This paper, prepared by Carers NSW, presents an evidence-based picture of how young carers balance their paid employment and unpaid caring responsibilities. It considers aspects of caring roles and work environments that can prevent young carers from accessing paid employment, and demonstrates that replacement care services and flexible working conditions are critical for many young carers to find and maintain suitable work.

Young carers are children and young people aged 25 years and under who provide unpaid care and support to a family member or friend who has a disability, mental illness, drug and/or alcohol dependency, chronic condition, terminal illness or who is frail. Young carers may be the main provider of support (primary carer), or they may assist other family members with care. Carers NSW estimates that in one year alone young primary carers would save the government $750 million in replacement care costs.

Many primary carers are able to balance some form of paid work with their caring role, however only a quarter are employed full time, compared with over half of non-carers. Of the 41 young carers aged 16-25 who responded to Carers NSW 2016 Carer Survey, 22 were employed and 19 were not. The vast majority (82%) who were employed were working on a casual or part time basis. Their survey responses indicated that their participation in paid employment was significantly impacted by their caring role. For example, many had stopped work or changed their working hours as a result of their caring responsibilities. Others were in a job below their skill level, or were reluctant to take on work.

**BARRIERS TO ACCESSING EMPLOYMENT**

There are around **275,000 young carers** in Australia, of whom 22,000 (8%) are primary carers (the individual providing the majority of care to a person).

Primary young carers are most often **female** (81%), and are more likely to have an **Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander or culturally and linguistically diverse** background than their peers.

Young carers are usually **caring for a parent or a sibling**. They are also more likely to live in lone-parent households.
CARING ROLE

HOURS OF CARE

Unsurprisingly, national data shows that primary carers providing fewer hours of care are more likely to engage in paid employment. This is consistent with the findings of the Carers NSW 2016 Carer Survey, which indicated that young carers aged 16-25 caring for more hours per week were less likely to be employed. Hours of care are clearly a key barrier to workforce participation. Interventions to reduce the hours young carers care may enable them to become employed.

CARE TASKS

The nature of the caring role may also impact a young carer’s ability to balance work and care. National data shows that the most common tasks carers assist people with are mobility, self-care, communication, transport and coping with emotions. In some caring roles, care tasks take place at unpredictable times. In others, constant supervision is required. In such situations, committing to regular working hours can be difficult.

Our survey found that young carers who were able to leave the person they cared for alone for more than a few days were more likely to be employed. Interestingly, the young carers who were employed most commonly indicated that the person they cared for could not be left alone at all, suggesting that a replacement care arrangement must be in place.

INFORMAL SUPPORT NETWORKS

The Carers NSW 2016 Carer Survey found that people who started caring at a young age and cared for many years generally had less support from family and friends than other carers. Only half of young carers who responded to the 2016 survey said there was someone else available to help them care. This is unsurprising given the isolation young carers often experience due to the demands of their caring role. Limited support networks may reduce the options available to young carers for replacement care while they work, and may also limit their opportunities to use connections to obtain employment.

FORMAL SERVICES

Young carers may experience a reduction in their caring responsibilities if the person they care for is supported by formal services. Depending on the nature of their caring role, this may free up some young carers to obtain work or increase their hours. However, only half of the young carer respondents to the Carers NSW 2016 Carer Survey reported that the person they cared for received formal services. In some cases this is a choice, however in many cases it is due to factors such as lack of awareness, ineligibility, or inadequate supply. Furthermore, nearly half of those who accessed formal services said that they did not reduce their caring role at all.

“There are no current services available to provide support or respite to my dad in times of crisis…He currently receives no funding as I barely have the time to meet his immediate needs e.g. facing homelessness, let alone completing NDIS paperwork.”

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WORKING CONDITIONS

HOURS OF WORK

Employed carers commonly report that their caring role limits the number of hours they can work. Around half of the employed young carers who responded to the Carers NSW 2016 Carer Survey reported that their caring role had prevented them from working more hours. Approximately one third of respondents said they had actively reduced their working hours.

The effect of caring responsibilities on availability can mean that certain types of jobs are out of reach. Full time work, for example, may never be feasible for some young carers. Research indicates that permanent part time roles may be more suitable overall for young carers.

FLEXIBLE WORK PRACTICES

It is likely that more young carers would be able to get and keep a job if flexible working arrangements – such as additional carers leave, flexible start and finish times and the option to work from home – were more widely available. For example, nearly half of working young carers who responded to the Carers NSW 2016 Carer Survey said that they would work from home if they could.

A number of the young carers who responded already made use of flexible start and finish times and were able to leave at short notice in emergencies. The Fair Work Act 2009 gives employees the right to access carers’ leave and to request flexible working arrangements. However, around one quarter of working young carers surveyed said carers’ leave was not available to them. Further, there is also no enforcement mechanism that requires employers to act on requests for flexibility.

SUPPORTIVE WORK ENVIRONMENT

Of the working young carers who responded to the 2016 survey, only one in five said their workplace supported them to combine work and care. Young carers who felt that their workplace did support them reported higher job satisfaction.

Around half of young carers who were employed said that their employer did not know about their caring role, indicating that they may fear negative repercussions or discrimination associated with disclosing information about their caring role. Young carers’ comments around balancing work and care highlight the need for a safe and supportive environment to disclose their caring role and gain appropriate, ongoing support.
SUMMARY

- 41 young carers responded to Carers NSW 2016 Carer Survey, 22 were working and 19 were not.
- Working young carers generally cared for fewer hours per week than their unemployed counterparts, and were less likely to access formal services.
- Young carers from both groups indicated that their caring role had affected their capacity to work and progress their career.
- Both groups also noted the impact of income payment thresholds on the number of hours they could work.
- A young carer's capacity to work is significantly affected by the intensity of their caring role, including the number of hours they care, the tasks they perform and their access to alternative support.
- Flexible working arrangements and a supportive work environment can enable young carers to remain employed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Carers NSW recommends that governments:

- Encourage employers to invest in flexible working arrangements via financial incentives and regulation
- Ensure adequate formal care services, including respite services, are available
- Fund programs to enhance young carers' social networks
- Assess young carers’ support needs when planning for the individualised funding packages of the people they care for
- Fund more tailored supports for young carers who are employed, or seeking employment, via the Try, Test and Learn Fund
- Remove disincentives to undertake paid work whilst receiving the Carer Payment, which a carer becomes ineligible for if they work, study or volunteer for 25 hours per week or more (including travel time).

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016) Disability, Ageing and Carers, Summary of findings, 2015, cat. no. 4430.0. NB: These figures are likely to be underestimates of the true young carer population as they do not capture young carers aged under 15, and because young carers typically do not self-identify.


