

Children in foster care at educational disadvantage

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Dr Ruth Knight, Kevin Gallard and Queensland Minister for Child Safety, Youth and Women Dianne Farmer, centre, receiving a copy of the report. Credit: Queensland University of Technology

Many of the 48,000 Australian children in foster care may struggle to

reach national literacy and numeracy benchmarks, could be at higher risk than their peers of becoming disengaged with schooling, being suspended or expelled, and may struggle long-term with social and economic disadvantage, a QUT study has revealed.

Dr. Ruth Knight from QUT's Australian Centre for Philanthropy and Nonprofit Studies (ACPNS) examined research here and overseas that identifies what puts children in foster and other out-of-home care situations at risk of educational disadvantage, what can protect them, their educational outcomes, existing intervention programs to improve these outcomes, and government policy approaches.

Key findings of her report include:

- School disruption due to moving between [foster care](#) placements, low self-esteem, trauma, poor access to books, lack of fundamental language and pre-reading skills are some of the factors that pose barriers to children in care engaging in [education](#).
- Without effective and early interventions to help with learning, children in care may struggle long-term with substance abuse, criminal behaviour, homelessness, employment, earning potential and other social and economic challenges.
- Lack of effective communication and planning between carers, child protection authorities and schools continues to inhibit effective learning interventions and outcomes for children in out-of-home care.

Dr. Knight said the ACPNS study, supported by pioneering charity The Pyjama Foundation, found there was a limited number of intervention programs that effectively address [protective factors](#) known to improve children's educational engagement.

"Those protective factors include family stability with a carer who supports educational and extracurricular activities, access to books and other literacy materials, developing literacy skills as early as possible in life, and having adult mentors or tutors for at least 12 months to build cognitive and social skills," she said.

"The most successful intervention programs for children in care are ones based on positive relationships with teachers, care givers and case workers, which take into account trauma, provide flexible learning, and which support children to genuinely love learning.

"This review shows that there are only a few of these programs available."

The report found that because of the crisis-driven nature of out-of-home care, often in response to parental abuse and neglect, "education all too often takes a backseat to other, more urgent issues".

However, Dr. Knight concluded that addressing the significant educational disadvantage children in care may face with effective prevention and early intervention programs to encourage learning should be a priority, to prevent disadvantage continuing into adulthood.

The Pyjama Foundation National Program Manager Kevin Gallard welcomed the ACPNS study findings.

"This research provides insight into the current educational landscape for children in [care](#) and the need for early [intervention](#) and strong supportive relationships," he said.

"It highlights the strengths of The Pyjama Foundation's Love of Learning Program, a mentoring program focused on improving literacy, numeracy and life skills.

"The [program](#) involves trained volunteer learning mentors, known as Pyjama Angels, meeting regularly and doing one-on-one reading sessions with more than 1400 foster [children](#) across Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria."

More information: Children in out-of-home care and their educational outcomes: a literature review,
eprints.qut.edu.au/122389/19/_..._taffHome_StaffGroupB%24_bakerj2_Desktop_Pyjama%20Foundation%20Literature%20Review%2031-10-18%20%20FINAL%202018.pdf

Provided by Queensland University of Technology

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