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Transforming early Education
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EVIDENCE BASE ON **GOOD PRACTICE IN SCHOOLS** TO MEET THE NEEDS OF STUDENTS LIVING IN OUT-OF-HOME CARE

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Executive Summary

This report has been prepared for the Western Australian Department of Education and aims to identify good practice in schools for supporting children in out-of-home care. It presents a rapid review of the evidence from peer reviewed studies published in English in the last decade with a primary aim of supporting academic and/or social-emotional development needs and outcomes for children and youth in out-of-home care that had been (or could be) delivered in schools. Eighteen studies met the inclusion criteria; fourteen of which used an experimental or quasi-experimental design and one used a cross-sectional design using baseline data for an Randomised Control Trial. Two mixed methods and one qualitative study were included that reported on emerging practices or elicited youth perspectives that would otherwise not have been represented in the review.

A critical synthesis approach was used to discern discrete practices within the literature for addressing the educational support needs of children and/or youth in out-of-home care. A total of ten practices that met a quality appraisal standard of high, emerging or promising evidence were identified. These are: 1) direct instruction; 2) small group tuition; 3) structured routines; 4) positive behaviour support; 5) engaging with carers; 6) appointing a designated teacher; 7) multi-disciplinary teamwork approach; 8) individualised planning; 9) trauma-informed approach; and 10) facilitating connectedness. Each practice was matched to a school-based intervention category. Four practices were allocated as Targeted and Intensive Support, three as Specific Teaching and Learning Adjustments and three as Whole of School Approaches. No practices associated with Professional Learning and Capability Building were identified in the literature.

Finally, this report considers the intersection of good practice for supporting children with a severe mental disorder in schools. This was based on consideration of information reported in a rapid evidence review commissioned by the Western Australian Department of Education and conducted by Megan O'Connell Consulting. Positive behaviour support, multi-professional teams and individualised plans were also highlighted as good practices in the evidence on supporting students with severe mental disorders. This overlap strengthens a case for the wider adoption of these three practices in schools to address a range of complex emotional and behavioural needs.



Introduction

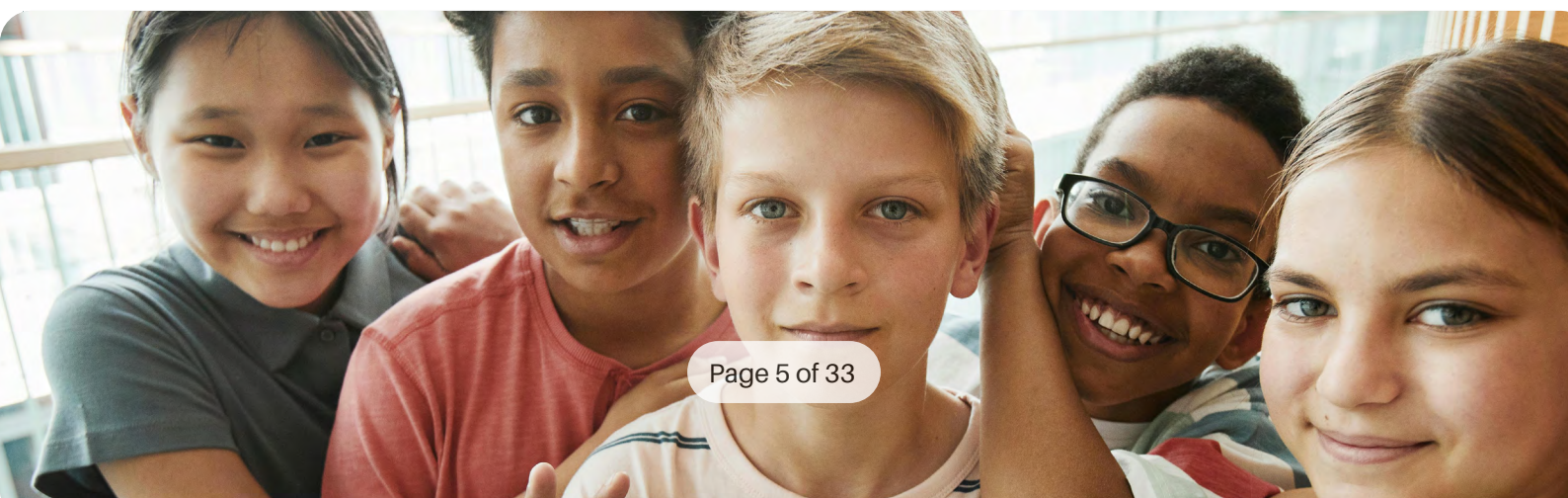
The Centre for Transforming early Education and Child Health Research (TeEACH) at Western Sydney University was commissioned by the Western Australian Department of Education to review the evidence on best practice in schools to meet the needs of students living in out-of-home care. TeEACH is a multi-disciplinary team working in partnership with policymakers, professionals, families and communities to address child health, education and wellbeing inequities and achieve positive outcomes for disadvantaged children and families through service and system improvements.

This report synthesises evidence from international research on supporting the educational needs of children and young people in out-of-home care. A critical synthesis of this evidence is presented to report on the main findings and provide a quality assessment of the evidence. The review discerns ten discrete practices that have been reported across studies and outlines how these could be used to guide best practice developments in schools.

Background

Adverse childhood experiences have been shown to have a ripple effect over the life course (Felitti et al., 1998). Developmental trauma due to child maltreatment has profound effects on behaviour, mood, self-regulation and memory (Szilagyi, 2018). Children and young people in out-of-home care have experienced early life adversity and trauma which can impact negatively on their educational outcomes (Lund & Stokes, 2020). A recent scoping review identified that children in out-of-home care often experience significant issues that lead to lower school engagement, academic achievement, and high school attainment than their peers (Lund & Stokes, 2020). Poor outcomes have been linked to a range of factors including poor mental health, developmental trauma, social disadvantage, and placement instability. School based factors include a lack of commitment to implement Individual Education Plans for students in out-of-home care; lack of staff understanding of, and skills to support children with complex developmental trauma and inadequate integration and partnership between child protection and education systems (Lund & Stokes, 2020). Poor educational outcomes increase the risk of psychosocial disadvantage (Forsman et al., 2016). Children and young people with a history of child protection involvement, especially those with special educational needs such as learning difficulties, have been identified at greater risk of exclusion from school than other children (Jay et al., 2022).

Quality educational experiences are essential for the immediate and longer-term health and wellbeing of children and young people in out-of-home care. Positive relationships between youth and their case workers can support school engagement (Jaramillo & Kothari, 2022) but children in foster care who experience numerous placement and school changes are less likely to develop supportive relationships with school staff and peers (Tilbury et al., 2014). High expectations of academic achievement from a significant adult and positive teacher-child relationships can exert a benefit on school performance and later social and behavioural competence in the classroom (Tilbury et al., 2014). Increased awareness by teachers of the impact of trauma and training of teachers to work with children who have experienced trauma also improves school outcomes (Lund & Stokes, 2020). Early intervention to support school readiness and ongoing interventions to prevent poorer outcomes can help children in out-of-home care to achieve their full potential (Maclean et al., 2024). Experiences of success, whether in education or other areas of their lives, also enhance educational attainment for children in out-of-home care (Tilbury, et al., 2014.)



Method

A rapid evidence review was conducted to identify and document evidence on best practice in schools to meet the needs of students living in out-of-home care. While a systematic review offers the most comprehensive appraisal of all available empirical evidence on a topic, this is a time consuming and intensive process (Higgins et al, 2024). A rapid review uses a systematic method to search and critically appraise the evidence within a relatively short timeframe (Ganann et al., 2010). A rapid evidence review is responsive to the needs of the end user and often used to synthesise key findings from the available research on a topic to inform policy and practice decisions (Hartling et al., 2017).



Inclusion/exclusion criteria

Strict inclusion and exclusion criteria were established prior to conducting searches to ensure relevant articles were retrieved. In line with the purpose of the rapid evidence review, inclusion criteria were restricted to peer reviewed studies published in English between January 2013 and December 2023. Studies had to be education-focused and conducted with children in (or transitioning into) primary or secondary school who were in some type of out-of-home care (foster/kinship, adoption, residential setting). Studies had to have a primary aim of supporting academic and/or social-emotional development needs and outcomes and to focus on delivery in school or school-like settings, or which could be adapted to the school context. Studies were excluded if the sample comprised students in, or transitioning to higher education; if they did not report on findings from empirical research; or if they reported on home-based educational interventions that were unlikely to be implementable in the school setting.

Included studies were primarily evaluations of program interventions and ranged from well-designed randomised control trials (RCTs) to quasi-experimental and pre-test post-test designs. A small number of mixed methods or qualitative studies were included. This decision was made on the basis that these studies reported findings on practices approaches that were otherwise absent from the review and their inclusion maximised retrieval of relevant information on emerging, promising or high efficacy programs and evidence-based practices.

Screening

Searches were undertaken in July and August 2024 and were conducted across four academic databases (ProQuest, MEDLINE, ERIC and Scopus) using four separate search strings.

- Child* OR young people OR youth OR young person* OR student
- out-of-home care OR care* OR OOHC OR looked after OR foster* AND care OR guardianship OR kinship* OR reunification OR restoration OR child protection OR child welfare
- Education* OR learn* OR teaching OR school* OR academic OR education* outcome OR education* attainment OR education* support OR educational achievement
- Intervention OR program*



2391 articles retrieved

The searches retrieved a total of 2391 articles. Titles and abstracts were screened, and duplicate references removed.



83 studies selected

A total of 83 studies were selected for full-text review and articles were imported into Covidence software to facilitate collaborative review.



2 reviewers

2 reviewers independently assessed each article for eligibility to ensure inter-rater reliability. Conflicting assessments were reviewed by both parties and a final decision regarding inclusion was reached.



18 articles in rapid review

A further 65 articles were excluded by reviewers on the basis that they did not meet inclusion criteria. In total, 18 articles were selected from inclusion in the rapid review. ([See Table 1](#). PRISMA flow chart).

Critical appraisal and narrative synthesis

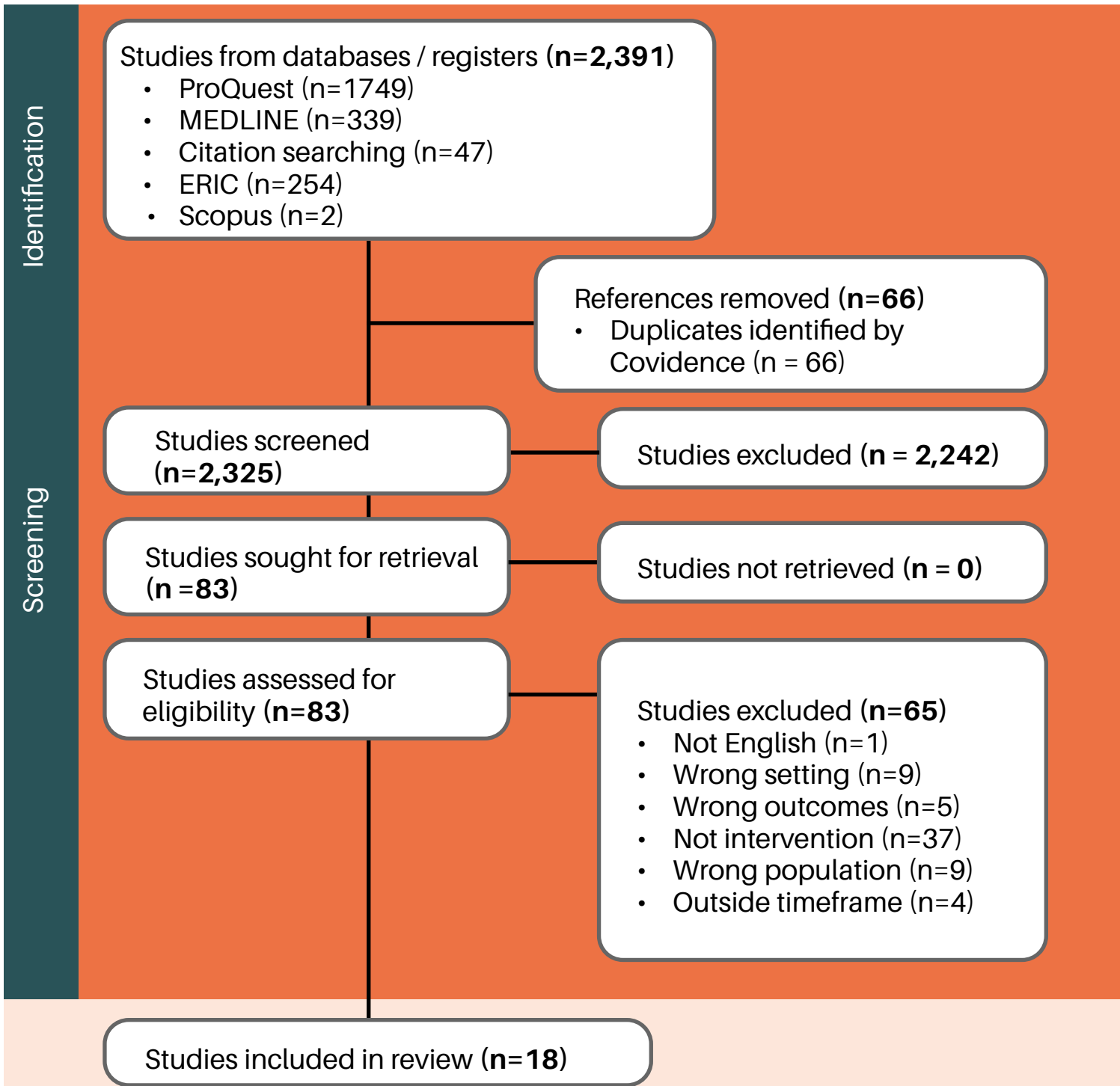
Critical appraisal is a systematic process in which the quality, biases, strengths and limitations of each article are evaluated (e.g. Aveyard, 2010). As the studies used heterogeneous designs, the Mixed Method Appraisal Tool (MMAT) was used (Hong et al., 2018). This is a reliability checklist that ensures each article has met appraisal criteria. An overall quality rating was assigned to included studies that ranked them as 'high', 'promising' (medium) or 'emerging' (low) (see Table 3). A rating of 'high' was assigned to studies that were RCTs employing a rigorous design and reporting post intervention outcomes. Studies received a 'promising' rating if they used a quasi-experimental or experimental/non-randomisation design and provided some evidence of the effectiveness of an intervention. Studies designated as 'emerging' either did not use an experimental or quasi-experimental design, or if they did, they only presented descriptive statistics rather than evaluation of its effectiveness.

Covidence™ software was used to extract and tabulate data and categorise study characteristics (see Appendix 1). This approach is well-suited to a rapid review of evidence of a heterogeneous group of studies since it allows for a critical appraisal and summary of individual study findings and a synthesis of overall recommendations for policy, practice and research improvements. Reviewer 1 independently completed a first parse of data extraction and Reviewer 2 checked extracted data for each study against the corresponding article. This process ensured decisions regarding data extraction were confirmed by both reviewers for reliability. A descriptive summary of studies is presented in Tables 2- 4. A narrative synthesis (King et al, 2022) was conducted and was used to formulate relevant policy and practice implications.





Table 1. Search Strategy



Results

Description of included articles

The 18 articles that were included in the review reported on multiple international program interventions addressing educational needs of children and/or youth in out-of-home care ([see Table 2 in Appendix A](#)). In three cases, the same intervention, or a replication of it, was reported in more than one article. The studies were heterogeneous in terms of research aim, population, intervention type, setting and methodology. Most studies were conducted in the United States (n=11), two from Canada and Sweden and one each from the United Kingdom, Norway and Australia. These 18 studies included 10 RCTs; 4 quasi-experimental designs; 1 cross-sectional study using baseline data for an RCT; 2 mixed method designs and 1 qualitative study.

Assessing the quality of evidence

The Mixed Method Appraisal Tool (Hong et al., 2018) was used to rank the quality of studies (Table 3). This was a first step to determining the effectiveness of programs or interventions reported in studies and, following this, to the identification of discrete activities that represent 'best' or 'good' practice. Table 3 describes the programs, the primary child-related support need they addressed, the overall quality rating they achieved and the reference(s) of publications which reported on them.



Table 3. Studies by MMAT Quality Rating

Programs or strategies	Primary support needs	Quality Rating	References
Do the Good program	Self-esteem, emotional regulation and social skills	Promising	D'Andrea et al 2013
Early Start to Emancipation Preparation Tutoring program	Academic skills	High	Zinn and Courtney 2014
Head Start Program	Pre-academic and pro-social skills, socio-emotional wellbeing	High	Lipscombe 2013
Kids In Transition to School program	Pre-academic and pro-social skills, socio-emotional wellbeing	High	Pears et al 2013 Lynch et al 2017 Graham et al 2017 Pears et al 2024
On The Way Home program	School attendance, placement stability, externalising behaviour problems	High	Trout et al 2013 Trout et al 2020

Paired Reading program (replication)	Academic skills	Promising	Vinnerljung et al 2014
Skolfam model SISUKAS model (replication)	Academic and pro-social skills, socio-emotional wellbeing	Promising	Durbeej et al 2017 Pirttimaa & Väливаara 2018
Teach Your Children Well program	Academic skills	High	Harper et al 2016 Hickey & Flynn 2020
Virtual Schools program	Academic and pro-social skills, socio-emotional wellbeing, placement stability	Emerging	Drew & Banerjee 2019
Ready to Succeed initiative	Academic achievement, school stability and engagement	Emerging	Weinburg et al 2014
Fostering Healthy Futures program	Academic achievement, school and placement stability	Promising	Somers 2020
Foster school connectedness	School engagement and relationships	Emerging	Tilbury et al 2024

A total of ten studies used Randomised Control Trial (RCT) design to evaluate interventions and all were assessed as reaching a 'high' quality standard. The programs these studies represented are: Kids In Transition to School Program (KITS); Head Start; Early Start to Emancipation Preparation Tutoring Program On The Way Home. Four studies evaluated outcomes of Kids In Transition to School Program (Pears et al 2013, 2020; Graham et al 2017; Lynch et al 2017) and two studies each evaluated outcomes of Harper et al 2016; Hickey & Flynn 2020) (Trout et al, 2013; 2020). All interventions except Early Start to Emancipation Preparation Tutoring reported statistically significant improvements in investigated outcomes.

Five studies using quasi-experimental design to evaluate an intervention (or an aspect of one) with a non-randomised control (or treatment-as-usual, population comparison) were assessed as reaching a 'promising' level of quality. These report on a total of four programs: the Skolfam model (Durbeej et al 2017) and a replication of it [SISUKAS] (Pirttimaa & Väливаara 2018); "Do the Good" (DtG) program (D'Andrea et al 2013); Paired Reading program [replication] (Vinnerljung et al 2014) and the Fostering Healthy Futures (FHF) program (Somers et al 2020).

Two studies reported findings based on data from implemented programs but did not evaluate the effectiveness of these programs and were thus assessed at the 'emerging' quality standard of evidence. The programs were the Ready to Succeed initiative (Weinburg et al 2014) and the Virtual Schools program (Drew & Banerjee 2019). Finally, a mixed methods study which did not report on a specific program or intervention was included as it presented findings about school-related practices to promote youth connectedness and was the only study from Australia (Tilbury et al 2014).

Summary of good practices

Ten distinctive practices were identified through a critical synthesis of included studies. Each practice was allocated to the most applicable school-based application; however, it should be noted that several had potential applicability across different levels. Four practices were allocated as Targeted and Intensive Support, and three were either Specific Teaching and Learning Adjustments or Whole of School Approaches. No practices were identified that focused on Professional Learning and Capability Building. Details of the ten practices and the corresponding evidence-based programs and evaluations from which they came are summarised in Table 4.



Table 4. Good practices identified in studies

Practice	Goals	Program examples	Type	Setting	School approach
1. Direct instruction	To improve (early) academic skills and attainment	Paired Reading program; Early Start to Emancipation Preparation Tutoring program; Teach Your Child Well program	1:1 or small group Reading, tutoring or pre-academic readiness	Home or school	Specific teaching and learning adjustments
2. Small group tuition	To provide more intensive learning support	Early Start to Emancipation Preparation Tutoring Program; Teach Your Child Well program; Kids In Transition to School program	Small group-based learning opportunities with higher teacher to student ratio	School	Targeted and intensive support
3. Structured routines	To build early literacy and prosocial skills	On The Way Home program; Kids In Transition to School program	1:1 or group-based, consistent routine and activities	Home or school	Specific teaching and learning adjustments
4. Positive behaviour support	To improve emotional self-regulation skills (e.g., appropriate interaction, attention, impulse control)	On The Way Home program; Kids In Transition to School program; Do the Good program	Group-based; use role-modelling, mindfulness, positive reinforcement	School	Specific teaching and learning adjustments

Practice	Goals	Program examples	Type	Setting	School approach
5. Engaging with carers	To build skills to support academic and behaviour management, support school engagement and attendance	Paired reading Program; On The Way Home program; Kids In Transition to School program	1:1 or group-based; Interactive (role plays, home assignments)	Home	Targeted and intensive support
6. Appointing a designated teacher	Appoint a designated teacher to support and champion children in care	Virtual Schools Program; On The Way Home program; Ready to Succeed Initiative	Primary contact within school; Advocate and support child; Liason with carer and professional support team	School	Whole of school approach
7. Multi-professional teamwork approach	To coordinate support across academic and emotional domains	Skolfam model; Virtual Schools program; Head Start program	Integrated team approach for assessment, planning, monitoring and adjustments	School, community	Targeted and intensive support
8. Individualised planning	To support academic and psychosocial development, self-esteem, peer relationships	Virtual schools program; Skolfam Model; Head Start program	Individualised education or learning plans	School	Targeted and intensive support
9. Trauma-informed approach	To support emotional regulation and interpersonal skills	Do The Good program; Virtual Schools program	Group or 1:1, may use evidence-based therapeutic programs (DBT, PCIT), professional development on impact of early trauma and care on learning	School	Whole of school approach
10. Facilitating connectedness	To promote school engagement and connection to schools, teachers peers	Fostering Healthy Future program; Do The Good program	Group based, use extracurricular activities and adult mentors to engage students at risk of exclusion	School, residential	Whole of school approach

1. Specific teaching and learning adjustments

Direct instruction

Several interventions focused on supporting literacy skills for children in care using direct instruction practice, including those focused on early school readiness. Direct instruction, or teacher-directed learning, involves clear, unambiguous and explicit actions by the teacher. This practice approach is appropriate for children in out-of-home care because it reduces uncertainty and confusion and builds a sense of confidence and mastery. A home-based program with potential application to the school setting is the Paired Reading Program to improve children's reading skills by instituting weekly reading routines with foster carers. The program is conducted in collaboration with schools, where the reading sessions and assessments take place, and includes specific procedures for training, monitoring, and supporting both the carers and the children throughout the intervention period. A Swedish replication study was evaluated and confirmed the positive results reported in the earlier UK program evaluation with significant gains in literacy skills such as word and image decoding and reading (Vinnerljung 2014). Teach Your Child Well is a 28 week tutoring program for primary school aged children which uses direct instruction by trained university student volunteers. Students engage in guided practice with immediate feedback from the teacher to reinforce learning and the program incorporates strategies to help children with behavioural challenges improve their academic and social skills. Results showed positive effects on literacy and numeracy for primary school aged children (Harper & Schmidt 2016).

Structured routines

Predictability is particularly important for children in out-of-home care due to the uncertainty and disruption in their early years. Routines can help restore a sense of safety, which is a fundamental condition for learning. Most programs in the review promoted structured routines, such as the home-based reading routines for the Paired Reading program, as noted above, and it was a fundamental part of early intervention programs to establish early learning habits. For example, Kids In Transition to School created opportunities for children in foster care to learn and practice the routines and activities that take place in a typical kindergarten classroom in the two months prior to and after starting school. The practice was led by a lead teacher with an early childhood education background and two assistant teachers with early childhood education experience using evidence-based classroom behaviour management strategies to support early literacy, self-regulatory and social skills. An evaluation examined its impact on cortisol levels, associated with stress response, and showed significant improvements in school adjustments across academic performance, appropriate classroom behaviours, and engagement (Graham et al 2017). Establishing consistency and routines at home was also a key practice of the On The Way Home program. The curriculum supported the reintegration of adolescent boys from residential care to home and their school reintegration. Caregivers were supported to establish rules and routines regarding school attendance and homework completion, including using a homework checklist to reinforce this practice.

Positive behaviour support

Several programs focused on behavioural supports to improve the learning capacity of children and youth in out-of-home care. This is unsurprising, considering the substantial literature about the deleterious impacts of childhood trauma on emotional regulation and social skills. Two programs that include positive behaviour support are Kids In Transition to School and On The Way Home. Kids In Transition to School also equipped children with the social and self-regulatory skills needed for school readiness. Teachers employed evidence-based classroom behaviour management strategies that support children with impulse control and social interactions, including emotional recognition, listening and following directions. Along with the evaluations noted above, a study was conducted to examine the impact of the program on suicidal ideation at age 10. Children in the intervention group showed improved self-esteem with potential to reduce subsequent suicidality (Pears et al 2024). On The Way Home focuses on reintegrating young people into the home and school environment in the transition from residential care. Behaviour support practice included close monitoring of school absences and suspensions, and then working closely with teachers, family and the young person to address externalising behaviour problems. The program demonstrated effectiveness for improving placement and school stability (Trout et al, 2013) and caregiver empowerment and self-efficacy (Trout et al, 2020).

A novel therapeutic intervention for young women with childhood trauma backgrounds that has potential application in schools is the Do the Good program. Young women are supported with four goals: (1) 'play the whistle' (perseverance and putting aside frustration to pursue the goal); (2) 'show up' (commit to be doing one's best and being aware of emotional reactions to distress), (3) 'build your team' (leadership skills and responsibility), and (4) 'fill the tank' (provide support to one another). The program includes positive behaviour practices to reinforce and reward positive behaviour and teach self-regulation mastery. DBT mindfulness skills are used to help the team members gain awareness of their emotional reactions, learn to de-escalate and find ways to persevere despite frustration using positive reinforcement and redefining goals and success. An evaluation reported encouraging results in the mental health areas measured which include lowered anxiety and stress, and statistically significant increases in peer helping behaviour, along with marginal growth in encouraging others (D'Andrea et al 2013).

2. Targeted and intensive support

Small group tuition

Two tutoring interventions focused on supporting children's academic skills development in a small group or individual learning environment. Teach Your Child Well involves tutors working with small groups of approximately four children. Following the promising results reported in the evaluation by Harper and Schmidt (2016), an evaluation was conducted to examine the effectiveness of a 15 week program compared to the 28 week program. A similar effect size was reported, demonstrating potential cost savings (Hickey & Flynn 2020). In contrast, there were no differences in academic outcomes for young people aged 14 and 15 who received the Early Start to Emancipation Preparation Tutoring

program, an individual home-tutoring intervention, delivered by trained university student tutors. The authors reported that significant implementation challenges hampered program fidelity. Only 61% of the intervention group received the program and a substantial proportion of the control group received school-based tutoring. The authors concluded that home-based tutoring programs may be no more effective than existing school-based tutoring services (Zinn & Courtney 2014). Kids In Transition to School is an early intervention program to prepare children in out-of-home care for kindergarten. The program had a high staff-to-child ratio to allow for individual instruction and interactional learning opportunities, including during snack breaks. It has demonstrated a positive effect on early literacy skills (Pears 2013). Kids In Transition to School was the only intervention in this review that conducted an evaluation to establish its cost effectiveness (Lynch et al 2017). Statistical analysis was performed to assess the relative costs of days free from internalising symptoms and externalising behaviours against program costs and other service usage. The results support a conclusion that the program represents good value for the use of public funds.

Engaging with carers

Several programs focused on practices to engage directly with caregivers to build their capacity to bond effectively to their child's learning at home and to actively support and reinforce school engagement. On The Way Home included delivery of curriculum-based programs by family consultants to improve caregiver skills in supporting community and school reintegration of 12-18 year old boys from residential care. The Common Sense Parenting program focused on learning how to stay calm, give praise, and set effective consequences. The impact of caregiver training on youth outcomes were not evaluated separately but the overall intervention was found to be effective at promoting school and placement stability (Trout et al 2013; 2020). Kids In Transition to School implemented an 8-session group-based program for caregivers during their child's transition to kindergarten. Facilitators used interactive teaching techniques, role plays, and home assignments to promote effective behavioural management by caregivers. While the impact of caregiver-directed program elements was not reported separately, the intervention demonstrated significant positive outcomes on school readiness (Lynch et al 2017). Finally, the Paired Reading program involves a manualised caregiver training program to teach foster carers how to engage their child in a regular reading routine (Vinnerljung et al 2014).

Multi-professional teamwork approach

A core element of the Swedish Skolfam® model and a Finnish replication of the model, SISUKAS, was the collaboration of an interdisciplinary team of social workers, psychologists, and special education teachers working together to provide holistic assessment and support to improve the educational outcomes and well-being of primary school-aged children in foster care over a two-year period. (Durbeej & Hellner, 2017; Pirttimaa & Valivaara 2018). Similarly, education liaisons in the Ready to Succeed program worked closely with youth and their caregivers alongside an interdisciplinary team of social workers, teachers and other services to coordinate comprehensive support. As documented by Weinburg et al (2014), these practices were consistent with strategies and interventions for decreasing risk factors and improving the educational success of foster youth. Head Start uses a holistic model of

care to support early literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional skills for disadvantaged preschool-age children and their families. The wrap-around support for children in the Head Start program includes supporting caregivers with parenting classes, housing, employment, access to healthcare, job training and community services. In addition, children received regular health screenings, including vision, hearing, and dental checks to identify and address any health issues early and were provided with nutritious meals and snacks to ensure their healthy development. The evaluation demonstrated an improvement in children's pre-academic skills, teacher-child relationship and externalizing behaviour problems (Lipscombe et al, 2017).

Individualised plans

The Skolfam® model [and its replication, SISUKAS] develop, implement and monitor individualized education plans tailored to support academic and psychosocial development. Pirttimaa & Valivaara (2018) reported non statistically significant improvements in reading, math, and writing skills and some improvements in psychosocial wellbeing; however, those with severe difficulties required ongoing support. Head Start develops individualised learning plans based on the unique developmental needs and services and accommodations for children with disabilities to ensure they can fully participate in the program. The Head Start Impact study found significant positive effects on pre-academic skills (Lipscombe 2013). Virtual School headteachers engaged with key stakeholders to formulate personalised education plans in partnership with children, social workers, carers, and schools. The focus of support in the transition from primary to secondary school was on building self-esteem and peer relationships. Drew & Banerjee (2019) showed the degree of variability in what each Virtual School program delivered and the wide range in the numbers of children they supported. However, all virtual schools focused on establishing close working relationships with other services and professionals including mental health and social work professionals.

3. Whole of school approach

Appointing a designated teacher

A practice used in several programs was to appoint a person as primary contact and support person for a child or youth in care. In some cases, this role sat within the school and in others it was part of the intervention. The Virtual School program falls into the former group with the program encouraging schools to appoint a 'designated teacher' to ensure continuity in planning for individual children and to champion the needs of all children in care in the school. Where it did operate, the designated teacher role would engage in partnership with the Virtual School Headteacher to develop, monitor and adjust individual education plans (Drew & Banerjee 2019). The family consultant was a central element of the On The Way Home program. Their practice included close monitoring of the young person's engagement with school, including absences and suspensions, and then working closely with teachers, family and the youth to address issues. The program demonstrated effectiveness for improving placement and school stability (Trout et al, 2013) and caregiver empowerment and self-efficacy (Trout et al, 2020). Similarly, the Ready to Succeed initiative included education liaisons as a critical program component.

Education liaisons perceived themselves as troubleshooting education barriers that the youth encountered and bridging the gaps between the various agencies that were involved and were seen by caregivers, school staff and other professionals as a key link between all the people and agencies in the young people's lives (Weinburg et al 2014). The practices used by education liaisons included providing support to ensure that young people were in appropriate school placements and to prevent unnecessary school transfers if their placement changed. While no statistically significant changes in academic achievement were reported, positive correlations between the number of school moves and attendance rates were found. Qualitative data indicated that their relationship with education liaisons assisted young people with problem-solving to address education barriers.

Trauma-informed practice approach

Trauma-informed practice is at the core of the therapeutic sports program, Do the Good which is designed to meet the complex support needs of young women with post-traumatic stress disorder and a history of abuse and neglect living in residential care. Do the Good incorporates three evidence-based therapeutic treatment models: Attachment, Regulation and Competency (ARC), Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) and Parent-child Interaction Therapy (PCIT) which include core components for building secure attachment relationships with adults and peers, developing developmentally-appropriate task competency, and self-regulation. Operating as a supplement to mental health services, the program offers a non-clinical opportunity for this group of young women to develop social and emotional skills including mindfulness, distress tolerance and leadership. PCIT was adapted to train sports coaches to provide behaviour-specific praise and to offer specific behavioural guidance and game strategy, both 1:1 and for the whole team. The intervention demonstrated a positive effect on mental health (D'Andrea et al 2013). Virtual School Headteachers recognise that schools need to embrace a trauma-informed approach to equip them to respond effectively to the learning support needs of children in care. The 'designated teacher' is identified as a key contact point within schools to raise awareness of this group of students and champion efforts to improve their learning outcomes. The Virtual School program also includes professional developments such as staff training, forums and conferences, to equip teachers and other staff to understand the impact of early trauma and placement in care on the learning of children and young people (Drew & Banerjee 2019).

Facilitating connectedness

Student engagement is a complex, underlying factor that impacts on school attendance and completion. While it is critical for the educational and wellbeing outcomes of children and young people in care, engagement was not the direct focus of any intervention studies reviewed. Two mixed methods studies present emerging evidence about the importance of connection and relationships for school engagement and future outcomes. Tilbury et al (2014) found that students who perceived the school environment as welcoming and supportive were more positively connected and optimistic about the future. Young people who were the most positively connected to school were those who indicated they received assistance from carers and caseworkers. Somers et al (2020) reported that academic success of youth in foster care was associated with school connectedness using data from

the Fostering Healthy Future program. Cultivating school connectedness is a shared responsibility, a whole of school approach, founded on a valuing of relationships and a commitment to creating a welcoming and inclusive culture. Aligned with trauma informed practice, fostering belonging and connectedness may involve creatively using extracurricular activities to bring students and teachers together as well as encouraging teachers to see themselves as positive attachment figures for students who may otherwise feel isolated and excluded. Do the Good provides a template for using team-based activities and adult mentors to support young people with a trauma background to flourish. While no evidence is currently available of the Do the Good therapeutic sports intervention in a school setting or with different groups, the evaluation demonstrates its effectiveness in a residential setting with traumatised young women and provides information about program elements for application to schools (D'Andrea et al., 2013)

Intersection with good practice for supporting children with severe mental disorders

The Western Australia Department of Education commissioned an evidence scan on good practices to support children with severe mental health disorders in schools. The final report by Megan O'Connell Consulting was examined to identify any intersections in good practice supporting children in out-of-home care.

Overall, the evidence suggests that the greatest opportunities for prevention and intervention of severe mental health disorders among students are a blend of universal and targeted interventions, with positive child outcomes dependent on implementation fidelity. O'Connell highlights some limitations in the available literature, including the absence of an agreed definition of 'severe mental disorders'. Despite this, studies showed alignment with an understanding that severe mental disorders span three dimensions: 1) diagnosis, 2) extended duration of condition (two or more years) and 3) impairment in the areas of education, employment, personal and/or social functioning (p 3-4). It also notes evidence that severe mental disorders often co-occur with conditions like autism and ADHD and are more prevalent among students who experience poor family functioning. Finally, although O'Connell drew on interventions to assist students with severe mental disorders, they noted that the good practices were aimed at supporting all children with mental health disorders.

No studies were found that focused directly on *Professional Learning and Capability Building* for teachers. Indeed, the literature indicated that teachers had limited confidence to respond to student mental health and behavioural needs, and a limited ability to recognise children who may internalise symptoms of severe mental disorders including anxiety (p 11). This indicates a significant area of practice development in teacher capability to identify symptoms of mental illness and the need to ensure teachers have access to reliable screening tools for early identification of children at risk of mental disorders (p18). There report also found there were no identified best practice to provide *specific learning adjustments* for students with severe mental disorders (p 28). Therefore, the report focused on practices that were associated with *targeted and intensive support* and *whole of school approaches*.

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) emerges as is an effective intervention to reduce depression and anxiety symptoms in children and young people and can be delivered in universal or targeted modalities. CBT can be delivered in group-based interventions and has proven efficacy in reducing elevated symptoms for those who have previously experienced mental health disorders. It has widespread use in clinical settings and is likely to be an effective intervention for children with severe mental disorders provided it is delivered with fidelity (p 18). As a targeted and intensive support, it is most effective when delivered by mental health practitioners (p18) but a range of computer-based CBT programs have been developed over recent years that enable students to engage online through guided sessions (p 19). There is some evidence to support the use of these low cost and highly accessible options, especially for young people who cannot or choose not to attend formal therapy, however, research on their longer-term efficacy is still emerging (p 17). These programs show potential as a standalone or used in combination with face-to-face therapy, and include SPARX, which delivers CBT in a game environment and MoodGYM, an Australian program (p 20).

Whole of school approaches are universal programs with a focus on social and emotional learning and are often delivered in a classroom setting by teachers. These universal programs were found to be most impactful for students at risk of emotional disorders or with heightened symptoms and successful implementation in the classroom relies on teachers who have received training, have sufficient time and are supported by the school (p16). The use of meditation and mindfulness has gained popularity in schools for supporting students with emotional regulation and concentration but is more costly than social and emotional teaching and there is no evidence of its effectiveness as a universal school intervention (p 13). Mindfulness, as part of evidence-based therapeutic programs, has been found to be an effective intervention for young people with complex trauma backgrounds (D'Andrea et al., 2013) and there may be a case for its use in targeted programs with students with complex emotional and behavioural support needs. There is some evidence that school-based interventions for promoting adolescent mental health significantly improve school climate when delivered by counsellors (p 17). This suggests an intersection with evidence on supporting students living in out-of-home care through the adoption of a multi-professional teamwork approach.

Social and emotional learning programs help children to identify and regulate their emotions and seek support where needed. These whole of school approaches are often modelled within a multi-tiered system of support to embed mental health literacy across the school (p 12). Positive behaviour support is identified as a team-based approach to coordinate care, support services and resources for children who have experienced trauma and/or have complex needs (p 21). Evidence also supports its use in individualised planning approaches such as the Team Around the Learner (TAL) framework (p 22). Positive behaviour support was also highlighted as a good practice in supporting students living in out-of-home care, strengthening the case for its wider practice adoption in schools for supporting students with complex emotional and behavioural support needs.

Discussion

The review identified 18 articles about school support and educational needs and outcomes for children and young people in out-of-home care. Taken together, the review reports on findings from a total of 12 programs, models or initiatives. There were nine intervention studies, which includes five RCTs rated as high quality and four quasi-experimental studies which were rated as promising. The review included two studies which reported on data collected for program interventions but did not evaluate effectiveness and one mixed method study reporting on findings from a large survey of Australian youth in care but not on any specific program or practice. These studies were rated as emerging since, despite their design limitations, they offered insights on the views of young people and focused on under-explored areas such as sense of school connectedness and belonging among students in out-of-home care. Overall, the review highlights a need for more rigorous interventions and larger sample sizes to draw definitive conclusions, including interventions focused on promoting school belonging.

In terms of the primary outcomes of interest, it was evident that the research had focused most on improving academic skills. A total of 16 studies (89%) focused on some aspect of academic attainment. In five cases, this was the sole focus (Harper et al., 2016; Hickey & Flynn, 2020; Vinnerljung et al 2014; Weinburg et al 2014; Zinn and Courtney 2014), whereas eleven studies focused on academic and social skills or outcomes such as school attendance (Drew & Banerjee 2019; Durbeej et al 2017; Graham et al 2017; Lipscombe et al, 2013; Lynch et al., 2017; Pears et al 2013; 2024; Pirttimaa & Väliavaara 2018; Somers et al., 2020; Trout et al, 2013; 2020). Socio-emotional wellbeing was the focus of just two studies (D’Andrea et al 2013; Tilbury et al 2014). None of the interventions that focused on socio-emotional support were school based or were solely focused on the initial point of entry to school. This represents a weakness in the evidence base for understanding the evolving and dynamic needs of children and youth in out-of-home care over the course of their schooling journey.

Policy and Practice implications

Good practice in schools for supporting children and young people in out-of-home care involves using a finely balanced mix of *targeted and intensive supports*, *specific teaching and learning adjustments* and *whole of school approaches*. The precise combination of these approaches will be context-specific and based on an understanding that some students will require targeted and intensive supports episodically across their school life, especially during placement changes and school transitions.

Trauma-informed practice emerges as a key *whole of school approach* that warrants further attention and application to school settings. D’Andrea et al (2020) report on a novel sports-based intervention that



could be readily adapted to existing school sports curricula. The evaluation demonstrates its significant positive impacts on mental health for young women with trauma histories in residential settings, but it has potential reach beyond this age, cohort and setting. As an embodied practice, therapeutic sports programs could be applied in schools across ages and stages, and with a broader group of children and youth who experience difficulties with emotional regulation and as a catalyst to behaviour change, self-esteem and positive peer interactions. The Virtual School is a compelling strategy for operationalising a systemwide focus on addressing the educational support needs of children and youth in out-of-home care. It takes a multi-level, cooperative and trauma-informed approach to improving child outcomes by focusing on building the capacity of schools and other systems to respond effectively to individual needs and to raising awareness of the additional learning needs of all children who have experienced early life trauma and care placement. The designated teacher role is a key strategy for raising awareness of the specific learning support needs of students in out-of-home care across the school ecosystem and addressing knowledge gaps about trauma through professional development.

Positive behaviour support practices are *specific teaching and learning adjustments* used to improve emotional self-regulation skills and the review shows these have been trialled in interventions that target the individual child and classroom setting. However, this practice in tandem with trauma-informed practice, has potential to be introduced as a whole of school approach with relational safety embedded as a core principle and mindfulness as a guiding practice for students and staff to develop reciprocal skills for deescalating difficult interactions. Similarly, practices that support a sense of belonging and connectedness sit at the whole of school level and involve commitment by all staff and the creative use of resources, such as sports and extracurricular activities. Together, these practices create a school culture that meets students where they are and helps them learn strategies to respond to emotional triggers and address behavioural difficulties that impact on their academic and social skills and sense of belonging. Schools are an important part of any child or young person's social ecosystem and for students living in out-of-home care, this ecosystem is likely to include a variety of other professionals and services who are each addressing specific support needs. This creates an inherent risk of confusion, service gaps and fragmented support. Schools need to actively collaborate with caseworkers, health and allied health teams as well as carers so that their educational plans align with other support plans.

Practices such as having lower student-teacher ratios and offering small group-based tuition may be particularly important *targeted and intensive supports* for improving educational experiences and outcomes of children and young people in out-of-home care. Evidence shows these are effective early intervention strategies to prepare young children for school, but they may also be helpful during transitions from primary to high school. Ensuring personalised learning plans are developed to monitor the learning support needs of students in out-of-home care is another targeted strategy supported by sound evidence alongside engaging with carers to ensure the home environment reinforces learning offered at school and promote placement and school stability. There is emerging evidence that caregivers are also an important resource for promoting school connectedness and optimism about future pathways for youth in out-of-home care (Somers et al., 2020; Tilbury et al., 2014). Based on this evidence, it is essential that schools create opportunities for carers to participate in school activities and events in order to promote a sense of belonging to their child's school. This is particularly critical for new

foster carers who may not have experience engaging with schools or those who feel excluded from professional decision-making processes.

Limitations

There were no practices identified in the review that were related to professional learning and capability building. This may be due to the rapid review method, which excluded grey literature and studies with small samples and using exploratory, qualitative designs. The same gap was also identified in the evidence scan on good practice for supporting students with severe mental disorders (O’Connell, 2024). While there is a clear role for trained clinicians and other mental health professionals to be involved in support for students with complex behavioural and emotional needs, it is also the case that positive teacher-student relationships are critical, so this omission warrants further investigation.

Conclusion

The rapid evidence review of empirical research conducted over the last decade helps to crystallise a number of good practices that have already shown efficacy, or may be used to enhance the capacity of schools to support the needs of children and young people in out-of-home care. Overall, there was limited intersection with evidence on good practice for supporting students with severe mental disorders, with the exception of multi-professional teams, individualised plans and positive behaviour support. Most programs that have been evaluated using high-quality experimental designs have focused on improving academic skills and performance, including school readiness skills, and are targeted to primary school students. The focus of programs targeted to high school students have been on school stability and externalising behaviour problems. Several programs attend to social and emotional needs, but this has rarely been the sole focus of the study. As such, there is less robust evidence of the effectiveness of these interventions. However, the review has distilled practices from the available evidence that promote trauma-informed approaches, including appointing a designated teacher to raise awareness of trauma-related needs and creative use of extracurricular activities. These provide opportunities to foster a whole of school environment where relational safety is prioritised and students in out-of-home care and their carers can experience a sense of connectedness and belonging.



Appendix A



Table 2. Overview of included studies

Program interventions are in **bold** text

Study aims	Int.	Design	Intervention purpose	Program elements	Measures	Population	Effectiveness/outcomes
To evaluate effectiveness of Do the Good (DtG) program	Yes	Pilot RCT	To implement a therapeutic curriculum and trauma-informed sports program for young women in residential care	Based on treatment models for youth impacted by complex trauma (Attachment, Regulation and Competency (ARC) Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) and Parent-child Interaction Therapy (PCIT) to build secure relationships with adults and peers, develop task competency and self-regulation.	Achenbach's Child Behaviour Checklist (CBCL)	88 female residential students aged 12 to 21 years (62 students voluntarily enrolled in the sports league and 26 control comparisons)	Significant interaction between total CBCL score, internalising symptoms and externalising symptoms with treatment condition
To assess the role of education liaisons in supporting school stability, achievement, and engagement of foster care youth	No	Mixed methods case study (using data from the Ready to Succeed initiative)	Ready to Succeed is a multi-component initiative	N/A	Interviews with education liaisons and qualitative data from intervention group	Non-representative cohort of 32 foster youth in 7th or 8th grade (n=102) who had received education liaison for 3 year period. Need further research experimental study design	No Statistically significant change but low rates of yearly school moves, high rates of attendance at traditional vs alternative schools

Study aims	Int.	Design	Intervention purpose	Program elements	Measures	Population	Effectiveness/ outcomes
To evaluate Early Start to Emancipation Preparation (ESTEP) program effectiveness	Yes	RCT	To improve academic performance and educational outcomes of adolescents in foster care.	Reading and math tutoring was conducted on a one-on-one basis by paid adult tutors in the child's home. Tutors (university students) receive initial and ongoing training.	Woodcock-Johnson Tests of Achievement III: letter-word identification, calculation and passage comprehension	465 youth in foster care aged 14 and 15 years (intervention n=246; Control n=219)	No statistical difference on academic outcomes in intervention and control groups at follow up. Results are inconclusive due to implementation
To evaluate impact of Head Start Impact Study intervention on early childhood outcomes and school readiness for children in care	Yes	RCT	To promote school readiness and reduce externalising behavioural problems among disadvantaged children and families	Individualised support matched to children's developmental level; regular vision, hearing and dental checks; nutritious meals for healthy development. Counselling to support children's emotional and psychological well-being. Holistic support to child and care givers.	N/A	253 preschool-age children (47% female) living in non-parental care drawn from a nationally representative sample of Head Start programs and families	Significant effects on pre-academic skills at 6 months and modest indirect effects at 18 months. Statistically significant impacts during the Head Start year on gains in children's pre-academic skills and relationships with preschool teachers, marginally significant effects on behaviour.
To evaluate effects of Kids In Transition to School (KITS) program on children prior to entering kindergarten (school readiness phase)	Yes	RCT	To promote early literacy and social-emotional skills of children in foster care to prepare them for school	Group based (12-15 children) curriculum-based program with high-teacher-student ratio (lead teacher and two assistants). 24 school readiness sessions and 8 caregiver sessions focusing on early literacy, prosocial, and self-regulation skills School readiness phase (pre-kindergarten) 2 hr twice weekly for 2 months). Transition/maintenance phase (early kindergarten) (2 hr, once weekly) in the first 2 months of kindergarten	N/A	192 pre-school aged children in care (102 intervention group, 90 control)	Children in KITS group exhibited significantly lower levels of oppositional and aggressive behaviours in the classroom at end of kindergarten compared to the control group. No statistically significant effects on prosocial skills

Study aims	Int.	Design	Intervention purpose	Program elements	Measures	Population	Effectiveness/ outcomes
To determine impact of KITS on internalising symptoms and externalising behaviour and asses cost effectiveness of KITS compared to services as usual.	Yes	RCT	As above	As above	CBCL scores over 12 months and data on days free from internalising symptoms (IFD) and externalising behaviour (EFD)	As above	Significantly increased IFD and EFD; did not significantly impact usual services. The cost of KITS is comparable to or less than similar programs.
To examine effects of KITS program on children's stress neurobiology and school adjustment	Yes	RCT	As above	As above	Cortisol level taken at start of school and examine if levels predicted teacher ratings of children's school adjustment 2 months later	As above	Positively influence stress neurobiology. Higher general cognitive functioning associated with higher ratings of school adjustment. No evidence of a significant direct effect on school adjustment.
To determine whether KITS program reduces preadolescent suicidal ideation (SI)	Yes	RCT	As above	As above	SI assessed at ages 9, 10 and 11 using the Children's Depression Inventory. Self-esteem measured at age 9.	As above	Intervention group less likely to report SI than control (21.7% to 33.9%) but difference did not reach statistical significance. Indirectly reduced SI through positive effect on self-esteem at age 9.

Study aims	Int.	Design	Intervention purpose	Program elements	Measures	Population	Effectiveness/ outcomes
To compare On The Way Home program to traditional aftercare supports for youth with disabilities discharging from residential care on placement and school stability	Yes	RCT	To provide integrated services and emotional, educational and behavioural support during the transition from residential treatment setting to home to prevent school drop-out	Trained OTWH consultant delivers 3 interventions (parenting, connections caregiver homework). School personnel are involved in direct services and weekly discussions; Consultant is key contact point for youth, family and school to promote collaboration	Placement and school stability data collected quarterly	88 youths aged 12-18 year old transitioning from residential care to home and community school (417 randomly assigned to treatment and 42 to control)	Negative events compared to control group
To assess the efficacy of the On The Way Home program for caregiver empowerment, self-efficacy, placement stability and school involvement.	Yes	RCT	As above	Focus on promoting school engagement but implemented with caregivers rather than schools.	Carers completed the 25-item Caregiver Self-Efficacy Scale and Family Empowerment Scale at post-test. Schools and family completed School & Home Placement Change Questionnaire at post-test and follow-up	187 child-caregiver dyads (n=98 intervention group and n=89 traditional aftercare supports), average age of child 15 years.	No significant differences on placement stability and school involvement at 12 month follow up but significant differences on caregiver empowerment and self-efficacy. Moderate to large differences in placement stability and school involvement at 21 month follow up. OTWH group 2-3 times more likely to be engaged in school and living in the community
To evaluate the Swedish replication of Paired Reading program	Yes	Quasi - experimental study (pre/post-test)	To improve literacy skills of children in foster care based on a UK short reading programme for children in care (PRP)	A 16-week paired reading program for foster carers to read with their child for 20 minutes a day, three times a week.	WISC-IV Vocabulary subtest, Swedish literacy and word decoding tests.	81 children in foster care aged 8-12 years (64% boys)	90% level of compliance with min. frequency (2+ weekly). Av. reading improvement of 11 months. Significant improvements in all areas for younger children and in 3 of 4 areas for older children.

Study aims	Int.	Design	Intervention purpose	Program elements	Measures	Population	Effectiveness/ outcomes
To examine interpersonal factors (connectedness, future orientation) and exogenous factors (placement and school moves) associated with schooling outcomes for foster care youth	No	Cross sectional study (using baseline data from Fostering Healthy Families program)	To improve academic and reduce disciplinary referrals for children in care	A short (9 month) mentoring and skills group program. Structured curriculum for 1:1 mentoring and weekly skills group (8 children) for 30 weeks. Topics include coping with change and loss, establishing healthy relationships. (see Taussig et al., 2007)	Participants receive cognitive, academic and mental health screening assessments including Psychological Sense of School Membership (PSSM) total scale, Adolescent Risk Behaviour Survey, Academic achievement (4 items); no detention or suspension (1 item); no placement changes (1 item)	363 children aged 9-11 in foster care (52.9% boys)	School connectedness significantly predicted higher academic performance. Special help in school associated with lower academic achievement. Future orientation, placement changes, and school moves did not significantly impact academic performance.
To assess impact of Skolfam model in school performance and psychosocial problems compared to services as usual	Yes	Quasi-experimental study (pre-post-test)	To improve school performance among foster children	The model adopts intervention that meets individual child needs and uses interagency collaboration and individualised planning in school and foster home.	WISC-IV to assess cognitive ability; Swedish scale DLS to assess literacy, writing, math; Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) to assess psychosocial problems and prosocial behaviour	91 children (54 intervention group and 37 in comparison group) at preschool or primary school	Small improvements with weak effects on perceptual reasoning, general cognitive ability and literacy skills relative to the comparison group. More rigorous designs (e.g., cluster RCTs) needed to confirm these findings

Study aims	Int.	Design	Intervention purpose	Program elements	Measures	Population	Effectiveness/outcomes
To evaluate SISUKAS , a replication of the Skolfam model	Yes	Quasi-experimental study (pre-post-test)	To improve the educational outcomes and well-being of children in foster care	Multi-professional team (social workers, psychologists, special education teachers) assesses and support the children over 2-year period	WISC-IV; SDQ Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire, CBCL, Child Behaviour Checklist, Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS), reading skills (ALLU), and math skills (MAKEKO)	20 foster children (15 girls and five boys) ages 6-10 years from 16 schools and six kindergartens.	Some children showed progress in reading, math, and writing skills. Improvements in psychosocial well-being, though those with severe difficulties required ongoing support
To evaluate the effectiveness of Teach Your Child Well on educational outcomes	Yes	RCT	To improve academic outcomes for children in foster care using a tutoring program	Small group-based (3-6 children) tutoring outside of school hours; 2 hr per week for 30-weeks. Trained university students as volunteer tutors.	Woodcock-Johnson (WJ) III reading and math subtests	91 children in care (IQ > 70) in grades 1 to 8, randomly assigned to intervention condition or a wait-list control)	Statistically significant and positive effects on word reading, spelling and math skills but not sentence comprehension.
To compare a shorter version of Teach Your Child Well (15 weeks) with a longer version (25 weeks)	Yes	RCT	As above	As above	As above	72 children in care (36 randomly assigned to the 15-week group and 36 to the 25-week group)	Shorter program as effective as longer program. 15 weeks is more beneficial for children with higher executive functioning than 25 weeks. Cost-effective and feasible intervention

Study aims	Int.	Design	Intervention purpose	Program elements	Measures	Population	Effectiveness/ outcomes
To understand the impact of connectedness on school engagement for youth in out-of-home care.	No	Mixed method study	N/A	N/A	N/A	404 youth aged 12-18 years. Survey responses from 202 youth in OOHC and 202 not in OOHC; interviews with 65 children in OOHC. 43 girls and 22 boys	Young people assisted by carers and caseworkers were more likely to be positively connected with school and to view education as a pathway to achieving future work and life goals.
To explore impact of education liaisons on school stability, achievement and engagement of foster youth	No	A mixed methods case study	Participant data from the Ready to Succeed initiative used.	N/A	Administrative data on GPA, school moves, attendance, Suspensions, expulsions for foster care youth obtained from state school records. Qual data based on interviews with school personnel, caregivers and document review.	32 youth in foster care in school grades 8-10	No statistically significant change was found in measures across the three-year period.
To explore the role of the Virtual School (VS) initiative in improving educational outcomes and emotional wellbeing for children in care	No	Qualitative study (Survey)	To champion the educational and emotional needs of children in care in transition to high school through creative use of funding to support educational activities including student tutoring, staff training.	N/A	N/A	Online survey sent to 148 VSH across England and 29 responses received (20% response rate)	Great variability in the local context and numbers of youth (10-15 years) being supported to transition to high school (< 20 to >250). Further research needed to evaluate effectiveness

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