

Title: Preliminary learnings from the KEYS East program– bringing mental health into partnership with out of home care.

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Authors: Alex James, Sarah Ryan, Anoushka Wootton, Edith Botchway, Lauren Gibson, Laura Hayes.

In Australia, risk of mental health challenges in young people in out-of-home care (OOHC) is much higher (60-83%) compared to their peers in the general population (14-25%), and these young people face more challenges when accessing support services. To improve the support provided to these highly vulnerable young people, the Victorian Government commenced the Keep Embracing Your Success (KEYS) program to address some of the systemic barriers to services. One of the program sites is KEYS East, delivered by a consortium of partners including MacKillop Family Services, Mind Australia, VACCA, and YSAS.

KEYS East provides 12 months residential care and 6-months transition support for young people aged 12–17 years. The program takes a new approach to working with young people in OOHC who exhibit complex, risky, and challenging behaviours. Staff include a multidisciplinary team (e.g., neurofeedback specialist and psychiatrist, trauma-informed staff, and mental health clinician) who utilise holistic trauma-informed therapeutic approaches and deliver an agile model of care. Young people receive a range of support and therapeutic interventions, assisting with their recovery and transition towards home-based care or independent living.

This paper will address three research questions: (1) What are the barriers to accessing services in young people in OOHC?, (2) How does the KEYS East program address these barriers? and (3) What are some of the emerging learnings and findings from the program?

Preliminary learnings:

A key barrier to accessing support involves support periods being closed due to young people's presentation or non-attendance of appointment, resulting in sporadic and disconnected mental health support.

A trauma informed lens for this vulnerable population requires increased flexibility in service system.

With the introduction of safer trauma informed in-home supports, we see a reduction in behaviours of concern and increased capacity to engage with treatment and biopsychosocial supports.