



Media Release

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Children in care struggling at school and in need of coordinated response

Children in out-of-home care are changing schools often, repeating grades, dropping out early and suffering higher rates of mental and physical health conditions which limit their participation at school a new report from Anglicare Victoria and Wesley Mission Victoria has found.

The report, *Care-system Impacts on Academic Outcomes*, is being launched today by Child Safety Commissioner Mr Bernie Geary OAM and is one of the most detailed studies into education outcomes for children in care undertaken in Australia.

The study included surveys with 199 carers and 21 teachers as well as six detailed case studies of young people and those who support them.

The findings show that children in care can be categorised into three groups in terms of their education – 'damaged', 'disengaging' and 'doing well'.

On average, children categorised as damaged were about 12 years old and had been in care for more than seven years. Almost nine in 10 had a long-term health condition, more than half had learning difficulties, a third had repeated a grade and one quarter had been suspended from school.

Anglicare Victoria CEO Dr Ray Cleary said the report made it clear 'damaged' children needed significant support to get them back on track.

"Children in the 'damaged' group have often suffered significant trauma and require therapeutic care, flexible learning options and better connections between schools, carers and mental health professionals to keep them in education and provide a brighter future," said Dr Cleary.

Mr Poul Bottern, CEO of Wesley Mission Victoria, said both Wesley and Anglicare Victoria were committed to improving outcomes for children and young people in care.

"All children deserve the opportunities that education provides. The report highlights that children in out-of-home care often need targeted, intensive support to meet their particular needs. As a community we need to take responsibility for and invest in the future of these valuable children." said Mr Bottern.

Anglicare Victoria and Wesley Mission Victoria are calling on the Brumby Government to develop a fully resourced 'education first approach' to prioritise education needs and meet the aspirations of children in care. Other recommendations include the expansion of therapeutic care placements, increased alternative education programs and improved integration across the out-of-home care, education and mental health systems to support children and young people in care.

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