

Push to recognise Australia's hidden young carers keeping kids out of foster care

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Credit: University of Melbourne

University of Melbourne researchers are pushing for recognition of

young 'kinship carers'—a hidden group aged 30 and under caring for family members or friends aged under 18, sacrificing their own careers, education and wellbeing.

Dr Meredith Kiraly, from the University's Department of Social Work, says while the media spotlight is on how much young carers cost the welfare budget, the costs of not supporting them properly are likely to be much greater.

"Often the only thing standing between a vulnerable child and state care is a young kinship carer who is trying to hold it all together," Dr Kiraly said.

"If we let these young carers down, the consequences are serious, yet policymakers are hardly aware this group exists."

Dr Kiraly's analysis of census data suggests there are about 10,000 primary carers aged 30 or under leading Australian households. She is conducting research to better identify young kinship carers' needs and challenges, and she says [young women](#) are particularly disadvantaged.

Rosie (not her real name), 27, found herself the primary carer for her two brothers because of her mother's bipolar disorder. She and her partner already had two young children, one of whom has a disability. She has had to give up her studies in interior design.

Dr Kiraly says stories like Rosie's are common among young kinship carers.

"Almost every [young woman](#) I've interviewed has had arrested education," she says.

"It is good for the children because they get to stay with their families,

but there is a cost on the carer."

Dr Kiraly said three things that would make a difference in supporting carers were Childcare, study scholarships and respite care (which is available for people caring for someone with a disability).

Consulting researcher Professor Cathy Humphreys from the University's School of Health Sciences says a lack of recognition means young carers are missing out on government support because it isn't targeted at them or they're unaware of what is available.

"All the support systems are set up for grandparents or those caring for people with disabilities, but young kinship carers are unrecognised."

She said recent media coverage of violence and dysfunction in state group housing showed that young kinship carers were performing a vital role in keeping their young charges out of state care.

"They are stepping up and saving the community a lot of costs and responsibility, but they are also being significantly disadvantaged, so we need to better understand that disadvantage if we are to address it."

Provided by University of Melbourne

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