

FACT SHEET

INDEPENDENT STUDENTS

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS ASSISTS SCHOOLS AND INDEPENDENT STUDENTS:

Community Connections has partnered with schools in north east Brisbane since 1997, to support young people (aged 12-18) who are at risk of or are experiencing homelessness, and who might be at risk of school disengagement. We work holistically to deliver comprehensive solutions, which focus on the individual needs of each young person & their supporters. The team is experienced in working with a diverse range of young people and the challenges they may be facing. We are a Child Safe Organisation.

Community Connections is an Accredited Employing Authority (AEA) by the Department of Education.

WHAT COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS CAN DO:

- Hold peer support groups
- Outreach to young people's schools, homes and/or communities
- Assist with independent living skills
- Provide information, support and referrals to young people regarding Centrelink, housing providers, legal information etc.
- Offer family mediation and support
- Build capacity of schools for early identification of youth homelessness risk factors
- ***Please note that we do not provide Emergency Accommodation***



Q. WHAT IS AN INDEPENDENT STUDENT?

The term "Independent Student" is used to describe a young person who is living away from their guardians and is responsible for their day to day wellbeing.

This factsheet has some information about supporting independent students in your school.

Q. HOW DOES A STUDENT BECOME INDEPENDENT?

Some of the factors that lead to young people becoming independent include:

- Trauma
- Guardians or family moving away
- Death of a guardian
- Guardians who are absent
- Unreasonable conditions in the family home including ongoing conflict, overcrowding, abuse, stressors of ill mental health, addiction, illness or disability within the family
- Becoming a parent
- Being a refugee in Australia without guardians (unaccompanied minor)

Q. WHAT MIGHT INDEPENDENT STUDENTS EXPERIENCE?

- Exhaustion: managing school, multiple work and/or Centrelink responsibilities, independent living responsibilities, and the impacts of the factors that have led to their independence
- Absences from school
- Financial difficulties
- Unstable housing or share house issues; having to regularly negotiate new housing arrangements
- Exploitation from accommodation providers or other negative relationships in their life
- Poor nutrition due to very low income and/or limited cooking skills
- Grief and loss e.g. absence of natural family relationships
- Isolation and loneliness from disconnection with peers and/or family.

Q. WHAT SIGNS MIGHT I SEE FROM STUDENTS?

- Arriving late to school or needing to leave early for appointments
- Missing class or falling behind in workload
- Tired or sleeping in class
- Unable to return permission slips or afford extracurricular activities
- Difficulties maintaining grooming due to hygiene poverty, i.e. wearing unwashed uniforms
- Needing to attend work or appointments with Centrelink or housing inspections. This could include use of phone at school
- Reduced access to food, hygiene products or resources previously obtained from family
- Increased stress symptoms, reduced ability to cope with workload or socialising at school
- Difficulty maintaining boundaries with friends

Q. WHAT CAN SCHOOLS & TEACHERS DO TO HELP?

Successful strategies used by school to assist independent students are:

- Referrals to support at the earliest possible time
- Acknowledge their ability to come to school, even if late (e.g. saying “thanks for coming today”)
- Be curious. Ask “*what do you need to get through today?*” or “*how can we support you today?*”.
- Offering flexible timetables
- Offering and supporting students with access to:
 - traineeships to increase income
 - Access to loan computers, text books and/or uniforms
 - information about and assistance to apply for school & QTAC special considerations
 - school fee waivers & support to apply for scholarships
- With student consent, Guidance Officers advise teaching staff of disruptions to learning
- **Remembering, school relationships are their community.** Graduation, Formal & other celebrations are important rites of passage in the absence of celebrations provided by family.



Community Connections
CASEWORK | COUNSELLING | GROUP FACILITATION

40 Station Street, Nundah 4012

07 3266 5199

www.communityliving.org.au