**Fact Sheet**

**Role of the Learning Mentor**

Students in Out-of-Home Care (OOHC) require additional support to achieve success in education. The allocation of a Learning Mentor is one strategy that has been shown to be effective in improving the learning, engagement and school experience of students in OOHC. Learning Mentors support student learning, engagement, academic achievement and wellbeing at school.

Through a strong relationship the Learning Mentor assists the student to feel safe, supported and connected to school and learning. The Learning Mentor is a role model, guide and advocate for the student – someone who knows them well and takes an interest in their life and learning. The Learning Mentor demonstrates unconditional positive regard and holds high expectations and aspirations for the student.

The Out-of-Home Care Education Commitment: A Partnering Agreement requires the allocation of a teacher or staff member, in consultation with the student, as a Learning Mentor to each student in OOHC enrolled in a school.

Learning Mentors offer support and guidance to students in OOHC, some of whom may be struggling with social, emotional or behavioural problems that affect their ability to learn.

Importantly, Learning Mentors:

* support the educational needs of the child or young person
* help them stay connected to their schooling
* support them to overcome barriers in their learning
* act as a role model, guide and advocate for the child or young person
* know them well and take an interest in their life and learning.

**Selecting a Learning mentor**

A Learning Mentor should be allocated in a timely manner. This may be when a student first starts school, following school transitions, or when the student first enters OOHC. The Learning Mentor should be identified by the principal and leadership team and the process should involve the student to ensure a good fit. Consideration of a staff member’s skills, experience, gender, workload and existing relationship with the student is critical.

The Learning Mentor may not be directly involved in teaching the student but should be a trusted staff member willing to take on this role. This role is voluntary and should not be imposed on a staff member or the student.

If the student or the Learning Mentor does not want the role to continue for any reason, it is the principal or their delegate’s responsibility to ensure that a new Learning Mentor is identified in collaboration with the student.

**Responsibilities of the Learning Mentor**

The Learning Mentor’s responsibilities include:

* Meeting regularly with the student at a frequency to be agreed between the Learning Mentor and the student – usually at least weekly.
* Identifying any challenges, the student may be experiencing that are affecting their learning or connection to their schooling and developing strategies that could assist.
* Advocating for the student (e.g. ensuring that other school staff are made aware of their learning needs, interests, passions, or fears or struggles).
* Participating in Student Support Group/Program Support Group meetings and providing advice about additional supports the student may require.
* Ensuring that the student’s voice is heard in the planning and decision-making processes that affect them.
* Facilitating the input of the student into the development of the Individual Education Plan/Personalised Learning Plan.

The Learning Mentor is not a counsellor: it is not the Learning Mentor’s responsibility to provide counselling. The Learning Mentor is also not the person to send the student to when they have behaved inappropriately. Further, the Learning Mentor should not have responsibility for supervising the student if they have behaved inappropriately and been removed from the classroom, as this can undermine the mentor relationship.

Preferred skills include:

* excellent communication and listening skills
* the ability to analyse problems and devise solutions
* determination to see problems and solutions through to the end
* the ability to empathise
* a non-judgemental approach
* organisational and time management skills
* the ability to relate to young people and adults
* the capacity to motivate and act as a role model
* negotiation skills
* flexibility and adaptability
* a commitment to equality and diversity
* an understanding of confidentiality
* resilience.

**Responsibilities of school leadership**

The principal or their delegate is responsible for the allocation of a Learning Mentor for a student in OOHC. It is important that Learning Mentors receive ongoing support from the school leadership team.

This should include:

* ensuring that an appropriate time and space is available for the student to meet with their Learning Mentor
* ensuring school staff are aware of the Learning Mentor’s role and responsibilities
* providing formal avenues for professional support to the mentor (such as access to a wellbeing coordinator, student support services, employee assistance program)
* providing access to professional development.