

Newsletter

Education and out-of-home care

This project aims to produce new knowledge about why children and young people in care experience significant absences from school, and what can be done to improve their attendance by schools, carers, education systems and OOHC systems. This study brings together people from the (usually siloed) fields of out-of-home-care and education, and uses multiple research methods to examine school attendance for students in care. Here's what we've done so far:

Research

Method 1 Policy audit:

- 22 policies from Victoria and 15 policies from Tasmania.
- 75 policies from Queensland.

Method 2 Care and Education Sector

Voice:

- three world cafés.
- 178 participants.

Method 3 Children and Young People

Voice:

- four workshops with total 23 children;
- one workshop with 5 young people;
- survey responses from 28 young people.

Outreach

- 5 conference presentations
- 4 keynote presentations
- 3 publications
- 2 stakeholder workshops

Apart from our own updates, this newsletter also has news from our nine wonderful Partner Organisations. Plus, on page 3 you will see our plans for data collection in 2026, including two surveys: one for carers and one for school staff. It would be wonderful if you can share the QR codes for the surveys with people in your networks.

Kitty

Thank You

This project has been partially funded by the Australian Government through the Australian Research Council Linkage Scheme (LP2201001130). We are so grateful to our Partner Organisations for their co-funding and support, and for the work they do every day to nurture children and young people in out of home care. Relevant Departments in Tasmania, New South Wales, South Australia Queensland and the ACT have granted permission for us to invite children and young people in out of home care to participate in our research. We highly value this support from Departments to enable students in care to contribute their views.



Australian Government
Australian Research Council

Update from our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group

The Reference Group is a partnership between staff from several Project Partner Organisations (Allambi Care, Berry Street, Key Assets Australia, Life Without Barriers, and Stronger Smarter Institute) and two representatives from the Project's Chief Investigators. Meeting several times a year, it provides cultural advice to our ARC Project team's research and operations.

Since the last newsletter we have welcomed with thanks Aunty Beryl Wilson (Key Assets Australia) and Dr Chris Sarra (Stronger Smarter Institute) to the Reference Group. Aunty Beryl and Dr Sarra each come with a wealth of experience in working to secure better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and expertise relevant for the Reference Group. It is anticipated that the Reference Group will meet on several more occasions across the year.



Update from project PhD candidate Shelley Stokes

- In October Shelley and Mike participated in the *Gunya to the Bunya's with Cherbourg at Heart* experience facilitated by Gunya Meta in Queensland. This cultural immersion experience was a foundational opportunity to build relationships and learn about traditional knowledge and ways of being and knowing to bring about strong partnerships.
 - Shelley presented her research progress with the Scholarship in Education Interactive Discussion with University of Tasmania School of Education.
 - Shelley has also undertaken a policy analysis of a suite of Queensland's education and child protection policies, examining how attendance and educational support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in OOHC are conceptualised in policy. An article from this work will be submitted as part of a special issue of the International Journal of Inclusive Education (see page 7).
 - She is currently completing a conceptual literature review chapter with a particular focus on school attendance. Alongside this she is progressing her ethics application for submission to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies.
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Have your say!

This study brings together people from the (usually siloed) fields of out-of-home-care and education, and uses multiple research methods to examine school attendance for students in care. This year, we are focusing on (1) sector voice and (2) promising case studies of schools.



We are listening to sector voices

Being at school is a prerequisite for benefitting from all that school has to offer. Absence from school harms students' social and academic outcomes. Students in out-of-home care (OOHC) miss out on school far more than their peers who are not in care.

We are interested in what carers and school staff have to say about enabling children and young people in OOHC to be at school.

We invite carers and school staff to have their say by taking part in a survey. The survey will take about 20 mins. If you are a carer or an educator, you can find out more and complete the survey using the QR codes and URLs provided.

Carers:

<https://tinyurl.com/y9js8jej>



Educators:

<https://tinyurl.com/4p29epp2>



Promising case studies

We will work with our Partner Organisations to identify possible school sites that are doing well to support children and young people who are in out-of-home care to be at school. We will develop 'case studies' of schools and key agencies in their community, using a strengths-based and solutions-focused approach that showcases what works. We will use this to develop resources with strategies for improving attendance for students in OOHC that schools, out-of-home care agencies, and education and child protection systems can act on.

This research will start in June 2026.

Continuing to listen to the voices of children and young people who are in Out-of-home care

In 2025, we listened to the voices of children and young people who are in out-of-home care about what helps them to be at school. We are continuing this in several additional places in 2026.

News and updates from our Partner Organisations

LIFE WITHOUT BARRIERS

'Hear my Voice' experiences of young people in out-of-home care

Children and young people in out-of-home care have the right to have their voices heard and to participate in decisions that affect their lives. At LWB, we believe this is particularly important when it comes to education. The LWB Education Strategy is a roadmap to uphold the fundamental right of access to education, so that all children and young people can meet their learning potential. A key part of our Education Strategy's success is listening to young voices. You can watch all the episodes in the 'Hear my Voice' series, including audio described versions, [here on YouTube](https://youtu.be/snldwPNjUdY?si=_isDuAWKzo8V3h3g): https://youtu.be/snldwPNjUdY?si=_isDuAWKzo8V3h3g



BSEM is proud to announce the national launch of the Berry Street Educational Leadership program (BSEL). BSEL is a nationally coordinated professional learning program for principals, assistant principals, leading teachers, wellbeing leaders, and members of school leadership teams. Grounded in the Berry Street Education Model (BSEM), this program equips school leaders to create safe, inclusive, and high-expectations learning environments for their whole school communities. The BSEL program includes a national community of practice to amplify shared learning and collective efficacy. Leaders learn from the latest research, as well as from exemplar schools, and then collaborate to share strategies and create responses to sustained challenges. The launch of the BSEL program follows the publication of the book, *Trauma-Informed Educational Leadership: Developing Leadership Practices Towards Social Equity* with CI Tom Brunzell and PI Jack Greig as contributing authors. Find out more about BSEL [here](#) and the new book [here](https://www.berrystreet.org.au/shop/products/trauma-informed-educational-leadership): <https://www.berrystreet.org.au/shop/products/trauma-informed-educational-leadership>



The Office of the Commissioner for Children and Young People recently published a [child-friendly progress report](#) detailing the Tasmanian Government's implementation of recommendations made in the CCYP's 2023 own-motion investigation, *A Place at the Table*, which examined changes to case management for many children and young people in care. This report shares back to children and young people what the Office of the CCYP has learned while continuing to monitor the Department for Education, Children and Young People's implementation of recommendations made in *A Place at the Table*. Further, the CCYP also recently released [Monitoring Report No. 3: Key data on Tasmania's out-of-home care system, 2019-2024](#), the third report in a series designed to provide a clear, evidence-based snapshot of key quantitative data relating to Tasmania's care system.



The Stronger Smarter Together Summit Reimagining Australia's Sovereignty was held in May in Brisbane. The Stronger Smarter Institute released a new online module *High Expectations Relationships* to support educators and leaders to strengthen learning environments through respectful, belief driven relationships and shaping identity, belonging and learning outcomes for young people, particularly in complex and diverse contexts. Learn more [here](https://strongersmarter.com.au/stronger-smarter-online-learning/): <https://strongersmarter.com.au/stronger-smarter-online-learning/> Further, CEO Dr Chris Sarra joined ABC Radio National Breakfast to talk about how high expectations shapes learning. Listen to the interview [here](https://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/radionational-breakfast/changing-oz-chris-sarra-becoming-stronger-and-smarter/106233642): <https://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/radionational-breakfast/changing-oz-chris-sarra-becoming-stronger-and-smarter/106233642>



Anglicare Victoria's Someone Else's Problem report (2025) highlights the urgent and unmet mental health needs of young people living in OOHC. It calls for coordinated cross-sector reform between the out-of-home care, mental health, and community service systems. Access the report here: <https://www.anglicarevic.org.au/research/someone-elses-problem-2025-report/>

Anglicare Victoria's Navigator Program supports children and young people who are not going to school regularly to reconnect with school. Read how the program helped one young student find their way back to the classroom: <https://www.anglicarevic.org.au/news/when-the-world-felt-overwhelming-one-program-helped-bella-find-her-way/>

Alongside Navigator, Anglicare Victoria's TEACHaR program is partnering with a number of new schools to strengthen school engagement for students in OOHC, adopting an evidence-based literacy approach (building foundational skills such as phonics and comprehension) and implementing a Pathways to Success stream for students aged 16–21 who aren't returning to mainstream school.



The MacKillop Family Services Education Strategy for children and young people in OOHC is now in its second year of implementation and focuses on four key pillars:

- Education is being positioned as a fundamental principle across MFS Residential Care, ensuring it is integrated into daily practice and recognised as a key driver of positive outcomes for young people. We have introduced education upskilling forums for residential care workers and teams, established monthly cross-regional education meetings to enable consultation, and developed networks for information and resource sharing.
- Ensuring that young people in our care understand their educational rights and feel a sense of autonomy over their learning pathways and future aspirations. Alongside ongoing advocacy, we are equipping young people with the tools, resources, and confidence to advocate for themselves.
- Driving long-term and systemic change through strong partnerships and contributing to sustainable, system-level improvements across both the education and OOHC sectors.
- Strengthening monitoring progress through improved data collection and analysis. This includes refining the education components of our biannual OOHC surveys to ensure changes are evidence-based, meaningful, and responsive.

The MacKillop Institute programs Power to Kids in Out-of-Home care and Power to Kids in Schools respond to the high risk of child exploitation, harmful sexual behaviour and dating violence for young people in care, supporting organisations nationally. A partnership with the Tasmanian Department of Education, Children and Young People is also supporting the implementation of Power to Kids to over 1000 staff in 10 OOHC organisations across the state.

ALLAMBI CARE

The Allambi Care Learning Centre has supported young people in OOHC for 18 years, delivering education and life-skills programs within a safe, inclusive and flexible environment. Qualified educators are trained in trauma, mental health and therapeutic crisis intervention. A core initiative, now in its 8th year, is the Tutoring Program delivered by the Education Support Officer. The program provides tailored, one-to-one support for young people, using diagnostic assessment in literacy and numeracy to close learning gaps and extend strengths. A strong focus on relationship-building further supports wellbeing and positive learning outcomes.

Voice of the Child Initiative: The Voice of the Child Initiative centres on listening to and elevating young people's voices, especially those of First Nations young people, to inform and transform organisational practices and policy. Launched in February 2024 by Key Assets Australia (KAA), the initiative is to embed the perspectives and lived experiences of young people into all aspects of the organisation's work. The initiative has been shaped through ongoing collaboration with the Young Person Working Group, Staff Working Group, Cultural Practice Collective, and partners. It has directly influenced KAA's 2025-2030 Strategic Plan and Theory of Change, reinforcing accountability to young people and recognising lived experience as a driver of meaningful change. Through this work, KAA is actively shifting organisational culture towards systemic and generational change, with accountability to young people identified as the catalyst for this transformation. Dr Dianne Jackson, KAA CEO states: "we commit to continuing to engage with young people at KAA in different ways so that we can ensure their voices are always in the room. We will incorporate young people's input into our decision-making processes. We believe the voices of young people are the catalyst for change in our sector."

"School Wishes": Is a practical, child-centred activity that supports children and young people to express their hopes, concerns, safe people, interests, challenges within the school environment. Presented as a flyer, it provides a clear and accessible way for a child or young person's 'voice' to inform the development of their Education Support Plan (ESP). The resource can be revisited throughout the year/s as the child or young person's 'wishes' and circumstances change. It also serves as valuable evidence of what is working well and what is not helpful for them in the school setting.

Therapeutic Life Story Work (TLSW): KAA staff are using TLSW with children and young people in out of home care. Through this process, children and young people develop a deeper understanding of their personal history and family relationships. In many cases, this includes gaining compassion for their parents and making sense of their out of home care experience. TLSW supports emotional resilience, strengthens identity and sense of belonging, and increases feelings of stability within the foster placement. As children and young people build a stronger sense of self, they are often better able to engage positively with schooling and learning environments.



At the commencement of Term 1, 2026, two children who are case managed by the FC/KC program began the school year at an Anglican College. This scholarship has been a unique opportunity for each child. Both children were enthusiastic and excited to start the new school year at their primary school. Planning for this transition began early, with PSP and the Anglican College working collaboratively from November 2025 to support a smooth and considered start to the 2026 school year. This thorough planning has been instrumental in enabling both children to successfully integrate into and engage with their new learning environments. The planning process was comprehensive and included consultation with the children's biological family, ensuring their views were heard and permission was obtained. Dedicated planning meetings were held between PSP staff and teacher staff to identify the individual needs of each child. Trauma-informed strategies and targeted psychoeducation were provided to teaching staff to support understanding of the children's experiences and to promote emotionally safe and supportive classroom environments. Ongoing partnerships and consistent communication between PSP and school staff have been maintained throughout the term. By the end of Term 1, both children had formed friendships, demonstrated positive engagement in learning, and the carers had developed strong connections within the school community. This experience highlights the strengthening partnership between the PSP program and Anglican College and demonstrates the value of early, collaborative planning. It reflects a growing pathway that includes education pathways and school scholarships that promote the importance of long-term educational outcomes for children in OOHC.

Upcoming

Conferences, presentations, and workshops

- Doing School Differently (Melbourne, June 2026).
- Relation-Centered Education Network (Brisbane, June 2026).
- Alternative Education Network (New South Wales, July 2026).
- Research team and Partner Organisation workshop (Melbourne, August 2026).

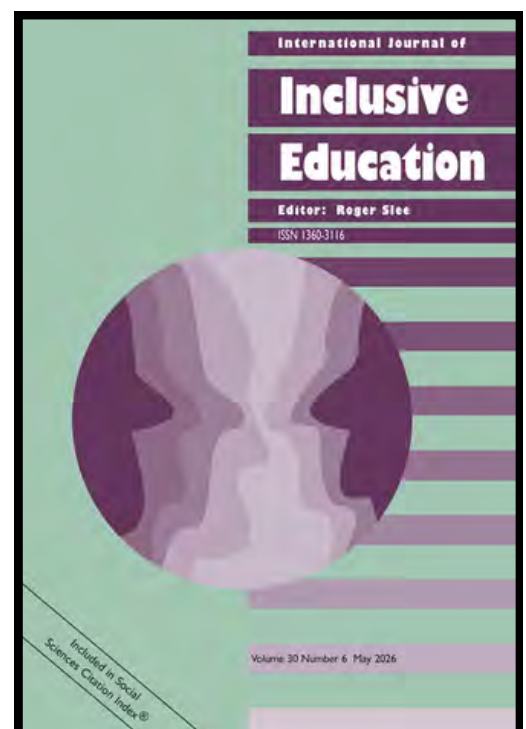


Special issue: International Journal of Inclusive Education (IJIE) focused on examining school attendance through an equity lens.

Together with colleagues Prof. Martin Mills and Dr Sasha Lynn (Queensland University of Technology), Kitty and Emily are editing a special issue for the International Journal of Inclusive Education. We have invited Australian and international contributors and there will also be two contributions from our project: one from our PhD scholar Shelley Stokes on an analysis of Queensland policy, and one from the team on world café data from carers.

Martin and Sasha work on the ARC Discovery Project *Towards a School-Community Based Approach to Addressing Student Absenteeism* (DP220101939) with colleagues from the University of Queensland.

We hope most of the papers for the special issue will be available online by the end of the year.



Our team

The academic team:

UTAS: Prof Kitty te Riele
UTAS: Dr Michael Guerzoni
ANU: Prof Sharon Bessell
ACU: Prof Daryl Higgins
Adelaide Uni: Prof Anna Sullivan
UniMelb: A/Prof Tom Brunzell
Life Without Barriers: Dale Murray
Berry Street: Jack Greig
UTAS: Dr Emily Rudling
(postdoctoral research fellow)
ANU: Dr Cadhla O'Sullivan (research
fellow)
UTAS: Shelley Stokes (PhD
candidate)
With research assistants:
UTAS: Zekantha Byard
UTAS: Thanh Hai Phan

The partner organisations:

Life Without Barriers
Berry Street Victoria
MacKillop Family Services
Key Assets Australia
Allambi Care
Stronger Smarter Institute
Anglicare NSW South, NSW
West & ACT
Anglicare Victoria
Commissioner for Children
and Young People (Tasmania)

Thank you, and welcome

Dr Chris Sarra has returned as CEO of the Stronger Smarter Institute (which he founded). Chris and his colleague Madeleine have taken over from Dyonne Anderson as project partners on behalf of SSI.

Tom Brunzell has moved from Berry Street to a new role at the University of Melbourne as Associate Professor in Trauma Informed Education. Tom's role on the project has therefore shifted from partner investigator to chief investigator.

Jack Greig has joined the team as the new partner investigator from Berry Street.

Rebecca Robinson has joined MacKillop Family Services as Director of MacKillop Education and has taken over from Anne Henderson as project partner on behalf of MFS.

Many thanks to Dyonne and Anne, and welcome Jack, Chris, Madeleine, and Rebecca!



Thank you for reading!

<u>Check out our website!</u>	Email us: eduoohc@utas.edu.au
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