



Young Carers Action Day – Robyn’s Story



Today is Young Carers Action Day, and our charity, [Young People and Children First](#), is proud to be providing a home and support to Robyn, one of these remarkable young people.

Robyn* has kindly shared her story with us. She talks of her experience as a young carer and how, with the right support, she now has a better chance of succeeding in all aspects of her life. A young carer is someone aged 25 and under who looks after a friend or family member who, due to illness, disability, a mental health problem or an addiction, cannot cope without their support.

Here is Robyn’s story ...

Robyn’s Dad was a drug addict and sadly committed suicide the day before Robyn’s 5th birthday. Robyn’s Mum suffers from various complex mental illnesses and several physical illnesses, including severe diabetes.

When Robyn was just 11 years old, her older sister moved out of the family home and it was at this point that she became her Mum’s main carer. Robyn tells us about the first time that she had to single-handedly care for her Mum while she was having a severe hypoglycaemic (hypo) attack.

“It was really scary. I didn’t know what to do. I tried to pick her up or drag her to somewhere more comfortable but I wasn’t strong enough. Mum was trying to tell me what to do to help but she was slipping in and out of consciousness. I grabbed duvets and put them under her and around her and was making her eat chocolate. Mum was soaked in sweat as if she had been under a hose pipe. I took her nightie off her and put a clean one on

and kept her warm. I was trying to do a finger prick test on her but I didn't really know what I was doing.

Because of her anxiety, Mum wouldn't let me call an ambulance and was trying to take my phone away from me. She was also worried about my little brother hearing what was going on. So I picked my brother up out of bed and put him in my bed and put cartoons on loudly so he couldn't hear."

Severe hypo's like this would happen once or twice a year and Robyn got more used to dealing with them. She knew the importance of trying to keep her Mum conscious to stop her going into a coma.

"Sometimes Mum said that she felt like she was dying and she would tell me that she loved me as she felt herself slipping away".



Robyn was bullied at school for how she looked and the fact that she was very easy to wind up. She needed constant entertainment and found it really difficult to be in the house all the time. She was diagnosed with ADHD in her 6th year at primary school.

It was this primary school that recommended a young carers group to Robyn and her Mum. They suggested that they both might benefit from Robyn getting support and entertainment there.

"I would passionately advise young carers to join a young carers group. I met people there that are still my best friends and they will be my friends for life. We didn't really talk much about our lives at home, we just had fun. We forgot about it all for a while.

The young carers group would pick us up once every two weeks by minibus or taxi and drop us home again. They even offered to get someone to help my Mum while I was away but my Mum never wanted that.

At half term we would do things as a group like rock climbing, Thorpe Park, ice skating, swimming and other things that we didn't get to do with our families.

The BEST event though was the Young Carers Festival which happened every year in Southampton. We would be talking about it for six months before it! It was literally amazing”.

Robyn wasn't ready for her time with the Young Carers Group to end when she turned 18 so she and her friends volunteered as 'Young Leaders' and hoped that they could go to the festival again.



Robyn's Mum's diabetes became easier to monitor when she had a diabetic sensor implanted into her arm and Robyn's brother became old enough to care for his Mum. At 18, and with her relationship with her mother becoming more and more turbulent, Robyn decided that she needed to move out. She slept on her sister's sofa for a few months and had no idea how she was going to manage to afford to live anywhere.

It was the Young Carers Group that told Robyn about our charity, [Young People and Children First](#). They knew we had three lovely family sized houses and went above and beyond to support our 16-25 year olds with both practical and emotional support.

“This is the most balanced that my life has ever felt. I love living here. They (YPACF) have helped me with things like tracking down a child trust fund that I had years ago, a passport and a provisional driving licence which my Mum wasn't able to help me with”.

Robyn was one of nearly 178,000 children identified as young carers in England and Wales in the 2011 census. One in eight of those were aged under eight years old. This is widely believed to be the tip of the iceberg, with some estimates suggesting that as many as one in five schoolchildren are young carers, with this number increasing during COVID (according to the University of Nottingham 2018).

YPACF is proud to be a part of Robyn's life and to help her on her road to independence.

If you have someone at home that depends on you then what you are doing is totally amazing. We know though that it can be difficult and lonely. Perhaps no-one knows that you are looking after someone or perhaps people do know.

Either way there is help, support and fun to be found out there!

The NHS recommends that young carers talk to relatives if possible or talk to a nurse or doctor or any trusted adult.

School

A teacher at school is a great person to talk to if you are looking after someone at home. Your teacher will be able to help you to get support.

As a young carer, you might find that school is a place where you forget about your caring responsibilities and feel 'normal' for a while. But it can also be a place where you're under extra pressure or where people don't understand what your life is like outside school. It can sometimes be hard to manage to do everything. Your school will understand this if they are aware of your situation at home.

Groups for Young Carers in the UK

This NHS website can help you to find a local group like the one that Robyn found. Go to this website [Find services - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk) and enter 'Young Carers Services' in the 'FIND' box and then enter the name of the town or county that you live in.

West Berkshire Council Young Carers Project

This is a free service available to all young carers in West Berkshire between the ages of 12 and 18. They hold fortnightly 'youth club' style meet ups and separate groups are available for young carers of addicted parents and young carers with mental health problems. You can refer yourself to the group by contacting them via phone (01635 529735) or email via their website [Overview - West Berkshire Council Young Carers Project - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)

There is also a great charity group in West Berkshire that offers support and fun events [News | Friends of Young Carers West Berkshire \(foyc-webs.org.uk\)](http://foyc-webs.org.uk)

The Annual Young Carers Festival

This is the largest festival in the world for young people with a caring responsibility at home. If you join your local Young Carers Group they may have plans to attend. [Young Carers Festival | The Children's Society \(childrensociety.org.uk\)](http://childrensociety.org.uk)

*name has been changed to protect her privacy