

lwb.org.au

**Submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry on
Early Childhood Education and Care
Prepared by: Learning Without Barriers for Life Without Barriers
May 2023**

At Life Without Barriers, we believe what unites us are the rights we have and should all enjoy as human beings. Yet the opportunity to live freely, without significant barriers, is not afforded to all Australians. This drives us, a collective of diverse and passionate people to partner through relationships and change lives for the better.

This is demonstrated by our impact for the people we support and the communities we serve. It is our reason for being. Our goals are to **provide great services, influence systemic barriers, and impacting future generations.**

As a major provider of out of home care for children and young people in Australia, Life Without Barriers recognise that we play an important role – not only are we responsible for ensuring children and young people have the best start in life, but also to support them reach their educational/learning goals and full potential.

We provide our foster, kinship carers and our workforce with the materials and resources that they need to support learning at the key developmental stages in ways that work for them.

Key Points:

ACCESS & INCLUSION

The importance of equitable access to early learning for children in Out of Home Care (OOHC) cannot be overstated. Children in OOHC are some of the most vulnerable in this nation and require priority access to structured early learning for at least two days per week. Further, research tells us that attendance for consecutive days of early learning provides a range of social, developmental, and cognitive benefits.

Our experience has shown us that this cohort of children is diverse and neurodivergent. Complex developmental trauma, disabilities (diagnosed and non-diagnosed) attachment complexity, cultural connection, learning, and developmental delays all feature as significant challenges for early learning pathways and providers. Ensuring this cohort has access, attends, and is monitored regarding their developmental milestones features as key support for these children in the care of the State.

We would recommend that all children in OOHC experience a developmental screening assessment while engaged in early learning and as they progress to school a school readiness assessment that forms the suite of transition supports to the next stage of education and learning.



In our experience, some children are not fully supported to remain connected to early learning; being subjected to suspensions, time limitations, and exclusions. While we acknowledge complex developmental trauma can manifest in escalated behaviour for some children, it is essential that children in care are not subjected to these non-attendance measures to manage behaviour. Rather providers implement trauma-aware programs that recognise “all behaviour is communication” and work with caregivers, families, and staff to ensure children in care enjoy the same learning experience as their peers. We recommend adherence to the Disability standards of Education for all children in OOHC in early learning.

AFFORDABILITY & SUPPLY

As a vulnerable cohort, children in OOHC must be a priority group for financial assistance and priority access to early learning opportunities and other supports that will support their full participation in early learning programs alongside their peers.

Supply issues impact regional and remote areas of our nation, again priority access for children in OOHC must be available in these communities where supply is limited.

Contact:

Mr. Dale Murray
Director – Education
Learning Without Barriers