

## Never Give Up on Your Dreams

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Have you ever heard of the term “young carer”? A young carer is a person under 18 who looks after a relative with a disability, illness, mental health condition, or alcohol problem. I first heard the term “young carer” on the TV news, where they said that it’s becoming a serious issue in Japan. Having to take care of their families is causing young carers to lose various opportunities, often forcing them to give up on higher education or employment.

According to a survey in 2021, one out of every 17 middle school students, and one out of every 24 high school students nationwide are providing care for a family member. Housework was the most common type of care, followed by manual labor, chaperoning when going out, and emotional support.

Here is my story about how I became a young carer. I have a sister who is one year younger than me. She first saw a psychiatrist two years ago. She was hospitalized for about a month to examine her mental health, but it was inconclusive. After she was discharged from the hospital, her condition worsened, and she began cutting her wrist. It broke my mother’s heart, and, as a result, she couldn’t bear to live with my sister anymore.

Over a year later, my sister was finally diagnosed with bipolar disorder and ADHD tendencies. At the same time, we decided that my mother would live separately from us. This decision was for all of us, and, seemingly, was a step in the right direction. However, it also meant that I had to take on the responsibilities that my mother used to have at home. Going to school and doing housework every day is never easy. I often feel that I have no energy left to study. Sometimes, I wonder why I must act like a mother. On the other hand, I hope all my family members live happily. I have no choice but to balance housework and schoolwork.

Through my research, I learned that many young carers are struggling with their situation. For example, 60 percent of past or present young careers indicated that there were things they wanted to do but could not because of their family. Furthermore, over 50 percent reported that being a young career had affected or caused them to be worried about their college education or employment.

Knowing the results of the survey, I think that it may seem impossible to take care of their family while also doing activities they enjoy. They might even feel it’s necessary to sacrifice their dreams and aspirations. However, I strongly believe that one should not give up on life goals, as life should not only be about family.

In my case, I didn’t give up on my life, or even my hobbies. I like to study English, so I started taking private English lessons after school. I was eager to join this competition, so I did. I’m even doing as well on my exams as I used to.

I would like to share two simple things to make that possible for me. First, using my time more effectively. For example, I start preparing for exams much earlier than before, as I can no longer study in a short period of time while also doing daily

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housework. Actually, studying for a short time every day could help to balance housework and study and possibly even improve my grades. Second, expressing my feelings. I don't hesitate to talk about my family. On the other hand, the survey shows that about 80 percent of young careers do not talk to the people around them about their family, or the concerns they have. When I consulted a social worker and my teachers, I felt relieved and more optimistic from the simple fact that they empathized with my feelings. Moreover, the previously mentioned idea of studying a little bit every day was suggested by my friend after talking to them about how I was finding it difficult to fit everything in. Therefore, I want you to know that others may be able to improve your situation if you just gather the courage to talk about it.

Even if you are a young carer, you can still do whatever it is that you want. I am living proof, and if I can do it, I know you can too. Regardless of your circumstances, never give up. Thank you for listening.