

Young Carer Case Studies

These young carer stories are designed to be used with the other resources originally produced for the Carers Week 2014 Young Carers Awareness Day.

The following four stories are either real, or based on the real story of a young carer.

Danny's story

Danny, is 16 years old and a young adult carer who cares for his mum and cousin.

“ I've only been a young carer for a year and a half but the last year and half has changed my life completely. It seemed my life changed overnight, from being able to go out with my friends most days to not being able to go out because I would have to help Mum and make sure she takes her medicine, make dinner, tidy up etc.

“People ask me: ‘If you had the chance not to be a young carer would you?’ and every reply is ‘No’ because it’s a fab bond between me and my mum and I wouldn’t change it for the world.

“I also cook dinner for my cousin who is blind. I do find it hard with cooking food because me and food don’t get on all the time – but I do it.

“The support that I’ve received from my local young carers service has helped me get through this and get to know others who are in similar situations. ”

Ed's Story

Ed is 21 and a former young carer for his mum and younger brother.

“ After I was born my mum had post natal depression – she was in a special facility until I was five and she also developed ME. I used to help her with little things like making tea and her medication.

“So when my younger brother was born, and he had some learning difficulties, I began to help care for him, changing nappies and making his dinner. I didn’t really know any different and I was just helping my mum out. My dad used to work away a lot so it would just be me, my mum and my brother.

“The worst bit was if I came home from school and couldn’t wake Mum up I’d have to call 999, which is not something many five year olds have to face.

“At high school I noticed things were different for me. I’d be asked back to friends’ houses but I couldn’t go as I would have to collect my brother from school. I also couldn’t really invite friends back to my house.

“I was 12 when my mum was diagnosed with cancer. I had a tough time at school and was even called a liar by a teacher when I told them. I struggled with homework as when I got home I had to help care for my mum and my brother. Then I’d get in trouble at school – it was pretty tough.

“Through Mum’s GP I was contacted by a project to support young carers. It made a massive difference, especially when Mum was ill, but they gave me enough support so I could function. ”

Sami's story

“ Sami is 20 and cares for her mum and brother.

When I started caring for my mum and brother, at the age of six, I was too young to understand that I was a carer. My mum has had a spinal condition as well as asthma, sleep apnoea and depression for many years.

“For years I was juggling caring with my studies and a part-time job at a local supermarket. But the big turning point came during my A-levels. Caring was having a big impact on my exams. I needed support more than ever.

“If it hadn't been for the local carers service I wouldn't have got to university. They provided much needed advice, showed me how to apply for grants and gave me the confidence to pursue the career I wanted in youth and community work.

“Together with other people from the service we started a campaign group for some of the issues young carers face. It has had an enormous impact and won community awards.

“Once I graduate, I want to start my own company working with young people and the issues that surround them. I want to share what I've gone through so that people know there is support out there. ”

Emma's Story

Emma, 13, cares for her mum and brother Aaron.

“ My mum first went into hospital when I was eight, just after my youngest brother Aaron was born. She was diagnosed with something called sarcoidosis, which affects the immune system. Mum was in and out of hospital all the time. Visiting her was scary as she was always really pale and had loads of tubes connected to her.

“My step dad works long hours, so as the eldest, I started to help tidy and do the washing up and laundry. When my mum was at home but feeling ill I'd often take days off school to help look after her. I wasn't resentful about the situation – I thought I was helping out. I didn't tell most of my friends what was going on because I didn't want them to think I was different. But some people I told would make hurtful comments.

“Aaron was diagnosed with autism when he was four. Now and again I'd get frustrated about not being able to go out with my friends or go shopping but I got used to things.

“I do get jealous of friends who have less to worry about, but I don't dwell on it – it's just part of my life. At school, people will mess about during their lessons and then do their work at home. But I can't do that – I try to get everything done at school.

“I think my home life has affected my personality because I have more things going on than your average 13-year-old. It's strange when I go round to my friends' houses and their mums are running around after them. I'll get up to do something and they're like, 'No, no don't worry, I'll do it!'

“I am concerned about what the future holds for Aaron but I don't dwell on it too much. I just concentrate on the present because I haven't got the time to think about anything else. ”

Information and support

www.youngcarers.net (18 and under)

www.youngercarersmatter.org (16-25)

www.makewav.es/YCiF



The Young Carer Quiz



This quiz is designed to be used with the other resources originally produced for the Carers Week 2014 Young Carers Awareness Day.

1. How many young carers are there in the UK?
2. How many young carers would you expect in a secondary school of 1,000 pupils?
3. Children can't start a caring role until they are eight years old.
True or False?
4. Young carers do better than their peers at GCSE level?
True or False?
5. Most teachers know who the young carers are in their class.
True or False?
6. Around 15% of young adult carers help or care for someone to 'a high or very high level'?
True or False?
7. What percentage of young carers care for a parent with a mental health condition?
8. What percentage of young carers are bullied simply because they are helping or caring for someone?
9. Most young carers don't want to go to college or university.
True or False?
10. The number of recognised young carers is increasing.
True or False?

Answers

1. A survey in 2010 by the BBC estimated there to be 700,000 young carers in the UK.¹
2. The BBC survey in 2010 estimated that 80 pupils in a secondary school of 1,000 pupils would be young carers.²
3. **False.** Recent figures highlighted almost 10,000 young carers aged 5–7.³
4. **False.** Young carers don't do as well at GCSE level as their peers (juggling caring and education can be tough!).⁴
5. **False.** A recent survey found that 42% of young carers said there was not a particular person at school who recognised them as a carer and helped them.⁵
6. **False.** A recent survey of young adult carers (average age 15.5 years) who were still at school showed that two thirds were helping or caring for someone to a 'high or very high level'.⁶
7. Research in 2004 found that 29% of young carers cared for parents with mental-ill health.⁷
8. In recent research, a quarter (26%) were bullied at school because they are helping or caring for someone.⁸
9. **False.** The majority (84%) in a recent survey, said they intended to go to university or college.⁹
10. **True.** Recent figures have shown an increase across all age ranges. The most startling increase was in young carers aged 5–7 with a growth of 83% since 2001.¹⁰

¹The BBC, with assistance from The Princess Royal Trust for Carers, surveyed 4,029 pupils in ten secondary schools and found 337 had caring responsibilities.

²BBC Survey

³Census 2011 (England and Wales)

⁴The Children's Society (2013), *Hidden From View, The Experiences of Young Carers in England* (The Children's Society)

⁵Sempik, J, Becker, S (2013), *Young Adult Carers at School: Experiences and Perceptions of Caring and Education* (Carers Trust)

⁶Sempik, J, Becker, S (2013), *Young Adult Carers at School: Experiences and Perceptions of Caring and Education* (Carers Trust)

⁷Dearden, C, Becker, S (2004), *Young Carers in the UK: the 2004 Report* (Carers UK and The Children's Society)

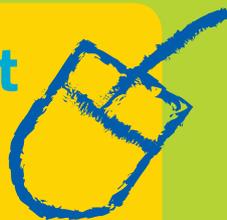
⁸Sempik, J, Becker, S (2013), *Young Adult Carers at School: Experiences and Perceptions of Caring and Education* (Carers Trust)

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¹⁰Census 2011 (England and Wales)

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Be an Agony Aunt for a Young Carer!



This activity is designed to be used with the other resources originally produced for the Carers Week 2014 Young Carers Awareness Day.

What problems do young carers worry about? What would be helpful to say to them?

Here are three issues that young carers are facing. They are based on real examples of problems that young carers have had. What might you say to help them?

Choose one and respond to the young carer in the style of an agony aunt.

To get you started, you will find an example of a response sent to a young carer by an online agony aunt on the back of this sheet.

Problem 1

My brother is ten and has a learning disability that means he behaves like a two-year-old. I am the only one that can calm him down and who he listens to. This is making me really stressed and I can't have a break without him. My parents find it really hard and leave me to look after him most of the time. What can I do to change their minds and help with my brother's behaviour? – **Asif**

Problem 2

My dad is disabled and he needs me to do lots of stuff for him. People at school have been excluding me from hanging around with them and everything has got so much I don't think I can cope with it any more. Please can you give me some advice because my mum is worried and I have been going to the doctors because I am really depressed and I don't know what to do. I need help. – **Stephen**

Problem 3

My mum's in hospital at the moment because she has kidney problems. So me and my little sister are living with our auntie. She keeps crying loads which makes us upset! Whenever I mention it she keeps saying that I'm being rude. How can I tell her in a good way that we can't cope with all this? – **Joanne**

Here's an example of a message a young carer sent to youngcarers.net, our website for young carers:

Hello, my name is Natalie. I care for my mum every day before and after school. She has serious heart problems and has had an operation but she's got to have more treatments all the time so it's quite scary. Caring for her is hard especially since she has been in and out of hospital and it's been pretty tough especially in school due to the fact I don't concentrate on work. I don't have much time to myself as I look after my mum. I don't have a life like any other 15-year-old. **Is there any advice you can give me?**

And here's how our agony aunt, Susannah, responded:

Hi Natalie

I'm really sorry to hear how unwell your mum has been; this must have been a worrying and stressful time for you, so it's not surprising you're finding it all a bit too much to deal with. Like many young carers, you have found that caring for a relative is affecting other parts of your life, like school work and the 'normal' things that young people your age are doing. That's really hard to manage, but the good news is that there are ways that you can get some help and support.

Have you told anyone at school about the situation at home? If not, it might be a good idea to confide in one of your teachers, or any adult in school who you get on with. Often, it's not until a student tells people they are struggling to cope that things start to improve. You might also find this link helpful:

www.youngcarers.net/at_school_and_college/11

You could also find out if there's a young carers service in your area. You should be able to do this by searching online for 'young carers' and your nearest town or city. Or, if you prefer, we can try to find out for you – just let us know the town you live in, or your postcode, and we'll do our best to help with this. Our email address is youngcarers@carers.org.

Another thing that often helps young carers to cope is to have other young people, in similar situations, to talk to. You might find it helpful to introduce yourself on a website for young carers, to make friends and get some advice. It's important to check that it's safe first, though.

Lastly, you mention that your mum has heart problems. That must be really hard to cope with, so I do understand why you're feeling you need some extra support. It might help you to understand a bit more about heart disease and the ways you can support your mum through her treatment. This link might be helpful:

<http://tinyurl.com/heart-booklet> – a great booklet from the British Heart Foundation that tells you all about caring for someone with heart problems.

I hope some of this gives you some ideas about where to go for help and I really hope your mum is much better soon.

Take care, Natalie.

Susannah

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Books with a Young Carer Theme



This activity is designed to be used with the other resources originally produced for the Carers Week 2014 Young Carers Awareness Day.

Books can be a great way for your school or college to help raise awareness of the issues faced by young carers. You may find the following list a useful start.

For younger children

Anderson, R. (2007), Big Ben

Matthew's older brother Ben has Down's syndrome and Matthew is horrified when Ben turns 16 and has to go off to a school for young people with specific educational needs. Gradually Matthew comes to realise that this is best for Ben and that he will need to find his own friends. When Matthew's teacher decides to focus on Ben for a class project on interesting people in the community the class comes to recognise what an amazing person Ben is.

Fine, A. (2006), The Granny Project

Ivan and his brother and sisters cannot believe it when their parents want to put their grandmother into a home for the elderly. They refuse to allow this to happen and find out what it is like to look after someone else.

Meyer, D. (1997), Views from Our Shoes

Siblings share their experiences as the brother or sister of someone with a disability. Their personal tales introduce young siblings to others like them, perhaps for the first time, and allow them to compare experiences.

Pielichaty, H. (2002), Jade's Story

A moving account of how a teenager copes with the issues of mental illness. Jade's father has schizophrenia and this story relays the ups and downs of the family's life as they try to cope.

Taylor, V. (2010), Caitlin's Wish

Life is good for Caitlin until her father becomes disabled, then everything changes in her life and she struggles to accept what has happened to her family. Based on a true story.

Vlamakis, G. (2004), What About Me?

Jamie is initially confused, resentful, jealous and sad when his sister Susie has to go to hospital and his mother spends a lot of time there with her. He either acts up to get his parents' attention or withdraws into silence. Through the love and understanding of his parents he is eventually able to realise how much he is loved and appreciated.

Wilson, J. (2002), Sleepovers

New girl in school Daisy is finding her feet with a new group of friends who take it in turn to have sleepover parties. Daisy is faced with telling her new friends about her mentally and physically disabled older sister and she is unsure how they will react.

Wilson, J. (1999), The Illustrated Mum

This is the story of Dolphin who lives with her sister Star and their mother Marigold who has depression and misuses alcohol.

This booklist contains information about books that have not been checked or vetted by Carers Trust. Before using any of the books, information or resources within these books, you must check them for appropriateness.

For older children

Almond, D. (2009), Skellig

Michael's new baby sister may have a damaged heart. He feels alone and unsure. When he discovers an angel dying in the garage, Michael enlists the help of his new friend Mina in caring for him.

Bette, P. (1992), Becca's Race

The story of Digby who has to look after his younger brother when his sister is diagnosed with leukaemia.

Cross, G. (2002), Tightrope

Ashley is the sole carer of her severely arthritic mother but she has another secret life, as a dare devil graffiti artist who sneaks out at night and risks her life in extraordinary places.

Desai, A. (2001), Village by the Sea

Set in a small fishing village near Bombay, Lila and Hari, aged 13 and 12, struggle to keep the family going, including two young sisters, when their mother is ill and their father is the worse for drink. When Hari goes to Bombay to find work, Lila seems to be responsible for everything.

Dickens, C. (1857), Little Dorrit

Following the death of her mother Amy, Dorrit takes on the role of supporting her father and becomes 'little mother' to her siblings. This classic is set in the mid-nineteenth century.

Dickinson, P. (2005), The Gift Boat

When his beloved grandfather has a major stroke, Gavin is devastated. He is determined to prove the doctors wrong and find a way to reach his real grandfather, inside the paralysed body in the hospital bed.

Hames, A. and Mcaffrey, M. (2005), Special Brothers and Sisters

A collection of real-life accounts from the brothers and sisters of children with specific educational needs, disability or serious illness, ranging in age from three to 18 years. They explain, in their own words, what it's like to live with their siblings.

Laird, E. (2006), Red Sky in the Morning

12-year-old Anna is looking forward to the birth of her baby brother. Ben arrives, but is disabled and will never be like other children. Anna loves him with her whole heart, but she finds herself unable to admit the truth of Ben's condition to her school friends.

Mahy, M. (1995), Memory

Johnny blames himself for his sister's death. He searches for Bonny, who was his sister's best friend. During his search he meets up with Sophie, an elderly lady who has dementia. He is horrified to learn she lives alone, and decides to do something about it.

Moore, I. (2001), Daughter

The story of 14-year-old Sylvie who lives with her mother. Sylvie arrives home one day to find her mum standing on the balcony of their flat, possibly about to jump. Sylvie's mother has Alzheimer's disease and Sylvie struggles to come to terms with what is happening. The roles of parent and child are quickly reversed as Sylvie has to take on the responsibility of looking after her mother.

Valentine, J. (2008), Broken Soup

This story follows the life of 15-year-old Rowan whose life changes dramatically when her older brother Jack dies. Rowan finds herself playing mum to her five-year-old sister Stroma, when her dad decides he can't take it any more and moves out, leaving her already fragile mum in an even worse state.

Whiteside, S. (1999), Tears After Dark

An account of a young boy, growing up in a family affected by alcohol and drugs.

Zindel, P. (1990), A Begonia for Miss Applebaum

Discovering that their beloved former teacher is terminally ill, 15-year-old Henry and his friend Zelda accompany her on her excursions to the colourful parts of New York and join her in confronting death with quiet courage.