



Keith Winterbottom, with his Mom, Elaine

TOUGH LOVE

ELAINE Winterbottom has been caring for her son Keith throughout the 28 years of his life. Keith has severe learning difficulties, and is now going blind. He needs a wheelchair because of his deteriorating eyesight.

Elaine is one of Birmingham's full time carers, and she, like many others, relies on the Carers Association for support. "We don't have any training and it is a very demanding job," says Elaine.

She was speaking at a coffee morning organised by Sainsbury's in Castle Vale. Carers UK and The Carers Association were promoting their work to shoppers.

"There are around 20,000 carers in Birmingham now," said Maureen Parker, chair of Birmingham Carers Association. Maureen has been a volunteer with the Carers for 25 years. "Caring is very demanding," she says. "Imagine having to look

after someone throughout the day and night, doing all their personal care and hygiene. It would be hard work for a young person. But many carers are elderly people looking after their husband or wife. We think that there are many people who work as carers in Castle Vale who could do with a bit of extra help, and we're hoping that they will get in touch with us."

"Being a carer is very isolating," says Elaine Winterbottom who is one of the volunteers in Carers UK. "My friends have all had children, but by this age they have left home and that gives the parents the opportunity to do something else, to restart a career. But my care for Keith is 24/7, and there is no way I could ever get a job. We get a carer's allowance of £55.50 per week. It's not a lot, is it? Nobody else would go to work for that."

"Things can get on top of you in such a demanding job," says Elaine, "but the Carers Association and Carers UK help us to get out and about."

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Caring for carers:

Sheila Hyland (centre) and her helpers provided the refreshments for the Carers Event in Sainsbury's cafe