WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE A YOUNG MUM?

Over the past year we have been talking to mums aged under 25 to find out what is important to them, and what they think about work, children and employment support. We found that high numbers of young women struggle with money and mental health issues and feel isolated and lonely. Laura, 26, talked to us about her experience of being a young mum.

“Being a mum is one of the most amazing things. You have a child that loves you, needs you and is always there for you. Your time is filled up in a whirlwind of nappies, feeding, nap times and juggling more jobs than you could even imagine. But being a mum can also be one of the loneliest times too.

As a young mum I knew I was going to face judgement, I had this sinking feeling in my stomach each time I walked into a mother and baby group. The sudden looks and stares when you knew that everyone was trying to calculate in their head how young you actually were. The self-awareness that all the mums had formed cliques whilst you were sat in the middle with your baby on your own.

Despite having my child with me all the time, I had a real awareness of being lonely. Motherhood had alienated me from my past. Whilst all my friends were off forging a future for themselves, I was under a mountain of baby clothes, trying to navigate my newly formed future. That’s not to say they didn’t reach out, but when your schedule is completely different it’s hard to keep those bonds tied and, slowly, cracks become canyons and they fade into the background.

“It’s not until you become a parent that you realise how much your life is going to change. Trying to find mum-friends when your self confidence is at rock bottom is scary and daunting.”

It took me a long time to find my place in the world of motherhood. To find mum-friends who would understand being a young parent. The friends I have now are inspirational, they are always there with a shoulder to cry or to vent to. A mix of school mums, nursery mums and Young Women’s Trust mums that form this patchwork quilt of support and friendship. They have helped fill the void of loneliness, helped me focus and patch myself back together.

No one ever tells you that when you have a child, you will feel an overwhelming sense of love that you cannot describe, but also an overwhelming sense of loneliness when you realise that your life won’t be the same again. That’s not to say it’s a bad thing. Having my child actually helped me realise that the future I originally wanted wasn’t for me and I’m now working towards making myself and my child proud. Despite the loneliness, being a mother is the greatest achievement I will ever have.”

Read more about our report over the page
Balancing parenthood and paid work is a challenge for parents of any age. Childcare is expensive – even if the UK government does offer some hours for free – and is often considered a barrier to parents working. There are fewer part-time jobs available than full-time, and they are often lower paid. The gender pay gap begins to widen at the age when women commonly become mothers, and is partly driven by mothers missing out on opportunities for experience, progression and pay.

We conducted research with mothers aged under 25 to find out what it is like to be a young mum today and what changes need to be made in the way young women are treated by society.

We found that mothers aged under 25 are clearly committed to their children’s upbringing but all too frequently encounter stigma, feel isolated, and struggle for money.

“IT IS IN EVERYONE’S INTEREST TO HELP YOUNG MOTHERS WHO WANT TO WORK. AS OUR FINDINGS SHOW, YOUNG MOTHERS HAVE A HUGE AMOUNT TO CONTRIBUTE TO THEIR WORKPLACES AND MANY WANT TO BE FINANCIALLY INDEPENDENT AND SUPPORT THEIR FAMILIES. TACKLING DISCRIMINATION WOULD BENEFIT MUMS, BUSINESSES AND THE ECONOMY AS A WHOLE.”

Dr Carole Easton OBE

WHAT WE FOUND:

OVER A QUARTER OF YOUNG MOTHERS (26%) LEFT THE HOUSE ONCE A WEEK OR LESS

MORE THAN A QUARTER OF YOUNG MUMS HAVE USED A FOOD BANK DUE TO FINANCIAL STRUGGLES

39% HAD BEEN ILLEGALLY QUESTIONED IN AN INTERVIEW ABOUT HOW BEING A MOTHER AFFECTS THEIR ABILITY TO WORK

AMONGST THE MEASURES WE WANT TO SEE ARE:

- Easier access to childcare.
- The National Living Wage extended so it applies to those under the age of 25 – currently it only applies to those over 25.
- A greater focus on supporting young adults – especially young women – with confidence, emotional wellbeing and employability.

READ OUR FULL REPORT ON OUR WEBSITE AND FIND OUT MORE ABOUT WHAT WE ARE DOING TO HELP SUPPORT YOUNG MUMS

www.youngwomenstrust.org/young-mums
Young women are more likely to face a lifetime of poverty. Our Chief Executive Carole Easton talks to us about why poverty disproportionately affects young women and why we work to raise awareness of young women in crisis and support them to build their confidence and find work.

Period poverty
I was distressed, but not surprised, last week to read about girls at school who cannot afford sanitary protection.

Food poverty
I was appalled, but again not surprised, to read the results of our research which showed that over ¼ of young mothers (aged 18-24) have used a food bank and half have gone without food in order to feed their children. This is not just a few mothers and children going without. It is true that fewer women under 24 are having babies but last year alone over 130,000 young women in this age group had a baby. A rough estimate would suggest that more than 100,000 young women around the UK are struggling to feed their children, let alone themselves.

Fuel poverty
Over 4 million people in the UK are considered unable to heat their homes and sit shivering, compromising their health, rather than turn on their heating.

I imagine you will know immediately to what I am referring when I talk about "transport poverty" and most young people I speak to certainly know what "housing poverty" is.

I wonder how many more types of poverty we will need to invent before we can accept that poverty is poverty. And no matter what you call it, it carries stigma and shame which makes it even more likely that those who are struggling the most will be silent, reluctant to draw attention to themselves or their children.

Giving poverty a variety of names does not make the reality any different, it does not make it any easier to cope with the humiliation of using a food bank in order to eat or begging teachers for supplies of sanitary products.

We are talking about the basic necessities of life – food, shelter, warmth, personal hygiene. In a developed country how can we justify that people are having to choose between themselves and their children, between food and shelter, between eating and personal dignity. I for one am ashamed, ashamed that so many individuals are driven to such desperate measures.

In the 21st century surely we can do more to ensure that all our citizens have life’s basic necessities. Let’s also face up to the reality that those who are going without food, are those most likely to be going without fuel and the other basics as well.

Let’s stop talking about the type of poverty and look at what we can do about low pay, insecure employment and the cost of fuel, housing and transport as a way of making sure everyone can, at bare minimum, lead dignified lives.

Carole Easton,
Chief Executive
RUN THE ROYAL PARKS HALF MARATHON FOR US THIS OCTOBER

The Royal Parks Foundation Half Marathon is one of the most scenic city runs in the world. The beautiful 13.1-mile autumnal route takes you through four of London’s magnificent Royal Parks and past some of the capital’s most iconic landmarks.

As a member of our team you will have the chance to be an ambassador for the work that we do and make a difference to the one million young women who are at risk of spending a lifetime in poverty.

Registration is only £5 and the fundraising target is £350. We will provide you with:

- a guaranteed running place for this event
- a fundraising pack
- sponsorship forms
- a Young Women’s Trust running vest
- dedicated fundraising support and advice

Apply on our website www.youngwomenstrust.org/royalparkshelf, email rebecca.richards@youngwomenstrust.org or call us on 020 7600 7451 for more information.

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Card number

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Security code

Switch issue number

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Date:

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