

Being Me

kidscape 30
30th anniversary 2015

Isn't it time someone heard your story?



Carers Trust
—
Supporting
Young Carers
in your class

Jack's diary for the day

9 am I don't mind being late to school some days. Yesterday was Kayden's birthday and I couldn't go so they'll be talking about it in the cloakroom and if I'm late I'll miss that. Kayden did invite me but my mum was having a bad day and asked if I'd bring Fi (my seven year old sister Fiona) home after school before the party. To be honest once I'd arrived home and got her sorted with a snack and made Mum a cup of tea and changed my jeans (Mum said the ones I put on were dirty and it took me ages to find clean ones) I thought I'd probably missed too much – they might even have gone to the park to play football by now.



Mrs Adams asks me why I'm late. She asks me the same question so often she doesn't even wait for an answer and tells me to sit down and get on with my reading in her firm voice. I can see Poppy and Josh in front sniggering to each other as I get into my seat and search for my book in my desk.



9.05am I look at the clock and work out I have been up for three hours. Dad has to leave for work really early so woke me to help with Fi at 6. He wanted to make sure we were ready for school before he left at 7. Then after he'd gone Fi spilt her Coco Pops on her shirt and I had to find another and iron it and she made such a fuss about getting changed. I got her to watch TV for a bit while I got Mum her breakfast and sat with her to make sure she ate it. Then it was already 8.20 and Fi complained all the way to school, going along like a big ugly slow snail to the school gate and that's why I'm late.

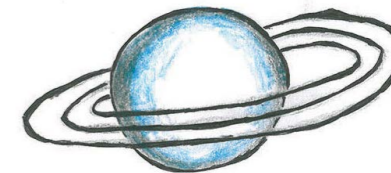


11am At break the boys are talking about the party. "Why didn't you come?" Josh asks in a voice you'd use to say "why are you stupid?"

11.30am Reading time but I can't focus on my book. I keep reading the same page twice. I think about Dad reading the paper out loud to Mum each evening. I don't like using Mum as an excuse for why I don't always go to things. It's hard to explain what's wrong with her. My friend Lauren's mum has cancer and she has to help get her a bowl when she feels sick, or help her get washed when she's feeling wobbly on her feet. I wonder if it's easier to explain cancer though I don't want Mum to have that. I love Mum, and I like helping her and Fi. In fact I like being me – but I just wish we could be a family like everyone else, at least in term time. And I wish Mum felt better. Mum has nervous problems and gets really sad and some days can't get out of bed. Once I did try and explain what was wrong with Mum and this boy in my class, Lee, said 'you mean she's sick in the head?' and everyone laughed and called me a 'mummy's boy' and I have never mentioned Mum since.



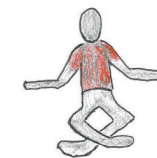
12 noon We're in science now talking about bones. I like this class. I made this great model of the planets last term. Dad helped me. Dad's really good at that sort of thing. He has to work all the way up in town so leaves at 7 to catch a train and doesn't get in until after 7 but at the weekend we do stuff together.



1pm At lunch time when I go out everyone is already playing some new card game. I say sorry to Kayden about missing his party and he says it's okay. He tells me he got the card game for his birthday but it only needs four people. I go and see if I can find anyone else to hang out with. I ask Mrs Crossly on reception if I can phone home but she says the phone is just for emergencies and I should ask Mrs Adams my teacher. I go back to the playground.



1.45pm Back in class, waiting for PE. I've forgotten my PE kit and Mrs Adams makes her loud tutting noise but says I can do PE in my uniform. I can see some of the boys smirking and hear one of them say 'what a loser'. I feel like a loser. I stick out like a sore thumb. That's something Lauren is always saying at Carers Club. We must stick out like sore thumbs and that's why we get picked on.



2.15pm I've been given the job of collecting the ball when it goes out of play. I wish the bell would go so I could go home. It's only when I go to Carers Club at the village hall on Friday nights that I realise I'm not the only one who feels like I do. There are girls and boys who have to look after their little brothers or sisters because they have disabilities, or their dads or mums when they become ill. Lauren only started coming in October because her mum only found out she had cancer recently. She says it has changed everything for her. We talk about things we hate like not having someone to help with homework or not always having uniform or PE kit ready or not being able to hang out with friends at the weekend or the house being messy and nurses coming in and it being embarrassing when people come round. But most of all we hate it that our mum or dad or brother or sister is ill or disabled and so not as happy as they should be. Lauren says we are just the same as everyone else except for the fact we are caring for someone. And Mrs Teddington who runs the club says what we do is amazing, and if the children in our classes ever had to care for someone in their family they would understand just how amazing we are. And just how amazing they could be, too.



By Jack

Molly's story for you.

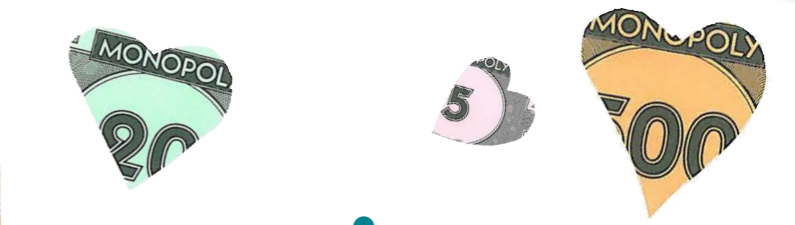
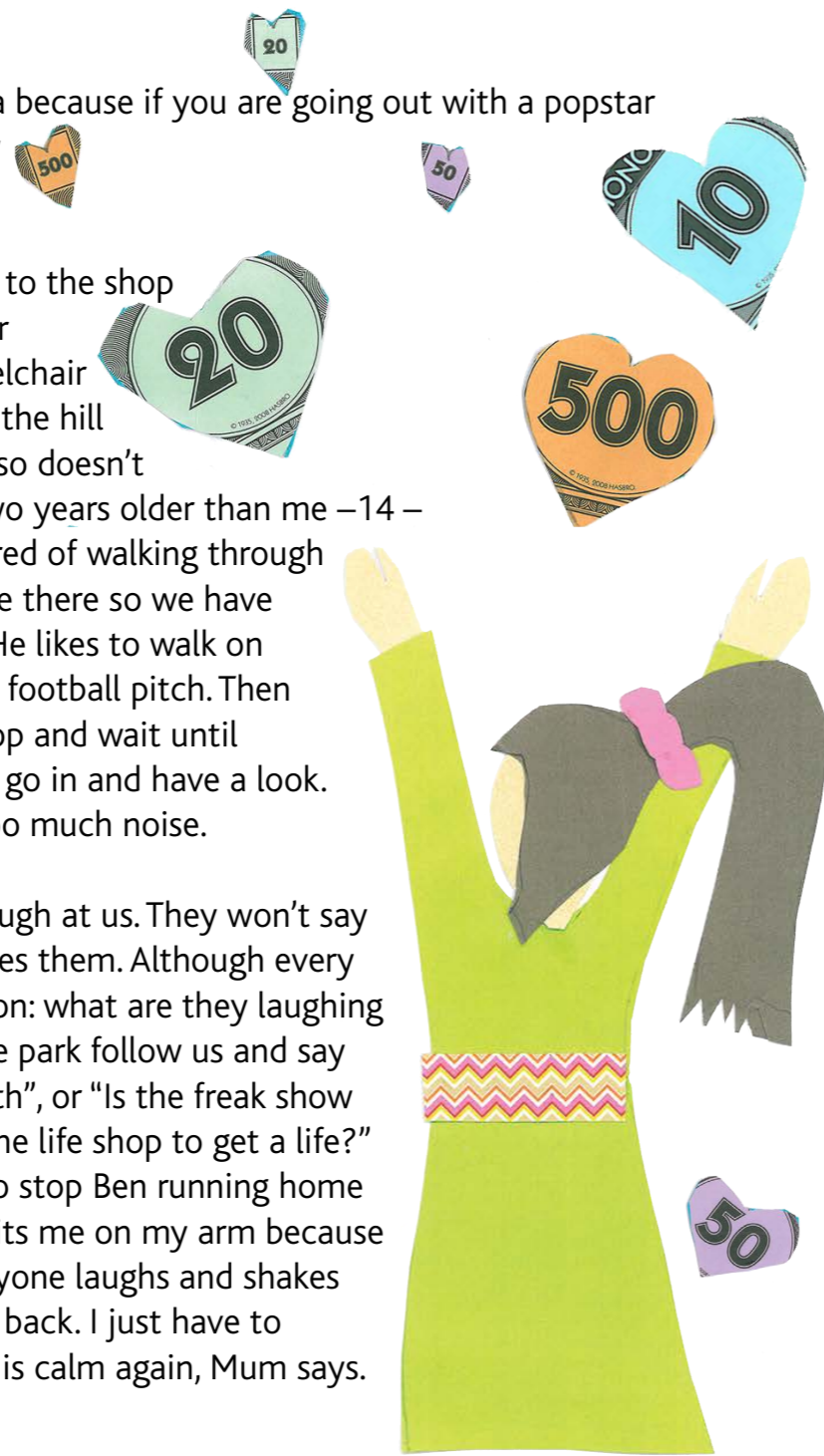
We were playing this game at home called Money No Object, where we each had to think up one thing we'd do if we won the Lottery or if someone else was going to pay the bill. My grandad liked mine best.

I was going to pay Harry Styles from One Direction a zillion pounds to come to the shop with me. The thing is he'd have to wear this bag over his head so no one would know it was him.

That might sound like a mad idea because if you are going out with a popstar then you want everyone to know it's him. Right?

But you see I take my brother up to the shop every day to get milk or whatever Mum needs. My mum's in a wheelchair so it's dead hard for her to go up the hill and Ben, my brother, has autism so doesn't like to go out on his own. He's two years older than me -14- and I'm 12 but he gets really scared of walking through the park if there are lots of people there so we have to walk right round the outside. He likes to walk on the white lines that go round the football pitch. Then we cut up a quiet path to the shop and wait until everyone has gone out so he can go in and have a look. He's scared of busy places and too much noise.

On a good day people will just laugh at us. They won't say anything and I don't think Ben sees them. Although every day I ask myself the same question: what are they laughing at? But sometimes the kids in the park follow us and say things like "Weirdo on the warpath", or "Is the freak show opening?", or "Are you going to the life shop to get a life?" Then I have to work really hard to stop Ben running home or getting cross. Sometimes he hits me on my arm because he's so cross with them and everyone laughs and shakes their head. Ben knows I won't hit back. I just have to stroke his hand and wait until he is calm again, Mum says.



Anyway. What has this got to do with Harry Styles? Well I reckon if he'd put a brown paper bag over his head and just wear the old jeans he seems to like, I could walk him up to the shop. And even (if he'd let me) hold his hand like I hold Ben's hand and hopefully the park would be full of people and they'd follow us and call him a weirdo and a freak and a loser and all those things they call Ben. Then, when we got to the shop, he'd take the bag off and ask the gangs what they get out of making Ben's life so horrid. And everyone would be really amazed

that I was at the shop with Harry Styles. And he'd tell them he has loads of friends like Ben and they should try to get to know Ben. And he'd tell them (I don't mind if this bit isn't true) that Ben is coming to his party and meeting all the band and that I am going too. Would that be cool or what? Maybe he could make them stop and then Ben and I could go out every day without worrying.

My grandad says it would be really cool (he uses the word smashing, not cool) if I took a different person every day with a bag over their head. Perhaps one of the mean girls' mums or maybe our teacher or the guy who owns the



sweet shop. And every day the kids who bully us would feel really stupid for being horrid to Ben because it wasn't Ben. Grandad reckons they don't know anything about Ben, so it really is like they're shouting at someone when they don't know who he or she actually is.

That's what I'd do if money was no object. Perhaps...maybe... I could get one of the cool and popular kids at school to do the bag thing for me. If just one of the cool kids stood up for Ben maybe they could change our lives just as well as Harry Styles could.



Molly x

Michael Sheen, actor and supporter of Carers Trust

"I first came across the work of Carers Trust a few years ago, and was astounded by the numbers of extraordinary young people taking on the demanding role of carer for their family, some with little or no support. It would be wonderful if schools could create an environment where disabilities and issues around caring are understood. It could not only reduce bullying but enrich the lives of all pupils in the school who might learn something about themselves by connecting to these extraordinary young people in a new way."



Information for teachers

There are around 700,000 young carers in the UK and most spend between 11 and 20 hours each week caring for their mum or dad, or a brother or sister. Often they're looking after someone who is sick, has a disability, a mental health condition or is dealing with an addiction. Most don't tell their teachers or even their friends, and their families are rarely asked if any of their children have caring responsibilities when they enrol at the school. These children and young people do an extraordinary job but often end up isolated and bullied as a result of their commitment to their family.

School can start to get difficult for a young carer because of limitations on their social life. Young carers can find it hard to host or attend play dates, might find other children are nervous around their family if they are ill or disabled, or find friends simply get fed up when they cancel arrangements because of what's going on at home. Sometimes problems start if children are often late for school, or perhaps behind with schooling. This can knock their confidence and make them vulnerable to friendship problems.

Carers Trust is a charity now working with schools across the UK and Isle of Man. The charity knows there are so many things teachers can do to help these young people. Perhaps you could find out (via a letter home or at enrolment) if a child has

any caring responsibilities and then be mindful that they may need to phone home at school or need extra time or help with homework. Let all staff know that pupils who are carers have a good reason to be late (and need reassurance on arrival), or may need to go home straight after school (perhaps some after-school activities could be moved to a lunchtime slot).

You could talk about the amazing job young carers do in PSHE or an assembly, without identifying any pupils by name.

Crucially, it helps if the school understands how young carers can be vulnerable to bullying behaviour. Children can feel both angry or nervous around others, on the outside of friendship groups, or be a champion for the underdog – all behaviour that can be seen as weak and make them susceptible to bullying. Sometimes young carers need extra support to build friendships (perhaps via peer mentoring) and help (perhaps from other parents) so they can attend activities outside school. For more support you can direct young carers to www.youngcarers.net



The life you don't see: by being aware of a young carer's responsibilities at home, teachers can make sure they get the proper support at school



If you would like to find out more about Carers Trust and how they can help your school support young carers visit www.carers.org or <http://professionals.carers.org>

Words: Jenny Hulme. Design: Price Watkins. Photos: Carers Trust, iStock. Identities have been changed in the interest of privacy. These stories don't relate to the young carers in the photographs. Illustrations: Eleni Hulme