



Pre-budget submission

Financial Year 2021-22

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29th January 2021

Budget Policy Division
Department of the Treasury
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Little Dreamers Australia – 2021-22 Pre-Budget Submission

Little Dreamers Australia appreciates the opportunity to provide a submission to the Australian Government in relation to the 2021-22 Budget.

Little Dreamers is Australia's leading not-for-profit supporting Young Carers. We are working towards an equal world for Young Carers, delivering direct support programs aiming to improve quality of life. With an estimated 1 in 10 children in Australia giving up their childhood to provide unpaid care to a family member, Little Dreamers delivers proactive and empowering support programs to reduce the risk factors that they face and increase their life opportunities.

We believe in a world where every Young Carer is supported by someone or something by 2030. To do this, we deliver internationally recognised best practice programs here in Australia, whilst working on international boards and partnering with organisations in countries like Norway, Sweden, UK, Canada, India, Nepal and Bangladesh to develop new supports for Young Carers.

All Little Dreamers programs have been developed by Young Carers, for Young Carers. These programs target each of the five main risk factors that these young people face - social isolation, poor mental health, unemployment, financial and educational disadvantage.

Over the past 12 months, Little Dreamers moved 80% of our programs online. This means that while many social services ceased during the COVID-19 crisis, Young Carers have still been able to access online school holiday programs, virtual one-on-one and group mentoring, Big Dreamers sessions and additional case management. Gaps were found in the provision of education support and online tutoring to help Young Carers whose families were not able to provide the necessary support for home schooling. To combat this, we launched an online tutoring program at Little Dreamers with over 40 Young Carers taking up this offer in less than 2 weeks.

As expected, the outbreak posed additional worries and anxiety for those Young Carers who look after a loved one with a complex health need. Many were concerned about how to provide vital support without putting their family at risk. This meant that they may have had less access to essential services including supermarkets and pharmacies at the peak of the pandemic, especially if the main driver in the family was unable to leave the house due to a lower immune system. The crisis also resulted in less support workers around to provide care, with more responsibilities falling onto the Young Carer themselves.

School often provides respite for Young Carers and with all education moving online around the country for a period, many Young Carers found that they were providing care 24/7 with less time to balance caring with their school work. Without school to go to, we found that Young Carers were losing an important layer of support and there was a higher risk of them losing focus on future opportunities. With heightened levels of unemployment and financial stress, caring families who are already facing financial disadvantage may have found themselves on harder times than usual and without school meals, many Young Carers were struggling to get the food they needed at the time.

Since the COVID-19 crisis started, Little Dreamers has experienced a 155% increase in demand for support from Young Carers and their families year on year. Funding opportunities however have been considerably impacted by the cancellation and/or suspension of grants as a result of economic uncertainty caused by COVID-19.

While we acknowledge that our country has a number of priorities to consider, we believe that there needs to be a greater focus on supporting our youngest carers and a strong investment in this area should be a Government priority.

This submission identifies a number of focus areas and strategies for the Federal Budget 2021-22 to improve the opportunities and support available for Young Carers and therefore, the broader community. These areas include:

- Adaption of the Carer Gateway to better support Young Carers
- Investment in supports co-developed by Young Carers
- Investment in capacity building for more research into Young Carers
- Provision of national guidance to state departments to best support Young Carers in Schools

ABOUT LITTLE DREAMERS

Founded in 2009, Little Dreamers has been supporting Young Carers for over 10 years. Our vision is a world in which every Young Carer around the world is supported by someone or something by 2030.

To achieve this, we advocate for policy change and run campaigns to raise awareness in Australia and around the world. Our dedicated one-to-one and group support programs reflect our desire for change and commitment to Young Carers.

We are revolutionising the way Young Carers are supported. Little Dreamers is headed up by Young Carers, who have created internationally best practice programs that are developed from a position of empathy and understanding.

We believe that we are never going to reduce the number of Young Carers that there are around the world (after all, carers save the Australian Government \$60bn a year) but we can increase the support and reduce the negative impacts of being a Young Carer. We can only do this if we all work together.

THE CARING CRISIS

In 2016, the Australian Child Wellbeing Project named Young Carers one of the four most at risk groups of young people in Australia. The past 3 decades have seen an increase in recognition of Young Carers as a distinct social group with specific experiences and distinct needs from those of their peers (Cass et al., 2011). This increase in recognition can be seen across Australia, the United Kingdom and also somewhat throughout the United States, Canada, New Zealand, Ireland and some parts of Europe.

There are more than 2.65 million carers of all ages in Australia.¹ The annual value of unpaid care in Australia has increased by 29% since 2015 with Carers in Australia providing approximately \$77.9 billion of unpaid care in 2020.² This number is continuing to grow with more young people taking on caring roles each year. A report by Carers Australia highlighted that the demand for informal care will outstrip supply by 2030.³ The pressure being placed on the provision of informal care comes from a number of places including Australia's ageing

¹ Carer Gateway, "About Carers", Accessed January 20, 2021, <https://www.carergateway.gov.au/about-carers#:~:text=Carers%20are%20people%20who%20look,people%20in%20Australia%20are%20carers.>

² Julie Skatssoon, "Unpaid Carers worth \$78b a year", Community Care Review, Published August 4, 2020, <https://communitycarereview.com.au/2020/08/04/unpaid-carers-worth-78b-a-year/#:~:text=A%20report%20by%20Deloitte%20Access,2020%20comes%20to%20%2477.9%20billion.>

³ Deloitte Access Economics, "The value of informal care in 2020", Carers Australia, Published May 2020, <https://www2.deloitte.com/au/en/pages/economics/articles/value-of-informal-care-2020.html>.

population, the increase in the number of women entering into the workforce and the subsequent decreased propensity for care, participation of older workers in the labour force, an increased understanding and acceptance of mental illnesses, a longer life expectancy of people with disabilities and many other factors.⁴

The estimated number of Young Carers in Australia varies as the definition of caring differs depending on the age group being captured, whether care is provided inside or outside the home and whether the person recognises and reports on their caring duties. It is estimated that 1 in 10 people under the age of 25 are Young Carers.⁵

In a report released by the Australian Institute of Family Studies in 2017 on Young Carers almost 40% of 14-15 year olds said that they spend some time caring for a person who is either elderly or has a health condition or disability.⁶ 22% provided help with core activities and a further 12% said they provided assistance other than help with core activities.⁷

This same report revealed that Young Carers are up to 1.5 years behind peers in Reading and Numeracy based on NAPLAN scores.⁸ AIFS economist Dr Diana Warren noted that “year 9 boys who spent two or more hours per day as carers were the equivalent of 1.9 years behind their peers in reading [while] girls were 1.6 years behind”.⁹

Some fast facts and stats

- There’s an estimated 2-3 Young Carers in every single classroom¹⁰
- 50% of Young Carers report having difficulty attending school every day¹¹

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Myra Hamilton and Gerry Redmond, “Are Young Carers Less Engaged in School than Non-Carers? Evidence from a Representative Australian Study”, Child Indicators Research: Australian Child Wellbeing Project. doi: 10.1007/s12187-019-09647-1.; Deborah Noble-Carr and Carers Australia, “Young carers research project : final report”, Dept. of Family and Community Services, Published 1 September 2002, <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/disability-and-carers/publications-articles/young-carers-research-project-final-report?HTML>; Diana Warren and Ben Edwards, “Young Carers, in LSAC Annual Statistic Report”, Growing Up In Australia, Published August 2017, <https://growingupinaustralia.gov.au/research-findings/annual-statistical-report-2016/young-carers>

⁶ Diana Warren and Ben Edwards, “Young Carers, in LSAC Annual Statistic Report”, Growing Up In Australia, Published August 2017, <https://growingupinaustralia.gov.au/research-findings/annual-statistical-report-2016/young-carers>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Helen Connolly, “Take Care — What can be done at school to support children and young people with caring responsibilities at home”, Commissioner for Children and Young People, Published June 2020, <https://www.ccy.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Screen-Take-Care-Report-4.pdf>.

¹¹ Tim Moore, Morag McArthur and Ros Morrow, 2009, “Attendance, achievement and participation: Young carers' experiences of school in Australia”, Australian Journal of Education 53, no. 1 (April):5-18.

- Young Carers are almost twice as likely to be disengaged from work or study than their peers¹²
- 60% of Young Carers between the ages of 15-24 are unemployed compared to 38% of non-Young Carers¹³
- 50% of Young Carers live in households that are close to or below the poverty line¹⁴
- 2 in 3 Young Carers experience mental health challenges¹⁵
- Young Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse people are over represented in the Young Carer population¹⁶
- Young Carers fear being bullied due to the stigma surrounding illness and disability¹⁷ (Moore and McArthur, 2007)

Young Carers do not always self-identify as carers and this can be for a number of reasons. Some feel as though they shouldn't be discussing family challenges in the community, others don't want to attract further attention and shy away from the stigma of being labelled a Young Carer. Some Young Carers fear repercussions or questions around child protection from divulging the fact that they are Carers in their family and many just don't think of themselves as having a particularly special or unique role. It is just what they are accustomed to doing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Young Carers are a group of vulnerable people that cross government departments, often resulting in them falling through the cracks.

After extensive consultation with Young Carers and their families across Australia, Little Dreamers encourages the Government to make caring for our Young Carers a national priority. Without supporting carers from a young age, we are already putting our young people at risk. We are not equipping them with the tools needed

¹² Diana Warren and Ben Edwards, "Young Carers, in LSAC Annual Statistic Report", Growing Up In Australia, Published August 2017, <https://growingupinaustralia.gov.au/research-findings/annual-statistical-report-2016/young-carers>

¹³ Deborah Noble-Carr and Carers Australia, "Young carers research project : final report", Dept. of Family and Community Services, Published 1 September 2002, <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/disability-and-carers/publications-articles/young-carers-research-project-final-report?HTML>

¹⁴ ABS, "Caring in the Community, Australia: Summary of Findings, 2012", Australian Bureau of Statistics, Last updated June 25, 2014, [https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/4436.0Main%20Features22012?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=4436.0&issue=2012&num=&view=.](https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/4436.0Main%20Features22012?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=4436.0&issue=2012&num=&view=)

¹⁵ Sue McAndrew, Tony Warne, Debbie Fallon, and Paul Moran, 2012, "Young, gifted and caring: A project narrative of young carers, their mental health, and getting them involved in education, research and practice", International Journal of Mental Health Nursing 21, no. 1 (February): 12-19.

¹⁶ Trish Hill, Ciara Smyth, Cathy Thomson, and Bettina Cass, "Young carers: their characteristics and geographical distribution", Social Policy Research Centre, Published 2009.

¹⁷ Tim Moore and Morag McArthur, 2007, "We're all in it together: supporting young carers and their families in Australia", Health Soc Care Community 15, no. 6 (November): 561-8.

to face the challenges posed by being a Young Carer, which often extends into adulthood. Early intervention and prevention of risk factors facing Young Carers should be top of the list.

The immediate priorities in relation to this recommendation are:

- Adapt the Carer Gateway to better support Young Carers
- Invest in dedicated supports developed in consultation with Young Carers rather than those developed for them;
- Invest and build capacity in Young Carer research; and
- Provide national guidance to state departments to best support Young Carers in Schools



RECOMMENDATIONS IN DETAIL

Adapt the Carer Gateway to better support Young Carers

On 5 March 2018, the Federal Government announced an additional \$85.6 million to support new services for Carers around Australia in the form of the Carer Gateway. At this time, the tender applications for funding read that Young Carers were defined as those between the ages of 18-25. Between launch of the tenders and roll out of the program in April 2020, the program was extended to reach Young Carers under 18, however little consideration was given to how the program might need to be adapted to be appropriate for the younger age bracket of Young Carers. This challenge is now evident in how we have seen Young Carers access and interact with the Carer Gateway platform and programs since launch.

If we circle back to the development of the Carer Gateway, we know that whilst a co-design process was undertaken with Carers, no Young Carers under 18 years old were consulted due to increased ethical requirements, and only a small percentage of those involved were between the ages of 18-25. This lack of involvement of Young Carers in the development of a support system demonstrates how this group of carers are devalued and forgotten about.

The Carer Gateway has been designed to “improve a carer’s quality of life” and make “carer supports and services easier to navigate and more accessible”. In practice, we have seen Young Carer support programs all over the country close down at the end of funding and while some consortiums are doing extremely well, many are not even offering Young Carer support, some even informing Young Carers that they are not eligible for the program. The reasons for this confusion and lack of consistency have a direct correlation with the lack of input Young Carers had in the development of the program.

We know, and this can be seen in every aspect of society, young people, and even young people of varying ages, require different support to adults. The Carer Gateway is supposed to be a proactive support service for Carers and if we want to reduce the impacts of being a Young Carer in the long term, we need to get this support for them right. The way the service is set up at the moment, is simply not working for our Young Carers.

Invest in dedicated supports developed in consultation with Young Carers rather than those developed for them

Developing programs with Young Carers can assist in empowering and engaging this group of at-risk young people on a new level. Rather than providing services that have been built from a top down approach, it is crucial that we begin to work bottom up and include Young Carers in co-development of support programs .

Involving Young Carers in the development of support programs ensures that the available funds are being used in a targeted and effective manner and that the programs are what Young Carers actually want.

With funding from the Department of Health, Little Dreamers is delivering a national advocacy project this year to better understand the experiences and views of Young Carers around Australia. This information can directly feed into the creation of a National Care Act, an Australian Carer Strategy, the improvement of the Carer Gateway and the development of additional supports for Young Carers around the country.

Invest and build capacity in Young Carer research

Australia is ahead of the curve in support available for Young Carers, however considerably falling behind in the amount of research being produced on Young Carers. Many programs are built using research from data coming out of the United Kingdom, Canada or Belgium.

Little Dreamers currently sits on the board of Euro-Young Carers and we are instrumental in the launch and development of the Me-We Research Project, reviewing current practices for Young Carers across six key countries.

For Australia to be put on the map for international recognition and support for Young Carers we require regular research to be funded and developed within Australia. This increase in research will ensure that funds are being directed as needed, programs will be better tracked, and impact measured more effectively and efficiently.

A practical way to do this is to offer additional grants for research projects around Australia.

Provide national guidance to state departments to best support Young Carers in Schools

While the education system is a state jurisdiction issue, guidance should be provided at a Federal Government level to unify education departments across the country for a consistent approach.

Proactive and early intervention support is an essential addition to ensuring holistic support. It is estimated that two to three students in every classroom have caring responsibilities at home and with additional challenges posed by COVID-19 restrictions, teachers have had a unique insight into students' home lives like never before.

We are advocating for two key introductions: the development of national guidance for education departments on best practice to support Young Carers to ensure consistency across the country; and, required training for teachers in schools across Australia.

We believe these amendments will increase attendance and school completion rates amongst Young Carers, resulting in more employment opportunities post-graduation.

CURRENT FUNDING CONCERNS


As mentioned, the Carer Gateway model has been developed primarily with older Australian Carers with the aim of fitting a one size fits all model to the community. Without clear and targeted support, Young Carers will be inadequately supported by this model and once again slip through the cracks. This will put further pressure on the Government, healthcare system, and the wider community.

CONCLUSION

Little Dreamers Australia views the 21-22 Budget as a vehicle for significant change for Young Carers. While this group in our country requires long term support, it will result in a more resilient and supportive nation. We appreciate the work that the Department of Social Services is doing with the Carer Gateway, however we believe that special attention needs to be given to Young Carers to ensure they do not get lost in the system.

We would be pleased to provide further information and commentary on these recommendations as required.

Warm regards,



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Founder and CEO,

Little Dreamers Australia



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