

REAL LIFE

WE'RE YOUNG CARERS!



Sisters **Ella** (15) and **Mia** (13) share their story, and tell us about the support they've received from **Children in Need**.

MEET ELLA AND MIA



Tell us a bit about yourself!

Ella: I'm 15, I'm in year 11 at school and I go to RAF Air Cadets. I also love going on residential trips during the holidays! I want to join the RAF as an air medic if my allergies will allow, or work in hospital theatres.

Mia: I'm 13, I'm in year 9 and I enjoy rock climbing, cycling, swimming, dancing, football, hockey and many more sports. Being in the water is my happy place! I want to be someone who performs, whether that's acting, singing or dancing. I've always wanted to have my own YouTube channel or be an ambassador for young carers.

What's the story behind you being young carers?

Ella: I care for my mum and have done since I was four years old. My mum has Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (ME, also known as Chronic Fatigue Syndrome). I support my mum when she's having a bad day, help her get ready and even make her cups of tea and food sometimes. When my dad isn't very well, I take the lead sometimes making meals for the family.

Mia: I've been a young carer since I was probably about two or three years old. I've seen my mum's illness progressively get worse, and over the years I've taken on more responsibility than most other people my age. Not only do I care for my mum, but my sister (**Ella**) has severe food allergies which have impacted her life and everyone around her, including me.

What do your daily duties look like?

Ella: Helping Mum with her medications, helping with chores around the house like tidying, ironing, cleaning, dishwashing, and supporting Mum if she needs help to get to bed. I also help with my younger siblings, but mainly my younger brother **Ryan** who is eight.

Mia: My duties include making sure Mum has enough coffee and water throughout the day - lots of it. I also make sure she tops up her medicine bag and check their dates are correct. I help around the house by sorting out the washing, and when we go out, I push Mum in her wheelchair (while trying not to push her into shelves in the shops!). I normally have to help pay for things as Mum can't always reach the card machines.

How does it make you feel being a young carer?

Ella: I feel proud as it's something different that not a lot of people know about. Sometimes I feel very tired and exhausted, and I just need to switch off without having to worry about anyone else.

Mia: It's definitely had its ups and downs but I have a lot of life skills that other people my age may not have. At the end of the day, I know I'm doing this for a reason which is to help Mum. Sometimes I do feel frustrated and upset that my mum is poorly, and I wonder why she was chosen to be unwell.

How has being a young carer affected your life?

Ella: I can't go out and do what I want, when I want, as I have to stay home and help. I struggle to keep on top of my school work as I have dyslexia and sometimes need support, which Mum and Dad can't always help with if Mum is unwell. Sometimes I can't meet up with friends if Mum isn't having a great day, and it's difficult to have friends over if Mum isn't well.

Mia: Mum and Dad have always tried to make sure we have as normal an upbringing as any other child growing up with the same chances. I don't think being a young carer has made it difficult to make friends, but it takes a lot to trust someone enough to tell them about my mum's situation, and about being a young carer.



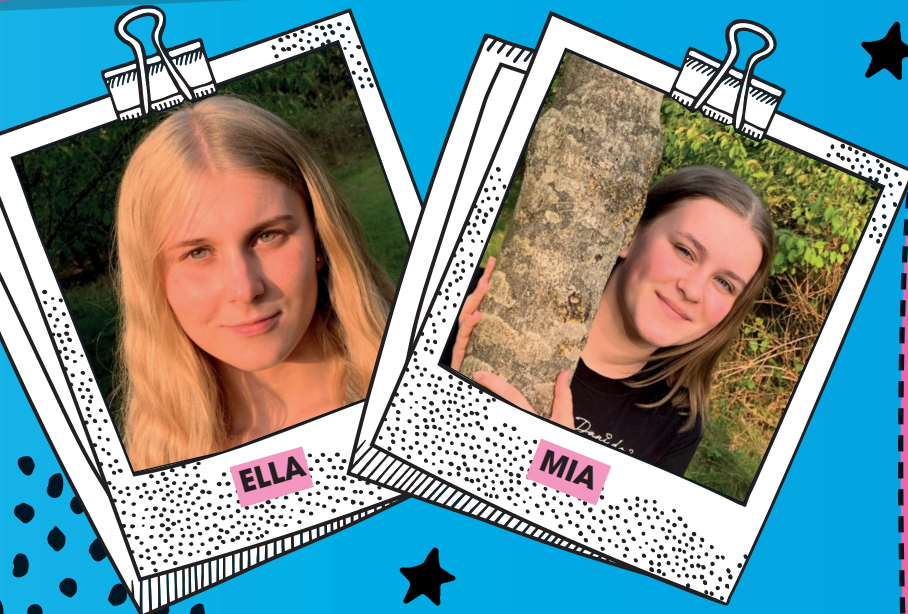
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#LETSTALK...

Young Carers!

Ella, Mia and their family are supported by the organisation **Connects & Co.** which is funded by **Children In Need.**



How did **Connects & Co.** get involved and how have they helped?

Ella: They've helped by giving me a space to be able to relax. I have made lots of friends through them, and it's really nice to speak to people who are going through the same thing. The group is more than just a social group, they're like family.

Mia: **Connects & Co.** are the only group of people who've been there for me right from the start. It's nice that I don't need to hide how I'm feeling or who I am with them. I can be myself when I'm at the group and if I'm having a rough day, it's OK and I don't need to explain or pretend.

As a young carer, what would you most like people to know?

Ella: Being a young carer is a really hard thing to do, however I've been doing it from a young age, it's all I can remember doing - it's normal to me. It can be very emotional at times as you have to deal with someone that can be struggling with things that people don't always see or understand. It gives you an understanding of other people with disabilities and the barriers they have to overcome. On some of the plus points, you get to meet new people, get to go to the **Connects & Co.** group, and do different activities.

Mia: It's not as easy as people think, it's a lot more than just caring for someone. It's not just physical care but emotional support too. Mum found it really hard to lose her independence when she became unwell. On the other hand, it has its perks and benefits, such as having the experiences of going out with **Connects & Co.** and doing activities like camping, day trips to theme parks, boat rides and canoeing.



BBC Children in Need is currently funding

over **160** projects working with young carers to the value of **£7.9 million.** Found out how you can get involved in fundraising, donate or read more stories at

www.bbcchildreninneed.co.uk