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## Students go from care to life on campus

- **Andrew Harvey**



Over 50,000 young Australians are formally placed in foster care, kinship care, or residential care.

They are children full of talent and potential, but many face disrupted schooling, trauma, and a culture of low expectations. Universities can help to raise these expectations and improve outcomes.

On Friday, La Trobe University is hosting an event for young people in care, their guardians and supporters. Presenters will highlight pathways to university, the benefits of study, and the support services of the Bendigo campus.

Importantly, attendees will also hear from university students who have themselves successfully transitioned from care. The event is part of a sustained effort to improve outcomes for young Australians leaving care.

Since 2015 La Trobe University has worked with Federation University of Australia and the peak Victorian welfare body, the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare.

Through the 'Raising Expectations' project, we have changed the way that universities and the welfare sector operate.

**Read more:**

- [La Trobe University confirms changes to school of education](#)
- [New La Trobe University course paves way for regional doctors](#)

University application forms now prioritise students from care, contact officers have been appointed to support these students on campus, and more targeted scholarships are offered.

Our work has been supported by the Myer Foundation and Victorian Government.

Since introducing these changes, our collective enrolments have increased fivefold. Over 230 students from care backgrounds now study at La Trobe and Federation, and Swinburne University has also now joined our project. For young Australians who transition from care into higher education, the financial and employment benefits are substantial.

Raising Expectations is not simply about university enrolments.

University may not be the best option for some children in care, but it should be an option for everyone. Normalising higher education is thus part of a broader cultural effort.

All children in care have potential, and all should be entitled to the same information, pathways and possibilities as other children.

Equally, universities benefit by enrolling students from care backgrounds.

Research confirms that classroom discussions and campus environments are improved through diversity of opinions.

We have also found that care leavers typically bring resilience, independence, and commitment to their studies, and that other students benefit from these attributes and knowledge.

Improving university access and support for students from care backgrounds is part of a larger project.

Governments are the corporate parents of children in care, and public universities have a mission of social justice.

We must all strengthen our efforts to ensure that children in care have the resources to realise their dreams.

*Associate Professor Andrew Harvey is Director of the Centre for Higher Education Equity and Diversity Research at La Trobe University*