

15 December 2017

EEJSC Submission No. 61
Received 15 December 2017

Executive Officer
Economic, Education, Jobs and Skills Committee
Parliament House
Spring Street
East Melbourne, Victoria 3002

Dear Mr Elasmr

The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare (the Centre) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Victorian Parliament's Economic, Education, Jobs and Skills Committee's Inquiry into career advice activities in Victorian Schools.

The Centre is the peak body for child and family services in Victoria. For over 100 years we have advocated for the rights of children and young people to be heard, to be safe, to access education and to remain connected to family, community and culture. We represent over 150 community service organisations and individuals throughout Victoria working across the continuum of child and family services, from prevention and early intervention to the provision of out-of-home care. Many of our member organisations work closely with vulnerable children and young people in schools, including young people in and leaving care.

We also have a significant interest in the outcomes of this inquiry. The Centre manages the Raising Expectations project in collaboration with Federation University Australia and La Trobe University. The project is designed to increase the number of young people transitioning from out of home care and post-care to go onto university or TAFE. The project is aimed at lifting the educational aspirations and achievements of young people in care; improving the knowledge of carers, teachers and other professionals supporting young people in care to pursue educational pathways towards tertiary education; and strengthening services available to young people who have been in care once they have enrolled in university or TAFE.

The project is funded for three years by the Sidney Myer Fund and early findings confirm the importance of well-informed career advisers able to raise and support the educational aspirations of young people in care and other vulnerable youth to undertake further and higher education.

In responding to the terms of reference, we wish to focus on disadvantaged and vulnerable students in foster, residential, kinship and permanent care arrangements.

The number of children in out of home care arrangements has doubled in the last ten years. Currently, over 9,700 young people are in care arrangements.¹ This does not include children and young people without a statutory care order, who are often in the care of their grandparents.

¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2017) Child Family Community Australia Resource Sheet, October 2017, Children in Care – An overview of out-of-home-care statistics in Australia
<https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/children-care>

Studies show that educational aspirations and expectations for young people in care are low with few going onto university.²

Our submission is structured around five of the six terms of reference guiding the work of the Economic, Education, Jobs and Skills Committee.

1. Relationship between career advice activities and workforce participation of young Victorians

The Centre's work with carers, teachers and with leaving/post care professionals in the child and family services sector indicates that careers advisers are not always aware of all the programs, services and supports available to young people leaving school and/or leaving care. A resource sharing portal via the Department of Education and Training website would assist careers advisors to have access to the best available information.

2. Extent to which career advice activities meet the needs of school leavers

There is limited research into whether career advice activities are meeting the needs of school leavers who have been in care. A 2015 study by the CREATE Foundation found that young people wanted greater assistance in planning for their future and their careers and wanted teachers/advisers to allow them to make their own choices.³ Among the recommendations CREATE based on the 2015 study were the following:

- additional programs that address mental health alongside life skills such as self-image, career and life planning, goal setting, healthy relationship and positive mental health, with access occurring directly through schools.
- Increased support for young people who are leaving care to obtain employment in their adolescent years
- Increased availability of jobs which take young people's current mental health into consideration, while also paving the way for a career path
- Programs which connect community minded employers with young people who may have additional barriers to accessing employment
- A more fluid transition for young people into tertiary training programs.⁴

3. Challenges advisers face helping young Victorians transition from education to the workforce

In the case of students in and leaving care, there are multiple challenges for advisers. One study which compared adolescents in out-of-home care with adolescents not in care (matched for age, gender and school achievement) on career-related aspirations (occupational aspirations, educational aspirations, life barriers) and career action behaviours (career exploration, career planning) found that:⁵

² Harvey, A., McNamara, P., Andrewartha, L. & Luckman, M. (2015). 'Out of Care into university: Raising higher education access and achievement of care leavers'. Access and Achievement Unit, La Trobe University.

³ CREATE Foundation (2105) What's important YOUTH? Youth Policy Framework consultation for the Office for Youth, North Melbourne.

⁴ CREATE Foundation.

⁵ Creed, P., Tilbury, C., Buys, N., & Crawford, M. (2011). The career aspirations and action behaviours of Australian adolescents in out-of-home-care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 33(9), 1720–1729.

The out-of-home care adolescents reported lower occupational aspirations, less career planning, more career barriers, lower educational aspirations for themselves, lower parental aspirations, and more school engagement. Further, career exploration was lower for out-of-home care children who had higher aspirations, lower self-efficacy, parents who communicated higher aspirations, and low aspiring friends.⁶

These findings highlight the need for advisers to build on the existing strengths and capabilities of students in or leaving care and to encourage high aspirations, including the possibility of going to university either through a TAFE pathway or directly.

4. *Considering strategies to improve the effectiveness of career advice activities for school leavers*

Trauma-informed practice

One key strategy to improve the effectiveness of career advice activities for care leavers is to make sure careers advisers are fully informed about the impact of trauma on a young person's development. Research shows trauma undermines children's ability to learn, form relationships, and function appropriately in the classroom.⁷ It can lead to:

- Delays in all domains of development
- Higher drop-out rates
- Lower academic achievement (reduced ability to organize, problem-solve and process information)
- Higher suspension and expulsion rates
- Higher rates of referral for special education
- Emotional responses or symptoms of trauma can negatively impact concentration and memory.⁸

Given these and other impacts of trauma on student engagement, self-confidence, educational aspirations and outcomes, it is important for careers advisers to be able to tailor career support and information to the needs of students in out of home care.

Careers advisers need also to be aware that students in out of home care are required to leave formal care at the age of 18 years, regardless of whether they have accommodation, education, training, employment or the ability to meet the cost of living. This accelerated transition to independence and associated uncertainty around secure housing, financial and other supports 'have obvious ramifications for the ability of care leavers to continue with education and enhance their prospects'.⁹ Career activities need to consider that not all students are in stable, safe environments where basic needs are being met, and educational aspirations are encouraged and normalised.

⁶ Creed, et al, p.

⁷ Krasnoff, B. (n.d.) A practitioner's guide to educating traumatized children, Education Northwest.

⁸ NASP School Safety and Crisis Response Committee (2105) 'Supporting students experiencing childhood trauma: Tips for parents and educators'. Bethesda, MD, National Association of School Psychologists

⁹ Mendes, P. Mitchell, D, & Wilson, J. (2014) Young people transitioning from out-of-home care and access to higher education: A critical review of the literature, *Children Australia*, Vol 39, Special Issue 04, pp 243 - 252
DOI: 10.1017/cha.2014.25,

Advisers need to encourage students in care to see education as life-long and in different forms (e.g. higher education, on-the-job training, employment, study, mentoring) and to explore ways of supporting young people in and leaving care to make informed decisions.

More accessible information for carers and students in care

The Centre's consultations with foster and kinship carers highlights the need for better promotion of current and relevant information to support decision making by young people in care and their families about post school options and supports when students leave school.

Developing a single centralised state-wide package of current and relevant online resources – including links which can be accessed by career advisors and students – would enable careers advisors to identify local business, training and study options and opportunities. Such a resource could be structured by geographic area and include:

- Programs and information offered through the Department of Education and Training (DET) such as Reconnect and Springboard (for young people who have lived in residential care homes) offered through Department of Health and Human Services, other training and education providers such as Victoria Skills Gateway, and Local Learning and Employment Networks
- Links to key websites for employment, training and study, scholarships/bursaries, other financial supports (government), accommodation, and mental health and wellbeing services
- An interactive portal to promote local employment, training and education events
- More outreach programs and partnership programs with TAFEs and universities such as the School Partnership Program at La Trobe University
- Stronger relationships with key employers and small business, particularly in regional and rural Victoria about job and potential career opportunities
- Improved information sharing within and among schools so good experiences and relationships between school and industry can be built on and are not lost when staff leave
- Increased higher education opportunities for students and their families who are struggling financially by providing scholarships and bursaries to support completion of study.

Feedback from past students living in out of home care suggests:

- starting conversations about possible career pathways and post school options earlier in secondary school – Year 8 – to enable students and their families to be better informed and have more time to consider and discuss options. This particularly applies to students who might be thinking of leaving school early.
- using the work experience program more effectively to make sure all students are supported to undertake work experience; increase the potential for work transition options post school. Careers advisers could provide more follow up after work experience to see what worked and what needs to be improved.

- encouraging carers and parents to develop networks to help children navigate work experience and prepare for options after school, including further and higher education. Unlike their peers living at home, young people in care are unlikely to have the same access to parental networks to source quality work placements and to talk about post school options.

5. *Career advice needs of young people in regional Victoria and ways to address these needs*

There is limited transport availability in rural areas, particularly for young people living in care who might not have the same private transport options that a young person living at home might have. Transport was seen as ‘a huge barrier to accessing services, education and work’.¹⁰

The Centre recognises the importance of the career advisor function and the need to make sure activities support, inform and, as far as possible, assist in preparing students and their families when students leave school. However, it is important that the specific needs of students with a care background and/or experiencing disadvantage are understood and considered, particularly students on a statutory order who are required to exit formal care at 18 years. For most students this coincides with Year 12.

At a minimum, schools need to have a coordinated response with the designated teacher and other support staff as appropriate, to work with the student to identify post school employment and education options. However, it is not clear how schools are held accountable for making sure all students and families access careers advisor services or whether the school evaluates its services to know whether it is meeting the needs of students and their families, what works well, and what needs to improve.

The Raising Expectations project has highlighted the need for children and young people in care, and those adults who support them at school and at home, to be given the best available information in timely and accessible ways to enable informed careers choices to be made. It has also shown the importance of raising our expectations in regards to what young people in care can achieve in education with the appropriate supports. We look forward to the outcomes of your inquiry.

Please contact Joanna Humphries on [REDACTED] if you would like to know more.

Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]

Deb Tsorbaris
Chief Executive Officer

¹⁰ CREATE Foundation.