ACWA Policy Statement on Education for Children and Young People in OOHC

Introduction

Widespread anecdotal evidence and our independent research suggests that far too many children and young people in Out-of-Home Care (OOHC) in NSW don't get the opportunity for regular, consistent schooling that other children get (ACWA Education Snapshot 2017). While we recognise the initiatives already underway for this cohort, more support is needed to achieve positive educational outcomes for children and young people in care.

Facilitating access to education for children and young people who are in OOHC is considered critical for their future health, welfare and wellbeing. Education is an important building block that prepares children and young people to be productive participants in society and children and young people in OOHC are at greater risk of poorer educational outcomes.

ACWA Policy Statement

Achieving the best educational outcomes for children and young people in Out-of-Home Care requires strong leadership, adequate resourcing and continuous monitoring for improvement.

Improving educational outcomes for this small but significantly educationally disadvantaged cohort should be made an explicit objective for the NSW Government and non-government service sector. Accessible, high quality education in this context will require the ongoing commitment and co-operation of all stakeholders involved in the child or young person's care including educators across public and private school systems, Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) and non-government OOHC service providers, foster carers, health professionals and relevant peak bodies, such as ACWA.

Implementation - Call to Action

NSW requires specific objectives to address and promote educational inclusion and achievement of children and young people in OOHC.

Objective 1 – Data, monitoring and funding
The OOHC cohort are recognised as a NSW Department of Education equity group, whose attendance and attainment is tracked.

This would mean:

- Improved data sharing to link FACS identifiers to the Student Registration Number (SRN);
- Reliable aggregate level outcomes data collected and shared with government and non-government agencies; and
- As a distinct equity group with a greater risk of poorer educational outcomes, students in OOHC need to be represented in the school Resource Allocation Model (RAM).

Objective 2 - Inclusion
Principals and school staff are supported at a local level with alternatives to suspension and expulsion.

Approaches used include:
- Restorative practice approach to behaviour management;
- Sharing incident reports and behaviour timelines with the child's support network;
- Use of specialised trauma informed programs in a school setting; and
- Availability of a range of alternative school setting for when inclusion in a mainstream setting has been adequately tried and resourced and educational engagement continues to decline.

Objective 3 – Educational support
Senior educational professionals will be assigned across NSW to build capacity to improve educational outcomes for children and young people in OOHC.

These professionals would:
- Provide professional development to staff and carers in the school setting on trauma and working with children with complex needs;
- Receive basic information on each child's attendance and progress; and
- Evaluate actions taken to improve attendance and work with schools to determine action to take if a child is at risk of chronic non-attendance.

Objective 4 – Educational planning
Every child in OOHC in NSW schools will have a holistic educational plan with input from their designated teacher, health worker, the child, OOHC caseworker and carer by mid 2018, which is monitored and reviewed as part of regular professional meetings with the child's support network.

Objective 5 – Cross-sector collaboration
By the end of 2018 a new protocol will be developed between FACS, OOHC agencies and government and non-government schools to guide interagency coordination and collaboration based on best practice in OOHC educational inclusion.

A robust reporting and monitoring system should be developed to ensure that this new cross-agency protocol is implemented effectively.