



## **Policy Platform: Young Carers**

### **Youth Coalition of the ACT**

Young carers are those young people aged 12 – 25 who provide care to a family member or friend including those with an illness, disability, mental health issue, alcohol or other drug issue, or who is frail aged. It is estimated that there are approximately 380,000 young carers in Australia, with 170,600 of these under the age of 18.<sup>1</sup> The average age of young carers who are under the age of 18 is 12 – 13 years. Approximately 33% of young carers care for a person with a mental illness, 25% care for a person with a physical disability, 15% care for a person who is chronically or terminally ill, and 11% care for a person with an intellectual disability.<sup>2</sup> In 2002, it was estimated that around 10% of the population of young people in the ACT were young carers.<sup>3</sup> However, more recent research suggests that this figure is underestimated, as young people caring for family members affected by alcohol and other drug (AOD) use are often excluded from the definition of young carers.<sup>4</sup>

A 2005 research project conducted by the Youth Coalition found that young carers cared for an average of 6 hours per day, over a six-year duration. While young carers reported positive impacts, including (but not limited to) feelings of pride and self worth, a sense of accomplishment, greater resilience and stronger family relationships; they also experienced negative impacts, such as fatigue, injury, stress, anxiety and feelings of hopelessness, family conflict, financial insecurity, limited social and recreational opportunities and poor outcomes in education.<sup>5</sup> Children and young people living with a parent with mental health issues may be at increased risk of social, psychological and physical health problems, including the risk of developing mental health issues themselves.<sup>6</sup> In the 2012 *Rate Canberra* survey conducted by the Youth Coalition, young carers frequently identified 'caring for a family member or friend' as an issue that was affecting their lives and worrying them (5% of survey respondents identified themselves as young carers).<sup>7</sup>

The Youth Coalition recognises the hidden nature of caring for a relative as a young person. Because young people do not have access to the networks that independent adults have; access to information, knowing what to do, fear and stigma are all elements that can be out of proportion for young people. This puts young carers in situations in which they are often highly marginalised from mainstream processes and support networks.

Research indicates that young carers want:

- Raised community awareness of their existence;
- A reduction in stigma related to their family circumstances;
- Recognition and inclusion by current service providers;
- Access to age appropriate information resources about their parents' illness/issue and the supports that are available to them;
- Access to age and developmentally appropriate counselling;
- Peer support;

- Adult mentoring or befriending programs;
- Opportunities to participate socially with the wider community;
- A break away from their family situation;
- Education supports and assistance; and,
- Direct provision of practical and financial support.<sup>8</sup>

In the Youth Coalition's 2005 research project *More than Words*, young carers identified that they would like to be supported through holistic family approaches that recognised the notion that young carers are inextricably linked with their families, and were often reluctant to receive support from outside the family unit.<sup>9</sup> In a 2009 report on young carers in families affected by AOD use, it was identified that the targeting of services to either exclusively parents, or young people, and their focus on either exclusively AOD issues or youth issues, kept young people and their families from receiving this holistic response.<sup>10</sup>

In October 2011, the ACT Government launched the *ACT Carers Charter* that aims to identify what carers can expect from ACT Government agencies and government funded organisations that work with them. The Youth Coalition supports the implementation of the charter, including that it recognises the importance of support for young carers (under 18 years) and young adult carers (18 – 25 years).

At a primary prevention level, the Youth Coalition also believes that the needs of people receiving care need to be adequately addressed in order to ultimately support young carers.

### **Commitments**

1. Advocating for increased awareness and recognition of the role of young carers in the ACT.
2. Advocating for increased consistency in the use of more inclusive definitions of young carers across government departments, agencies and community services.
3. Advocating for the provision of appropriate supports that meet the needs of young carers and their families.
4. Supporting the implementation of the *ACT Carers Charter*, and advocating for its on-going monitoring and evaluation.
5. Advocating for the active involvement of young people in designing, planning and evaluating youth policy and service delivery frameworks particularly for young carers.
6. Advocating for the active and supported participation of young people in their individual care planning and case management as young carers.

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2009) 'Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers' <online> [www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4430.0](http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4430.0) cited in Carers Australia (2013) 'Young Carers', Canberra <online> <http://www.carersaustralia.com.au/about-carers/young-carers2/> Accessed 19 April 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Carers Australia (April 2010) 'Facts about Young Carers', Canberra.

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- <sup>3</sup> Mary Gays (2002) A Lifetime of Caring: ACT Schools-based Young Carers Survey; Marymead Child and Family Centre, Canberra
- <sup>4</sup> Noble-Carr, D; Moore, T; McArthur, M (2009) Who Cares? Experiences of Young People Living with a Family Members who has a Alcohol or Other Drug Issue, Institute of Child Protection Studies, Canberra
- <sup>5</sup> Moore, T (2005) Stop to Listen: Findings from the ACT Young Carers Research Project, Youth Coalition of the ACT, Canberra
- <sup>6</sup> Hargreaves et al, in AIHW (2012) Young Australians: Their health and wellbeing 2011. Australian Government, Canberra.
- <sup>7</sup> Youth Coalition of the ACT (2012) Rate Canberra 2012: Findings from the Survey of Young People aged 12-25 in the ACT, Canberra
- <sup>8</sup> Noble-Carr, D; Moore, T; McArthur, M (2009) Who Cares? Experiences of Young People Living with a Family Members who has a Alcohol or Other Drug Issue, Institute of Child Protection Studies, Canberra
- <sup>9</sup> Moore, T (2005) More than Words: Supporting Young Carers and Their Families, Youth Coalition of the ACT, Canberra
- <sup>10</sup> Noble-Carr, D; Moore, T; McArthur, M (2009) Who Cares? Experiences of Young People Living with a Family Members who has a Alcohol or Other Drug Issue, Institute of Child Protection Studies, Canberra