Voices of young adult carers

Stories of young adult carers' experiences of caring and learning

"Always try your hardest, never give up and always be proud of yourself."

niace
promoting adult learning

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Foreword

Young adult carers are young people, aged 16–25, who have unpaid responsibility for caring for someone, usually someone in their family. They may start caring as young as five or six; they may be caring for a parent or grandparent, or sibling. They may be caring for both parents, running the family home, sorting out medicines and hospitals and caring for younger siblings. And all this while trying to go to school or college, having a social life, thinking about growing up, and wondering what to do with their life as an adult.

Young adult carers don't have the chances in life that many of our young people and children have; their schooling is often disrupted, they can't take up the chances post-16 of college or apprenticeships, or a job, because they find it too hard to fit around their responsibilities. This publication shows the transformational effects of learning; how offering chances to these young people, with care and guidance, and with consideration for their needs, can give them the opportunity to develop their skills and think about employment.

NIACE has led the way in thinking about the role of learning for young adult carers, and I'm very pleased to be able to support this short and powerful report of the voices of young adult carers talking about their experiences of learning and the impact it has had on their lives.

Francis Hare, The Earl of Listowel

1. About this publication

The stories featured in this publication are young adult carers' (between the ages of 16 and 25) personal accounts of their caring role and the impact that caring has had upon their lives, particularly upon their participation in learning. All of the stories have been written by individual young adult carers, in their own words.

NIACE believes that the most powerful advocates for effective learning and support are young adult carers themselves; the stories included here highlight this. We hope that these stories will encourage and inspire other young adult carers, and that they will enable practitioners and policymakers to gain a deeper understanding of young adult carers' experiences and needs.

2. Background

NIACE is the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education. NIACE's aim is to encourage all adults to engage in all kinds of learning.

NIACE has a long history of work with both carers and young adult learners. In 2008, the two areas of work were brought together when NIACE gained funding from the Nuffield Foundation for a small-scale project examining the impact of caring upon young adults' access to and participation in learning. This project highlighted that: young adult carers have distinct needs and experiences; they often find it difficult to make effective transitions to adult services and to further and higher education; and that learning providers were largely unaware of young adult carers' needs and did not provide tailored or effective support to enable them to engage, aspire and achieve in learning. The Nuffield Foundation project provided the platform upon which a range of work has been developed. Since 2008, NIACE has:

- engaged with a wide range of young adult carers and providers;
- developed and disseminated an action planning and self-assessment tool for use by learning providers, and a policy briefing paper;
- produced resources targeted at young adult carers, practitioners and further education colleges;
- consulted with young adult carers with a learning difficulty and produced resources targeted specifically at their needs; and
- developed and delivered a series of staff training sessions, and ran a national conference.

When NIACE embarked on this programme of work in 2008, there was very little targeted provision or support for young adult carers aged 16–25. Services predominantly focused on young carers (under the age of 18) or adult carers. This is changing. In particular, many carers' services and voluntary sector organisations now offer tailored support designed to meet young adult carers' specific needs. In addition, many learning providers are becoming more aware of the need to reach out, engage and support young adults with caring responsibilities. While good progress has been made, there is still much to be done to raise awareness of the needs and experiences of young adult carers and to ensure that they gain the support they need in order to engage in learning, achieve their potential and lead full, active and happy lives.

NIACE's funding for work with young adult carers and access to education and training has now come to an end, but we are committed to taking the agenda forward in order to secure more, different and better learning opportunities and support for young adult carers. This 'voices' book is the first output of a programme of planned development work by NIACE. Other work will include a policy seminar, the publication and dissemination of further resources and a policy impact paper. If you would like to join NIACE's network of people interested in work with young adult carers, please e-mail Nicola Aylward: **nicola.aylward@niace.org.uk**.

To find out more about NIACE's work with young adult carers, and to download copies of the resources mentioned above, please visit: **www.niace.org.uk/current-work/young-adult-carers**

3. Context

Young adult carers make an invaluable contribution to the lives of the people they care for, their local communities and the national economy. However, their efforts and the contribution that they make often go unrecognised. Young adult carers are a largely hidden group. Fear of judgement, intervention from social services, stigma, discrimination and bullying often result in young adult carers and their families choosing not to disclose the difficult situations that they find themselves in.

The majority of young adult carers are passionate about their caring role and are fiercely protective of the people that they care for. They also recognise that caring can have a positive impact on their lives in a number of ways, including close family relationships; a sense of self-worth; a mature outlook and sensitive manner; good communication skills and the ability to interact with services and professionals; budgeting, cooking and practical caring skills. While the positive outcomes of caring are important and should be recognised and valued, many young adult carers also experience a range of difficulties as a result of their responsibilities, including:

- lack of time for personal activities and friendships;
- feeling tired, lonely, isolated and depressed;
- feeling trapped, angry and frustrated, which can sometimes be manifested through aggressive or challenging behaviour;
- feeling 'different', being bullied by peers and misunderstood or disbelieved by adults, teachers, tutors and other professionals;

- lack of confidence and self-esteem; and
- perceived lack of opportunity and hopelessness, often resulting in low aspirations.

In addition, when engaging in learning, young adult carers, due to their caring responsibilities, commonly experience particular difficulties including:

- absence and lateness;
- lack of time to join extra-curricular activities;
- bullying and restricted peer networks;
- tiredness resulting in lack of concentration;
- underachievement and poor attainment;
- difficulty completing homework and coursework on time; and
- anxiety and behavioural problems.

In the face of these difficulties, and as highlighted throughout this publication, young adult carers commonly demonstrate tenacity, drive and determination. The quote taken from Emily's story, included in the title of this publication, illustrates this resolve: "always try your hardest,

> **“be proud, because the person you care for is proud of what you do for them. It's a hard job, but it's the best job ever”**
>
> (Leanne, page 18)

never give up and always be proud of yourself.” While being a young adult carer can be hard, it also brings opportunities, great times and a sense of fulfilment. As Leanne says in her story, “be proud, because the person you care for is proud of what you do for them. It’s a hard job, but it’s the best job ever.”

Like all young people, young adult carers have the right to participate in learning; and learning providers have a duty to support them. Some do this very well, with compassion and understanding; others lack awareness, understanding and the motivation to help. The following stories highlight both the benefits and the difficulties of being a young adult carer. The stories also highlight a huge variation in the support and understanding that learning providers offer to young adult carers. We hope these stories will inspire all learning providers to recognise the needs of young adult carers and support them effectively.

4. Young adult carers' stories

Gemma

I am 16 now. I was between the ages of seven and nine when I started caring for my mother. My mother suffers from type 1 diabetes. I started to realise my mother was ill when I was nine as she stopped working and couldn't pick me up from school as much. I realised I was a carer when I came home from school one day and my mother was lying on the living room floor in a hypo. I was around nine years old then.

The impact caring had on my childhood wasn't as bad as many people think, even though my mother was a single parent, we had my nanny and bampy to help us. I did lose a little of my childhood as I had to mature quickly and had to do certain things my friends didn't know had to be done, but as I hit my teens my mother developed cancer as well. She had more hypos and she was a lot weaker physically. Sometimes I had to go to the hospital with her and she started to lose her hair with the chemo and radiotherapy, but now the cancer has gone and sometimes it gets better, but some days it goes bad again.

> **"...you're not on your own, there are plenty of young adult carers and many people to support you."**

Sometimes it's great being a carer – I feel helpful and I feel content. The good thing is that I never ever feel lonely because me and my brother go through it together; we hold each other up when we fall. I understand that some carers don't have siblings or any support and I realise how lucky I am to have a brother. The negative for me is when I see my brother upset, it makes me feel I haven’t been there enough. It also upsets me whenever my mother gets frustrated about her illness and upset; she says, ‘It’s supposed to be my job to look after you, not the other way round.’ That upsets me because I know how much it upsets her.

Being a carer has definitely affected my learning and attendance at school because I worry too much and some days my mother is too ill for me to go to school, but my school has been extremely helpful with the circumstances and given me a lot of support and counselling, etc.

> **“Being a carer has definitely affected my attendance at school because I worry too much and some days my mother is too ill for me to go”**

I had a lot of help and support from Cynon Valley carers, Action for Children and the young carers support team – they have helped me tremendously. My plan for the future is to be a well-known worldwide hairdresser.

The message I would like to send to the other young adult carers is you’re not on your own, there are plenty of young adult carers and many people to support you. Also, it does get better – this is the start of a great life.

Laura

My name is Laura and I am the full-time carer for my father who has Alzheimer's disease. There are no other family members or friends to help out. My dad is 80 years old and was diagnosed in January 2011, but had experienced memory loss for several years before this – so I have cared for him since I was a young teenager. I am now 20 years old.

I first realised that I was a carer when I was 18 and approached by Aileen from Barnardos. My caring role has progressively got more demanding. I was at Manchester University but had to quit because of the situation. It can be hard to get a job because I am restricted on the hours I can work. It is also hard to dedicate time and energy to studying. My social life is minimal because it is difficult to arrange adequate care for my dad.

Once I made my school, college and university aware of my caring role they were supportive in that they said I could talk to them at any time. Some could also signpost me to other people and advise me.

Being a carer has affected my health; I am clinically depressed, stressed and anxious, and more lonely than I used to be.

> **“Once I made my school, college and university aware of my caring role they were supportive … I could talk to them at any time.”**

The best thing about being a carer is that I am now more sensitive to both my dad's and others' needs. It has made me and my dad closer and our friendship is better than ever. I now appreciate family life (my dad) more.

I have recently reassessed my future prospects and although I am unsure of what career I want to pursue, I am now taking my time to decide and have applied to do an apprenticeship.

Barnardos has been the best source of support that I have received and this view is shared by many other young adult carers. They are always there for me and help in any way they can – both practically and emotionally. They are unique in that every person that works there, I feel, genuinely and personally cares for each young person. They also recognise that each situation is unique and can be difficult. The staff are all so open, friendly, smiley, knowledgeable and welcoming. The project is a safe place for young adult carers.

I would like to send a message to other youth centres and carers' projects, to say that Barnardos is an exemplary model of support for young adult carers and deserves recognition for the contribution it makes to improving young adult carers' lives.

“Being a carer has affected my health; I am clinically depressed, stressed and anxious”

Jon

My name is Jon. I started caring for my mother when I was three years old, I did not realise I was a carer until I was around twelve years old when the social worker to my mother put me in touch with the young carers project based in Malvern. After spending a few years there I was then placed on the RCT carer's project when I moved to Wales.

The impact of being a carer on my personal life whilst I was younger was high; I lost a lot of school friends and it also had an impact on my school. This was because mum was always sick or unable to do things herself. Due to this I had to look after her at home and do the things that she could not do. This ranged from cooking and cleaning to keeping on top of her personal hygiene and dressing her. As I got older this got harder and happened a lot more often. This was difficult because I was getting older and I began to realise a lot more about what I was doing, and about how embarrassing it could be if people found out. It was also hard as I did not want my siblings to go through the same as things as I was going through. I used to think it was hard enough for one child doing the caring without having to teach my siblings what to do, and also about how to deal with the way people tease you because you are a carer.

Even to this day being a carer is hard, as mum has got so used to having me around all the time and doing things for her. It can be hard for her to let go sometimes and it can also be hard to say no, because I don't want to make her upset as, due to her depression, she would take it out on me or my siblings.

Some of the positives about being a carer are that it gives you a bit more life experience, and it also gives you the feeling that you are making a difference to someone. You also get a chance to meet others in the same situation, and to support them in ways that only another carer can. The down side to being a carer is that you lose a lot of friends who do not understand what you are going through. Sometimes this causes bullying and other problems along the same line. When it is time for you to move on from being a carer, it can be hard for the person you care for to let go and understand that the carer has a life of their own – to live a life they want to live.

> **“Education providers need to realise how many carers there are out there and that every single one of them will need help and support in some way, shape or form”**

Because of my caring role my school grades suffered – I know they could have been a lot better than they were. Same as my college grades, and university grades. Sometimes it can be hard to tell the person you care for that the reason your grades are bad is because of them, so we have to lie to them so they do not feel so bad. When I was kicked out of university because of bad grades, I had to lie to mum. I failed due to looking after mum and the family on a full-time basis.

When I was in school I had no help from the staff at all. They had the attitude that I should

> **“…being a carer gives you the feeling that you are making a difference to someone”**

leave the caring for somebody else; they also said that it was not their problem as I was old enough to stand on my own two feet and say I don’t want to care for my family. If I had had even a little support from school or the university I would have been happy, but I didn’t.

The first time I really received any help was when I joined the young carers and the young adult carer’s project. I received help and support from the staff and also the other carers. Because of this I became very close with some of the other carers and we became the best of friends; we are always there to help each other in any way we can.

Education providers need to realise how many carers there are out there and that every single one of them will need help and support in some way, shape or form, and that sometimes they are too afraid to ask for this help. Carers need to know that sometimes the only time we get help is when we ask for it, even though this can be hard we need to step up and say, “hey, I’m a carer and I need some help!”.

Holly

My name is Holly and I will be 18 years old in August. When I was ten I realised that my family did not function or behave the same as my friends' families did in their homes.

My mum did not leave the home often and my brother had got into trouble at school and although my dad seemed to try and sort things out, they just didn't get better and he became more and more upset and anxious. People kept saying the word 'depression' but I did not understand.

> **"...consider and accept the offers of support that come your way – do not be so independent that you cannot accept help."**

When I was 13 my brother got into trouble with the police and became involved in services which visited our home. The worker had knowledge of young carers and she recognised that my life had become one of holding the house together as my mum had become more and more withdrawn. She had by then acquired eight dogs which she seemed to love and respond to, but did not walk or take care of. This was another job in the home that fell to me. I can look back and see that the animals never told her to pull herself together or demanded anything of her. My dad was unable to respond and whilst he supported me the best he knew how, his own mental health was impacted on a high level. The worker referred me to the Young Carers Service.

My parents’ marriage broke up and I lived part time between my parents, feeling really guilty about needing to support both of them. In the last four years my parents, between them, have moved home eight times and I have continued to follow them round, sorting things out – departments, inappropriate relationships and friendships. One of the moves mum made was 70 miles away.

> **“I have been given a safe and relaxed group where there are no difficult questions and an understanding from peers.”**

The house moves and disruption caused me to change college education half-way through and move to another college. Whilst at a continuous secondary school I was able to find support and the staff were genuine and made good links to my parents, always making sure I had opportunities. Staff even went out of their way to give me a lift home after any outside school activities, especially in the dark winter months. I achieved to my ability and started college where I built up good relationships with tutors. However, on my move to the college 70 miles away I had to restart the course, and although I tried to tell staff about my issues I was left isolated and have fallen behind in my studies.

Recently my mum has suddenly moved again, back to the original area we lived, and I have started once again the process of college change.

During this time I have been supported by a Young Carers Service and youth workers. I have had one-to-one support. Workers have checked up on me when I've been absent and made phone calls on my behalf. I have made friends in the support groups and have been given a safe and relaxed group where there are no difficult questions and an understanding from peers. I have also had opportunities over the past few years to join residential trips – one being to Germany, to explain the needs of young adult carers. I have also gained first aid and food hygiene certificates to help my CV.

I have considered myself an independent person from an early age – even older at times than my parents. I would like to give the message to young carers to consider and accept the offers of support that come your way – do not be so independent that you cannot accept help. Life can be lonely.

I would like to tell any professionals that we need to feel important and individual. When I have tried to explain my situation as a young adult the questions have been, "Are you homeless? Are you on drugs? Are you being abused? Well things aren't too bad then".

Leanne

I started caring for my mother when I was seven years old. I did not understand that helping my mother around the house was actually caring, but when I was eight I was introduced to a young carers' project. That's when I started to understand.

Gradually I started doing more things around the house like cleaning, cooking and making sure my mother took her medication. Doing these duties stopped me from going out and socialising with friends. When I got home from school I couldn't just have food and go out, I had to make sure my mother took her medication and had eaten before thinking about myself. This was very tiring, but after a while I got used to the routine of not going out and staying in all the time. The only time I would leave the house was for school and the carers' project. I did not socialise with anyone outside the house until I was about 13 when I was in high school. But it was still difficult because I couldn't have friends round or for sleepovers because of my mother.

When I became a young adult I really started to miss going out and being a normal young person. But as I have got older I have realised how important I am to my mother and without me I don't think my mother would be ok on her own.

> **"Adult carers still need help and support … The caring role doesn't stop just because a young person passes 18."**

There are negatives and positives to being a carer. The negatives are that I cannot go out and socialise with friends often. As her sole carer, whatever I wish to do I have to include my mam in all my plans, whether it's holidays or just going down to the shop. She has to come into all my plans, which worries me about future things I would like to do. I have low confidence and low self-esteem because I feel I am not good enough like everyone else, as I have not really lived like everyone else, as I have mostly been in the house.

But there are positives too. I love my mother a lot and I wouldn't want anyone else doing what I do for her. I have a really good bond of friendship and trust with my mother because I have been with her every day, caring for her. She is my best friend. The hardest job is the best job.

> **"I have low confidence and low self-esteem because I feel I am not good enough like everyone else, as I have not really lived like everyone else"**

In terms of education I feel my confidence levels have dropped and so has my self-esteem because I do not feel I am important enough to do things like everyone else. Some tutors at college know I am a carer and give me extensions for assignments, whereas other tutors see it as an excuse not to hand things in on time. This upsets me because I want to do well; I just don't have a lot of time to do work at home. College this year has been a nightmare. I have had to drop down from a national diploma to a certificate because it's impossible balancing college work and caring.

At college I get the same amount of help from tutors as anyone else. I do not want to be favoured because I'm a carer, but I do think all carers should have as much time as they need, because we do more than others when we leave college at the end of the day.

I have received a lot of help and support from the carers' project since I was eight years old, and now I am 19. Now that I am over 18 I get support from the adult carers group, which has made me happy because I thought I would have to leave and be forgotten. Adult carers still need help and support once they have hit the age of 18. The caring role doesn't stop just because a young person passes 18.

My plans for the future are to hopefully qualify at college and get a job, so I can save for a house of my own, and to better myself ready for future goals ahead.

I would like to send a message to staff, teachers and tutors – all young adult carers need help. Some staff need to respect the fact that when we leave college or school at the end of the day, we don't go home and go out with friends, we go home and take care of someone until they are in bed. It's a hard job, but it's the best job ever.

To all carers out there – you're doing a great job and you should be proud of yourselves, no one else can do the job you're doing. Be proud, because the person you care for is proud of what you do for them.

David

I started caring for my mum when I was just eight after my mum and dad got divorced. I realised straight away that I was a carer as I'd seen my father being a carer so I knew what I'd have to do. I had always shown a curiosity in helping around the house and from a young age wanted to help.

Being a young carer didn't really have an impact until I reached high school and my attendance started to slip. Teachers always noticed this and thought it was truancy or laziness. It wasn't until I explained about things at home that they began to understand. I always felt good about caring and felt as if I was making a real difference to somebody who had been there for me. I was giving something back to somebody who had given everything to me. The only thing I lacked was a social life. I was always embarrassed about bringing friends round to the house and would make up excuses as to why they shouldn't come. It was always "my dog's ill" or "we're having some work done."

It wasn't until I was about 15 that I found the Hyndburn Young Carers after being signposted through school. They had a pupil mentor who was always on hand to offer support and give me that push in the right direction. At school my grades fell, my attendance dropped and I just didn't want to face the consequences of turning up late. School understood, but not

> **"…my grades fell, my attendance dropped and I just didn't want to face the consequences of turning up late."**

to the level they should have done. It wasn't until Hyndburn Carers Centre came into school and gave a presentation about young carers that teachers began to understand what my home situation was like. I left school with better than predicted GCSEs and went to college.

College were very supportive and from day one they were aware of my home situation and were very understanding of everything. If I missed college, my tutor would always send me the work, so that I would always be able to catch up. But unfortunately college didn't really work out for me – I'd missed too much work and I failed my A-levels.

I plan to return to education in 2012; I will be doing a course provided by the RANK Foundation, who pay for courses for carers, to enable them to aspire to achieve their potential. In the future I'd like to work with young people and give back some of the support that I have received.

Overall I think schools and colleges could do more, and could be more understanding of carers. For me, it would have been much easier to study from home, for example, and go into college occasionally whenever mum was having a good day. Also there wasn't really an easy way to find the carers service; I was passed from organisation to organisation. If I had been given support earlier it would have stopped me heading in a downward spiral; luckily I was able to be pulled back out, but some people aren't as lucky.

> **“…schools and colleges could be more understanding of carers.”**

Saffron

My name is Saffron, I'm 18 years old and care for my mother alongside my father, who is her full-time carer. She was born with the disease muscular dystrophy – limb girdle, which has left her wheelchair-bound and without use of her muscles; this illness has also attracted two secondary illnesses.

I've been caring for her since I was born, carrying out tasks such as washing the dishes, cleaning, making food, etc. As a child, this had a major impact on my life, my school life was difficult due to the fact that other children would be shocked when they would see my mother, and start to ask questions. Sometimes they'd tease.

From when I was about four, mum started to deteriorate even more, she'd frequently be absent from school performances or fetes, which made me very sad. That's when the other children would ask questions; "Why's your dad here alone this time?", "Is your mam in hospital again?" I didn't know how to react. I got angry. It was nobody's business.

Hospital became a part of life from this point, as mam got really ill and as a family we started to struggle with day-to-day life. Dad had to give up work and convert to being a full-time carer. This was a hard thing to accept, and we felt it in many ways. We had to live off a lot less money than we were used to, and being at home

"I broke down. I became a victim in a very malicious case of bullying."

> **“…being a carer may be looking after someone … but it’s also about one person loving another and sharing a special bond. I’m not just a carer, I’m a daughter too!”**

together all day everyday was a strain for all of us.

Comprehensive school was a new environment – they were so understanding about me missing school or being tired in class and they’d listen to all my ‘problems’. That’s when I got introduced to Crossroads Young Carers. I was made aware that I was a carer myself and that there was a special youth club I could go to where there would be young people like me, with houses like mine and parents like mine. This was exciting – a place where no questions needed to be asked.

My mother’s illness causes her to deteriorate over time. It also attracts lots of other illnesses – she may contract things like pneumonia, and this is when my life changes completely. She’s admitted to hospital, and it’s usually for a few months at a time – she’s critically ill and struggles to sustain her health. At times like these, my world turns upside down, and the only thing that stays on top is her, she’s all I can think about and my time with her is precious.

School become a chore – my friends started to ignore me and spread rumours about mum. This was all too much pressure and teachers failed to notice my depression creeping on. I broke down. I became a victim in a very malicious case of bullying. At this point, I was in my last two years at comprehensive, and my favourite place to be was Crossroads! That's where my friends were, and where my trust lay.

> **“I was made aware that I was a carer myself and that there was a special youth club I could go to where there would be young people like me … a place where no questions needed to be asked”**

As for the future – this topic has always been locked away, as a family we don't tend to talk about it too much as we know what to expect and decide to take each day as a blessing. Mam will deteriorate as years go on, and eventually be bed-bound and require a lot more attention. However scary this is, I appreciate the time I have with her now, and make the most of it.

Throughout my life as a carer, there's one thing I strongly promote – being a carer may be looking after someone with an illness/disability, but it's also about one person loving another and sharing a special bond. I'm not just a carer, I'm a daughter too! And that is my story.

Emily

I became a full-time carer at the age of 13, although I had cared for my mum from a much younger age. When I was 13 my mum became very ill, which put a lot of emotional strain on the family and also had a huge impact on my social life. My mum was diagnosed with manic depression, also known as bipolar disorder– at any age this is difficult to understand, but more so when very young.

The immense strain of being a carer impacted on my education. I found it hard to get the right balance between home life and school. It seemed to get harder, never easier. I left school with an E in English GCSE, F in English Literature, E in Mathematics and a double G in Science. These grades were far from great, but I tried my hardest, faced with the barriers caused by being a carer. I always believed that if you try your hardest you will go far, even if it's not as you expected.

> **“I still wanted to go further with my education”**

As my mum unfortunately could not hold down a job, I had to make the most of my schooling and grades, so I followed my dream of wanting to work in a nursery, as at school I had a brilliant placement in a nursery. This placement helped me to be enthusiastic and to follow my dream. I started at the bottom with Level 1 childcare, then through my determination I finally reached Level 2 in 2008. Following this I decided to become a nursery nurse full time. I still had the desire to keep going, so I moved on to my Level 3 whilst working full-time, alongside improving my maths and English on a night course. This was an enormous challenge, but one that I was willing to take. I received a huge amount of support from teachers, learning support, family and friends. But my utmost goal was to make my mum proud. Finally in 2010 I was awarded my EDL Level 3 certificate in childcare and I gained my Level 2 in maths and English. With all the positive things that come from my hard work and determination, I still wanted to go further with my education, so I then went on to study for an Access to Social Care and Guidance course, which was to be a stepping stone for me to go to university to get a degree. This was one of the most challenging things I have ever done, as my mum was ill at the time and it caused a lot of pressure throughout the year.

I have now completed my first year at university – through my determination and pain, I have finally got there. This may have taken me many years but I'm there now. I have loved all my experiences – negative and positive. I empathise with young adult carers and the difficulties we face, but everyone has a dream. Always try to follow your dream, you may face barriers and difficulties along the way – it just proves you are willing to give it a try. Even if I don't get to my final goal of achieving an undergraduate degree in social care, I will still be immensely proud of myself.

Alongside university, I also volunteer with young carers, as they supported me throughout my childhood. It's nice for me to help young people that are in the same situation that I was in.

Always try your hardest, never give up and always be proud of yourself.

5. Conclusions

For most young people, the transition to adulthood is an exciting time. It is not always easy, and often filled with challenges, decisions and new responsibilities. However, along with these challenges also come opportunities, new experiences and relationships, and the freedom to define one's own future and establish an independent way of life. For young adult carers this is often not the case – the small selection of stories included in this publication illustrate that for young adult carers the transition to adulthood is often very different. As a result of caring responsibilities, many young adult carers do not make linear transitions, are not afforded the opportunities taken for granted by their peers, and therefore become increasingly isolated and disaffected.

There are young adult carers throughout the country who, like Laura, are forced to leave a university course because the pressure of caring and learning is just too much. Others, like Jon, find themselves lying to their loved ones, to protect them from the reality of the impact of being a young adult carer. Many, like Saffron, experience bullying and discrimination because being a carer makes them different.

Despite the difficulties they encounter, the young adult carers who have shared their stories in this book remain deeply committed to being carers and are proud of the help and love they provide. Many of them also show high levels of resilience and strive relentlessly, in the face of substantial adversity, to engage in learning, achieve their goals and create a better future for themselves and their families. Emily's learning journey is a good example of this, from grades E, F and G at GCSE, to the completion of her first year as an undergraduate at university, and with big aspirations for the future! Her determination to succeed, and the joy, progression and achievements that Emily has gained from learning, highlight the potential benefits of education for all young adult carers. However, like all young people, young adult carers can't do it alone; they need support.

Many young adult carers receive invaluable practical and emotional support from young adult carers' services, often provided by voluntary organisations and local authorities. However, as both Holly's and Jon's stories show, it can be hard to ask for and accept help, particularly from learning providers. We hope that the stories in this book will raise learning providers' awareness of the needs and experiences of young adult carers. Learning providers have a responsibility to support young adult carers to engage in learning and have the potential to make a significant difference to their lives.

NIACE has produced a range of resources to support learning providers in their work with young adult carers; these can be downloaded from our website: **www.niace.org.uk/current-work/young-adult-carers**

NIACE always welcomes feedback on its work. If you would like to offer comments about this publication please contact: **nicola.aylward@niace.org.uk**

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NIACE has a broad remit to promote lifelong learning opportunities for adults. NIACE works to develop increased participation in education and training, particularly for those who do not have easy access because of class, gender, age, race, language and culture, learning difficulties or disabilities, or insufficient financial resources.