



American Association of Caregiving Youth® (AACY) Executive Summary of the Caregiving Youth Project (CYP)

Problem: Child caregivers are a hidden, vulnerable population in the US, sacrificing their education, health and childhood in fulfilling roles and responsibilities beyond their years. They are at risk of underachievement and high school dropout. Family caregiving is an adult responsibility; adults are not always available; children now bathe, dress, feed, assist with walking, give medications, prepare meals and do many other tasks for family members with an illness, injury, functional decline or disability. The stressors and responsibilities of caregiving create a barrier for students to learn, complete their education, experience childhood and become healthy, productive adults. Of young adults who dropped out of school, 22% did so to provide care for family.

Background of Evidence: For more than two decades, researchers in the UK and Australia have documented the effects and assisted the development of support programs for “young carers”. The first US study, released in 2005, reported that there are at least 1.3 million caregiving youth, ages 8-18 years. Of these, 72% care for a grandparent or parent. Those most adversely affected live in single parent and lower income homes. In 2002, Palm Beach County research revealed a high prevalence of caregiving among students as well as negative ramifications on their education. Of note is that the County and FL demographics include a greater than US norm for an older population, single parent households, prevalence of HIV/AIDS, grandparents as parents, and cultural/ethnic diversity, all which compounds and contributes to family health issues and concomitant caregiving situations.

Description: In response to the challenges caregiving youth face, what is now the American Association of Caregiving Youth® (AACY) established the first US Caregiving Youth Project (CYP) in 2006 to identify and support student-caregivers. The CYP provides professional services in school, out of school and at home as well as supports students and their families with a myriad of needs-driven wraparound services with the help of collaborating partners. Its evaluation-based model addresses caregiving ramifications including isolation, anxiety and depression which hinder the child’s psychosocial, emotional, developmental, physical health, education opportunities and well-being. The CYP offers in-school Skills Building groups, Lunch and Learn sessions and educational/fun workshops. Home assessments by a social worker validate the caregiving status, link families to respite and resources, and evaluate the need for in-home academic support and/or special projects. Out-of-school sponsored activities include camp, wellness days, picnics, College prep and more. Program participation voluntarily continues in high school with students spending an average of 5.46 years in the CYP. Mentoring for youth prepares them for graduation and the steps to take to achieve future goals.

Objectives: When child caregivers are recognized and supported their lives change. They learn they are not alone. They feel valued in their role and learn the skills they need to manage their responsibilities. The measures of academic success include >95% progression to the next grade level and high school graduation with >85% going on to post-secondary education. Youth report increased skills and confidence, less isolation and better family and peer relationships. They and their families handle anger and manage stress. Through its work, AACY is reaching more individuals and families, raising awareness about caregiving youth issues and seeing results as evidenced by research, analyses and reports. There is compelling momentum to develop a Florida network as well as to assist students and their families who are unaffiliated with CYP serviced schools. Demonstrated success warrants expansion; children affected by caregiving reside throughout FL and the US.

Progress: The CYP began at Boca Middle School and has expanded regionally. It has served >1600 caregiving youth and their families with 586 active students as of June 2019. During the past four years, of 294 active CYP seniors, 288 graduated (98%), at least 90% are going to post-secondary education or are entering the military. AACY is the national expert in child caregiving. It has established the Caregiving Youth Institute and the CYP work is being replicated in other states through affiliate relationships. AACY is participating in research to further document and to publish the impact of its work. There is economic and societal value to the student and the economy for caregiving youth to graduate from high school without the negative ramifications of caregiving on their health and in their lives.