

# A Different Life

*David was 9yrs old and a young carer, looking after his mum who had mental health problems. This made him feel isolated from other people his own age. He is now 13yrs old and has been with the Glasgow Association for Mental Health (GAMH) Young Carers project for four years. This is his story.*



“ I used to hang about in my street. My friends weren't that friendly. They were horrible and nasty, calling me names and hitting me. School was across the road. No-one at school knew. I never told anyone, it was easier not to tell. They wouldn't understand. Sometimes I would go to the shops and the banks and things. It was scary because you didn't know who's watching you take money out at the cash point. I noticed my friends didn't do that and that I didn't have as much fun.

“When my Mum took ill the social workers said it would be good for me to get out and about. They told me about Young Carers and sent someone to the house to talk about it. I was thinking it would be fun to go and meet people. Sometimes I had to take care of Mum when my brother was out. Then Mum got really ill and my brother left home. I felt annoyed because then I was left to do most of it. I was on my own with my mum for a wee while, dad wasn't living with us. I don't see him now. I just got on with it, didn't talk to anybody, just Young Carers.

“Arriving for the first time was scary, because I didn't know where to go and who I was going to see. They were nice and friendly, and the other kids were roughly the same age or a bit older. It was good because then I could make more new friends. We had games night or we'd go to the cinema. I didn't get to do that before. Mum thought it was better because it gave her some space and gave me a chance to make friends.”

**“It's made a huge difference to my life. I've had so many fun times, getting to know new people and have nice chats. They understand my situation, the other young carers.”**

“My mum passed away when I was 10, so that was three years ago. I live with my Gran and Grandad now. They're both disabled and I've got to look after them sometimes. It's stressful. I do shopping and help Gran in her wheelchair to get out and about and I take the dog out

and clean up the house. Young Carers helped by talking me through it. That made me feel a lot better. I would feel the same rubbish way if I didn't have Young Carers, it would be horrible."

**"With Young Carers I'll probably get further in life. It's made my life a lot easier. I feel a lot happier now, more relaxed, less stressed. I'm achieving things through Young Carers."**

The primary aim of the Young Carers project is to improve young people's resilience, confidence and life chances in a safe and supportive environment. Laura, David's project worker says,

"David initially came into the 8 -12yr group, a pilot programme using an early intervention approach for children living at home with a parent with a mental health problem. When David first started we would go to the parks, bowling, cinema, food, going out and having fun; taking time out from his caring responsibilities. When David's Mum passed away he was given ongoing support to help him deal with his bereavement, his personal and emotional adjustments and his transition through secondary school.

"In a couple of weeks' we're doing the Bear Grylls survival course; den building, setting up a camp, making fires, building shelters, animal tracking and how to use ropes. This has a Dynamic Youth Award alongside it. We've been in the cycling club going all over to different places. We've started a cooking course at Cardonald College to encourage the young

people to do some cooking at home. This helps them build life skills and is part of the Good Food, Good Health programme with the NHS. We also do workshops around anti-bullying, first aid and we do physical activities and sports to tie in with healthy lifestyles."

Young carer's can now also do one-to-one sessions which are informal and relaxed. The sessions are aimed at supporting young people who need additional help, out-with a group setting. David talks about the value of these sessions for him,

"It's good and it's more helpful because you can talk to just one person without being surrounded by other people. It's a chance to talk to someone who knows you. Me and Laura like Costa for our one-to-ones! It's good that I can be trusted to travel on my own and I know there's going to be someone waiting for me. It's been a year now and I don't let anyone down, I'm always there and on time.

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#### What we did

GAMH were awarded a 5-year grant of £600,500 from our Investing in Communities 2 programme. The funding will allow the project to continue to support young people who care for family members with mental health problems.

Find out more at [www.biglotteryfund.org.uk](http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk)