

Youth Advisors' Page

What about school?

Everybody says 'if you want to get anywhere, you've got to get an education'. And we know that people are telling us we need to go to school.

The *Charter of Rights* says we have the right to a good education and to get extra support for special education needs and extra support for students with disabilities.

When Sara talked about her own experiences at school at the *Opening the Doors to Wellbeing State Conference* convened by KidsMatter and MindMatters it started us talking about what it was really like for children and young people at school. We talked about:

What did school look like for me?

[I had] a desire to do well and succeed that was instilled in me by my carers.

For the 13 years I was at school, I had around about 80 different people looking after me. That included foster carers and youth workers. That doesn't include the social workers, mentors, managers, psychiatrists or counsellors, who were also a part of my life.

...it was the only thing that was familiar to me and safe. Sometimes I used to go to school and have no idea who was looking after me when I got home.

I always enjoyed studying (despite my grumbles about assignments and exams) and this has largely been because I've been lucky enough to have a stable family life during my time in care.



What are the most difficult challenges?

...some children and young people are moved around often, which then means a move in school, something that can disrupt their education.

We also have to deal with complex issues that others may not have to deal with, family issues, self-identity issues, understanding our place in the world.

I think there's a stigma attached to 'being a kid in care' — I know that teachers have made assumptions about my behaviours, my abilities and whether I'm a trouble-maker or a special needs student...

I changed placement... I changed school... I lost friends... I lost my sense of belonging. For a long time I didn't know where I fit... I think I'm still trying to work that out.

What did I miss out on?

I feel like I missed a lot of my school years, I don't feel as though I concentrated at all in the time that I went there. And it's been really hard for me to be able to pick those learning habits up now, even as an adult.

What have you learnt about your school experiences?

A stable family life and supportive carers are crucial to success at school...

Keep at it!

Don't give up... ask for help... that's what some people are there for.

Most importantly, try to have some fun.

It's amazing what I can accomplish.