

Evaluation of the Young Carer Bursary Program and Young Carer Network

Summary of key evaluation findings

Overview

Thank you for being part of the evaluation of the Young Carer Bursary Program (YCBP) and Young Carer Network (YCN). Your feedback will help inform policy decisions to make the Young Carer Bursary Program and Young Carer Network better.

This summary shows what we learned about the Young Carer Bursary Program and Young Carer Network relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous young carers and service providers.

Findings

Overall, this evaluation has found the YCBP is highly valued by recipients and other stakeholders. The changes over time have improved young carers' awareness of the bursary, the application processes, and data collection, allowing for more accurate monitoring and administration. Thus YCBP has been found to meet the needs of young carers and is a valuable program which provides opportunities to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and non-Indigenous young carers who otherwise would not only miss out on education, but whose life course could potentially be altered.

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous young carers reported that receiving the bursary helped them in many aspects of their lives including financial, education, health and wellbeing, and social participation.
- Both stakeholders and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous young carers noted the importance of the increase in funding for the YCBP which has allowed more young carers to access the program.
- The application process has also been improved over time to better assess the eligibility of applicants and to rank applicants according to need. However, the process may still advantage those young carers who are more literate and disadvantage those who are most vulnerable.
- Parents, siblings, friends and Carers Australia were the main sources of information about the program
- Young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers and non-Indigenous young carers also found the application relatively easy but some needed help to complete the written sections of the application.
- Young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers also noted there was information about how to talk to an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person if they needed help with the application.

- Young carers felt that the communication around whether their applications were successful could be improved.
- Young carers who were not successful in the current round of applications also wanted to have more information about the eligibility criteria and why they had not been successful, particularly those who had received a bursary the previous and their circumstances had not changed.

The number of recipients grew in 2023, but the bursary still reaches a small number of potential recipients. If more funding was available and publicity for the program improved, larger numbers of eligible young carers are likely to apply for the bursary, given that demand consistently outstrips supply, even when numbers of bursaries have been increased.

Factors that affected outcomes

Two key factors have contributed to the achievement of outcomes for the YCBP:

- Funding levels were generally seen as adequate and but the increase in funding was welcomed by stakeholders. The flexibility of funding is also important, allowing recipients to choose how best to spend the bursary.
- The more streamlined application process was welcomed by participants.

Suggestions for improvements

Interviews with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and non-Indigenous recipients and stakeholders indicated the YCBP had improved outcomes in terms of self-regard, education/workforce participation, and social participation.

As the program continues to develop and expand suggestions for improvements to the program from stakeholders and young carer recipients include:

- Adapt the written component of the YCBP application to not disadvantage young carers
- Take further account of family's economic circumstances in applications without placing additional burden on applicants.
- Increase publicity in school, community and social media with information about who young carers are and what they do, and why the bursary is important to them.
- Provide feedback to unsuccessful applicants about why the young person did not receive a bursary
- Encourage more communication between YCBP recipients and Carers Australia
- Provide clear assessment guidelines that align with the program goals and the specific needs of young carer applicants.

Evaluation approach

The evaluation used different methods including reviews of performance monitoring reports, analysis of program data, surveys, interviews with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and non-Indigenous young carers and stakeholders.

The Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC), UNSW Sydney, UNSW Canberra, the Social Research Centre (SRC), and Ipsos Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research Unit conducted the evaluation.