

Newsletter

Education and out-of-home care

January 2025



The photo shows the research team at the University of Tasmania (UTAS) in Hobart, from left to right: Dr Michael Guerzoni (UTAS), Prof Daryl Higgins (Australian Catholic University), Prof Kitty te Riele (UTAS), Prof Anna Sullivan (University of South Australia), Prof Sharon Bessell (Australian National University), and Dr Emily Rudling (UTAS).

Here's what has happened so far and what's to come!

Welcome to our first newsletter for the Australian Research Council Linkage Project "Fostering school attendance for students in out-of-home care", 2024-2026.

As this is our first newsletter, we have included a brief project overview on page 2. We share with you our first publications, a glimpse of initial insights from fieldwork, and news and stories from our Partner Organisations. We are so pleased to announce that late last year Anglicare Victoria joined us as our ninth Partner Organisation. This newsletter also introduces you to our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group and to our PhD candidate.

So many people have told us it is vital to support students in care to be able to be at school, and get the full benefits of school, just like their peers. We look forward to helping achieve this, together with our partners, stakeholders, and research participants.

Thank you so much for your interest!

Kitty

Thank You

This project has been partially funded by the Australian Government through the Australian Research Council Linkage Scheme (LP2201001130).

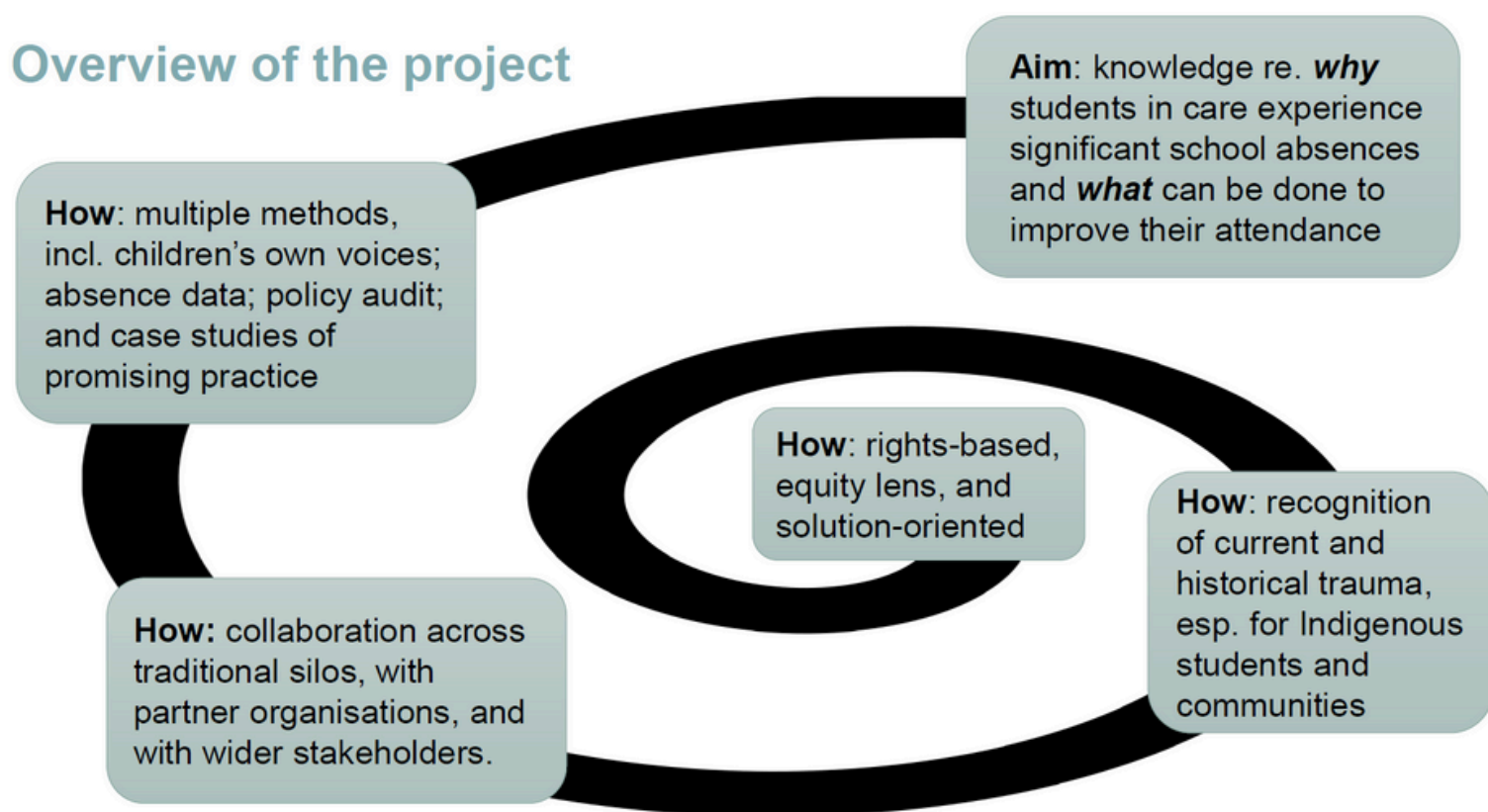
We are so grateful to our Partner Organisations for their co-funding and support, and for the work they do every day to nurture children and young people in out of home care.

See their news and stories further in this newsletter.



Australian Government
Australian Research Council

Overview of the project



Spotlight

Introducing our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group

Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group is chaired by Dr Michael Guerzoni. He is a researcher on the project from the University of Tasmania, with expertise in the safeguarding of children in organisational settings, and the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Mike is a descendent of the Trawulwuy people of Tasmania's northeast and post-war Italian migrants. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group has been established and has met thrice in 2024. It has members from Partner Organisations: Stronger Smarter Institute, Life Without Barriers, Key Assets Australia, Allambi Care, and Berry Street.

This reference group helps the research team to put in place processes that make the research safe and inclusive for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, organisations, and participants. The group will guide the research team to draw on relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge, especially for analysis and dissemination. They have already provided valuable guidance for our child-friendly workshops. We will also work together to develop processes for creating publications that are useful for diverse Indigenous communities.

The ATIRG will meet quarterly in 2025, and meet in person in May on *nipaluna* (Hobart).

Publications

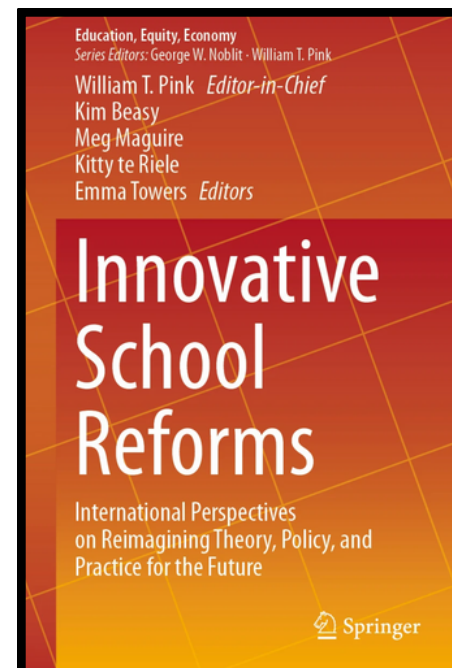
Being at School: A Prerequisite for Educational Equity

Attending school is a pre-requisite not only for academic learning, but also for social connections, emotional wellbeing, and physical development. This is even more important for students experiencing disadvantage, such as those in out-of-home care. However, these students are likely to be absent from school far more often than their more privileged peers, which means school attendance is a crucial equity issue.

Importantly, absence from school is not just an educational concern but also a social concern. It is certainly not simply the fault of students, their families or carers. In this chapter, we outline three ways of reimagining school attendance. First, making school systems more inclusive to reduce system-generated absences. Second, ensuring schools are places where students want to be, to reduce unauthorised absences. Finally, strengthening links between social services and schools to enable students to be at school and reduce authorised absences. All of these require changes in practices, political will, and proper resourcing.

Enabling students experiencing disadvantage to gain the full benefits of school by being in class and in the playground alongside their peers is a key foundation for a better and more equitable future—both for these students themselves, and for our wider communities.

Read more here: https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-031-64900-4_6#citeas



Attending school every day counts - but kids in out-of-home care are missing out

Children and young people in out-of-home care tend to have lower educational achievement than their peers because of additional challenges like unstable housing or their needs not being met. Supporting children and young people to regularly attend school is fundamental to setting them up for educational and lifetime success.

Our article was published in The Conversation and was selected for inclusion in the 2022 yearbook by The Conversation: te Riele, K. et al. (2022). Attending school every day counts – but kids in out-home-home-care are missing out. *Reckoning with Power and Privilege*. Edited by Michael Hopkin. Thames and Hudson: Australia.

Read the Conversation article here:

<https://theconversation.com/attending-school-every-day-counts-but-kids-in-out-of-home-care-are-missing-out-182299>

Listening to carers at the National Kinship, Permanent and Foster Care Conference

Research team members joined the National Kinship, Permanent and Foster Care Conference in Melbourne (9-11 August 2024) to invite carers and care sector workers to join research workshops on attendance for students in out-of-home care.

Two workshops were facilitated by (from left to right) Emily, Kitty and Daryl. More than 150 conference delegates participated in a short survey, world café and/or general discussion. It was a privilege to listen, and we are grateful for their deep and valuable insights.

We are pleased to share some initial findings from the survey here. Almost 100 people completed the survey. Many included comments about their experiences. A key question, informed by the Longitudinal Survey of Australian Children, was to indicate the number of days the child had been absent from school in the previous four weeks (excluding school holidays).

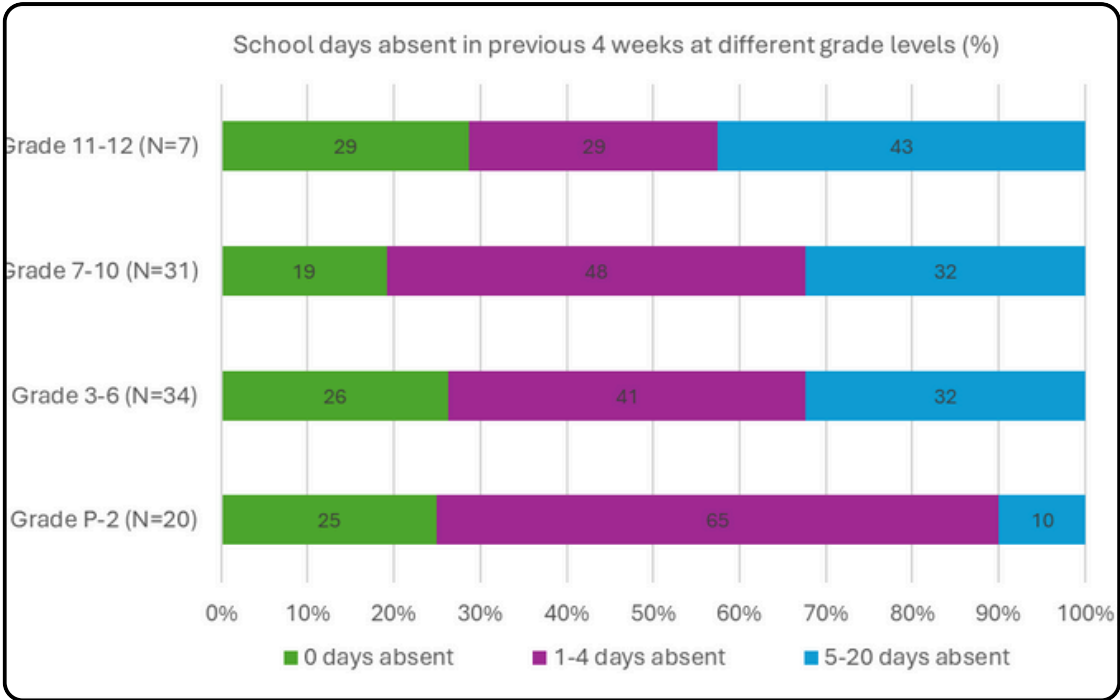
We asked participants to focus their answers in the survey on one school aged child in their care, and to let us know what grade that child was in.



“There have been many behavioural issues at school however I have advocated a lot and have a very good rapport with the teachers. His teachers have been amazing at helping him remain in the classroom as much as possible. ” – Carer

“Hasn’t engaged since Year 10. School refusal returning back from COVID and placement instability.” – Carer

“Not engaged, lack of enjoyment, limited friends, feels isolated...just does not like going at times.” – Carer



The diagram shows that overall about a quarter of the children had not been absent at all. This is great to hear and a key reminder not to assume that all students in care miss out on school a lot.

Almost half of the students had missed between 1-4 days. The most common reason was health related: being ill, having a medical appointment, or due to a disability.

Just over a quarter of the students had missed 5 days or more out of the previous 20 days of school. For this group, the participants indicated the most common reason was that the child did not want to attend. This reflects the rise in school refusal (or “school can’t”) in Australia since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Fostering school attendance for students in care: The role of policy

We were invited to join a symposium titled Student attendance: An issue of Social justice at the Australian Association for Research in Education held in Sydney, 5 December 2024.

Kitty presented findings from our policy analysis of education policies, focused on the ways government policy can create possibilities for students in care to be at school, as well as on the challenges caused by the invisibility of students in care and their carers in many policies and by the overwhelming number of policies for schools.

The symposium was an excellent opportunity to connect with a research team from Queensland examining attendance from a community perspective. There are many synergies, so we look forward to further collaborations with these colleagues.

Hearing from stakeholders

We are grateful to have connected with and learned from many stakeholders. They included people from government departments, peak bodies, care providers and NGOs, as well as academic experts.

Here are key insights based on their expertise and experience that they shared with us:

- It is vital to enable students in care to attend school and be in class the same as any other student, as part of supporting success at school and in life.
- Attendance is an essential first step but of course on its own it is not enough. Once students are at school they need to be engaged with high quality learning and supported with their wellbeing. Such experiences in turn will also further enable students in care to be at school. It is important to hear directly from children and young people in care as well as from carers.
- Each jurisdiction has its own processes for permission to invite people in the care system to take part in research and these processes can be time consuming.
- Significant reasons for missing out on school include school refusal; frequently being moved from one school to another; suspension and exclusion; and trauma, disability and illness.
- There is widespread understanding about the importance of school attendance for students in care and much goodwill. However, relevant professionals need more knowledge about useful strategies and more support to enhance their capacity for action.
- Improving school attendance and experiences is not just up to schools and education systems. The out-of-home care sector and the wider community also play a major role.



News and updates from our Partner Organisations

We are pleased to share relevant news and updates from our Partner Organisations (POs).

Our website also has links for all our POs:

<https://www.utas.edu.au/community-and-partners/peter-underwood-centre/research/fostering-school-attendance-for-students-in-out-of-home-care>

LIFE WITHOUT BARRIERS

The Learning Without Barriers team at Life Without Barriers have released resources, including a practice tool, social policy position and education strategy. Scroll to the end of: [Learning Without Barriers | Life Without Barriers](#) to download the resources



Shaped by 140 years of experience, decades of research and thousands of dedicated teachers, the Berry Street Education Model (BSEM) helps educators gain new perspectives, strategies and skills to build safer, healthier and more engaging classrooms for students with complex unmet needs for learning and all students. Learn more at www.bsem.org.au

ALLAMBI CARE

Allambi Care has established North Academy as an alternative school for those who find that mainstream does not meet their needs. For nearly 20 years, Allambi Care has been at the forefront in providing alternative education to children and young people within the service who had been expelled, suspended, excluded or left behind. In 2023, North Academy officially opened its doors to 20 young people in Years 9 and 10. Fast forward to 2025, we have expanded to include our first senior pathway for Year 11 and increased our capacity to offer enrolment to up to 30 of the community's most vulnerable young people.

North Academy is an Independent Non-Government Registered and Accredited Special Assistance School. We're located in West Wallsend, on Awabakal land NSW. Our educational philosophy is driven by the fundamental belief that every young person, regardless of their circumstances, deserves the opportunity to learn and thrive in an environment that is right for them. See: <https://northacademy.nsw.edu.au>



MacKillop Family Services and MacKillop Education have developed a 4-year Strategic Plan to Enhance Education Outcomes for Children and Young People in Out of Home Care. We will be working collaboratively across program areas to provide support and track data to ensure the Annual Action Plan Goals and Strategies are building capacity and leading to enhanced education outcomes for every child. MacKillop is recruiting a Project Manager who will support this work. The Strategic Plan will be published on our website in January 2025. [Empowering Children & Families | MacKillop Family Services](#) The MacKillop Institute's Power to Kids in Schools program will be formally launched in 2025. This program is designed to build the capacity of school leaders and staff to identify, and respond effectively to child sexual exploitation, harmful sexual behaviours and dating violence. Children and young people in Out-of-Home Care are at increased risk of child exploitation and early intervention is critical. <https://www.mackillopinstitute.org.au/programs/Power-to-Kids-in-Schools/>

The Commissioner for Children and Young People continues to monitor the Tasmanian Government's progress to implement recommendations made in Commissioner's report, A Place at the Table: An investigation into a change to the case management of children and young people in care in Tasmania. Visit [CCYP investigation into a change to the case management](#) for information about the investigation methodology, findings and recommendations.



Anglicare Victoria has been expanding its TEACHaR and Navigator programs to support more disengaged students. The Victorian Government has recently invested in 500 tailored education support packages for students in Out-of-Home Care, through a pilot of one to one tutoring and educational advocacy to support school re-engagement. Anglicare will be delivering the pilot in two of the four locations – using our evidence-informed TEACHaR model. TEACHaR is now operating across most parts of Victoria, and employs 35 VIT registered teachers providing one-to-one outreach to students in Out-of-Home Care.

Our Navigator program is now also operating across 6 sites supporting students who have disengaged from education to return to school. As part of these programs we are also working closely with schools, child protection, out-of-home care teams and the Department of Education to upskill both education and out-of-home care settings in supporting the needs of students in care.



In 2024 over 500 alumni from the Stronger Smarter Leadership Program and Jarjums Programs responded to the SSI census. The data is invaluable in helping document and understand the impact of the Stronger Smarter Approach in schools and workplaces.

In terms of student outcomes, respondents reported improved behaviour, attendance, engagement and performance. Some explained this further as students being happier, with a greater sense of trust, pride and connection to culture. See: [Stronger Smarter Census 2024 - Stronger Smarter](#)

[Key Assets Australia](#) has incorporated the use of Virtual Reality (VR) in providing trauma informed/ trauma responsive training of foster and kincarers as well as school personnel where children and young people who are supported by Key Assets are enrolled:

[Immersive VR into Foster Care training.](#)

Using Virtual Reality gives carers and school personnel an opportunity to understand:

- the importance and impact of empathy
- that 'all behaviour is communication'
- that 'if you see a child (and their behaviour) differently, you will see a different child'.

(Dr Stuart Shanker)

Key Assets Australia is a founding member of 'Allies for Children' - [Allies for Children](#). | [Key Assets Australia](#) and is committed to work in partnership with chief executives working across the child, youth and family sector to advocate for better policies and systems to ignite genuine reform in child protection that moves service responses towards early intervention and family support.



Anglicare NSW South, NSW West & ACT has held 'Cost of Living @Schools' events this year. Hosted by different schools, the events are designed to help connect parents and carers to community service providers, like Anglicare, who can offer support with ongoing cost of living pressures. The program is part of the Southside Initiative 2024. See [Anglicare](#). | [Connecting with local families at Cost of Living @Schools events](#) and also p.2 in the Spring 2024 Thrive newsletter: [THRIVE-Spring-2024.-final-small.pdf](#)

IT TAKES A VILLAGE



We would like to acknowledge the fantastic work by research assistants and research fellows who are supporting our project:

- Dr Emily Rudling (UTAS) is the postdoctoral research fellow for the whole project. She works closely with Kitty and is a core member of the research team. Emily is providing essential project management and is currently taking a key role in the analysis of education and care policies.
- Dr Cadlha O'Sullivan (Australian National University) working with Professor Sharon Bessell on participatory, rights-based engagement workshops with children and young people in care.
- Lottie Harris (Australian Catholic University) working with Professor Daryl Higgins, Professor Kitty te Riele, and Dr Emily Rudling on policy analysis of education and care policies in Victoria and Tasmania.
- Samantha Chapman (University of South Australia) assisting Professor Anna Sullivan analysing literature for our case studies.

Welcome to project PhD candidate, Shelley Stokes!

Shelley commenced her candidature with UTAS in September 2024. Shelley has a Bachelor of Education, a Master of Human Services, and Graduate Certificate in Neuroscience and Youth Mental Health. She has worked in a range of education roles in schools and the Queensland Department of Education, and currently works at Saint Ursula's College in Toowoomba. She will be supervised at UTAS by Dr Michael Guerzoni, with Kitty as co-supervisor. Shelley recently attended the Trauma-Aware Conference held in Brisbane and heard Partner Investigator Dr. Tom Brunzell present *What's next for Trauma-Aware Education: Strategies for all schools to learn, apply and sustain*. Shelley shared some key takeaways:

- When students gain hope from schools, communities gain hope.
- Creating culturally safe environments is a priority for the engagement and outcomes of First Nations children
- Cross sector collaboration and further interconnectedness is vital to develop communities that operate as protective factors
- You can learn twice as much when positive emotions are generated, make learning fun!

Upcoming in 2025:

- Listening to children and young people about their views and experiences of school attendance and missing out on school, through rights-based and strengths-based workshops, surveys and research conversations.
- Hosting the research team, Partner Organisations, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group, and stakeholders for in-person workshops in Hobart in May.

Thank you for reading!

Check out our website!	Email us: eduoohc@utas.edu.au
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