

Young Carers at Stormont

On 22 September 2016 a group of 11 young carers from Action for Children and Barnardos Young Carers Services attended a consultation with the British Irish Council's Social Inclusion Group at Stormont Castle, followed by a meeting with Department of Health staff working in family policy. David and Jasmine from Action for Children Young Carers Service share their experience of the day.



Why did you attend the British Irish Council (BIC)?

We attended the British Irish Council meeting so we could be a part of a once in a life time experience that will make a difference to the way people look at the young carers. We were very excited to be asked to attend and felt that it was a great opportunity to get our voices heard, as young carers can often be hidden or ignored by professionals.

What topics were covered?

We talked about our caring roles and the impact on different parts of our lives. For example it can be difficult to have a social life, friends who don't have a caring role can struggle to understand why we might have to cancel plans if the person we care for needs us. Friends we have made in young carers are better at understanding this. Although every young person's caring role can be different we found we have

lots in common. Young Carers projects provide us with the opportunity to meet other young carers who understand what it's like, making us feel less alone.

We were able to talk about what it was like to be a young carer living in Northern Ireland and discuss services available to us and the differences in services in other parts of the UK and Ireland. Something we found interesting and would like to have here is that in Wales young carers are provided with a Young Carers card which they are able to show in school to explain why they may be late or not have homework done. School is something that can be very difficult for us as sometimes teachers don't understand what it is like to be a young carer and how difficult it can be for us to get to school on time, do our homework or pay attention in school when we are worrying about the person we care for. We are hoping that the launch of the booklet about being a young carer in school will have a positive impact on how young carers are treated in school and the support available to them.

We also discussed what happens to us when we turn 18. This is something we worry about, particularly as we near our 18th birthdays. We all get a lot out of the Young Carers services we take part in but are aware that when we turn 18 we need to move on from the service. We know there are some adult carers services but worry that these might be too old for us at 18. We felt we were being listened to regarding this and that this is something that is affecting other young carers in the UK and Ireland. We talked about the impacts of a sibling we care for moving into adult services and how lack of services for adults has an impact on the young person caring for them.

What stood out the most?

We felt listened to, and that the participants were really interested in what we had to say. Sometimes we feel that professionals don't listen to us particularly about the person we care for.

Also the fact that other young people are in the same boat as us, across the UK and Ireland and face similar difficulties made us feel less alone.

What do you hope to happen as a result of the BIC meeting?

We hope that the young carers projects can grow and help other kids and young adults like ourselves. We have gained a lot of experience from it and we hope that other people can gain opportunities from young carers like we have. We also hope that schools can understand more and should take on board that sometimes young

carers can't help the times they can't do their homework or when they are late. We would also like the young carer cards to be considered as we think they will be useful and avoid us having to explain continuously in school that we are young carers and who we care for.

“The day was a remarkable experience and it opened my eyes to how much the young carers are looked at by the powerful people in the British Irish Council. I also got to meet some new people and it was all in all a really good day” - quote from a young carer.

For further information contact Avery Bowser, Action for Children at Avery.Bowser@actionforchildren.org.uk or see the CYPSP Regional Subgroup page for Young Carers <http://www.cypsp.org/regional-subgroups/young-carers/> .