

# Student Caregiver Support Services: A Grant Proposal

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## Abstract:

- The Student Caregiver Support Services thesis project was developed to secure funding and design a grant proposal supporting university students who also serve as caregivers for older adults. The goal is to provide tailored resources, education, and advocacy while creating a pilot model that can be replicated at other institutions.
- An estimated five million U.S. students manage both caregiving responsibilities and academic demands, often experiencing heightened stress and mental health concerns. Despite these challenges, institutional support for this population remains limited.
- The proposed program includes peer support groups, educational workshops, counseling, and case management services aimed at reducing caregiver burden and improving student well-being. These services will be delivered in collaboration with campus mental health services.
- If funded, the initiative could enhance educational access for caregiving students and offer social workers a platform to advocate for an underserved and growing student population.

## Introduction:

- College students who care for older adults face heightened stress, financial hardship, and academic challenges.
- According to AARP (Skufca & O’Connell Hartman, 2020), many student caregivers avoid disclosing their role due to privacy concerns or fear of discrimination.
- The National Alliance for Caregiving (NAC, 2020) found that 11% of adult caregivers are enrolled in college—a number expected to grow as the aging population increases.
- Due to financial barriers and healthcare workforce shortages, families increasingly rely on unpaid caregivers.
- Research shows that student caregivers report lower academic performance, limited study time, and emotional exhaustion (Armstrong-Carter et al., 2022).
- AARP also found that 70% of student caregivers feel their responsibilities negatively impact their education.

**To address these challenges**, the proposed Student Caregiver Support Services program at California State University, Long Beach, will provide education, advocacy, and support—creating a model other institutions can follow.

## Intended Population of Service:

The program intends to serve students at California State University, Long Beach (CSULB) who are caregiving for an older adult while attending college.

## Host Agency:

**Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) at CSULB** supports students facing mental health and personal challenges.

**Provides a range of services:**

- Short-term individual counseling
- Group therapy and support groups
- Case management and referral services
- Psychoeducational workshops and crisis intervention

**Staff includes:** social workers, therapists, psychologists, and graduate interns.

**Mission:** Help students achieve academic success by improving well-being.

With its comprehensive mental health support and student-focused mission, **CAPS is well-positioned to host a caregiver support program** tailored to the needs of student caregivers balancing academics and family responsibilities.

## Description of Proposed Project:

The program will implement a multi-faceted approach to provide emotional and practical support to students. Through peer-based support groups, educational workshops, therapeutic interventions and case management sessions, the program will provide services to help reduce caregiver burden, improve mental health and enhance caregiving skills. The program will be facilitated out of CAPS to offer accessible support to student caregivers at CSULB.

## Literature Review

### Brief History of Family Caregiving

- Early recognition came with the *Little Mothers' Movement* in the early 1900s, which trained young immigrant girls to care for infants during a time of high infant mortality. Led by public health reformers like Dr. Josephine Baker, *Little Mothers' Leagues* provided caregiving education but often overlooked the well-being of the young caregivers themselves.
- The Family and Medical Leave Act (1993) offered unpaid leave for caregiving but excluded students and part-time workers; the Older Americans Act (1965) funded local caregiver support services
- Since the 1990s, NAC and AARP have raised awareness of caregiving burdens and called for stronger support systems through their *Caregiving in the U.S.* reports (Olson & Edmonds, 2023).

### Culture & Demographics of Family Caregiving

- Cultural values, especially familism in collectivist cultures, pressure young caregivers—particularly Asian, Latinx, and immigrant students—to prioritize family, leading to “family achievement guilt”.
- AARP and NAC (2020) report 1 in 5 Americans are caregivers, many of whom are women, people of color, and young adults, with over half feeling they had no choice in this role. Student caregivers often come from underrepresented backgrounds and rely on financial aid (Armstrong-Carter et al., 2022).

### The Impact of Caregiving on Student Caregivers

- Caregiving disrupts student life, with young caregivers four times more likely to drop out of college. About 70% report academic struggles, emotional strain, financial stress, and limited time for self-care (AARP, 2020; Skufca & O’Connell Hartman, 2020).
- Many student caregivers balance full-time classes and jobs, leading to physical exhaustion, depression, anxiety, and social isolation. Risks are higher for those caring for individuals with dementia or complex medical needs (Armstrong-Carter et al., 2022).
- Financially, caregiving consumes over 25% of income, causing job strain, debt, and even school withdrawal, particularly affecting students of color and low-income backgrounds (AARP, 2020).

### Caregiver Interventions

- Support Groups:** Reduce caregiver burden and isolation by providing emotional support, coping strategies, and knowledge exchange, offering relief and encouragement (Chu et al., 2023).
- Therapeutic Interventions:** Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), counseling, and logotherapy reduce stress, depression, and anxiety, improving coping, self-care, and outlook.
- Educational Interventions:** Care training, workshops, and online classes increase knowledge, reduce burden, and enhance confidence, equipping caregivers to meet care needs and access resources (Chu et al., 2023; Reinhard et al., 2008).
- Multifaceted Approaches:** Combining education, emotional support, and therapy provides the best outcomes, with psycho-educational models and university-community partnerships recommended (Reinhard et al., 2008).

### Role of Universities

- Importance of Universities:** Universities play a crucial role in supporting student caregivers, as many students are affected by caregiving responsibilities due to societal trends, with 35% expected to become caregivers soon.
- Lack of Data:** A lack of data on student caregivers prevents the implementation of adequate services. Surveys can help universities identify caregivers and better understand their needs (Armstrong-Carter et al., 2022).
- Student Caregiver Needs:** Many student caregivers desire counseling, resource assistance, support groups, and academic flexibility, with a significant percentage wanting these services provided by the college counseling center (Skufca & O’Connell Hartman, 2020).

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## Goals and Objectives:

**Goal 1:** Reduce loneliness, stress, and caregiver burden through peer support groups.

**Objective:** Enroll 20 student caregivers in support groups.

**Outcome:** 90% attend ≥60% of sessions; 75% report reduced isolation/stress.

**Goal 2:** Enhance caregiving and coping skills via workshops.

**Objective:** Hold 8 workshops/year with ≥10 participants each.

**Outcome:** 75% report improved confidence and problem-solving.

**Goal 3:** Improve mental health through therapeutic interventions.

**Objective:** Provide CBT/psychoeducation to 15 students.

**Outcome:** 60% report reduced anxiety/depression and greater control.

**Goal 4:** Increase use of community and campus resources.

**Objective:** Offer case management/resource navigation to 15 students.

**Outcome:** 75% access ≥1 new resource within 6 months.

## Summary of Budget:

The total cost for the Student Caregiver Support Services program is \$167,013, covering staff salaries, stipends, benefits, and operational costs. Key staff include:

**LCSW Program Coordinator:** \$83,000/year, plus \$21,580 in benefits. Oversees the program, supervises interns, and collaborates with resources.

**Case Manager (Social Work Intern):** \$10,000 stipend, supported by LCSW supervision, provides case management and resources for student caregivers.

**Social Worker/Counselor (Social Work Intern):** \$10,000 stipend, supported by LCSW supervision, offers counseling and psychological support services.

**Adult Gerontology Nursing Educator:** \$50/hour, 5 hours/week, contributing 12.5% effort for \$9,750. Provides specialized education and leads workshops with the Program Coordinator.

## Potential Impact of Proposed Project:

The Student Caregiver Support Services program will positively impact CSULB students by improving academic success, mental health, and overall well-being. It will provide critical resources, reduce stress, and raise awareness of caregiving challenges, helping students better balance caregiving with their academic responsibilities. The proposed program will also serve as a pilot model for student caregiver support services, with the potential for replication at other colleges and universities, fostering a supportive connection between institutions and student caregivers.

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