

CARER'S STORY



Jordan McKenzie

I care for my younger sister Kayley who has Cerebral palsy. I live with my mum, and my two younger sisters, Kayley and Rachel.

I first heard of the Young Carers when my guidance teacher at school recognised that the issues I was dealing with could mean I was a Young Carer. She sent away for an information pack to let us see what help was out there. We read the pack, decided that we thought I was a Young Carer and we called to arrange a meeting with Mary Kearns, Social Worker, Young Carers Service.

Mary put in a referral for me and after this I was placed in the Hamilton group because at this stage we didn't have a Larkhall group. I went to Hamilton Universal Connections once a fortnight. We went on trips to Laser Quest, the cinema and ice-skating. We also spent evenings in the centre; we cooked, played games on the wii and made Christmas cards.

In 2007, Mary told me about the new South Lanarkshire Young Carers Forum they were setting up and she asked me if I wanted to be involved. I agreed but was still really quiet and didn't participate in most meetings, until it became time to elect office bearers. Mary asked me if I would stand for chair, I said I didn't think I could manage it and she convinced me I could. So I stood for chair and got voted in. This gave me the confidence boost I needed and I was a step closer to the person I am today.

The Forum involves representatives from all of the Young Carers groups in South Lanarkshire. We meet monthly and have a combination of business meetings and outings. We say what we think the young Carers Service needs to do for young people and we try to influence local and national government policies to try to raise awareness of the needs of Young Carers. We have participated in 2 Scottish Young Carers festivals where politicians come for question time. At this year's festival directors of social work such as Harry Stevenson came to be held to account by the young Carers who asked questions of them. We have also fundraised to organise a Christmas party for all of the junior Young Carers in South Lanarkshire and hope to have a similar event for the older groups in the coming year.

After a year of being at the Hamilton group, a group opened up in Larkhall. I moved to the Larkhall group because it was closer to home, so meant I spent less time getting there. My Larkhall group met once a week which gave me more time out of the house. This I feel made a big impact on me. It brought me out of my shell a bit and made me feel down less because I was getting out the house more, even although it was just an extra two hours a week.

At the Larkhall group we had lots of outings to the usual places, but we also had amazing opportunities, to do 6 weeks of driving lessons, 6 weeks skiing lessons and 6 weeks of golf lessons. Last summer we went on a residential trip to Centre Parcs. We had the privilege of doing fencing, we did a tree top adventure, had our nails painted and our hair done in the salon. This was a great experience that brought the group together.

I managed to sit my exams, something I never thought I would be able to. I got my 8 standard grades at credit level and 8 highers. I was then accepted to university to study Applied Psychology, which I started in September. My course is at Heriot Watt University, so I have now moved away from home to Edinburgh.

I have been accepted as part of a voluntary group to go to Tanzania in the summer for 5 weeks to teach first aid.

Looking back, I don't think I could have got to where I am now without the Young Carers Service. They brought me out of my shell and made me a more confident individual and prepared me to deal with anything life throws at me.