

Connecting Youth Carers to Life Opportunities & Personalised Support

Barriers to Access for Young Carers to Mainstream Services

by Tim Moore

Though young carers account for 10% of Australia's youth population they do not account for 10% of mainstream service reception. This is due to a number of structural and ideological barriers that restrict young carers access – preventing them from receiving the supports they need and deserve.

In this paper we list a number of the more common barriers to young carers access and include strategies for individual services to reduce these restrictions.

Barriers include:

(a) Services are unaware of young carers, their existence and their needs

Young carers continue to be a hidden group of young people within our community. Though statistics would show that up to one in ten young people have care responsibilities, social policy and services often do not reflect this fact.

Strategies:

- *workers across the health, youth, carer, disability and education sectors participate in training about young carers*

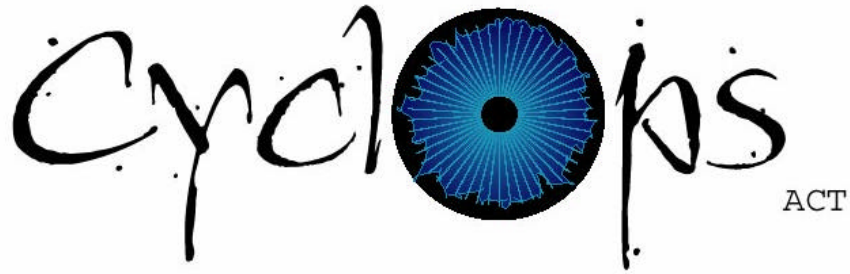
(b) Young Carers are not recognised as an "at risk" group

Due to a general lack of awareness about young carers and their needs, community and government organisations have often failed to identify young carers as an "at risk" group.

As a result, young carers may be excluded from services as they fall outside of target audiences.

Strategies:

- o *Young Carers should be included in target groups for youth, health, children's and family services.*
- o *Young Carers should be actively recruited for all relevant and generalist programs*



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(c) Perception that young carers have too many issues to deal with

It is true that young carers can have a multitude of issues and needs and that no one agency has the scope to deal them all. Agencies and young carers should be aware of the strengths of particular services and collaborate where gaps are found. This collaboration should ensure confidentiality and reduce service duplication.

- *services should ensure community partnerships so that the holistic needs of young carers might be addressed*
- *government and community organisations should recognise that the needs of young carers are varied and that a whole-of-government and multi-sector approach is necessary*
- *young carers should be informed of agency's limitations but assured that in partnership, their needs can be better resolved*

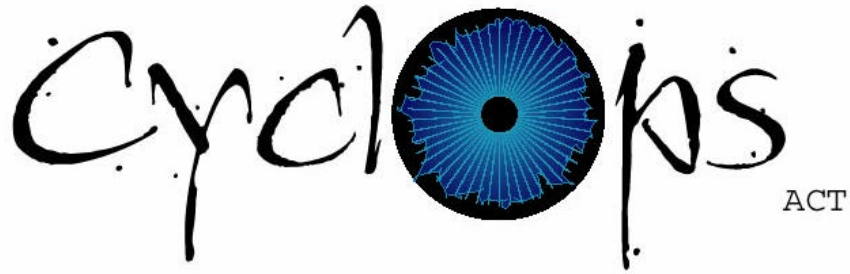
(d) Inflexibility of services (time commitments)

Young carers are often unable to leave the home due to their caring responsibilities. This restricts their access to many youth services generally. When able to leave the home, young carers are not always able to set commitments of time to programs. Services must acknowledge this and, where possible, accommodate the young carers' participation.

Realising that many programs do exclude or restrict the participation of young carers, services should also provide follow-up to young carers encouraging them to participate when possible.

Strategies:

- *ensure that programs are flexible in their delivery and do not exclude young carers due to their inability to make firm commitments to programs*
- *services should follow up on young carers absent from program, encouraging them to participate when possible and offer them opportunities to be involved in other ways*



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(e) Services are not disability / illness / dependence - friendly

As disability, illness and dependence are an integral part of their lives, young carers are quite sensitive to service cultures that are not supportive of families in their situation. Young carers do not feel comfortable in services that allow the use of derogatory terms about illness or disability, who do not acknowledge the right of people with disabilities to access (ie not having wheelchair ramps etc), who do not send positive messages about illness, disability or dependence.

Strategies:

- *services should be aware of their service culture and adjust it where inappropriate*
- *services should ensure accessibility to people with disabilities*
- *services should challenge participants' prejudices and behaviours regarding illness and disability*
- *services should send positive messages about disability, illness and dependence through posters, brochures and other materials*

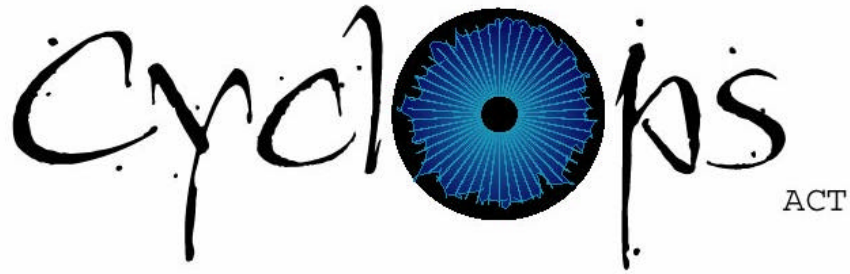
(f) Fears about child protection issues

Many Young Carers and their families believe that if the community knows that care is being provided in the home and that this care may be deemed inappropriate that the family will be separated. In a majority of cases this is not the case.

Young carers need to know that (a) it is normal and okay to care and that (b) services are available to assist young people in their caring. Conversely, they need to know that services will respond if they believe that the young carer's safety or wellbeing is at risk but that they will do so with the young carers knowledge and, if appropriate, consent.

Strategies:

- *services should promote the notion that "it's OK to care"*
- *pamphlets, brochures & posters on caring and disability should be displayed*
- *when discussing families, families with dependence, disability and illness should also be discussed. The positives of these families should be identified*



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(g) Limited income

Many young carers come from disadvantaged backgrounds. To ensure their access, services should either provide free programs or organise sponsorship from young-carer or disability-funded services

- services should run free programs
- workers should be aware of services who can provide funding, sponsorship or financial support to ensure young carers' participation in activities

(h) Limited access to transport

Young carers have limited access to transport and are therefore often unable to be involved in programs.

- services, where possible, should organise transport or refer young people to local transport agencies
- services should conduct programs in areas geographically accessible to young carers

(i) Limited access to respite

Before being able to participate in activities, young carers must organise alternative care for their family member.

- services should be aware of young carers' need to organise respite and should be flexible in service delivery
- services should be aware of respite options for young carers and support them in accessing these services