



OPEN LETTER

6 January 2011

Help us find young mental health carers.

Dear Members and Stakeholders,

Last month, the Mental Health Council of Australia (MHCA) launched a survey application targeting young mental health carers on Facebook. This is a very significant project with the potential to shed much-needed light on the experiences of Australia's young people who are providing care and support to people living with mental illness.

Young carers often experience significant disadvantage as a result of their caring role. Their caring responsibilities often take priority over school, casual jobs and socialising with friends, and over the long-term this can result in lower rates of employment and education participation, poorer physical and mental health and social isolation.

The long-term negative impacts are preventable, but before we can begin to address the challenges facing young mental health carers, we must first hear from them directly. We need to know how they feel about their caring, how it impacts on their sense of health and wellbeing and what they might like in the way of assistance and support

We need your help to both disseminate information about this survey and assist us to find young mental health carers who are willing to publicly share their experiences.

To-date, young mental health carers have been largely absent from research and data collection activities targeting Australian carers. This is in spite of the fact that they often experience significant disadvantage as a result of their caring role. Young mental health carers are especially difficult to identify. They are often unaware that the care and support that they provide constitutes 'caring', and instead view it as a normal facet of their lives. They do not readily identify with the term 'young mental health carer', and as a consequence do not respond to research, services and programs that have been specifically designed to support them. The stigma associated with mental



illness can also act as a barrier to identifying as a 'young mental health carer'.

The MHCA is determined to address this gap in mental health research and ensure that the voices of young mental health carers are heard.

The Young Carers Project (YCP) survey app on Facebook is specifically designed to connect with young carers. Social media platforms like Facebook allow us to contact and talk with young mental health carers in locations that are safe and comfortable for them, and collect their comments views in a way that respects their right to privacy and anonymity.





By engaging with young carers directly we hope to find out what sort of caring activities they undertake; how caring impacts on their day-to-day lives; what supports are available to young mental health carers in their area; and the appropriateness of these supports.

In order to reach our target of 1,000 young mental health carers, we need your help in communicating and promoting the Project in such a way that talks directly to young Australians and raises the profile of this Project in a range of media, both online and offline.

What you can do to help

You and/or your organisation can assist us in locating young mental health carers for this research by:

- posting promotional information, banners and flyers on your websites and social media pages;

- identifying young mental health carers in your network who are prepared to talk to the media about their experiences and act as a 'front person' for the Project;

- disseminating information about the research project through your professional and personal networks; and
- writing and disseminating media releases that support and promote the Young Carers Project.

All attempts to promote the Project will be publicly acknowledged in the research findings.

Promotional material including website banners and images and printable flyers can be requested from MHCA Policy and Project Officer, Kate Judd on 02 6285 0813, or by email at kate.judd@mhca.org.au.

Similarly, if you know of any young mental health carers who might be interested in publicly sharing their experiences, please put them in touch with Kate Judd or our Director of Communications, Simon Tatz on 0402 613 745 or 6285 3100.

Your assistance in supporting and promoting this groundbreaking research project could have a very positive and long-lasting impact on the lives of Australia's young mental health carers, and I strongly urge you to join us in shedding light on their experiences.

Yours Sincerely

Frank Quinlan Chief Executive Officer



Find us on Facebook! www.facebook.com/youngcarersproject

The Mental Health Council of Australia is the independent, national representative body of the mental health sector in Australia





About the Young Carers Project (YCP)

This YCP survey app forms part of the broader MHCA Mental Health Carers Project 2011-12, and builds on the work of *Adversity to Advocacy: the lives and hopes of mental health carers,* and the *Mental Health Carers Report 2010.*

All young mental health carers aged 13 to 18 in Australia are eligible to participate in the YCP survey app. The MHCA is also offering a \$20 pre-paid VISA gift card to survey participants in recognition of their time and contribution. The app will remain live on Facebook until the start of February 2012, or until 1,000 responses are collected.

The Mental Health Council of Australia is the independent, national representative body of the mental health sector in Australia