

Case study - Sandwich carer

In the past few years we have seen the development of a new social phenomenon – the 'sandwich generation'. The term 'sandwich generation' is often used to refer to those looking after young children at the same time as caring for older parents.

Mrs Jones cares for her mother in law who has cancer, her eldest child who suffers from ADHD, and her husband who is in chronic pain due to back problems. Her youngest child Sam, is now experiencing emotional difficulties. The parents suspect that having a caring role at a young age is a contributory factor. Sam has been having suicidal thoughts which have led to some disturbing behaviour.

Sam has been asking for some time away from home, and the family feel they would benefit from visiting relatives in England; to facilitate this I sent a grant application to the Family Fund.

The family has encountered financial worries as the PIP (Personal Independence Payment) is under review; if they lose the Care element of PIP this will result in the loss of their Blue Badge and mobility car. Mr Jones is unable to walk far so he would be unable to leave home. I arranged for Avalon Advice to get in touch with the family to assist with the PIP review issues.

Mrs Jones is also having housing issues; I was shown pictures of the front bedroom wall which was black with mould. Mrs Jones wants to swap bedrooms with Sam because it is the quietest room in the house, and she currently has difficulty sleeping because noise is waking her up during the night. However, Sam suffers from asthma, and the family have been told by an Enviro-vent inspector that “under no circumstances” should Sam move into the front bedroom. No action has been taken since the inspection, and Mr Jones now has nodules on his lungs, possibly due to inhaling mould spores. To tackle the mould issue, I requested a technical survey of the property and a health and safety inspection. The housing association referred the case to the maintenance officer and their Health & Safety Officer.

Having services in place for her husband's parents would reduce the strain on Mrs Jones, thus allowing her to focus more on her family. Therefore I provided details of the assisted bin collection service and local lunch groups for people aged 50+.

Sam's school attendance is poor; I referred Sam to Action for Children's Gwynedd Young Carers Project. They provide educational support and liaise with schools on behalf of the family. Mrs Jones told me that Sam has become quite a recluse. The young carers project holds monthly groups which will give Sam the opportunity to mix with other young carers, who have similar difficulties at home. The groups allow young carers to make new friends, create memories, and take part in new experiences.