

FACT SHEET

INDEPENDENT STUDENTS



The term “Independent Student” is used to describe a young person who is living away from their parents 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.
- | Parents or family moving away.
- | Death of a parent(s) or care giver.
- | Parents or family unable to exercise their responsibilities (absent).
- | Unreasonable conditions in the family including ongoing conflict, overcrowding, abuse, stressors of mental illness, addictions, illness or disability within the family.
- | Becoming a parent.
- | Being a refugee in Australia without parents (unaccompanied minor).

The term “Independent” most commonly comes from an assessment by the Department of Human Services (Centrelink) confirming one of the above factors. This is an intensive assessment process completed by a Centrelink Social Worker.

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS ASSIST SCHOOLS AND INDEPENDENT STUDENTS:

Since 1997 Community Connections has been working with schools in the North East of Brisbane, supporting young people (aged 12 to 18) who have stopped attending school or are at risk of leaving school early. Working in collaboration with schools we deliver comprehensive solutions, which focus on the individual needs of each young person. Our workers are experienced in working with a diverse range of young people including Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Island students, students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and students with a disability.

Community Connections is an Accredited Employing Authority (AEA) by the Department of Education, Training and Employment (DETESOA101051a)

WHAT COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS CAN DO:

- | Hold peer support groups (Independent Student Groups) in school lunchtimes.
- | Outreach to young people’s schools or homes.
- | Assistance with independent living skills.
- | Offer family relationship counselling/ mediations.
- | Provide information, support and referral to the young person regarding Centrelink, Housing Providers, Real Estate agents, income support, legal information etc.
- | Build capacity of school for early identification of youth homelessness risk factors.
- | *Please note that we do not provide Emergency Accommodation.*

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Q. WHAT MIGHT INDEPENDENT STUDENTS EXPERIENCE?

- | Exhaustion – from managing school + work (or Centrelink) responsibilities + independent living responsibilities + impacts of the factors that are causing the independence.
- | Absences from school.
- | Financial difficulties.
- | Unstable housing or share house issues and 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 or limited cooking skills.
- | Grief and loss.
- | Isolation and loneliness from disconnection from peers and/or family.

Q. WHAT ARE SIGNS I MIGHT SEE FROM STUDENTS IN MY CLASSES?

- | Arriving late to school or needing to leave early for appointments.
- | Missing class or falling behind in workload.
- | Tired in class.
- | Unable to return permission slips or afford extracurricular activities.
- | Unkempt appearance ie. wearing uniforms multiple times, unwashed.
- | Needing to attend work or appointments with Centrelink or housing inspections.
- | Reduced access to food or resources previously obtained from family when living at home.
- | Increased stress symptoms, reduced ability to cope with workload or socialising at school.
- | Difficulty maintaining boundaries with friends.

Q. WHAT THINGS CAN SCHOOLS AND TEACHERS DO TO HELP?

While participating in education may be very challenging for young people who do not have family support, school communities offer a range of protective factors to independent students.

It can be very confronting for young people to repeat the full details of what's happening in their life. Young people may feel most comfortable talking to a teacher they trust. Successful strategies used by schools to assist independent students are:

- | Flexible timetables.
- | Offering and supporting students with traineeships to increase income.
- | Waive school fees.
- | Guidance Officers advise teaching staff of disruptions for the student.
- | Information about and assistance to apply for special consideration
- | Access to loan text books or secondhand uniforms.
- | Referral to support at the earliest possible time.

When considering independent students the Department of Education, Training and Employment's State Education Fee's policy document outlines:

- | In waiving a fee entirely or in part, the principal should consider whether:
 - | a student at risk of disengaging from learning (independent students, for example) or a student of parents experiencing financial hardship would be disadvantaged through the charging of the school fee
- | In terms of this policy, 'parent' also means carer, guardian and independent student.

To find out more about Education Queensland policy on supporting Independent Students please see:

- | DETE: Independent Student Support Tool Kit
 - | DETE State Education Fee's Policy
- (<http://ppr.det.qld.gov.au/corp/finance/services/Pages/State-Education-Fees.aspx>)



Community Connections

CASEWORK | COUNSELLING | GROUP FACILITATION

