

Media Release

No child should lose their education to family violence and homelessness – World-first education initiative bridges this gap

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A trial of a first-of-its-kind early-intervention education initiative has recently been launched, led by McAuley Community Services for Women (McAuley) and MacKillop Education in partnership with Monash University to address a critical education gap for children experiencing family violence.

Each year, thousands of Australian primary-aged children experiencing family violence become disconnected from education through no fault of their own. Often displaced into motels, refuges and crisis accommodation, many are unable to attend school safely or consistently, placing them at significant risk of falling behind and disengaging from learning altogether.

In 2024–25, more than 6,000 children assisted by specialist homelessness services in Victoria required short-term or emergency accommodation – and for 42% of them, family violence was the main reason they sought help¹.

Rather than replacing school, this program is designed as a bridge back to education, helping children maintain stability and continuity of learning during times of crisis. The trauma-informed initiative provides virtual learning opportunities for children.

McAuley CEO Jocelyn Bignold OAM said children should not lose access to education due to family violence and homelessness.

"When women and children escape family violence, safety is rightly the first priority. But too often children's education becomes another casualty of the crisis," Ms Bignold said.

"We see children moving between motels, refuges and temporary accommodation, separated from their teachers, classmates, routines and community. Many effectively disappear from education systems that are not designed to follow them during periods of instability."

Research shows that frequent moves and changes of school can significantly impact children's learning, placing them at greater risk of poorer educational outcomes². With many families moving multiple times within a year, learning loss can quickly become entrenched.

"Every child has the right to learn, regardless of their circumstances," Ms Bignold said.

"This program ensures children remain connected to education during some of the most difficult periods of their lives. It reduces the risk of disengagement and gives them the best possible chance of successfully returning to school."

Drawing on Monash University's expertise in digital learning design and delivery, the program provides a short-term stabilisation and re-engagement model that sits between crisis and reintegration into school.

The program is being delivered in partnership with MacKillop Education, whose trauma-informed education team fosters a safe and supportive learning environment that responds to the complex needs of children in crisis and empowers them to re-engage in their education.

The features of the program include:

- Up to two hours of daily learning engagement through virtual delivery

¹ AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare) (2025) *Specialist homelessness services annual report 2024–25*, AIHW, Australian Government

² Gannon J, Budgeon CA and Li IW (2023), 'Relationships between student mobility and academic and behavioural outcomes in Western Australian public primary schools', *Australian Journal of Education*, 67(3), 220–289.



- Learning aligned with the Victorian Curriculum
- Trauma-informed educational approaches that prioritise safety, regulation and readiness to learn
- Consistent educators who build strong, supportive relationships with students

The program is currently supported entirely through philanthropic investment, but ongoing funding is required to ensure it is sustainable in the long-term.

Ms Bignold said the program addresses a longstanding service gap for children affected by family violence and homelessness, and ongoing funding will be critical to providing more children the ability to continue their learning need while in crisis and short-term accommodation.

"For too long, we have accepted that children experiencing family violence and homelessness will fall behind at school while their families seek safety. This has enormous ramifications for children's futures and for our whole society. It does not have to be this way."

"This is a practical, evidence-informed solution that keeps children connected to learning when they need it most."

McAuley acknowledges the support of Safe Steps and wayss, whose referrals play an important role in connecting children and families experiencing family violence with the program.

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