

Building Capacity and Supporting a Young Carer Aged 8-12



For Schools and Service Providers

Young carers aged 8-12 years require adult support and supervision to participate in respite activities provided by Carers WA. Therefore, accessing these activities (e.g. sporting club events, camps etc.) may be limited when guardians unable to accompany the child.

Identifying any adult carers in the family, and ensuring that they are connected to available carer supports, also positively impacts on the young carer.

Where wrap around support is required for the adults and/or family, a referral to the Family Support Network may be appropriate as they provide family case management support above what Carers WA provide. Carers WA is not a crisis service.

Carers WA may be able to provide financial support for 'respite activities' where transport and supervision are already in place for example a school camp, activity or resources that the family may struggle to pay for due to financial pressures as a result of the caring situation.

Other effective ways that schools and service providers can support a young carer:

- 1. Acknowledge the role the young carer takes on - positive and negative.**
Although the young person may acquire the

qualities of being mature, responsible, and empathetic, it can be tiring and stressful as well. Simply acknowledging that there is a reason things may feel difficult for them at times can be a huge relief. With the young person's permission, let only 'key staff' know about the situation and updates, if relevant. This can make them feel more supported and save them having to repeat conversations.

- 2. Check in regularly to offer support, even if the young carer appears to be fine.**
Although the young person may be used to caring and helping others, try not to fall back on always relying on them to look after the care recipient (i.e. sibling, if in the same setting) or others that require frequent support.
- 3. Identify opportunities for the young carer to take break.** Help the young person identify a particular person, place or activity that can be their 'respite' within the organisation if they are feeling overwhelmed or need a break.
- 4. Put a call out to see if there is staff who can facilitate a Peer Support Group for young carers.** Carers WA have written a free program with 8 activities that can be adapted to suit the needs of your setting. This reduces the isolation and increases the support and engagement for the young person. Request the starter kit at: www.carerswa.asn.au/peer-support-toolkit

To hear some experiences of young carers in a Carers WA Peer Support Group visit: www.youtube.com/watch?v=84TdBK_nDrc

5. Normalise the caring role and care recipients by increasing visibility of those that require support and those who provide it. This may be by simply mentioning in conversation, celebrating Carers Week and showing videos such as 'Are You a young carer?' www.youtube.com/watch?v=X0m8JFYu99Y

6. Connect the family to support. Ensure that the adults in the family are appropriately connected to all available service provider supports that they are eligible for. By strengthening and connecting supports for the adults, whether that be the person being cared for, or the primary adult carer, this reduces the burden of responsibility on the young carer.

7. Link the adults to other local service providers. This could include NDIS, GP, mental health, or even Carers WA.

If mental health support is the main area of need identified by the young person:

We recognise the shortage of free counselling support for 8-12 year olds across WA; Carers WA does not currently employ counsellors for 8-12 year olds. However, by visiting a GP and requesting a Mental Health Care Plan, this provides access to up to 10 free or subsidised sessions with a mental health professional each calendar year.

Protective and challenging factors for young carers in school and the community:

Challenging Factors

- Stigma and discrimination around disabilities and health conditions creates barriers.
- Bullying from peers.
- Social isolation delays or prevents seeking support.
- Low self-esteem.
- More likely to withdraw from the education system, than young people not in a caring role.
- More likely to struggle with learning because of their caring role.

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 or school facilities, programs and activities.
- Provide an opportunity for the young carer to take a break from the caring role.
- Opportunity to make peer connections and friendships with others who have shared experiences eg. young carer peer support groups.
- Development of school policy around young carer needs to increase education outcomes. Talk to the Carers WA Young Carer team for some suggestions for how to do this.