

Carers ACT submission to

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT
AND TRAINING

Inquiry into school to work transition

July 2017

About Carers ACT

Carers ACT is the ACT peak body representing the diversity of Canberrans who provide unpaid care and support to family members and friends with a:

- disability
- chronic condition
- mental illness or disorder
- drug or alcohol problem
- terminal illness, or
- who are frail aged.

There around 48,500 unpaid, family and friend carers in the ACT, who are an integral part of our aged, health and disability systems.

Carers ACT has a constitutional mandate to represent the voices of carers to government and the wider community. We actively consult with a wide diversity of caring families on an ongoing basis to enable improved understanding of their needs, and enable better inclusion for them and the people they care for.

Carers ACT also provides advocacy support to ACT's Foster and Kinship carers.

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1. Introduction

Carers ACT is the peak body for unpaid family or friend carers in the ACT. We welcome this opportunity to provide comments on the Inquiry into school to work transition to the Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Training.

In our response to the Inquiry we address young carers schooling completion and the opportunity to transition to and participate in employment. Carers ACT has provided a range of support to young carers for over 10 years.

2. About carers and young carers

Caring can affect the activities that people would expect to undertake during their life – being a student, being part of the workforce, engaging with the community, supporting family and friends and planning for their economic security. Or, activities that determine an individual's social inclusion or social participation.

Around 48,500 people living in the ACT are unpaid family or friend carers. Of these 4,000 are young carers. Three thousand are young adult carers aged 15 to 25 years, and 1,000 are young carers aged up to 15 years.¹ Nationally, the Australian Bureau of Statistics estimated there were 272,000 young people under the age of 25 who were carers. Female young carers (61 per cent) are the majority of the estimated national young carer population, and 39 per cent are male.²

While young carers aged up to 18 years tend to be caring for parents and grandparents, young adult carers, particularly those aged over 21, are more likely to be caring for a partner or their own child with a disability.³ Many adult young carers will not identify as a carer, and will not have accessed services to assist their caring role.

Although many young carers report positive aspects about their caring relationships, caring can have a significant toll on their health and wellbeing, social connectedness, financial security and employment participation.⁴ Some young carers live in the poorer households in our community and experience financial disadvantage.

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016) *2015 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers: Summary of Findings, 2016*, Canberra.

² Estimated using 2011 Census data and Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers 2015*, Canberra. (See Inside Policy (2017) ref 20. below).

³ Bray JR (2012) *Young carers in receipt of Carer Payment and Carer Allowance 2001 to 2006: characteristics, experiences and post-care outcomes. Occasional Paper no.47*, Australian Government Department of Families, Housing Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. Accessible https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/02_2013/op47_text_print_ready.pdf

⁴ Australian National University and Australian Catholic University (2013) *Universities...Who Cares? HEPPP Research project application*, Canberra, unpublished. Note: Carers ACT was a research partner in the proposed project.

Some young carers report they had little choice about taking on their caring roles because of complex family dynamics or other family members not accepting a caring role.⁵

Young carers risk ongoing socioeconomic disadvantage because of their lower education completion and workforce participation. Appropriate support to reduce this disadvantage is required to allow young carers to enjoy similar life opportunities to transition into adulthood as non-carers. It is well recognised that education, particularly higher education, is directly linked with employment and an income that determines economic and social participation in the community.

Importantly, research on young carers in receipt of Carer Payment and Carer Allowance payments indicated for young carers aged up to 18 years their durations of care were shorter than other carers in receipt of Centrelink assistance, while for adult young carers their durations of care and receipt of income support were similar to carers aged 25 to 54 years. They were also more likely to remain on income support after their caring responsibilities cease.⁶

3. Young carers, education and transition to employment

Terms of Reference 1: Measurement of gain in school and how this contributes to supporting students to prepare for post-school education and training.

The *Carer Recognition Act 2010 (Clth)* includes outcomes relevant to young carers in its *Statement for Australia's Carers' 10 principles*:

Principle 4. Children and young people who are carers should have the same rights as all children and young people and should be supported to reach their full potential.

Other relevant principles:

Principle 5. Carers should be acknowledged as individuals with their own needs within and beyond the caring role.

Principle 9. Carers should be supported to achieve greater economic wellbeing and sustainability and, where appropriate, should have opportunities to participate in employment and education.

Principle 10. Support for carers should be timely, responsive and appropriate.⁷

⁵ Hill T, Thomson C, Raven M et al (2016) *Carers and Social Inclusion*, Social Policy Research Centre, University of NSW, Sydney. Accessible https://www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/media/SPRCFile/Carers_and_Social_Inclusion_Final_report.pdf

⁶ Bray JR (2012) *ibid*.

⁷ Parliament of Australia (2010) *Carer Recognition Act (2010)*, Canberra. Accessible <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2010A00123>

However, young carer research consistently reveals the disconnect between the expected outcomes of this legislation and principles with the experiences, and education and employment outcomes of many young carers.

What we know about young carers, education barriers and education completion:

- Young carers are an at-risk group and have difficulties at school for varying reasons. There are likely to be multiple, intersecting issues which impact on their lives and make it difficult for them to stay engaged in education.⁸
- Young carers struggle to engage with education because their caring role can place intense demands on their time and energy, rather than their lack of interest in education or scholastic ability.^{9,10}
- Some schools and teachers have little understanding of young carers and how their caring role impacts on their education outcomes, and some have limited young carer training resources for teachers and students.¹¹
- Young carers are less likely than other young people to complete secondary school or undertake post-secondary education because of lack of school support and teacher awareness e.g inability to complete assignments because of non-flexible assignment deadlines, inability to afford school tools (iPad) or school curriculum activities, and real or perceived discrimination from teachers and peer students.¹²
- Only four per cent of young people and young carers (aged 15 to 25 years) are engaged in education compared with 23 per cent of non-carer peers.¹³
- Many young carers choose to be ‘hidden carers’ because of their concern that the family unit may be broken up.¹⁴
- There is little awareness among post-secondary education providers of how to identify and to assist young carers successfully engage in tertiary education and attain positive education and psychosocial outcomes.¹⁵

⁸ The Youth Coalition of the ACT and ACTCOSS (2015) *Issues Paper: Educational Inequity in the ACT July 2015*, Canberra. Accessible http://www.actcoss.org.au/publications/Publications_2015/1615sub-educational-inequity-in-act.pdf

⁹ Hill T, Thomson C, Raven M et al (2016) *ibid*.

¹⁰ Carers Australia Young Carers Program website. Accessible <http://www.youngcarers.net.au/>

¹¹ Carers ACT delivers a Young Carers Program in the ACT and through our outreach program 12 ACT primary and secondary schools in 2016-17 engaged in our young carer support program.

¹² Hill T, Thomson C, Raven M et al (2016) *ibid*.

¹³ See 12. above.

¹⁴ Parents of young carers can also be reluctant to reveal a child or young person’s caring responsibility because of notification to relevant child protection services. Refer to Hill T, Thomson C, Raven M et al (2016) page 45.

¹⁵ Australian National University and Australian Catholic University (2013) *ibid*.

- Female young carers experience a greater negative impact on their capacity to participate in education and employment, and female carers aged 25 to 64 years experienced the most education and employment disadvantages compared to their peers, particularly if they had no post-secondary school qualifications.¹⁶
- Adult young carers are more likely to remain on income support payments (welfare) for the same duration as adult carers aged 25 to 54 years.¹⁷

Interventions that support young carers school retention and post-secondary school education:

Australian and international research provides strong evidence that government policy direction and initiatives can assist school retention and transition to post-secondary school education. Examples of national initiatives are:

• **The Young Carer Bursary Program (YCBP)** was introduced by the Coalition Government and Carers Australia was funded to administer the \$3.45 million YCBP grant pool over three calendar years (2015-17). In its initial year the annual bursary amount was between \$4,000 to \$10,000, and a flat \$3,000 scholarship rate was introduced in subsequent years. The intent of the YCBP is to increase the likelihood that young carers under the age of 25 will remain in, or return to, education and transition to employment because of the scholarship.

Over the first three years of the program 987 bursaries were awarded.^{18,19} Each bursary funding round is for a one year bursary (a short-term intervention), and recipients and unsuccessful recipients can apply for a bursary in subsequent funding rounds. Following program evaluation, a further \$1 million was committed in the 2017-18 Federal Budget for the 2018 calendar year.

In 2015 (Round one) there were 800 young carer applications, with 300 bursaries allocated. In 2017 (Round 3) there were 1,200 applications, with 343 bursaries allocated. While there was a 50 per cent increase in applications in the funding rounds 2015-2017 the increase in allocation of bursaries was around 10 per cent.²⁰

¹⁶ Hill T, Thomson C, Raven M et al (2016) *ibid*.

¹⁷ Bray JR (2012) *ibid*.

¹⁸ Inside Policy (2017) *The Evaluation of the Young Carer Bursary Program Final Report February 2017*, prepared for the Australian Government Department of Social Services, Canberra. Accessible <https://www.dss.gov.au/disability-and-carers/programs-services/for-carers/young-carer-bursary-programme/an-evaluation-of-the-young-carer-bursary-program-final-report>

¹⁹ Bursary allocation to ACT young carers was four per cent of the total YCBP recipients. This proportion is slightly higher than the estimated ACT young carer population. See Inside Policy (2017) *ibid* pages 29-30.

²⁰ Inside Policy (2017) *ibid*.

Inside Policy, who evaluated the YCBP, found that for a modest investment the annual YCBP can reduce the financial pressure and stress that young carers face. The YCBP evaluation indicated that bursary recipients had the ability to stay in education, have more social time with friends, participate in hobbies or activities of interest and focus on things to help with their personal development.

Bursary recipients indicated that the young carer bursary had reduced their daily stress and allowed them to continue their caring role. It had also enabled recipients to aspire to a better future and led to more opportunities, such as university study or skilled professional careers that previously seemed beyond their capacity.

Inside Policy found:

“ ... YCBP is an important and much needed initiative that supports young carers by relieving financial pressure and helping them fulfil their caring responsibilities while remaining in education ... [the YCBP] has implications for the longer-term welfare costs and savings to government for this group of soon to be 987 young carers who were more likely to receive long-term unemployment benefits.

... recipient characteristics (as compared to unsuccessful applicants) share the characteristics of the desired cohort i.e. they have a high caring load, come from low income households and are all engaged in education.²¹

... in the 2016 funding round nearly three-quarters of recipients cared for someone with a mental illness and nearly half cared for someone with a physical disability.

... the number of applications and eligible applications per round compared to the number of bursaries available demonstrate the need for the YCBP.

... 86 per cent of bursary recipients live in a household with income of less than \$40,000 per annum, and over three-quarter of recipients lived in a single parent household.

... when compared to the estimated national young carer population, the female recipient population is slightly under-represented.

... demand for the bursary is growing year-on-year. Coupled with the benefits the bursary creates to both young carers and government, there seems to be a case to increase the number of available bursaries.”²²

²¹ Recent data suggests if nothing changes for young carers, 60 per cent of this cohort could be on income support in a decade's time (Source: Australian Priority Investment Approach to Welfare – Carers Factsheet. Accessible https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/09_2016/carers_factsheet.pdf)

²² Inside Policy (2017) *ibid*.

● **Young Carers Respite and Information Services** is the Government's major program to assist students with a significant caring role who need support to complete their secondary education or the vocational equivalent due to the demands of their caring role. Funding commitment over July 2016 to June 2019 is \$22.9 million. The program has two components:

1. Respite education support services to assist students up to and including 18 years of age with a significant caring role to access short term or immediate activities and supports that meet the educational support needs to continue and complete their education.

Students undertaking university or other tertiary level courses are not eligible for assistance under the Educational Support component. Students taking courses at a vocational institution that are not related to completing their secondary school equivalent education are also not eligible.

Direct respite services provided under the Young Carers activity will transition into the National Disability Insurance Scheme. Direct respite services for young carers must be accessed by their care recipients through their NDIS participant plan.²³

2. Information and services to support students with a significant caring role up to and including 25 years of age with information, advice and referral services, including referral to counselling. These services are delivered by Carers Australia and the network of state and territory Carers Associations.

Eligibility for education support includes young carers in primary school, secondary school, completing secondary school in tertiary institutes, or who are secondary carers with extensive responsibilities and are struggling to complete their education because of their caring role, including considering leaving secondary school or equivalent education prematurely.

Carers ACT auspices two Young carer respite and support services (component 1) – one in the ACT and one in SE NSW, and auspices the ACT funding to deliver Information, referral and advice services (component 2). Carers ACT employs one full time Young Carer Coordinator. In 2016-17 Carers ACT young carer support included:

- The Young Carer Coordinator assisted four schools in the ACT to either establish or re-establish young carer groups in the reporting period. Young carer groups are facilitated in eight high schools

²³ Carers ACT and other members of the national network of carers associations have strongly advocated that young carers who care for a family member with a mental illness or psychosocial disability are disadvantaged by this NDIS Guideline. What we know is that many people with mental illness or psychosocial disability are not being assessed for the NDIS. Where the person they care for has been assessed, the National Disability Insurance Agency does not recognise the needs of the participant's young carer as part of the informal care cluster regardless of their caring load. We anticipate there will be an increase in unmet need for young carers and their families, such as flexible support to enable the young carer to stay engaged in education and transition to employment and to maintain their caring role. YCBP evaluation data indicates nearly 75 per cent of 2016 bursary recipients were caring for adults with mental illness.

across the ACT and form invaluable links for young carers. These groups create safe environments where young carers can connect with each other sharing their experiences and knowledge.

- We supported 279 young carers through flexible respite, counselling, case coordination and other activities.
- We supported 54 new young carers through the Information, referral and advice services activity. Note: this support to young carers is only a small proportion of the estimated 1,000 plus young carers aged under 18 years in the ACT and those in SE NSW.

4. Young carer identification

Young carer research by the Social Policy Research Centre, University of NSW, in 2009 and again in 2016 identified the impact on life outcomes of being a young carer and the importance of young carer identification.

Their 2009 research for the Australian Government states:

... Policy makers and service providers agreed that young people rarely regard themselves as young carers. They observed that young people rarely approach services of their own accord, unless they are referred to services by school staff or by other formal contacts, since they accept and carry out their responsibilities as an integral part of family life.²⁴

The proposed national Integrated Carer Support Services (ICSS), to be implemented in July 2018. Its success measures will rely on carer self-identification or carer identification at a local level and referral to the Regional ICSS. Local carer identification and awareness at a local level includes schools.²⁵

With evident, low young carer identification and access to support Carers ACT is concerned that without a targeted intervention to identify and support young carers they will continue to experience education and employment disadvantage.

Currently, there is no national young carer education framework with the aim that all State and Territories implement policies to ensure their student welfare and retention at school. The framework should include improved identification and response to young carer needs and referrals to education support and

²⁴ Social Policy Research Centre (2009) *Number 38: Young carers in Australia: understanding the advantages and disadvantages of their care giving*, Canberra. Accessible <https://www.dss.gov.au/about-the-department/publications-articles/research-publications/social-policy-research-paper-series/number-38-young-carers-in-australiaunderstanding-the-advantages-and-disadvantages-of-their-care-giving?HTML>

²⁵ Australian Government Department of Social Services (2016) *Delivering an integrated carer support service: A draft model for the delivery of carer support services*, Canberra. Accessible https://engage.dss.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/draft_service_delivery_model_0.pdf

information and flexible support and early intervention to ensure they continue and complete their education.

5. Young carer transition to employment

Terms of Reference 2: Opportunities to better inform and support students in relation to post-school education and training, including use of employment outcomes of students who undertake school-based vocational education or post-school tertiary pathways.

● **Try, Test and Learn Fund (TTLF)** is the Australian Government's first response to the Australian Priority Investment Approach to Welfare and \$96.1 million was committed to trial new or innovative approaches to assist people who have the capacity work, and who are risk of long-term reliance on welfare, into stable and sustainable employment. It is an outcomes-focused approach to policy development. There three initial priority groups are young carers, young parents and young students.

The *Priority Group – Young Carers* booklet indicates the 2015 priority investment approach baseline valuation indicated for each of the 11,200 young carers aged under 25 years receiving the Carer Payment the average future lifetime costs was \$464,000.

The average young carer started receiving the Carer Payment when they were aged 20 years. If nothing changes 60 per cent of this priority group will be receiving income support payments in 10 years, and 50 per cent will be receiving income support payments in 20 years.²⁶ This data does not include an estimated trajectory of the intergenerational socioeconomic disadvantage for these adult young carers and their current or future children.

The Australian Department of Social Services is managing the TTLF and received 389 expressions of interest for innovative projects across the three priority areas. The announcement on the selected ideas for project co-development was expected in June this year.

Carers Australia participated in a Department's 'Policy Hack' to develop innovative ideas and several expressions of interest were submitted by some carers associations, including Carers ACT. These ideas were based on their experience and expertise of the barriers young carers face to complete school and transition to employment. They included internships with wrap-around support, collaborative assessment and pathway planning, peer support champions.

²⁶ Australian Government Department of Social Services (2017) *Priority Group – Young Carers*, Canberra. Accessible <https://engage.dss.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/TTL-Fund-Tranche-1-Priority-Group-Data-Young-Carers-20161208.pdf>

The TTLF project ideas indicate the range of possibilities to support young carers through their education and transition to employment, but Carers ACT believes that a more systemic national approach by the Government to identify and implement timely, responsive and appropriate interventions during a young carer's caring path is necessary to deliver improved lifetime outcomes for young carers.

Some project ideas by the Department to 'encourage a dramatic rethinking of the way that the Government determines its policy direction', such as case coordination for NDIS young carers²⁷ and raising or removing the 25-hour cap to encourage young carers to complete school, and go onto further study or employment²⁸ reflect this.

6. Recommendations

Recommendation 1

Carers ACT recommends that in line with the Young Carer Bursary Program evaluation the Australian Government continues:

- to invest in the Young Carer Bursary Program as a priority young carer initiative
- increases the program funding to increase the number of young carer bursaries, particularly younger young carers with extensive caring responsibilities²⁹
- implement a strategy to increase the number of female young carer bursary recipients.

Recommendation 2

Carers ACT recommends that in line with the Inquiry's aim to support young people continue education and transition to employment that:

- all Australian Governments invest in the development and implementation of a national young carer education framework or strategy to better identify and respond to young carers' education support needs, including mandatory young carer identification at enrolment

²⁷ See 23 above for more about the NDIS and young carers.

²⁸ If a young carer is studying or working for more than 25 hours in a week they cannot access a Carer Payment. There is early evidence that this 25 hour cap creates perverse outcomes among young carers (see https://engage.dss.gov.au/ttl_fund_dec16-submissions/sub-id-4881-carer-payment-25-hour-rule-behavioural-insights-team-australia/)

²⁹ Inside Policy (2017) *ibid*.

- that the Australian Government monitors and identifies unmet needs in the Young Carers Respite and Information Services initiative and implements measures to provide early intervention access for at risk young carers to ensure they continue and complete their secondary education
- that the Australian Government invests in and commits funding to meet the service demands of the Young Carers Respite and Information Services initiative to young carers in need.

Recommendation 3

Carers ACT recommends that as a priority the Australian Government rethinks the way it determines its young carer policies so that young carers are identified and supported at the beginning of and along their caring path with timely, responsive and appropriate interventions to ensure that they complete their education and transition to further study or employment, while maintaining their caring role.