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## CHICHESTER FESTIVAL THEATRE LAUNCHES 'YOUNG CARERS CONNECT'

### Pilot project aims to provide 300 West Sussex young carers with vital IT equipment and a programme of arts activities

Chichester Festival Theatre has launched a major new pilot project and fundraising appeal, Young Carers Connect, to help reconnect young carers in West Sussex with support, education and the arts.

There are an estimated 6,000 young caregivers in West Sussex under the age of 18, including some children as young as four years old. Young carers take on substantial responsibilities, providing vital care and support to their loved ones when they are themselves just children and teenagers.

44% of young carers use online platforms to access help and support, and to keep connected with others. Due to Covid-19 and the closures to schools, support centres and libraries, many young carers have been unable to access the help and support they rely on, simply because they do not own, or are unable to afford a computer or internet access; the majority of young carers live in low-income households. Even as schools reopen, many will remain confined to their homes as they continue to care for vulnerable family members.

In partnership with West Sussex Young Carers, local schools and family support workers, Chichester Festival Theatre aims to address this serious issue by delivering a one-year pilot project to reconnect young carers in West Sussex with vital support services, their education, fellow young carers, the arts, and a world beyond their life as a young carer.

Young Carers Connect will:

- Provide 300 young carers with suitable IT equipment and resources, training and ongoing support to help them become digitally literate and safe
- Deliver a vibrant programme of online arts activities to educate, entertain and inspire – allowing young carers to express their creativity and experience moments of joy
- Enable young carers to connect with each other and build friendships in a safe environment
- Signpost young carers in crisis to the support they need

**Dale Rooks**, Director of Learning, Education and Participation at Chichester Festival Theatre, says: 'At CFT we've been working with young carers for many years, offering them the chance to see performances and take part in workshops. With the advent of the pandemic, we've been increasingly conscious of their isolation: a situation that the re-opening of schools will not solve for many of them, since they continue to shield vulnerable relatives and often miss formal education as a consequence.'

'The project will cost £91,000 to deliver – £303.33 for each young carer to receive the provision, skills and support they need to become significantly more independent, resilient and inspired. Donations of any size really will make a lasting difference and we thank our supporters for anything they can do to help.'

Young Carers Connect is supported by **The G D Charitable Trust** and the **Noël Coward Foundation**.

To read more about the project and to donate, please visit [www.cft.org.uk/young-carers-connect](http://www.cft.org.uk/young-carers-connect)

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*For further press information, please contact Lucinda Morrison on [lucinda.morrison@cft.org.uk](mailto:lucinda.morrison@cft.org.uk)*