

The Young Carers benefit greatly from the right level of understanding and support. Without this support, young carers are a greatly overlooked group. The Youth Coalition recognises the impact caring for an unwell parent can have on a young person, and supports policies and services which assist young carers in a holistic and client-focused manner.

There are around 388,800 people aged 25 years or under who provide care in Australia. This represents 17% of the total carer population and six per cent of all people less than 26 years of age. Only 4% of young carers aged 15-25 years are still at school, compared with 23% of the general population.¹

While the ABS reports around 7,600 young carers in the ACT, it is recognized that this is a gross underestimation, and a more accurate number is around 11,500.² This makes up 10% of ACT's young people. In either case, the number of young people taking on a caring role is significant. Most young carers assume their caring role between 12 and 14 years (Youth Coalition, 2005).

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 which are out of proportion for young people. This puts young carers in situations where they are often highly marginalized from mainstream processes and support networks.

In a study published by the Youth Coalition in 2005, it was found that Young Carers spend an average of 6.4 hours a day over 6 years caring for a relative.³ They often care for more than one relative at a time, with more than one condition, without receiving Centrelink carers allowances. Most young carers live in families of financial hardship, and do not identify times without care responsibilities. Young carers who are incarcerated often continue their care responsibilities from detention.

A large number of young carers are responsible for tasks around the home (78%), for caring for other relatives (including ensuring their safety)(78%), providing emotional support (74%), helping financially (50%) and protecting the family (68%).⁴ These caring responsibilities are most often provided without supervision or support. Young carers often assume similar levels of caring responsibility to adults.

¹ Carers Australia (2001) *Young Carers Research Project*

² Mary Gays (2002) *A Lifetime of Caring: ACT Schools-based Young Carers Survey*; Marymead Child and Family Centre, Canberra

³ Youth Coalition (2005) *More Than Words: Supporting Young Carers and Their Families* p6

⁴ Ibid p7

Young carers may experience positive impacts of caring including “feelings of pride and worth, a sense of accomplishment, greater levels of fitness, greater resilience, stronger family relationships, better outcomes in education, more skills and a positive outlook on life”.⁵ However, they may also experience negative impacts of caring including fatigue, injury, greater levels of stress, anxiety and feelings of hopelessness, family conflict and breakdown, financial insecurity, limited social and recreational opportunities and poor outcomes in education.⁶ These impacts include young carers caring for a relative with an alcohol or other drug issue.

The Youth Coalition believes that holistic family approaches produce the best outcomes for young people who care for a family member(s). The Youth Coalition has completed research with young carers in the ACT which demonstrates that young carers are “reluctant to receive support from outside their families and therefore need to be supported within it”.⁷ Further to this, children and young people’s access to appropriate services can “either be enabled or restricted by the willingness and support of other family members”.⁸

On a primary prevention level, the Youth Coalition believes that the needs of parents experiencing ill health need to be adequately addressed to ultimately address the situation young carers find themselves in. If the needs of people with illnesses and disabilities were effectively responded to, the negative impacts of care would be reduced significantly for carers.⁹ Young people themselves have demonstrated that care for their relative is what they themselves want, including personal and emotional support, respite care, in-home support, access to employment, and family-based rehabilitation programs.¹⁰

The Youth Coalition is committed to:

- ◆ Advocating for increased support for young carers through the provision of respite services, in-home support, access to employment, family-based rehabilitation program and personal and emotional support.
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- ◆ Advocating for increased services to support those experiencing ill health.
- ◆ Continuing to support those working with young people to be aware of young carers and to respond effectively to their needs.
- ◆ Advocating for the increased awareness among young carers of their eligibility for the Centrelink Carers Payment.

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid 15

⁸ Ibid 15

⁹ L. Keith & J. Morris (1995) ‘Easy Targets: A Disability Rights Perspective on the `Children as Carers’ Debate’ *Critical Social Policy* (44) 45 p55

¹⁰ Youth Coalition of the ACT Op Cit