

# HEADLINERS

## Headliners care

### Grace gives young carers the acknowledgement they deserve



**At times we all need help. Young people as well as adults need support and the places we find it vary.**

But what about adults who turn to young people for help? If you are a young carer reading this, I'd just like to take this opportunity to say a massive 'Well done!'

In Headliners we want to acknowledge you, unlike the mainstream media, where inspirational young people like you seldom get a look in.

**Picture this:** When we need medical help it is trained professionals who give it to us. If it is moral support we are looking for then friends or family are the key providers. If we seek educational help then we look to our teachers. The majority of times it is adults whom we ask for advice. Not always, but mostly.

Now, imagine if the roles were reversed and teenagers were the source of assistance to the adults. For many young people this is a reality. These young people spend countless hours caring for either: a parent, a grandparent or another relative. The roles of a young carer include; cooking, cleaning, shopping, nursing and providing emotional support.

A lot of the jobs are small, but as they have to be done everyday the hours mount up. Basically, since they have to do any job that the patient is unable to do on a day to day basis, they have a lot of responsibility.

Considering that the average age of a young carer is just 12-years-old, young carers have a lot to cope with. A census taken in 2001 showed that there are 175,000 young carers in the UK and a third of these care for people with mental health problems. A total of 13,000 said that they care for over 50 hours a week. That is a massive amount of time given up to caring for someone else. A lot of these young carers live in one-parent families so they have no other parent to share the responsibilities. Young people who spend so much time looking after someone else may not have a lot of free time. This can have a knock-on effect to their social life and some are bullied because they can't relate to their peers. Other carers report problems with education and missing out on a lot of opportunities other children have.

For some, it is a vicious circle and carers become stressed from the emotional pressure they have no relief from.

Despite this being some carers experience it is not everyone's. Jake Hamilton (15), from Derry is certainly not a pitiful suppressed person. After being asked about his experiences in caring he responded both brightly and positively about his role as a young carer making him a prime example of someone who efficiently juggles his social life and caring life. Jake has a lot to thank caring for. It has made him the person he is today and that person is Mr Personality Plus.

#### Jake answered a few questions:

**Would you describe yourself as a young carer?** "A bit but I know that there are young people out there that do a lot more than me."

**Who do you care for?** "My mum."

**What responsibilities do you have as a carer?** "None of your business. Only joking! Small things like cooking and cleaning around the house. Going messages too."

**How long have you cared for your mum?** "For as long as long as I can remember."

**What are the rewards of being a carer?** "Money and 'self-pride' (ha-ha)."

**What are the drawbacks of being a carer?** "Maybe not being able to go out as much as I'd like to."

**Will being a carer affect your independence as a young adult? In what way?** "If anything, it would make me more independent. I'll be able to care for myself maybe better than those who aren't carers."

**In what way do you feel you are different to other young people your age who aren't young carers?** "Not at all different because I'm not a carer 24/7 so I'm out almost just as much as them."

**What support do you receive or would you like to receive?** "I don't think I need any because I'm managing just fine but I do think there are young people that need to receive more help."

Obviously how much you are affected as a young carer depends largely on how long you care for each day and, in turn, how much free time that then allows you.

Having another adult working alongside you can be a great relief because you now know that not all responsibility rests on your shoulders. The reaction from a lot of young people I spoke to is that very few know any young carers. The reality is that many of them probably do but maybe it's just not obvious.

A lot of young people also thought that the behaviour and maturity levels of carers would be different. They seemed to think the way they would react to certain situations would be different as would be their ways of communicating with others their own age.

Ryan (14) said: "I suppose carers would have to be more mature because they would have more responsibilities." The feeling that the pressures placed on the shoulders of young carer would press them to grow up fast and learn to adapt to their different lifestyle is a popular one.

Catherine (14): "Their personalities are different but I don't treat them in any other way." This reaction shows how not all young people are completely ignorant

of how young carers feel. They accept that maybe they'd be different but treating them separately will not achieve anything.

Ronan (16) didn't think carers would be different to others. For him to think that they would just act like another young person who maybe didn't have so much responsibility is a huge step forward. It shows that many young people are taking into account the fact that everyone's family life is different and the things some young people have to deal with on a day to day basis don't necessarily have to change their personality.

When I asked whether they thought young carers were an inspiration to others. Shannon (14) said: "I completely think they are an inspiration to young people." This particular quote struck me because she said it without hesitation. I thought that maybe if more young people could view carers in this way it would be an end to them feeling unappreciated and undervalued. In the same way Lauren (16) said she was inspired by young carers because: "They show maturity and put others before themselves." As an afterthought she added: "They value things more because have a sense of responsibility in looking after other people."

Young carers definitely do value things we take for granted. Things like free time and having someone else cook a meal for them. Kevin (13) however, picked up on the thought that young carers may be stressed and the things that could lead to. He said: "They would get more frustrated easily. They should be treated the same as other people because if you treat them different it could make them angry and frustrated with themselves."

Ryan (13) added: "They would probably have more sense of what they are doing because they would be used to taking care of people." Ryan clearly thinks this jump in maturity is more of a help than a hindrance.

He said: "They inspire me because they do a lot for different people. It's really kind." The kindness and selflessness of young carers does inspire other young people. The main challenge now is channelling that positive feeling so that they know just how much others understand and feel inspired by them.

Finally, Carolann (14) told us how much she admired the work of young carers: "My friend is a carer. She looks after her mummy. Her mummy is deaf in both ears and partially blind. She is more mature than most and she doesn't carry on as much and she takes things more seriously when jokes are being said." This shows us how we should all be careful of the jokes we make and the things we say. People may be affected by these offhand comments more than we care to notice. She ended with, "She's definitely an inspiration to me. I don't think I could do what she does for her mummy every day and she's younger than me!"

This is evidence again of just how young carers actually are and how a lot of us actually couldn't contemplate having to go even a day in their shoes. But of course if you do find yourself in a situation in which you become a young carer be careful to remember that not everything will change. You can still be the same person you always were and it's really not the end of the world.

Taking Jake as an inspiration you can see that it has had no major impact on his life as far as he is concerned. This is particularly heartening for new young carers who have never had this experience before and are scared they may not step up to the bar. Anything you can do is a help, any time you can give is appreciated and anyone you help will always value it and value you.

In conclusion the work of young carers is seriously overlooked. The things they do everyday are so small that some people wouldn't even consider it caring at all! But the difference they make is phenomenal and many people would not be able to stay and live in their own homes without their help.

A lot of us have to open our eyes to see what is right in front of us, to realise and value the role of young carers and treat them with the respect and dignity they deserve. Exclusion and awkward feelings from others should not hinder a young person's progress.

Before we make assumptions or immediately stereotype a young carer we should remember that not everyone finds their responsibilities overwhelming. Some people in fact view it as an important part of their personality and cannot really imagine life without this experience.

#### About this article

This article was written by **Grace McGowan (14)**

#### 0 comments

- [Add a comment to this page](#)

---

Built on **Cubik**  
©2012 Headliners

Registered Charity Number 1043300. Supported by the **Department for Children, Schools and Families**