Transcript – LOOKOUT Video Long Version

00:03

School was really difficult for me. I felt really disconnected from a lot of the kids. I guess because of my circumstances at the time, I felt a bit different, I felt like I didn’t belong.

00:17

My experience at school was quite great from year seven to eleven. But once I hit year twelve, I had a lot of family issues. In that process, I was actually kicked out of home and become homeless.

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I didn’t feel safe at school because I was always being judged. And all my teachers were always saying ‘you know how to behave’, ‘you know how to act’. That’s all well and good but when you’ve got so much going through your head and so much spinning around, you just can’t hold it all in. You’re just trying to catch stuff and it keeps on falling through.

01:18

LOOKOUT is part of the Education Department that supports children in out-of-home care. They describe themselves as the ‘pushy parent’, and I think that’s a great analogy because they’re there making sure we’re doing the right things by the kids, that DHHS are doing the right thing by the kids, that everyone’s got the kids best interest at heart.

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We know that a lot of kids in out-of-home care don’t attend schools. So LOOKOUT are really an important part of making sure that children and young people are engaged in an educational setting.

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LOOKOUT makes a difference because it’s got such a heart and it really does advocate and push for the rights of these young people. Particularly in the academic arena, and I think that is really exciting because they deserve it.

01:59

The Partnering Agreement is an agreement to work together to meet the needs of our young people in out-of-home care.

02:04

It clearly sets out what my responsibly is as the Principal, the Designated Teacher’s role and responsibility, and DHHS’ and the carer’s role as well. So it gives us really clear guidelines on what we can expect.

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And the exciting thing for us is that we all sit around a table, we all sit around the table together, we all strategise around that individual child. We put them at the centre and hopefully, their every need is being meet as a result of all the partners that are there.

02:34

The Out-of-home Care Education Commitment, or Partnering Agreement, aims to ensure that every Victorian child and young person in out-of-home care is supported to participate in school and to achieve their full potential academically, socially, emotionally and culturally.

Schools play a crucial role in creating a safe and engaging learning environment for students in out-of-home care.

Each student has a Learning Mentor who helps them stay connected to school. And Designated Teachers provide support and advocate within schools to ensure that students engage with education and meet their learning goals.

LOOKOUT Education Support Centres work with schools to build their capacity to improve the educational outcomes for children and young people living in out-of-home care. LOOKOUT Centres also work with a range of other professionals, including Student Support Services and Koorie Engagement Support Officers.

The overall care of a children or young person in out-of-home care is the responsibility of the carer, care manager and the case manager. The care manager is responsible for the child or young person’s day-to-day care. The case manager oversees the child or young person’s statutory case plan. They also ensure that all Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care have a cultural plan.

Under the Partnering Agreement, each student in out-of-home care is provided with individualised support for their education. A Student Support Group brings together the student, teachers, care managers, case managers, carers and support services and meets regularly to plan and support the student’s education and wellbeing.

An Educational Needs Analysis helps inform an Individual Education Plan by understanding a student’s social, emotional and cultural learning needs as well as their strengths.

By all working together, we can ensure that children and young people in out-of-home care have high expectations for their learning and are supported to achieve their full learning potential.

04:53

As a teacher, when we think about strategies for supporting young people in out-of-home care in school, the first thing I talk to my staff about is the relationship. Before anything else, you need to be able to build that relationship with the young people we work with. Trust is really important and feeling safe is really important.

05:09

I think a lot of it is about the relationship you build with the carer. And of course, the relationship you build with all the other agencies that are involved with the Partnering Agreement.

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One of the strategies that we make sure we use is really fostering that friendship with their peers. So when we group them for the following year, we make sure we’ve got them with someone they’ve really connected with.

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A huge amount of work goes into emotional regulation. And often that involves calm spaces for these children and developing in them strategies where they know what zone they are in in terms of what they are feeling.

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For children in out-of-home care, it is particularly important that we set high expectations for them because the more they succeed the more their efficacy builds, which means if they have succeeded today, if they have achieved this goal today, they want to come back and achieve tomorrow.

06:02

When we talk about goals and aspirations with our young people, I think that with a lot of young people there is a lot of hesitation and self-doubt and all of those natural feelings. With our young people, we have those conversations fairly regularly so it becomes common language. It is important that they understand that we value them and that we believe in them and that we are proud of them.

06:23

The three-way interview we would have at the end of the term when they come with their carer and their teacher, they lead the interview, they talk about their learning, they can articulate their next goals and they can talk about how they have achieved the goal that they are at. That’s what we call high expectations.

06:41

Often with Student Support Group meetings, making sure our kids have a voice at that table is really important. So often the student will be involved in those meetings.

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It is so important for children and young people in out-of-home care to be given a voice. I never felt listened to. When I was in care, I never felt like what I said was important.

07:00

I think to feel heard means so much to them. It means that they have got someone who cares about them that is willing to listen, that is willing to dig deep and to really understand them.

07:16

Teachers can make a difference in the lives of young people in out-of-home care.

07:19

At first this teacher intervened with me coming into school dirty. He came up and slowly asked me questions, if I was OK. He began to slowly build this rapport where I could trust him enough to say ‘hey, this is my circumstance’, and in response to that he offered different help to me. But by doing that he actually asked me what I needed.

07:38

My English teacher, we got along from the outset. She had lots of time for me, more than she probably would have had for a lot of students. At lunch time, I’d come in and say hello and check in with her. She provided that and it was really essential for me. It made me feel like I wanted to come to school.

07:57

The main different from that teacher and all the others, this teacher was actually able to get me to come to school whether I did class or not. It was just the actual attendance first up. And then it was this slow, gradual increase of what I could do with my time and how I could actually improve my life.

08:14

When I sit there and reflect about what she did, she changed my life for sure.

08:21

We can definitely make a difference to the lives of young children in out-of-home care. And LOOKOUT centres have only strengthened that.

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My hopes for LOOKOUT is that is grows and grows and grows. I think we are so lucky to have this group of people who are supporting our most vulnerable kids. There is a lot of them and they need all the help they can get. I am really proud to be a teacher and to stand by the LOOKOUT team doing this really amazing work.

08:50

Really the sky in the limit for these young children. If we can continue with this model, the sky is the limit in terms of support for them.