

LITTLE DREAMERS

2019-20 Pre-Budget Submission

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Little Dreamers Australia: 2019-20 Pre-Budget Submission

Little Dreamers Australia appreciates the opportunity to provide a submission to the Australian Government in relation to the 2019-20 Budget.

Little Dreamers is a not-for-profit organisation that works to improve the quality of life for Young Carers around the country. These young people give up their childhood to care for a parent or sibling with a chronic or mental illness, disability or addiction. They are also one of our country's most vulnerable group of young people.

While we acknowledge that our country has a number of priorities to consider, we believe there needs to be a greater focus on supporting our youngest carers and that 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 2019-20 to improve the opportunities and support available for Young Carers and therefore, the broader community.

These areas include:

- The launch of a new Australian Youth Strategy.
- Investment in supports co-developed by Young Carers.
- Investment in capacity building for more research into Young Carers.
- More proactive early intervention supports for carers in the workplace and Young Carers in schools.

ABOUT LITTLE DREAMERS

Founded in 2009, Little Dreamers has been supporting Young Carers for over 10 years. Our vision? To ensure that 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 international 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 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

The most common risk factors facing carers are social isolation, financial and educational disadvantage, unemployment and poor mental health. Often, carers can also suffer from poor physical health due to incorrect lifting and physical care techniques.

There are 2.8 million carers of all ages in Australia providing around \$60bn of unpaid care per year. This number is continuing to grow with more young people taking on caring roles each year. This rise is due to the ageing population, an increased understanding and acceptance of mental illnesses and a longer life expectancy of people with disabilities.

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.

In a report released by the Australian Institute of Family Studies in 2016 (LSAC Annual Statistical Report) it was revealed that almost 4% 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. 22% provided help with core activities and a further 12% said they provided assistance, other than helping with core activities.

In August 2017 it was revealed that Young Carers have significantly lower performance in Reading and Numeracy in NAPLAN at Year 9 compared with their non-caring peers. 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”.

SOME FAST FACTS AND STATISTICS

- Young women are more likely to be carers than young men.
- Young people in low resource and single-parent households are more likely to take on a caring role.
- Households with Young Carers are generally characterised by lower incomes.
- Young Carers are more likely to live in more disadvantaged communities, in outer urban locations and country towns.
- Indigenous young Australians are two to three times more likely than non-indigenous young people to be carers.
- Higher rates of caring are evident for children with parents from countries that had experienced war including Iraq, Afghanistan, Croatia, Bosnia, Herzegovina and Serbia.

YOUNG CARERS OFTEN DON'T IDENTIFY THEMSELVES AS CARERS

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 feel that there may be repercussions 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

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 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 at the top of the list.

The immediate priorities in relation to this recommendation are:

- The development of a new Australian Youth Strategy
- Investment in dedicated supports developed in consultation with Young Carers rather than those developed for them;
- Investment and capacity building in Young Carer research; and
- Investment in supporting carers in the workplace and Young Carers in Schools to create a more skilled and informed as opposed to engaged workplace and community.

1. Development of a new Australian Youth Strategy

The existing Australian Youth Strategy, launched in 2010 prioritised eight action areas; health and wellbeing, education, families, communities, online, work, early intervention and safety. The national conversation that led to the creation of an Australian Young Strategy focused on the need to support Young Carers. In order for this country to continue supporting our youth through preventative and early intervention practices, this strategy needs to be redeveloped and updated. We are advocating for a focus to be placed on at-risk youth.

2. Investment 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.

3. Investment and capacity building in Young Carer research

Australia is ahead of the curve in supports 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 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.

4. Investment in supporting Young Carers in the workplace and Young Carers in Schools to create a more skilled and informed workplace and community

Reactive approaches currently in place for supporting carers in schools and the workplace will no longer suffice. Proactive and early intervention support is an essential addition to ensuring holistic support. One in eight people in our workforce are carers with two to three students in every classroom having caring responsibilities at home. This is a large group in our population that could use extra support from both employers and teachers. We are advocating for two key changes: mandatory carers Leave to be allocated separately from Sick Leave for all employees; and, required training for teachers in schools across the country. We believe these amendments will improve workplace retention and increase both attendance and school completion rates amongst Young Carers.

CURRENT FUNDING CONCERNS

The new ICSS model has been developed alongside older Australian carers with the aim of implementing a 'one size fits all' model into the community. Without clear and targeted support, Young Carers will be inadequately supported by the new 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 19-20 Budget as a vehicle for significant change for Young Carers. Whilst 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 ICSS, however we believe that special attention needs to be given to Young Carers to ensure that 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,



Madeleine Buchner OAM

Founder and CEO

Little Dreamers Australia