

***Minister for Social Protection Éamon Ó Cuív T.D. and Young Carer of the Year, Maria Maher, launch Carers of the Year Awards 2010***

**23 June 2010** The Carers of the Year Awards 2010 are being launched today by Minister for Social Protection, Éamon Ó Cuív T.D. and the current Young Carer of the Year, Maria Maher, accompanied by Patron of The Carers Association and broadcaster, Mary Kennedy.

"As patron I have always found the family carers I meet extraordinarily impressive. Last year I met Maria Maher, who was young carer of the year. The work she does in caring for her mum is an inspiration to us all. For many carers who act so solely out of love, their caring role is often a daily emotional, financial and physical struggle" says Mary Kennedy.

The Carers Association chose Maria to launch, with Minister Ó Cuív T.D., The Carers of the Year and Young Carer of the Year Awards 2010, sponsored by Emergency Response, to highlight the lack of awareness and supports in place for Ireland's Young Carers.

Ireland's Young Carer of the Year, Maria Maher from Ballincollig, Co. Cork has provided care for her mother, Mary, since she was 12 years old. Mary is a permanent wheelchair user following an accident and Maria helps with her daily caring needs. Maria also helps her three older siblings who have mild physical disabilities and mobility problems. She combines her caring role with her studies at UCC.

"Young carers have a unique experience, living different lives to that of their peers with more responsibilities and often miss out on the same social activities" says Enda Egan, CEO of The Carers Association. "While the work of family carers can be rewarding, the fact remains that many carers sacrifice their careers and lives to provide care. Family carers and young carers have told us that these awards are so important in appreciating the work they do and we would urge people across the country to nominate their carer of the year."

The Carers Association's Carers of the Year and Young Carer of the Year (under 18) Awards are based on a national nomination process, whereby the public are invited to nominate their chosen family carers. All entries will receive a commemorative certificate and four regional winners are chosen. The National Carers of the Year 2010 will be announced at a special ceremony later this year.

There are an estimated 161,000 family carers in Ireland, providing over three million hours of care per week and saving the state EUR2.5 billion every year. According to the Census 2006, there are 5,500 young carers under 18 caring for relatives, a figure The Carers Association finds a huge underestimation in comparison to figures from the UK and Scotland.

**To nominate your family carer for the Carers of the Year Awards 2010, sponsored by Emergency Response, see [www.carersireland.com](http://www.carersireland.com).**

**ENDS**

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