What’s it like having to deal with cancer AND with growing up?
We all know that adolescence is a time for big changes. There’s a whole lot of stuff going on, like school, uni, TAFE, jobs, relationships, learning to drive, moving out of home and more. There’s also some big identity-related questions like ‘who am I?’ and ‘what kind of adult will I be?’. We can all guess that getting a cancer diagnosis at this time can have lots of unexpected effects.

Growing Up with Cancer is a research project about the impact of cancer and treatment on adolescents and young adults. It’s great news that CanTeen’s Research & Evaluation Team is working with the University of Sydney and the University of Newcastle on this exciting project. We’re conducting surveys and interviews with young people aged between 14 and 24, whose cancer diagnosis was at age 11 or older. We’ll also be interviewing parents of young people who have a cancer diagnosis, and health care professionals.

Ok, that all sounds like a good idea, and a fairly standard research project.
Well, the project is about the ‘who am I?’ identity-related questions, we are doing something a bit more exciting than just talking to people... We’re asking young people to make a self-portrait – this could be in the form of a photograph, a collage, a poem, a video, a dance, a song, a still life, an animation, an article, an interview, an essay, a story, a slogan, a poster, a song or a dance. Basically, it’s a different way for young people to express something about themselves and their experience of growing up with cancer.

Wow! How does that work?
People attend a self-portrait workshop in Sydney and work with Kita, our friendly artist (the bearded guy in the photos). They learn about lighting and different photographic techniques, and use state-of-the-art digital equipment to make their own self portrait. The images on this page show people working together in the workshops. We’ve already run. Some people brought things along to use in their self portrait and some used the workshop to come up with ideas and then make something afterwards. So far no one has been asked to make an animation or write a song but we’re hoping!

What will you do with the self portraits?
When the self portrait is finished, a researcher will interview the young person about it. When all the self portraits are done we’ll ask people if they’d like to be part of an exhibition to show the public what it is like to grow up with cancer. We’ll be up to them to decide who they want to see their self portrait. Some people might decide the portrait is just for them.

How will your project help young people with cancer?
The project will educate people about the needs of young people with cancer. It will help health care professionals and CanTeen offer more support to young people who have to deal with cancer AND deal with growing up.

Pandora Patterson and Brett Miller, Research & Evaluation Team, CanTeen
Julie Mooney-Somers and Peter Lewis, University of Sydney

CanTeen to Pilot Counselling Service for Offspring Members

We all know how great CanTeen is at bringing together young people who are going through similar experiences. The peer support provided to each other by CanTeen Members is amazing and its effects can be invaluable. Unfortunately for some Young People living with Cancer (YPLWJ), their needs are greater than can be met solely through the peer support CanTeen provides. We are aware that not all of our Membership group have access to the same type or even same level of services outside CanTeen.

With this in mind, you may have heard that CanTeen has in recent times been investigating the possibility of introducing some type of formal counseling service to make up for any additional level of support. What you may not have heard is that CanTeen recently had the opportunity to apply for funding to implement a pilot (or kind of trial/first run) of this counselling service. And guess what...we got the money!

Thanks to the really generous support of the RB Foundation who have funded the establishment of a specific CanTeen counselling program for young people whose Mum or Dad has cancer or has died from cancer. The pilot will be held in two different places – Brisbane, Newcastle and Melbourne over the next three years, and will be open to both Members and non-Members.

The service will provide group and one-on-one counselling, telephone counselling all specifically available for young people who live in rural and remote areas, as well as online counselling options. The service will be provided free of charge by qualified mental health professionals who have experience in working with young people, and they will be based in the CanTeen offices as part of our wonderful staff.

The Offspring and Emerging Offspring group has been chosen as the focus of the pilot, because while there are currently other great organisations such as RedKite, that offer counselling for young people with cancer or with a family member with cancer, no one else offers a service specifically for the Offspring group. Our research has shown that this is a gap that really needs to be filled.

We will be formally launching the new project in July (watch this space for more details) and if it’s as successful as we hope, we will eventually offer it across all our Divisions.

If you have any questions or want some more information about this project please feel free to contact Frances Conroy (National Office) fconroy@canteen.org.au