

It's time we cared for our carers

Chesterfield MP Toby Perkins has called a summit to discuss how everyone involved could do more to support young carers



I AM always happy to support community events, but none more so than when unsung heroes take centre stage and we recognise and celebrate the contribution they make to our lives.

I write this during National Carers Week - my chance to help to raise the profile of the thousands of people within our community who look after loved ones in difficult circumstances. Caring is about total commitment but it can be a long, challenging and lonely battle to give someone you care about a decent quality of life.

At the Carers Centre on West Bars, Chesterfield, I heard about the initiatives, old and new, that aim to raise the profile of our 'hidden carers' and to ensure they get the help and support they need to carry out such vital work. The 'Carers Pledge' and a new website to signpost and support were both launched today, and I heard about the ongoing success of the Carers Centre and their dedicated staff and volunteers in reaching out to anyone in a caring role.

Three years ago, I came here to attend the launch of the 'Transition' initiative aimed at raising awareness at GP surgeries. GPs treat the patient in front of them, but may not link the needs of the carer and all too often one patient becomes two. The transition project has been vital in raising awareness and has been instrumental in the setting up of carers groups at surgeries and sharing best practice.

I also met representatives from the Young Carers group. The dark tunnel of adolescence can be testing for everyone, but for young carers, this may include getting up at 6am to get mum ready for the day before heading off to school to take an exam.

It is hard to imagine how you can concentrate on algebraic formula if you are worried that your parent may be unable to reach their medicines or make themselves a drink as the temperatures soar. Often schools don't know they have young carers in their student base or consider what alterations they should make.

That was why I called a summit to discuss how everyone involved could do more to support young carers with representatives from education, social services, voluntary and health sectors held to account for the steps they have taken or will take in the future.

I signed the 'Carers Pledge' a new initiative to ask people, wherever they are and whatever they do, to think about the additional strain caring may add to someone's life and to think if there is a different way to go about their work which could facilitate access for carers.

Carers really are the unsung heroes of our community, and have my heartfelt admiration

and deepest thanks for all they do for their loved ones. Now let's play our part and see if we can't together raise awareness of their needs during National Carers Week.



Toby with members, staff and carers, Derbyshire Carers



Signing the pledge (left) with Helen Weston and shown learning about young carers



Toby launching DCA new website with Joanne Goodison