

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL ISSUES

Inquiry into transition support for students with additional or complex needs and their families

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS FOR WITNESSES

Dr Michelle Townsend, Researcher, Centre for Children and Young People, Southern Cross University

1. Approximately how many children and young people in out-of-home care are there in NSW schools?

Community Services data indicate that there were 17,896 children and young people in out-of-home care in NSW as at 30th June 2011. Of that group, approximately **13,851** are compulsory school aged. I cannot provide an exact figure as some 5 years of age may or may not, have commenced school. (Source: Community Services Quarterly Data June 2010-June 2011, http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/docswr/assets/main/documents/docs_data/quarterly_jun10_jun11.pdf)

Community Services data also estimated that, by June 2009, **2 per cent of NSW children aged under 18 years had ever lived in out-of-home care**. (Source: Community Services Report Estimate of NSW children involved in the child welfare system, http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/docswr/assets/main/documents/research_estimate_child_welfare.pdf)

2. What sort of transition planning and support was offered to students in your study for their transition to high school? Did the students feel that this was adequate?

The children in my study had a range of orientation experiences and most identified attending an orientation program in Year 6. Some children only went once to the high school to meet the teachers and to have a tour of the school, while other children went to the high school on a number of occasions to help prepare them for high school life. The children who experienced a more thorough orientation were less likely to feel anxious before making this transition. Overall, the children in this study identified their peers as their key support during the transition to high school.

Children with a disability or behavioural issues were more likely to have a transition plan, however, none of the children who participated in the study discussed having a plan in their interviews. Over half of the children in the study (54%), did not feel that they participated in the decision of what high school they would attend, but almost all would have liked to participate in this decision.

What did emerge is that the first few weeks is particularly an important time to be supporting children in this transition. The children who were not successfully making this transition in the initial

period of high school were less engaged in their schooling and this disengagement appeared to continue through Year 7.

In summary, involving and supporting children with a comprehensive transition plan and orientation before commencing at high school, intensive and supportive orientation in the first few months of high school and supporting children to make this transition with friends were the key factors identified in my study that support the transition to high school of children in care.

3. Who is responsible for finding out about the transition support services that are available to children and young people in care?

As far as I am aware, no one professional or organisation has responsibility for this. The recently introduced out-of-home care coordinators in every Department of Education regional office would be aware of what transition supports are available for children in out-of-home care. But it is unlikely that this small team of professionals across the state would be able to address the transitional needs of the approximately 1500 children in care who transition to high school each year. Implementing a policy of having a designated teacher in each school that has children in out-of-home care enrolled would support the development and implementation of a transition plan with all stakeholders and ensure transitional supports are in place to support children's successful transition to high school.