

**2021**

**THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE  
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**Response to Assembly Resolution 3 June 2021 – Out of Home Care Education**

**Presented by  
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I am pleased to be able to present the Government's progress on the important topic of improving educational outcomes for children and young people who are involved in the out of home care system, particularly for those in residential care and for those young people in custody at Bimberi Youth Justice Centre.

I also wish to thank Ms Kikkert for her motion and highlighting the importance of putting the right supports in place for young people in these settings.

As we know, abuse and neglect can have a highly traumatic impact on a child or young person's development in a range of domains such as motor, social, psychological, language, attachment peer relationships, neurological, behavioural, academic and scholastic.

Sadly, the journey of healing and recovery for these children and young people can be lengthy, as they often have many challenging aspects to overcome before they are able to move forward.

Children and young people living in out of home care can be at greater risk of disengagement with education. Their life circumstances, history of trauma, disrupted schooling, learning experiences, behaviours and needs, can all impact on their ability to engage and learn.

In 2014, the ACT Government established the Improving Educational Outcomes Committee, with the intent of working collaboratively across education sectors and Directorates, to ensure the educational needs of children and young people in out of home care were given priority.

Membership of the Improving Educational Outcomes Committee includes the Education Directorate, Catholic Education Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn, the Association of Independent Schools of the ACT, ACT Together and the Community Services Directorate.

A Collaboration Agreement was signed in 2017 between all agencies to promote:

- information sharing about each organisation’s policies, programs, services and other resources
- support the learning needs to children and young people in out-of-home care through the implementation of a range of education plans to improve participation and engagement and
- coordinated service delivery at key stages or circumstances of the child or young person’s life.

We have data that shows some children and young people in care are not reaching their education potential. The Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPS) assessment shows children living in out of home care in the ACT are typically starting their first year of full-time schooling with less well-developed literacy and numeracy skills than the general ACT Kindergarten population.

But we can see through the NAPLAN assessment children and young people living in out of home care in the ACT have rates of literacy and numeracy skills growth over successive year levels are similar to, or higher than, the general ACT student population, demonstrating their potential for skills growth over time, when provided with suitable supports.

In the ACT, most young people living in out of home care are enrolled in College and complete Year 12.

As a response to the data, ACT children and young people in out of home care are provided with supports through a dedicated team of individual agencies and professionals who work together to provide a holistic approach to meet the needs of a child or young person. This individualised team draws on the expertise of many specialised areas including

education, and considers options for tutoring, if this is determined to be in the child or young person's best interest at the time.

The views of the child or young person are also a significant factor in developing practical strategies and acceptance in implementing improvements in educational opportunities. Children and young people need to be willing and wanting to engage in education and to be active in identifying the supports they need.

Children and young people who are placed in residential care, usually have experienced significant trauma in their own families and come into the system with very complex needs and challenging behaviours.

The Australian Childhood Foundation, who delivers services as part of the ACT Together consortium, provide essential therapeutic care to those children and young people in residential care. Every child or young person is assigned an Australian Childhood Foundation Therapeutic Specialist, who is involved in each child or young person's individual professional care team to provide psychoeducation, training and advice. It is the responsibility of the Therapeutic Specialist to work alongside residential youth workers, case managers, education and other services to assist them to understand the young person's behaviour, their needs, and how best to meet these needs.

Australian Childhood Foundation provide induction training for all youth workers on trauma informed practice prior to commencing in a residential setting.

The ACT Government recognises these children and young people face many challenges, and with the appropriate supports in place are able to engage and connect with their peers, supports and the community.

The youth workers who support children and young people in residential care generally have a minimum qualification of a Certificate 4 or Diploma in Disability, Youth Work or Community Services.

Prior to commencing in a residential setting, staff are required to undertake induction training which is delivered by ACT Together therapeutic services. This includes training staff in the use of specific trauma informed responses to challenging behaviours such as the PACE model (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity, Empathy) and Foundational Trauma Training.

Staff are also required to undertake shadow shifts with Team Leaders within residential care and are supported by House Leaders and therapeutic specialists through fortnightly clinical review meetings.

In circumstances where a child or young person has multifaceted developmental needs, staff are trained to ensure the quality of care is at the highest standard possible. This training may include supporting a young person with Epilepsy, Foetal Alcohol Syndrome, Alcohol and Drug training and the administration of certain medications when required.

Youth workers in a residential setting are role models and mentors and demonstrate positive attributes which allow children and young people to learn. They provide a safe, therapeutic environment to live, establish routines and promote life skills.

It is important to note support and responses to a child or young person in residential care is not the responsibility of any one person. Care teams are used to share information, seek the views and wishes of those involved, and undertake planning and shared decision making. Care teams brings together professionals, families, and carers to collaboratively work together to develop an individualised plan based on the circumstances of the child or young person, to manage their care and achieve positive outcomes by meeting their needs.

The Future of Education Strategy highlights the ACT Government's focus on ensuring the systems supporting learning, promote equity of opportunity and excellent outcomes for all learners. The Education Directorate is committed to working across all sectors of the ACT Government and community to support students in out-of-home care.

In response to Mrs Kikkert's motion, the Community Services Directorate has contacted Anglicare Victoria to discuss the TEACHaR program being implemented in Victoria and better understand its role in the Victorian system.

The TEACHaR Program provides one on one tutoring and group learning, has four tiers of support available starting at two hours of teaching per week under the Tailored Education Support as part of the program. All teachers are qualified and trained in trauma-informed practice.

The Community Services Directorate has also consulted with the Education Directorate about the TEACHaR Program.

The Education Directorate has extensive and well-embedded programs within our school communities to aid students who are disengaged with learning or who require additional literacy and numeracy supports.

Positive Behaviour for Learning is a framework schools utilise to get everyone – students, staff, families and school community on the same page, to create a safe and supportive learning environment.

Positive Behaviour for Learning is an international evidence-based whole school process. The benefits include, improved social-emotional wellbeing, positive and respectful relationships among students and staff, and reduced inappropriate behaviour, just to name a few.

ACT schools offer individualised learning to ensure a child or young person is receiving the support they need. Tutoring around particular subject is

also offered to support those children and young people who require additional assistance.

Distance Education is an equity program for ACT school aged students whose individual circumstances prevent them from regularly attending school. This program is provided through the Education Directorate's Flexible Education team and the Finigans School of Distance Education.

The Future of Education Strategy is a principle of inclusion which identifies diversity is embraced, all students are accommodated, schools aim to deliver a universal sense of belonging, and children and young people are valued for who they are and what they can contribute.

All ACT public schools can make reasonable adjustments and offer supports for students to make education accessible and engaging.

Where appropriate, the Education Directorate connects students to a multidisciplinary team, developing education and wellbeing plans that may intersect with community agencies to address the needs of students and their families.

All government students and schools have access to the Network Student Engagement Team (NSET). NSET works in a multidisciplinary manner to holistically look at the needs of students and identify barriers to learning and engagement. This may also include support to develop and implement plans and processes from whole school universal strategies, selected small group approaches, and targeted interventions for individual students.

Additionally, ACT public schools have access to the School Psychology Service, which is comprised of School Psychologists, Senior Psychologists, an Early Intervention Team, and an Assessment Team.

On 2 October 2021, the ACT Government announced an early commitment for an additional 25 youth and social workers to be employed in ACT public

schools at a cost of \$7.4m to provide early intervention and support for students and their families. This funding will be integral to support vulnerable children and young people who need a holistic service response.

There are also a range of supports specifically for young people detained in Bimberi Youth Justice Centre. The Education Directorate, in partnership with the Community Services Directorate, provides educational supports and programs through the Murrumbidgee School for children and young people aged 10 to 21 years. Regardless of the time spent in custody, the educational needs of all young people are a priority, and Bimberi draws on the expertise of professionals to support the complex needs of these young people.

The Murrumbidgee School provides high quality, academically rigorous, and trauma informed learning for all students who may be on short or long term remand or have been given a committal.

These programs include a number of nationally recognised qualifications to assist young people to reintegrate into the community on exit from custody.

This includes:

- Year 10 Certificate
- Year 12 Certificate
- Certificate I in Information Technology
- Certificate II in Business and Hospitality
- Certificate II in Horticulture
- Statement of attainment in Bricklaying
- Road Ready Certificates
- The General Construction Induction Card (i.e white card and asbestos).

In addition, Bimberi provides several vocational and life skills programs to assist young people to find positive interests they can continue upon their release. Murrumbidgee School also has a Transitional Officer position, specifically to assist young people in their transition from custody to community to engage in education or employment.

Bimberi will often hold mentoring, team building and/or training programs for young people delivered by influential members of the community, who discuss aspects of their life and what led them to change their life trajectory and fulfil their dreams.

These programs specifically help young people at Bimberi to develop team skills, goal setting, achieve personal bests and take personal responsibility. It teaches life skills through training and mentoring and teaches participants how to apply these lessons in everyday life. These programs reinforce the messages of teamwork, confidence and belonging.

In April 2020, the Inspectorate of Correctional Services commenced a whole of centre review known as ‘the *Healthy Centre Review of Bimberi Youth Justice Centre*’. The final report presented to Government on 22 June 2021 states “*young detainees told us that they enjoy education at Murrumbidgee School at Bimberi*”. This is a positive indicator that young people in custody are engaged in their education. Units of study at Murrumbidgee School includes general education of literacy and mathematics embedded into project-based learning, with art, woodwork, music, cooking, and horticulture adapted to year levels and competencies which can provide pathways to vocational pursuits.

Young people coming into Bimberi, in addition to their offending behaviours, have multiple needs, these include drug and alcohol, health, behaviour, educational and employment needs. There were 21 agencies providing a service within Bimberi during the first half of the 2020-21

financial year. These services contribute to assisting young people to working towards successfully transitioning out of Bimberi and back to community

The Principal Practitioner at Bimberi provides expert advice on the care and case management of young people. They work closely with service providers, including Murrumbidgee School, to support the trauma informed and therapeutic care of young people, and develops, delivers, and assesses the provision of therapeutic and rehabilitative programs offered within Bimberi.

I was delighted to hear during July to December 2020, four (4) young people were able to attain modules contributing to their Year 12 certificate, and nine (9) attaining Year 9 modules whilst in custody. This is a positive result, given the average number of young people detained at Bimberi over the same period was 12.

All staff who work at Bimberi are required to participate in a seven-week comprehensive induction program prior to commencement. The Bimberi induction program includes trauma-informed practice, cultural awareness, emergency operating procedures, responding to critical situations and a human rights e-Learning component.

The induction training and ongoing training provided to Bimberi staff emphasise the important role staff have in being role models, mentors and coaches for the young people they work with. Staff support young people to improve their attitudes towards anti-social behaviours by demonstrating and reinforcing pro-social modelling and mentoring the behaviours expected of young people in the community.

A Behaviour Management Plan is also developed for, and in consultation with, a young person when they display negative and/or challenging behaviours. It provides identified goal setting to support the increase of

positive behaviours. In developing a plan, Bimberi staff will work with other relevant services such as Murrumbidgee School, Forensic Mental Health, Justice Health and other professionals working with the young person. This approach includes the identification of factors which contribute to the young person's negative behaviour.

In recent years, Bimberi has supported a number of staff to complete both tertiary qualifications and external training. Currently thirteen (13) staff are completing their Certificate IV (four) in Youth Work, five (5) staff are completing undergraduate degrees in social work or social welfare and one (1) staff member is completing a diploma in mental health. These qualifications will further support their ability to help young people to identify and move towards positive life outcomes.

I want to reassure the Assembly that education staff who work full-time at Bimberi have continued to attend Murrumbidgee School and deliver educational programs throughout the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency, including during lockdowns. The Programs and Services team continue to attend Bimberi Youth Justice Centre to facilitate programs and services for young people in a way that is consistent with the health advice.

All children and young people in out of home care deserve the best education and care can be provided. We are confident our education system delivers opportunities for children and young people in out of home care and Bimberi to engage and access quality education.

Our Government is always seeking to improve the experiences and outcomes of young people who come into contact with the statutory out of home care and youth justice systems and I thank Ms Kikkert again for raising these issues in her motion.

We know access to education, provided by qualified, well trained educators, give children and young people the best start in life and this will continue to be a focus of this ACT Government.

As this statement outlines, the Community Services Directorate and Education Directorate have considered the TEACHaR program implemented in Victoria, and the Education Directorate has a number of programs and services in place that offer similar services to support vulnerable children and young people of the ACT.

There are significant reforms underway in the out-of-home-care and youth justice spaces, and the educational needs of children and young people will continue to be a focus of our government as part of this holistic work.

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