YC's access to creative clubs outside of school, based upon their interests: "*…not everyone who comes through young carers would want to go and explore their creative side but some of them…they absolutely flourish, and when nothing else has been the answer necessarily, to the difficulties, they're having, I'm thinking now of a girl who left in year six last year… she always was a young carer, I put her through the X (*organisation which runs creative foundations e.g. drama, music, dance*) and that changed everything, that was an absolute game changer for her and I managed to secure funding for a taxi for her as well because her family couldn't get her there and she just flourished*" (P2). A person-centred approach also supported YCs with their aspirations and hopes for future jobs as highlighted by Participant 3: "*so one of them… she wants to be a firefighter, so she talked about that and she wanted to be able to get into the fire cadets…so I got hold of a local firemen, he came in and he had a chat with her at the young carer meeting, lunch meeting, and then they had*

photos and stuff together and she's now joined the fire cadets coz she didn't feel like she had that confidence before, so.. we just offer like a bit more opportunity if they want anything they can come to us, and we can find a way to make it easy for them" (P3).

Alongside supporting YCs with their interests and future aspirations, participants also highlighted the need to understand what YCs might be finding difficult in school and how to provide them with the most appropriate support: *"It's knowing about their individual needs and how we can best support them"* (P6). Involving CYP in action-planning was considered important by participants, to ensure that their needs and views remained at the centre of the support and the approach taken. For example, one participant discussed a personalised timetable that was negotiated with a YC, to provide flexibility and support: *"…we've got a year 11, her brother is extremely autistic and she doesn't get a lot of sleep, like now…she's going through her GCSEs and she'll take...time to…she'll, come out of her lesson to focus on something, so she can keep doing that, so she's sort of like, she's worked it out in her own way, but she's sort of adapted her timetable, to fit everything in…"* (P4). This emphasises participants' narratives surrounding the importance of working collaboratively with YCs so that a person-centred approach can be effectively implemented with bespoke support, including the voices of YC in decision-making and action plans.

For younger, primary-school aged children, several participants highlighted that a flexible approach was adopted to support them. Participants commented on the individuality of the YCs known to them and emphasised that a personalised approach needed to be taken, as the following extract demonstrates: *"…or a child that is always late, and you're looking at the reason behind that and discovering that… sometimes you have to face facts, I had a young carer at my other school, knew her from the age of four…she was never on time for school and her mum had probably four alarm clocks set, and the child would say "mum, mum, come on you gotta get up" and that push in the school to have that attendance and have that child in school on time and that negotiation then that when she came into school, nobody was going to roll their eyes, nobody was going to say 'ohh, late again' and she just had a system where she could get into the classroom, get on with what she needed to do, and people would spend time at lunchtime with her covering the phonics she'd*

missed" (P2). This participant's narrative underlines the importance of considering home-based factors that may contribute to CYP's difficulties with attending school, as there may be factors that are outside of the child's control (e.g., not being old enough to walk to school independently). A supportive, not punitive approach was also highlighted by this participant, with staff offering flexibility and academic support as needed.

When considering a personalised approach to support, participants emphasised that there were multiple professionals they could refer YCs to if appropriate. "…*it's all so much on an individual basis isn't it, we do have various things available that we could offer if it was appropriate*" (P6). Participants highlighted there was support available in school, such as 1:1 and group support from ELSA's (Emotional Literacy Support Assistants), who were trained members of staff to support CYP with their emotional wellbeing. There were also a range of external services and organisations who could provide support to YCs inside and outside of school if required. Participants discussed: Resilience Coaching, Counsellors, Art Therapists, Chaplains, Youth Services, Young People's Mental Health Hubs at Doctors Surgeries, Psychodynamic Counselling Coaches, Friendship Skills groups ran by the NSPCC (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children), as well as Family Support services. Participants stated that listening to the voice of the YCs ensured that support was tailored to what they felt they needed. Participant 5, for example, highlighted that for some YCs, this included the availability of someone to talk to who was separate from school and home: *"…we have obviously counselling, if they need it, some of them have said… I'd just like someone to talk to, that's not linked to family, not linked to school, so our counsellors are independent counsellors..."* (P5). Based upon the needs of the YCs and their unique home circumstances, this participant emphasised that a flexible approach could then be adopted if needed: *"…and obviously that (counselling) normally goes 8 to 12 weeks but if we feel that needs extending and they need them obviously we can have them conversations and extend it, with the permission obviously of the parents and the children"* (P5). *"…if it is something where it's a long-term illness or something then obviously if parent has a relapse or whatever they might need that extra time"* (P5). Participants' overall reflections were that it was important for YCs to have their views heard and incorporated into agreed action plans regarding support from external professionals.

2.7.2.3 Subtheme: Information Sharing and Facilitating Choice

The analysis indicated that participants believed an important aspect of their role as DYCLs was to provide information to CYP and their families regarding the role of the DYCL and the support that is available to them in school and from external organisations. This was communicated by a variety of means, such as on the school website, leaflets, in assemblies, through conversations with CYP and their families and on display boards, as exemplified: "…*have some sort of display somewhere that everybody can see so that...even when they are sitting eating their lunch that they're aware, just by familiarity of like, oh that's the young carer lead, that's a picture of her, so just building that up, making sure that everybody is aware…*" (P6).

Participants also discussed informing CYP and their families of their role in making referrals to relevant professionals and services outside of school who could provide support to the family, such as external YC Organisations. Providing students and their family members with clear, accessible information was viewed as important so they can make informed choices as to whether they would like to engage with the support available: "…*what I'd normally do, is, I have a letter explaining at our school…the support we can give…and then, I also print off the information from the young carers service, so that they can read through it and they can see what it actually entails…*" (P5). Participants highlighted the importance of supporting choice regarding accessing the external YC service, with one participant expressing that they supported the young person to complete the referral themselves, to take ownership of the process: *"…you can do it on a form or print it off but I normally do it online with them and I normally get them to actually do it, I'll sit with them and support them with it but it's about them doing it themselves really…"* (P1).

 For younger children, participants highlighted that an important first step was gaining consent from parents to access support from the external YC organisation. Participants discussed that there was sometimes reluctance from families to access the support available, citing that parents can sometimes be in "*two minds whether they want the referral*" (P5). One explanation participants provided for this was due to families' fear of social care, as exemplified in the following extract: "*…I have had*

parents say before, is it anything to do with social care, I'm like no, it's nothing to do with that at all, but I think they sort of think oh is it people are going to be keeping an eye on us or is it they're checking out that we are OK… so I think that's the bit of the stigma, it's like okay, what is it to do with, is it to do with social care, that's one of the things that seems to come up quite often" (P5).

Another explanation offered by participants related to their view that families did not want to be perceived to be struggling and may feel embarrassed about their circumstances or accepting help. This is exemplified in the following extracts:

"…you get some families that are very open to that and some that probably, a little bit embarrassed…and maybe they're the more tricky ones that you don't find out about until much later on because they're trying to manage and…to keep it very in-house and…yeah maybe they just feel a bit embarrassed about the situation, so, I could identify or the student has identified that they are a young carer but you obviously need to ring home and say are you happy for this referral to go in… well, actually no, they're OK…sometimes that does happen and then we would just try and support them as we can in-house really" (P1).

"… so, I think it's that whole stigma of accepting help and saying that maybe we need help…" (P5).

Therefore, because of this, participants emphasised that part of their role as the DYCL was to mediate parental concerns around social care involvement: "…*we're not doing it because you're doing something wrong, we're doing it because we want to help you…*" (P4). As this extract suggests, participants cited that encouraging open dialogue could help tackle the stigma some families felt towards the involvement of external services in their lives. Participants also stated that explaining what the support from the YC organisation may look like was important to help mediate parental concerns, as exemplified in the following extract: *" I had a conversation with a parent and she was like but we've got things sorted at home, home's fine and I said I know home's fine and you've got a routine, you've got support from your family, but this is about your child…and when I explained some of the activities they do, like, they might get tickets to go and see the pantomime or like*

a cinema trip or a cookery class…or like a meeting to meet other young carers..” (P5).

Ultimately, participants emphasised that it was the CYP's choice as to whether they wanted to be identified as a YC in school and if they wanted to access the support available in school and externally:

"…and then they don't have to go on the young carer list to be like coming to the X (lunchtime club) and things like that if they don't want to, but we do try and encourage it cause, it's not a stigmatised thing here at all" (P3).

"…X Young Carers, they come in…not all our young carers are seen by these people, and they can identify if they don't want to be seen anyway, if they don't want any support…" (P4).

For primary school children, the decision whether to access support from the external YC organisation was made by their parents, and this choice needed to be respected, as exemplified by Participant 6: *"…the parents agreed to me making referral but when they'd had their contact from young carers* (organisation) *they actually decided not to go ahead, they just decided it wasn't for them… so obviously we respect that that is their choice…"* (P6).

2.7.3 Theme Three: Promoting YC's Sense of Belonging

This theme reflected the unanimous conclusion amongst participants that promoting a sense of belonging in school for YCs was important. YCs' sense of belonging was promoted through a variety of ways, including acknowledging YCs within school, creating social spaces for YCs to connect with other YCs, and a relationship-based and nurturing approach to ensure their needs were met.

2.7.3.1 Subtheme: Acknowledging YCs in school

All participants strongly emphasised the importance of acknowledging there were YCs in school. A need for early identification when supporting YCs was articulated, as exemplified: *"You can't start early enough really"* (P2). It was felt by participants

that there were consequences if YCs were not acknowledged in school: "*It isn't rocket science, it isn't difficult to do, but you have to sit down and acknowledge it and say we as a school are going to do this now, because to not do it is failing these children and young people and that's a tough thing for anybody to say*" (P2). Some participants also referred to other schools that were not yet identifying YCs: "*I know that there's a school locally that are not identifying their young carers, so me and (name) from (Young Carers Organisation), we've been discussing that, so she's… regularly, sort of hounding them as such, because there's a few of the young people, they come to her Carer group outside of school, and she knows obviously that they go to that school, so she keeps saying, no you have got young carers, you keep saying you haven't but they come to our group, you need to identify them, because…sometimes they do struggle, and by not being recognised, I feel that's just sort of setting them up to fail…*" (P3). One participant however, acknowledged that this is likely to change soon due to new statutory duties: "*we can add that identifying, we don't like labels, but it's a description… and that is about to become a statutory category, in the authority, so we're streets ahead of that cause we were doing that before and during the pandemic, really helpfully*" (P2).

Participants felt that recognising YCs ensured they were supported in school, therefore promoting positive mental health and wellbeing, and fostering a sense of belonging, as illustrated: "*…once you've identified them and provided them with…what you would see is the tiniest provision, you get so much out of it, you're giving but you're getting back bucketful's...*" (P2).

Once YCs had been acknowledged within school, participants emphasised that YCs should also receive praise for their role in supporting their families, as illustrated by the following extract: "*…and actually you know what a good person they are kind of doing that and how, how that differs to maybe you know your typical young person so I think some of them…was so unaware of what they are actually doing but actually they needed some praise for what they were doing and they needed some awareness actually that, this isn't maybe the norm, and you know doing a really good job*" (P1). Participants felt that acknowledging their role as a YC could support the development of a positive YC identity: "*It's better, really, because they've got that acknowledgement, time will tell…but I had children who were identified in my other*

school, as they came into the school, who are now in year six, who are so evolved in that understanding of themselves, that life's different for me, but do you know what it, it can be really positive, it's giving it that positive sort of outlook…and so if you were to go and see the young carers there, you'd be astounded at how, absolutely, bouncy and full of joy that they're young carers...but that didn't come from nowhere, that took quite a long time to get established here" (P2).

2.7.3.2 Subtheme: Facilitating Connections between YCs

This subtheme captured participants' reflections on the importance of facilitating relationships between YCs, to reduce isolation and encourage feelings of belonging. The data revealed that most participants had set up a YC's club within school, as a space for YCs to socialise. A variety of approaches were discussed: e.g., activities within school, someone from the external YC organisation joining the club every week, activities out in the community e.g., ski dome, bowling, cinema etc, and special events/ treats e.g., tea party.

Several participants emphasised that the club was set up exclusively for YCs so that it was something special just for them: "*…we do it as an invitation, because right from the get-go I wanted it to be something that made them feel important.*" (P2). "*…we try and do little things in school, we try and have little treats for them, we had a tea party, just little morale boosters along the way things like that*" (P6).

Through creating YC's clubs and events in school, participants felt that this supported YCs feeling that they were part of a cohort with other YCs: "*That cohort bit is really important, it's quite amazing to see and you couldn't bottle it and you couldn't explain it but having done it across two schools, I've now seen exactly the same buzz come out of the group, and…I can't have transported that from the other school, that's among them, it's part of who they are, it's really lovely*" (P2). This sense of belonging and cohort is further articulated within a specific example from Participant 2: "*…if you wanted to get technical, you will have maybe the poorly member of the family passes away, dies… which sadly happened for one of my ones at the other school where he lost one parent, the other parent took over the parenting and sadly he died last year very suddenly and then he said to me the*

immortal words, am I still a young carer and…there's no possible way I was gonna turn round and say do you know what no, that ship has sailed, I said of course you are, you're still in a caring role, you still looking out for all the members of your family…and that was really reassuring to him, that he was still part of that cohort…and hadn't been for ages, but as soon as that happened he wanted to come back to his familiar little group of people, that have challenges not unlike his…" (P2).

A participant working in a smaller school discussed linking up with YCs in another school, to develop a wider cohort and sense of belonging: "*Tea party just for the young carers, but we invited the young carers from another local school…just to build that community link, to say it's not just us, there is other children in other schools out there with exactly the same sort of things and it was fantastic really, because, knowing that they had that sort of thing in common, they were all very happy to get together, played lots of games and, and they really got on and it was very interesting, it was good to see*" (P6).

Participants described the positive impact of running YCs clubs and creating spaces for YCs to meet up and socialise within school: "*…they absolutely love it. So, the other week they had cheese boards, they all requested a cheese board, so we thought, oh OK that's fine we'll get you some…and they just went absolutely crazy like I've never seen, they were just obsessed with this cheese, it went down so well. So yeah, they love it, it's brilliant*" (P2). Another positive aspect that emerged included YCs having a mutual, yet unspoken understanding that they all share something in common: "*… they all knew that they were young carers, they all knew that they have something in common, but it didn't need to be spoken about*" (P1). Another participant shared that the YCs within their school did talk about their YC role and how this varied between them: "*they started talking about like, oh yes, you know, I help my mum to do blah, blah, blah, so they did actually have chats about their roles and I think they found it interesting hearing about some of the different things that other children did and as well as the things that they had in common…*" (P6). Facilitating YCs clubs also enabled CYP from different year groups to come together, therefore supporting cross-age communication and support, as exemplified by Participant 1: "*We are a sixth form school as well, so we'd go from year 7 right through to year 13 and we'd have young carers from all of those year groups*

and…just for an example, we'd go to the (climbing centre), *and you'd have a Year 13 supporting a Year 7 and…it was just really beautiful to watch them encouraging each other and egging each other on to kind of do these quite… scary things really, did the high ropes at the ski slope, it was really lovely to watch"* (P1).

Two participants explained they had previously held social events for YCs; however, these were currently not taking place due to the impact of the covid pandemic, and logistical considerations like the limited time available during the school day:

"…it's more the social side of things that hasn't kind of started up again… and that is just time" (P1).

"We were having a lunchtime thing…we were just getting together, having a social thing and...we would, each week, one of us was making a cake, and bring it in… and we'd all sit round and have a chat and have a cup of tea, but the fact of the matter was, it's only half an hour, and by the time I've come from somewhere and they've come from somewhere, it just isn't feasible, so then you think maybe something after school but then, a lot of them have to get home, because of the impact that stuff has at home, so it's a difficult one… and then you've got the holidays, but then other things happen in this holidays…" (P4).

One participant had not yet facilitated a club, however expressed a desire to establish one:

"… the other thing that I'm hoping to put in place eventually is having a meet for all the young carers in the school, to have like…cakes and crafts…just so that they all meet together, so they are aware that they are not on their own, so that they know that there are others that are doing the same…sort of role as they are" (P5).

2.7.3.3 Subtheme: Nurturing and Relational Approach to Ensure YC's Needs Met

Participants discussed the importance of CYP feeling safe and regulated within school, by ensuring that their needs were met. This subtheme explores the impact

caregiving can have on children's emotional wellbeing (e.g., worry and anxiety), and the subsequent consequence this can have on their ability to engage with learning. Participants reflected upon the need for children to feel valued within school to promote a sense of belonging, and that this could be achieved through a relational and nurturing approach.

Within this theme, the importance of 'relationships' was commonly cited across all interviews. Participants discussed that CYP developing trusting relationships with adults in schools was important, as it contributes to CYP's feelings of a sense of belonging and safety within their environment. In many instances, participants shared that this 'key adult' in school was often themselves as the DYCL. The importance of a trusting relationship with a key adult in school is exemplified by Participant 2: "…*if I could show you, you would cry, I certainly did, the letters I got from my lot when I left, one put 'Dear (name), I'm so happy that you exist', like I'm not gonna get anything better than that as long as I live…I am happy you exist*" (P2). Alongside a relational approach, participants also emphasised within their narratives the importance of creating 'safe spaces' within schools that YCs could access if they had concerns about a family member or if they were finding things challenging in school, as exemplified in the following extract:

"*… if they have loved ones in hospital…then they know they can come in to speak with me as the young carer lead so they can have time out in here, we've got a lot of coffee machines, we do hot chocolates with that so they can just have that time to either, use the phone to ring or they can get their mobile phone out in here if they need to call and then obviously they are not supposed to have it on site but they are allowed, they come here if they need to, if they are worrying we'd rather they would come in and they can clear their minds...*" (P3)

For one participant this took the form of a card for YCs to step out of the classroom if needed: "…*one of the things I set up some time ago was, they had a little card, that if they were worrying, that they could come and see me or their head of year or their student support officer and just to make a phone call home and it would just make their day at school a lot easier to kind of get through, because you know some of them have got really poorly parents or, might have mental health issues or*

something and that's something that really worked for a little while, it wasn't encouraged, you know, like 3 or 4 times a day, but if there was a particular time that a parent has or sibling was having a bad time, that they could just use that card to step out…" (P1).

Within this subtheme, several participants also articulated a need for a nurturing approach to ensure that CYP's basic needs were met, so they were ready for school and to engage with learning and felt a sense of belonging:

"… in school, that would be when she arrived in the morning...making sure she'd had some breakfast, help to get her hair sorted out, we had a… toiletries kit...in school, so she could come in, brush her teeth… always have spare ponytail bands, you know just little things like that, that make a difference so that when you actually go into class, you're looking as you would want to be, the same as everybody else, things like, for instance…school plays...she'd be the one that would never have a costume provided… so school would always make sure we do things like that, Christmas jumper day when she wouldn't have one, we'd have a collection of ones so we can make sure she's got one…just all those little things to make sure that she's having the same opportunities as all the other children really and …making sure that she wasn't hungry, and that she'd got some lunch, and that she knew what was happening after school…so just trying to be that sort of, reassurance, I suppose, apart from anything else, so that she could just be a little girl for part of the day at least.." (P6).

"…making sure that they have breakfast, so we have breakfast club in the morning, that's for everybody, making sure that they are being fed, because that's not always the case, it might be their only hot meal that they get here today… and just basic things like making sure that they've got books and their uniform…and we do help with…equipment and if they do food tech, we provide a lot of the food for our students to cook, which is also the nature of our school to be fair, because of where it is situated and the needs of the community…" (P4).

2.8 Discussion

2.8.1 Introduction

The aim of this research was to explore Designated YC Leads' (DYCLs) experiences of identifying and supporting YCs in school. DYCL's views were explored in order to elucidate where good practice may already be in place and identify any challenges and areas in which support may be required to develop. Existing literature around supporting YCs in school is lacking qualitative research exploring the perspectives of school-based professionals, particularly DYCLs. Therefore, this research aimed to provide greater insight to those working directly with YCs every-day.

Reflexive TA was used to analyse the transcripts of 6 DYCLs. Three themes, 'Knowledge and Awareness of Young Caregiving', 'Family-Centred Approach' and 'Promoting Young Carers' Sense of Belonging' were identified in relation to the RQs. These findings will be discussed using a psychological systems lens, Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1992) within the context of the existing literature around young caregiving. The implications for schools and EP practice will be discussed, and suggestions for future research will be proposed. The limitations of the research will be stated and will be further explored in Chapter 3 (Reflective Account).

2.8.2 RQ1: How are YCs identified in schools, from the perspective of DYCLs?

Consistent with previous research, all participants emphasised within their narratives that schools were well positioned to identify and initiate support for YCs (Barnardo's, 2017; Hebden, 2021; Warren, 2007). The overall narrative of participants in this study was that raising knowledge and awareness of young caregiving was a fundamental first step to identifying YCs in school, relating to theme 1 'Knowledge and Awareness of Young Caregiving'. Participants' conceptualisations of young caregiving accorded with the literature; as they suggested that the term 'young carer' is heterogenous, given the diverse range of caring roles and differing experiences that CYP have (Doutre et al., 2013). For the YCs known to them, participants highlighted a range of people that CYP care for, with parents and siblings most cited, however grandparents and other family members were also referred to. This mirrors findings from the quantitative survey conducted on behalf of the Department for Education (Aldridge et al., 2017), and other research within the literature base on

young caregiving (Abraham & Aldridge, 2010; Dearden & Becker, 2004; Joseph et al., 2019). The present study also corroborated with previous findings suggesting that YCs often taken on responsibilities that would typically be expected of an adult and provide support that is beyond what other CYP provide for family members (Aldridge et al., 2017; Joseph et al., 2019; Warren, 2007). However, participants also drew attention to the fact that a YC may be identified due to the impact of a challenging home situation, rather than a direct caregiving role. Therefore, participants' views were that the role of school can be to mitigate the effects of a difficult home situation for CYP (Gough & Gulliford, 2020). Participants also voiced that YCs were often more mature than their peers, echoing YCs self-assessment in previous research, who reported developing responsibility, maturity, and life skills due to their caregiving role (Fives et al., 2013; Rose & Cohen, 2010; Thomas et al., 2003).

Participants emphasised that it was important to raise awareness of young caregiving in different groups, including CYP, families and school staff. This is consistent with the available guidance and toolkits which have been produced to support schools with their identification and provision for YCs, such as The Carers Trust and The Children's Society (2017) and guidance available from local LA YC organisations. Participants stated that a proactive approach to raise CYP and family's awareness was adopted through a variety of means such as: noticeboards, school websites, assemblies, PSHE lessons, letters to families, articles/school newsletters, coffee mornings, meetings with parents and using opportunities such as YC's Days/ Weeks. This ensured that information was shared regarding who YCs are, what the role may involve (e.g., caregiving responsibilities at home) and the support available in school and externally. Participants stated that raising awareness promotes positive messages around young caregiving, which is hoped to reduce stigma and develop a supportive school atmosphere, which encourages YCs and their families to self-identify. Raising awareness activities were considered important as many of the CYP and their families do not recognise, nor identify with, the term 'young carer'. Participants attributed this to an element of 'perceived normality', which is congruous with the literature base that suggests CYP view their activities as part of a regular familiar familial relationship with reciprocal and loving bonds (Smyth et al., 2011). Although all participants had indicated that there was a system for

identifying YCs in school, many referred to the presence of 'hidden YCs' who were not yet known to the school or other services, further agreeing with existing literature (Barnardo's, 2017; Blake-Holmes & McGowan, 2022; Manwaring, 2022).

Participants also stated raising awareness of school staff was important to support the identification of YCs. This mirrored the aforementioned guidance that has been developed to support schools with identifying YCs. Staff awareness of YCs was raised through various means, such as: staff noticeboards, assemblies, training/ Continuous Professional Development (CPD) sessions (e.g., twilight, INSET days), and sometimes involved positive engagement with the local YC organisation. Participants highlighted the need for ongoing CPD for staff and for YC systems to be communicated and shared with new members of staff joining the school setting. Consistent with previous research, participants highlighted that educational staff are well placed to recognise the possible indicators of a potential young caregiving role at home (Warren, 2007). Possible indicators discussed by participants included difficulties completing homework (Thomas et al., 2003), changes in hygiene, appearance, eating habits and tiredness. Participants also referred to attendance as something that YCs may have difficulties with (Warren, 2007) and therefore highlighted the need for systems to be in place in school which monitor and flag attendance difficulties. These views were consistent with the literature that has outlined the role of school in considering when a CYP is regularly missing from education (Carer's Trust, 2020; Children's Commissioner, 2022). Participants also drew attention to some of the difficulties faced by YCs with their educational engagement and attainment, which aligned with previous research (Barnardo's, 2017; Carers Trust, 2020; Hounsell, 2013; Lloyd, 2013).

Findings indicated that a holistic, whole school approach to identification was needed to ensure that no YCs slipped through the net. Participants highlighted that any member of staff within the school may be the first person a CYP feels comfortable to talk to about their caregiving responsibilities. There was therefore a need for all members of staff to be alert and prepared to have these conversations with CYP. This is consistent with the suggestion in previous research that any frontline professional could be the first point of contact for YCs (Barnardo's, 2017) and echoes the finding that YCs are most frequently identified by their teachers or

support staff (Barnardo's, 2017). Raising staff awareness was also important to ensure staff knew the next steps once they had identified a CYP they think may have a caregiving role, linking to the subtheme 'School Professionals' Communication and Collaboration'. Participants commented upon the need for effective communication pathways to ensure a collaborative working partnership between themselves, as the DYCL, and staff members, for example communicating who the YCs are in school.

A collaborative approach to identifying YCs extended to building relationships with other schools and other DYCL. Participants also highlighted the need for communication between schools, to support CYP identified as YCs in feeder schools transition to another educational setting, and thus ensure appropriate support is continued. This accords with previous research (Clay et al., 2016; Choudhury & Williams, 2020) and illustrates the multi-faceted role of DYCLs, to build relationships and collaborate with students, parents and other school professionals to identify YCs.

A multi-agency approach to identifying YCs was also articulated by participants, which aligns with previous literature (DfE, 2016; Joseph et al., 2020; The Children's Society, 2020). Participants stated that no professional group can have sole responsibility, as any frontline professional could be the first point of contact for YCs and their families (Barnardo's, 2017). Participants commented that sometimes Social Workers, Family Support Practitioners, YC's Organisations, or other professionals were the first to identify YCs and then informed the school about a potential YC role and possible need for extra support. Therefore, a coordinated, multi-agency approach to identification was highlighted and represented a key interaction within the exosystem level (Bronfenbrenner, 1992).

2.8.3 RQ2: How are YCs supported in schools, from the perspective of DYCLs?

Findings from this research indicated that a family-centred approach was at the heart of supporting YCs in schools and their families, therefore linking to theme 2. This is consistent with the existing research and guidance available on supporting YCs in schools (Carers Trust, 2020; Family Action, 2012; Ronicle & Kendall, 2011). Participants commented that building trusting relationships with CYP and their families was a key first step to encourage open dialogue and understand families'

unique circumstances (Manwaring, 2022). This therefore adds to the body of literature by highlighting the importance of building positive home-school relationships, underpinned by trust, to support YCs and their families (Family Action, 2012). Within the context of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory (1992), the interaction between the school and the YCs families was a key finding at the mesosystem level, aligning with Choudhury's research (2018). One approach discussed by participants to support the development of this relationship was through school staff and DYCLs being visible and accessible (e.g., standing at school gates to communicate with parents, holding coffee mornings, availability at lunchtimes for CYP), to increase familiarity and build relationships. Participants also commented upon communication channels to liaise and build rapport with YCs and their families (e.g., letters, emails, meetings etc).

Participants highlighted that providing CYP and their families with clear, accessible information regarding the support available both within school and externally was important, relating to the subtheme 'Information Sharing and Facilitating Choice'. This was so CYP and their families knew who the DYCL was in school, and how to contact them. Additionally, participants highlighted a key part of their role as the DYCL was to sign-post and make referrals, with the consent of CYP and their parents, to external agencies and organisations who could provide support. In particular, participants voiced that families should be provided with clear and accessible information regarding what the support from the local external YC organisation entailed, due to parental concerns like fear of social care involvement. Participant's views were consistent with existing literature, whereby YCs' and parent narratives highlighted a fear of stigma and of being separated from their families and taken into care (Bolas et al., 2007; Clay et al., 2016; Rose & Cohen, 2010; Thomas et al., 2003). Therefore, aligning with previous research, the role of the DYCL as the 'key person' within school was to mediate parental concerns (Choudhury, 2018; Manwaring 2022).

Through providing clear and accessible information, participants stated that this allowed CYP and their families to make informed choices as to whether they would like to be identified as a YC and whether they wanted to engage with the support available. This highlighted the importance of facilitating autonomy and promoting a

sense of agency and can be considered within the context of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2000). According to this theory, motivation is underpinned by three psychological needs; autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy is a central component of SDT and was reflected in the participants narratives that ultimately it was the CYP and family's choice that needed to be respected.

The present findings also indicated that a tailored approach to support was essential, relating to the subtheme 'Personalised Support for YCs'. Each participant commented on the individuality of the YCs within their schools and highlighted how their experiences and needs differed and fluctuated depending on their home circumstances. This linked to the subtheme 'Conceptualising Young Caregiving' as participants narratives highlighted that due to the heterogeneity of the YC role, 'what works' will likely differ between individual families and circumstances. Therefore, participant's narratives mirrored suggestions from previous research that support should be bespoke based upon YC's individual needs, aspirations and talents (Warren, 2007; Manwaring, 2022). Support systems developed within participant's schools included; flexibility and leniency around homework and deadlines; academic support (homework clubs, tutoring); facilitating access to lunchtime and afterschool activities; and spaces within school for YC to access when needed, to ensure that they received personalised learning, care, and support. Participants also discussed that a key part of their role involved making referrals based upon YC's voice and needs to external professionals such as counsellors and family services. This is particularly consistent with the findings of Doutre et al. (2013), Hebden (2021) and McAndrew et al. (2012), who advocate for listening to YCs and involving them in decision making. This can also be considered within the context of SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000) as it highlights the role of the DYCL in utilising a child-led approach to promote YC's sense of autonomy and competence in deciding the support they received from school.

The present findings additionally indicated the need for interdisciplinary working and a multi-agency response to supporting YCs (Choudhury, 2018, Clay et al., 2016; Joseph et al. 2020; Manwaring, 2022; The Children's Society, 2020). This highlighted the role of external professionals in supporting YCs representing the

'Exosystem' within bioecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). Participants drew attention to their role as the DYCL in engaging with a range of external support services, therefore relating to the subtheme 'multi-agency working to support YCs'. This finding therefore draws parallels with Choudhury's research (2018) who highlighted the role of a 'key person' in school in coordinating and planning support with other services. As is consistent with Boddy (2016), the most frequently accessed form of support cited by participants was external YC Organisations. Participants expressed they had developed close working relationships with external professionals, and they valued the support they provided, with some participants considered them as part of the team. This contradicts findings in the literature which has highlighted poor communication between schools and external YC projects (Choudhury, 2018), and the lack of coordinated support for YCs between agencies and professionals (Children's Society, 2016). Previous research has indicated that "schools remain closed shops when external agencies try and engage with them to support vulnerable pupils in schools" (Family Action, 2012, p.16), which was not the case within the current research.

Research within the caregiving literature highlighted a need for future studies to investigate the specific contributions made by schools to support YC's educational experiences, attainment, and psychological well-being (Boddy, 2016; Hebden, 2021; Joseph et al., 2020; Scottish Government, 2017). This therefore formed two sub-questions to the research question above, which will be explored within the sections below.

2.8.4 RQ2 (a) How are YC's social, emotional, and mental health needs supported in the school environment from the perspective of DYCLs?

The aforementioned family-centred approach was an essential way of supporting YC's emotional wellbeing by enabling bespoke support tailored to YC's individual needs e.g., support from ELSA's, counsellors etc. In addition, participants cited that promoting a sense of belonging was important to support YC's social, emotional and mental health needs. Therefore, this research question is primarily addressed by the theme 'Promoting Young Carers' Sense of Belonging'. Belonging is frequently discussed within psychological theories as a core psychological need (Maslow 1943; Ryan & Deci, 2000). The need to belong is a fundamental human motivation and

subsequently has significant consequences on emotional and cognitive processes (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Therefore, having a sense of belonging in school is a powerful protective factor for supporting CYP's emotional wellbeing (Prince & Hadwin, 2013). This theme of 'belonging' algins with previous research which explored the educational experiences of YCs with additional needs (Choudhury, 2018). Participants narratives indicated that YC's sense of belonging was promoted through a variety of ways, notably: acknowledging them within school, promoting a positive perception of YC identity through recognition, understanding YCs SEMH needs, a relationship-based and nurturing approach to ensure needs were fulfilled, and creating social spaces for YCs to connect with other YCs. Each of these will be considered in turn and discussed within the context of the existing literature.

Participants in this study strongly emphasised the importance of recognising YCs within school, relating to the subtheme 'Acknowledging Young Carers in School'. Acknowledgement was felt to be important by participants to ensure that YCs were recognised and supported in school, therefore promoting positive mental health and wellbeing through this process and fostering a sense of belonging. This aligns with the narratives of YCs themselves in previous research, who reported that where their role was recognised and valued, and when they reported higher levels of resilience and support, they were more likely to report better mental health (Cassidy et al., 2014). Participants' narratives also mirrored other findings which has suggested that social recognition of YCs' roles was needed, alongside the presence of support (Dearden & Becker, 2000; Cassidy et al., 2014). Acknowledging YCs within school may mitigate some of the difficulties they have voiced in research, such as feeling insufficiently recognised and that they are not being listened to by staff (Becker & Becker, 2008).

Raising awareness of YCs through school-wide activities was also considered important by participants. It was felt by participants that sharing positive messages around YCs amongst all CYP helped reduce stigma and develop a supportive school atmosphere that acknowledges and celebrates YCs. Participants narratives were indicative that this helped mitigate some of the difficulties YCs have reported within research, such as stigma (Earley et al., 2007), isolation (Bolas et al., 2007) and their friends not understanding why they can't go to after school clubs or socialise outside

of school (Banks et al., 2001; Cree, 2003; Thomas et al., 2003). Increased peer understanding may indirectly foster improved wellbeing, as it fulfils the need to connect and be accepted by others (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Participants also drew attention to the high degree of resilience that YCs demonstrate, which is consistent with caregiving literature (Barry, 2011; Cassidy et al., 2014). Positive aspects of young caregiving, such as developing responsibility, maturity, and life skills were cited by participants, which was consistent with YC narratives in research (Fives et al., 2013; Rose & Cohen, 2010; Thomas et al., 2003). This also supported recommendations from researchers within the caregiving literature, who have stated a need for a move towards recognising positive aspects of the caregiving role, rather than a deficit and risk saturated narrative predominately focused upon the negative impacts (Banks et al., 2001; Doutre et al., 2013; Newman, 2002).

Participants acknowledged the role of schools in supporting a positive YC identity, through promoting positive images and messages around young caregiving to support self-esteem and pride and reduce stigma. Consistent with previous findings, participants highlighted that some YCs actively integrated caring into their merging sense of self and derived pride and self-esteem from caring (Bolas et al., 2007). Participants expressed that recognising and celebrating YCs for their role can promote positive mental health and wellbeing. This aligns with the voices of YCs, who stated that their role can boost self-esteem as they feel helpful and good about themselves (Abraham & Aldridge, 2010; Wadey, 2015).

Findings from this study revealed that although it was important to acknowledge positive aspects of young caregiving, it was also essential to understand the impact these responsibilities can have on YCs' SEMH. This therefore links to the subtheme 'Professionals Understanding of the Impact of Caregiving Responsibilities'. Participants narratives were indicative that when school professionals understood YCs' needs, they were more able to implement a personalised approach, which subsequently facilitated belonging within the school context. Participants commented upon the anxiety and worry which can consume many YCs daily, which mirrors the narratives of YCs within research (Cree, 2003; Earley et al., 2007; Thomas et al.,

2003). Consequently, the need for trusting relationships and 'safe spaces' for YCs within school was articulated by participants, relating to the theme 'Nurturing and Relationship-based Approach to Ensure YC's needs met'. This aligns with recommendations from YCs themselves, who have suggested within research that having understanding and supportive teachers, or someone they could talk to at school regularly, contributed to a positive school experience (Barry, 2011; Thomas et al., 2003). Participants expressed that their role as DYCL was to provide emotional support and safe spaces, for example inviting YCs to their office for a hot chocolate and a talk if needed. This has parallels to the 'role of a key person' (e.g., a Pastoral member of school staff) as articulated in Choudhury's research (2018) and as being a salient feature of the YC's microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1992).

The findings from this research additionally highlighted that supporting communication and relationships between YCs in school could foster YCs feelings of belonging and subsequently enhance wellbeing. The narratives from the data revealed that several participants had provided opportunities for YCs to connect with other CYP who have caring responsibilities, through setting up YC's clubs and events, which offered a space for them to meet and socialise. These interactions amongst YCs are mirrored in other findings within the literature (Boddy, 2016; Hebden, 2021) and highlights a significant mesosystem interaction implicated in supporting YC's educational experience and wellbeing (Choudhury 2018; Bronfenbrenner, 1992). Participants articulated that YCs feeling part of a wider cohort facilitated belonging and improved wellbeing due to the shared experiences of being a YC (Barry, 2011). Participants stated that for some YCs, it provided spaces for them to talk about their caregiving roles if they wished, however for others there was an unspoken yet mutual understanding amongst them. This can be considered within Ryan and Deci's Self Determination Theory (2000). 'Relatedness' is a key psychological need and refers to the feeling of being connected to others (Ryan & Deci, 2000) through establishing relationships. Participants narratives aligned with findings in the existing literature which highlighted that school's YC clubs can promote social wellbeing and feelings of belonging, through developing YCs voices and identities and fostering positive and trusting relationships with other YCs (Barry, 2011; Choudhury, 2018).

2.8.5 RQ2 (b) How are YC's educational experiences and attainment supported in the school environment from the perspective of DYCLs?

This research question is primarily addressed by the theme 'Knowledge and Awareness of Young Caregiving', and particularly the subthemes 'Professionals Understanding of the Impact of Caregiving Responsibilities' and 'School Professionals Communication and Collaboration'. Consistent with previous research, participants cited the difficulties that YCs can have keeping up with homework and schoolwork (Aldridge et al., 2017; Thomas et al., 2003) and problems with concentration and fatigue (Banks et al., 2001; Cree, 2003; Dearden & Becker, 2004). Therefore, it was articulated by participants that school-based professionals needed to be aware of the impact that caregiving responsibilities can have on YCs ability to engage with learning and homework, so they could be lenient, flexible with deadlines and offer appropriate support. This has also been articulated by YCs within research, who have highlighted the importance of teachers who were understanding, supportive and provide extensions for homework if they had a change in home circumstances or provide support during stressful times such as exams (Clay et al., 2016). The support participants provided YCs to support their academic attainment in school mirrored other findings within the quantitative research, including personalised teaching, access to homework clubs and greater flexibility in school and class attendance (Boddy, 2016; Clay et al., 2016). The subtheme 'Professionals Communication and Collaboration' also related to this research question. Participants made references to their role as the DYCL as an intermediary between staff and YC. For example, when a YC might be having a particularly challenging time at home, teachers were made aware by the DYCL and could subsequently provide flexibility and support or make allowances to school policies during lessons.

Attendance and lateness were also highlighted by participants as issues that YC may have difficulties with, which aligns with previous research (Barnardo's, 2017; Carers Trust, 2020; Clay et al. 2016; Family Action, 2012). Therefore, participants cited the importance of a supportive, not punitive approach if YCs were late, and establishing mechanisms of support to catch-up on missed work. However, some participants noted that not all YCs missed school and were no more likely to be late for school than their peers (Warren, 2007). This demonstrates the heterogeneity of

the YC role; and whilst highlighting that overall, attendance may be something YCs find challenging, it is not something all YCs experience. This suggests that an individualised approach to support is needed based upon the unique experiences of each YC and their family, and therefore links to theme 2, a 'Family Centred Approach'.

Findings from this study also indicated that school-based professionals need to understand YC's emotional needs and how this can impact upon their ability to engage with learning. As articulated by Doutre et al., (2013), YCs who need support and who struggle with their well-being will find accessing learning challenging. Emotions can have a substantial influence on cognitive processes, leaving limited cognitive resources available for YCs to access learning (Eysenck et al., 2007). Participants cited that concern about the care recipient was a key emotion YCs experienced. Therefore, participants narratives suggested the need to address the SEMH needs of YCs superseded efforts to promote their academic achievement. This incorporates ideas from Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943), which suggests that individuals require their physiological needs (e.g., food and clothing), security and safety needs and psychological needs to be fulfilled before being able to engage in high order skills like learning and self-actualisation. The subtheme 'Nurturing and Relational Approach to Ensure YC's Needs are Met' mirrors this, with participants discussing the importance of YCs basic needs being met so they feel ready to engage with school. This mirrors findings from previous research, whereby YCs have described school as a 'safe haven', 'sanctuary', or 'refuge', separate to home and their caring role (Becker & Becker, 2008; Cree, 2003). This indicates that the school environment can support the development of feelings of safety and belonging, which therefore has important implications for supporting YCs to feel ready to engage with learning.

2.8.6 Distinct Findings

This study explored the practice and experiences of DYCL's in identifying and supporting YC in schools. This therefore contributes a novel perspective to the young caregiving literature. Much of the findings aligned with the voices and perspectives of YCs in previous research, which has emphasised some of the

difficulties that YC can face with regards to their educational experiences and wellbeing, alongside what can support YCs within educational settings. The current findings also mirror guidance presented by the Carers Trust and the Children's Society (2017), for example raising awareness of YCs amongst CYP, families and staff, identifying YCs, and the other ways YCs could be supported in school. Although providing a valuable resource for schools, including practical step by step recommendations, the guidance does not detail the more subtle nuances that take place within interactions between CYP and their families and school. 'People skills' such as effective communication, interpersonal skills and problem-solving skills were unearthed through this research within participants narratives. The emphasis participants placed on relationships, connection and trust was present throughout the analysis and the findings offered a unique perspective by elucidating the practical ways in which trust, and communication can be encouraged. This could take the form of the DYCL ensuring their visibility to both pupils and their families and establishing various communication channels to liaise and build rapport with YCs and their families (e.g., coffee mornings, letters). Alongside a relational approach to support, a nurturing approach, which has not been recognised in prior research within the caregiving literature was also articulated by participants. This highlighted the need for schools to ensure that YCs had their basic needs met, prior to being expected to engage with learning.

Another distinct finding from this research related to the scope and definition of a 'Young Carer'. In the current research, participants emphasised that a CYP might be identified as a YC due to the impact of a challenging home situation, rather than due to having a direct caregiving role. This contrasts with some of the available pre-existing definitions for YC, such as in the Children and Families Act (2014) which defines YCs as a person under 18 who provides care for another person, and the Carer's Recognition and Services Act (1995) which defines YCs as providing a 'substantial amount of care on a regular basis'. The role of school, however, as suggested by participants, was to identify and support any CYP who were vulnerable and affected by a difficult home situation and would benefit from support to progress and fulfil their potential (Ofsted, 2015; DfE, 2022). This therefore has important implications for schools in reflecting who they would include in their definitions of YCs and who may require support.

Another unique finding that has not been previously identified by studies related to participant's reiterations of the importance of acknowledging YCs and their role within the school setting. The reasons cited for this were two-fold. Firstly, by acknowledging YCs, their participation and role in supporting their families could be recognised, praised, and celebrated, to support the development of feelings of pride, positive self-esteem and an overall positive YC identity. It also ensured that bespoke support could be provided in school based upon their individual needs. Secondly, raising awareness of YCs through whole-school activities was also considered to be important by participants, as it ensured positive messages around young caregiving could be shared with all CYP, to reduce stigma and develop a supportive school atmosphere that acknowledges YCs. Participants cited that by acknowledging and raising awareness of YCs within assemblies, PSHE lessons and national YC days/weeks this supported CYP with self-identifying as a YC and increased peer understanding and acceptance (e.g., of what it might be like to be a YC). It was also felt by participants that increased understanding may increase compassion, reduce stigma and support YCs with talking about their caring roles with their peers and staff members. This therefore has important implications for schools when considering how to acknowledge and celebrate the presence of YCs, increase peer awareness, and foster a supportive and understanding school ethos.

Another interesting finding related to participant's positive working relationships with external YCs organisations and other external agencies. Participants cited that they valued the support provided from external agencies and examples of effective multi-agency working were present throughout participant's narratives. This was a unique finding which contrasts the literature which has highlighted poor communication between schools and external YC projects (Choudhury, 2018), and a lack of joined-up effort and coordinated support for YCs between agencies and professionals (Children's Society, 2016).

2.8.7 Conclusion

A review of the young caregiving literature highlighted a gap regarding school-based professionals' experiences of supporting YCs. Only a few studies to date have investigated school-based professionals' awareness of YCs, and such studies overall have indicated a lack of confidence amongst education professionals and a paucity of support for YCs in schools (Barnardo's, 2017). Therefore, to address this gap within the literature, this study explored the practice and experiences of school DYCLs in identifying and supporting YCs, contributing a novel perspective to the young caregiving literature. Much of the existing literature within the caregiving literature has also focused on the challenges that YCs face regarding their educational experiences and well-being (Joseph et al., 2020). Therefore, the current study aimed to elucidate the role of schools in supporting positive educational and psychological well-being outcomes for YCs.

Findings revealed the ways in which DYCLs identified and supported YCs within school settings, as summarised by the three key themes that emerged from the analysis: 'Knowledge and Awareness of Young Caregiving', 'A Family-centred Approach' and 'Promoting YC's Sense of Belonging'. The findings highlighted the importance of raising awareness of YCs across CYP, families and school staff, to support the identification of YCs. The findings also emphasised the need to work collaboratively with YCs and their families, through adopting a person-centred approach, and the need to promote YCs' sense of belonging within school settings through acknowledging YCs in school and through a relational and nurturing approach.

These findings therefore have important implications for schools when considering how to acknowledge, identify and celebrate the presence of YCs, increase peer awareness, reduce stigma and foster a supportive and understanding school ethos. They also have important implications for schools with regards to the need to adopt a relational approach, to communicate, build rapport and work in collaboration with YCs, their families and other professionals to implement a personalised approach and tailored package of support. The findings also highlight the importance of facilitating YCs' sense of belonging, which therefore has implications for schools in

creating opportunities for YCs to connect with other CYP who have caring responsibilities, such as through setting up YC clubs in school, or through sign-posting YCs to external YCs organisations. Moreover, a unique finding that has not been recognised in prior research related to a 'nurturing approach'. This highlights the need for schools to ensure that YCs have their physiological, security, safety and emotional needs met, prior to being expected to engage with learning.

The findings and implications from this research will be disseminated to educational professionals through guidance documents aimed at schools and through presenting research to settings, such as through DYCL networking sessions, SENDCo forums and other school meetings. Moreover, publication options will be explored for journals such as the British Journal of Educational Research.

2.8.8 Implications for EP Practice

A key implication from this study related to the underlying psychological frameworks and processes that arose from participants narratives. Within their practice, EPs utilise a range of psychological frameworks and use their psychological knowledge and understanding to support CYP, their families and schools (Fallon et al., 2010; Miller & Frederickson, 2006). Therefore, it is EPs distinct perspective that can help them support YCs and schools, through utilising evidence-based practice (Hebden, 2021; Fallon et al., 2010). It has been suggested that there are five key functions within an EP's role (consultation, assessment, intervention, research, and training), which can be conducted at three levels (organizational, group and individual) across different educational settings (Fallon et al., 2010; Scottish Executive, 2002). Therefore, there are several pertinent implications for EP practice arising from this study.

At a systemic level, EPs could support schools with reflecting upon their current practice in ensuring the meaningful involvement of YCs and their families in decision-making processes. A key finding in the current study related to participant's iterations of the need to support YC's and their families' autonomy and agency. EPs could therefore utilise SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000) to consult and work collaboratively with school settings and support them with reflecting upon the ways they can support

YCs autonomy and decision-making regarding the support they receive in school and from external professionals. Another key aspect of SDT is 'relatedness' and EP involvement (for example, through training/consultation) could therefore draw upon the 'belonging hypothesis' and articulate the need for YCs to maintain strong, stable interpersonal relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). The findings of this study indicated the potential benefits of an inclusive and supportive school ethos and facilitating relationships with peers, other YCs and supportive adults. Therefore, as suggested by Gough and Gulliford (2020), EPs could review and support the degree to which schools offer an environment which facilitates connectedness and fosters YCs to develop positive relationships.

Due to the prevalence of young caregiving, it is highly likely that EPs could be involved in supporting YCs (Gough & Gulliford, 2020). At an individual, casework level, EPs could work alongside YCs, their families, school staff and other professionals to co-construct a holistic understanding of the YC's strengths and needs and to inform targeted school support. Given the heterogeneity of the YC role, as emphasised within this current study and previous research, EPs are adept at prioritising listening to the voices of CYP and can help schools and other professionals gain a better understanding of their lives (Doutre et al., 2013; Hebden, 2021) and devise action plans to support them. EPs can also support school staff with recognising and increasing the protective factors which can support the resilience of YCs (Williams, 2016).

2.8.8 Limitations of Methodology and Implications for Future Research

The following section highlights the limitations of the current study, as well as proposing future research directions based upon the findings. Firstly, this was a small-scale, qualitative study which explored the views of DYCLs in mainstream primary and secondary schools in the East of England. Therefore, the small number of participants reduces the transferability and generalisability of the findings (Willig, 2013). It would therefore be useful for future research to acknowledge the perspectives of DYCLs from a wider range of schools across the country, to include further education settings and specialist provisions alongside primary and secondary schools in different regions of the UK. Moreover, a case study approach could be utilised in future research, triangulating multiple date sources (Yin, 2014) such as a

school YC's policy document, or through introducing another phase of data collection (e.g., questionnaire for school staff), to add robustness to existing findings.

It is additionally acknowledged that the decision to focus on DYCL's experiences alone excluded the perspectives of other professionals important in supporting YCs, including YC Organisations and other professionals and LA teams. Previous research exploring the relationship between external YC organisation and schools, has indicated schools' limited engagement with external YC Organisations (Choudhury, 2018). This was not the case in the present findings which in fact found evidence of a coordinated, multi-agency approach between services and schools. Therefore, research gathering the views of other professionals implicated in supporting YCs would be beneficial to further explore what facilitates or restricts an effective, coordinated, multi-agency response to supporting YCs. Moreover, none of the participants mentioned Educational Psychology Services as an external service they accessed. This was an unexpected insight and highlights an area that would benefit from further exploration, for example, exploring EPs views of when they have supported YCs and their families at individual casework or more systemic level.

It is important to note that all participants who partook in this research were from schools who had received a form of award for their 'good practice' and support that they provide for YCs in school. Therefore, it is likely that there was some form of self-selection bias (Robison, 2014), as potential participants may have felt more inclined to participate in the research than professionals who felt less confident in their role in identifying and supporting YCs. However, this can also be considered a strength of the research, as it contributed to the aim of the research, which was to elucidate good practice already happening within schools and to share it more widely. Further research which sensitively gathers the views of school-based professionals who are at the start of this process, would be useful to elucidate challenges preventing effective support and how to overcome these. Moreover, given that identifying YCs is now a statutory requirement for schools, an avenue for future research would be to gather the perspectives of YCs and their perceptions of educational support, considering these wider systemic changes. Given the importance of personalising support based upon YC's voices within the current research, it is essential that research continues to prioritise the voices of YCs, to gather their perspective on what

facilitates positive educational experiences and wellbeing. The caregiving literature also presently under-represents parent views, which would therefore be an important avenue for further exploration.

This research contributes to the caregiving literature around supporting YCs in schools, through adopting a qualitative design and a reflexive TA approach to data analysis. As noted by Willig (2013), the researcher influences and shapes the research process based upon their experiences, values, and beliefs (e.g., epistemological position). Therefore, analysis is not fully objective and there is an element of subjectivity. This is because themes are actively produced by the researcher through their systematic engagement with, and all they bring to, the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2022). It is acknowledged that a different researcher, who holds an alternative epistemological position will have interpreted the data differently. However, as noted by Braun and Clarke (2022), research subjectivity is the primary tool for reflexive TA and is not "a problem to be managed, or controlled, it is a resource for analysis" (p.15). However, it is recommended by Braun and Clarke (2022) that researchers are clear about their personal values, biases, and subjective experiences that they bring to the research process. This will be further considered in the reflective chapter.

Chapter Three: Reflective Account

3.1 Introduction

EPs have been positioned as 'scientist-practitioners', with a dual role of contributing to research that has real world application (Fallon et al., 2010; Sedgwick, 2019). A key element of training to become an EP involves reflection on practice, both on placement within an LA (Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC, 2021) and as a self-reflective researcher (British Psychological Society (BPS), 2021). Reflexivity requires an awareness of the researcher's contribution to the construction of meanings throughout the research process, and an acknowledgement of the impossibility of remaining outside of one's subject matter while conducting research (Willig, 2013). Reflexivity has been highlighted as an important approach because it provides a means of strengthening greater transparency and quality in research (Finlay & Gough, 2003). To support this reflexivity, aspects of Schön's (1983) Reflective Practice Theory and Gibb's Reflective Cycle (1988) will be drawn upon, to further explore experience through the research process.

This reflective account is written in first-person, to immerse myself within the process and facilitate genuine reflections. Both Willig (2013) and Braun and Clarke (2022) describe completing qualitative research, and TA, respectively, as an "adventure". This certainly encapsulated my initial feelings of undertaking a doctorate level piece of research. I experienced feelings of apprehension and anxiety, whilst simultaneously feeling excited at the prospect of developing my research skills and contributing to the literature base on young caregiving. This section will explore my reflections around the process of completing this research project, including personal reflectivity (how my interest in the topic and values shaped the research and the knowledge produced), functional reflexivity (the key decisions I made around the research methods and design) and the process of conducting the analysis and presenting findings. Considerations around dissemination and the wider implications of the research will then be discussed. This section will conclude with the contributions to personal development, to include reflections upon how the research

may have affected and possibly changed me, both as a person and as a researcher (Willig, 2013).

3.2 Identifying a Research Interest

My interest in young caregiving stemmed from both personal and professional experiences. Whilst I have not been a YC myself, I had a school friend who became a YC due to a family member being diagnosed with a progressive and degenerative illness. I saw first-hand the impact this had on my friend's emotional wellbeing, opportunities to socialise, and attendance at school. This led me to reflect upon the challenges my friend faced, both educationally and emotionally, due to caring for their parent at home. Moreover, through my professional experience as a Trainee EP, I had worked with a YC whilst undertaking a statutory assessment. When gathering the views of this young person, I was touched by his outpouring of love for his sister and his dedication in learning sign language to communicate and support her. I subsequently became interested in the role of siblings in helping to look after their family members and decided that young caregiving was an area I wanted to explore further within research.

3.3 Reviewing the Literature

I conducted a thematic literature review to digest and synthesise the body of literature on young caregiving. This approach was chosen to explore the main themes within the existing body of literature and to organise, synthesise and critically analyse the existing research (Kiteley & Stogdon, 2013). An alternative approach, such as a systematic literature review, was not selected as this starts with a clearly formulated question and uses explicit methods to identify, select and critically appraise research to answer this question (MacKenzie et al., 2012). This approach was not selected because, whilst I had identified young caregiving as a research interest, I did not have a clearly formulated question and therefore wanted to review the current research base to identify themes and subsequently a gap for empirical study.

In my early research into the subject, I found that much of the early academic research was driven by Jo Aldridge and Saul Becker in the 1990s, which provided

the foundation for later research. This research focused upon defining the nature of the tasks and responsibilities undertaken by YCs and the prevalence of YCs. More recent research included qualitative methods to explore the lives of YCs in greater depth. I found reviewing this research emotive, particularly when reading YC's experiences and the difficulties some YCs reported, including feelings of isolation, experiences of bullying and stigmatisation, and mental illness, with some YCs even reporting feelings of suicide.

Through reviewing the literature, I found that YCs are often faced with challenging circumstances and are a group of CYP more vulnerable to negative outcomes in their psychological, physical, and social wellbeing (Barry, 2011; Bolas et al., 2007; Clay et al., 2016; Cree, 2003; Robison et al., 2020). Subsequently, my perspective aligned with Joseph et al. (2020) who concluded there is a certain degree of saturation that seems to have been reached in the qualitative literature in describing the difficulties that YCs face. Whilst it is important to acknowledge the challenges that YCs encounter, it was encouraging to read research that drew attention to the positive aspects of the caregiving role articulated by YCs, such as developing responsibility, maturity, life skills and a closer family relationship (Abraham & Aldridge, 2010; Fives et al., 2013; Rose & Cohen, 2010; Thomas et al. 2003). I was particularly interested when reading papers which detailed the factors that strengthen the educational inclusion of YCs with additional needs (Choudhury, 2018), and research exploring concepts such as 'school connectedness' (YC's relationships with school) and 'benefit finding' (the process of deriving positive growth from adversity) and YC's perceptions of what contributed to their adjustment and benefit finding within their caregiving role (Gough & Gulliford, 2020). Subsequently, I therefore developed an interest in further exploring protective factors, and what contributes and supports YC's positive wellbeing, self-esteem, and resilience.

Several studies highlighted that schools could be an important protective factor in the lives of YCs (Barry, 2010; Becker & Becker, 2008; Gough & Gulliford, 2020; Roberts, 2008). Therefore, I was curious to explore the existing research which has focused upon YC's educational experiences. I was pleased to find numerous studies which had prioritised the voices of YCs within research and previous Trainee EP (TEP)

theses, as gaining the voice of the child is paramount to my practice as a TEP. When reviewing this literature however, I was struck by the discrepancies reported from YCs, with some experiencing school as a 'safe haven' with supportive adults who were understanding (Barry, 2011; Cree, 2003; Thomas et al., 2003). In contrast, other YCs felt disappointed and frustrated with the lack of understanding and support they received at school (Eley, 2004; Rose & Cohen, 2010). Moreover, I was particularly shocked by statistics in recent research which highlighted that 52% of 571 YCs who participated in a survey reported they do 'not often' or 'never' get help from school to balance their work and 40% of YCs reported they do 'not often' or 'never' have someone at school to talk to about being a YC (Carer's Trust, 2022). This led me to reflect upon the role of school-based professionals in supporting YCs.

Further exploration of the literature revealed only a limited number of studies which included the voice of school-based professionals, and these had primarily utilised quantitative methodologies or were conducted prior to key legislation in 2014 which strengthened the rights of YCs. Therefore, I identified a need for qualitative research which seeks knowledge in an area from the professionals that work with CYP every day. Additional reasons contributed to this decision. Through searching 'grey literature', I had identified that there had been multiple guidance documents and toolkits aimed at helping schools with supporting YCs, with one of the suggestions being to appoint a staff member as DYCL. However, there was little insight within the existing research as to if and how these texts were being accessed and utilised by schools, and therefore I was interested in exploring this further.

I was not able to find any research detailing the current good practice in schools for supporting YCs. Moreover, several authors had suggested focusing future research on what support's YC's educational experiences and positive wellbeing (Boddy, 2016; Hebden, 2021; Joseph et al., 2020). This aligned with my values of promoting social inclusion, positive wellbeing and social justice and my desire to focus upon protective factors and supporting YC's in educational settings. This also aligned with a solution-oriented approach, which is fundamental to my practice as a TEP (Harker et al., 2017). This approach incorporates a strengths-based framework which focuses upon what exists already and works to support YCs in school, whilst also allowing space for discussion around any barriers and challenges to supporting YCs.

3.4 Developing Research Questions

I found Mayer's (2008) recommendations useful to refer to support my thinking around RQs. Mayer (2008) suggests developing RQs from a combination of personal interest and curiosity, engagement with the literature and consideration of the educational implications and avenues for contributing to the research base and evidence-based practice. Therefore, the initial review of literature informed the formulation of my initial RQs at the research proposal stage, which led to the following RQs:

- How are YCs identified in school settings?
- How are the needs of YCs perceived by school-based professionals?
- What support is currently available to support YCs in schools?
- How do school-based professionals feel support for YCs could be better implemented in schools?
- What are the barriers to supporting YCs in schools?

After seeking feedback from my research supervisor, it was discussed that these RQs were very general, and a reader may wonder why I was not doing something bigger and more quantitative, if trying to ascertain levels of support more generally. Therefore, I refined the RQs to focus specifically on what I was interested in exploring in greater depth, and in line with a qualitative, inductive, exploratory approach. Moreover, through further engagement with the caregiving literature, I noted that several authors had highlighted a need for future research to explore the positive educational interventions and wellbeing support provided for YCs by schools. Therefore, these were added as two sub-questions to the second RQ as noted below:

- How are YCs identified in schools, from the perspective of Designated YC Leads?
- How are YCs supported in the school environment from the perspective of Designated YC Leads?
  - How are YC's educational experiences and attainment supported in the school environment from the perspective of Designated YC Leads?

> o How are YC's social, emotional, and mental health needs supported in the school environment from the perspective of Designated YC Leads?

An additional change included switching 'school-based professionals' to 'Designated Young Carer Leads', in-line with the changing participant group recruited for my research. Whilst the DYCL were still school-based professionals, they were all specifically DYCL, rather than teachers etc, so it felt important to distinguish whose perspective was gathered within the RQs.

3.5 Epistemology and Ontology

As noted by Willig (2013), the researcher influences the research process as a theorist/thinker (epistemological reflexivity). This is because epistemological assumptions held by the researcher regarding the nature of knowledge (e.g., how knowledge can be acquired and communicated to others) has implications for the methodological approaches utilised and subsequently how the researcher intends to discover this knowledge (Cohen et al., 2007). Therefore, it is important for researchers to be transparent about the position they adopt (Willig, 2013). Critical Realism (CR) aligned with my views of truth and knowledge and communicates my combined ontological position of realism and epistemological position of relativism. This is based on my belief and assumption that an objective 'reality' exists, whilst acknowledging this reality can only be partially known (Maxwell, 2012), e.g., a 'mediated reflection' of reality (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This contrasts to a positivist standpoint which aims to produce objective knowledge and an understanding of reality that is impartial and unbiased (Cohen et al., 2007; Willig, 2013).

Moreover, CR aligns with my belief about knowledge being mediated by individual values and perceptions (Maxwell, 2012), and constructed within wider social and cultural contexts (Pilgrim, 2013; Willig, 2012). Therefore, I took a CR approach, to both capture participants experiences of identifying and supporting YCs, but to also understand them as contextually located within pre-existing social relations and structures (Smith & Elger, 2012). CR acknowledged that the participants shared the 'reality' of working as a DYCL in an educational setting that supports YCs, whilst also acknowledging that participants' experiences will be shaped by contextual and societal factors such as the school system, the LA, government policy, etc.

3.6 Data Collection

As identified through the literature review, there were several pre-existing quantitative studies that had explored school-based professionals experiences with questionnaires. These studies indicated a paucity of school-based support, and the overall narrative was that participants felt more should be done to support YCs in schools. However, due to the constraints of the quantitative methodology, it was not possible to follow-up on interesting responses, as surveys are not well suited to carrying out exploratory work (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Therefore, a need for qualitative research emerged. Moreover, initial discussion with the Deputy Principal EP within my placement LA highlighted that as an EP Service we were not currently allowed to send out questionnaires due to the ongoing demands placed on schools because of the coronavirus pandemic. Therefore, this placed initial constraints on my ability to complete a quantitative or mixed methods study.

In terms of research design, my previous experiences of conducting research during my undergraduate degree had been quantitative. Therefore, I was excited of the prospect of conducting qualitative research as I felt it would offer novel and exciting learning opportunities and contribute to my ongoing professional development as a researcher. I was also particularly drawn to qualitative methods as I was interested in how people make sense of the world and how they experience events (Willig, 2013) and the opportunity to obtain rich and detailed narratives (Robson, 2011). Qualitative research methods were also congruent with my epistemological position of CR, as qualitative methods such as interviews and focus groups gain access to accounts of experiences and underlying processes which represent "different facets of a complex and multi-layered social reality" (Smith & Elger, 2013, p.14).

Ethical considerations remained at the forefront when designing this study and throughout the entire research process (BPS, 2018, 2021). Within my initial approved ethics application, I had detailed my intention to conduct focus groups, to gather multiple perspectives from school-based professionals and their experiences of supporting YCs within educational settings. Focus groups were initially selected as they offer an efficient way of gathering a range of views on a particular topic and allow participants to comment upon one another's contributions (Willig, 2013).

However, despite multiple attempts to recruit participants within my placement LA, this was unsuccessful. My initial reflections surrounding this were that some school-based professionals may feel they have not had sufficient experiences of supporting YCs to participate in the research. This seemed to further reflect the narrative that YCs are often a 'hidden' group of CYP in schools (Blake-Holmes & McGowan, 2022; Children's Commissioner, 2022; Doutre et al., 2013).

My initial difficulties with recruitment were discussed within supervision. Whilst searching the 'grey literature' I had seen that a key recommendation contained with guidance for schools was to assign a staff member the role of DYCL, who oversees the provision for YCs in schools. I had also noticed that, to my knowledge, there was not any existing research that had gathered this perspective with school professionals who held this named and defined role. Therefore, during research supervision a move towards purposeful sampling was discussed as an approach for the identification and selection of information-rich cases which can provide an in-depth understanding for the purpose of the inquiry (Patton, 2002). Semi-structured interviews were also discussed as a method for accessing detailed accounts of participant's thoughts and experiences (Robson & McCartan, 2016). This led to me submitting an amendment to my ethics application, which stated I would engage in purposeful sampling and contact DYCLs directly to ask whether they would be interested in hearing further details about the research. I also stated that I would broaden my search to other LAs allied to the UEA Doctoral Course. This amendment was approved (Appendix 6). Therefore, the final two selection criteria for the study were that participants held the role of DYCL within their school and worked in a school that was within a LA that is allied to UEA's EP Doctorate Course.

These changes resulted in the recruitment of my first couple of participants, which I was very pleased about. Although initially successful, further recruitment attempts proved difficult. Overall, I found the recruitment process time-intensive and one of the most challenging parts of the research process. However, my supervisor and I decided that I should aim for a minimum of 6 participants as this has been a recommended number within research for conducting TA (Fugard & Potts, 2015). After considerable time and effort, I was pleased to have reached this number. None

of the participants recruited were known to me prior to the research and were not from schools within my placement LA.

Within my purposive sampling approach, I was very aware of my ethical responsibilities towards potential participants and made sure it was emphasised that participating in the research was completely voluntary and that there was no obligation to participate (BPS, 2018, 2021). Providing participants with the Participant Information Sheet ensured they were fully informed of the research interests, aims and methods, and time was given to allow the participant to ask any questions they had regarding the study. Participants were also reminded of their right to withdraw at any time during the research, up until the data had been analysed, as it would not be possible to withdraw individual responses. Moreover, as I was visiting schools to conduct my research, I took my enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check with me and ensured that I had a form of ID, my UEA Student Card and had signed in as a Visitor to the school.

3.7 Developing the Interview Schedule

The interview schedule was guided by the research aims and questions, in particularly the emphasis on understanding how schools identify and support YCs. The initial question which asked participants about their role(s) in school was developed to help participants feel at ease when talking about themselves, be person-centred and gain an insight into the school context. Following this, open-ended questions were used throughout the interview to encourage participants to speak freely and descriptively about their experiences (Robson, 2016). A closing question was utilised to allow participants time to reflect or share any additional information that they wanted (Sowicz et al., 2019), in line with the inductive approach of the research.

Critique of the interview schedule I had developed was sought during research supervision. My supervisor suggested it may be beneficial to reduce the number of questions I had developed. This was so I could ask participants a small number of open-ended questions to encourage longer dialogue and then use 'probes' to elicit further details from participant, and to follow up on interesting responses (Robson,

2016). I hoped this would facilitate iterative interactions between myself as the interviewer and the interviewee, as opposed to a transactional question-answer approach (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Moreover, an additional revision to the interview schedule that was discussed in supervision included removing a question asking specifically about working with EPs. We discussed that a broader question, asking about schools' collaboration with external professionals and organisations would be sufficient, as it would be interesting to see whether participants spoke about EPs or not as an external support they accessed.

3.8 Conducting Interviews

Going into my first interview, I experienced simultaneous feelings of nerves and excitement, particularly as I was an inexperienced interviewer and because I had not used a recording device before. I was therefore anxious about the device not working efficiently or capturing the discussion properly, particularly as participants had given up their time to participate in the research. This fear was managed through completing several practices and trial-runs with the device prior to the interview (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). As the interviews went on, I noticed that I became more trusting of the technology. I also became more confident and comfortable with my skills as an interviewer and found I relied less upon the interview schedule as the interviews progressed, which aided flow.

All interviews were conducted in-person, which I felt facilitated participants with feeling at ease, as the interviews took place in the real-life settings in which they worked (e.g., their office at school). Conducting the interview in person also enabled the participant and I to have informal conversations prior to the interview to build rapport (e.g., when walking to their office). Within the literature, this relational focus, and the importance of establishing trust and rapport prior and during interviews has been emphasised by researchers (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Conducting the interviews in person also enabled me to monitor non-verbal cues which helped understand the verbal response (Robson & McCartan, 2016). At times, there were occasional disruptions during the interview (e.g., staff members knocking on the door, lunch bells going off etc), however these were only minor interruptions, and I

did not feel they significantly impacted on the flow of the interview, but rather reflected the experience of conducting interviews in real-life settings.

Drawing upon the 'feelings and thoughts' aspect of Gibb's model of reflection (1988), and Schön's (1983) 'reflection in action', I was conscious of my own emotional responses during interviews. I felt high levels of empathy for the YCs, particularly as participants anecdotally explained some of the really difficult situations that YCs have faced (e.g., child having a parent who is currently on palliative care, child whose both parents had passed away). Moreover, I felt that conducting the interview in-person enabled monitoring of participant's emotional state (e.g., through body language and non-verbal cues), and although not needed by participants within the current study, I would have been able to offer a break to the interview if participants needed when reflecting upon some of the sad situations that CYP known to them had faced (BPS, 2018; McIntosh & Morse, 2015).

I was also particularly shocked that a number of participants informed me about local schools who do not currently acknowledge they may have YCs in their school. One participant explained how a school local to them was refusing to acknowledge they have YCs in their school, despite local YC organisations informing them that they have pupils from their school known to their service and attending the external support club. It concerned me there may be some YCs in schools going under the radar who may not be receiving the support they need, whilst acknowledging that there are reasons why YCs may choose to remain 'hidden' from school (Family Action, 2012). I wondered how this may have changed in light of wider systemic changes, such as the census requirement that all schools must identify YCs, that came into effect in January 2023. Therefore, future research which gathers both the perspective of YCs and educational professionals would be useful given these systemic changes within the 'macrosystem' (Bronfenbrenner, 1992).

I was also surprised that none of the participants mentioned involvement from the EP service when they were asked about external agencies that they worked collaboratively with. This reflection was similar to Boddy's (2016) who was also surprised EPs were not involved, given the potential impact of the caring role on a

YC's education, emotional wellbeing, and social inclusion. This therefore remains an avenue for future research exploring the role of EPs in supporting YCs.

3.9 Transcription

Transcribing the interview data by hand facilitated my immersion in the data (Braun et al., 2014). Gibbs Reflective Cycle (1988) provided a useful tool when reflecting upon what went well in each interview, what I learnt and what I could have done differently. Upon transcribing the initial interviews, I noted on several occasions that it would have been beneficial to ask a follow up question to encourage participants to further elaborate on their answer. Therefore, at times, I felt frustrated that I may have missed opportunities for gaining deeper insights. This led me to reflect upon the demands of executive functioning skills as an interviewer, for example, simultaneously holding in mind what participants have said in working memory, the interview schedule, and being alert to participant's body language and non-verbal communication (Robson & McCartan, 2016). During transcription in comparison, there were less demands on executive function skills and therefore enabled a clearer avenue for gathering my thoughts. Therefore, it was easier to identify areas for follow-up questions and probes when transcribing than when 'in the moment' interviewing.

3.10 Experiences of Data Analysis

Reflexive TA was chosen to analyse the data obtained from the semi-structured interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was an alternative approach that was considered, and previous research within the literature has utilised this within the context of young caregiving (Bolas et al., 2007). However, IPA has a dual focus on the unique characteristics of individual participants (an idiographic focus which seeks detailed examinations of personal lived experiences), as well as on pattern of meaning across participants (Eatough & Smith, 2017). Reflexive TA on the other hand, provides the opportunity to identify shared themes/patterns of meaning across a dataset, and thus, the experiences across schools, rather than focusing upon individual professionals' experiences alone. Therefore, reflexive TA felt more suited to the research aims of furthering understanding around how schools identify and support YCs. However, an inductive

approach was taken to reflexive TA, ensuring that coding and theme development was still 'data-driven' and grounded in participant's experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Given my inexperience working with and analysing qualitative data, starting the process of Reflexive TA was daunting. During a university session we had been introduced to Dublin's Dichotomies (Burch, 1970), and my feelings of anxiety about starting the process of analysis reflected my awareness of my 'conscious incompetence'. On reflection, I feel it was this heightened anxiety which led to me attending a webinar run by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke titled 'Common Challenges in TA and how to avoid them'. I found attending this webinar helpful with regards to their recommendations of not writing TA as if it is a single approach, as there are multiple variations of TA. Moreover, it helped minimise my anxieties about getting analysis 'right' and acknowledging and more importantly, embracing, the subjectivity I bring to the research as a researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

The first stage of Reflexive TA involved reading and re-reading transcripts and listening to the audio recordings multiple times, to immerse myself within the data set. This facilitated my familiarity with the data set and enabled me to identify interesting or intriguing elements within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022). I completed coding, the second stage of Reflexive TA, electronically through using the 'comment feature' on Microsoft Word. I found that this approach worked well for me, as it supported me with coding the data in a systematic way that was thorough and rigorous. Codes were refined, merged, or collapsed over several rounds, and at times, I had difficulties with 'letting go' of proposed codes (Braun & Clarke, 2022). I also found moving on from the coding stage to the next stage of the data analysis difficult, and this was fuelled by my concerns around premature closure of this stage of analysis.

When generating initial themes, I felt I experienced 'analytic paralysis' (Braun & Clarke, 2022) at times, whereby I was overwhelmed with the number of codes and possible combinations. During the process of theme development, I found taking time away from the analysis, as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2022), was helpful, as I could distance myself from the process and allow my analytic ideas to percolate. I also found research supervision invaluable, as I could share and discuss

my initial analytic observations and insights and reflect upon how I was engaging with the data. Research supervision also provided a space for my thinking to be questioned and offered ways of developing theme names. For example, an initial theme I had developed was 'Raising Awareness of YCs in different groups', therefore my supervisor questioned what I meant by 'groups', which therefore supported me with enhancing clarity, by adding 'CYP, family and school staff'.

3.11 Dissemination and Wider Implications of Research

To my knowledge, this is the first study exploring the perspectives of school-based professionals with a named DYCL role. This therefore contributes a novel perspective to the literature and compliments the predominately quantitative research exploring school-based professionals experiences of supporting YCs in schools. The findings from this research have implications for schools and also EPs working at a systemic and individual, casework level.

I intend to publish and disseminate the findings of the research. First and foremost, I will share a summary of the findings from this study with the participants, who all expressed a wish to receive feedback about the research. Moreover, given that a primary aim of the study was to identify aspects that may be helpful for schools to consider when supporting YCs, I hope to share a summary of my findings through presenting research to schools, such as through DYCL networking sessions, SENDCo forums and other school meetings. Another potential avenue I will explore is to share a summary of my findings with key organisations and charities that support YCs such as the Carers Trust and The Children's Society, who may be able to distribute the research further. I am also going to explore options for publishing in a journal such as the British Journal of Educational Research.

I also hope to present an overview of the current study and findings to EPs within my placement LA, through team development meetings, peer supervision and CPD opportunities. Given the prevalence of YCs, it highly likely that EPs at some stage in their career may be involved in supporting a CYP who is a YC. Therefore, I also hope to pursue the possibility of publishing my research within a research journal. A proposed journal that I hope to submit my article to is the Educational Psychology in

Practice (EPIP). This is due to its previous interest in publishing research related to YCs (Choudhury & Williams, 2020; Gough & Gulliford, 2020). I will also consider presenting my research at conferences such as the BPS's Division of Educational and Psychology TEP Conference, which offers a space for TEPs and recently qualified EPs to share their experiences of conducting doctoral research. It is hoped that this may spark interest in future TEPs to conduct research focusing on YCs.

3.12 Conclusion

Conducting this research has been a rewarding, yet challenging process, however I am pleased to have contributed research to an area that I am passionate about, supporting YC's educational experiences and emotional wellbeing. Undertaking a piece of doctoral level research has been a steep learning curve, however I feel it has contributed to both my personal and professional development. I have developed my skills in conducting a thematic literature review (Kiteley & Stogdon, 2013), reflecting upon my epistemological stance and how this permeates throughout the research process (Cohen et al., 2007; Willig, 2013), conducting research ethically (BPS, 2018, 2021), conducting semi-structured interviews (Robson, 2016) and analysing data through Reflexive TA (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Conducting this research has affirmed my upmost respect and admiration for school-staff, DYCLs in particular, who whilst juggling multiple different roles within school, are dedicated to supporting YCs. What really shone through in their narratives was their commitment and care to reduce stigma, create a positive school ethos, work collaboratively with YCs and families, and provide bespoke support based upon individual needs. I hope that their great practice and positivity when discussing and providing examples of supporting YCs was reflected across the findings.

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Appendix 1

Participant Information Sheet

Isabelle Milldown
Trainee Educational Psychologist

November 2022

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Supporting the educational experiences and wellbeing of Young Carers (YCs) - perspectives from school-based professionals

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

(1) What is this study about?
You are invited to take part in a research study looking at how the educational experiences and wellbeing of young carers can be supported in schools. You have been invited to participate in this study because you are a school-based professional. I am interested in your views about young carers, even if you feel you haven't worked directly with a young carer in the past.

This Participant Information Sheet tells you about the research study. Knowing what is involved will help you decide if you want to take part in the study. Please read this sheet carefully and ask questions about anything that you don't understand or want to know more about.

Participation in this research study is voluntary. By giving consent to take part in this study you are telling me that you:

✓   Understand what you have read.
✓   Agree to take part in the research study as outlined below.
✓   Agree to the use of your personal information as described.
✓   You have received a copy of this Participant Information Sheet to keep.

(2) Who is running the study?
The study is being carried out by the following researcher(s): Miss Isabelle Milldown.Trainee Educational Psychologist, on the Doctorate in Educational Psychology (EdPsyD) in the School of Education and Lifelong Learning at University of East Anglia. This will take place under the supervision of Dr Andrea Honess ([INSERT PRIMARY SUPERVISOR'S EMAIL ADDRESS], [INSERT PRIMARY SUPERVISOR'S TELEPHONE NUMBER]).

(3) What will the study involve for me?
Taking part will involve a discussion with me on a day and time that suits you. Questions will be asked around the following topics: identifying young carers, perceptions of young carers' needs and supporting young carers in an educational setting. An audio/video recording will be taken.

(4) How much of my time will the study take?
The discussion will last 45 minutes, with breaks as needed.

(5) Do I have to be in the study? Can I withdraw from the study once I have started?
Being in this study is completely voluntary and you do not have to take part. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of East Anglia or (LA)

If you decide to take part in the study, you have a right to withdraw at any point during the interview. However, once the data has been analysed, your responses cannot be withdrawn as they are anonymous and so it will not be possible to identify individual responses.

(6) What are the consequences if I withdraw from the study?
You are free to stop the interview at any time. Unless you say that you want me to keep them, any recordings will be erased and the information you have provided will not be included in the study results. You may also refuse to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer during the interview. If you decide at a later time to withdraw from the study your information will be removed from my records and will not be included in any results, up to the point I have analysed and published the results.

(7) Are there any risks or costs associated with being in the study?
Aside from giving up your time, we do not expect that there will be any risks or costs associated with taking part in this study.

(8) Are there any benefits associated with being in the study?
Young Carers have been identified as a vulnerable group of children and young people, who have an increased risk of experiencing difficulties with their emotional wellbeing and their ability to engage with education. Participating in this research will contribute valuable information regarding how young carers can be supported in schools. The findings will help to look at the ways schools are currently supporting young carers, providing an opportunity to identify and share good practice. It may also highlight the ways in which support-systems for young carers could be further developed in schools. This could inform future practice in education, contributing to school policy and to the work of teachers and other educational professionals.

(9) What will happen to information provided by me and data collected during the study?
Audio recordings will be collected during the study and then transcribed. Study results will be published in a doctoral thesis and may be published in journal articles.

Your personal data and information will only be used as outlined in this Participant Information Sheet, unless you consent otherwise. Data management will follow the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018) and UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), and the University of East Anglia's Research Data Management Policy.

The information you provide will be stored securely and your identity will be kept strictly confidential, except as required by law. Study findings may be published, but you will not be identified in these publications if you decide to participate in this study.
Study data may also be deposited with a repository to allow it to be made available for scholarly and educational purposes. The data will be kept for at least 10 years beyond the last date the data were accessed. The deposited data will not include your name or any identifiable information about you.

(10) What if I would like further information about the study?

When you have read this information, Miss Isabelle Milldown (i.milldown@uea.ac.uk, 07713488906) will be available to discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. You can contact me at i.milldown@uea.ac.uk

(11) Will I be told the results of the study?
You have a right to receive feedback about the overall results of this study, which will be available to you at the end of the study. If you would like to receive a one-page lay summary of the research findings, please provide your email address so I can send it to you.

(12) What if I have a complaint or any concerns about the study?
If there is a problem please let me know. You can contact me via the University of East Anglia at the following address:

Isabelle Milldown
School of Education and Lifelong Learning
University of East Anglia
NORWICH NR4 7TJ
i.milldown@uea.ac.uk

Andrea Honess
School of Education and Lifelong Learning
University of East Anglia
NORWICH NR4 7TJ
a.honess@uea.ac.uk

If you are concerned about the way this study is being conducted or you wish to make a complaint to someone independent from the study, please contact the Head of School of Education and Lifelong Learning [INSERT NAME OF HEAD OF SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT AND EMAIL *AND TELEPHONE NUMBER*].

(13) How do I know that this study has been approved to take place?
To protect your safety, rights, wellbeing and dignity, all research in the University of East Anglia is reviewed by a Research Ethics Body. This research was approved by the EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee).

(14) What is the general data protection information I need to be informed about?
According to data protection legislation, I am required to inform you that the legal basis for processing your data as listed in Article 6(1) of the UK GDPR is because this allows us to process personal data when it is necessary to perform our public tasks as a University.

In addition to the specific information provided above about why your personal data is required and how it will be used, there is also some general information which needs to be provided for you:

- The data controller is the University of East Anglia.
- For further information, you can contact the University's Data Protection Officer at dataprotection@uea.ac.uk
- You can also find out more about your data protection rights at the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO).
- If you are unhappy with how your personal data has been used, please contact the University's Data Protection Officer at dataprotection@uea.ac.uk in the first instance.

(15) OK, I want to take part – what do I do next?
You need to fill in one copy of the consent form and return it to i.milldown@uea.ac.uk*.* Please keep the letter, information sheet and the second copy of the consent form for your information.

(16) Further information
This information was last updated in November 2022. If there are changes to the information provided, you will be notified.

This information sheet is for you to keep

Appendix 2

Participant Consent Form

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (First Copy to Researcher)

I, ... [PRINT NAME], **am** willing to participate in this research study.

In giving my consent I state that:

- I understand the purpose of the study, what I will be asked to do, and any risks/benefits involved.
- I have read the Participant Information Sheet, which I may keep, for my records, and have been able to discuss my involvement in the study with the researcher if I wished to do so.
- The researcher has answered any questions that I had about the study and I am happy with the answers.
- I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary and I do not have to take part. My decision whether to be in the study will not affect my relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of East Anglia or (LA) now or in the future.
- I understand that I may stop the interview at any time if I do not wish to continue, and that unless I indicate otherwise any recordings will then be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study results. I also understand that I may refuse to answer any questions I don't wish to answer.
- I understand that the results of this study may be published but that any publications will not contain my name or any identifiable information about me.
- I understand that personal information about me that is collected over the course of this project will be stored securely and will only be used for purposes that I have agreed to. I understand that information about me will only be told to others with my permission, except as required by law.
- I understand that I will have the opportunity to review my transcripts and the information generated about me prior to publication

I consent to:
Audio-recording   YES   ☐   NO   ☐

Would you like to receive feedback about the overall results of this study?
                                         YES   ☐   NO   ☐

If you answered YES, please indicate your preferred form of feedback and address:

☐ Postal: _____

              _____

☐ Email: _____

....   ………………………

Signature   **Date**

....

PRINT name

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (Second Copy to Participant)

I, ... [PRINT NAME], **am** willing to participate in this research study.

In giving my consent I state that:

-   I understand the purpose of the study, what I will be asked to do, and any risks/benefits involved.
-   I have read the Participant Information Sheet, which I may keep, for my records, and have been able to discuss my involvement in the study with the researcher if I wished to do so.
-   The researcher has answered any questions that I had about the study and I am happy with the answers.
-   I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary and I do not have to take part. My decision whether to be in the study will not affect my relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of East Anglia or (LA)
-   I understand that I may stop the interview at any time if I do not wish to continue, and that unless I indicate otherwise any recordings will then be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study results. I also understand that I may refuse to answer any questions I don't wish to answer.
-   I understand that the results of this study may be published but that any publications will not contain my name or any identifiable information about me.
-   I understand that personal information about me that is collected over the course of this project will be stored securely and will only be used for purposes that I have agreed to. I understand that information about me will only be told to others with my permission, except as required by law.
-   I understand that I will have the opportunity to review my transcripts and the information generated about me prior to publication

I consent to:

Audio-recording   YES   ☐   NO   ☐

Would you like to receive feedback about the overall results of this study?
                                                   YES   ☐   NO   ☐

If you answered **YES**, please indicate your preferred form of feedback and address:

☐ Postal: _____

                 _____

☐ Email: _____

....
Signature   **Date**

....
PRINT name

Appendix 3

Interview Schedule

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this interview. The purpose of this research is to explore how young carers are supported in schools. There are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions I will ask you today and you do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to.

Before we start, I just want to remind you that you will remain completely anonymous, and your name/ name of school will not be kept on any records of the interview. The interview should take no longer than 45 minutes, but you can withdraw from this interview at any time.

Do you have any questions so far? Are you happy for me to being recording?

Background questions:

What is your role(s) in school? How long have you been working in your current school?

Definitions and characteristics of Young Carers
- How would you define a YC?
- Are there YCs on roll at your school? How many approximately?
- What is the age range of YCs in school?

Identifying Young Carers in school
- How are YCs identified in your school?
- Are there any barriers to identifying YCs in schools?

Perceived benefits and needs of Young Carers
- What are the strengths of YCs in schools?
- What do you feel the needs of YCs are in school?

Educational and emotional support
- What support is currently available to YCs in your school? Impact?
- Are there any barriers to supporting YCs in school?

Multi-agency working
- Are there any external support services/ organisations/ professionals that you work with to support young carers?

Debrief - Thank you for giving up your time to participate in this research, it has been really brilliant to speak to you and listen to your experiences. Have you got anything else you'd like to say or any final thoughts that you'd like to share? Are you happy for the interview to end and for me to stop recording? Would you like to review your transcript?

Appendix 4

Process of Reflexive Thematic Analysis
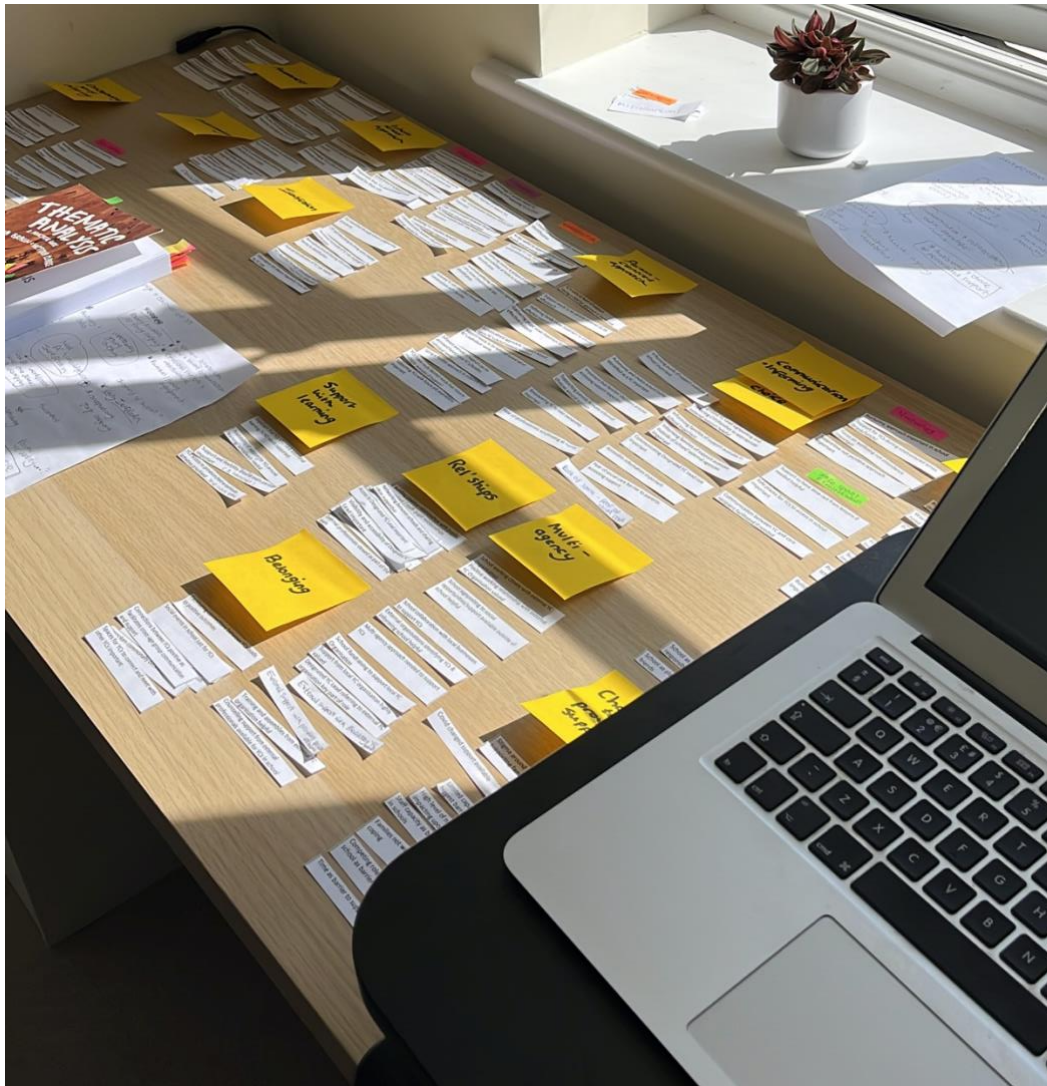
Sample of Data Familiarisation Notes

Data Familiarisation Notes

- YCs not a homogenous group of CYP
- Increasing numbers of young carers being identified in school
- Whole staff awareness needed
- Whole school approach/ collective responsibility to identify YCs
- Positive aspects of young caregiving, such as resilience
- Reducing stigma
- Importance of relationships (YC Lead)
- Connections with external agencies/ organisations → 'part of the team'
- Parents not always aware of YC role/ familiar with the term YC
- Social club for YCs to meet up with other YCs

Sample of Coding Process

	Transcript	Izzy Milldown
145		- positive young carer identity
146	P: Absolutely, yeah yeah, yeah it doesn't come out, we don't, we don't actually just say oh if	
147	you say you are, you must be, the classic that I have often quoted was at the other school, it	**Izzy Milldown**
148	became there was more kudos to being one than not being one, so we'd have people	- sensitively gathering information around CYP's home life
149	coming up saying I think my friends a young carer they want to come to the club with me,	- Designated YC lead developing resources to aid identification
150	you see and then you say right let's have a chat and I devised a sort of set of questions to	- conversations with pupils to identify potential YC role
151	use with them, now we didn't sit and run through the questions, I asked the members of	- Level of caregiving responsibilities/ impact on YP's life as to whether identified as YC or not
152	staff that were doing the assessment to do it in a, like having a chat, but cover each	
153	question, because, you know, you don't want to sit down with a piece of paper, start ticking	
154	boxes with children that are talking about family life and difficulty, but they had to cover	
155	each area, yeah and once, one it came down to it that her brother had asthma and	
156	sometimes she passed him his inhaler and he was in school and we did have an inhaler, in	
157	school, in school that was gathering cobwebs, cause he very rarely needed it so we	
158	regretfully and I did it very tactfully had to explain that you're probably not a young carer	
159		
160	R: So it's about going through that process, you know, exploring more what might be going	
161	on?	
162		**Izzy Milldown**
163	P: Yeah, because there's some big surprises, there was one that was trying to get in, oh I've	- presence of hidden YCs in school
164	learnt from this big time and everything about her life you could not see it and yeah, yeah	- Importance of equality and all CYP having right to YC assessment
165	she is, she's my friend and the reason she came up with were constantly, just weren't it	- importance of formal identification processes
166	didn't mean she was and then I said well we've gotta give her an assessment, this is why we	
167	would have this tool, as this is showing equality right across the board and when I did that, it	
168	turned out her Dad was quite severely epileptic and she was petrified that , if he went into a	
169	seizure while mum was out, that he might die in front of her, she actually told me all of this	
170	and dad went to work and came in to collect the kids and put himself across, quite correctly,	
171	as a well person, yeah, we have epilepsy in my family and I know that given a certain set of	
172	circumstances a very healthy functioning human being in my family could just…so yeah,	
173	now, now we're talking, you know but I wouldn't have, I wouldn't have guessed that, we	
174	shouldn't rely on guesswork, we should never rely on guesswork	
175		
176	P: That's interesting, you mentioned about the questions, what sort of questions did you ask	
177	when you were doing that initial kind of assessment?	
178		**Izzy Milldown**
179	R: You know I don't have the form here, if you were at my other, my old school, I could just	- sensitively exploring children's home life
180	pull it out, but we haven't used it here although, somewhere I will have a copy of it, it would	- having appropriate conversations with CYP based upon their age
181	be things like, you know, how do you get to school in the morning, how do you get home,	
182	do you go to after school clubs, oh - is there anybody in your family who needs extra help,	
183	how do they need extra help, is there anybody in your family who sometimes feels a bit sad,	
184	and cause, we try and cover mental health in a way, you know, that allows them to be able	
185	to so, oh yes sometimes they're sad, they don't want to say, you know, I, one of my very	
186	earliest young carers was, erm, mum was an alcoholic, also had very severe mental health	
187	problems and life at home was very, very, very difficult it wasn't, just, you know, oh, dear	
188	mum drinks a bit and you know, it wasn't just that, there were all sorts of other things going	

Generating Initial Themes

Appendix 5

Ethics Approval

Study title: Supporting the educational experiences and well-being of Young Carers (YCs)-perspectives from school-based professionals

Application ID: ETH2122-1260

Dear Isabelle,

Your application was considered on 7th June 2022 by the EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee).

The decision is: **approved**.

You are therefore able to start your project subject to any other necessary approvals being given.

This approval will expire on **30th June 2023**.

Please note that your project is granted ethics approval only for the length of time identified above. Any extension to a project must obtain ethics approval by the EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee) before continuing.

It is a requirement of this ethics approval that you should report any adverse events which occur during your project to the EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee) as soon as possible. An adverse event is one which was not anticipated in the research design, and which could potentially cause risk or harm to the participants or the researcher, or which reveals potential risks in the treatment under evaluation. For research involving animals, it may be the unintended death of an animal after trapping or carrying out a procedure.

Any amendments to your submitted project in terms of design, sample, data collection, focus etc. should be notified to the EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee) in advance to ensure ethical compliance. If the amendments are substantial a new application may be required.

Approval by the EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee) should not be taken as evidence that your study is compliant with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018. If you need guidance on how to make your study UK GDPR compliant, please contact the UEA Data Protection Officer (dataprotection@uea.ac.uk).

I would like to wish you every success with your project.

On behalf of the EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee)

Yours sincerely,

David Jones

Appendix 6

Ethics Approval – Amendment

Study title: Supporting the educational experiences and well-being of Young Carers (YCs)-perspectives from school-based professionals

Application ID: ETH2223-0848 (significant amendments)

Dear Isabelle,

Your application was considered on 16th November 2022 by the EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee).

The decision is: **approved**.

You are therefore able to start your project subject to any other necessary approvals being given.

This approval will expire on **30th June 2023**.

Please note that your project is granted ethics approval only for the length of time identified above. Any extension to a project must obtain ethics approval by the EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee) before continuing.

It is a requirement of this ethics approval that you should report any adverse events which occur during your project to the EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee) as soon as possible. An adverse event is one which was not anticipated in the research design, and which could potentially cause risk or harm to the participants or the researcher, or which reveals potential risks in the treatment under evaluation. For research involving animals, it may be the unintended death of an animal after trapping or carrying out a procedure.

Any amendments to your submitted project in terms of design, sample, data collection, focus etc. should be notified to the EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee) in advance to ensure ethical compliance. If the amendments are substantial a new application may be required.

Approval by the EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee) should not be taken as evidence that your study is compliant with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018. If you need guidance on how to make your study UK GDPR compliant, please contact the UEA Data Protection Officer (dataprotection@uea.ac.uk).
I would like to wish you every success with your project.

On behalf of the EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee)

Yours sincerely,

Lee Beaumont