TEACHaR

TRANSFORMING **E**DUCATIONAL **A**CHIEVEMENT FOR **C**HILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN **H**OME BASED **A**ND **R**ESIDENTIAL CARE
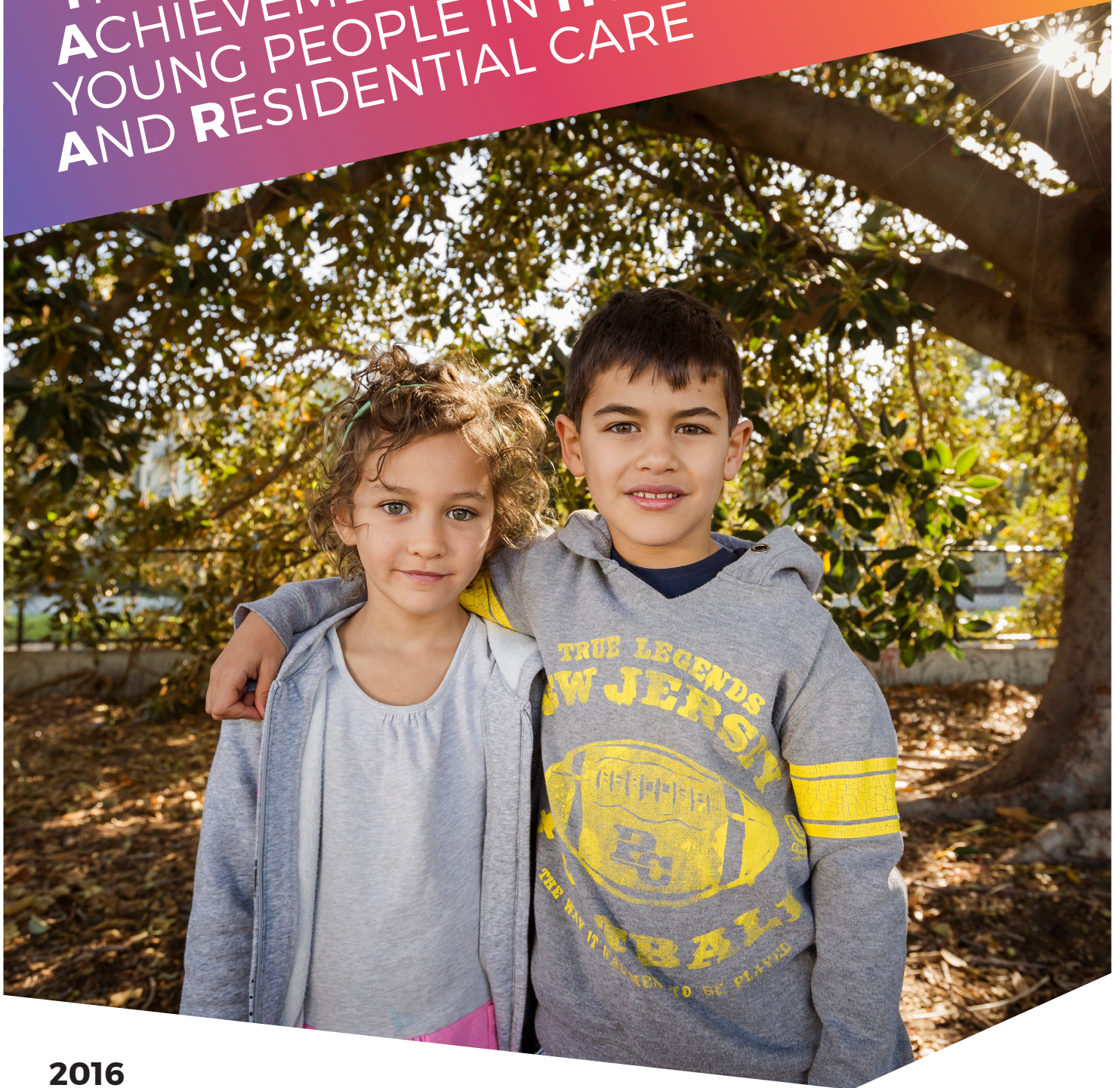
2016
Snapshot Report

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BETTER TOMORROWS

Program Funders

Background

TEACHaR is an aspirational education program dedicated to fostering positive educational opportunities and outcomes for children and young people in out of home care (OHC). The program seeks to close 'the education achievement gap' between students in care and those in the wider community, and to forge a culture of strong educational belief and expectation for students in care across OHC services, schools, carers, Government, and importantly within students themselves.

Education has the potential to be truly transformative. Education can offer pathways out of disadvantage, and can positively impact the future economic, psychosocial and broader health outcomes of individuals, families and whole communities. In the context of complex, and often intergenerational hardship, a great education can provide children with a gateway to a brighter future.

In 2015, the TEACHaR program was awarded the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Robin Clark Education Initiative Award, for its innovative practice with students in care.

Program Aims:

- Support students to develop more positive feelings and attitudes towards learning

- Strengthen student engagement and attendance in compulsory schooling

- Lift student literacy, numeracy and academic skills

- Support students to obtain results that are more consistent with their potential and ability

- Support students to complete Year 12 or its equivalent at the same rate as others in the community

What The Research Tells Us

Research tells us that children and young people in care experience poorer educational and vocational outcomes in comparison to the general student population. Lower levels of numeracy and literacy have been found among students in care, a gap which widens as students proceed from grade three (primary school) and into high school (AIHW, 2015; Sebba, Berridge, Luke, Fletcher, Bell, Strand, Thomas, Sinclair, O'Higgins & Aoife, 2015; Connelly & Furnivall, 2013; Font & Maguire-Jack, 2013; Townsend, 2012). Young people in care are also less likely to finish compulsory schooling and complete Year 12, and very few go on to university.

Poorer school attendance and engagement are also associated with care cohorts, together with more frequent school changes, potentially as a result of placement transitions (Sebba et al, 2015; Flynn, Tessier & Coulombe, 2013; Font & Maguire-Jack, 2013). Students in care are also more likely to be diagnosed with special education needs, and to develop complex behavioural presentations associated with past experiences of abuse and trauma, such as violence, poor concentration, irritability, hyperactivity and dysregulation (Flynn et al. 2013; Buckingham, Wheldall & Beaman-Wheldall, 2013; Wise, Pollock, Mitchell, Argus, Farquhar, 2010). Less-positive interactions with peers, difficulties maintaining friendships, and more frequent experiences of bullying may also emerge.

Schools can also struggle to provide the types of differentiated curriculums and modified classroom environments required by some students in care – particularly those impacted by complex trauma who may demonstrate challenging classroom behaviours and struggle academically (Ferguson & Wolkow, 2012; Font & Maguire-Jack, 2013; Wise et al, 2010). The care system has the potential to exacerbate educational disengagement as well, due to frequent placement changes and inadequate management of timely school enrolments and transitions (Ferguson & Wolkow, 2012; Townsend, 2012; Wise et al., 2010).

However, the research nonetheless tells us that students in care have the capacity to do well (AIHW, 2015; Sebba et al. 2015; Flynn et al. 2013). Factors such as stable school and care placements, earlier entry into the care system, access to supportive and consistent teachers that students trust, and caregivers that are aspirational and value education have been identified as making a difference to this trajectory. Research also shows that students from low socio-economic backgrounds have the capacity to perform consistently with higher socio-economic cohorts if supported by explicit and quality teaching, often in the first years of schooling and during key transition years (Buckingham et al, 2013; Mallett 2013; MacKay, 2007; Johnston & Watson, 2005).

The Program Model

The TEACHaR program employs experienced, registered teachers, who are embedded within established OHC teams. TEACHaR Educators bring a range of classroom, welfare and senior level teaching experience, together with a range of complementary higher qualifications, such as special education and social work.

Core Practices:

- The program is outreach based, and interventions delivered holistically across OHC placement and classroom settings.

- Interventions are highly flexible, and include direct student support where possible. Typical interventions include one-on-one student tuition, group work, and informal and creative learning activities. Interventions have a focus on student wellbeing, together with positive school engagement and academic progression

- Educators provide advocacy, liaison and educational case management, often in the context of school disengagement, complex classroom behaviours, placement changes, care planning, school transitions/new school enrollments

- The program prioritises mainstream school attendance wherever possible, and encourages schools to pursue alternatives to suspensions, expulsions, and the use of 'out of classroom' behaviour management strategies that can impede student engagement and access to learning opportunities

- Communicating positive aspirations and expectations for education achievement is a core program philosophy. The program insists that school attendance is possible for all children and young people in care, and that all students are deserving of positive education experiences. Interventions seek to:

  - Ensure students attend as much school as possible

  - Raise students' own beliefs and expectations about what they can achieve as learners, as well as the expectations that organisations and schools may hold for them

  - Build on students' strengths and interests, and encourage teachers and schools to adopt a strengths-based outlook

  - Support carers and OHC staff to strengthen and enrich the education 'culture' and opportunities available to students in their OHC home environments, and to 'put education first' in care and case planning processes.

- Educators provide in-class support and professional development to teachers and schools about the care system, the impacts of developmental trauma, and the special education needs and learning difficulties often experienced by children and young people in care. Educators also support schools' understanding/implementation of the Victorian Government *OHC Education Partnering Agreement* [1].

- The program provides referrals and funding for educational and allied health assessments, complementary services (such as tutoring and music lessons), extra-curricular activities and learning resources (such as laptops, books and instruments)

- The program's holistic operating model is summarised in Figure 1.

Figure 1. *Summary of TEACHaR Operating Model.*
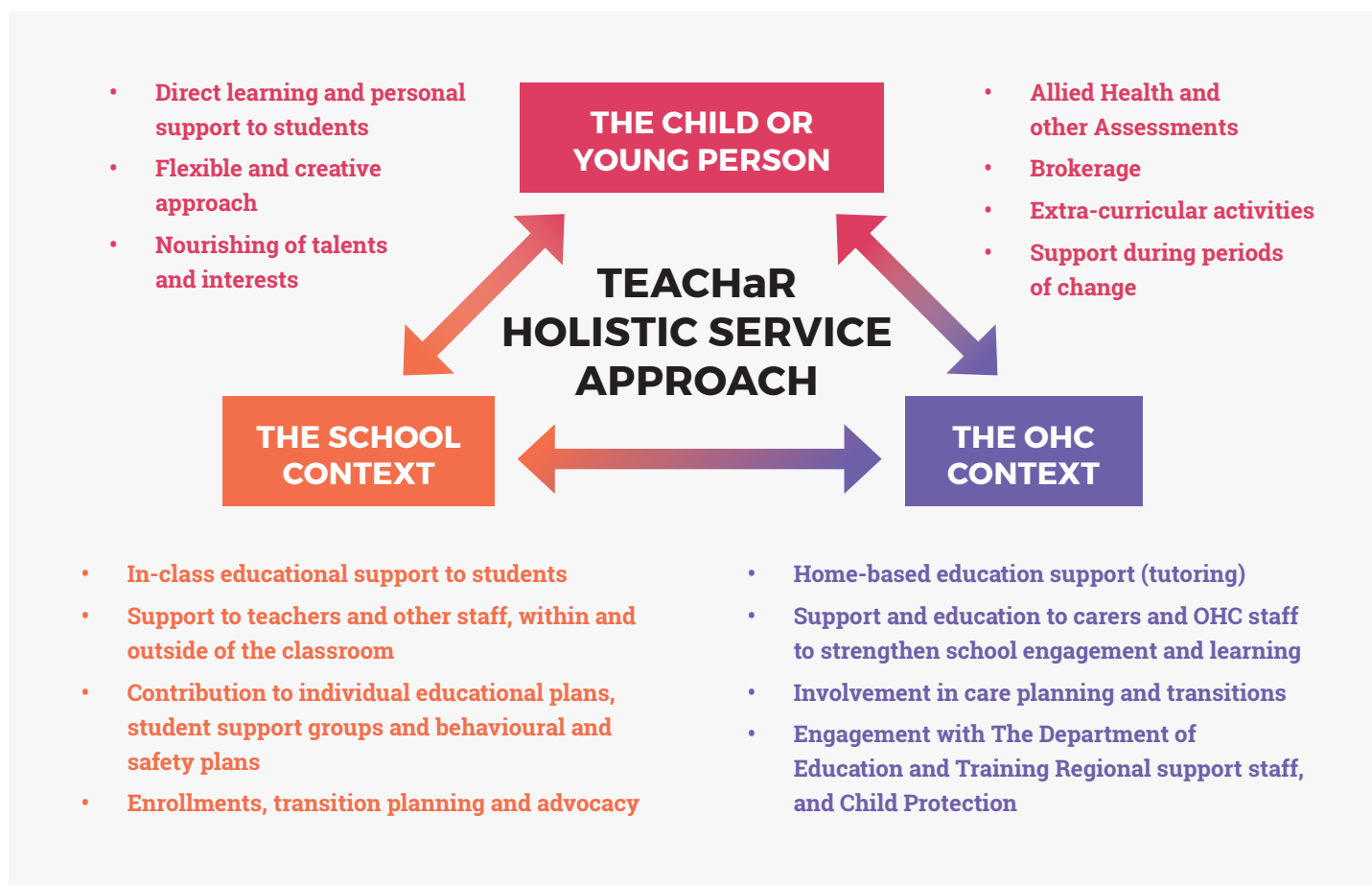
Service Length and Intensity

The program delivers a combination of short (under 6 months), medium term (6 to 12 months), and longer term interventions (12 months plus).

Interventions vary in terms of intensity, consistent with the needs of the client. Longer term interventions are generally less intensive, and often provided to maintain student engagement, provide consultancy to schools, and assist students to continue to achieve to their ability.

68% of clients received an intervention of 12 months or less over the first three years of the program.

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1. *Out Of Home Care Education Commitment: A Partnering Agreement between the Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, the Catholic Education Commission of Victorian and Independent Schools Victoria.*

Who has the program supported?

Over its initial three years of implementation, TEACHaR has supported a growing community of students, schools and teaching staff.
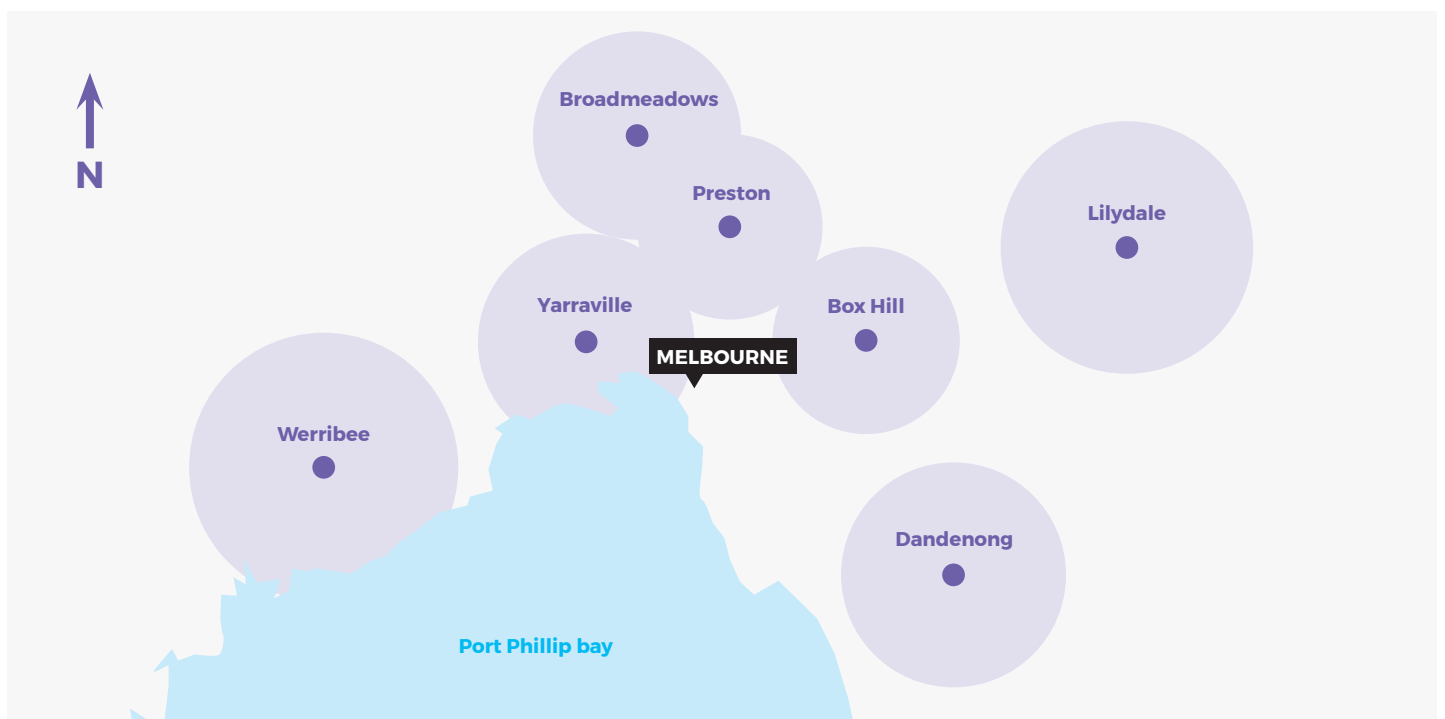
The program works with children and young people across all forms of OHC, including foster, kinship, and residential care.

Approximately 185 children and young people in OHC

185

165

Approximately 165 schools or alternative learning environments

Approximately 450 teachers and other staff within schools

450

Program Locations

From 2016 TEACHaR operates in a number of locations across **Eastern, Southern, Northern and Western** Metropolitan Melbourne.

As an outreach-based model, Educators work with a broad range of schools, carers and other services across these wide catchment areas. The program also supports a number of students in regional areas.

N

Broadmeadows

Preston

Lilydale

Yarraville

Box Hill

MELBOURNE

Werribee

Dandenong

Port Phillip bay

Client Demographics

Demographic data for 147[2] children and young people who received the TEACHaR intervention over the program's first three years of implementation are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Profile of TEACHaR participants at service entry, 3 year sample (n=147).*

			% of clients
Age at service commencement	*5-8 years*		26.5%
	9-12 years		27.2%
	13-15 years		37.5%
	16-18 years		8.8%
Gender	*Male*		58.5%
	Female		41.5%
Country of birth	*Australia*		95.2%
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	*Yes*		14.3%
Placement type	*Foster care*		52.4%
	Residential care		38.8%
	Kinship care		8.8%
School level	*Primary school*		48.6%
	Secondary school		36.8%
	Ungraded/Community school		2.3%
	No current school		12.3%
Challenges to Learning	*Diagnosed cognitive impairment, learning disability or learning related difficulties*	*Yes*	32.1%
		Being assessed	10.4%
	Emotional or behavioural difficulties	*Yes*	87.8%
	Diagnosed mental health problem or disorder	*Yes*	21.7%
		Being assessed	7.8%

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2. *While the program supported approximately 185 children and young people over the initial three year intervention period, baseline assessments were completed for a reduced sample of 147 clients only. Demographic data were collected at the baseline period. Baseline data were unable to be collected for some of the program's early consultation or short term clients – for example clients whose schools received consultation support, or clients who disengaged from the program before an assessment could be finalized due to a placement breakdown.*

Outcomes

The TEACHaR evaluation measures outcomes for children and young people receiving the intervention, consistent with the program's key objectives.

The TEACHaR Assessment and Outcomes Measurement Tool (devised for this program) draws upon the AUSVELS curriculum standards and the Looking After Children (LAC) Assessment. The tool also contains measures designed specifically for the purpose of the program, largely informed by the learnings from CIAO study conducted by Anglicare Victoria and Wesley Mission (Wise et al., 2010).

The TEACHaR Assessment Tool is utilised by Educators as part of their routine practice with clients. Data is collected on a six monthly basis, commencing at service entry (Baseline). Assessments are informed by Educators' direct practice with, and observation of students, together with information derived from agency case file data, school report cards and test results, and information provided by clients, classroom teachers, carers and caseworkers. The Tool is also intended to strengthen practice, in particular the assessment of educational needs and progress, and the ongoing formulation and review of service goals and activities.

The following core outcomes are presented in this Snapshot:

* School attendance and student active engagement in learning
* Students' level of overall academic achievement
* Students' literacy and numeracy skills
* Students' experience of support in schools

Where relevant, all data are informed by school report card outcomes.

OUTCOMES FOLLOWING 12 MONTH SERVICE EXPOSURE

Are our clients showing improved engagement in learning and attendance at school?

School Attendance

For students with school attendance difficulties, there was a trend of improved attendance with increased exposure to the program. This is demonstrated in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2. *Change in weekly school attendance, service entry to 12 months (n=83).*
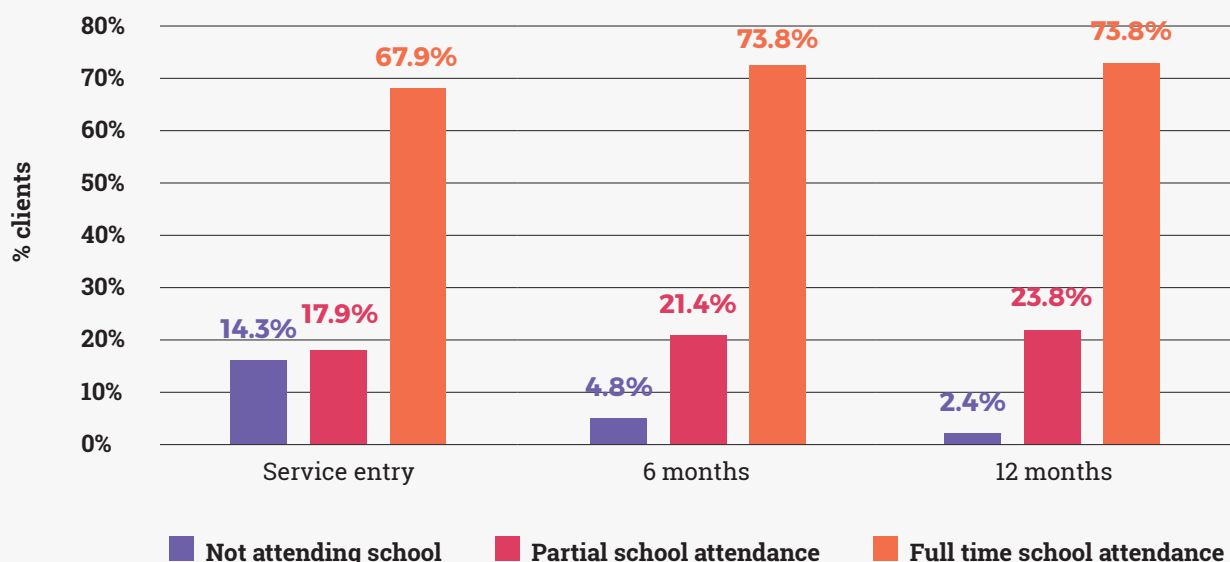
Following exposure to the intervention:

- Four students (4.8%) were not attending school after 6 months of support from 12 at service entry
- Two students (2.4%) were not attending school after 12 months of support

The two children/young people not attending school at 12 months were nonetheless in the process of making transitions into school placements, and both were receiving in-home tuition from the TEACHaR program focused on their academic and school engagement needs.

Further, for the group of 26 students either *not attending or partially attending school* at service entry:

- 21 students (80.8%) improved their school attendance in the first six months of the program
- Eight students (32%) improved their school attendance in the second six months of service exposure.

Active Engagement in Learning

There was a steady increase in student engagement in learning observed with increased program exposure.

Figure 3 shows that over a third more clients were always or usually actively engaged in learning at the 12 month service period.

Figure 3. *Percentage of clients **always or usually actively engaged in learning tasks** at school.*
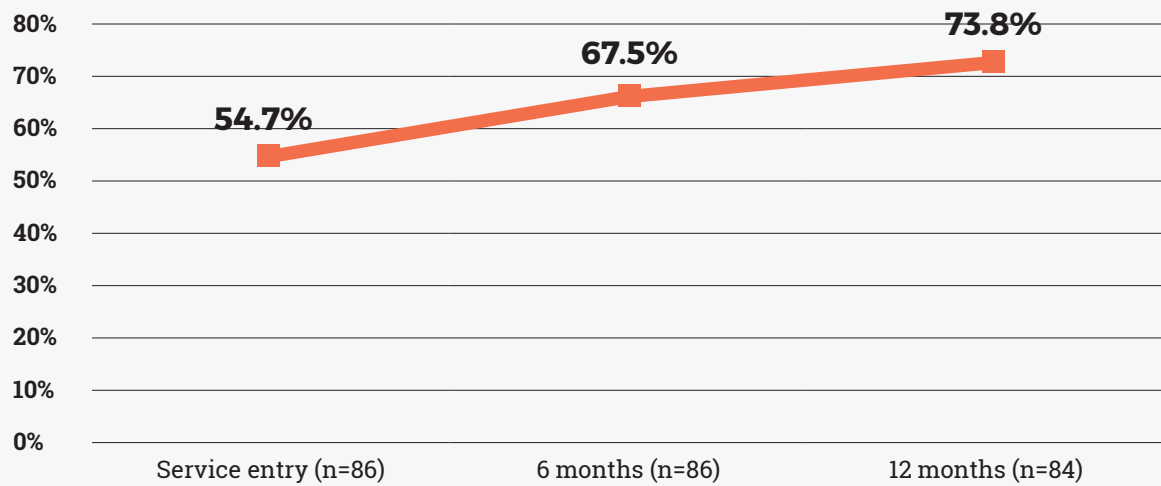
Are our clients making academic progress?

Overall academic achievement

The percentage of students with average or above overall academic achievement nearly doubled over the first six months of program exposure. An additional 11.5% of the student cohort achieved average or above academic skills in the following six month period, as demonstrated in Figure 4 below.
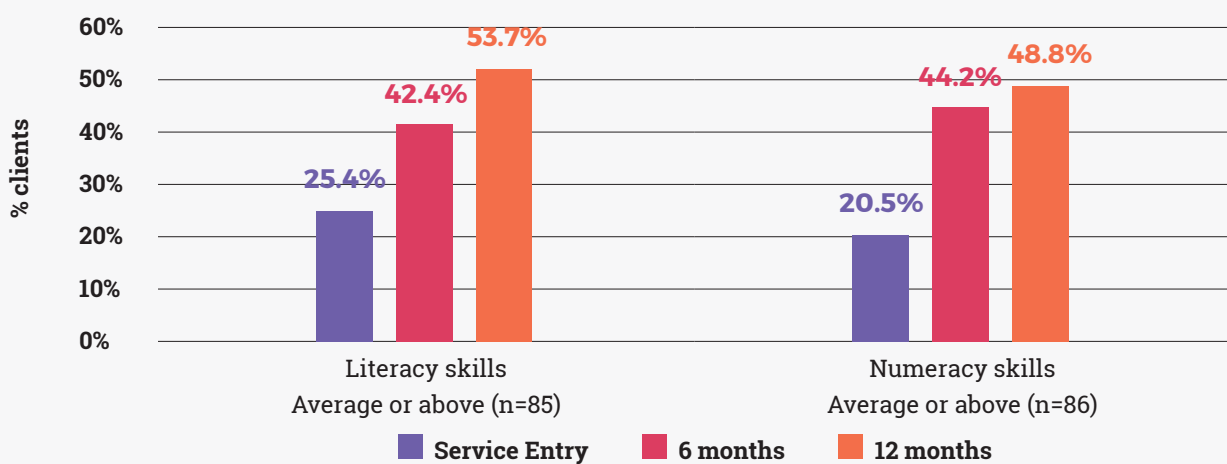
Figure 4. *Percentage of clients with **average or above overall academic achievement**.*
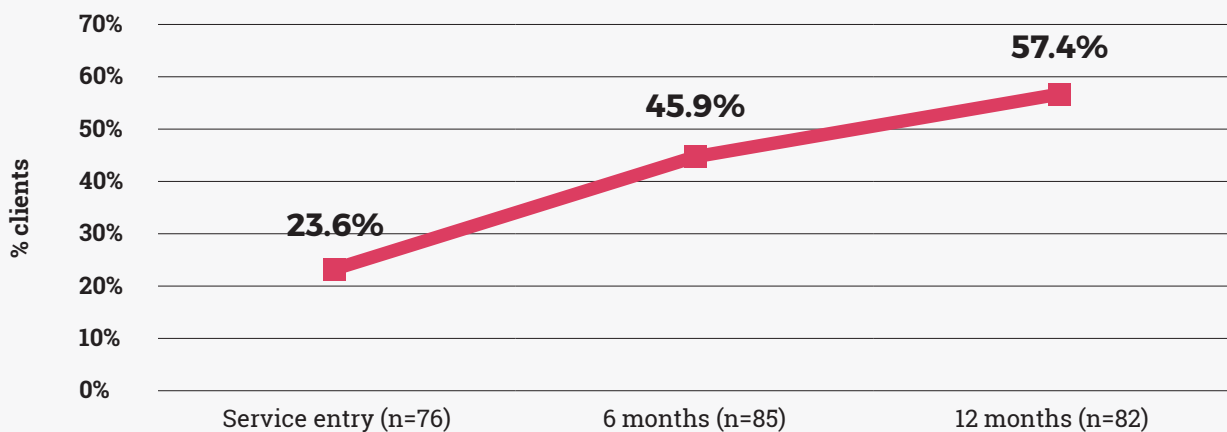
Literacy and Numeracy Skills

Specific gains in students' literacy and numeracy skills were also observed following six and 12 months program exposure.

Figure 5. *Percentage of clients with **average or above literacy and numeracy skills**.*

Residential Care Clients

Particular improvements in active engagement in learning and overall academic achievement were observed for clients in residential care. Given that students in residential care represent a largely older and higher risk/need cohort (with higher levels of school disengagement and under-performance at service entry), the improvements amongst these students are noteworthy.

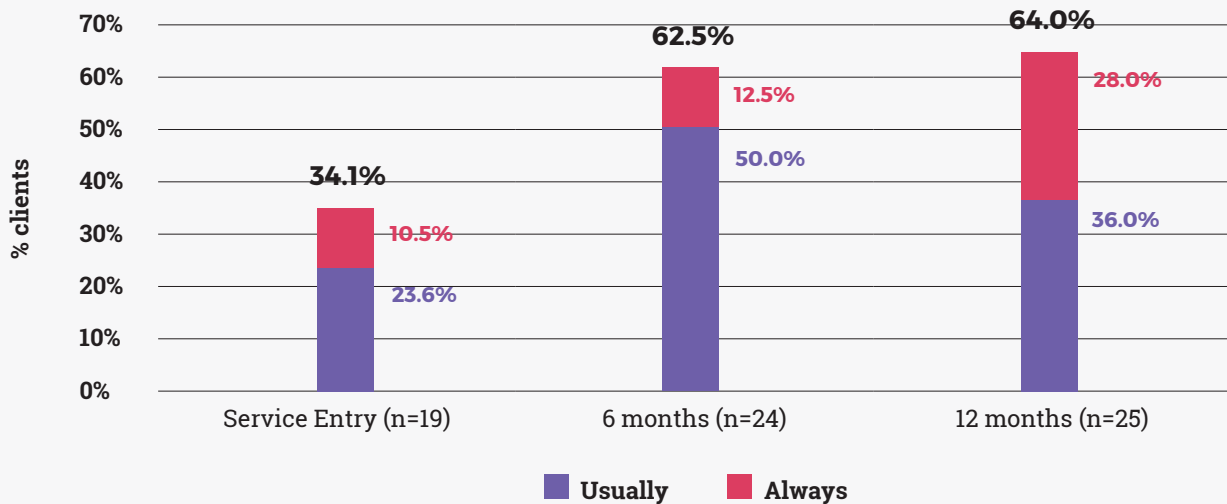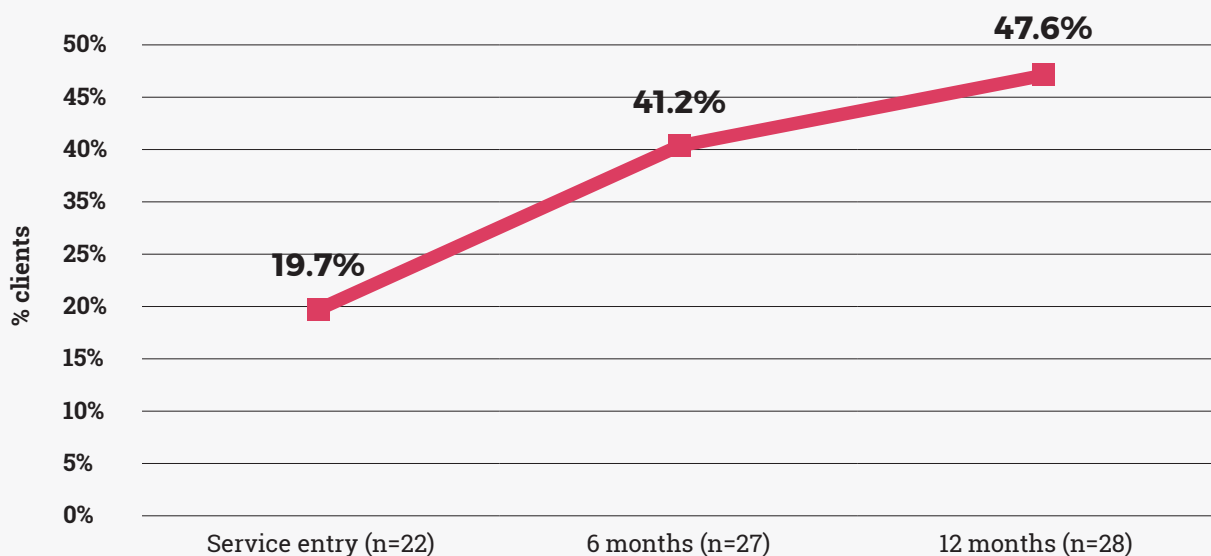**Figure 6**. *Percentage of residential care clients **always or usually actively engaged in learning.***


Figure 7. *Percentage of residential care clients with **average overall academic achievement**.*

Are our clients supported in schools?

Consistent with the aims of the Victorian Government OHC Education Partnering Agreement, there was an increase in the proportion of clients with 'in-school supports' with increased exposure to the TEACHaR intervention over 12 months.

Figure 8. *Percentage of clients with school-based supports.*
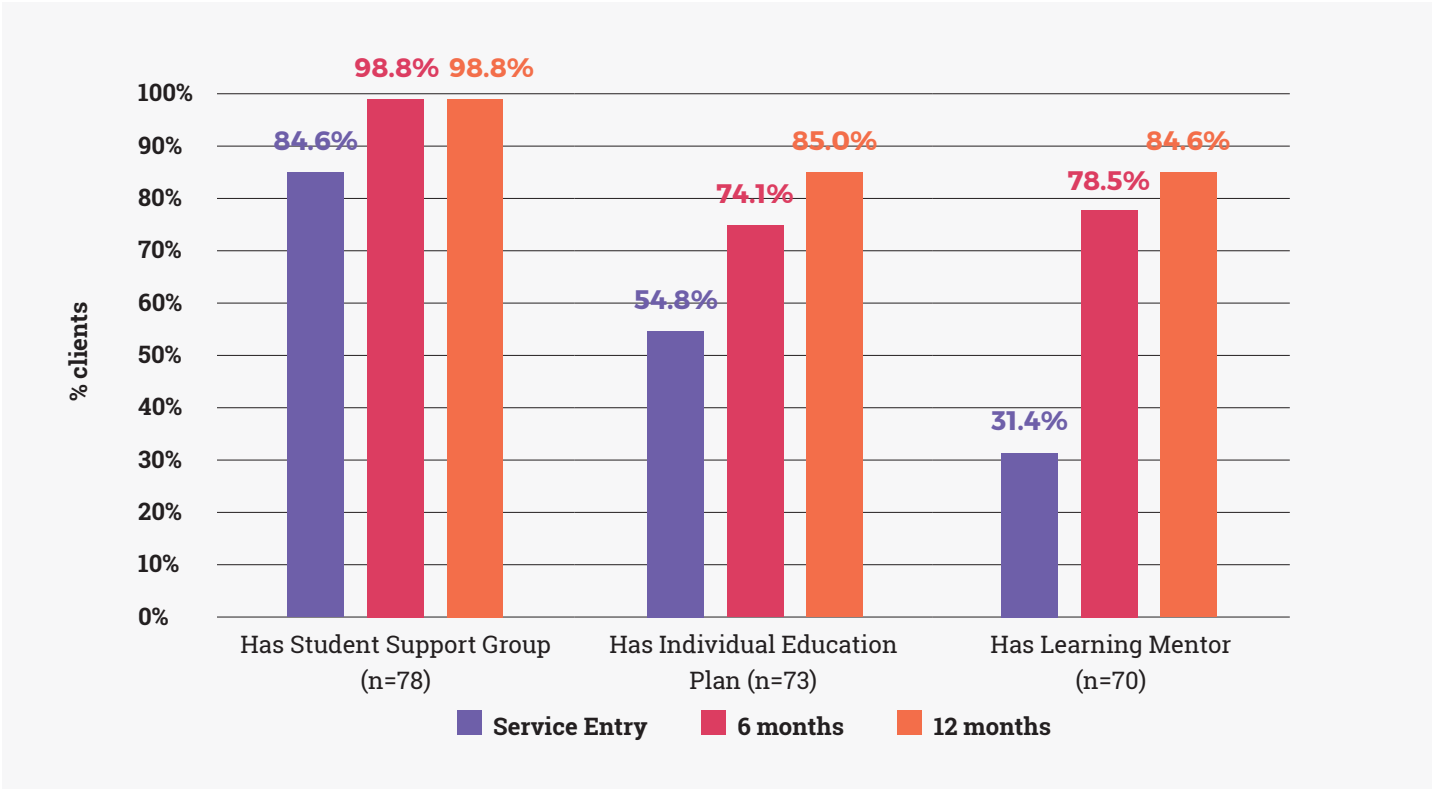
OUTCOMES FOLLOWING 24 MONTH SERVICE EXPOSURE

The 24 month data is reflective of a sub-sample within the program. 93% of this group were foster care clients, with typically more stable placement environments and higher levels of educational engagement, despite experiencing academic difficulties.
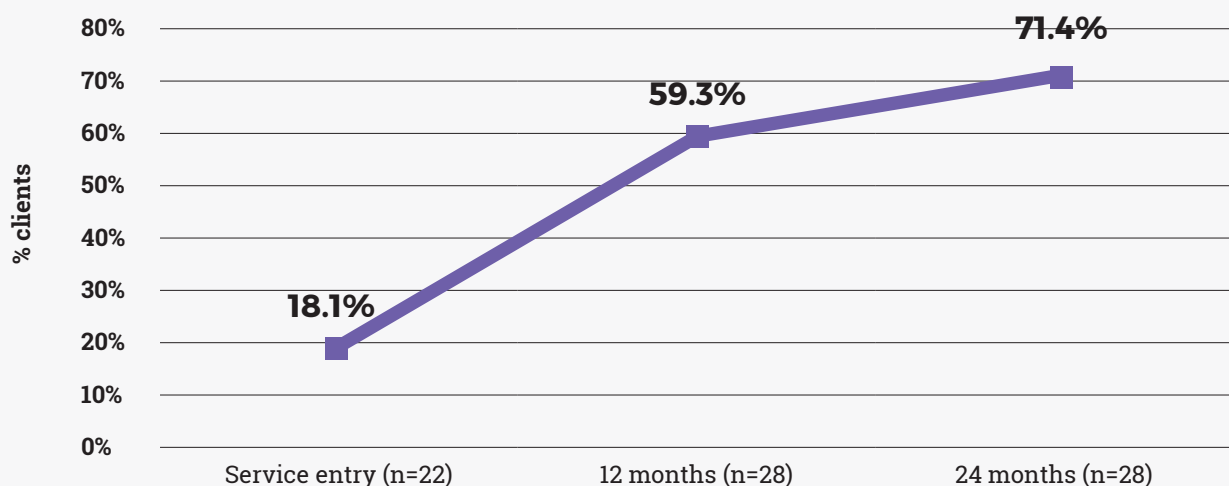
Overall Academic Achievement

There was continued growth in the number of students with average or above overall academic achievement with increased exposure to the intervention beyond 12 months.

Figure 9 shows that a further 12.3% of the student cohort attained average or above overall academic achievement between the 12 and 24 month service period.

Overall, the percentage of students with average or above overall academic achievement more than tripled over the total 24 month period (18.1% to 71.4%).

Figure 9. *Percentage of clients with **average or above overall academic achievement.***

Literacy and Numeracy Skills

Aligned with the gains observed in student overall academic achievement, there were also continued moderate improvements in student literacy and numeracy skills with increased service exposure beyond 12 months.

Figures 12 and 13 demonstrate the following gains with increased service exposure:

- An additional 10.5% of the student cohort had above average level literacy skills at 24 months, compared to at 12 months (increased from 7.4% to 17.9%)

- An additional 9.2% of the cohort had average numeracy skills at 24 months, compared to at 12 months (increased from 44.4% to 53.6%)

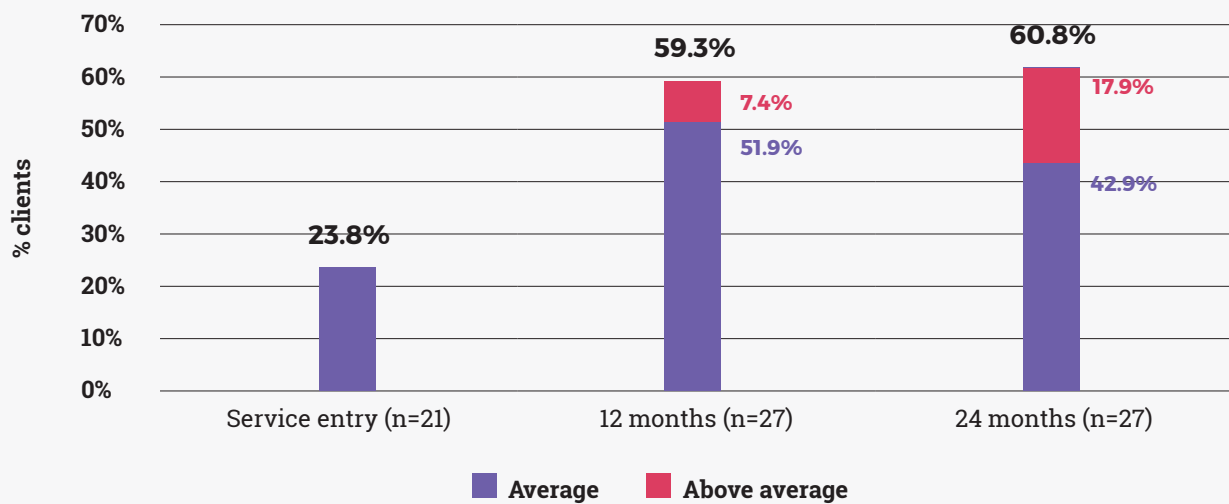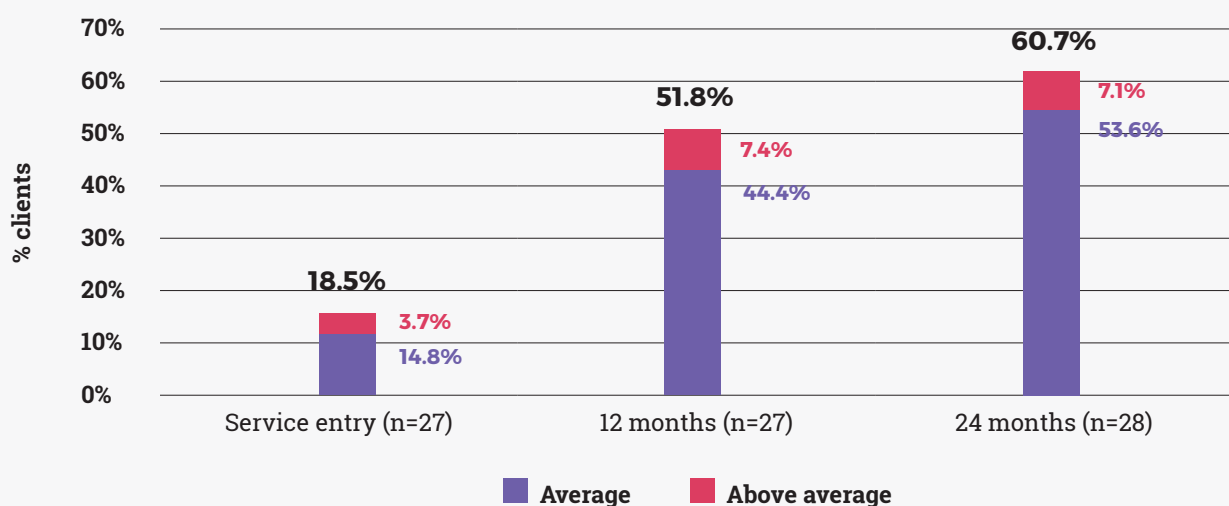**Figure 12.** *Percentage of clients with **average or above literacy skills**.*

Figure 13. *Percentage of clients with **average or above numeracy skills**.*

Selected Program Feedback

"TEACHaR has worked very closely with (our student), and provided that essential support that has obviously been lacking in his life. The student has taken the opportunity to improve his education outcomes and is now building a strong basis of success and I attribute this primarily to TEACHaR' s refusal to give into the frustration that inevitably arises after he takes the one step back after the two steps forward. TEACHaR's continued support of the student, myself and the school is paramount if the strong gains are to be built upon"

Eltham College

"The support that TEACHaR has delivered to our staff and (our student) is very useful. ...Planning, classroom management, and general advice about (the student's) strengths and weaknesses. The program has provided invaluable information and strategies to develop (the student's) social skills. The teachers were pivotal to (the student's) engagement in the classroom and willingness to come to school every day. This success cannot be under estimated. Also giving (us) at the college an insight into (the student's) world. These were critical to his successful integration into school".

John Fawkner College

'We have appreciated the whole school professional development offered to our staff in terms of building understanding of trauma in children and the associated behaviours they exhibit. Our teachers feel more equipped to manage traumatised children to obtain the best learning outcomes for them"

Monbulk Primary School

"Young people in out of home care have numerous reasons for why they won't attend school. The TEACHaR team listens and build plans that will enable small steps to engagement, (and) strengthen their attendance and inclusion. The TEACHaR program can move across different out of home care agencies and placement types, which is the flexibility required. Having a service that understands and supports both the education and welfare side of service provision is invaluable."

Student Wellbeing Unit
DHHS

"The most useful part of the program is the "connect" between The Department of Education staff, policy, and the care team (DHHS). The TEACHaR worker assisted the care team to navigate through policies, curriculum, programs, services etc. with ease. The professional support TEACHaR gave us really highlighted the clients' educational needs. One-to-one support really benefited the client and assisted him to finalise his last year at mainstream school with respect and dignity, rather than amidst the cloud of behavioural conflict".

Child Protection
DHHS

"We at specialist services value the TEACHaR program and approach and believe that you are well placed to advise and collaborate with the formal school setting. This supportive role provides an opportunity for capacity building within the school, and consequently improved outcomes for students. Your persistent approach and willingness to utilise a 'solutions focused model' when faced with barriers has been an effective and useful strategy. Through the program you have demonstrated creativity when engaging with (clients). In addition to this your strategic planning, preparation and attention to detail has no doubt contributed to (clients) viewing educational opportunities more positively. The opportunity for (clients) to experience success through your program has been both novel and therapeutic".

Specialist Services
DHHS

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OUR FOCUS IS ON TRANSFORMING
THE FUTURES OF CHILDREN AND
YOUNG PEOPLE, FAMILIES AND
ADULTS. OUR WORK IS BASED
ON THREE GUIDING PILLARS,
PREVENT, PROTECT, EMPOWER.