Out of care, into university: Raising higher education access and achievement of care leavers

Dr Andrew Harvey, Dr Patricia McNamara, Lisa Andrewartha, Michael Luckman
Background to the report

• La Trobe University project funded by NCSEHE at Curtin University

• Mapped the higher education sector in relation to care leavers - adults who have spent time in out-of-home care

• Mixed methods: lit review; examination of national data sets; online survey of universities; interviews with reps from out-of-home care service providers

• Partnership with MacKillop Family Services and Berry Street and reference group of national and international experts.
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Main sections of the report

1. Lessons from the national and international research

2. The need for a stronger evidence base

3. Policy and cultural reform: the higher education sector

4. Policy and cultural reform: the community service sector
1. Lessons from the national and international research
International evidence of low higher education participation for care leavers has led to legislative and program responses

- United Kingdom – *By Degrees* research
- Continental Europe - *Young People from a Public Care Background: Pathways to Education in Europe (YiPPEE)*
- United States - evidence for extending the legislative age limit of state responsibilities.
Australia has moved more slowly in terms of research and legislative and program responses

- Poorer school achievement levels are well documented (e.g. AIHW, 2007, 2011).
- Research at higher education level is limited but suggests low rates of higher education participation (e.g. Cashmore et al., 2007)
- Most states and territories have introduced legislation or policy to assist care leavers beyond 18 years of age but types of support and upper age limits differ
- No national-level data collection or reporting of the educational outcomes of care leavers.
The need for a stronger evidence base
‘reliable statistical information is an essential basis for improving the educational opportunities of young people who have been in care’

YiPPEE, Jackson & Cameron, 2012

- Child Protection National Minimum Data Set (CPNMDS) – key statistics for the national out-of-home care group under 18
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare is working on a project to match the CPNMDS to educational data sources e.g. NAPLAN, the VET provider collection, government school data,
- No plan to extend scope beyond 18 years of age.
3. Policy and cultural reform: the higher education sector
Online survey sent to senior equity representatives at 37 Australian public universities

Research questions

• What types of policies, support structures, and procedures are in place that specifically target care leavers?
• How can universities increase higher education access and support for care leavers?

Survey responses

• 28 universities responded; 76% response rate.
Most universities do not have any policy, support structure, or procedure specifically targeted to care leavers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Does your university have any of the following policies, support structures, or procedures specifically targeted to care leavers?</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment policies or guidelines</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admission policies</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outreach programs</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarships</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation options</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other policies or support programs</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection procedures</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progress tracking procedures</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships with out-of-home care service providers</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Note: The total number of responses differs for each item as responses were not mandatory (i.e. respondents were able to skip items).
Opportunities to expand accommodation, financial, academic, and broader support for care leavers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How can universities increase access for care leavers?</th>
<th>No. of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(n = 23)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Targeted scholarships and financial support</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnerships with out-of-home care service providers</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work with secondary schools to support students in out-of-home care</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How can universities better support care leavers?</th>
<th>No. of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(n = 21)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarships and financial support</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation support</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Link care leavers to student support services</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create institutional awareness and recognition of the group in equity policies and initiatives</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Policy and cultural reform: the community service sector
Eleven interviews with senior representatives from major out-of-home care services providers across Australia

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Limited educational data tracking</th>
<th>‘What’s missing is a centralised data system to record the educational outcomes for children, young people in our services.’</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Often unready to transition to tertiary education at 18</td>
<td>‘there are certain processes and pathways that kids have to pass through before they're ready to take that on’</td>
</tr>
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Barriers and facilitators to higher education

Barriers:
e.g. accelerated transition to independence; mental health issues; intergenerational trauma; low expectations.

‘moving kids on at 18, and the pressure that that puts on kids to actually start to join the adult world, is horrendous’

“We have a high percentage of carers that have low education (achievement) and they’ve had low aspirations themselves.’

Facilitators:
e.g. continuity of careplacements and schooling; committed mentors; financial and housing support.

‘provide them with living support, emotional support, mentoring and good people around them that are motivated to help them keep going’
Barriers and facilitators for Indigenous higher education

Barriers:
e.g. Trans-generational trauma (Stolen Generation experience); behavioural and learning issues; racism; suspensions; un-readiness for HE; family and community responsibilities

‘They get very caught up with the intergenerational trauma of their family; even if they're okay it's very difficult to separate from families of origin’

‘They have to go back to country to maintain responsibilities...lore and culture...they’ve always got this stuff going on in their head and they do get homesick.’

Facilitators:
e.g. Educated families and carers; mentors and role modelling; advocacy

‘If they’ve got family that have already gone through, they have a support base (who’ve) done it; they’ve come from the country, endured the hardships and completed their studies’
Recommendations summary
• Nationally consistent data on HE access and outcomes

• Policy reform within the higher education sector
  – greater recognition of this student group
  – national student equity framework.

• Policy reform within the community service sector
  – continued support beyond the age of 18
  – community service organisations need access to greater individualised data, and increased capacity to provide education and training to carers and the related workforce.

• Overarching need for cultural change – the soft bigotry of low expectations is omnipresent for care leavers.
Thank you

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