

NSRA Submissions

Little Dreamers Australia

Preamble

Little Dreamers Australia is a non-profit organisation dedicated to supporting Young Carers in Australia. They provide peer support, educational assistance, respite opportunities, advocacy, and empowerment programs to help Young Carers thrive despite their caregiving responsibilities. The organisation aims to raise awareness about Young Carers' challenges and ensure they receive the recognition and support they deserve.

This submission to the consultation Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System by Little Dreamers Australia. This submission is focused on responding to 2.2, 2.4.4 and specifically question 4 in section 2. (Should the next NSRA add additional priority equity cohorts? For example, should it add children and young people living in out-of-home care and students who speak English as an additional language or dialect? What are the risks and benefits of identifying additional cohorts?)

About Young Carers in Australian Schools

A Young Carer in Australia refers to a young person who plays a significant caregiving role within their family, providing support and assistance to family members affected by a disability, chronic illness, mental health issues, or are elderly. It is estimated that 1 in 10 young people in Australia are carers, with approximately 2-3 Young Carers present in every single classroom. Young Carers face numerous challenges, including difficulty attending school daily, which is reported by 50% of them. This can lead to academic setbacks, with Young Carers being up to 1.5 years behind their peers in NAPLAN scores and less likely to complete or perform well in secondary school compared to non-caring peers.

The impact of caregiving responsibilities on the educational journey of Young Carers is further highlighted by their increased likelihood of disengagement from work or study, contributing to higher unemployment rates among those aged 15-24 compared to non-Young Carers. Moreover, 60% of Young Carers from this age group live in households that are close to or below the poverty line, and Carers, in general, have higher rates of poverty compared to non-carers.

The emotional toll of caregiving is evident, with two in three Young Carers experiencing mental health challenges. Additionally, Young Carers fear being bullied due to the stigma surrounding illness and disability. Young Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse people are overrepresented in the Young Carer population, signifying the intersection of challenges faced by these vulnerable groups.

Young Carers are one of the four most at-risk groups of young people in Australia, emphasising the urgency to address their needs and promote equity within the education system. Recognising the unique challenges faced by Young Carers is crucial for providing targeted support and resources, breaking down barriers to their educational achievement, and fostering an inclusive and supportive learning environment.

The inclusion of Young Carers as a priority equity cohort in the next National School Reform Agreement (NSRA) is imperative to address the unique challenges faced by these young individuals and promote equity within the education system. Young Carers play a significant role in providing care and support to family members with disabilities, chronic illnesses, mental health issues, or who are elderly. The statistics and information provided shed light on the various hurdles Young Carers encounter, underscoring the urgency of recognising and supporting them in their education/school journey.

Benefits of Identifying Young Carers as a Priority Equity Cohort:

- **Targeted Support:** Recognising Young Carers as a priority equity cohort allows for the allocation of targeted resources and tailored interventions to address their specific needs. These resources can help alleviate the burden of caregiving responsibilities, allowing them to focus on their education.
- **Improved Attendance and Academic Performance:** With half of Young Carers reporting difficulty attending school every day, targeted support can help improve their attendance rates and academic performance. By addressing barriers to attendance and learning, Young Carers can better engage in their studies.
- **Addressing Disengagement:** Young Carers are almost twice as likely to be disengaged from work or study compared to their peers. By identifying them as a priority cohort, interventions can be designed to re-engage them in their educational pursuits and future career pathways.
- **Supporting Mental Health:** The statistics show that two in three Young Carers experience mental health challenges. Prioritising Young Carers in the NSRA enables the provision of mental health support and well-being programs, helping them cope with the emotional toll of caregiving.
- **Promoting Equity:** Including Young Carers in the NSRA aligns with the goal of promoting equity within the education system. It acknowledges the unique circumstances they face and seeks to level the playing field, ensuring equal access to opportunities and resources.

Risks of Identifying Young Carers as a Priority Equity Cohort:

- **Resource Allocation:** Identifying Young Carers as a priority equity cohort may require additional resources to provide adequate support. Ensuring sufficient funding is essential to implement effective programs and initiatives.
- **Data Collection and Reporting:** Accurate data collection on Young Carers may pose challenges, given the potentially hidden nature of their caregiving responsibilities. However, overcoming these challenges is necessary to measure their progress and tailor interventions effectively.
- **Raising Awareness:** Prioritising Young Carers in the NSRA requires raising awareness among educators, policymakers, and the wider community about the specific needs of these students. Building understanding and empathy is crucial to create a supportive environment for Young Carers.

In conclusion

Adding Young Carers as a priority equity cohort in the next NSRA is a vital step towards creating a more inclusive and equitable education system in Australia. By acknowledging and addressing the challenges faced by Young Carers, we can provide the necessary support to ensure their educational success and wellbeing. The NSRA can play a pivotal role in promoting positive outcomes for Young Carers and breaking down barriers to their educational achievement.

