

# Great Expectations

Supporting children and young people in out-of-home care to achieve at school



## **Acknowledgements**

This resource was commissioned by the Child Safety Commissioner. It was written by Ian Seal of the Foster Care Association of Victoria and edited by Robert A. Baker.

The development of the resource was managed by Maree Tehan, Office of the Child Safety Commissioner. Thanks to Clare Green from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development for her invaluable input and advice.

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Printed by ???

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Front cover illustration by Millie, aged 3.

# Foreword



The response to the development by my office of *Calmer Classrooms*<sup>1</sup> has resulted in the publication of *Great Expectations: supporting children and young people in out-of-home care to achieve at school*.

This resource was originally commissioned by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development for their website. However, with their agreement, I am publishing the full version because of my special interest in vulnerable children and young people.

While *Calmer Classrooms* examines the impact of trauma and attachment disruption experiences on children generally, this resource particularly addresses the educational needs of children and young people who live in out-of-home care.

It has been developed for education professionals who are teaching, or in contact with, children and young people who do not live with their families. Over 5,000 Victorian children are currently living in out-of-home care. They have been removed from their families after assessment by the Department of Human Services has deemed the biological parents unable to provide for their adequate care and protection. This time away from their families ranges from a few weeks to more permanent arrangements. The children may go to live with relatives, foster parents, or in government funded and managed residential units.

The stress and trauma experienced by these children may impact on their educational success. Research indicates that many have learning difficulties, higher absentee rates, and lower school retention rates than other students.

This resource provides Victorian schools with a comprehensive guide about how they can more effectively improve the educational outcomes for students in out-of-home care. It is designed for various potential audiences – principals, student welfare staff and wellbeing teams, classroom teachers and student teachers.

Not everyone associated with the education profession will find every section relevant or useful. However, it is hoped that selective use of the resource will promote an understanding of the educational barriers confronting children and young people in out-of-home care.

The resource includes helpful strategies and learning activities to help schools respond more appropriately to the special needs of these students.

It outlines the obligations of the Departments of Human Services and Education and Early Childhood Development under the Partnering Agreement and is to be used in conjunction with the agreement.

I would like to thank the Department of Human Services and the Student Wellbeing and Support Division of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development for their support and assistance with the development of this resource.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bernie Geary". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Bernie Geary OAM  
Child Safety Commissioner

<sup>1</sup> *Calmer Classrooms* examines how trauma and attachment disruption can impact on children and young people. Available at [www.ocsc.vic.gov.au](http://www.ocsc.vic.gov.au) or phone the Office of the Child Safety Commissioner on 03 8601 5884.

‘All children should be given the opportunity to reach their full potential and participate in society, irrespective of their family circumstances and background.’

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# About this resource

The resource has been developed to guide principals, assistant principals, student welfare coordinators and wellbeing teams, and classroom teachers support children and young people in out-of-home care by assisting them to:

- know how and why students are in out-of-home care
- understand key research about educational outcomes and concerns for students in out-of-home care
- access information and advice relating to teaching and learning activities and student participation
- find key contacts and resources that will enable them to more effectively support students in out-of-home care
- meet their obligations under the Partnering Agreement.

While there have been specific pieces of advice provided by departments and agencies about supporting students in out-of-home care, this resource provides, for the first time, a comprehensive guide for Victorian schools about how they can more effectively improve the educational outcomes for students in out-of-home care. The resource includes the voices of children and young people in out-of-home care, as well as the voices of carers and teachers.

## Using the resource

Supporting children and young people in out-of-home care: A resource for schools allows principals, coordinators and teachers to systematically progress through the resource, or to refer to that section of the resource that meets their immediate or ongoing need.

### Section 1: Students in out-of-home care

Why children and young people are placed in out-of-home care; information about the legal frameworks and requirements that relate to the best interests and safety of the child.

### Section 2: Research about the educational outcomes of students in out-of-home care

An overview of Australian and international research about educational outcomes, education deficit, developmental delay and behavioural issues for children and young people in out-of-home care.

### Section 3: School support for students in out-of-home care

Information and advice about how schools and teachers can support students in out-of-home care: the role and purpose of the Partnering Agreement, Student Support Groups, Individual Education Plans, building relationships with carers and case workers, school engagement and wellbeing, excursions and activities, wellbeing and responding to inappropriate behaviours.

### Section 4: Inclusive curriculum practices for children in out-of-home care





Information and advice about how to develop inclusive curriculum practices based on the strands and domains of the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS).

### Appendix, Glossary, Useful resources, References

Appendix, Glossary, Useful resources, and References that can be used for the ongoing support by schools of children and young people in out-of-home care.

## Professional learning opportunities


Key points in the text are selected where there are opportunities for principals, coordinators and teachers to extend their understanding through structured professional learning. Completion of some or all of these activities is optional and will depend on the needs of the user. Professional learning opportunities are indicated in the text by a range of symbols. Symbols may be used concurrently.

-  Locate, gather and interpret resources
-  Locate resources on the Internet
-  Use reflective learning techniques
-  Undertake informal and formal professional learning activities

An electronic presentation to support professional learning and/or parent education can be downloaded from the Office of the Child Safety Commissioner website ([www.ocsc.vic.gov.au](http://www.ocsc.vic.gov.au)).

## Online support

It is recommended that *Great Expectations: Supporting children and young people in out-of-home care to achieve at school* is used with a range of print and digital resources developed by Victorian Government departments and agencies.

 A digital copy of the resource can be accessed from the publications and media section of the Office of the Child Safety Commissioner website ([www.ocsc.vic.gov.au](http://www.ocsc.vic.gov.au)) or the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development website ([www.sofweb.vic.gov.au/wellbeing/homecare/index.htm](http://www.sofweb.vic.gov.au/wellbeing/homecare/index.htm)).




# Section 1:

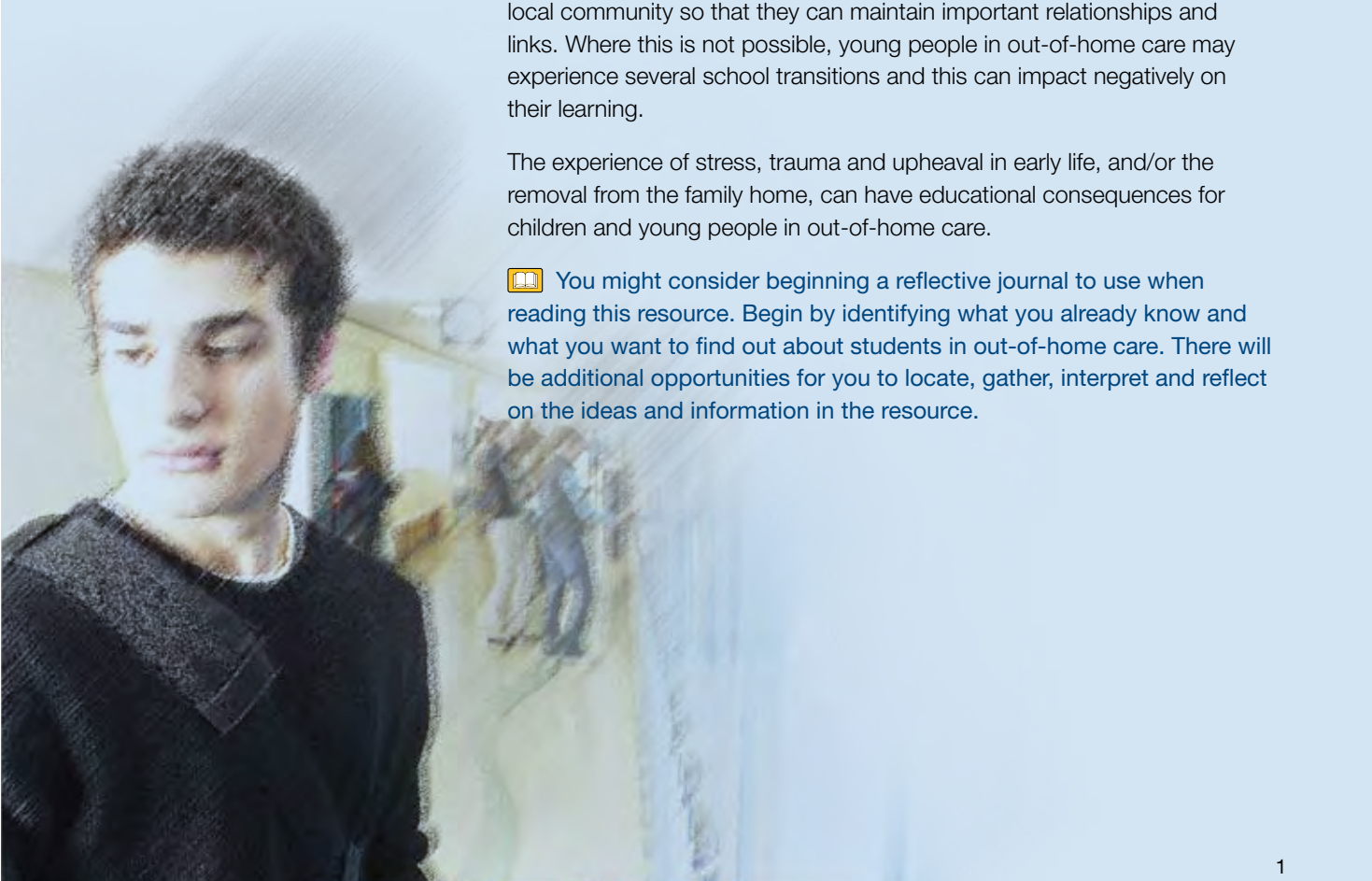
## Students in out-of-home care

There are approximately 24,000 Australian children and young people who spend time in out-of-home care each year. In Victoria, over 5,000 children are currently living in out-of-home care. These children and young people may have been removed from their family home after experiencing abuse or neglect, or because the biological parent, as assessed by the Department of Human Services, is deemed unable to protect the child from harm or adequately care for them. In other situations the parents themselves may have relinquished the child because they feel unable to look after them. A child may be in out-of-home care for just a few days, for weeks, months, or years, or from their infancy until they turn 18.

Wherever possible, children are placed in out-of-home care in their local community so that they can maintain important relationships and links. Where this is not possible, young people in out-of-home care may experience several school transitions and this can impact negatively on their learning.

The experience of stress, trauma and upheaval in early life, and/or the removal from the family home, can have educational consequences for children and young people in out-of-home care.

 You might consider beginning a reflective journal to use when reading this resource. Begin by identifying what you already know and what you want to find out about students in out-of-home care. There will be additional opportunities for you to locate, gather, interpret and reflect on the ideas and information in the resource.



# Victorian legislation


Applicable legislation relating to children and young people who are at risk of harm from abuse or neglect are the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 and the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005.

## The Child Wellbeing and Safety Act

This Act provides the overarching framework for promoting positive outcomes for all children. The legislation was designed to ensure that:

*'All children should be given the opportunity to reach their full potential and participate in society, irrespective of their family circumstances and background. While parents are the primary nurturers of a child, society as a whole shares responsibility for children's wellbeing and safety. Planning and delivery of services should focus on sustaining and improving children's outcomes, promoting and protecting a child's safety, health, development, learning and wellbeing.'*  
(Department of Human Services 2007, *The Best Interests framework for vulnerable children and youth*).

 Download, save, print and read *The Best Interests framework for vulnerable children and youth* from the Department of Human Services website.


 The *Best Interests framework* resource includes a section on the 'Victorian children's outcomes framework'. If you are a principal or coordinator with responsibility for student welfare and or management, you might consider developing a presentation for colleagues or parents about the 'Key features' of the framework (Department of Human Services 2007, p. 4–5). If it is applicable to your school, you might highlight those ideas and values relating to Aboriginal children and their families.

## The Children, Youth and Families Act 2005

This Act builds on the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act to guide the actions of all parties in the best interests of vulnerable children and young people. The Act defines how:

- children's best interests should drive all planning, decisions and service delivery
- earlier interventions and prevention and greater targeting of secondary services should be directed to those families most in need
- increased emphasis on partnership and collaboration across and within the service systems should result in improved planning, coordination and delivery of services to families
- there needs to be a stronger focus on children's cultural identity and cultural competence in all service delivery
- Aboriginal children's cultural connectedness should be maintained.

(Department of Human Services 2007, *The Best Interests framework for vulnerable children and youth*).



 The 'Best Interests framework' resource includes 'Figure 2 – The Best Interests framework' (p. 16–17). If you are a teacher with a student in out-of-home care in your class, analyse the framework to identify aspects that will support your teaching practice.

The Children, Youth and Families Act (s.16 f) gave responsibility to the Secretary of the Department of Human Services for the publication and promotion of a Charter for children in out-of-home care in order to provide a framework of principles to promote the wellbeing of those children (Appendix A).



# The child protection process




In Victoria, the Children Youth & Family Division within the Department of Human Services has responsibility for child protection. The department has produced a range of resources to support the Children, Youth and Families Act, including the every child, every chance series (2007).

  If you have not received or read *Providing support to vulnerable children and families: an information sharing guide for registered school teachers and principals in Victoria* (Department of Human Services 2007) download a copy from the Department of Human Services website. You may like to read it before progressing further.

## Mandatory Reporting

An investigation by Child Protection may be triggered for a number of reasons, including a report of suspected abuse or neglect made by a teacher under Mandatory Reporting legislation. Only a small percentage of investigations result in a child's removal and only where the risks to the child cannot be managed safely within the family home.

Legislation for Mandatory Reporting of sexual and physical abuse was introduced in Australia in 1994. In 1992/93, 15,182 notifications were received. In the year following mandatory reporting legislation, notifications jumped to 31,699. In 2004/05, 37,253 notifications were received. ('Child Abuse Reporting Statistics: 1992/1993 to 2004/2005', Department of Human Services 2007).

   The *Safe From Harm* professional development kit was distributed to schools through Department of Education and Early Childhood Development regional offices. It can also be downloaded from the Internet. Survey teachers, identifying those requiring initial, or additional, professional learning about mandatory reporting. For teachers in need of training, make available 'Providing support to vulnerable children and families' as preliminary reading, then organise the delivery of the four modules in the Safe from Harm kit by a suitable trainer.

The Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide includes information about student care and supervision that outlines the requirements for teachers and principals in relation to mandatory reporting. The Catholic Education Office, Archdiocese of Melbourne, and the Association of Independent Schools of Victoria websites also include guidelines relating to mandatory reporting.

## Children's Court orders

When Child Protection receives a report about a child or children, it makes an assessment regarding the most appropriate response. Outcomes include taking no action, providing advice and other supports to the family, or referring the family to a Child FIRST team or other agency. A number of principles guide decision-making; most importantly, the best interests of the child.

Where the risks to the child cannot be managed safely with the child continuing to reside with the child's biological parent/s, Child Protection may issue a Protection Application and take the matter to the Children's Court of Victoria. Under the Children, Youth and Families Act the court may make any of a number of orders:

- Custody to Third Party Order – placement in the custody of another person without Child Protection supervision.
- Supervised Custody Order – placement in the custody of another person; Child Protection supervises the placement and is responsible for case planning.




**Figure 2** Providing support to vulnerable children and families



**Figure 3** Safe From Harm

- Custody to the Secretary Order – placement in the care of the Secretary [of the Department of Human Services] who arranges a foster care or other placement, supervises the placement, and is responsible for case planning.
- Guardianship to the Secretary Order – placement in the care of the Secretary who arranges a foster care or other placement, supervises the placement, is responsible for case planning, and assumes parental responsibility. A Long Term Guardianship to the Secretary Order is where a young person aged at least 12 consents to an order until they are 18 or until their long-term placement ends.
- Permanent Care Order – permanent placement in the care of specified people, who become the child’s legal guardians until the young person’s 18th birthday.

*Permanent care recognises that some children and young people will never be able to return to the care of their parents. Permanent care is when children are placed with approved permanent care parents by Adoption and Permanent Care teams, or when an existing foster care or relative/kinship care placement is converted to permanent care by the granting of a Permanent Care Order or another kind of order from the Family Court. Permanent care can provide security and stability for children who have entered the Child Protection system and for whom a decision has been made that they are unable to live safely with their birth parents on a long- term basis. Children placed in permanent care are on protection orders and represent a steadily increasing proportion of the total number of children in out-of-home care.*

 Detailed technical knowledge of Children’s Court orders and how they are defined by the Children, Youth and Families Act is not essential for all teachers. If you are a principal, coordinator or a member of a Student Support Group, you may find it useful to discuss with the child care team the particular orders applicable to each student in out-of-home care in your school.

Each child or young person in out-of-home care will have a Best Interests Plan identifying where they will live and for how long, where they will go to school, key goals for their time in out-of-home care, the level of contact they will have with their parents, and any of plans to reunify them with a parent or parents.

Knowledge of appropriate orders will be critical in ensuring that children and young people in out-of-home care are not placed at risk through provision of information or access by unauthorised individuals, including family members.

All Department of Education and Early Childhood Development staff must comply with the Information and Privacy Act 2000 and the Health Records Act 2001 whenever personal information about students is collected, stored, transmitted, shared, used or disclosed. Different disclosure standards apply to information relating to students’ educational progress and their health and personal information. Additional resources supporting privacy practice in student wellbeing are available by contacting the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development’s Privacy Officer at: [privacy.enquiries@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:privacy.enquiries@edumail.vic.gov.au)

## Types of out-of-home care

The term out-of-home care encompasses a range of short and medium term and permanent living arrangements for children and young people who cannot live in their family home.

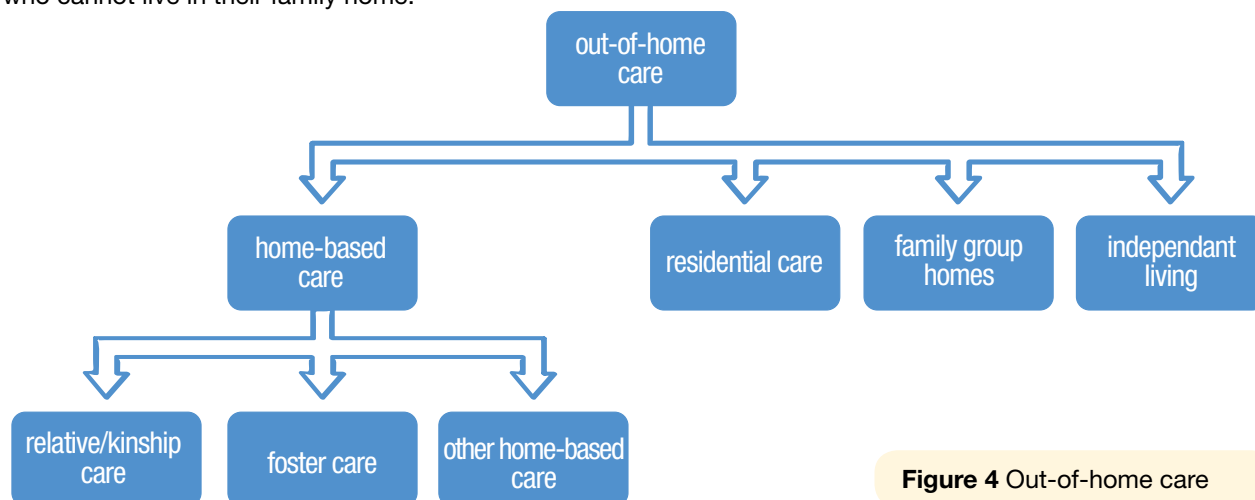


Figure 4 Out-of-home care

### Home-based care

In Australia, there are three basic types of home-based care. Relative/kinship care is provided by a family member or a person or persons with a pre-existing relationship with the child. Foster care is provided in the private home of a substitute family. Other home-based care is where the type of care does not fit into either of these categories.

A relative/kinship carer will have been assessed by the Department of Human Services as suitable for this role. Kinship care may be short-, medium- or long-term, may provide respite to the parents or other carers, or may be full-time. Relative/kinship care is the preferred type of care for children as it minimises the traumatic effect of separation.

Foster care may be short, medium or long term. If a child or young person is in foster care, he or she lives with volunteers who have been trained and approved. Foster carers are supported by a social worker from a community service organisation.

*While foster carers provide the day-to-day care for the child; their legal authority for broader decision making is limited by the order on which the child is placed. This means that typically, a foster carer cannot make decisions such as the school to which a child in their care will go. Foster carers cannot take children or young people interstate or overseas without permission, authorise surgical procedures, or sign permission forms for excursions and camps. This is currently under review.*

Other home-based care can be provided by carers such as respite care on a regular weekend each month to provide a break either for a child's parents or their full-time carers. Emergency care, for example, may be necessary when a child has first been removed from their home, or another care placement has broken down, and decisions are still being made about a long-term placement.

### Residential care

Residential care is provided in a house setting, but rather than care being provided by a volunteer single carer or couple, residential carers are paid staff working rostered shifts to look after a small group of children and young people. Students who are in this type of care are typically older children and adolescents or those with complex needs or high risk behaviours.

### Family group homes

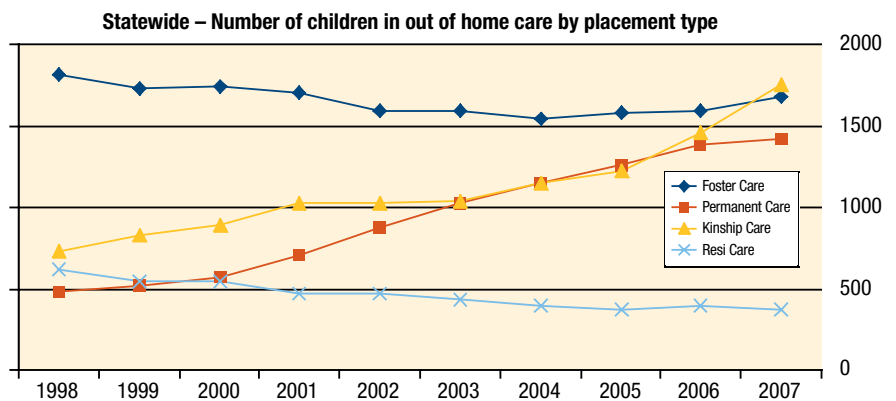
Family group homes provide short-term care in department-owned homes with approved carers. In some States and Territories, family group homes are staffed by 24-hour carers who are paid staff.

### Independent living


Independent living is when young people live in private boarding arrangements or in 'lead-tenant' households. Lead-tenants are volunteers who live rent free and are provided with board. They typically live with two or three older adolescents who are in out-of-home care but moving towards independence. There are usually two lead tenants in each household, who may be a couple or two singles.

### Victorian data for children in out-of-home care by placement type

The following graph demonstrates that, over the ten year period from 1997/98 to 2006/07, the numbers and proportions of Victorian children in permanent care and kinship care are increasing while those in foster and residential care are decreasing.



**Figure 5** Number of Victorian children in out-of-home care by placement type.



 You might identify the kinds of out-of-home care represented in the student population of your school and consult with regional staff about the implications of this for a Student Support Group, as outlined in the Partnering Agreement.

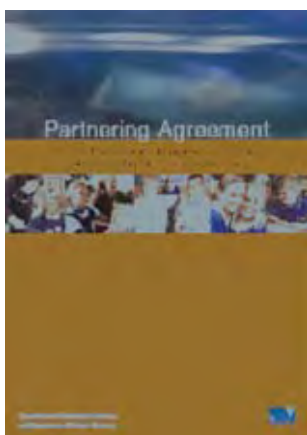
## The Partnering Agreement

The Partnering Agreement was developed in 2003 between the Department of Human Services and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to coordinate support for children and young people in out-of-home care.

The Partnership Agreement identifies policies and processes at a statewide, regional and school level that can assist care teams to improve each child's and young person's engagement with school, their learning outcomes and their retention at school. The Partnering Agreement requires school principals to establish a Student Support Group to oversee the development of an Individual Education Plan for each student in out-of-home care and to monitor the student's progress.

The Partnering Agreement: School Attendance and Engagement of Children and Young People in Out of Home Care, (Department of Education & Department of Human Services 2003) can be downloaded from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development or the Department of Human Services websites. Additional information about using the Partnering Agreement is included in Section 3 of this resource.

  If you are a principal, a coordinator or a member of a Student Support Group, collect resources identified in Section 1 of Supporting children and young people in out of home care: A resource for schools. Identify key school and regional staff.



**Figure 6**  
Partnering Agreement

# Section 2:

## Research about the education of students in out-of-home care

Children and young people in out-of-home care are as capable of learning as any other children. Some may already be achieving academic, sporting or social success. However, for the majority of students in out-of-home care, Australian and international research indicates that they:

- achieve lower learning outcomes, particularly in numeracy and literacy
- suffer from educational deficit
- have specific issues relating to development at key stages of schooling
- exhibit a range of problematic behaviours.

Reduced educational outcomes may result from a range of factors including: abuse and neglect; poor role modelling for learning in the family home; multiple transitions and disruptions to important relationships; extended periods of stress and trauma; and low expectations for achievement.

Specific learning difficulties experienced by children and young people in out-of-home care may be masked by other issues. Children and young people in out-of-home care are less likely to have had timely diagnosis, treatment and support for health, learning or behavioural difficulties.





# Educational achievement

There are two major sources of research information available to schools about the educational outcomes of students in out-of-home care.



Figure 7 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare website

 Hunter, Nicole & Mathur, Sushma 2007, Educational outcomes of children on guardianship or custody orders: A pilot study, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

 Harvey, Jadyne & Testro, Paul 2006, Report Card: Education of Australian Children and Young People in Care 2006, CREATE Foundation.



The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) pilot study was based on a study population of children in years 3, 5, 7 at government schools who participated in education department-based reading and numeracy tests. The study compares the academic performance of children on guardianship or custody orders with the State norm, as assessed by reading and numeracy test scores.

## Reading and numeracy

Australian research indicates that children in out-of-home care have lower educational outcomes than all other children.

Hunter & Mathur (2007) found that:

- 'Children on guardianship/custody orders were considerably less likely to achieve the national benchmarks for reading and numeracy across almost all year levels compared with all children in each jurisdiction.
- Indigenous children on orders have much lower reading and numeracy scores than other children on orders.
- There were generally no significant or consistent associations for sex, living arrangements, nor length of time on care and protection orders with mean reading and numeracy scores for children on guardianship/custody orders.'

  The complete report can be downloaded from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare website in PDF format. Collect, read and discuss the report and other reading and numeracy research with your colleagues.

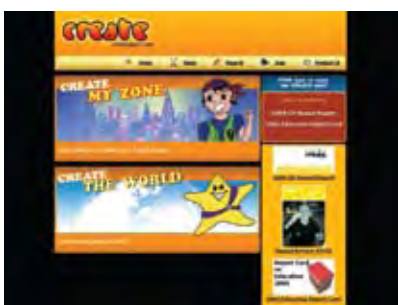


Figure 8 CREATE Foundation website

## School experience, attendance and completion

The CREATE Foundation is an Australian not-for-profit organisation that aims to empower children and young people who are placed in out-of-home care through a combination of direct service provision and systemic advocacy.

In 2006, CREATE released its Report Card: Education of Australian Children and Young People in Care, 2006. In the report, Harvey & Testro summarise Australian and international research about the educational outcomes of children in out-of-home care.

The Report Card notes that the number of Victorian children and young people in out-of-home care gradually increased from a rate of 3 per thousand children in 1997 to 3.8 per thousand in 2005. (Harvey & Testro 2006)

The CREATE researchers contend that children and young people in out-of-home care are more likely to:

- have more than double the school transitions of other students (Cashmore & Paxman 1996)
- are likely to have demonstrated delays in personal development and social skills, and greater levels of emotional and behavioural disturbance (Cavanagh 1996)

- are below average in literacy and numeracy (Cavanagh 1996; de Lemos 1997) and adaptive behaviour (de Lemos 1997)
- are older than their year-level peers (Courtney, Terao & Bost 2004; de Lemos 1997)
- are likely to have frequent episodes of truancy, school expulsion or suspension (Cavanagh 1996)
- complete fewer years of schooling (McDonald et al. 1996; Cashmore & Paxman 1996)
- have lower secondary school completion rates (Mech 1994; McDonald et al. 1996; Cashmore & Paxman 1996)
- are less likely to go on to higher education (McDonald et al. 1996)
- are more likely to be in special education (McDonald et al. 1996; Cavanagh 1996)
- are less likely to be attending school at all (Cavanagh 1996).

The study by de Lemos (1997) also found over one third of the children in out-of-home care were identified as having a disability compared to an expected prevalence rate of two per cent for the student population as a whole. Among those students with an identified disability, 61 per cent were identified as having an emotional or behavioural disorder.

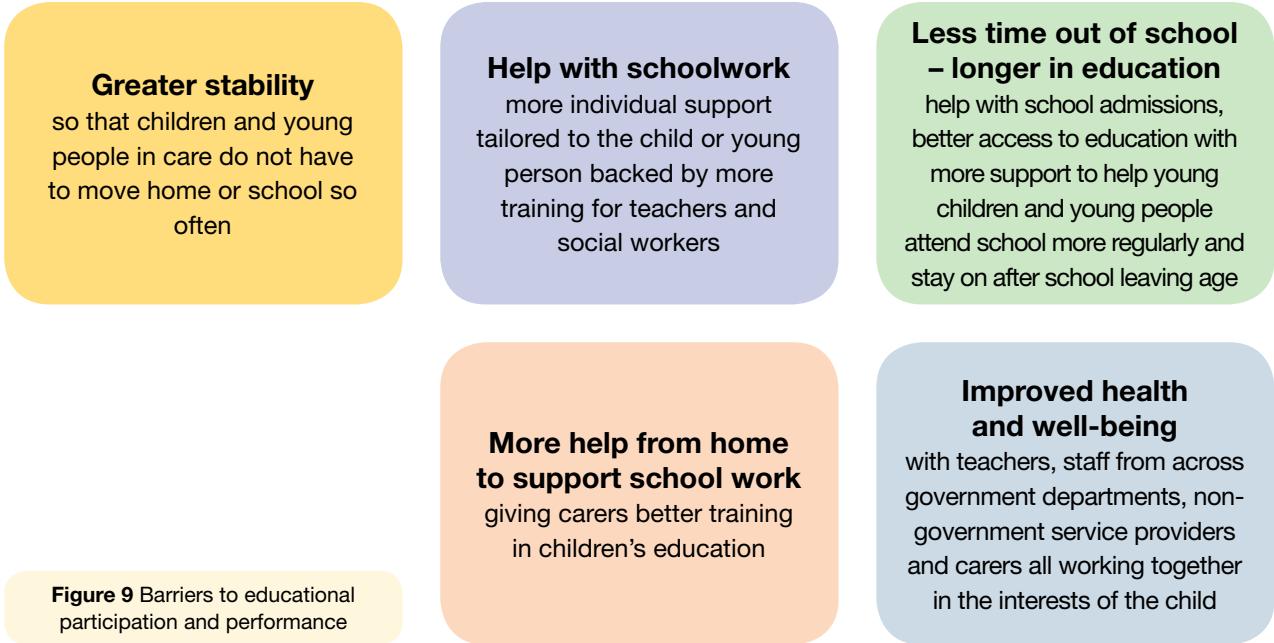
### ***The Victorian sample***

The CREATE Report Card draws specific conclusions based on State and Territory supplied research data. Key findings about Victorian children and young people in out-of-home care include:

*‘At all year levels the out-of-home care cohort performs below the expected levels of academic performance as determined by Education standards and also in comparison to the performance of the general population of students.  
The performance trends of the out-of-home care cohort follows similar patterns to the general population of students in that performance levels decline as students move through the higher school levels in the post compulsory education years...  
The out-of-home care cohort have higher rates of absenteeism compared to the general population of students...  
The percentage of out-of-home care students in Year 12 who move to another school prior to completion of the school year is significantly higher than for the general population...  
At the end of Year 12 the primary exit destination for out-of-home care students was to alternative training or higher education providers...  
A higher percentage of out-of-home care students moved on to University compared to the general population of students.’*  
*(Harvey & Testro 2006).*

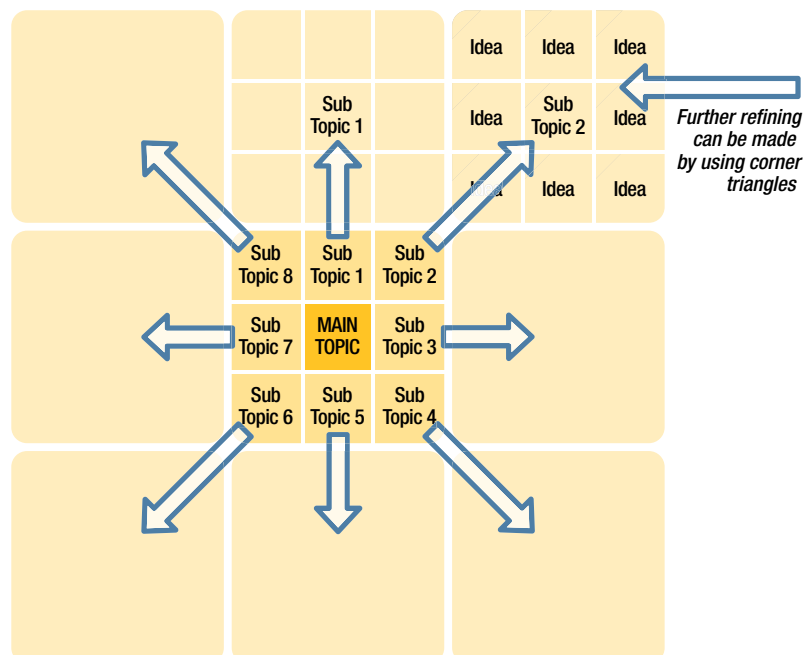
**Barriers to participation and performance**

The CREATE Report Card 2006 extrapolates from the research findings to identify the significant barriers to education participation and performance of out-of-home care children and young people. These are organised under the areas of change required to improve educational outcomes of children and young people in out-of-home care.



**Figure 9** Barriers to educational participation and performance

Using information provided in the CREATE Report Card (p 57–60), either individually or collaboratively reflect on, and or discuss the five barriers identified (Figure 9). Which barrier do you think that teachers and or school leaders can develop strategies to overcome in the short, medium and longer term? A graphic organiser such as a Lotus diagram (Figure 10) can help you think creatively and critically about solutions to these barriers. Write the main topic in the centre of the lotus diagram. Place each of the barriers in the rectangles surrounding the centre rectangle. Transfer each of the barriers to its corresponding numbered rectangle and brainstorm. Use the available data from the CREATE Report Card to assist you in this activity.



**Figure 10** Lotus process (VCAA 2007)



# Concerns about lower educational outcomes

A number of Australian and international reports are a useful starting point for understanding the broader educational concerns for students in out-of-home care.

Only the second of these reports specifically relates to children and young people in out-of-home care. The other reports provide data and information from which observations about children and young people in out-of-home care may be induced.

- Bellhouse Robert, et al. 2004, 'Social, emotional and cognitive development and its relationship to learning in school: Prep to Year 10', Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority.
- Heath, Anthony F, Colton, Matthew J, Aldgate, Jane 1994, 'Failure to Escape: A Longitudinal Study of Foster Children's Educational Attainment', British Journal of Social Work, Vol 24.
- Lansford Jennifer et al. 2002, 'A 12-year prospective study of the long-term effects of early child physical maltreatment on psychological, behavioural and academic problems in adolescence', Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med. 156 (8).
- Peterson, Candida 1996, Looking forward through the lifespan: Developmental Psychology, Third Edition, Prentice Hall, Sydney.
- Reeve, Robert & Ainlee, Mary 2004, 'Prep to Year 10 Learner Characteristics', Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority.



Download, save, print and refer to the two Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) discussion papers while reading or completing the remainder of this section. Each discussion paper will allow you to focus on the particular stages of schooling represented within your school's student population: the early years (Prep – Year 4), the middle years (Years 5–8), and Years 9–10.

## Abuse, neglect, stress and trauma

Heath, Colton & Aldgate (1994), in a longitudinal study of the educational attainment of foster children in the United Kingdom, found that foster children in general were significantly behind their peers – those who had similar socio-economic backgrounds and family structures – across a range of learning outcomes in literacy and numeracy. There were also significant differences within the foster care group between those for whom abuse or neglect was the primary reason for their removal. Lansford *et al.*, (2002) found that children who experienced abuse or neglect were absent more often from school, performed less well than their peers academically, and had higher level of behavioural disturbances, even after the abuse had ceased.

*'Peter came in to my care aged 8, straight from his mother. She had been unable to protect him from regular and ongoing physical and sexual abuse by a number of adults. When I met him he could not read or write, couldn't sit still in the classroom and was behaving dreadfully at school, and couldn't focus his attention for more than a couple of minutes on anything; even stuff he really enjoyed like favourite shows on TV. All his energy, all his focus, went in to constant monitoring of his surroundings. He knew exactly who was in his vicinity and what they were doing, and he was always watching out, even if we happened to be in a dark cinema watching a movie. No wonder he couldn't concentrate at school.'*

**Rob, foster carer**



It is known that children who experience abuse, neglect, stress and trauma may develop thinking processes and responses focused on survival, escapism and hiding – literally, or in their own thoughts – rather than on engaging with education, and learning core competencies. For many children and young people in out-of-home care, the most important thing they may have learnt is to survive unnoticed in hostile environments.

Even for those who have not experienced significant abuse or neglect, cognitive development may be affected by trauma resulting from their removal from the family, as well as by the experience of resettlement.

Experiences involving abuse, neglect and trauma by children and young people in out-of-home care will create challenges for later learning. A relationship between the school and the care team is crucial for assisting children and young people in out-of-home care to learn effectively and move beyond early trauma.



**Figure 11**  
Calmer classrooms

  If you would like to read additional research relating to understanding and working with children and young people whose lives have been affected by trauma, download and refer to *Calmer classrooms: A guide to working with traumatised children* (Child Safety Commissioner 2007). The Guide is designed for kindergarten, primary and secondary teachers.

### **Attachment and bonding**

The child's or young person's emotions and ability to learn effectively in school may be connected to the kinds and quality of emotional bonds developed in infancy. In infancy most children become securely attached to their primary caregiver, usually their mother, and sometimes to one or more other people such as the father or a sibling. It is argued that about 20 per cent of children develop avoidant attachment, and a smaller group, about 10 per cent become anxiously attached.

Peterson (1996) describes the importance of attachment:

*'The security of a baby's attachment to its parents can have a great impact not only on social development, but on cognitive growth and emotional wellbeing. Throughout the remainder of their lives, those individuals who managed to develop secure attachments to their caregivers in infancy are likely to enjoy many advantages over their peers...'*

A range of factors lead to elevated risk of insecure attachment: socio-economic hardship, parental drug or alcohol addictions, parents with a mental or other serious illness, and abusive and neglectful families. A parent who themselves had an insecure attachment to their own parent is more likely to have an insecure attachment to their children.

Children and young people in out-of-home care are much more likely to have an attachment disorder than their peers. This, in turn, may make it difficult for them to develop positive emotional bonds with other people. This may have behavioural implications for the classroom, as students with attachment disorders may be less amenable to behaviour strategies that rely on students wanting to maintain good relationships with peers and teachers.

There are other implications of insecure attachment that can impact on learning. Peterson (1996) identifies the following among the outcomes of different attachment styles for long-term development and wellbeing:

*‘Studies have (also) shown that, when they grow older, securely attached infants score higher than their counterparts on measures of (a) self-esteem, (b) popularity with peers, (c) skills for coping with difficult cognitive problems or social situations, (d) skills for coping with failure, (e) enthusiasm and persistence in learning, (f) curiosity, (g) mature independence from parents and (h) freedom from problem behaviours such as aggression, hyperactivity or anxiety (Sroufe 1985). These are ideal qualities with which to embark not only upon future social relationships, but upon a life of learning, creative expression and self-discovery.’*

Schools and teachers can assist children with attachment issues by:

- developing relationships with them that are emotionally predictable and stable
- assisting them to understand their own feelings and the feelings of others
- setting clear and known rules for behaviour, and consequences for misbehaviour
- structuring their time with peers and others so that it maximises the likelihood of positive interactions.

### **Socialisation to early learning**

Growing up in a family that values learning, that actively builds a child’s knowledge and engages their interest in the world, creates both an interest in and a capacity for learning. This provides a strong base of knowledge and understanding on which to build when entering formal education.

Bellhouse *et al.* (2004) contend that:

*‘In order for learning to occur effectively and efficiently, students need to understand how their existing knowledge relates to new tasks. The greater the contrast between the cultural and social norms of school and community, the more problematic a student’s opportunities for learning and success.’*

The birth family of the child in out-of-home care may not have provided an environment that was stimulating and positive for the child’s learning. Many children in out-of-home care have moved several times from placement to placement, or in and out of the birth family home, and have had to contend with getting to know new families and their lifestyles and cultures. This disrupts the development of an integrated knowledge.

The above factors can make learning more difficult. Reeve & Ainlee (2004) state that:

*‘Children’s curiosity and persistence are supported by adults who direct children’s attention, structure experience, support learning attempts, and regulate complexity and difficulty levels of information for children. Thus, development involves interactions between children’s early competencies and the environmental supports – strengthening relevant capacities and pruning the early abilities that are less relevant. Learning is promoted and regulated by both the biology and ecology of the children – learning produces development.’*

Children and young people in out-of-home care may require assistance in connecting to and participating in a positive learning culture. Carers can and will develop positive learning environments for children in their care, but often need to focus their effort on a number of pressing emotional, health and behavioural concerns, and on building a sense of family. At the same time, carers may have little or no information about specific learning needs, difficulties and deficits of children in their care, and may be relying on schools to identify these.

### **Emotion and cognition**

While exposure to abuse and trauma can undermine later learning, Bellhouse *et al.* (2004) contend that the links between emotional states and cognitive ability are more fundamental.

*'Our thinking brain evolved by building on parts that are involved in emotion and feelings, causing them to be intricately linked. Feelings, then, are both created and perceived by the brain. They directly influence our behaviours and attitudes. (Zull, undated). For instance, stress may lead to impaired cognition and fear may result in the physical deterioration of memory systems.'*

*(Sylwester 1998). (VCAA 2004)*

For children and young people who have been educationally disadvantaged by their early life experiences, schools and teachers need to ensure that their present learning environment does not exacerbate the damage caused by past trauma.

Bellhouse *et al.* (2004) maintain that building a safe, supportive yet academically challenging learning environment is the key to learning.


*'In general, complex learning is enhanced by challenge and inhibited by threat. The brain learns optimally when appropriately challenged in an environment that encourages taking risks, but where it is not subjected to high levels of stress, or negative emotional excitation (Caine and Caine 1994). Unpleasant feelings, such as fear, anger and helplessness, impair thinking, while more pleasant feelings, such as calm, safety and self-determination, tend to enhance thinking. Emotional regulation is a key skill.'*


*(VCAA 2004)*

# Stages of Schooling

Hunter & Mathur (2007) present the clearest indication of the ways in which children and young people in out-of-home care are significantly below the State norm in reading and numeracy at all levels apart from Year 3 Reading. This is confirmed by research summarised by Harvey & Testro (2006) in the CREATE Report Card.

The two VCAA discussion papers by Bellhouse *et al.* (2004) and Reeve & Ainlee (2004) also describe children and young people's development within the compulsory years of schooling (P–10) in Victoria. Learner characteristics and social, emotional and cognitive development are characterised at key stages of schooling: the early years (Prep–Year 4), the middle years (Years 5–8), and later years (Years 9–10).

 Read the research findings on social, emotional and cognitive development in the early years, the middle years, and/or the later years in the Bellhouse R *et al.* (2004) discussion paper. You may like to reflect on these in your journal.

 If you are working through this section in a school-based or regional team, allocate a particular stage of schooling to each member. Each member should compare the overviews provided below with the complete sections in the discussion paper. Refer to the table 'summary of essential learning skills accumulating through stages of schooling' included at the end of the discussion paper. Highlight those skills relevant to students in out-of-home care. Present a summary of your findings and/or observations to the wider group and discuss strategies that can be used within a classroom to improve the educational outcomes of children and/or young people in out-of-home care.

## The early years

Bellhouse *et al.* (2004) contend that the first task of schools is to assist beginning students to adjust to the school environment and become engaged in formal learning. The researchers describe three types of engagement in schooling:

- behavioural**
  - habits and conduct that are cooperative and helpful to the student's own learning and that of others in the classroom
  - positive attitudes to learning, such as persistence and concentration
  - participation in the social and cultural life of the school emotional
  - general feelings of wellbeing in the school environment, such as happiness and safety, and a sense of positive connection to school
- cognitive**
  - ability and practice of self-regulation in learning – planning, monitoring and self-evaluation.
  - positive coping styles and a preference for challenging learning tasks.

Children who have grown up in abusive and neglectful households, or families with chaotic lifestyles, are less likely than other children to have developed positive social behaviours and conduct, and may have little ability to self-regulate even their most basic behaviours.

*“By the time Jeff came in to care he was seven years old. He had no regular sleeping pattern, and could stay awake for 30 or 40 hours at a stretch, then curl up and sleep wherever he happened to be at the time, for 14 or 16 hours. He couldn't sit at a table to eat, and would horde food in his bedroom to snack on whenever he felt hungry. He rarely spoke, never in sentences, and had a vocabulary of less than 25 words.”*

Margaret, carer

Jeff's story illustrates how embedded routines, or lack of routine, can disrupt the lives of children and young people. The more complex structures, routines and behaviours required for functioning classrooms may not be familiar to many children, and may need to be implemented with understanding and without blame.


Bellhouse *et al.* (2004) define a particular skill that children need in order to function in the classroom, as well as in the broader world.

*'An important fundamental emotional skill that should be developed early and maintained throughout schooling is impulse control. Impulse control is a skill many children appear to develop naturally around the age of four ... Teachers can help children to develop impulse control by teaching them to recognise the feelings in themselves and others, by implementing behaviour management approaches that encourage children to regulate emotions, and by helping children to reflect on their behaviours.'*

Children in out-of-home care may struggle to develop impulse control. Many will have had poor modelling in their family home, as well as experiences of abuse that may make controlling their emotions difficult. Assisting children to understand their feelings and develop appropriate responses to emotional situations is a key task for both teachers and carers. A dialogue between teachers and carers is needed to ensure that their approaches to this are congruent.

While the first step in cognitive development is to engage children, a focus on learning requires that children in out-of-home care are appropriately challenged intellectually. An appropriate level of challenge is one that encourages children to extend themselves within the realm of possibility for each child. Using assessment for learning (formative assessment) rather than assessment of learning (summative assessment) also allows children to experience success and be encouraged to strive further.

Social development becomes increasingly a focus for children as they approach the middle years of schooling. Friends become more important, and emotional bonds may develop with people outside the family home. This is an important period of socialisation, and for those children with attachment issues and or multiple disruptions to significant relationships, assistance may be needed in forming and sustaining friendships and other relationships. Proactive support at a school level might provide structures for social interaction such as games or other activities during lunchtimes, as well as guidance and modelling about how to manage emotions and difficult interactions.

 [Reeve & Ainlee \(2004\) describe five core cognitive competencies. Read about each of these in the VCAA discussion paper, particularly as they relate to this stage of schooling. Describe any issues that may arise in each about how children in out-of-home care may need to be supported in the classroom.](#)

## **The middle years**

The middle years are critical for the success and wellbeing of out-of-home care children. Hunter & Mathur (2007) have identified that Reading and particularly Numeracy test scores of students in out-of-home care significantly decline against the State norm in Year 7 in Victorian schools.

The development of skills to form and maintain positive relationships is also a key challenge for children in the middle years. This may be exacerbated by the normal transition from primary to secondary school.

Lack of social skills can lead to isolation and the undermining of self-esteem, anti-social behaviours such as bullying, and attachment to other individuals and groups with anti-social behaviours. Individual Education

Plans and the work of Student Support Groups need to take into account these social learning needs, as well as academic learning concerns.


Some children do not come into out-of-home care until they are completing primary school or beginning secondary school. Students in the middle years may have recently experienced abuse, neglect and deprivation in the family home. Their cognitive development may have been focused on survival in dysfunctional surroundings, rather than learning in functional ones.

Bellhouse *et al.* (2004) acknowledge the relationship between stress, learning ability, and resilience:

*“Stress may impede the development of the adolescent brain... At the onset of adolescence, young people who remain connected to adults, school and family are more likely to develop resilience, which includes the ability to manage stress positively... Resnick et al. (1993) found that feelings of safety and security are also critical to developing resilience skills.”*

A focus on resilience is a very important strategy for supporting the learning experience of children and adolescents in out-of-home care at school. This includes:

- building supportive relationships in, and a sense of belonging to, the school, which may be the most stable environment in which the young person spends time
- providing them with the skills and the opportunities to communicate with a range of peers and adults
- assisting them in identifying and building on their skills and interests
- encouraging them to learn through the development and delivery of challenging, engaging curriculum.

 Reeve & Ainlee (2004) describe five core cognitive competencies. Read about each of these in the VCAA discussion paper, particularly as they relate to this stage of schooling. Describe any issues that may arise in each about how young people in out-of-home care may need to be supported in the classroom.

### **Learning and older students**

Harvey & Testro (2006) note how Years 9 and 10 may be critical for young people in out-of-home care. They acknowledge research that indicates that young people in out-of-home care have lower secondary school completion rates (Mech 1994; MacDonald *et al.*, 1996; Cashmore & Paxman 1996); and are less likely to go on to higher education (MacDonald *et al.*, 1996).

Reeve & Ainlee (2004) suggest that the inherent interest in learning content and the support and praise of adults may not be sufficient to engage students in Years 9 and 10:


*“Many of the activities and experiences that are required within the school curriculum may not trigger curiosity and so do not directly activate information seeking or the development of competence. However, these experiences often occur within a social context where their pursuit is encouraged, praised and rewarded by parents and teachers. For school-related competencies this external regulation may develop into internal regulation (ie, it becomes internalised). Activities undertaken to maintain a sense of self, to avoid the displeasure of adults (parents, teachers) or to receive their praise, become internally regulated. The internalisation process may develop further to the point where a student values and finds the activities themselves to be important, not just a means to an internal goal. The experience of achievement in the relevant domain provides important information, confirming and re-affirming the self. Achievement behaviour that was initially externally regulated may become internally regulated.”*

Students in out-of-home care may struggle to develop an internal locus of control for their learning because:

- they may not have sufficient building blocks for the more complex learning required at this level
- they may not have a consistent adult with oversight of their homework; for example, adolescents in residential services where several staff may be rostered on across any one week
- they may have experienced a range of developmental delays, as previously discussed.

Years 9 and 10 are critical in developing pathways to post-compulsory education, training or employment. Young people may struggle to develop a positive sense of their future or to engage with and understand increasingly complex curriculum content.

Adolescents in out-of-home care may need more one-to-one support, and opportunities to check in with teachers in order to break complex learning tasks into discrete sections. They may need assistance in identifying areas of the curriculum in which they can demonstrate their skills as well as those in which they struggle. And they may struggle to recall, or may have never learned, basic skills and knowledge that is the foundation on which their later learning is built.

 Reeve & Ainlee (2004) describe five core cognitive competencies. Read about each of these in the VCAA discussion paper, particularly as they relate to this stage of schooling. Describe any issues that may arise in each about how young people in out-of-home care may need to be supported in the classroom.

## Multiple transitions and gaps in knowledge

Greater stability for children and young people in out-of-home care is essential for educational participation and performance. Harvey & Testro (2006) acknowledge Cashmore & Paxman's research (1996) that children and young people in out-of-home care have more than double the transitions of other students.

Many parents whose children ultimately end up in out-of-home care live in unstable accommodation or are transient. Others are unwilling, unable or just disorganised when it comes to getting their children to school regularly.

*“By the time I was in Grade 3 I'd been to 14 schools. I had days off all the time, because Mum and I were always moving. Then I went in to care. Then I went with Mum again. Then I went back in to care. I finally had two years at one Primary School, but I'd missed so much I didn't really understand any of it.”*

DeeJay, 16



The entry into out-of-home care can also involve several moves, both in and out of a parent or parents' care and from short-term or reception placements to longer term care. Children and young people can find themselves missing out on significant knowledge, skills and values when moving from school to school. In other cases, students may repeat sections of the curriculum. These cumulatively represent multiple transitions.

Education may be a low priority for children and young people during times of extreme stress and difficulties. This results in these students having significant gaps in knowledge and basic learning skills; an absence of foundational knowledge and core competencies making subsequent learning more difficult.

Children and young people in out-of-home care may need assistance from teachers to identify knowledge gaps and other educational deficits and strategies to address them.

## Wellbeing and inappropriate behaviours

Like many other children, those who are in out-of-home care can exhibit a range of problematic behaviours. These may develop and be displayed for various reasons:

- they may be coping strategies that have assisted the child or young person to deal with extreme and traumatic situations in the past
- they may be attention seeking when the child or young person feels unsupported or out of their depth in the classroom
- they may be a 'cry for help' for more serious reasons
- they may simply reflect the child's or young person's lack of opportunities to develop pro-social skills given developmental difficulties and life experiences.

Harvey & Testro (2006) acknowledge that children and young people in out-of-home care are likely to have 'demonstrated delays in personal development and social skills, and greater levels of emotional and personal disturbance'; while Cavanagh (1996) contends that they are 'likely to have frequent episodes of truancy, and school expulsion or suspension'.

Just as cognitive development is affected by early experiences of abuse, neglect and deprivation, so too are behaviours. The behaviours that children and young people in out-of-home care use to cope with situations of extreme stress and anxiety may not be ones that are useful or appropriate in the classroom, though they may have been crucial to their survival in other environments.

Assisting a child or young person to develop appropriate, pro-social behaviours occurs most effectively when their teacher is relating positively to them. Role modelling pro-social behaviours and structuring a child's or young person's time in a way that supports them to stay focused and engaged are important strategies for developing positive social-skills. Positive behaviour strategies that assist students to learn more appropriate ways of behaving, such as restorative justice conferencing, are useful means for assisting children and young people in out-of-home care to develop pro-social skills.

## Developing proactive strategies

Australian and international research indicates that there are many educational challenges for children and young people in out-of-home care.

It is important that their teachers work to challenge, engage and support children and young people in out-of-home care by:

- developing Individual Education Plans that identify, record and monitor individual learning strengths and weaknesses
- ensuring they receive appropriate teaching and support that enables them to achieve national literacy and numeracy benchmarks at all stages of schooling
- providing inclusive and relevant curriculum activities
- focusing on building positive relationships with adults and peers in the school and building social skills
- providing non-judgemental familiarisation with classroom values and practices.

The following section will elaborate on these proactive strategies.



# Section 3:

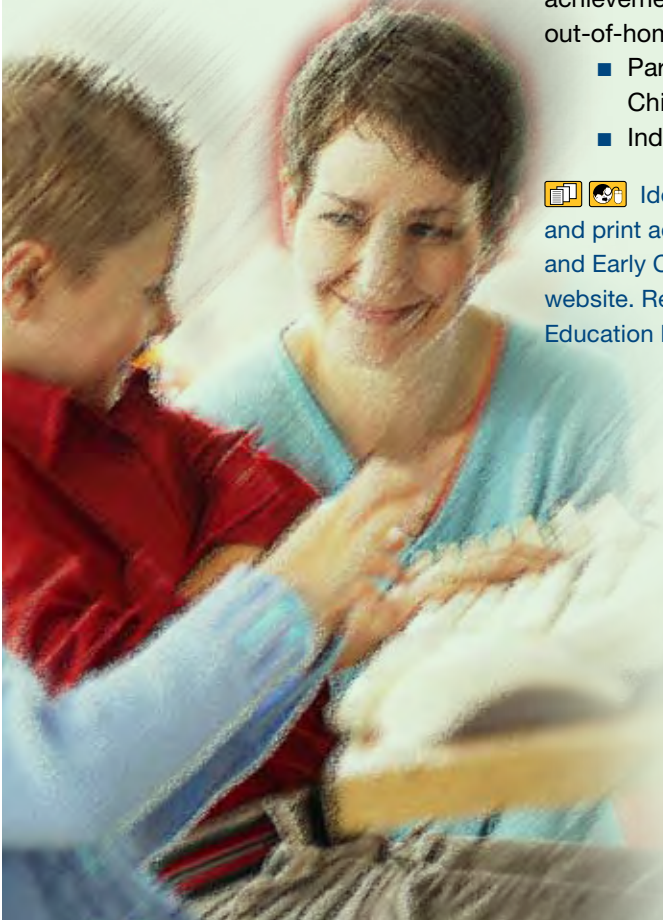
## School support for students in out-of-home care

Academic achievement, school attendance and participation are key components of success for children and young people in out-of-home care. What they learn in school becomes the foundation on which they can build a future. Relationships with teachers and other students at school may also be the student's most durable and stable social interactions. In spite of the importance of school to the lives of children and young people in out-of-home care, many struggle to make positive connection to school and to engage effectively in learning.

To maximise the opportunities of children and young people in Victorian schools, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the Department of Human Services have provided two resources to school communities to support the enrolment, attendance, achievement, retention and monitoring of children and young people in out-of-home care.

- Partnering Agreement: School Attendance and Engagement of Children and Young People in Out of Home Care.
- Individual Education Plan.

  Identify the location of these documents in the school. Download and print additional copies as required from the [Department of Education and Early Childhood Development](#) or the [Department of Human Services](#) website. Read through the Partnering Agreement and the Individual Education Plan before beginning this section.



# Responsibilities under the Partnering Agreement


The Partnering Agreement outlines the general responsibilities of the two Departments and the specific responsibilities of regions, schools, case managers, parents, guardians and care givers. Each school with a child or young person in out-of-home care is expected to be familiar with the content of the Partnering Agreement and to implement the range of the strategies outlined.

The Partnering Agreement includes advice about policies, practices, and responsibilities relating to student enrolment, supporting attendance and achievement, case planning, school retention, implementation of the agreement, monitoring of student outcomes, and evaluation of the agreement.

The responsibilities of the Department of Human Services appointed case manager under the Partnering Agreement are:

- to provide the school with relevant data relating to the child's or young person's history and care arrangements
- to ensure that parents, guardians and care givers are known to the school
- to participate in a Student Support Group.

Each region has a representative from both the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the Department of Human Services who is responsible for supporting schools and care teams.

 Identify a key role within a school or region – principal, coordinator, teacher, or case manager – and identify their roles and responsibilities under the Partnership Agreement. If you are undertaking this activity as a member of a team, or within a Student Support Group, you might consider allocating different roles and reporting on, or presenting a role play, to enable the team to recognise these complementary and distinct roles and responsibilities.

## Student Support Groups

School principals are expected to establish a Student Support Group for each child and young person in out-of-home care within the school. The Student Support Group brings together representatives of the school and the child's or young person's care team. Where appropriate, it is recommended that the child or young person also attends.

*“We meet once a term. Corey is a vital part of each meeting. It's important that he knows the meetings are not just adults making decisions for him.”*

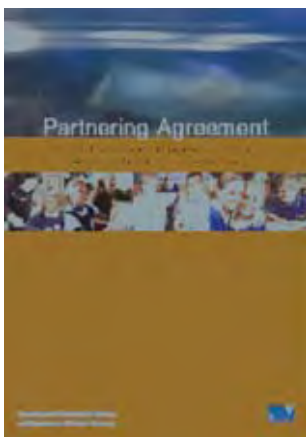
*Barry, Student Welfare Coordinator,  
Eastern Metropolitan Region Secondary College*

Each Student Support Group collaborates to:

- support the attendance and participation of the child at school
- establish shared educational and social goals
- monitor the student's progress.

*“We only meet a couple of times a year, but it's made a world of difference to feel that we're all working together to assist Jade in this way. It's made all the other interactions we have with the school throughout the year so much easier too – I know who I need to talk to and when, and the school knows that they can always call me.”*

*Jemma, carer*





**Figure 12**  
Partnering Agreement

The Chair of a Student Support Group needs to provide adequate notification for the establishment of the Group. Making direct contact with each member will create the consensus required to support the child's or young person's education. The initial meeting will provide opportunities for discussion about who in the care team will take the lead role in working with the school, as well as clarifying each member's responsibilities: such as, who may sign consent forms, who is contacted if the child is ill at school, and who attends Parent-Teachers nights. A discussion about how school-related information is shared across the care team will also be useful.

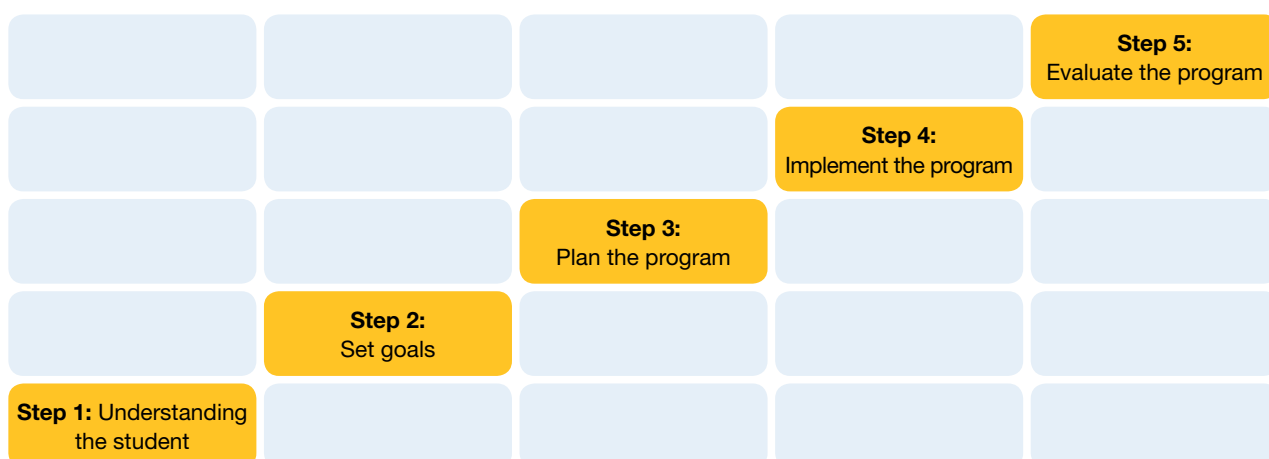
### The Individual Education Plan

The document, *Individual Education Plan Guidelines* (Department of Education & Department of Human Services 2003), provides information, planning advice, resources and proformas to be used in developing an Individual Education Plan for each child and young person in out-of-home care in the school. The proformas provided allow a Student Support Group to document and monitor a child's or young person's capability and aptitude, academic progress, social skills and relationships, attendance and engagement.

  Select one of the proformas in the Individual Education Plan document for further study. Analyse its component parts. Identify what each of these parts represents. Identify issues and challenges for the principal, the coordinator or the teacher in completing the proforma. If you are undertaking a team-based professional learning activity, allocate, analyse and report back on the features of the proforma you have selected.

A planning sequence for the development of an Individual Education Plan is provided on pages 2–3 of the document. Each of the recommended steps (Figure 13) in the sequence is explained in the document.

Completing the first two steps of the planning sequence may require a School Support Group to access existing information, or gather new data about the child or young person.



**Figure 13** Recommended planning sequence in an Individual Education Plan

**Step 1: Understanding the student** allows for data to be recorded about the student as learner: skills, strengths, preferences, abilities, motivations; and their preferred learning styles.


If there are no adults currently in the student's life who have a long-term, in-depth understanding of their educational needs, learning strengths and difficulties, gaps in understanding and cognitive abilities, the Student Support Group should complement existing data with requests to classroom teachers from earlier years of the child's or young person's schooling, or make a request for a learning assessment from student support services staff.

Data collection can also be augmented by using the data collection framework of the Department of Human Services. The Looking After Children framework supports information sharing and planning across a child's care team and includes information across a range of life areas. Information about the Looking After Children in Victoria framework is available on the Office for Children website.

**Step 2: Set goals** requires data to be recorded about short- and long-term goals that are measurable, achievable, supported and time-framed. These should include goals that reflect learning outcomes in social, academic and life skills. Clarifying goals provides an opportunity to establish realistic goals and targets based on the child's or young person's literacy and numeracy test scores. It also provides opportunities to recognise and discuss social and behavioural concerns and to think proactively about how to support the student's socialisation through the development of positive relationships.

*'Dylan has always been fine academically and doesn't need special assistance in that area. What is important for him is that he can build a personal relationship with each of his teachers. We talked about this in the Student Support Group and came up with simple strategies that each teacher can implement in order to build trust with Dylan. It's made a huge difference to him and he's begun to enjoy school so much more as a result.'*

*Bronwyn, carer*

 If you are a member of a Student Support Group, read about and analyse each of the steps described in the document. You might like to develop a presentation for the Support Group about what the school or the care team can contribute at each step.

### **Building relationships with carers and case workers**

The Partnering Agreement identifies a number of individuals or representatives who may have input into a child's or young person's education: case managers, parents (where appropriate), guardians, caregivers, and case managers. At enrolment, the case manager ensures that parents, guardians or caregivers are introduced to the school and that the school recognises their involvement in decision-making. Following enrolment, parents (where appropriate), guardians or caregivers are invited to participate in a Student Support Group. This enables them to provide ongoing advice and support for the school.

Children and young people in out-of-home care may have biological parents who remain actively involved in their lives. When a child has entered out-of-home care while enrolled at a particular school, the school is likely to have a pre-existing relationship with the parents. Maintaining these relationships wherever possible is important. The Department of Human Services or Community Service Organisation case manager will advise as to whether it is appropriate for parents to be invited to attend Student Support Groups or other school events.

The participation of each member of a care team depends on a range of factors: the length of time each has known the child or young person; their previous experiences with the education system; and the negotiations they have made with each other.

In home-based care placements, the carer is likely to have considerable knowledge relating to a child's day-to-day social and emotional needs. These carers are volunteers, acting in the role of a parent, and will be the most consistently present people in the child's life. While carers may have full- or part-time work, other children and/or a range of other commitments, they are the ones most likely to need communication from the school about issues from school that will have an impact at home.

## School engagement

For children and young people in out-of-home care, school engagement is essential for the development and maintenance of positive educational outcomes.

The **'Wingspread Declaration: A National Strategy for Improving School Connectedness'** is a summary of the evidence-based research on student engagement. The Declaration describes critical requirements, proposed strategies, and outcomes of positive engagement.

Wingspread school connectedness strategies include:

- 'Implementing high standards and expectations, and providing academic support to all students.
- Applying fair and consistent disciplinary policies that are collectively agreed upon and fairly enforced.
- Creating trusting relationships among students, teachers, staff, administrators, and families.
- Hiring and supporting capable teachers skilled in content, teaching techniques, and classroom management to meet each learner's needs.
- Fostering high parent/family expectations for school performance and school completion.
- Ensuring that every student feels close to at least one supportive adult at school.'

(Center for Adolescent Health and Development, University of Minnesota 2003)



Download the complete Wingspread Declaration from the Internet (<http://www.allaboutkids.umn.edu/WingfortheWeb/schooldeclaration>). Use your reflective journal to record aspects of the Declaration. Do you agree with its ideas? Which aspects would be worthy of promotion in your school? You might like to identify a small research project in your school that follows up one of the Wingspread Declarations 'Best Bets Warranting Further Research'.

“The two things that kept me at school were flexibility in hours, so I didn’t get in trouble when I couldn’t make it, and a teacher who was persistent and really did her homework to understand me. She asked me what I wanted to focus on – what was important to me. We made a deal that she’d help me if I helped myself. She rang me when I didn’t come to school to ask me why and see what it would take to get me there. I struggled writing reports and stuff, so she would say, “Let’s just focus on doing a bit. How would you do the middle bit?” If I didn’t hand something in on time she would say, “How about we sit down and do it now?” She gave me constant praise, like “You’ve done so well” and “You’re awesome. She did her best so I did my best.”

Lyn, young person”

Building positive relationships is the cornerstone of school engagement for children and young people in out-of-home care. A recommended strategy in both the Partnering Agreement and the more general literature on engagement is to identify a key adult in the school who can act as a mentor to the child, offering regular one-to-one contact. This person, as well as offering direct support can then assist the child by facilitating interaction with other people in the school and building a network of support. This mentor may be the regular classroom teacher of the child or young person or another member of staff.

Like any young person who is at risk of being disengaged from school, or who has difficult relationships with family, peers and adults, young people in out-of-home care may be at increased risk of drug and alcohol use, early sexual activity and other potentially harmful behaviours. Prevention and early-intervention on these issues is crucial, must take into account the complex life experiences of these young people, and should include a focus on building positive relationships, engagement with learning and allowing the young person to feel both safe and valued.

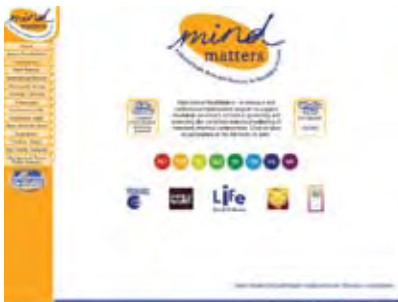


Figure 14  
MindMatters website



Figure 15  
Gatehouse Project website




### Wellbeing and children in out-of-home care

Children and young people in out-of-home care may have significant wellbeing concerns. As well as the social, emotional and behavioural issues identified in this resource, these children generally have poorer physical health than their peers. These result from the complex interplay of early abuse and neglect, stress and trauma; multiple transitions; disruptions to relationships; and a failure to diagnose and treat illness and other health problems.

Resources available to Victorian schools that provide assistance and advice in developing student wellbeing include the MindMatters initiative and the Gatehouse Project approach. Each can be adapted and or used with children and young people in out-of-home care.

MindMatters is a national mental health initiative for secondary schools funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing. It is implemented by the Australian Principals Associations Professional Development Council and Curriculum Corporation. The MindMatters website hosts Classroom Ideas that identify strategies for addressing wellbeing across the school and wellbeing in the classroom.

The Gatehouse Project approach was a model developed in Victoria by the Centre for Adolescent Health at the Royal Children’s Hospital. The approach identifies security, communication and positive regard as three key areas of focus for building school engagement at a classroom, whole school, and school-community partnership level.

   Are you familiar with the concept of school and classroom wellbeing? Select either the MindMatters initiative or Gatehouse Project to explore to improve your coordination or teaching role. You might like to share your findings with your colleagues in formal or informal professional learning situations.



Wellbeing at school is essentially connected with and inseparable from engagement, relationships and curriculum practice. Focusing on these is crucial for building and maintaining wellbeing. Schools can assist by communicating any wellbeing concerns to the child's or young person's care team, and providing advice about services and support in the local community.

The role of a Student Welfare Coordinator, or its equivalent, is important in the school for children and young people in out-of-home care. This role can provide direct support to the student, act as mentor and primary relationship in the school (especially in secondary schools), hold and appropriately disseminate information about the student, and assist and support classroom teachers.

*'As Student Welfare Coordinator, I run the Support Group meetings, attend case plan meetings at DHS and relate the needs of each student to teaching staff. All staff take the responsibility to build a relationship with and get to know the student; I'm the constant across the years who helps with that. I act as an advocate around learning and behaviour. I get to know everyone around the child. Working this way helps teaching staff to look more kindly on these kids and to develop more appropriate curriculum. My role is to always be there for the student. It's all about personal connections. I make sure that I find something endearing about each child, and let them know it. It's important to keep giving positive messages.'*

**Rob, Student Welfare Coordinator,  
Northern Metropolitan Region Secondary College**

## Pro-social skill development – a restorative approach

Developing behavioural procedures that foster positive student behaviour need to be inclusive of children and young people in out-of-home care and require an understanding of the social, familial, cognitive and developmental factors that influence the student's development.

The challenging behaviour of some children and young people in out-of-home care may result from poor social skills, difficulties with processing information, disengagement from learning and the early development of survival behaviours that are not appropriate for the school environment.

*'When he even thinks he's in trouble, Dylan goes in to survival mode. He just shuts down, and can't think logically, hear what anyone is saying or respond in a sensible way. The teacher needs to give him time to calm down before they can talk about it. Then they are in a position to sort it out.'*

**Bronwyn, carer**

Children and young people in out-of-home care who have experienced abuse may interpret raised voices and expressions of anger as a prelude to violence and harm. When fearful, their cognitive abilities and responses may be undermined, driving them to apparently irrational, even dysfunctional behaviours that have previously enabled them to cope with anxiety.

*'Fear of punishment was my biggest issue at school. I couldn't trust anyone who was angry at me. I'd avoid going to school for three or four weeks rather than turn up for a detention.'*


**Lyn, young person**



**Figure 16**  
Calmer classrooms

The most effective strategies for supporting positive student behaviours for children and young people in out-of-home care are those that allow the child or young person to learn and to make amends without humiliation, and that aim to restore relationships and calm in the school environment. Students respond best to consequences that are delivered without anger or raised voices.

Clear and consistent rules and boundaries assist students in out-of-home care to develop a sense of safety and to control their own behaviours. ***Calmer Classrooms: A guide to working with traumatised children*** (Child Safety Commissioner 2007) provides advice for teachers about creating connection, defusing conflict and planning for challenging incidents.

 Source a copy of ***Calmer Classrooms*** from the school or the Child Safety Commissioner website. Read those sections relating to welfare and discipline. Identify aspects that can improve your welfare and discipline practices with students who have suffered from trauma.

*“When I acted up in class instead of “Go to the Principal’s office” we would go somewhere together afterwards and talk. There wasn’t immediate punishment, like a detention; there was discussion. My teacher would say “I’ll help you, but it needs to be both ways.”*

*Lyn, young person*

Suspension and other exclusionary practices may undermine relationships and learning opportunities and increase the risk of disengagement for children and young people in out-of-home care. For this reason they are best used only as last resort or when maintaining the child or young person in the environment creates safety risks.

## Excursions and extra-curricular activities

Excursions and extra-curricular activities are an important part of learning and engagement in school. Children and young people in out-of-home care may regularly miss out on excursions or extra-curricular activities that require consent unless the school gives sufficient time for that consent to be provided.

Legal guardianship of the child can be held by the person or people providing day-to-day care, the biological parent or the Department of Human Services. If the carer is not the guardian, it may take several days or longer for a consent form to be completed. A consent form, typically, may be sent home with the child whose carer may then forward it to the community service organisation, which might then need to locate a parent or send the form on to the Department of Human Services for approval. At the end of such a process, the consent form would then need to be returned to the school.

This lengthy process can be expedited in several ways. The school should identify the legal guardian through the Student Support Group. This person might be contacted directly; with the carer also notified. The school might also identify in advance (over a term, semester or year), any excursions and events in which the child or young person in out-of-home care will participate and request consent for these as a group. A school should ensure that the maximum possible time to have a consent form returned is given for each and every excursion involving a child or young person in out-of-home care.

# Section 4:

## Inclusive curriculum practices for children in out-of-home care

Australian and international research relating to the learning outcomes and the achievements of children and young people in out-of-home care is included in Section 2 of this resource. That research indicated that:

- children and young people in out-of-home care are considerably less likely to achieve the national benchmarks for reading and numeracy across almost all year levels compared to the state norms
- Indigenous children and young people have much lower reading and numeracy scores than other children in out-of-home care
- children and young people in out-of-home care complete fewer years of schooling and have lower secondary school completion rates
- children and young people in out-of-home care are less likely to go on to higher education.

Poor educational outcomes of children and young people in out-of-home care clearly result from a complex range of factors. Schools and teachers have the capacity to make a difference by developing inclusive teaching programs that engage all students, including those in out-of-home care.

An Individual Education Plan for a child or young person in out-of-home care provides opportunities to monitor and evaluate the student's academic progress. Within the Individual Education Plan (Department of Education & Department of Human Services 2003) there is a proforma for recording academic progress. The proforma allows for goals, strategies, resources, tasks, personnel and evaluation to be identified. This high-level identification can then be used to inform specific classroom practices and monitor the progress of the student.



## Personal information and curriculum

Curriculum activities regularly require students to make a degree of personal disclosure. This helps to build the relevance of the curriculum for each student and to engage them actively in their learning. Some caution is needed however, to ensure that children and young people in out-of-home care are not expected to disclose information that may cause them embarrassment or highlight their difference from their peers.

*“The boys both came home from school at different times with assignments asking them to get information from “Mum and Dad” about some point of family history. Damien would just refuse to consider attempting the assignment at all. Mark, on the other hand, would get very anxious about it, worried that he’d fail because he couldn’t get all the information he needed. For both boys it was a negative experience, and I’d have to ring the school to negotiate different assignments for them.”*

Ian, carer

The Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide offers the following advice for schools:

*“Students may be asked to collect data about their out-of-school life, for example, to list all the drugs in the home or to ask personal questions of other people. Such surveys can place undue pressure on students and therefore the design of survey activities should be carefully monitored and evaluated. The principal should approve any personal survey. Teachers should also be conscious of issues related to disclosure of personal information.”*


For further information about privacy, schools should refer to section 6.8 in the Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide at: [http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/referenceguide/management/6\\_28htm](http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/referenceguide/management/6_28htm)

When organising activities such as family history projects, alternative projects should be offered to give students and their families an option that does not involve disclosing personal information.


Students and parents/guardians have a right to privacy and confidentiality. Teachers should be sensitive to other family structures and not presume that all students come from a nuclear family.

## Teaching inclusively within the strands and domains of VELs

Within the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS), teachers need to identify inclusive strategies that cater for the individual learning needs of all their students. The following analysis of, and suggestions for, inclusive learning issues and opportunities for children in out-of-home care in the VELs Strands and Domains are not exhaustive. Rather, it models an approach that can be used by classroom teachers to reflect about and plan for how the VELs can be used to meet the needs of all students in a class, including those in out-of-home care.

 If you are reading and responding to this individually, select the strand or domain that is relevant to your teaching. Read the inclusive learning issues and opportunities to identify those that are relevant to the levels at

which you teach. Use your reflective journal or another means of reflection to consider the implications of these for your teaching practice.

 If you plan to respond to these inclusive learning issues and opportunities within a group professional learning situation, investigate a particular strand or domain to identify other inclusive learning opportunities. Develop additional inclusive curriculum strategies to cater for out-of-home care students.

### Physical, Personal and Social Learning (P–10)

Physical, Personal and Social Learning offers the greatest challenges and opportunities for teachers and schools supporting and engaging children and young people in out-of-home care. These students may be disadvantaged physically, personally and socially, so the opportunities provided to learn and develop skills in these domains are critical.

**Table 1**  
Health and Physical Education (P–10)

| Health and Physical Education (P–10)   |   |
|--|---|
| Inclusive learning issues  | Inclusive learning opportunities  |
| Children and young people in out-of-home care may be developmentally delayed as a result of early abuse or neglect, or due to a low-stimulation environment in infancy, and thus may be significantly behind their age peers in the development of motor skills. This, combined with the poor social skills that many such children have, can make competitive and team sports and activities awkward and embarrassing.  | Students with poor or delayed motor skills can quickly find themselves marginalised and humiliated in competitive team sports. Team selection processes that don't leave some children to be the last one picked, an emphasis on inclusion and participation rather than prowess and competition, and a broad range of physical activities will assist these students in developing their skills and feeling supported. |
| Malnourishment and lack of nurture in infancy can also delay physical development, resulting in many children and young people in out-of-home care being of shorter stature than their peers; they may appear younger.   | Enabling and supporting children to play actively in a range of groups of different ability and different social structures facilitates learning and engagement.  |
| Survivors of sexual abuse can find discussion of physical changes to the body, puberty and sexual health difficult. Sensitivity is needed when discussing these and the full range of experiences children and young people might have need to be normalised. It is important that no child feels singled out in exploring these topics. Exploration of issues such as nutrition, sexual health and emotional responses to puberty must avoid creating guilt in young people for issues that are beyond their control.   | Discussion of sexual health, puberty and sexuality should be framed within the context of rights and choices, and delivered along with details of services that can provide support and assistance. Organisations such as Family Planning Victoria run programs and training and have resources to assist teachers in this work.  |
| Assisting children and young people to develop assertiveness strategies must be handled sensitively. Those who have experienced abuse must not be made to feel that it is their own lack of assertiveness that led to the abuse.   |   |
| Some young people with abuse issues struggle with personal hygiene. Others will find changing rooms difficult or display inappropriate behaviours in such environments.  |   |
| Developing a sense of personal safety and strategies for staying safe can be problematic for children who have experienced abuse and trauma. For each individual child in out-of-home care, this is likely to be something their care team is addressing, so discussion in the Student Support Group can assist teachers to identify appropriate strategies for discussion in the classroom. Building such conversations into classroom discussion can be crucial in helping young people understand their right to be safe and to seek support when feeling unsafe. | Focusing on personal safety, as well as on resilience strategies more generally, can provide opportunities for children to identify and consider how they will remain in contact with people whom they trust, and where they can go for support.  |

Building a coherent personal identity and understanding the influence of family and others in this can be challenging for those with fractured family relationships, poor social skills, multiple transitions and a history of trauma. Assisting each child and young person to see their strengths, the skills they have developed, and the achievements they have attained is vital. Many young people in out-of-home care develop a sense of helplessness – that bad things just happen to them – and must be supported to develop a sense of agency in their lives.

Building a coherent sense of personal identity and values can be explored in curriculum, but is honed through diverse and supportive relationships and experiences. Providing a range of opportunities for children in out-of-home care to explore and make sense of their lives in a supportive environment can assist them in this important work.

Young people in out-of-home care have often lived in two or more very different family cultures. This can create difficulties for their development of personal values, as discrepant views and opinions from parents and carers need to be considered. Exploring roles and responsibilities in families and how they change over time can be similarly problematic.

**Table 2**

Interpersonal Development (P-10)

### Interpersonal Development (P-10)

#### Inclusive learning issues

Interpersonal Development involves key tasks that may present challenges for children and young people in out-of-home care.

It can be challenging for children and young people to manage interpersonal relationships when they have difficult family histories, fractured families relationships, memories of abuse and trauma, and multiple transitions. They may have difficulty with social interactions, exploring and understanding feelings and emotions, and the link between these and their behaviour. Managing impulses, developing empathy, learning appropriate behaviour for different social activities and developing and maintaining friendships and other relationships can also be problematic.

#### Inclusive learning opportunities

Progress in Interpersonal Development for all students will come from teachers, other adults and peers modelling appropriate behaviours and relationships; opportunities to practise communication and other social skills in a safe environment; and time to reflect both on their own feelings, behaviours and interactions and those of their peers, characters in stories, and their teachers.

Schools can structure students' time both in the classroom and in the playground to ensure maximum likelihood of positive interaction between peers. They can create opportunities for students in out-of-home care to interact in a variety of small and large groups during learning and other activities, as well as to engage with teachers and other adults in diverse ways.

Teachers should model appropriate behaviours in their interactions with students, and assist them to separate emotions and behaviour by demonstrating that the emotion of anger does not necessarily lead to the behaviour of violence. Simulating this through the study of novels, movies and other media forms, and explicitly identifying the choices that characters have in responding to situations, can be valuable.

Many children and young people in out-of-home care, as well as socio-economically disadvantaged students, may have had little opportunity to participate in and experience diverse social situations – a 'posh' restaurant, a cultural event, an interstate or overseas holiday. Providing opportunities to understand and practise different social conventions in a supported, affirming way, and to experience a diversity of social situations is important for developing social skills. Stories and other texts can assist in this.

**Table 3**

Personal Learning (P–10)

| <b>Personal Learning (P–10)</b>   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Inclusive learning issues</b>  | <b>Inclusive learning opportunities</b>   |
| Personal Learning establishes a sense in each child of their learning capacity and their engagement with learning. These are important for students in out-of-home care who may struggle to engage or to learn effectively.   | Students in out-of-home care need assistance to connect to and find relevance in the content of their learning, and in experiencing success.  |
| For an individual to develop a positive sense of themselves as a learner they need to see value and to experience success in learning, and this can be difficult for those who are developmentally delayed, who struggle to connect socially with teachers and other adults, or who have had to focus on survival in traumatic situations over engagement with learning.    | Providing relevant, engaging curriculum does not require simplified curriculum content or the development of unique content for every child. Content needs to be developmentally appropriate, inclusive, diverse and challenging. Working through a child’s or young person’s Student Support Group can assist you to relate curriculum content to the needs of the student and ensure that individualised strategies for providing support are in place. |
| Many children and young people in out-of-home care will have low expectations of themselves as learners as they struggle with past difficulties or with social situations. Some will have little sense of control over any aspect of their life, and will struggle to develop learning strategies, practising positive self talk and persisting when learning is difficult. | Focusing on what is developmentally appropriate for each child and strategies for assisting their learning will allow a child or young person in out-of-home care to experience success. Regular positive and constructive feedback, delivered in a variety of ways, is important.  |
| For students who feel helpless, who have experienced abuse and trauma, or who do not feel anchored by positive achievements and interactions in other areas of their lives, negative emotions associated with the struggle to learn can be difficult to manage, resulting in avoidance and escapism.  | Using assessment for learning rather than assessment of learning allows children to experience success. Formative assessment can be formally structured into reporting processes as part of regular feedback to students.   |

**Table 4**

Civics and Citizenship (P–10)

| <b>Civics and Citizenship (P–10)</b>  |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Inclusive learning issues</b>  | <b>Inclusive learning opportunities</b>   |
| Civics and Citizenship uses each child’s own experiences as a reference point for learning. This includes exploration of family rules, responsibilities, culture and status. Students may be reluctant or unable to contribute to family-centric discussion unless such discussion is framed to allow for diverse opinion and experience. |   |
| Some children and young people in out-of-home care will include their carers as part of their idea of family; others will not. For this reason, some children, especially those in residential care, will not live with anyone that they identify as family.  | Curriculum content regarding families should be preceded by classroom discussion about the notion of family. For many children, not just those in out-of-home care, a family may include biological relatives and others who have a strong emotional bond but no biological connection, people who are separated geographically and may rarely or never see the child, and people whose only connection to each other is through the child (carers and parents, for example).<br><br>Activities focused on rules, responsibilities, structures and cultures in families can normalise diverse family types by identifying real and hypothetical living situations for children and young people and using these as a basis for discussion. Over time, students can be encouraged to develop stories and ideas around different family types, and continue to use them in ongoing classroom discussions. |

Exploring laws and rules in the community, the role of governments, courts and police and the concept of human rights will also be flavoured by each student's personal experiences. In the case of students in out-of-home care, that will mean direct experience of laws that have removed them from the family home, court determinations about where they will live and with whom, and government departments that take on the legal role of parenting.

Exploration of laws and the roles of governments, courts and police can use real and hypothetical situations to explain that everyone's experience of these things is unique, and that laws designed to apply universally can have differential impacts on individuals.

Children and young people in out-of-home care often feel that they have no input into decisions affecting their lives.

Providing a focus on the concepts of responsibility, empowerment, democratic decision-making, and active citizenship in the community engagement dimension could have a positive impact on students in out-of-home care.

This domain provides opportunities for students to practise leadership and to take action on matters that personally interest and concern them.

## Discipline-based Learning Strands

**Table 5**  
English (P–10)

### English

#### Inclusive learning issues

In English, students use their own personal experiences to develop texts, practise language and develop communication skills.

#### Inclusive learning opportunities

Set topics can be developed in such a way that they do not preclude or marginalise students who live in out-of-home care, do not force them to disclose traumatic or difficult experiences or to lie, but which allow them to communicate their personal experiences should they choose to do so.

Novels and other texts used in English can be an opportunity for all children to learn about and explore experiences different from their own that enable them to reflect on aspects of their own lives. Texts that describe non-nuclear family and living arrangements for children and young people can thus be appropriate for all students, while normalising the experiences of those in out-of-home care.

Language styles and expressions of children in out-of-home care from significantly disadvantaged backgrounds may be particularly poor, with limited vocabulary, inappropriate word use and poor comprehension.

Improvement in these areas is fundamental to other learning, so appropriate and timely remedial support in English needs to be a primary focus of Individual Education Plans.



**Table 6**  
Humanities – History (6–10)

| <b>Humanities – History (6–10)</b>   |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Inclusive learning issues</b>   | <b>Inclusive learning opportunities</b>  |
| <p>The teaching of history uses the home and family as reference points for beginning to understand concepts such as timelines, historical context, evidence (oral histories, birth certificates, photographs) and culture.</p> <p>Activities such as the development of family trees or personal timelines, gathering oral histories from relatives, and exploring their own family history in a broader cultural context can be not only very difficult, but also alienating and potentially humiliating for children in out-of-home care. They may not have sufficient information to participate fully in such activities, or may not want to disclose detail regarding their family life.</p> | <p>Some students will benefit from being able to construct a personal timeline as a one-to-one activity with a teacher or other adult, rather than as a solo or classroom activity. Alternately, personal timelines can be developed on a single day, week, month or year of a child’s or young person’s life; allowing them to avoid plotting traumatic and possibly humiliating incidents from their lives into a document.</p> <p>Students can be given the opportunity to interview their teacher, carer or other adult in their lives to explore and understand oral history processes or historical causation. Many children and young people in out-of-home care will value opportunities to learn about the life of their carer or another significant adult in their life, rather than about their parents’ lives, or may, with structured support from their care team and discussion in their Student Support Group, be able to learn valuable things about their family history.</p> <p>Students can be given the option to develop either a family tree, or to use another diagrammatic representation to show how those who care for and love them relate to each other. These may take the form of spider maps with the child at the centre and important people in their lives plotted at various distances around the outside, or Venn diagrams defining networks of important people as they connect to each other, such as the child’s or young person’s biological family, carer’s family etc.</p> |

**Table 7**  
Science (P–10)

| <b>Science (P–10)</b>   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Inclusive learning issues</b>  | <b>Inclusive learning opportunities</b>   |
| <p>When a Science class considers genetics and inheritance, some young people who are in out-of-home care will find discussion of heredity in their own family uncomfortable and difficult. They may not know the physical attributes of one or both of their parents, may not want to accept that they have inherited characteristics from their parents, or may have a fatalistic sense of what heredity may mean for them.</p> | <p>If students are studying the influence of heredity in their own lives, an opportunity exists to explore the ‘nature versus nurture’ debate. Students can choose to identify either genetically inherited characteristics, or those characteristics they may have developed through the influence of significant people in their lives, such as carers, role models and mentors, teachers or friends.</p> |

# Appendix A

## Charter for Children in Out-of-home Care



### As a child or young person in care I need:



- to be safe and feel safe
- to stay healthy and well and go to a doctor, dentist or other professional for help when I need to
- to be allowed to be a child and be treated with respect
- if I am an Aboriginal child, to feel proud and strong in my own culture
- to have a say and be heard
- to be provided with information
- to tell someone if I am unhappy
- to know information about me will only be shared in order to help people look after me
- to have a worker who is there for me
- to keep in contact with my family, friends and people and places that matter to me
- careful thought being given to where I will live so I will have a home that feels like a home
- to have fun and do activities that I enjoy
- to be able to take part in family traditions and be able to learn about and be involved with cultural and religious groups that are important to me
- to be provided with the best possible education and training
- to be able to develop life skills and grow up to become the best person I can
- help in preparing myself to leave care and support after I leave care.

## Charter for Children in Out-of-home Care

A charter lists the rights and privileges people have. We all have rights, and as members of the community, we need to respect each other's rights.

This charter has been especially prepared for children who can't live with their parents and are in out-of-home care. It lists what you can expect from all those people who look after you and work with you when you are in care. All these people

need to make sure that the things they do for you and the things they allow you to do, keep you safe and well. Being safe and well are the most important rights, so they have been put first. It means that if there is a clash between you being safe and well and another right, your safety and wellbeing always comes first.

**These are your rights.**



Endorsed by the Secretary of the  
Department of Human Services  
Victoria, Australia

Developed and printed by:



promoting  
the safety  
and wellbeing  
of children

# Useful resources

## Victorian Government

### Children Youth and Families Division

[www.office-for-children.vic.gov.au](http://www.office-for-children.vic.gov.au)

### every child every chance

Includes the Best Interests series

[www.dhs.vic.gov.au/everychildeverychance](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/everychildeverychance)

### Department of Education and Early Childhood Development student support services

Includes the Partnering Agreement and Individual Education Plan

[www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/wellbeing/index.htm](http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/wellbeing/index.htm)

### Looking After Children

[www.dhs.vic.gov.au/lac-victoria](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/lac-victoria)

Office of the Child Safety Commissioner

[www.ocsc.vic.gov.au/](http://www.ocsc.vic.gov.au/)

### Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide

[www.education.vic.gov.au/referenceguide/](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/referenceguide/)

## Federal Government

### Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

[www.aihw.gov.au/](http://www.aihw.gov.au/)

### MindMatters – A mental health promotion initiative for secondary schools

[www.curriculum.edu.au/mindmatters](http://www.curriculum.edu.au/mindmatters)

## Other

### CREATE Foundation

[www.create.org.au](http://www.create.org.au)

### Foster Care Association of Victoria

[www.fcav.org](http://www.fcav.org)

### Gatehouse Project

[www.rch.org.au/gatehouseproject/](http://www.rch.org.au/gatehouseproject/)

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