Carers WA

Young Carers Peer Support Group Toolkit

A practical guide for **educators, non-teaching staff** and **leaders** to provide young carers with peer support groups in education facilities.

Acknowledgement

Carers WA

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General Carer Referrals
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www.carerswa.asn.au

ABN
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NB: The above numbers and emails are not crisis support numbers and are not manned outside of business hours. If you need support outside of these hours please call Lifeline 13 11 14; Suicide Callback 1300 659 467; Crisis Care 9223 1111; Beyond Blue 1300 224 636; Samaritans 135 247

Hello & welcome

To your four-part practical toolkit to support young carers in your education facility!

This guide has been designed by the Young Carers team at Carers WA in consultation with young carers, educators, non-teaching staff and service providers across multiple schools in WA.

This online resource is designed for anyone and everyone and can be used by educators, non-teaching staff, students and leaders. Whether you are a primary school, high school, CARE school, TAFE or university, this toolkit can be utilised and adapted to suit your staff and young people.

Whilst we make recommendations throughout, you may choose to use parts or all of the toolkit. As we say, it is entirely up to you to decide what will work best for your young carers and education facility.

Throughout this toolkit you will be provided with all of the information and resources you need to set up a Peer Support Group for young carers in your education facility.

Let's get started!

Contents

Part A: Let's Begin!

In Part A of this toolkit, you will learn the key "who, why and how" concepts of supporting young carers, and how Carers WA can support you. After all, we don't expect you to know all the answers or do this on your own.

How to use this toolkit

For us to be able to support you along the way, we have developed a series of information sheets and resources that have been embedded into this document. To open the resource you require, click on the icon in the section.

The following icons are recognised throughout the toolkit to represent the type of resource;

Document	Activity	Information

Who are Carers WA?

Carers WA is a non-profit, community based organisation and registered charity dedicated to improving the lives of the estimated 230,000 family and friend carers living in Western Australia (WA).[1]

The Young Carer team at Carers WA are a youth friendly team of professionals dedicated to recognising and supporting the needs of young carers.

Carers WA is recognised by both State and Federal Governments as the peak body representing the needs and interests of carers in WA.

Through our research and work with carers, service providers and education facilities, we have identified the increasing value of peer support to a carer's ability to better manage their caring role.

Key findings that have informed this toolkit include;

- Carers develop a wealth of lived experience and benefit from an opportunity to utilise it.[2]
- A strengths-based program builds resilience, is respectful and builds confidence to better deal with challenges.[3]
- Peers provide a unique form of support.[4]
- Mentoring is a mutually empowering relationship where those with a shared experience can pool resources, share stories and work together towards identified goals.[5, 6]
- Many carers are isolated due to distance or their caring role.[7]
- A caring role can change over time requiring a service to be understanding and flexible.[8]
- Support provided online would be accessible and beneficial to most carers, especially those who are isolated or living with their own health concerns.[9, 10, 11]
- Support provided over the telephone is similarly accessible and will provide carers with a relatively immediate and personal form of support.[12]
- Support provided face-to-face can be harder for a carer to access, however it promotes social participation and is a quicker way to form a trusting relationship.[12]

Who are young carers?

National and international research shows that young carers rarely self-identify for a variety of reasons, making them a "hidden" vulnerable group. Many young carers also aren't familiar with the term "young carer" until after the term has been explained to them, meaning that identification can be difficult for you as a key person at school.

A young carer is a person, under the age of 25, who provides unpaid care to a loved one, who may be living with one or more of the following conditions;

Disability

Mental Illness

Chronic condition

Terminal Illness

Alcohol or Drug Dependancy

Frail Age
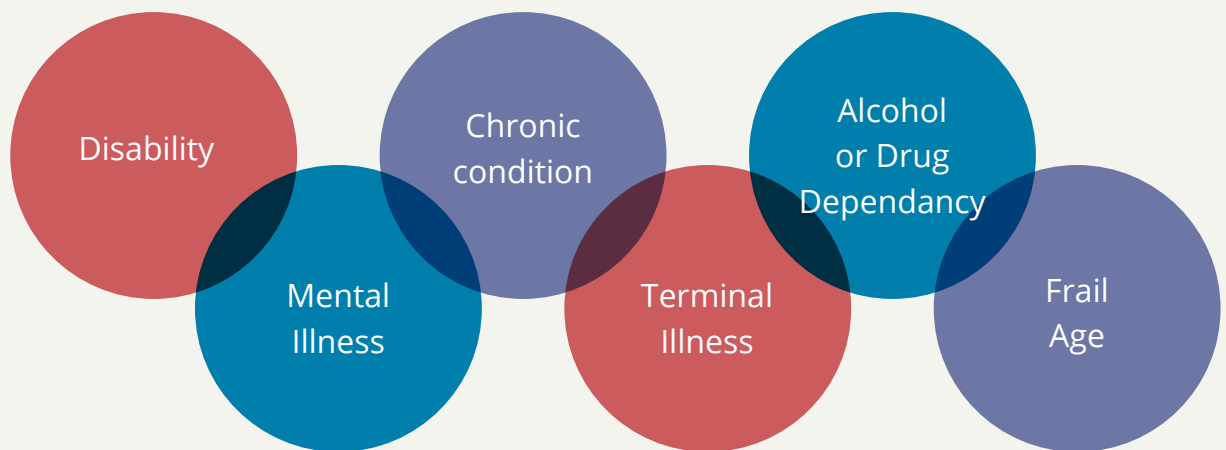
Due to their situation, young carers have extra responsibilities which can impact on their home, school and social life.

In Western Australia, it's estimated there are over 22,000 young carers in both metropolitan and regional or remote areas.

At least 1 in 11 young people in Australia have some level of responsibility as a carer in their home. This equates to there being, on average, 2-3 young carers in every classroom in Australia.

Why is it important to support young carers?

A young carer's role will vary from person to person and may include physical and emotional tasks that can be demanding and challenging. The support a young carer provides will go above and beyond what a non-carer would be responsible for.

Types of responsibilities may include;

Household duties - cooking, cleaning, laundry, shopping, looking after other siblings or family members including themselves.

Personal support - showering and bathing, dressing, using the toilet, mobility assistance (transport, wheelchair assistance, getting in and out of bed and shower), administering medications, translating, making phone calls and managing appointments and finances.

Emotional support - providing company to the person they are caring for, regular and sometimes constant supervision, having to assess and support the care recipient's emotional and psychological wellbeing.

Due to the demands of the role, there are a range of systemic issues that can occur which can impact the young person's wellbeing, education, relationships and connection to the community.

In the figure on the next page (pg. 7) you are provided with a holistic visual framework which underpins the challenging and protective factors of being a young carer.

The "school" section is important for leaders and educators as it outlines how the education environment can support and have a positive impact on a young carer's wellbeing.

Challenging and Protective Factors Information Sheet
www.carerswa.asn.au/yc-challenging-protective-factors-info-sheet/

Community

Protective Factors
- Sense of belonging, purpose and connection to land/community.
- Peer connection and friendships.
- Information and access to service providers that can offer support to both carer and care recipient.
- Respite through community facilities, programs and activities (there are often lots of free options including sports, parks, beaches etc.).

Challenging Factors
- Community stigma and discrimination creates barriers to individuals regaining positive health and education outcomes.
- Social isolation delays treatment seeking causing further deterioration in health and the ability to look after one's health.
- Community resources become further stretched to meet increased needs.

Relationship

Protective Factors
- Increased empathy to other's needs.
- Providing safe places to discuss feelings.
- Being understood and therefore increasing confidence to form relationships.
- Better relationship with family members.

Challenging Factors
- Lack of social skills or social isolation.
- Difficulties in accessing social and recreational activities outside of the home.

- Co-dependency between the young carer and the person they are caring for.
- Thoughts and feelings of worry, fear or that something terrible might happen if they leave the person they are caring for unattended.

School

Protective Factors
- Sense of belonging and purpose.
- Provides opportunity for the young carer to take a break from caring role.
- Opportunity to make peer connections and friendships with others who have shared experiences.
- Development of school policy around young carer needs to increase education outcomes.

Challenging Factors
- Bullying from peers.
- Social isolation.
- Low self-esteem.
- More likely to have poorer learning outcomes.
- More likely to withdraw from the education system, than young people not in a caring role.

Individual

Protective Factors
- Increased self-esteem and overall wellbeing.
- Skill development around self-care.
- Genuine social connections.

Challenging Factors
- Feelings of shame and/or embarrassment, or resentment (from missing out on "normal" experiences) about their caring role.
- More likely to experience negative impacts on their mental wellbeing due to feelings of being alone and isolated.
- More likely to experience increased illness due to poorly managed self-care eg. lack of sleep.

How can a Peer Support Group help young carers in your school?

What does peer support look like for young carers?

We know that peer support is recognised as being a valuable prevention and early intervention tool, particularly for young people.

Peer support can be described as the sharing of knowledge, lived experiences and social, emotional and practical support among peers.[13]

Peer support groups encourage young people to be empowered to build positive relationships and encourage help seeking behaviors.[13]

What are the benefits of peer support?

Benefits to the school;

- Enables the school to review their policies under the "Carer's Recognition Act 2004" WA legislation to ensure they are delivering a best practice approach.

- Empowers schools to encourage young carer students to remain engaged in school increasing attendance, education outcomes and overall opportunities.

- Raises awareness of young carers and their needs, which reduces stigma and encourages young carers to build a positive relationship and seek help from the school.

- The school will receive personalised support from the Carers WA Young Carer team and resources that will support young carer policy, promotion and peer support.

References 5, 6, 11, 12, 13, 14

Benefits to the young carers;

- Provides the opportunity to take a break from their caring role, in a safe and inclusive environment.

- Reduced isolation which leads to improved mental health, improved ability to cope with stress, trauma and change, and improved optimism and self-esteem.

- Builds a sense of belonging and feelings of acceptance, inspiration, hope, empowerment and motivation.

- Reduced stress through the provision of support and coping strategies that enables the young carer to better manage their own self-care.

- Confidence and upskilling of emotional resilience to better manage their educational outcomes alongside their carer responsibilities.

Young Carers 'My Mental Health'
bit.ly/Young-Carers-My-Mental-Health

What might you want to consider before you begin?

There are several considerations to take into account before starting the planning stages of a peer support group. This includes policy, privacy, capacity and sustainability.

Take some time to go through each of the following considerations to ensure you're adequately prepared to take the next step.

Including young carers in your school's policy

Policy plays an important role in embedding a positive culture and reducing stigma which will support young carers in their education environment. Young carers need governments, service providers and the community to be informed about, and respond appropriately to, issues that are important to their caring role and family's needs.

The following document highlights the rights of the carer which is outlined in Western Australia's state legislation under the "Carers Recognition Act 2004".[14]

You can also adopt this policy if your school has not yet developed one. We recommend including young carers, young people, parents and staff in the development of your school's policy.

Young Carers School Policy
www.carerswa.asn.au/young-carers-school-policy/

National Principles for Child Safe Organisations
bit.ly/NPChildSafeOrg

Privacy

In order to maintain trust with both parents and students, and meet legal obligations, it's important to protect individuals' personal and health information. All school staff share the responsibility and obligations of protecting privacy. [17]

With regards to young carer's information, it is important to review your school's privacy policy around the collection, storage and communication of information and parental consent.

Diversity and inclusion

In planning an inclusive peer support group, it is important to encourage diversity that takes into account different ages, cultural backgrounds, and genders to enable variants in perspectives and broaden group membership.[18]

We understand that each school is unique, diverse and has varying needs. Your school will know more about your cultural needs than we do! We encourage you to consult your young people and include them in the process to ensure all promotions and group actions are inclusive, respectful and appropriate.

Sustainability

Ensure your group is sustainable using the following strategies:

- Invite young carers to register as member with Carers WA so they can have access to all of our supports and events!

- Adopt a policy and promote young carers in your school (we can help with that)

- Encourage the group to take ownership and take the lead - this is after all their group - the group should be empowering, insightful and most of all, fun!

Regularly evaluate the group's growth through feedback. We recommend reviewing the group at least once per year or as required.

Part B: Planning

Following a process chart, planning document or checklist can be a great way to ensure that you are covering all bases and nothing will be forgotten.

We have put together the following Process Flowchart to provide a clear overview of all the steps required to implement your Peer Support Group from connecting to Carers WA all the way through to evaluating the group.

We have provided the flowchart on the following page as well as a printable version of the document accessible through the icon below.

Process Flowchart (printable version)
www.carerswa.asn.au/peer-support-process-flowchart/

CONNECTION

Connecting with the Young Carers team at Carers WA to see how they can support the entire process of implementing a Peer Support Group.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Establish whether there is a need by consulting with the student services team, teachers, parents and current identified young carers.

REVIEW

Determine what actions the school already has in place. Does the school already have policies and practices that support young carers?

PROMOTION

Consider what methods of promotion will be most effective in your school. You may consider general public communication and also consultation with already identified young carers.

PREPARATION

You will need to consult with the young people to determine a suitable meeting schedule. You may also want to ensure all materials are ready for the first meeting.

IMPLEMENTATION

You are now ready for the first meeting! At this meeting its important to discuss confidentiality, expectations and allow the young carers opportunity to get to know one another.

CONSULTATION

Its important to regularly check in with the young carers to ensure they feel supported. You may want to consider consulting with the parents if you are a primary school.

EVALUATION

This is key in ensuring longevity of the peer support group and continued improvement.

Promoting your Peer Support Group in your school

Now, we are not going to have a group unless we do a little bit of awareness raising!

The following resources have been designed as a way to engage young carers in your school to get involved. You may wish to use some or all of the resources based on your school's capacity and need.

To access the document click on the ✎ icon next to the description.

Let's get promoting!

Promotional Poster
www.carerswa.asn.au/peer-support-promo-poster/

Classroom/assembly and social media promotion
www.carerswa.asn.au/peer-support-social-promotion/

Newsletter announcement
www.carerswa.asn.au/peer-support-newsletter-announcement/

Preparing for the first meeting

Eligibility

If there is a lot of interest in the group, you may want to consider dividing the group by ages. For example;

- Group one (8-12 years)
- Group two (12- 14 years)
- Group three (15-17 years)

Always consult with the young carer group members first as they may wish to have a larger group of mixed ages.

Timing

Finding a time to suit all students (especially in high school) can be tricky! Once all expressions of interest have come through, check everyone's class timetables to determine whether it's possible to hold the group meeting in class time. If not, other alternatives include recess or lunch time, free periods or after-school hours.

We also recommend that the group meeting goes for anywhere between 30 minutes to 1-hour.

Before the first meeting you can also look at your availability and how frequently the group will meet. For example, this may be fortnightly, monthly or once a term.

We suggest discussing what works best with the young carers (considering your schedule too) in the first meeting.

Meeting Location

Based on how many young carers will attend the group, you will need to consider the size of the room and the activities that they will be doing.

You may have access to a permanent meeting room that you can use to host the

meeting each time. Alternatively, you may wish to consider booking rooms such as a library room space, arts rooms, or the gymnasium. Perhaps get outdoors on the oval, if the weather is looking clear.

Facilitation

There are several ways to ensure the group runs effectively. One way is to appoint an employee to coordinate the group. This will generally be a student services staff member such as a school chaplain, youth worker, psychologist or you may even appoint a school leader or teacher.

The role of the staff coordinator is to coordinate the group meetings, locations etc. They would not necessarily be required to facilitate the group's activities or conversations, as you may choose at the first meeting to develop an Activity Leader role.

The Activity Leader role may work in a number of ways. Each young carer in the group could take turns as leader per meeting or you could have the group decide on a group member to be an Activity Leader. This person should not dominate the space or the discussions. Instead, they will be responsible for time keeping with activities and conversations, and facilitating the group out of any potentially harmful or irrelevant topics.

Funding

Does the school have money in the budget to put on some light snacks for the group?

As a general estimate, if the school can arrange food, we recommend averaging approximately $10 -15 per meeting. If the school cannot provide snacks, ask the young carers if they would all like to bring a "share plate". For example, this may include dip, crackers, chips, cookies, fruit or vegetables.

Schedule

Now that you've completed your planning and are ready to go, your meeting schedule might look something like this! Please note this is an example.

What	Young Carer Peer Support Group
Date	1st February 2020
When	Every three weeks
Where	School Library - Room 1
Time	10.00am -11.00am
Comments	For any further questions contact: School Chaplain, Jane Smith

Part C: You are now ready!

You can expect that the first meeting's purpose will be around establishing the group dynamic and getting to know one another.

On request, our team may be able to support facilitating the first meeting if required.

Check out the following documents you can use to track attendance, participation and session outlines to guide your first meeting.

Participant Recording Document
www.carerswa.asn.au/participant-recording-document/

Attendance Recording Document
www.carerswa.asn.au/attendance-recording-document/

Peer Support Group Session Outlines
www.carerswa.asn.au/peer-support-group-session-outlines/

Part D: Resources

The following section includes resources to support conversations, activities and opportunities for the group.

Topics to discuss

There are plenty of topics that can be discussed in the peer support group meetings. This may be related to the young carer's roles or it might simply be discussing key themes young people experience. It's all about having a holistic and person-centered outlook, so remember to listen to the young carers and what they think might be important to talk about!

Here are some possible ideas on ways to incorporate different topics into the group discussion:

1. If the group is still in the early stages of getting to know one another, or if there is a lot of silence happening, you may want to read out the topics and get everyone to choose what they would like to talk about. This will open up interesting and diverse opinions and conversations.

2. Just before the end of each group session you could choose a topic or pull a topic out of a hat to discuss at the next meeting. This could allow people to come to the meeting feeling more prepared with something they can contribute.

3. Consider inviting an organisation to attend one of the sessions to talk about this topic and their service including, Carers WA's Young Carer team. You can access these services in the support services section of this toolkit.

Discussion starters - choose one to get the conversation going!

Mental health and emotional wellbeing
Recognising signs of different mental health issues, seeking support, supporting others with mental health illnesses, compassion fatigue and burnout.

Mindfulness and building resilience
Share ideas around things you find helpful when dealing with stress and ways in which you identify when you might not be dealing with stress. There are lots of mindfulness activities available in this toolkit and online to research and practice.

Relationships
Understanding healthy relationships (friendships, family, intimate), boundaries and consent. Identify relationship and sexual health services that are available.

Social media
There are a lot of positive benefits of social media, however, there are also many negative impacts. Discuss key important themes around cyber safety (privacy, stalking, harassing), cyber bullying (trolling, verbal), screen time (concentration and sleep), body image, constant comparison and gratification through amount of "likes and followers/ friends" and human connection. How to overcome the pressures of social media and use social media in a positive way (advocacy and choice).

Bullying
Discuss the varying forms of bullying for example; face-to-face, covert and cyber which can be physical, verbal and psychological. Discuss overcoming bullying, taking action and seeking support.

Sexual and reproductive health
Learn about sexual and reproductive health, issues, rights and diversity in its many forms. It's important to also consider topics around safe sex practices, relationships and informed consent and behaviors.

Healthy habits
Support for building healthy habits around sleep, nutrition, physical exercise, social media and gaming.

Alcohol and other drugs
Talk about safe partying, leavers, how to manage peer pressure, abstaining from or cutting down on alcohol or other drugs and what support services are available.

Culture
Learn about each other's backgrounds and explore other languages and cultures around us. This may include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds or even learning more about your heritage.

Politics
Advocating for young carers needs, climate change, human rights, equality and equity are just some of the political topics that may interest young people.

Adulting
Learn skills for #Adulting101! Managing Centrelink, Medicare, tax, health appointments, NDIS support, budgeting and life after school.

Employment and careers
Discovering what careers interest you, building on your skills as a young carer, resume and cover letter writing, where to look when applying for jobs and how and mastering an interview. Did you know, Carers WA has a "Be Job Ready" program available for young carers aged 16+ to build their skills? To find out more you can access this information here.

Education opportunities and future studies
Discovering what you like, applying for courses, time management, the career pathways from different education facilities; training centres, TAFEs, universities

Services and supports available for young people and young carers

Do a little investigating to find out what services out there may be useful for you, there are plenty! We also recommend looking into what supports are available within your current networks for example; school, community groups, sporting clubs, online groups. Also check out what supports Carers WA can provide you here.

Check out these additional resources!

Now that you have some key discussion points to choose from you can also include icebreakers and activities for each session (as per the session outline document).

Here you have complete access to a library of useful icebreakers and activities that can be used.

Icebreakers
www.carerswa.asn.au/peer-support-icebreakers/

Activities
www.carerswa.asn.au/peer-support-activities/

> ## Remember to evaluate as you go - consider the needs of the group, adapt and evolve!

Staying Connected

Stay connected with the Young Carers team at Carers WA by visiting us at…

🌐 **Website**
www.carerswa.asn.au/

f **Facebook**
www.facebook.com/CarersWA/

in **Linkedin**
www.linkedin.com/company/carers-wa/

If you are looking for additional support about young carers you can visit the "Young People" section on the Carers WA website to keep up with our happenings, events and services, such as counselling.

We can also provide individualised support to young carers facing a range of challenges. To find out what we can do for you, you can reach the Young Carers team at:

📞 **Carers WA General Phone**
1300 227 377

📞 **Carers WA Counselling Phone**
1800 007 332

✉ **Email**
youngcarers@carerswa.asn.au

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14. A copy of the Carers Recognition Act 2004 is available at www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/wa/consol_act/ cra2004197/

15. A copy of the Carer Recognition Act 2010 is available from www.comlaw.gov.au/Details/C2010A00123

16. For more information on the National Carer Strategy please contact Department of Social Services https:// www.dss.gov.au/disability-and-carers (Document is currently unavailable online)

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