We need a plan to help young carers'

Extra responsibility and anxiety

By Sarah O’Grady

A HIDDEN army of a million young carers has been left reeling by a triple Covid whammy.

The children, who look after sick or disabled parents or siblings, were abandoned by health and support services during lockdown.

School closures meant there was no respite from caring.

And family members were sometimes stricken with Covid, forcing many youngsters into caring for the first time.

Today is Young Carers Action Day and campaigners are calling for a national plan to help the UK’s million young carers, some of whom were only live when they started.

Carers Trust boss Gareth Howells said: “Coronavirus, and our findings of its impact, have brought into sharp focus the unacceptable pressures young carers are under and the effect this is having on their well-being and life chances.”

“We’re long past the time when sympathy and kind words for young carers is enough.”

Burden

“Hundreds of thousands of young carers across the UK need real support and we are calling on the Government to urgently invest in support services for young carers to ensure they get the support they need.”

Duties can include personal care, such as washing or helping relatives to the lavatory alongside cooking, cleaning, organising medicines and doctor’s appointments.

Charities, academics and others say the burden has grown heavier over the last year and urgent action is needed to stop a sharp downward spiral in the mental and physical health of a new generation.

A trust survey revealed high levels of anxiety and stress. Two-thirds of young carers aged 12 to 17, and almost four in 10 of those aged 18 to 25 are more worried about their futures since coronavirus.

MP Paul Blomfild, chairman of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Young Carers, said: “Covid-19 has highlighted the challenges young carers face in juggling caring responsibilities, schoolwork and the other demands in their lives.”

“The Government must act to ensure that young carers get the help they need, because too many are unreconciled and face these challenges alone.”

“We should start by introducing a requirement for every school to appoint a young carers lead able to identify and support those with caring duties.”

Lib Dem leader Sir Ed Davey has tabled an Early Day Motion in the Commons calling for young carers to get support.

He said: “Having been a young carer myself – as a teenager, nursing my mum during her long battle against bone cancer – I know how difficult it can be to juggle caring responsibilities with schoolwork.

“As a result, young carers’ exam results are, on average, a staggering nine grades lower than their peers.”

The trust is also urging employers to acknowledge the skills and attributes young carers develop.

Paul Feneley, chief executive of wealth-management group Quilter, which has supported 1,800 young carers, was one.

He said: “I was raised by a single mum who had to care for my grandma who had a stroke, and I helped then and I helped care for my mum later on. It made me who I am today in terms of responsibility and values I hold.”

My 13-year-old Summer sunshine

SUMMER Amerena is the sole carer for mum Sandy, who suffers from the painful condition fibromyalgia.

For the last six years, the 13-year-old has helped her mother get out of bed, wash, dress and put on her socks and shoes.

Summer said: “We don’t have help from carers, there’s only me here. “There is some help but nothing really practical. I could do with some.

By Sarah O’Grady

I like going out with my friends but when I do I worry about mum.

The teenager, who wants to be a forensic scientist, has to give Sandy the right medicines at the correct time and has to prompt her to eat. “She also washes her hair.

Sandy said: “I’m proud of Summer, she does a lot for me. She’s right, there should be more help, if not for the adults, for the children like her.”

Fibromyalgia sufferers also experience confusion – called “Fibro Fog” – and Summer has to be alert to this as her mum moves around their Brighton home.

She added: “I worry about what will happen if I go to university. “Unless there’s a cure, mum will be left to cope by herself, and she can’t.”