

Learning Without Barriers
Education Strategy
2023-2025

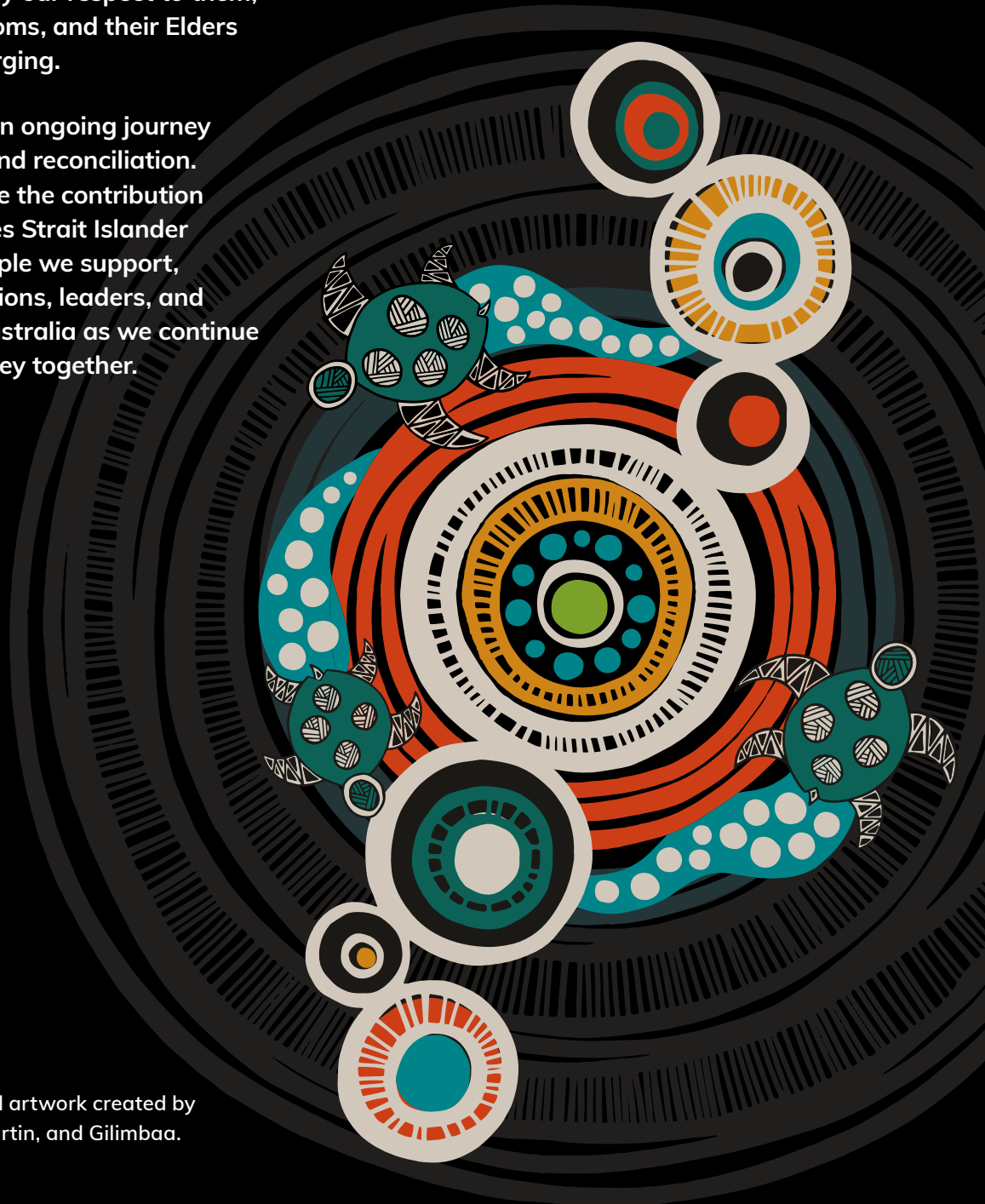


LIFE WITHOUT BARRIERS

Acknowledgement of Country

Life Without Barriers acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of this Country and their connection to land, water, and community. We pay our respect to them, their cultures and customs, and their Elders past, present and emerging.

We are committed to an ongoing journey towards truth-telling and reconciliation. We recognise and value the contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees, carers, people we support, peak bodies, organisations, leaders, and communities across Australia as we continue our reconciliation journey together.



'Empowered Voices' cultural artwork created by Keisha Leon, Lisa Sorbie Martin, and Gilimbaa.

Contributors

The development of a Learning Without Barriers Strategy was a process of consultation to deepen our understanding of emerging challenges and opportunities for children and young people in out-of-home care.

We wish to acknowledge and thank the following contributors:

- Local and international education, child protection and First Nations academics, namely Professor Kitty te Riele, Professor Emeritus Clare Tilbury, Dr John Davis, and Dr Iain Matheson
- State-based education department experts
- Peak child protection organisations
- First Nations peak bodies and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations
- State-based Children's Commissioners
- National Foster Care Ambassador group
- Life Without Barriers Child Youth and Family staff and leaders

Together we seek to support children and young people in our care with pathways out of disadvantage so they may succeed in their education and learning and enjoy a future filled with opportunity.

Message from our Chief Executive and Board



Children and young people in the child protection system deserve our support and innumerable opportunities to experience the benefits of education.

Too often, children and young people in care experience barriers and disruptions to their learning that can impact them throughout their life and prevent them from forging pathways out of disadvantage.

Our Education strategy 'Learning Without Barriers' is designed to wrap support around children and young people to remove the challenges they often experience in learning and to harness their unique potential through education.

In partnership with the care sector, foster and kinship carers, our people, government and the sector, our education strategy focusses on key areas including establishing and sustaining engagement in structured learning and to advance employment opportunities in the future.

Together we can enable positive futures for children and young people in the care system and eradicate the many barriers they experience in education and future employment.

Claire Robbs
Chief Executive
Life Without Barriers



I saw firsthand while NSW's first Children's Commissioner, that a positive learning environment and regularly attending early childcare and school can provide the much-needed stability to children and young people in out-of-home care.

Being removed from family and friends and the disruptions that can occur between placements in child protection can significantly impact a person's life including their long term social and employment opportunities. Education is one of the keys to unlocking entrenched disadvantages often faced in out-of-home care.

I am very supportive of Life Without Barriers active role in advocating for greater access to education and learning for children and young people in out-of-home care through the Learning Without Barriers Education Strategy.

I am encouraged to see the creation of Learning Without Barriers and its first strategy's strong focus on supporting families and partnering with the sector to improve access to inclusive learning environments for children and young people in out-of-home care.

Gillian Calvert AO
Deputy Chair
Life Without Barriers

Our Strategy to Create Learning Without Barriers

Our vision is that children and young people are supported to build brighter futures through education: *‘Every Day, Every Way’*.

Over the past few decades, Life Without Barriers has seen firsthand the challenges children and young people in care can experience in relation to their education.

The trauma of being removed from family and the transition into out-of-home care can have a substantial impact on a child and young person’s ability to focus and engage in a structured learning environment. There is a strong correlation between education and the trajectory for future health and wellbeing, and meaningful employment outcomes for children and young people. What we know:

- Children in child protection have double the absence per term and four times the rate of suspensions than other children¹.
- Studies show that children in care are at greater risk of poor educational outcomes than other children. In 2018, only 57% of young care leavers (aged 18-25) surveyed in Australia had completed Year 12².

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are over-represented in out-of-home care and, thus, are more likely to have poorer education outcomes³
- There is a higher prevalence of children and young people with a disability in out-of-home care (at 18%⁴) than in general (at 3.7% to 10.8% depending on age⁵). Many children with a disability, particularly those in out-of-home care, do not get the benefits of full participation in schooling.

As a major provider of out-of-home care services, Life Without Barriers recognises that we play an important role – not only in being responsible for children and young people having the best start in life, but also in supporting them to reach their learning goals and full potential.

¹ L Graham et al, 'Inquiry into Suspension, Exclusion and Expulsion Processes in South Australian government schools: Final Report' 2020
² Dr J McDowall 'Transitioning to Adulthood from Out-of-Home Care: Independence or Interdependence' 2020
³ SNAICC – National Voice of Our Children 'The Family Matters Report 2022'
⁴ Australian Institute for Health and Welfare Child Protection Collection 2020-21
⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2019. Microdata: Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia, 2018. ABS cat. No. 4430.0.30.002

We heard from children and young people in our care to understand what matters most to them.

They told us they want:

The following are the quotes presented in the circles:

- “ To have a good education experience where my school works closely with my carer to support me. ”
- “ To feel proud and strong in my own culture. ”
- “ To be able to develop life skills and grow up to become the best person I can. ”
- “ To have fun and do activities that I enjoy. ”
- “ To be provided with the best possible education and training. ”
- “ To keep in contact with my family, friends and people and places that matter to me. ”
- “ Help in preparing myself to leave care and support after I leave care. ”

Through our **Strategy 2025**, Life Without Barriers set broad aspirations to improve the education and learning outcomes for children and young people in our care. The children and young people we support face barriers and challenges created by our society, policies, and systems and we believe real and lasting change requires trusted partnerships, collaboration and a belief that kids in care deserve more.

This strategy for Learning Without Barriers has been developed to focus on four key areas:

1. Lifelong Learners

Engaging and inspiring children and young people in education and learning that ignites learning for life

2. Confident Caregivers

Supporting staff and carers to be a driving force in setting children and young people up for education and learning success

3. Purposeful Partnerships

Partnering with government, educators, and the care sector to accelerate education opportunities for children and young people in care

4. Responsive Organisation

Adapting our services to best meet the changing needs of children in the child protection system

Page 10 summarises this strategy.



Our Strategy

Our Vision for Education of Children in Care

That children and young people are supported to build brighter futures through education: *‘Every Day, Every Way’*

Our Commitment

Education is a pathway from disadvantage. Life Without Barriers will support children and young people in our care to reach their potential through access to individualised learning pathways that are right for them.

We will create the supports that each child and young person in care needs to succeed in their education and learning and enjoy a future filled with opportunity.

Education and Learning Aspirations for Children and Young People in Our Care

Pre-school

- Children and families are supported in the first 1000 days of their learning and development
- All 3-5 years olds are enrolled in early childhood education and care for at least 2 consecutive days per week
- Children are supported through a school readiness assessment

School Age

- Children and young people have an individual education and learning plan
- Every child is enrolled in school
- Every child achieves 80% attendance at school

Transition from School

- Young people are enrolled in school, pre-employment activities, further education or in employment

Focus Areas

Lifelong Learners

Children and young people are engaged and inspired to participate in education and learning that ignites learning for life

Confident Caregivers

Staff and carers are a driving force in setting children and young people up for education and learning success

Purposeful Partnerships

Our positive relationships with government, educators and the care sector help us to accelerate education opportunities for children and young people in care

Responsive Organisation

Adapting our services to best meet the changing needs of children in the child protection system

Case Study | Joe's Experience

Joe's experience reflects the challenges many children and young people in out-of-home care (OOHC) face in accessing quality learning.

Joe* is 12 years old, identifies as Aboriginal and is in his first year of high school. He has a kind and exuberant nature and is well liked. He has a great sense of humour and when he is in a supportive environment, he thrives.

Joe has been in out-of-home care with Life Without Barriers for 3 years and has a significant trauma history. This means he can sometimes exhibit behaviour which people find challenging to deal with and manage.

Joe has a range of diagnoses in addition to difficulty with speech. School has been challenging for Joe and he was attending a small primary school that made many adjustments to support Joe's learning and engagement at school which had variable success.

Joe transitioned to high school and within the first week he was in trouble for vaping. In the second week he was involved in a serious altercation with another student and, despite Life Without Barriers staff advocating for him, he was expelled from school.

Joe's diagnoses should have afforded him greater protection under the Australian Disability Standards for Education 2005, however at the time, the school was unable to support Joe and understand his trauma background. The school saw violent and anti-social behaviour, they did not understand what contributed to this for Joe and how to work with him and his care team to keep Joe engaged in school.

The parent and student community didn't understand Joe's behaviour, they only saw him as 'naughty' and 'aggressive'. Joe's expulsion is an example of some of the education policies and challenges that can impact a young person like Joe and which can prevent his right to be supported through a trauma informed approach at school.

How could this be different for Joe?

When child protection and education systems work together with carers and case managers, we have a much better chance of supporting a child in care to remain engaged in education.

This requires co-created education plans that engage the voice of the young person and are supported by the school and the teaching body to respond to trauma behaviours and to see the underlying factors driving the young person to behave the way they do.

For Joe, the disciplined response to behaviour was the only response offered and, in this case, led to expulsion, placement breakdown and more change in his life. It is essential that all those who support the education of children and young people in OOHC recognise that "all behaviour is communication" and craft empathic responses for young people that enhance positive life futures, build attachment, and are based in trauma-informed practice.

*Name changed



Contact



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To speak with Life Without Barriers about our Learning Without Barriers education Strategy, contact:

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Alternatively, email learningwithoutbarriers@lwb.org.au



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