



How a carers centre changed my life forever

Support was a turning point

BY BAMIDELE BAMGBOPA

AS a first-time mum in Nigeria, the country where I was born and raised, I was filled with joy when my son was born. This wasn't just about the joy a new mum has but it was also a reflection of my victory over the hurdles and health "scares" I encountered during the pregnancy.

However, as months turned into years, my son didn't hit the developmental milestones as expected. The joy turned into worry and at times, momentary sadness. The health checks and hospital visits soon began.

My husband and I couldn't afford the expensive healthcare, so going to government hospitals was all we could do. It was a harrowing experience because the visits didn't lead to any tangible solution. It felt like pouring water into an ocean.

Based on the things we saw our son do, we speculated he might be autistic. He covered his ears with his hands, was a picky eater as a toddler and didn't speak on time so we thought he was tongue-tied. Was there any right thing a pregnant woman should have done that I didn't do? This question and more kept ringing in my head.

My son gradually began to walk, I had another child, my husband fell ill and eventually died. How else can one's world come crashing down right before their eyes?

I became a widowed single mum of two children who wouldn't stay down but chose to pick up the pieces of her life.

I however, relocated to Scotland some years ago with my children. This was the beginning of a new phase of our lives. Getting accommodation, school placement for the children, navigating the transportation system, adjusting to the weather and into the society were all daunting. With determination and resilience, we forged ahead.

As expected, the school nurse arranged various hospital appointments. My son and I started attending these appointments like our lives depended on them. It was one hospital after another.

I was worried about how stress-



Bamidele Bamgbopa reached out – and it made all the difference

ful the visits were for my son but somehow, he enjoyed the bus rides to these places. The trips soon began to feel like going for excursion. The school and church have been very supportive. They are our Scottish family and support system.

Then came a turning point.

In one of the "Team around Child" meetings I frequently attended at my son's school, I was told that I needed to visit the Carers Centre for more information. I reached out to the centre in my council.

This decision changed everything.

I was made to know that apart from being a mum, I'm also my son's carer.

A carer? I needed to know more. I became more involved and that was how I became a mum and a carer. I have met other carers – old and young – who go above and beyond for their "cared-for" persons.

Over time, I wanted other ladies who are "in my shoes" to be aware of this – knowing their rights as carers, the services available for them and organisations that advocate for them.

However, not everyone was receptive. I recall a particular instance where one lady said to me: "Isn't it my 'natural' responsibility to care for my family member? Why do I need the title of a 'carer' to do this?"

I felt like I was trying to force a bitter pill down her throat so I respected her opinion and gave her some space.

Here is my observation. There are people who do not want to discuss issues about their cared-for persons publicly. They are either ashamed, not comfortable or fear being judged.

Some others are afraid of being discriminated against in the society. There are those who even think it's a taboo to see themselves as carers. They care for their loved ones without expecting any help from the government.

There's another group who would like to be called carers but are afraid that there are government benefits that come along with it and they do not want to be on the wrong side of the law as they do not have access to benefits because they are "unsettled" immigrants.

I also can't access benefits yet but despite this, the support I have received as a carer cannot be quantified. Taking care of a special needs child is not an easy task however, beyond monetary benefits, I'm better off as a carer and mum.

The centre has helped me understand my rights, access services available and signposted me to organisations that can advocate for me.

The Scottish Government cannot afford to rest on its oars concerning putting more resources in place for carers and their loved ones. More funds should be made available for the welfare of carers. Also, healthcare professionals and service providers should be better equipped to engage with carers with empathy and understanding. Caring should not be invisible – it should be acknowledged, supported, and respected.

In conclusion, across all sectors, more policies should recognise and value the role of carers.

This story was written as part of the Pass the Mic programme