

PRACTICE GUIDE

Supporting education outcomes for children in care

Overview

Children who have experienced abuse and neglect have a range of complex needs and challenges compared to their peers. The impact of abuse and harm can affect all domains of a child's development (motor, social, psychological, physical and cognitive). Educational disadvantage is one of these challenges with children in out-of-home care struggling to reach national literacy and numeracy benchmarks. (Knight and Rossi, 2018)

“Queensland data indicates that students living in out-of-home care (OOHC) show lower rates of achievement of the National Minimum Standards in NAPLAN tests than all Queensland students. Students in OOHC are also more likely to not be in the labour force, earning or learning six months after completing Year 12” (DET, January 2020).

A positive and successful educational experience for children in care is a key factor which contributes to their future life outcomes as an adult. Education outcomes for children in care should be a priority for child protection and education professionals.

The right to an education

The Human Rights Act 2019 which came into force on 1 January 2020, protects the right to an education. This means that public entities* in Queensland are required to act compatibly with Section 36, which says that:

1. Every child has the right to have access to primary and secondary education appropriate to the child's needs.
2. Every person has the right to have access, based on the person's abilities, to further vocational education and training that is equally accessible to all.

*A public entity is defined as state government departments, state schools, vocational education and training, non-government organisations and businesses performing a public function. Note: private schools are not defined as a public entity.

In line with this right, Child Safety staff have a responsibility to ensure that each child is engaged in either schooling or a vocational education and training program.

Risk and protective factors for educational disadvantage

A review of the literature conducted by Knight and Rossi (2018) identified several risk and protective factors for children in care that either support or hinder their educational engagement.

Risk factors include:

- trauma
- poor stress regulation
- low self-esteem and self-efficacy
- a lack of fundamental language and pre-reading skills
- poor access to books at home and school disruptions due to moving between care placements.

Protective factors include:

- developing literacy skills early in life
- personal self-efficacy and resilience
- family stability with a carer who is supportive or educational and extracurricular activities
- access to literacy materials
- supportive adults (teachers, case workers, carers) who act as mentors or tutors for at least 12 months to build the child's cognitive and social skills.

The importance of education for children in care

Considering these risk and protective factors, facilitating positive educational experiences and attainment for children is vital for enhancing the likelihood of positive adult outcomes. Young people who successfully complete school are more likely to experience employment, financial independence, positive self-esteem and positive relationships.

School provides much more than academic instruction. The opportunity for children to participate in a range of social experiences provides essential developmental scaffolding for them in terms of their social, emotional and academic learning. School can also provide a regular, consistent and safe environment for children.

Children can develop positive relationships with school staff. Teachers can be particularly influential for children in facilitating their engagement in the school environment. Consider whether to include school staff in a child's safety and support network.

Children's educational engagement should be a priority for Child Safety Officers, teachers and carers.

Early intervention strategies

Engaging children in early learning and early childhood education assists with their preparation and transition to school. Early childhood education:

- helps create a life-long passion for learning
- helps develop social skills
- encourages the development of fine motor and sensory skills
- fosters language development and vocabulary
- primes children to be creative
- equips children to cope with problem solving.

(Department of Education, New South Wales, n-d).

Early intervention strategies include:

- exposing children to reading to encourage early literacy and phonological skills. This includes:
 - having access to books in the home or placement
 - reading books to children
 - engaging a service such as [The Pyjama Foundation](#) to read books to the child, play educational games and help the child with their homework
- encouraging play based activities that are age and developmentally appropriate
- enrolling the child in an approved kindergarten program (these are offered in either a kindergarten service, long day care service or limited hours care service)

- arranging a comprehensive health assessment to identify whether the child has development delays or disability that may impact their learning and if so, engage them in appropriate treatment or interventions
- referring children aged 0-7 years with a developmental delay or disability to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) [Early Childhood Early Intervention](#) (ECEI), and children aged 0-5 years with suspected or significant disability to the Department of Education [Early childhood development programs](#).

Support at school

Supporting and encouraging a child's education is important to assist them to achieve to their potential, have positive, happy school experiences and to increase their chances of successful life outcomes. Strategies to support school aged children include:

- engaging the child in the development and review of an education support plan that is meaningful and facilitates their participation and involvement
- recognising the importance of school choice and the benefit of a stable school community to help achieve physical permanency for the child
- advocating and arranging for appropriate assistance
- ensuring that when a child has to change schools, relevant information is shared with the new school so that the child's records, progress and needs are promptly communicated, and a review of the education support plan is undertaken jointly by Child Safety and the new school
- remaining connected and working with school personnel to keep the school informed and updated about issues the child is experiencing that could impact on their education (including issues with family, mental health concerns, outcome of health assessments, and instability with the child's care arrangement)
- including someone from school as part of the safety and support network
- minimising disruptions and being an advocate for the child, arranging appropriate assistance to meet individual needs
- celebrating progress and achievements
- encouraging carers to support the child's development and learning by:
 - making learning fun
 - finding ways of learning that makes sense or are relevant to the child
 - participating in and contribute to school events
 - setting aside a pleasant, quiet study space.

Post school

Starting transition to adulthood planning from 15 years provides an opportunity to explore and assess a young person's ongoing education needs and aspirations.

- What hopes for the future does the young person have, and what are their strengths and interests that will help motivate them as they transition to adulthood?
- Do they want to go on to further education or learn a trade?
- What resources, knowledge and skills do they need to facilitate their ongoing learning?

The [Go your own way](#) kit developed by CREATE is filled with resources and information to engage young people in thinking about and planning their future education and vocational needs and to assist their transition to adulthood planning process. The [My Future](#) website is a further resource to assist young people to start building their personal career journey.

The phase of transitioning to adulthood when a young person physically leaves care, is a critical time to provide practical support. This includes helping the young person locate a safe, affordable,

secure and stable place to live and ensuring they have a means of financial support. These factors improve a young person's outcomes in multiple areas of their independence including, employment, education, training and positive social relationships (McDowall, 2009; Johnson et al, cited in Campo & Commerford, 2016).

Conclusion

Children and young people in care experience a range of challenges which impact their educational outcomes. In partnering with the child or young person, their carer, and education professionals, learning experiences are enriched and full potential realised as the young person moves into adulthood.

References

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