

Friday, 5 January 2017

To Whom It May Concern

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Victorian Parliamentary Economic, Education, Jobs and Skills Committee inquiry into Career Advice Activities in Victorian Schools.

Below is a brief background of Carers Victoria's work and young carers issues, followed by recommendations addressing the inquiry terms of reference.

About Carers Victoria: Carers Victoria is the State-wide peak organisation representing people of all ages who provide informal care. There are more than 736,600 unpaid family and friend carers across Victoria – people caring for someone with a disability, mental illness, drug and alcohol issue, chronic illness or an age-related condition. People receiving care could be a parent, child, spouse/partner, grandparent, other relative or friend. Carers Victoria is a member of the National Network of Carers Associations and the Victorian Carer Services Network.

Carers Victoria is a not for profit association reliant on public and private sector support to fulfil its mission on behalf of carers. Carers Victoria is a membership-based organisation. Our members are primarily family carers who play an important role informing our work, contributing to advocacy and strategic aims, and distributing information more widely to other carers.

Our work with young carers: Carers Victoria has operated a successful young carer program since 2007 and has proven service and youth sector expertise. Carers Victoria provides supported referrals to youth seeking access to carer services across the State, including via a free 1800 number intake and advisory line. Significant numbers of youth referrals to the Carers Victoria State-wide counselling program are triaged via the 1800 line. Carers Victoria also provides a full range of support services to young people across Victoria. Youth data is collected via young carer workers for these programs using a Carer Specific Wellbeing Index.

Carers Victoria also supports young carers post-secondary education within the organisation's regional, aged, disability and mental health programs, as well as providing respite assistance to young carers living in the Western region. Other youth service activities Carers Victoria undertakes include:

- Space4us youth peer leadership programs which raise awareness of mental illness and carer mental health

- Young carer group activities and camps with an educational, health and wellbeing focus
- Young carer peer support groups
- Mentoring youth leaders and representatives on the Victorian Young Carer Action Team (VYCAT)
- Mentoring youth leaders and representatives who attend the annual national young carer forum, and
- Providing policy advice via a young carers policy portfolio, working collaboratively with Federal and State peak youth organisations and support agencies to develop policy positions.

Carers Victoria has well developed working relationships with a range of youth stakeholders, peaks and programs across Victorian metropolitan, rural and regional areas. Other significant working relationships include secondary schools throughout the western region, universities, job-seeking service providers, local government youth hubs and small business. There are approximately 736,600 Victorian carers of which at least 10 per cent are estimated to be young carers¹. However, Carers Victoria is aware many carers in marginalised communities such as young LGBTI carers, young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers and young carers in culturally diverse and refugee families remain 'hidden' due to various barriers to services their communities experience.

Relationship between career advice activities and workforce participation of young Victorians

Young carer program staff at Carers Victoria have lived experience of young caring and apply youth participation models of practice. Carers Victoria's policies and programs are informed and shaped by working in partnership with young people. Issues raised by young carers are addressed within program design, planning, organisational policy (including recruitment), advocacy strategies, carer support practices and communications.

Carers Victoria believes similar inclusion of young carer's voices in the design of career advice programs would assist in more feasible expectations around work, which specifically suits them. Young carers should be supported to participate in the co-design of career advice activities and employment programs so supports into the workforce reflect their unique needs.

Recommendation 1: State Government leads the inclusion of young carer participation in the development of career advice activities and initiatives. This will ensure young carers can embed strategies and supports to help others just like them identify challenges and solutions earlier during their journey to further education and employment.

The extent to which career advice activities meet the needs of school leavers

Career advice activities can meet the needs of young school leavers if they are able to sustain participation in education to the point where these activities are offered and have the most benefit. Therefore, more needs to be done to provide formal support to young carers so they can fully participate in school.

Through our direct work with young carers, Carers Victoria knows they experience educational disadvantage, which can impact employment prospects throughout their lives. This can also result in missing valuable career guidance and counselling needed to embed sustainable education, training and career goals in young carers.

A 2017 report by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) highlighted disadvantage among young carers due to their care responsibilities. This research taken from *Growing Up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC)* identified young carers in Year 9 performed lower in reading and numeracy skills.

Of the 3,341 children in the cohort who completed the survey, 39 per cent (40 per cent of boys and 37 per cent of girls) reported providing some type of care ⁽ⁱⁱ⁾. Twenty-two per cent of all 14–15 year olds provided assistance with core activities of daily living, such as personal care (e.g. washing, dressing, eating, toileting), mobility (e.g. getting in/out of bed or chair) and communication (being understood and/or understanding family, friends or others). Caring for multiple people was also not uncommon, with almost 20 per cent of these young people disclosing care relationships with more than one person. These findings are generally consistent with earlier Australian research which used Census and income support payment data. This previous research also proposed the existence of relatives with a long-term health condition, disability or who is elderly increased the possibility a young person entering a care relationship, especially if they live in the same household ⁱⁱⁱ.

Compared to their non-caring peers, in reading, boys were 1.9 years behind and girls were 1.6 years behind their peers when they spent two or more hours per day as a carer ^(iv). It has been very difficult to find rich, large-scale data, to identify the extent of young carer educational disadvantage,^v however the LSAC results are likely to reflect the circumstances of a much larger age cohort of young carers.

Recommendation 2: The Department of Education and Training provides holistic wrap-around practical support to young carers to participate fully in school and therefore properly plan their transition to employment. This includes support to access all available flexible learning options during secondary studies to reach their academic milestones and the opportunity for young carers to explore a wider range of career and further education options. In addition, the Department of Education and Training works collaboratively with Carer Associations, young carers, as well as youth peaks and youth service providers to achieve this outcome, through consultation, co-design and the use of young carer lived experience.

Challenges advisers face helping young Victorians transition from education to the workforce

Specific challenges exist for advisors wanting to ensure all students benefit from their guidance, with the most significant being adequate identification of student and school leaver's needs. Many young carers will not disclose a care relationship due to harmful stigma, which can be attached to disability, chronic or mental illness. Identification of care relationships is orientated better to environments where these types of stigma are openly challenged. An increase in community awareness of how disability, chronic or mental illness impacts families and carers is required. This includes a need to improve knowledge among those who work with youth in the education system through tailored professional development.

In relation to this, it is also vital employers adopt carer friendly practices so young people who are in care relationships may enter the job market with confidence they can negotiate care arrangements, and not have to choose between work and care.

Recommendation 3: The Department of Education and Training introduces a State-wide education and awareness program delivered to staff and students which addresses stigma arising from identifying students in care relationships.

Recommendation 4: State Government, together with the Department of Education and Training, the Office of the Victorian Skills Commissioner, Industry Advisory Groups, Carer Associations as well as youth peaks and stakeholders, works to identify sectors which are complementary to young carer skills, interests and capacity to work.

Strategies to improve the effectiveness of career advice activities for school leavers

Carers Victoria has built State-wide relationships delivering education and training packages to organisations from the health, human services, non-profit sectors and grass roots groups – many of whom have targeted youth programs. Our research and work with other stakeholders demonstrates the reason young carers struggle to engage with education is not because they are uninterested or lack ability, rather it's because their caring role can place intense demands on their time and energy when they are not supported.

As noted, lack of self-identification by young carers with the term 'carer' precludes uptake of support services. When combined with a lack of awareness about care relationships among teachers and others working in education settings, young carer's unique circumstances are not often picked up and they can get left behind. Training career advisors and school staff how to identify care relationships and appropriately respond and referral is crucial to resolve this. Training could increase student comfort with disclosure, as well as earlier recognition of care responsibilities (by either the student or staff) and what it means for the young person's education and career development.

In addition, there are significant considerations required when supporting young people during transition between education environments and employment. During this period students require a broader array of services and their study load can increase, some may experience additional social pressures among peers. Other responsibilities such as part-time work and navigating further education options can demand considerable time or seem overwhelming. Some supports for young carers do not have to cost a lot of money. While employment and trainee supports may need more investment, school settings and staff practices and supports can be adjusted to meet the needs of carers in a similar manner to how young people with disabilities are supported.

Carers Victoria would like to see more flexibility offered to young carers in the event of any unforeseen crisis involving a person they care for. Responsibilities can also be episodic, for example when a care relationships exists due to mental illness. Ideally supports should be in place for young carers so any risk of absence/crisis during assessments, exams or key learning opportunities are mitigated. Prevention strategies should be encouraged and applied. Additionally, limitations of respite availability need to be recognised alongside planning with students who have ongoing care responsibilities.

While Carers Victoria works collaboratively with schools and the Education Department; there remains a need for a systematic approach to consider young carer needs and barriers to education in the learning and outcomes for a range of State initiatives such as Managed Individual Pathways (MIPs).

Recommendation 5: State Government in partnership with carers and their representatives provide ongoing professional development and resources for staff around young carer identification.

Recommendation 6: State Government and the Department of Education and Training apply a systematic approach to working collaboratively with carer representatives, relevant stakeholders and young people to meet the needs of young carers who are trying to become job ready and to support those at risk of disengaging from school.

Career advice needs of young people in regional Victoria and ways to address these needs

Young carers need to develop the skills, knowledge, behaviours and capabilities to make informed course and career decisions, and effectively manage significant changes. However, this will not be achievable if there are career conflicts with unsupported care responsibilities.

Rural and regional young carers trying to become career ready are not only vulnerable to changes in (sometimes thinning) job markets, they are also dependent on variabilities in health, aged, disability or mental health service provision in their area, which they rely on to assist a person they care for.

Support in mapping health, mental health, aged and disability services, as well as

seeking carer respite, often becomes part and parcel of job seeking for these young carers who may require additional planning and referral.

There is an opportunity for career advisors, schools, MIPs coordinators and student welfare staff (among other stakeholders) to work collaboratively and systematically with carer support services to ensure the best outcomes for students and enhance responsiveness to young carers; however, the future of many carer supports is uncertain under the proposed National Integrated Carer Support Services model.

These supports could otherwise assist young jobseekers with respite or address care related issues which create barriers to job seeking and career advisory program uptake. Furthermore, current nationally funded young carer services do not include comprehensive case management. Case managers could coordinate a varied range of stakeholders to support young carers who may otherwise be daunted by the number of providers required to resolve issues they face. For example, some young people may require support and assistance simultaneously for their education and their care role.

This can involve Department of Education and Training staff, school staff (teachers and welfare workers), child protection staff, legal services, carer associations, health and mental health services, disability services, respite services, youth and welfare services. Carers Victoria believes resourcing an ongoing mix of high quality State and Federal services for young carers will benefit young people State-wide and ensure fewer gaps.

Recommendation 7: State Government lobbies the Australian Department of Social Services (DSS) to ensure the ongoing provision of nationally-funded services currently accessible to young carers. These services are uncertain to continue in a similar capacity, or at all under the proposed Integrated Carer Support Service Model beyond June 2018. Specifically, we refer to the Young Carers Respite and Information Services (YCRIS), the Carer Information Support Services (CISS) and the National Carer Counselling Program (NCCP).

Recommendation 8: State Government funds targeted young carer services to deliver case management to provide wrap around support, including working with career advisers, as well as MIPs and other school support staff.

Exploring what other jurisdictions both in Australia and overseas have in place that could be implemented in Victoria

Currently there are no targeted State funds allocated specifically for young carers in Victoria, nor are there any State-funded, State-wide young carer specific career advice initiatives. Generic State funding of carer services is targeted to 16 – 65 year olds, however these are not youth specific meaning referrals are limited via mainstream sources outside youth and education sector. There are some initiatives throughout Australia which target young carers in education, training and employment. While the Federal Government's Young Carer Bursary Program goes some way towards supporting school retention, these bursaries only benefitted just over 300 young carers aged between 12 and 25 nationwide during 2017^{vi}. There is a list of school resources

designed to assist education staff support young carers listed on the Carers Australia website which we encourage schools and stakeholders to refer to^{vii}.

Recently the Federal government initiated the 'Try Test and Learn' pilot projects to address young carers who receive Centrelink payments. However, Carers Associations understand a large number of young carers are hesitant to apply for payments, or do not characterise themselves as a 'carer'.

It is for this reason Carers Victoria would like to see further integration of care responsibilities and care relationships within the suite of tools used to identify 'at risk' young people for school programs designed for disengaged or vulnerable students. Carers Victoria also recommends the consideration of and means to address young carer specific needs in the provision of support and referral provided by these programs.

In addition, we believe further data collection from young carers regarding their experience of these programs is essential. It is only when we know where the gaps are in these initiatives that we can respond to them and ensure better outcomes.

Recommendation 9: State Government leads and works in partnership with Carers Victoria to better integrate care responsibilities in the design of school-based programs which target disengaged or vulnerable students, in particular within assessment, support planning and outcome evaluation processes.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require further information.

Yours sincerely,



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ⁱ ABS, (2015), Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia, Victoria, Catalogue # 4430.0

ⁱⁱ Warren, D., & Edwards, B. The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children Annual statistical report 2016 p. 88

ⁱⁱⁱ Warren, D., & Edwards, B. The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children Annual statistical report 2016 p.115

^{iv} Warren, D., & Edwards, B. The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children Annual statistical report 2016 p.111

^v Carers Australia, 'Young carers put at educational disadvantage' Posted online August 8, 2017

^{vi} Carers Australia, 'Young carers put at educational disadvantage' Posted online August 8, 2017

^{vii} Carers Australia Website, 2017 <http://carersaustralia.com.au/about-carers/young-carers2/young-carers-in-secondary-schools/>