

The Commission for Children and Young People's Youth Council is a group of young people aged 15-24. We write this as a collective of young people, who are members of the Commission's Youth Council. We come from diverse backgrounds, and many of us have lived in out-of-home care and experienced the effects of this on our educational engagement. While the Commission has already provided a submission to this inquiry, we want to build on this and the *Let us learn* report with our own experiences and perspectives. The Commission's work is very much informed by the voices of children and young people and we strongly encourage the Committee to do the same.

Our involvement in this inquiry began during the planning and engagement phases and continued through to the end, assisting to conduct consultations and develop findings and recommendations with the Principal Commissioner and the Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People.

In this submission, three of the Youth Council Members detail why the *Let us learn* inquiry is important to them and to encourage the Committee to consider the report in detail. We believe the findings and recommendations of our report directly relate to each of your inquiry's terms of reference.

Nikita

Maslow's hierarchy explains that humans have a ladder of needs and we must fulfil our physiological needs, before moving forward to self-actualisation. I understand that many of you are already familiar with this theory but I thought it important to reiterate, due to the lack of safety, security and love that I received during my formative years.

When I entered foster care in grade 4, I had spent the first term sleeping rough and disengaged from school. This placed me at a disproportionate disadvantage in my schooling. I was severely bullied at school while also experiencing multiple placements in foster care and periods at home. I also attended a new school every year.

In year 7, I was placed in foster care again. I couldn't focus in the classroom due to all of the issues I was facing outside of it, and I would often be dealt consequences for my tendencies to distract others. However, I did eventually find myself feeling safe and supported at school when I didn't feel that anywhere else.

In year 9, I was in foster care again. After engaging with the wellbeing services, my principal asked to participate in my care team meetings to ensure that my education was made a priority, due to the fact that it was my biggest protective factor at the time.

I graduated year 12, went to TAFE and now I'm in the middle of applying to university. I would not be where I am today, if it wasn't for the people who held onto hope for me, when I felt hopeless. I'm so grateful

for the teachers who would ask if I had eaten, how things were at home, if I needed extra time or help with homework or just to let me know they believed in me.

Growth needs to continue to be felt. Therefore, we need to support and celebrate the achievements of young people, no matter how small.

I look forward to the conversations and ideas that this inquiry brings about, including positive improvements to the education and out-of-home care systems to ensure young people do not experience the same obstacles that so many young people in care universally experience at school.

Amelia

My name is Amelia, I am currently in my fourth year of a Bachelor of Laws/Bachelor of Global Studies and have been on the Youth Council at the Commission since 2020.

School was always my safe and happy place, the one thing I could control. I loved being in the classroom learning new things and playing with my friends. When I went into kinship care two weeks before starting Year 11 at a new school, my whole world flipped upside down. Schoolwork became an escape and a coping mechanism, a way to avoid stressing about what was happening at home. School still remained one of my happy places although I didn't know how to tell people what was happening at home and at times this made it really difficult to make new friends. The wellbeing team were incredible and provided me with a safe place to vent and problem solve.

Throughout this inquiry it became clear that I was very lucky to have been supported at school before, during and after my time in care. We found that many children and young people in care disengage from their education for a number of reasons but one that really stands out to me is the lack of adequate and individualised support.

We know, like for me, school is one of the only safe and or happy places that children and young people have. We need to protect that, not strip it away from them. Disengagement from education is not caused by only one thing, there are so many multi-layered barriers that we face as students in care. Many of these barriers are invisible and others don't know they exist. In most cases, if not all, children and young people in these situations don't choose to disengage but rather it's something that happens to them as a result of systemic issues in the education and child protection systems.

We don't get to choose the family we're born into or the situation we grow up in and that shouldn't prevent us from being able to have a positive experience at school and dream of a brighter future. We know it takes

a community to raise a child and we as a community need to start doing better for children and young people in care.

Ravin

My name is Ravin, and I'm a student who just completed Year 12. Whilst I've never been through the out-of-home care system myself, in reviewing the Commission's inquiry, I've gained a deep appreciation for the immense difficulties, many of them systemic challenges, which my peers have faced as they tried to complete the same certificate as myself.

The fact that my peers in care are five times more likely to be suspended and expelled compared to the general student population stood out as a great disparity to me. Moreover, the consistent practice of informal suspensions and soft expulsions outlined in our systemic inquiry was also prevalent throughout our consultations and is particularly problematic as it is not formally recorded despite its commonality. Students in care are also seven times more likely to be restrained or secluded in education settings compared to the general student population. Shockingly, preppies in care were twelve times more likely to be suspended than other students in prep, demonstrating a markedly weaker foundation for the educational prospects for students in care.

Importantly, I urge the Committee to consider the cumulative effect of multiple suspensions for students in care, with over a third of Year 7 students and almost 40% of Year 8 students in care being suspended in 2022. This is indicative of an education system not equipped to support students with complex needs or difficult behaviors. It also hinders what should be the supportive nature of the school environment for students in care and instead subjects them to a cycle of exclusion, disrupting their learning and engagement in school.

I hope that this parliamentary inquiry can likewise connect to my peers on the Youth Council. Their lived experience reveals the changes which must be made to significantly benefit children in care and importantly to level the educational playing field and improve the schooling experience for all children.

Some quotes from the *Let us learn* report that we want to highlight:

When I asked for help with schoolwork, the teacher said: 'no it's your project, you should be able to do it, typical resi kid. If you were any smarter, you wouldn't be in resi and you'd be able to do it.' (Avery, 14, Residential care)

One example is a 10-year-old being suspended on numerous occasions and the school not having any capacity or space for them to do internal suspensions rather than being at resi care all day. This is with knowing that the child's trigger is feeling excluded from peers and community. (Health and Education Coordinator)

Schools shouldn't be a place Child Protection remove kids from their families. Called into a little room at school and saying you're not going home tonight. So many kids won't go to school because they know if they go that's the place they're getting bad information. It happens a lot. (LOOKOUT Learning Adviser)

We hope that in reading this submission and the *Let us learn* inquiry, you can appreciate the immense importance of lived experience and the voices of young people in our work and incorporate them similarly into your parliamentary inquiry. We also welcome the opportunity to participate in a public hearing.

Thank you for your time.