

## real life

# 'I feel as if I'm robbing my girl of her childhood'

## Helping hand

THE Cambridgeshire Community Foundation (CCF) is an independent charity. Established in 2004, it provides funding for community-based projects throughout the county – via donations from individuals, businesses, public-sector organisations and other charitable trusts. International law firm Eversheds is among the businesses which support CCF: thanks to the funding the firm provides, the Centre 33 Young Carers Project has been able to give three children one-to-one support. "CCF is, in effect, the middleman," explains Eversheds' Dilys Lloyd. "It is the most efficient and effective way to get money through to local and smaller organisations – and to make sure the money goes to those with a genuine need."

■ For more information call (01223) 421588 or visit [www.cambscf.org.uk](http://www.cambscf.org.uk).

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But Chloe, a pupil at Histon Juniors, insists she's always been more than happy to help.

"I like to help her," she explains, slipping a pair of shoes onto her mum's feet. "But I do get scared sometimes: when she's in pain, she cries and then I get really scared. And some kids do pick on me because of it."

"This boy started laughing at me the other day and I said: 'It's not something to laugh about: if you had to look after your mum you'd know how it feels'."

While many of Chloe's friends find it hard to understand, she says there is one place where she feels totally accepted: Cambridge Young Carers. Run by the charity Centre 33, the project supports more than 130 young carers in the city and south of the county. It is, says Chloe, "brilliant – because you don't have to explain what it's like, everyone just knows."

"Going to Young Carers has been brilliant for her," says Lisa. "She's made new friends and she doesn't seem to worry so much: if something happens at home she's got someone to talk to about it."

As well as attending fortnightly meetings, Chloe, who lives with her mum in Cottenham, has been given one-to-one support by a trained youth worker. "He helped me with my homework and one day took me to the zoo," she explains. "That was really nice."

Chloe, who herself has ADHD (Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder), admits she sometimes struggles to concentrate on her school work. But, citing maths as her favourite subject, she says studying with her youth worker made a big difference.

"It's lovely for Chloe because, thanks to Young Carers, she can go to places like the zoo – places that I can't take her," adds Lisa,



**Foot soldier:** Chloe helps her mother, who is in constant pain, in all sorts of ways. Inset, with her pet cat, who may not be quite so keen on Take That as Chloe is. Pictures: Warren Gunn 518690/686.

32. "My illness restricts me from doing so much."

Lisa's ill-health dates back to her childhood in Northern Ireland. "I started having what the doctors said were growing pains when I was about Chloe's age," she says. "When I got older, and still had the pains, they said it was depression. It wasn't until we moved to England, six years ago, that I was actually diagnosed with fibromyalgia."

Characterised by chronic, widespread pain, the condition causes a crippling ache in all Lisa's joints – from neck to feet. Doctors have since diagnosed her with both the bone density disease osteoporosis and sciatica, which plagues her with sharp nerve pains. On constant medication, Lisa

says she's "a walking pharmacy".

Three years ago, Lisa collapsed and had to be rushed into Addenbrooke's: after two weeks, tests showed she was also suffering from the bowel condition Crohn's Disease. "I was vomiting and had diarrhoea," she remembers. "It was horrible and I still have problems with my stomach."

In pain 24 hours a day, she struggles to sleep. "I get about two hours a night. The rest of the time I'm up knitting." Lisa sells her knitwear online and in a local shop.

"That means I have to try and get sleep whenever I can, often during the day, just to get me through. Once I woke up and didn't know where Chloe was – I really freaked out! She'd gone out to play while I was sleeping. Nowadays she knows not to do that; she's had to grow up quickly."

Lisa moved to England after a violent relationship had taken its toll on both her and Chloe, who was then a toddler. "That was a hard struggle in itself," she admits. "I wanted Chloe to have a stable life."

Chloe helps her mum bathe and dress and around the house. There are, of course, some tough times. But – encouraging her pet cat to dance along with her beloved Take That – it's clear Chloe has a great sense of fun.

"When she's out at school or Young Carers the house is very quiet," says Lisa. "I don't know what I'd do without her, to be honest: I think she's just fantastic."

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## Support for our young carers

THE Centre 33 Young Carers Project – which supports Chloe – currently works with 134 young carers across South Cambridgeshire and Cambridge city. Respite and support is provided through fortnightly groups, one-to-

one work, residentials and regular trips (with the young people choosing activities themselves, through elected reps). The Young Carers Project is one of many run by Centre 33. A registered charity, it provides a wide range of services for

young people aged 8 to 25. Funded by, among others, Cambridgeshire Community Foundation, Centre 33 was set up in 1981.

For more information call the Young Carers Project on (01223) 307488 or visit [www.centre33.org.uk](http://www.centre33.org.uk).

## if i ruled the world



### Julia Seiber Boyd, 59, from Cambridge, Chair of Cambridge Szeged Society

#### If I ruled the world, I would ban:

■ Any country from failing to operate a full democratic voting procedure. The vote should be available for both sexes equally from the age of 18.

■ Prime Ministers from being able to call or abort a General Election. Instead, parliament would have fixed terms. There are still so many autocratic rulers doing so much damage and this would regulate things a bit.

■ Torture and "special renditions". They would be outlawed. Technically they are outlawed already, but nobody enforces the Geneva (or other safeguard) conventions.

■ Litter. Every time I go away and come back to this country it really hits me: plastic debris, fag ends, paper dropped everywhere... It looks disgusting.

■ Tuition fees at university. If Scotland can manage, so can the rest of the UK.

#### I would make mandatory:

■ A proper education system. This would include a basic grasp of Personal, Social and Health Education and Citizenship. It would also cover the purpose and elements of a legal system – because most people have a worrying lack of understanding.

■ A school curriculum which includes some grasp of all the world's major religions (and atheism). Children would also be encouraged in tolerance towards all of them. Ignorance is not bliss.

■ Children would have to speak at least two languages to a reasonable standard by the age of 14. This means they would be better equipped to travel and understand other cultures – and be more tolerant of others.

■ Growing your own vegetables! They taste better.

■ Enjoying at least one hour per day when not "having to do" work or housework. Sit quietly and dream or look at something nice. It will do no harm.

#### My motto would be:

■ Let everyone be more tolerant. Life crises are more easily overcome with collaboration than conflict – and learning about our neighbours is not a bad way to start.

■ Cambridge was twinned with the Hungarian city of Szeged in 1987. To celebrate the 21st anniversary of the twinning, members of Cambridge Szeged Society are hosting a week-long festival starting today. Events will include music concerts, film screenings and talks on science and culture. Visit the website [www.cambridge-szeged-society.org.uk](http://www.cambridge-szeged-society.org.uk).