

GRADUATE WOMEN VICTORIA

Serving and empowering women through education and advocacy



20 February 2017

The Hon James Merlino MP
Minister for Education
Level 3, 1 Treasury Place
East Melbourne, VIC 3002

Dear Mr Merlino:

Re Educational Outcomes for Children and Young People in Out of Home Care

Graduate Women Victoria (GWV) is a non-government organisation of women graduates whose mission is to further the provision of affordable quality lifelong education not only to girls and women but to all members of society.

We would like to draw to your attention the following motion passed by its 2016 Annual General Meeting in relation to educational outcomes for children and young people in out of home care:

That this meeting of GWV urge the Victorian Government to provide adequate funding and to implement fully measures that will improve educational outcomes for minors in out-of-home care by:

- *Regular monitoring of their attendance at primary and secondary school, with provision of remedies for any deficiencies in attendance;*
- *Exploring alternative educational arrangements for young people whose needs are not being adequately met by the school system and providing funding to agencies with expertise in this area to provide these alternatives.*
- *Ensuring that those approaching the age of leaving care have been provided with life skills to enable them to live independently in matters of seeking employment, finding housing and managing finances;*
- *Providing immediate access to special support services to care leavers for at least 12 months after the date they cease to be in out-of-home care, while considering the economic, social and personal benefits of extending the Out-Of-Home-Care program from 18 to 21 years.*

We know that the Victorian Government is aware of this as a matter needing attention, as evidenced in the August 2015 Report of the 2014 Commonwealth Government Inquiry into out of home care. The opening paragraphs of the section of Chapter 4 dealing with Education Outcomes read:

4.57 The available evidence indicates that education outcomes for young people in care are generally worse than for the general population across jurisdictions. The Commission for Children and Young People Victoria noted in its submission, based on data from the Victorian Child and Adolescent Monitoring System, 'children in out of home

GRADUATE WOMEN VICTORIA

ABN: 65 475 228 451 Registered Incorporated Association: A0030910N

www.gradwomenvic.org.au

care generally have lower levels of educational achievement than the general student population'.[\[72\]](#)

4.58 While the committee notes that the integration of NAPLAN data with the CP NMDS will assist to improve the available data on outcomes for school aged children, the currently available data on these outcomes is limited. Anglicare Victoria's 2014 Children in Care Report Card found children in care are much less likely to attend preschool compared to their peers (18.8 per cent compared with 2.1 per cent), and more likely to experience bullying (35.0 per cent compared with 23.5 per cent).[\[73\]](#) The CREATE 2013 Report Card also highlighted a number of negative education outcomes for school aged children, particularly 'disrupted schooling due to changing primary schools, with those in residential care reporting more changes'.[\[74\]](#)

The Victorian Commission for Children and Young People also emphasised the need for better outcomes for children in care in its submission to the Education State Consultations. Its 2015-16 Report, however, suggests that primary attention has understandably turned more to the problems highlighted by the Betrayal of Trust Inquiry: the physical safety of those in care and the need to ensure their freedom from sexual abuse and exploitation.

We appreciate the complex demands involved in meeting the needs of this particularly vulnerable group, but we believe that meeting their educational needs must remain a high priority. In this respect we would like to stress the extent to which the second dot point of our Resolution – *Exploring alternative educational arrangements for young people whose needs are not being adequately met by the school system* – relates to the special needs of the growing number of Indigenous children in care.

We would very much appreciate a response from you to the cited Resolution and an indication of any recent progress made in improving educational provision for those in out of home care,

Yours sincerely,

Kerry Ferguson (President, Graduate Women Victoria)