

MEDIA RELEASE

Minister for Community Services
Minister for Women
The Hon. Linda Burney MP



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TEENAGERS IN CARE TACKLE HSC

The final HSC exams have extra significance for courageous teenagers who, despite not being able to live safely at home with their parents, are tackling one of the most important milestones in their lives.

Today Minister for Community Services Linda Burney acknowledged the hardships that these young people have overcome to face their final Year 12 exams.

“I want to wish these young people the best of luck in the coming weeks. As far as I am concerned they have already achieved top marks for sticking at it and getting through their final year of schooling,” Ms Burney said.

“Children in care have often had lots of upheaval in their young lives. It is through their own resilience and determination have they reached this important milestone, with the support and encouragement of their foster parents and families.

“The Create Foundation found that only 25 per cent of children in out-of-home care completed their HSC, compared with the 2008 ABS figure of 75.6 per cent for non-Indigenous Australians.¹

“We all know education is the key to a good start in life and I’m hopeful these young people will use their education as a springboard to a productive and happy adult life.”

Jenna is one such young person, who at 18 has had more than her fair share of ups and downs.

Jenna spent a year at the Red Cross Young Parents Program which focuses heavily on education. While she was there she completed years 7 to 10 and after leaving the residential program, she continued with her studies.

“By the time I finished the program, I felt like I was on the right track. I did not feel like the same person I was when I moved in. I felt like I had a better understanding of my past which gave me a new perspective on life,” Jenna said.

“I learnt how to study and how important it is for my future and my children’s. The program was life changing, the start of a new and positive life for me and my two daughters.”

Leaving school at a young age and truancy are common problems among young people in out-of-home care.

According to Anne King, Manager of the Red Cross Young Parents Program, there are many factors that impact on their attendance of educational programs.

¹ ABS CAT. NO. 4221.0 SCHOOLS, AUSTRALIA, 2008

“Education is and has been a low priority in their lives for a number of reasons,” Ms King said.

“They are affected by the attitudes and behaviour patterns of their own parents and their parents before them, about education, authority and the educational system.

“So many young people in out-of-home care have no goals due to lack of self-esteem and confidence.

“There is a lack of motivation because they may have had few positive and successful role models among their families and friends. They have little knowledge about of the benefits of getting a vocational training or what a good education can bring.”

The *CREATE Report Card 2008: Transitioning from Care* found only 25 per cent of care leavers had completed Year 12, and 43.4 per cent completed Year 10.

Jacqui Reed, Chief Executive Officer, CREATE Foundation, noted that survey respondents found homework hard to do when things weren't going well at home, and said many young people found social and other issues preventing them from enjoying school.

“Some simple aspects like having enough money to buy clothes to wear can contribute to the pressures influencing children and young people in care,” Ms Reed said.

“It is encouraging to know that over 14 per cent of the young people surveyed did complete tertiary studies, mainly via TAFE. Many expressed they enjoyed the adult environment of TAFE and having access to a hands-on learning experience.”

Ms Burney said that the Rees Government has recognised the need to provide additional support to children in school in *Keep Them Safe*, the action plan to reform the child protection system.

“There are some great initiatives from the Department of Education and Training to encourage people to attend school,” Ms Burney said.

“For each child entering out-of-home care, the school will develop an individual learning plan which recognises a student's current capabilities, sets goals for learning and develops a strategy to ensure that learning takes place. In addition, government schools will provide specially trained student out-of-home care coordinators who will work with health and other child welfare experts to ensure continuity of support.”

Jenna has a message for those who are battling to get an education.

“I would say to other young people in foster care that even when its tough, remember that finishing Year 12 means that you have a lot more options later in life and its worth all the hours studying.”

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