

# EXPERIENCES OF EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN IN CARE

**Voices of children and key adults in their lives**



# EXPERIENCES OF EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN IN CARE – AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

## **PART 1: Voices of children in care and key adults in their lives**

- interviews with 23 children and young people
  - 16 Māori
  - 4 NZ European
  - 1 Māori/Pacifica
  - 1 NZ European/Māori
  - 1 African
- interviews with 13 caregivers, 10 social workers and 12 education staff

## **PART 2: Review of government data**

- based on data from the IDI

## **PART 3: Literature scan**

- review of NZ and overseas literature

## **PART 4: Summary of key findings**

- synthesis of parts 1 – 3

# EXPERIENCES OF EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN IN CARE – AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

- Academic achievement
- Learning difficulties
- Exclusion and disciplinary action
- Impact of changing schools
- Experiences of stigma
- High aspirations and expectations
- Importance of friends
- Extra curricular activities



# ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

## Academic achievement can be difficult for children in care

### Literature scan

- In a systematic review of literature from the USA, Australia, UK and other European countries on care-experienced young people aged 17, all 32 of the included studies reported significantly lower school success and graduation for care-experienced children compared with their peers (Gypen, Vanderfaeillie, De Maeyer, Belenger, & Van Holen, 2017)



# ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

## Voices research

- Children often minimised their achievements and were unsure what achievement looked like
- Children's emotional needs needed to be met before they could learn and achieve



*"Even if we were eligible to get them [certificates], some teachers, they would pick and choose who they'd give them to anyway. The principal would pick and choose and if you weren't that popular or they just didn't really wanna choose you, they wouldn't choose you, even if you were eligible to get an award."*

[European female, age 14]

# ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

- Educators noted that home environments that offer stability, alongside encouragement and high expectations about learning, support children's achievements
- School can be a safe space to achieve when the home environment is unstable



*"I have a few kids on my caseload at the moment that are doing amazingly well academically at school. Because of all the things that are happening at home, to me it is their safe place. They are doing so well and excelling academically. It is not coming from home. I think it is coming from a really caring principal and taking one step further and looking out for kids. They call us if there are any problems."*

[Social worker]

# LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

**Children and young people in care can experience learning difficulties, which require access to learning support**

## **Literature scan**

- Children in care have higher rates of special education needs (Berridge, 2012)
- A systemic review of educational outcomes for children in care suggests that care-experienced children and young people perform below their age level academically (Luke and O' Higgins, 2018)

# LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

## Voices research

- Educators and social workers described children in care as benefitting from learning support
- Social workers talked about children in care benefitting from flexible learning opportunities



*"I had a teacher aide helping me, so she was on my side helping me ... she sits next to me and she helps me with my work ... When I am angry at school, I usually tell my teacher aide and she helps me through it."*

[Māori female, age 14]



# EXCLUSION AND DISCIPLINARY ACTION

## Children and young people in care can often experience exclusion and disciplinary action

### Literature scan

- Fergusson and Wolkow (2012) cite several studies which found higher rates of disciplinary referrals for children in care; they suggest this may be related to the higher rates of behaviour problems demonstrated by children in care



# EXCLUSION AND DISCIPLINARY ACTION

## Voices research

- Difficulties experienced by children in care can lead to exclusion
- Experiences of trauma can lead to challenging behaviours



*"... they have fallen behind in their education, end up with low self-esteem, can get angry, frustrated and then there becomes behavioural issues. At the extreme, I was involved with a child that was in care briefly who was excluded from primary school and they never re-entered mainstream education because of the accumulative harm caused from the environment he had been living in and the impact on his learning and it all just became too hard."*

[Social worker]

# EXCLUSION AND DISCIPLINARY ACTION

*“This boy is really mean to me. Heaps of people are really mean to me and I am just one of those people who can’t put up with it. I just get really angry coz things do hurt me and I just get really angry when I ask them to stop and if they don’t stop, I get into fighting and stuff like that. I can’t handle things like that, and I hurt people because it hurts me about what they say to me. ”*

*“Well I tried to stab someone. He was just like in my face and annoying me. The teacher didn’t care what he said but as soon as I like threatened him, I got into trouble more. So, I got sent home, then had a meeting and then got kicked out for three months. ”*

[Māori female, age 14]

# IMPACT OF CHANGING SCHOOLS

**Children and young people in care can experience frequent changes of school, which can negatively impact on their learning, social skills and relationships**

## **Literature scan**

- Changing schools impacts on the order in which the curriculum is taught (Elemens, Helm, Myers, Thomas and Tis 2017)
- Changes in school disrupt the development of relationships with trusted adults (Quest, Fullerton, Geenen & Powers, 2012)
- Young people felt that school stability could be maintained by increased focus on the needs and wishes of the child when making decisions about school changes (Clemens, 2017)

# IMPACT OF CHANGING SCHOOLS



## Voices research

- School can provide stability when care placements are changing
- Changing schools can be sudden and children and the school have limited information

*"It would be better if we had just stayed at the same schools because when you leave schools you end up learning different things. You are working on something and you have that all in your mind, then you go to another school and they probably teach you something you already know. "*

[African female, age 11]

# IMPACT OF CHANGING SCHOOLS

*"I have had four school changes. My first school was [A] then I went to this school in [Place] called [B] and then I went [C] and I then [D]. This was because first I was with my mum and dad then we moved to a different house – so went to different school. After that I got taken and went to [B]. Then I got taken again and then I went to [C] and stayed with caregivers, went to [D], moved everywhere, stayed with these other caregivers ... went from there, came to [care home] ... had a little visit, made friends, left, came back..."*

[Māori male, age 14]



# EXPERIENCES OF STIGMA

## Children and young people in care can experience stigmatisation from peers and adults

### Literature scan

- In a study of care experienced children and young people aged 10 – 15 years nearly half were not comfortable sharing information about their care status with other children; this was for several different reasons, including fear of social stigma, uncomfortable questions and bullying (Finkelstein, Wamsley & Miranda, 2002)



# EXPERIENCES OF STIGMA

## Voices research

- Some children in care felt anxious about being stigmatised due to peers finding out about their care circumstances
- Others were less concerned about their care status being known when they were in schools with a number of children in care

*"I don't even tell people at school that I live at [care home] cos I hate it when they ask questions. If they know then they can ask questions. They ask questions like "why are you in care, blah, blah, blah?" and they go on "where do you live, did your parents not feed you, did your parents hit you?""*

[African female, age 11]

**Interviewer:** *You don't feel embarrassed when your social worker turns up at school?*

**Child:** *No. Lots of people have them arriving. I know I am not the only one that gets it.*

[Māori/Tongan male, age 14]



# HIGH ASPIRATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS

**Children and young people in care can benefit from relationships with adults who have high aspirations for their learning and who are involved in their education**

## Literature scan

- Children described caregivers, social workers and teachers as having low aspirations and low educational expectations for children in care (Mannay et al. 2017& Cameron 2007)
- Meaningful and consistent involvement from caregivers, teachers and other care workers was identified as being important for developing educational aspirations (Neal, 2017)



# HIGH ASPIRATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS

## Voices research

- Children found it difficult to identify future ambitions and aspirations
- Adults reported that children in care tended to have low aspirations about their future and required adult support to develop these aspirations

*"I sat down with a 17-year-old who was like, "I want to go and work in a factory." I was like, "Well, that's great. That's cool if that's what you want to do. If you could, what's your biggest dream?" They couldn't even identify that, so I think, longer term, kids need to be encouraged to have big dreams, even if they've been in care." "*

[Social worker]

# HIGH ASPIRATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS

*"If you can instil in a child, that whole love of learning at the beginning, they can go wherever they want to go. It doesn't mean that every child goes to university but it means that they've got the ability and the belief in themselves, that they can go to a job and they can learn how to do it or they can learn a skill later or they can do anything. I think that's what primary school's about, it's about learning to learn and college, to me, is about what you're learning. That's how I see it. If you can get that love of learning right at the beginning, there's no stopping them, no matter who they are or what level they'll ever get to. "*

[Social worker]



# IMPORTANCE OF FRIENDS

## Children and young people in care can find establishing and maintaining friendships difficult

### Literature scan

- Approximately a quarter of children described themselves as having just one or no peer-aged friends at school (Finkelstein, Wamsley & Miranda, 2002)
- Relationships with friends, and friends who were willing to help, promoted positive educational outcomes (Sladovic Franz & Branica, 2013)
- Primary children in residential care reported positive perceptions of school and this tended to be related to social or play activities (Celste, 2011)

# IMPORTANCE OF FRIENDS

## Voices research

- School friends are important to children in care
- Some children found it difficult to spend time with friends outside of school



**Interviewer:** *In terms of friends at school, do you have friends that you see outside of school as well or do you just tend to see people at school?*

**Child:** *I've never seen any of my friends outside of school.*

**Interviewer:** *Okay, so you just see them when you're at school.*

**Child:** *Yeah, I wouldn't really call them my best friends, they're just friends. I've never really had best friends before.*

[NZ European female, age 14]

# IMPORTANCE OF FRIENDS

## Voices research

- Changing schools impacted on children's friendships
- Educators can support children to form and maintain friendships through pastoral support groups and one to one guidance to build social skills



*"[name of school] it's about the students mainly but everyone in school has support. No one is left without support. I go to lunch club on Tuesday lunchtimes and that's for girls who don't have many friends, need somewhere to hang out quietly or just want to meet some new people. It's in the learning support room, just a small room and we just get to chat, hang out and do whatever during out lunch hour. It's quite nice."*

[Pakeha female, age 14]

# IMPORTANCE OF EXTRA CURRICULAR ENGAGEMENT

**Children and young people in care can benefit from the opportunity to engage in extra curricular activities**

## **Literature scan**

- Involvement in extra curricular sport is a useful way to develop social networks (Quarmby, 2014)
- Children and young people identify being involved in extra curricular activities as important for developing an external support system and being involved in something positive away from the challenges of home life (Neal, 2017)



# IMPORTANCE OF EXTRA CURRICULAR ENGAGEMENT

## Voices research

- Most children in care were engaged in extra curricular activities, particularly sport, through their school or community clubs
- Social workers can facilitate children's engagement in extra curricular activities by providing access to funding for activities and equipment
- It is often part of the caregiver role to enable children and young people to access extracurricular activities but resources and time can be a barrier

*"Our caregivers help us with everything... like we need anything... they provide it... like rugby... he provides me with rugby gear, like if you need boots, they will get them for me."*

[Māori male, age 14]



# WHAT NEXT...

- Findings informing Oranga Tamariki and Ministry of Education joined up work
  - Care Standards
  - Responsibilities under Child & Youth Wellbeing Strategy and oranga tamariki action plan
  - Strategic priorities for joint work programme
- Reports will be published on Oranga Tamariki website