

# Stand with Carers: our ACT Election 2024 Campaign

Young Carer Mentoring Program

CarersACT

## The ACT's young carers need a head start

We believe that all of Canberra's young carers should:

- Choose how they spend their time, including taking breaks that nourish their wellbeing.
- Access a wide range of respite options that cater to individual needs and promote a healthy lifestyle.
- Receive the help they need to engage in activities that rejuvenate and maintain quality of life, especially for those in caring roles.

**1 in 11**  
carers are  
under 25

*"I've always thought that I had to keep up with the caring role as long as the person I'm caring for is still alive, or for some reason somebody else decides to take on the role full time... I never really thought about what I would do if all of a sudden I wasn't a carer anymore. It actually never occurred to me I could do anything else"*

- Young Carer

In the ACT, approximately 1 in 11 carers are under 25, which suggests there are around 4,545 young carers. However, this number is likely underestimated, as many young carers remain 'hidden' due to stigma, lack of self-identification, and societal misconceptions about the care young people can provide.

## The Problem

- Education is frequently disrupted due to the caring role, leading to poor academic outcomes and diminished long-term career prospects. Many young carers struggle to balance school with caring, often withdrawing from education altogether.
- Employment opportunities are limited as young carers are often seen as unreliable due to their caring duties. This results in job loss, fewer opportunities, and long-term dependence on government support.
- Low community awareness means many young carers remain hidden, receiving little support. Fear of stigma and job insecurity further isolates them, as they avoid disclosing their caring responsibilities.

## What's Working Elsewhere?

- Centacare Catholic Family Services in South Australia offers young carer case management focused on boosting engagement in education and employment, with personalised support tailored to individual needs.
- Little Dreamers, operating across Victoria, Queensland, and New South Wales as a Carer Gateway provider, offers one-on-one mentoring and tutoring to help young carers balance their responsibilities with their education and career goals.

In the ACT, we have:

- The federally funded Carer Gateway, which provides referrals to counselling, support groups,

short-term respite care, and group activities for young carers. Carers ACT also helps with tuition, works with teachers to support young carers in school, advocates within schools, and assists in forming young carers' groups.

- Anglicare ACT's CYCLOPS program, offering education support and case management to help young carers manage their responsibilities while staying engaged in their education.

While these programs are vital, there remains a significant gap in early identification and ongoing mentorship. Addressing this gap is crucial for enabling Canberra's young carers to thrive and reach their full potential.



## The Solution

We want a commitment to funding for a mentoring program (for at least 3 years) to support young carers in balancing education, employment, and caring responsibilities. This program will:

- Focus on early identification through school enrolment forms, ensuring young carers receive the recognition and support they need from the start.
- Connect young carers with experienced mentors who can offer guidance, encouragement, and practical advice.
- Fund events and talks to inspire young carers to pursue their ambitions and build self-worth.
- Create employment opportunities for former young carers to mentor and support the next generation, fostering a strong community of shared experience.

We want to see an ACT where young carers are recognised, supported, and enabled to achieve their full potential. By implementing this mentoring program, the ACT can set a new standard for how we care for those who care for others, ensuring a brighter future for young carers and our entire community.

## Legislative and Policy Frameworks

- **Carers Recognition Act 2021 (ACT)** – Young carers must be supported to reach their full potential, as mandated by the Carers Recognition Act. This mentoring program aligns with the Act's principles by providing the necessary support to ensure young carers are acknowledged and valued.
- **ACT Carers Strategy 2018-2028** – Education is a key priority within the ACT Carers Strategy. The first three-year action plan identified the importance of supporting young carers to complete their education and achieve their aspirations. With ongoing work to identify young carers through school enrolment forms, now is the time to invest in tailored mentoring programs that link young carers to educational and employment opportunities.
- **ACT Wellbeing Framework** – The proposed mentoring program aligns with several key domains of the ACT Wellbeing Framework, including Learning and Development, Health (particularly mental health), Social Connectedness, Community Participation, and Economic Participation. By investing in young carers, we can improve their long-term wellbeing and connection to the ACT community.