

- 1. We note in your findings a lack of data in relation to children's education experience in the early years, and also the recent report from the Qld Family and Child Commission which found Early Childhood Education attendance a significant protective factor in Child death enquiries. Is data collection in the years before school something that needs critical attention to better inform our service delivery system for children 0-5?***

Recommendation 1 in *Let Us Learn* reflects the need to strengthen data collection for preschool-age children to better inform service delivery. This recommendation relates specifically to improving data collection for children in out-of-home care in the areas of:

- routine collection of kindergarten attendance data
- better monitoring of the connection between improved kindergarten attendance and school readiness
- recognising children in care as an identified equity group in the Australian Early Development Census.

In Victoria, kindergarten enrolment data does not currently measure children's attendance rates. There is broad recognition that measuring this is critical to understanding kindergarten participation among all children and strengthening responses to the attendance patterns of specific cohorts of children, including those living in care. Improved data collection will also assist to determine the role of kindergarten in enhancing the transition to primary school for children in care, their levels of school readiness and what additional supports may be required.

- 2. There's a lot of great information, data and recommendations that is school based. Recognising the importance of early years on a child's trajectory and wellbeing, what recommendations (in addition to EC services adopting a trauma-informed approach) really stand out for you? What is something that a kinder teacher can start doing from tomorrow?***

As outlined above, at the government level, strengthening data collection for preschool children in out-of-home care is critical to understanding kindergarten attendance rates and identifying additional supports to achieve more equitable outcomes for this cohort of children.

For kindergarten educators and other staff, embedding a trauma-informed approach in their day-to-day activities will support children to meaningfully engage in early years education. This includes understanding the effects of trauma on social and emotional wellbeing and having appropriate and informed strategies to draw upon when responding to challenging behaviours. This, combined with building connections and positive consistent relationships with children in care, is essential to their participation.

The Commission also found there was a need for educators and other staff to enhance their understanding of the challenges associated with living in out-of-home care and to consider the role of carers. A positive connection between services and carers can support a child's learning and wellbeing, as well as ensure that carers feel comfortable to raise concerns or seek assistance where necessary.

Further, we heard examples of early childhood education services requesting carers to pick children up when behavioural issues arose. It is important for services to understand that this can jeopardise a child's placement due to carer fatigue and limited employment flexibility.

- 3. Is there much communication between LAC (Looking After Children) framework used within OoHC to the ENA and other educational support to capture educational goals and needs?***

Let Us Learn did not specifically discuss the relationship between the *Looking After Children* Framework and education-related supports for children and young people in out-of-home care, such as the *Out-of-Home Care Education Commitment* (Partnering Agreement). However, recommendation 5 requires the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing to enhance tools and strengthen guidance to assist Child Protection practitioners support educational engagement for children and young people in care through placement decisions, case planning and case management. There could be opportunities here for the *Looking After Children* framework to reference the Partnering Agreement, including the various responsibilities of Child Protection practitioners under the Agreement.

4. *In relation to the implementation of the report recommendations, would the Commission support the establishment of an Implementation Governance Committee with young people, CCYP, sector agencies/peaks, ACCOs and DFFH and DET - Taskforce 1000 Implementation was monitored through a governance committee?*

As for all systemic inquiries completed since 2018, the Commission will receive regular reports from the relevant departments and, in consultation with Youth Council members involved with the inquiry and other relevant stakeholders, the Commission will assess implementation of the recommendations. The departmental updates and the Commission's assessment of action will be published annually to ensure transparency.

5. *How did the inquiry explore education beyond the structural context? 'Good parenting/caring' involves a type of learning that hinges on our investment beyond school, i.e. resourcing and supporting sports/health, special interests, spiritual connections, tuition or simply homework guidance...etc. Is this aspect of greater educational development being reflected in the care system?*

While the predominant focus in *Let Us Learn* was on the experiences of children and young people in out-of-home care in schools and other education settings, the report also addressed the role of carers and home environments in supporting educational needs. All students need a supportive home to do their best at school, which for those living in care means a stable placement and carers who provide a safe environment where they feel happy and cared for. For Aboriginal children and young people in care, a supportive home that helps build and promote positive cultural and community connections is especially important.

Throughout consultations, the Commission heard that adequate financial and other supports to carers are critical to encouraging educational engagement for children and young people in care. Yet, we know that carers are under increasing financial strain and this can result in children and young people in care not having access to appropriate resources, such as uniforms and technology, and fewer opportunities to pursue extra-curricular activities.

Both *Let Us Learn* and *In Our Own Words* reports highlighted the importance of children and young people in care participating in recreation and leisure activities to provide opportunities for learning self-care skills and for promoting resilience generally, and developing community connections. The reports also noted links between children and young people in care participating in sport and other extracurricular activities and their engagement at school.

Regarding promoting learning in the home, the Commission heard from many children and young people in care and some carers that this was not always present in their home environment. This was particularly evident

in residential care, which the Commission consistently heard does not typically provide the environment needed for meaningful education engagement, including encouraging regular attendance at school or supporting learning in the home.

Let Us Learn made several recommendations to enhance the capacity of carers and residential carers to support the educational engagement of the children and young people in their care, including increasing access to flexible education-related funding to cover extra-curricular activities.

6. *Thank you all for a wonderful presentation and for sharing insights. Given the recommendations at the systems level, and we know systems change takes time, are there any tips or recommendations for practitioners and teachers they might be able to implement today to support children and young people in care?*

The Commission heard from 189 children and young people with a care experience as part of this inquiry and they identified many things that educators can do to support their educational engagement and day-to-day experiences at school. This is reflected in quotes throughout the report, especially in chapter 2.

The Commission's *In our own words* systemic inquiry discusses at length how children and young people wish to be supported in the care system, including by Child Practitioner practitioners.

The Commission's Youth Council members, Missi and Nikita, reflected on this question and provided the following responses:

Nikita

The number one thing [a teacher] can do for a kid living in care is take the time to understand a bit about what their outside of school world is like, so the out-of-home care system. From my own experience, I recall the most beneficial thing with how one teacher worked with me is that he didn't know every detail of my living situation but had a general idea including how long I'd been in a placement and an understanding of whether I felt safe there. There was a time that I didn't feel comfortable in a placement, and this impacted me so much at school, but that teacher understood. So basically, being aware of the world outside of school for the young person, which then makes it easier to understand why they might be showing different emotions at certain times. Also, if the young person has visitations happening, be aware of that if possible. I'd have it happening after school and would get really anxious about it, then I'd act out. So, if they understand the situation of the child, then you can understand why that behaviour might be occurring.

For practitioners, probably the number one thing is to stop showing up at school. We already miss enough having to go to court and getting moved around. Also, have good communication, even if you've said you'd do something but can't, let them know. Work out ways to communicate openly. We aren't stupid, we know sometimes that things don't happen as they should.

Also, if you're a new practitioner, take a bit of time to understand what's already been done for the young person. I had one practitioner ask me if I could live with my dad...he was dead. It's good that practitioners want to take the time to get to know you as a person, but that can happen 50 times so there is some basic information that you need to know before you come to the young person.

Missi

My number one thing, especially for teachers, is to show compassion and have an understanding that life outside of school is most likely not great for many kids in care due to the system's flaws. And that coming to school shouldn't make that harder. So taking the time to understand that can really make a world of difference.

For Child Protection workers, things they should already be doing like the care team meetings and having more involvement from kids. Basically, workers ensuring that they genuinely listen to what the kid wants. Often that is assumed, and the worker hasn't taken the time to understand or hear what they actually want.

7. *Did the Report uncover student's experiences of non-mainstream secondary educational settings? I'm interested in young people's insights on these options...and are they recommended?*

Throughout consultations for *Let Us Learn*, the Commission spoke to many children and young people who were engaged in alternative education settings, including flexible learning options (FLOs), and to several educators and principals working in these settings. Our findings and recommendations regarding FLOs and other alternative options are discussed in chapter 12 of the report. We found that mainstream education does not always meet the needs of all students, especially those who have experienced disrupted learning and disengagement from education. Many stakeholders stated that access to FLOs and alternative options is needed as schools are not always suitable for students with significant experiences of trauma.

Children and young people also told the Commission about the benefits of attending FLOs and other alternative options, including that they can improve educational engagement, outcomes, and their sense of wellbeing. Overall, the Commission found that FLOs can provide a tailored, supporting and engaging alternative to mainstream education. We also found, however, that fewer FLO options exist for younger children and the Department of Education needs to improve oversight, performance monitoring and resourcing of FLOs.