

Media Release

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Growing up before your time: life as a young carer

Maddy Oswald knows that being a young carer can be a tough gig.

The 18-year-old is a full-time carer for her mum, Heidi, who struggles with complex mental health issues.

“With mum, I’m there to make sure she takes her medication. I help her a lot when she leaves the house, I go with her to help explain her condition to people. If she goes out somewhere and starts to feel anxious, I’m there to explain why she’s anxious and why she does what she does. I provide a bit more understanding for those situations.

“I’m someone she can talk to, someone who will listen.”

It’s a lot of responsibility for someone as young as Maddy. She began caring for her mum at just 14-years-old and in turn, was unable to see her friends as much as she might have liked.

“Socially, I probably don’t go out as much as other teenagers do,” she says. “Sometimes it can be hard to make friends, because some people don’t understand why I do what I do. I do also feel anxious sometimes.”

There are approximately 388,800 young carers in Australia. Studies have shown that Maddy is not alone in her experiences of social isolation and anxiety, with poor physical and mental health, feelings of alienation and disconnect from their peers common among young carers.

Finding adequate support can be crucial to managing these challenges. This rings true for Maddy, who found support through VMCH four years ago.

The for-purpose organisation offers a Young Carers Program, designed to aid young carers through their struggles, provide them with assistance where needed and offer exciting social events.

The program is also a wonderful way for young carers to meet one another, share their respective journeys and make new friends. For Maddy, this aspect of the program has been lifechanging.

“I’ve met some of the nicest people in my life there,” she says. “They’re so supportive and I can relate to them because we’re on the same maturity level. I love getting to do all the fun activities that I wouldn’t get to do otherwise; we go to the movies, on camps, we’ve been to a lightshow, even rock climbing.”

Being around other young carers has offered Maddy a safe space to share her experience. It soon came to light that there was a common thought amongst the cohort; whilst being a young carer is undoubtedly challenging, it can be incredibly rewarding.

Maddy feels that caring for her mum is “what makes life worth living”.

“Helping other people feels like what I’m meant to do with my life. A lot of people ask me why I do what I do or tell me I’m throwing my life away. I say to them that I wouldn’t change it because it’s made me who I am. When I make my mum laugh and smile, it touches my heart.”

Heidi is incredibly grateful to her daughter and knows that without her, she would struggle with day-to-day living.

“Sometimes when I get anxious, I think I’ve done something wrong. Maddy helps me overcome those thoughts. She’s just amazing.”

As someone who has found support and knows how beneficial it can be, Maddy wants other young carers to know they’re not alone.

“Find a supportive circle of people, whether that be a teacher, a friend or through a program. Start off with someone you really trust and tell them how you’re feeling. Just reach out for help – you don’t have to do it alone.”

To learn more about VMCH’s Young Carers Program, please call 1300 698 624.

Media enquiries

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About VMCH

Here at VMCH, our services are as diverse as the people we support.

Our values underpin the work we do. As a Catholic, for-purpose organisation, compassion, respect and inclusion aren't just words to us, they guide us in everything we do.

While we've been around for over a century, we're always moving forward. Always staying true to who we are by supporting people and families to live their best lives; providing a place to call home and spaces to learn and grow.

Our professional and compassionate teams are with you on your life journey; helping you with a wide range of support from early learning and therapy, specialist education, disability services, affordable homes, residential aged care, retirement living and at-home aged care.

