



Meeting at the European Parliament, March 6, 2018, Bruxelles



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President & Founder of COMIP  
«CHILDREN OF MENTALLY ILL PARENTS – NGO»



# 20 November 2017

## «World Children's Day»



**«CHILDREN OF MENTALLY ILL PARENTS – NGO» (COMIP)  
is established as the first association in Italy  
created by adult children of parents with mental ill health to:**

- give voice to/advocate for children dealing with the same issue in their family, who are often invisible and not listened to or heard
- build up support strategies and extensive networks to enhance the wellbeing of children and their families
- develop partnerships with organizations, schools, sport centers, cultural/recreational centers, mental health services, family services, institutions, etc. to build up support for young carers who have one or both parents with a mental disorder
- fight stigma and promote communication, information, resilience and prevention in mental health among the general population, develop media guidelines to prevent harm when reporting news regarding people with a m.i.
- work for a family centered approach
- promote peer support

<http://www.comip-italia.org>  
<https://www.facebook.com/comip.italia>

# The Voices of Former Young Carers in Italy

***"There are many adolescents who have a parent suffering from a mental illness who are completely left alone and who would need psychological support and more!"***

D., 31 years, Italy

***"I always dreamed about finding someone that could understand the situation I was living home with my parents and I am still living, despite having moved at 200 km from them. I believe it would be fundamental for us daughters and sons to receive assistance to enter the labour market and society in general, since, at least in my case, after an entire lifetime spent taking care about my parents and surviving such a horrible situation, it is hard to finally live in the external world of everyone and stop living in the world my mother and father created due to their illness."***

F., 28 years, Italy

# The Voices of Former Young Carers in Italy

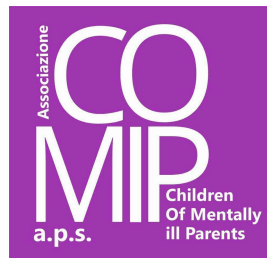
"Many years ago, when I was still a child, I dreamed about finding someone to talk to about what was happening to my mum and in my family. Now my dream has finally come true! ***Watching the regional news broadcast and hearing they were talking about this issue truly moved me.***"

L., 52 years, Italy

"COMIP ngo is a dream come true. It is the guardian angel of all those children who are alone, just like I have been. And it is due that I use my experience to raise awareness, to fight stigma, to help these children.

***When I was a child, adults - included teachers - told me I was the reason why my mum got mentally ill, that I was a naughty child and that my mother started getting ill because I drove her to despair. Children from the parish recreation center told me their parents said that mine was the HOUSE OF GHOSTS. This is ignorance, and it's a terrible injustice. Often, injustice kills. Things like these should not happen.***"

T., 26 years, Italy



# The Voices of Young Adult Carers in Italy



"I am writing this message with tears in my eyes, short breath, my mind and my body exhausted. ***My mother has just tried to commit suicide for the third time.*** She's finally conscious after 4 days. This time she really was succeeding.

***I need someone to make me feel I am not alone.*** Please, help me, I need you. Thank you."

C., 22 years, Italy

# The Voices of Young Adult Carers in Italy



"I have the same green eyes as my mum. Same eyes, but such a different view of the world. For my mother life's much more complex than it should be. Since many years her illness hides behind her eyes her true personality. My mum's a strong woman. A survivor of her life adventure. She has faced and won many challenges.

Nevertheless, through the years, her bipolar disorder has gotten worse and confused all the rest. ***I discovered what a psychiatric illness is when I was 12.*** At first I tried to get to know it, then to reconstruct its causes. Naively, I thought it could be defeated. Then, instead, I had to learn to fight with and for my mum to find an adequate support. For her and for my father, and for my 6 year older brother as well. To stay in her life, help her and continue fighting for her cause. Then I had to move away. I studied in another city, I now live and try to work in another town. It is a terrible choice I had to make, because I'd love to do more.

I hope others can recognize themselves in my story. ***While growing up, the hardest obstacle has been communicating such a complex and delicate situation to others.***

***I always asked myself why a psychiatric illness is still so scarcely known and so stigmatized. Then I understood that if we don't talk about it, we are not facing it.*** That's why I decided to speak up, often, and try to get people who avoid it, who are afraid of it, who ignore it, dig down into this reality "

A., 24 years, Italy

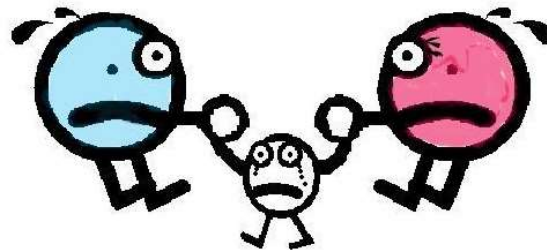


# Which challenges could you face when being a young carer for a parent with mental ill health?

Household tasks



Parental conflict



Emotional support for the parent



Dealing with doctors/hospitals/emergencies



Being bullied



Mum (or Dad) Is Unwell...

She (or He) is depressed... / Hears voices... / Looks into the void... / Says weird things... / Doesn't sleep at night...  
Scares me...



*[picture from the movie "A Woman Under The Influence" by John Cassavetes (1974)]*



...What about me? / What can I do? / Am I to blame? /  
Where can I turn to for help? /  
Where can I be safe? / Who can explain to me what is  
happening? / With whom can I talk about how I feel?



[picture from the short movie “The Wish Horse” by Lisa Ford (2014)]

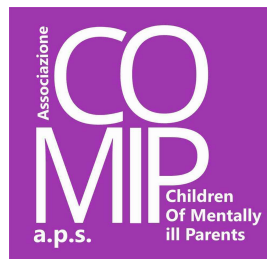
Why is it so important to offer young carers a safe environment where they can express how they feel about their parent dealing with a mental illness?

**SHAME – STIGMA – SENSE OF GUILT – LONELINESS  
FAMILY LOYALTY – CONFUSION**

***YOU BELIEVE YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE LIVING IN THAT SITUATION***

***IT IS HARD TO TALK ABOUT IT WITH PEOPLE AROUND YOU***

***YOU DON'T FEEL LIKE YOUR EXPERIENCE  
AND POINT OF VIEW ARE COMPLETELY UNDERSTOOD***



# What Could Help

## 1- HOW MANY YOUNG CARERS ARE THERE?

Each EU country should invest in an extensive national research to identify them

## 2- TRAIN PROFESSIONALS AND WORK TOGETHER

Create multiprofessional equipes including former y.c. to address their needs on a local and national level

## 3- MEDIA CAMPAIGNS AND MEDIA GUIDELINES

Fight stigma and social isolation, promoting resilience and information and prevention in mental & physical health

# What Could Help

## 4- A TRANSGENERATIONAL APPROACH

Include the whole family in the picture

## 5- ENGAGE ALL SOCIAL ACTORS IN A Y.C. STRATEGY

Not only professionals generally involved, but also the larger society (sport, music, culture, etc.)

## 6- MORE INVESTMENTS IN MENTAL HEALTH

IN ALL EU COUNTRIES AS A MUST:

establish by law a minimum threshold to be granted to avoid extreme financial cuts and protect good mental health as a basic human right

*We will pay a high price for the huge cuts  
in this area on a long term basis!*

# What Could Help

## 7- NOTHING ABOUT US, WITHOUT US

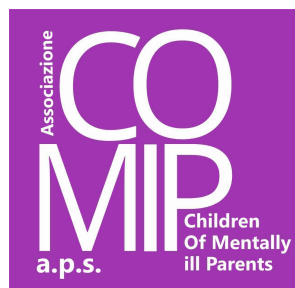
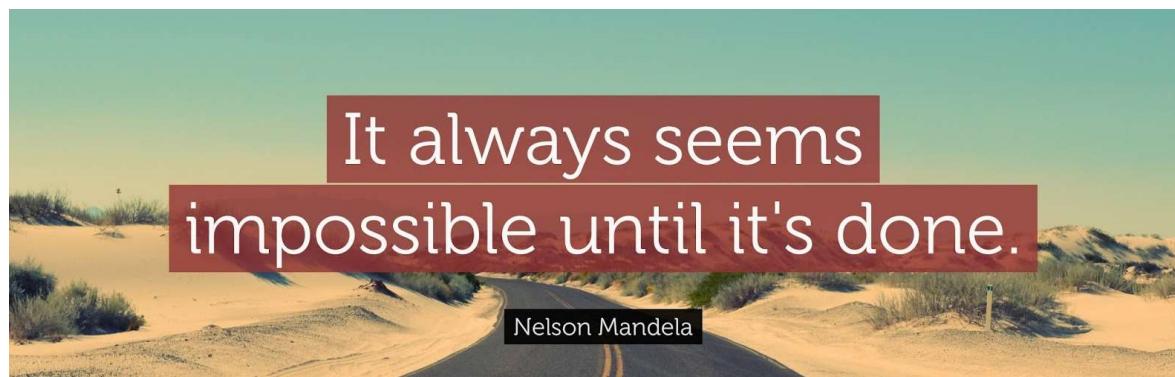
Always include y.c. and family members' voices in decisions/policies regarding them

So...



FOR INVITING US!

As you can see, there is a lot we can do.  
Let's just start! Will you join us?



comip.italia



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