



The Pyjama Foundation
Submission to the Inquiry into Child Safety in Queensland
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Executive Summary

The Issue

Children and young people in Queensland's out-of-home care (OOHC) system face systemic challenges—educational disadvantage, instability, and a lack of emotional and relational support (this includes foster care, kinship care and residential care). Despite the best efforts of carers and statutory services, the current system often cannot provide the consistent, individualised attention children and young people need to thrive.

Our Solution

The Pyjama Foundation delivers a proven, trauma-informed mentoring program through trained volunteer mentors known as Pyjama Angels. Currently there are 871 volunteer Pyjama Angel mentors supporting children in care across Queensland - Brisbane, Gold Coast, Ipswich, Logan, Toowoomba, Sunshine Coast, Moreton Bay, Cairns, Central Queensland, Mackay, Townsville and Wide Bay Burnett. These mentors provide weekly one-on-one educational and emotional support to children in care, helping to build resilience, improve learning outcomes, and foster trust-based relationships that often last for many years. An evaluation and review conducted by the Queensland University of Technology in 2023 concluded that: *"The Pyjama Foundation's Love of Learning program works within the child protection system to protect and promote children's wellbeing and a love of learning. The program is evidence-based as it utilises the best available evidence to manage and implement the program."* (Knight, R. L., L'Estrange, L., Campbell, S., Kingston, K., and Balczun, M. (2023). *The Pyjama Foundation's Love of Learning Program: Theory and Practice*. Australian Centre for Philanthropy and Nonprofit Studies (ACPNS), QUT, Brisbane.) **Full report attached.**

- Since 2004, we've mentored over 14,000 children and delivered more than 1,000,000 hours of one-on-one mentoring.
- 92% of foster and kinship carers surveyed say their Pyjama Angel is a valued part of their support network.
- 94% of children in the program say their mentor helps them do well at school and build academic resilience.

Why It Matters

Queensland currently spends over \$5 billion annually on the consequences of late intervention (Minderoo Foundation, 2024). The Pyjama Foundation mentoring model offers an early, cost-effective, community-based solution that complements the statutory system.

Key Benefits

- Improved literacy, numeracy, and life skills
- Enhanced emotional wellbeing and placement stability
- Reduced risk of school disengagement, homelessness, and re-traumatisation
- Consistent support for foster carers

Recommendations

- **Increase sustainable funding for community-based programs** like The Pyjama Foundation to provide consistent, long-term mentoring that builds resilience and complements statutory child protection services.
- **Embed trauma-informed volunteer mentoring** into Queensland's child safety strategy as a proven, empowering support for children in out-of-home care.
- **Integrate consistent one-on-one mentoring** into early intervention and child protection strategies to strengthen emotional and educational outcomes for vulnerable children.
- **Expand support for carers** by funding programs that ease their emotional and educational load through trusted community-based mentors.
- **Formally recognise and fund volunteer-based programs** as essential, cost-effective components of Queensland's child safety system offering preventative, long-term relational support.

The Pyjama Foundation fills a critical gap in Queensland's child safety system. Our model works—and the evidence is clear. Now is the time to make relationship-based, trauma-informed support a core part of how we create more positive outcomes for our most vulnerable children.

1. About The Pyjama Foundation

The Pyjama Foundation is a Queensland-based not-for-profit organisation that supports children in foster care through a unique trauma-informed, evidence-based volunteer mentoring program. Our trained volunteers, known as "Pyjama Angels", are matched with children in care to provide consistent, one-on-one weekly support focused on improving literacy, numeracy, and life skills.

Since 2004 we have worked to address the educational and social disadvantage experienced by children in OOHC, many of whom have suffered significant trauma. We currently support more than 800 children every week across Queensland with a dedicated volunteer network of Pyjama Angels in foster care, kinship care and residential care. Across Queensland there are more than 600 children in OOHC on the Foundation's waitlist seeking support. These children, among the most vulnerable in our community, are at risk of falling further behind in education, confidence, and life opportunities without the right support. The Pyjama Foundation works with foster care agencies and government departments who refer a child to our program.

Beyond academic and literacy support, The Pyjama Foundation plays a vital role in equipping children in care, their Pyjama Angels, and carers with the resources they need to thrive. As part of our mission, the Foundation provides essential items such as school supplies, uniforms, clothing, bedding, books, and pyjamas—ensuring children are prepared and confident in their environments. This practical support is especially critical during times of transition, where the Foundation steps in to help establish stability and comfort. These contributions not only meet immediate needs but also reinforce the Foundation's broader commitment to nurturing the wellbeing and potential of every child in care.

Importantly, The Pyjama Foundation provides opportunities for children and young people to strengthen family bonds. Many have had the opportunity to connect with their siblings at Foundation events, including the annual Christmas party, camps, math's clubs and National Pyjama Day celebrations. These gatherings play a vital role in fostering a sense of belonging and community for children in care.

The Love of Learning Program (0-11 years) - Early intervention is key

The Pyjama Foundation is dedicated to breaking the cycle of disadvantage for children and young people in OOHC. Through our unique Love of Learning (LOL) program, trained volunteer Pyjama Angel mentors are carefully matched with children and young people in care to provide weekly one-on-one mentoring focused on improving literacy, numeracy, and essential life skills. Many of these children have experienced trauma, domestic violence, neglect, and abuse leading to lifelong challenges which significantly impact their ability to learn and thrive.

The Teen Life Skills Program (12 – 24 years) - Empowering young people at risk

Teen Life Skills (TLS) is an extension of the Foundation's Love of Learning Program which offers age-appropriate resources, support and workshop opportunities, with the aim of

keeping our Pyjama Angels connected with their young people for longer. Research suggests long-term mentoring relationships for children in care are linked to improved mental health, stronger educational outcomes, reduced offending, greater placement stability, and enhanced life skills and independence. Evidence has proven that one significant, positive adult (other than a child's caregiver) is confirmed as not only "*protective for at-risk youth but as a normative component of adolescent development.*" (Bean, M.R., Chen, C., & Greenberger, E, 2002)

Young adulthood is a particularly vulnerable time and so support is vital as decisions that affect future direction, achievement and wellbeing are being made.

Volunteer Training

Volunteers are carefully selected through a rigorous recruitment process, including interviews, reference checks, Working with Children Checks, and a strong focus on trauma-informed principles. Once deemed suitable, they complete comprehensive training to ensure they are well-prepared to support young people in OOHC. Training covers safe practice around children, disclosure policies, privacy and confidentiality, trauma-informed approaches, and strategies for delivering age-appropriate content in a safe, supportive environment. Cultural awareness and methods for engaging diverse learners are also central to this training.

A fundamental priority in the early stages of volunteer engagement is building a safe, trusted relationship with the child. For children in foster care, kinship care, and residential care, feeling secure and supported is vital. Once this foundation of trust is established, volunteers can meaningfully foster both academic and personal growth.

The program assists the development of youth by providing consistent, one-on-one support to children in care, encouraging literacy, numeracy, prosocial behaviour, and a love of learning. Through positive relationships with trained volunteers, children gain self-confidence, resilience, and social skills, enhancing school engagement and emotional wellbeing. Tailored resources and mentoring help them achieve age-appropriate academic milestones and build essential life skills. By addressing disadvantage early, the program empowers young people to reach their potential, pursue further education or career opportunities, and grow into capable, confident, and engaged members of society.

Sector Statistics

- 54% of children in OOHC **do not meet or exceed** national minimum reading standards in Year 3 (compared to around 75% of the general Year 3 population in Australia who meet the minimum reading standards)
- 35% experience homelessness
- 43% will not finish year 12 or equivalent
- 62% experience mental health concerns

Snapshot of impact to date in Queensland

- Number of children and young people currently placed in Queensland - 871
- Number of children and young people currently waiting for placement in Queensland – 664. The waitlist is largely due to financial and resource constraints that limit the Foundation’s ability to place children with willing volunteers, especially in geographically challenging areas.
- Number of young people currently in Teen Life Skills in Queensland– 482
- Number of children and young people we have placed since 2004 – 10,531
- Number of hours of support to children and young people since 2004 – 758,232 (direct mentoring hours)
- Number of volunteers we have trained since 2004 – 8,899
- Number of hours spent with carers since 2004 – 84,264

Support models like the one developed and implemented by The Pyjama Foundation should not exist on the margins of the system. They should be an integral part of support as they represent a powerful approach to addressing the support needs of both children and carers within the sector.

Without support and early intervention, the cycle of disadvantage will continue for this vulnerable group.

2. In Their Own Words

Voice of a child

“We do positive thinking and what we are grateful for.”

“My Pyjama Angel is my superpower. She helps me do my homework and is very friendly.”

Voices of Pyjama Angel Mentors

“It is particularly rewarding to see the development of the child and see them gain confidence and enjoy things they previously found daunting. Sometimes it just takes a little bit more time explaining things on a one-to-one basis to make the learning experience easier and enjoyable.”

“I continue to have an amazing time with my little girl. She has moved up 2 reading levels since we started and we have just finished her first chapter book. From the bottom of my heart, thank you for the incredible opportunity of working with the most beautiful little girl. Spending the last 2 years with her has been life changing and one of the most important things I have ever done.”

Voice of a foster carer

"Both PJAs are significant people in these children's lives and part of their support team. If they can't talk to the carer, they feel comfortable to talk to their PJA's. It's a very non-threatening environment for the boys to open up and a relationship that lasts longer than a counsellor. A good team is important for the children, and they are the only people in their lives who don't get paid to be there. It's purely voluntary and they are a great role model for the kids."

A volunteer mentor system is an essential pillar in supporting children in care, offering something too often missing despite the efforts of dedicated carers and child safety officers: a consistent, personal connection that feels chosen rather than assigned. These young people frequently struggle with the belief that they are a burden, internalising the instability around them as evidence that no one truly cares. This can lead to a devastating mindset - "If no one else cares, why should I?" Volunteer mentors, by showing up consistently and without obligation, send a powerful message: You matter, and I choose to be here for you. That kind of relationship can be life changing. It brings emotional grounding, builds trust, and helps children in care believe in their own worth and potential.

3. Summary of Evidence

Over the last month The Pyjama Foundation surveyed a sample of children in the Love of Learning Program aged 6-14 years who had been in the program longer than 6 months.

Outcomes for children and young people	Causal Factors	Interventions	Benefits	Evidence
<p>Relational Pedagogy</p> <p>Relational pedagogy is an approach to teaching and learning that emphasises the quality of relationships between teachers and students as central to educational success. It is grounded in the belief that learning is not just about transmitting knowledge, but about building human connections, trust, and mutual respect.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many children in OOHC lack stable, trusting adult relationships. • Attachment disruptions and trauma hinder learning and connection. • Low self-worth and trust in learning environments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentors use a relationship-first approach to learning. • Consistent weekly presence builds trust and emotional safety. • Volunteers trained in trauma-informed practice and empathy. • Focus on identity, agency, and emotional attunement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children feel “seen”, heard, and emotionally safe. • Learning becomes possible through trust. • Strengthened identity as a learner and person. • Improved social-emotional wellbeing and readiness to engage. 	<p>My Pyjama Angel helps me learn how to listen to my teachers – 80.8% of the children surveyed ranked this as always or often</p> <p>My Pyjama Angel encourages me to care about my teacher's opinion – 80% of the children surveyed ranked this as always or often</p> <p>When I read books or instructions, my Pyjama Angel encourages me to ask myself questions to understand what I'm reading – 88% of the children surveyed ranked this as always or often</p> <p>My Pyjama Angel encourages me to talk to myself in a positive way – 88.5% of the children surveyed ranked this as always or often</p> <p>My Pyjama Angel helps me think about how important school is for achieving my future goals – 92% of the children surveyed ranked this as always or often.</p>

Outcomes for children and young people	Causal Factors	Interventions	Benefits	Evidence
Learning confidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience of instability/trauma/frequent school changes for children in OOHC. • Gaps in supportive, consistent relationships (mentors, caring adults). • Low achievement/difficulty with literacy or numeracy causing self-doubt. (Literacy/numeracy struggles can reduce confidence). • Possibly low school connectedness or feeling marginalised. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Love of Learning Program - one-on-one mentoring (reading aloud, educational games, social activities) weekly, in out-of-school time. • Relational pedagogy: building relationship first to support learning confidence, identity. • Resource library and online portal for books and games to support engaging literacy and numeracy tasks. • Training/screening of volunteers to ensure consistent, caring relationship. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased learning confidence and identity. • Improved self-confidence, decision making, enthusiasm for learning. • Better interpersonal relationships, social connections. • As confidence grows, children more willing to engage with challenging literacy/numeracy tasks. (Less fear of failure). Less explicit but implied. 	<p>When I feel like quitting, my Pyjama Angel helps me find ways to solve the problem – 100% of the children surveyed ranked this always or often</p> <p>My Pyjama Angel helps me do well at school because school is important to me – 88% of the children surveyed ranked this always or often</p> <p>My Pyjama Angel helps me feel confident that I will achieve my goals - 100% of the children surveyed ranked this always or often</p> <p>With help from my Pyjama Angel, I think I'm doing pretty well at school – 87% of the children surveyed ranked this as always or often</p>
Academic Resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaps in foundational literacy & numeracy skills (children in out-of-home care often start with deficits). • Interruptions to schooling or instability causing children to face more academic setbacks. • Low self-confidence / low learning confidence feeding into fear of failure. • Lack of consistent support or scaffolded help outside classroom. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same Pyjama Angels program: consistent weekly support in literacy / numeracy tasks in safe, non-judgemental environment. • Relational pedagogy to build trust, ensure the child feels able to try, make mistakes, persist. • Use of educational games, reading aloud, tasks tailored to child's level to scaffold up. • Engagement over time (long-term mentoring, not just one-off). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater capacity to persist in face of academic difficulty. Children show more willingness to try literacy/numeracy tasks. • Improved literacy & numeracy skills (because of consistent help). • Increased engagement with learning, less avoidance of challenging academic work. • Possibly better academic outcomes/ reduced educational disadvantage. 	<p>When I am confused about something I am learning, my Pyjama Angel helps me try and figure it out – 92.3% of the children surveyed ranked this is always or often</p> <p>My Pyjama Angel helps me understand what I am good at – 92.3% of the children surveyed ranked this as always or often</p> <p>My Pyjama Angel supports me – 92.3% of the children surveyed ranked this as always or often</p> <p>My Pyjama Angel is interested in me and my goals – 96.2% of the children surveyed ranked this as always or often</p> <p>When I am working out a problem, my Pyjama Angel helps me to keep thinking until I think of a possible solution – 100% of the children surveyed ranked this as always or often</p> <p>My Pyjama Angel helps me feel like I can solve most problems if I try hard enough – 84% of the children surveyed ranked this as always or often</p>

Outcomes for children and young people	Causal Factors	Interventions	Benefits	Evidence
School Connectedness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children in out-of-home care often feel disconnected or marginalised, instability in caregiver, school changes. Lack of trusting relationships with adults/mentors in school context. Possibly poor school experiences (low outcomes, negative feedback) reduce feeling of belonging. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pyjama Angels create a regular, positive relationship outside of school that can enhance sense of belonging/connectedness. Even if the program is out-of-school, relational support spills over into school. Encouraging children to talk about school, support their school experiences; helping with literacy/numeracy tasks related to school. Providing emotional support to buffer school adversities. The relational pedagogy approach aims explicitly to raise school connectedness, learning confidence, identity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children feel more belonging, less isolation. Improved engagement with school: attendance, participation. Better relationships with teachers/peers (because child has more self-confidence, is more willing to engage). School is seen less as adversarial, more as supportive. 	<p>My Pyjama Angel encourages me to always try my best – 96% of the children surveyed ranked this as always or often</p> <p>My Pyjama Angel helps me improve at school – 87.5% of the children surveyed ranked this as always or often</p>

The table above clearly indicates that there is compelling and consistent evidence that mentoring by The Pyjama Foundation significantly improves outcomes for children and young people in OOHC. The Foundation’s structured, trauma-informed program delivers one-on-one educational and emotional support through trained volunteers—known as Pyjama Angels—who meet weekly with a child over the long term.

This model offers a critical and unique form of stability and encouragement that is often absent in the lives of children in care. While statutory services rightly focus on child safety and protection, the broader developmental and relational needs of these children—such as literacy, confidence, trust, and emotional regulation—often go unmet. This is where The Pyjama Foundation fills a critical gap.

Child safety officers and foster carers are integral to the child protection system. However, the demands placed on them are extensive. High caseloads, resource constraints, and staff turnover make it extremely difficult to provide the sustained, individualised support that vulnerable children require.

Government funding prioritises statutory roles, but this approach unintentionally leaves a significant shortfall in educational and relational support. These are not ancillary needs—they are foundational to breaking cycles of trauma, disengagement, and intergenerational disadvantage.

The Pyjama Foundation offers a practical, cost effective, high-impact solution. By mobilising and training community volunteers, the Foundation provides consistent, long-term mentoring relationships that:

- Improve literacy and school engagement
- Enhance emotional wellbeing and regulation
- Increase trust and relational stability
- Alleviate pressure on carers and caseworkers

There are more than **45,000 children and young people** in care across Australia—many of whom will never experience the stable, supportive relationships that are essential to healing and growth.

Embedding and expanding access to mentoring through The Pyjama Foundation would provide a direct, cost-effective response to this urgent gap. This is not about replacing statutory services—it's about strengthening the ecosystem of care and providing children with what they need most beyond safety: **stability, connection, hope, and opportunity**.

The Pyjama Foundation's mentoring program aligns strongly with key findings from Christensen et al. (2020), Goldner & Ben-Eliyahu (2021), and Poon et al. (2021), supporting its effectiveness for children in out-of-home care.

1. Tailored, One-on-One Mentoring

Consistent with Christensen et al. (2020), the Foundation provides personalised, one-on-one support from a non-parental adult, targeting the specific needs of children in care. This approach recognises that tailored interventions lead to stronger outcomes for at-risk youth.

2. Strong, Trust-Based Relationships

All three reviews emphasise the central role of relationship quality in achieving positive outcomes. The Pyjama Foundation focuses on building stable, trusting, and long-term mentor–mentee relationships, which supports emotional well-being, educational engagement, and behavioural improvement.

3. Long-Term Commitment

As Goldner & Ben-Eliyahu (2021) highlight, matches lasting 12 months or more are linked to greater benefits. The Pyjama Foundation encourages long-term involvement, reinforcing stability and consistency for children who often experience disruption.

4. Relational and Recreational Engagement

The program incorporates both relational elements (trust, consistency, support) and recreational aspects (reading together, playing games, building connection), mirroring the effective mentoring practices identified in Goldner & Ben-Eliyahu's review.

5. Trauma-Informed and Culturally Responsive Practice

Poon et al. (2021) underscore the importance of trauma-informed care and cultural responsiveness. The Pyjama Foundation integrates these principles into its training, ensuring mentors are equipped to support children with diverse and complex backgrounds. 35% of those children and young people in the Foundation’s programs identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. As a result, we have formed a First Nations Advisory Board, a group of key personnel who meet regularly to advise The Pyjama Foundation on the cultural needs of the children and young people and share knowledge and insights relating to procedures and resources for our Programs. The Board plays a vital role in fostering awareness and inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

6. Ongoing Training and Support for Mentors

In line with Poon et al. (2021), the Foundation provides regular training and supervision for volunteers, helping them address challenges and maintain engagement over time. This includes regular information sessions delivered by experts covering a range of topics including the challenges and triumphs of living with ADHD and improving their energy, productivity and wellbeing.

The Pyjama Foundation’s model reflects best-practice evidence across multiple large-scale reviews. Its commitment to long-term, high-quality, and trauma-informed mentoring for children in care positions it as an evidence-aligned and impactful program.

4. Key Issues Identified

4.1 Lack of Continuity and Stability in Child Safety System

We regularly observe the impact of placement disruptions, caseworker turnover, and system delays on children's emotional and educational development. Many children we support have had multiple caseworkers within a single year.

Each child in the program is matched with a volunteer “Pyjama Angel”—a screened and trained adult who visits the child once a week, long-term. Unlike caseworkers or placements, who may change frequently, Pyjama Angels are committed to building a stable, trusting relationship with one child over time. Pyjama Angels often remain involved with a child for years, even through placement or school changes, helping to mitigate the impact of instability in other parts of the system. This continuity of care offers emotional security and reliability that many children in care lack.

4.2 Educational Disadvantage

Children in care face significant educational gaps, often entering school with delayed literacy and numeracy skills. Our volunteers report limited support for learning within placements, and schools frequently lack the resources or training to meet the complex needs of children in care.

The Pyjama Foundation’s Love of Learning Program is designed to tackle these challenges by engaging the children and young people weekly in activities that build literacy, numeracy and life skills.

Pyjama Angels are trained to understand the impacts of trauma on learning. They use a gentle, patient, and relationship-first approach that supports emotional regulation and builds the child’s confidence as a learner—key components often missing in traditional educational settings. They act as a bridge—reinforcing school-based learning in the home and encouraging a positive attitude toward education, even in the absence of strong academic support in other parts of the child or young person’s life.

4.3 Inadequate Emotional Support for Children

While support currently focuses on safety and placement, the emotional and relational needs of children are often overlooked. The consistent presence of a Pyjama Angel—often the only stable adult relationship over years—highlights a gap in support in the system.

For many children in care, their Pyjama Angel is the only stable adult relationship they have over several years. Amid frequent placement changes, school moves, and caseworker turnover, Pyjama Angels offer a predictable and dependable connection, which helps to foster trust, attachment, and emotional healing.

The Pyjama Foundation’s approach is grounded in trauma-informed practice, recognising that healing from trauma occurs in the context of safe, supportive relationships. The program offers exactly that—consistent, compassionate adults who show up week after week, making a meaningful difference in a child’s emotional world.

4.4 Limited Recognition of Community-Based Supports

Despite our demonstrated outcomes in improving children’s confidence, educational engagement, and wellbeing, community-based programs like ours are often undervalued or underfunded in the broader child protection strategy.

Greater investment in these proven, relationship-based models is essential to addressing the long-term needs of children in care. Policymakers have an opportunity to strengthen outcomes for children in care by supporting programs that provide the consistent, trauma-informed support that statutory services often cannot deliver alone.

4.5 Insufficient Support for Foster Carers

Foster carers play a critical role in the child protection system by providing safe, stable, and nurturing environments for children who are unable to live with their biological families. These children often present with complex emotional, developmental, and behavioural needs resulting from trauma and instability.

While foster families are central to their healing and growth, the demands of the role—both emotional and physical—are significant. Without adequate support, training, and respite, carers are at high risk of burnout and placement breakdown. The sustainability of the foster care system depends on recognising, resourcing, and retaining these carers through stronger support structures and policy investment.

To ensure the long-term wellbeing of both foster carers and the children they support, stronger, relationship-based, wraparound services are essential. Valuing and sustaining foster families require more than recognition—it demands meaningful, ongoing support that helps them manage the emotional and developmental complexities of caring for children who have experienced trauma. **This is where The Pyjama Foundation plays a vital role.**

In a recent survey conducted by the Foundation with **experienced Foster and Kinship Carers**, many of whom have over a decade of caring experience:

- **92%** agreed or strongly agreed that their *Pyjama Angel* is a valued part of their personal support network. ***Full survey findings attached.***

In a separate survey of children participating in our program, the impact of our approach was equally clear:

- **94%** said their mentor helps them build academic resilience
- **94%** felt their mentor supports them to do well at school
- **83%** said their mentor helps them enjoy learning
- **89%** said their mentor helps them feel positively about themselves and their future

These results highlight the dual impact of The Pyjama Foundation’s work: supporting children’s educational and emotional development while also strengthening the capacity and sustainability of foster care arrangements. As policymakers look to improve outcomes for children in out-of-home care, investment in proven, community-based models like ours must be part of the solution.

5. Cost of Inaction

A recent *“Cost of Late Intervention Report, 2024”* produced by the Minderoo Foundation highlights the economic burden of failing to identify health and development issues in young Australians (0-24 years) has surged almost 50% to \$22.3 billion annually, with Queensland being \$5 billion. The new report revealed that the largest share of late intervention spending is on child protection at \$10.2 billion – a 72 percent increase since 2019.

It costs just \$1,637 to screen, recruit, train, and provide ongoing support to a Pyjama Angel—a remarkably low investment considering the profound impact each Angel has on vulnerable children’s lives. Impressively, 80% of these funds are raised directly by the Foundation itself through targeted campaigns, grants, corporate partnerships, and philanthropy. Each Pyjama Angel provides approximately 52 hours of personalised support

per year – at an estimated cost of \$22.85 per hour – far lower than the cost of remedial tutoring, therapeutic support or residential care.

This self-sustaining funding approach ensures that every dollar is efficiently utilised, making the Love of Learning Program a low-cost, high-impact model that transforms communities and creates lasting change.

Some key points from the report:

- Early intervention enables problems to be identified and addressed before they escalate. It is particularly impactful for young children whose brains are still wiring and bodies developing.
- Although positive childhood experiences, like having a trusted adult to rely upon, may reduce the impact of adverse childhood experiences, minimising exposure to adverse experiences is most impactful on children’s development, reducing the proliferation and escalation of issues into adulthood (Narayan, 2018; Johnson D, 2022)
- Addressing problems early on will reduce the incidence of children and young people suffering the lifelong ill-effects of issues arising during childhood or reduce the severity of these issues. This then reduces the demand for spending on crisis services and chronic health interventions. These benefits accrue over time – early intervention is not a quick fix but has a profound impact.

6. Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Increase Investment in Community-Based Support Programs

Action:

Allocate sustainable funding to mentoring programs that complement statutory services and build children’s confidence and skills over time.

Rationale:

Community-based programs play a crucial role in complementing statutory child protection services by addressing the relational and emotional needs of vulnerable children. These programs provide stable, long-term relationships that help children build confidence, develop essential life skills, and form secure attachments—particularly vital for those who have experienced trauma, neglect, or frequent changes in care. Unlike formal interventions, which are often time-limited or crisis-focused, programs like The Pyjama Foundation’s offer consistent, relationship-driven support that fosters resilience and supports positive developmental outcomes.

Critically, these sustained mentoring relationships contribute directly to improved safety outcomes. By promoting emotional stability and a sense of belonging, they help reduce the likelihood of placement breakdowns, which are known to increase a child’s risk of harm. Consistent, supportive relationships also buffer against the negative effects of instability in living arrangements, such as disrupted schooling, emotional distress, and behavioural

issues. As such, long-term community-based support not only enhances wellbeing but also reduces the risk of further harm, strengthening the overall child protection system.

The average volunteer-child relationship through programs like this last 3.5 years, with many continuing for 5, 10, or even 20 years. Sustained and secure funding is essential to ensure these programs remain accessible, high-quality, and responsive—ultimately contributing to safer, more stable outcomes for children in care.

Recommendation 2: Embed Volunteer Mentoring in Child Safety Frameworks

Action:

Recognise and embed evidence-based, trauma-informed mentoring (such as the Pyjama Angel model delivered by The Pyjama Foundation) into Queensland’s child safety strategy as a protective and empowering mechanism.

Rationale:

Volunteer mentoring models delivered by The Pyjama Foundation have demonstrated positive impacts on children in out-of-home care by providing emotional support, improving literacy and educational engagement, and reducing feelings of isolation. Incorporating such evidence-based mentoring into Queensland’s child safety strategy acknowledges its value as both a protective factor and a tool for empowerment. Embedding mentoring within formal frameworks ensures alignment with child protection goals, fosters collaboration with statutory services, and enables more structured evaluation, training, and oversight, enhancing the consistency and effectiveness of support for vulnerable children.

Recommendation 3: Strengthen Emotional and Educational Support Through One-on-One Mentoring

Action:

Embed access to consistent, one-on-one mentoring with a trusted adult—such as Pyjama Angels from The Pyjama Foundation—into Queensland’s broader child protection and early intervention strategies.

Rationale:

Mentoring through The Pyjama Foundation provides children with a stable, reliable adult outside the statutory system. The consistent presence of a Pyjama Angel has been shown to improve literacy, confidence, emotional regulation, and trust-building—particularly for children who have experienced significant relational trauma. Volunteers often become a positive, enduring relationship in a child’s life, especially when placements or caseworkers change. This consistency not only benefits the child but also alleviates pressure on foster carers by providing them with another consistent adult in the child’s support network.

With high staff turnover many child safety practitioners remain unaware of the long-term, relationship-based support that Pyjama Angels provide. An education and awareness campaign targeting frontline professionals is recommended to increase understanding of the program’s value. By integrating information about the program into staff inductions and

professional development agencies can ensure more children benefit from the stability, educational support, and emotional resilience the program fosters.

Recommendation 4: Support Foster Carers by Reducing Their Educational and Emotional Load

Action:

Increase funding and referral pathways for in-home or community-based programs, including those delivered by The Pyjama Foundation, that provide educational and relational support to children in care, relieving pressure on carers to manage every aspect of the child's development alone.

Rationale:

Many carers report feeling overwhelmed by the range of needs they are expected to meet—emotional, behavioural, and academic. Programs like those run by The Pyjama Foundation offer trusted adult mentors who help children with school readiness, homework, and emotional engagement, enabling carers to focus on maintaining a safe and loving home.

Recommendation 5: Fund Community-Based Volunteer Programs

Action:

Formally recognise and sustainably fund trauma-informed, evidence-based volunteer programs, including those delivered by The Pyjama Foundation, as key components of the child safety support system in Queensland.

Rationale:

Volunteer mentors coordinated by The Pyjama Foundation make a measurable difference in the lives of children in care. The Foundation's programs provide a cost-effective, community-driven solution that offers early, preventative, and long-term relational support beyond what statutory systems alone can provide.

7. Supporting Information

Attached to this submission are:

- Program evaluation summaries
 - Letters of support
 - Case studies demonstrating impact
 - Testimonials from carers and volunteers
 - Relevant academic research on mentoring and trauma-informed support
-

8. Declaration

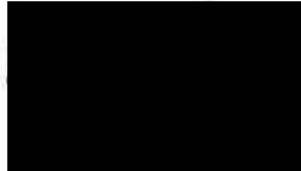
"We declare that the information provided in this submission is true and accurate to the best of our knowledge. We consent to the use of this information for the purposes of the Inquiry into Child Safety in Queensland, subject to the confidentiality preferences indicated above."

Name:

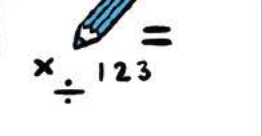


Position: Founder + CEO

Signature (if submitting hard copy):



Date: 19-11-2025



Ashley's Story: The Life Changing Impact of having a Pyjama Angel Mentor for 19 years

A Case Study By The Pyjama Foundation



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This evaluation was conducted in December 2023 to profile the significant relationship between a volunteer mentor and a foster child over a 19-year period, which has led to a young person finishing Year 12 and doing some volunteer work experience in the community.

The aim of this case study was to gain reliable evidence about The Pyjama Foundation's Teen Life Skills program outcomes and the positive difference it has created in the fractured life of a child entering the foster care system.

The young person has successfully completed his high school education with a positive report card. This case study has a strong focus on how the relationship between the young person and volunteer has been very significant in the happiness, positivity, and general wellbeing of the young person.

The Pyjama Foundation instils purpose and direction into the lives of Australian children in foster care. This process is changing their aspirations and prospects. Without this intervention and support, many of these children would not have the opportunity to connect learning with happiness, or gain the personal confidence to improve their literacy, learning and life skills.



Ashley with his TAFE Certificate

The benefits of having a mentor are well documented.

These benefits include:

- Increased high school graduation rates
- Lower high school dropout rates
- Healthier relationship and lifestyle choices
- Better attitude about school
- Enhanced self-esteem and self confidence
- Improved behaviour, both at home and at school

Research shows that children in mentoring relationships are less likely to abuse drugs and alcohol later in life. The caring relationships they build with mentors helps them avoid high risk behaviour by making them less susceptible to unhealthy influences, instead often remaining more focused and connected to their education.

Having a mentor helps them learn how to control themselves and behave appropriately in a wide variety of settings. Working with a mentor can help kids who are at risk of dropping out focus on school.

A healthy mentoring relationship can help children see further study as a viable goal, teach them about their financial and educational options, and guide them towards making the best choices for their future, or gain the self efficacy to improve their educational and consequently, their life outcomes.



THE TEEN LIFE SKILLS PROGRAM

THE THEORY OF CHANGE

We extend the relationship formed between our volunteers and children in care to become a significant adult in the life of a young person by supporting them to build on skills that can make positive change to their life outcomes.

We launched the Teen Life Skills Program (TLS) with the vision that all young people living in, and transitioning out of, OOHHC are self-aware, connected, responsible, resilient and have goals and aspirations. The TLS Program is currently supporting over 300 young people (and growing) in QLD and NSW over the age of 12 years, many of whom have been working with their mentor since their formative years. The activities that the young people have the opportunity to participate in are intended to support young people to develop their skills to ask critical questions.

The TLS Program focuses on enhancing the mentoring relationship to explore the development of four key pillars. The TLS Program provides resources, support, and key workshops that focus on these pillars, outlined below.¹⁹

1. Goal setting skills and resilience (i.e. vocational and life skills)
2. A sense of self and self-awareness (i.e. self-efficacy)
3. Health and wellbeing (i.e. cooking, well-being, mental health)
4. Cultural and community connections and support

Young people are given the opportunity to participate in a series of workshops with the support of their mentor, with the goal of developing their skills to ask critical questions, learn from experiences and practice self-reflection. These young people learn to understand how to manage change and transitions in healthy ways.

**WHAT HAVE
YOUNG PEOPLE
HAD TO SAY?**

75%

of participants gave the Jamie Oliver Workshop a 4 star rating or above (out of 5)

"I didn't think I was clever but I could do the activities and might be able to go to university one day."

MR 14
(UQ STEM FOR EVERYONE DAY)

87%

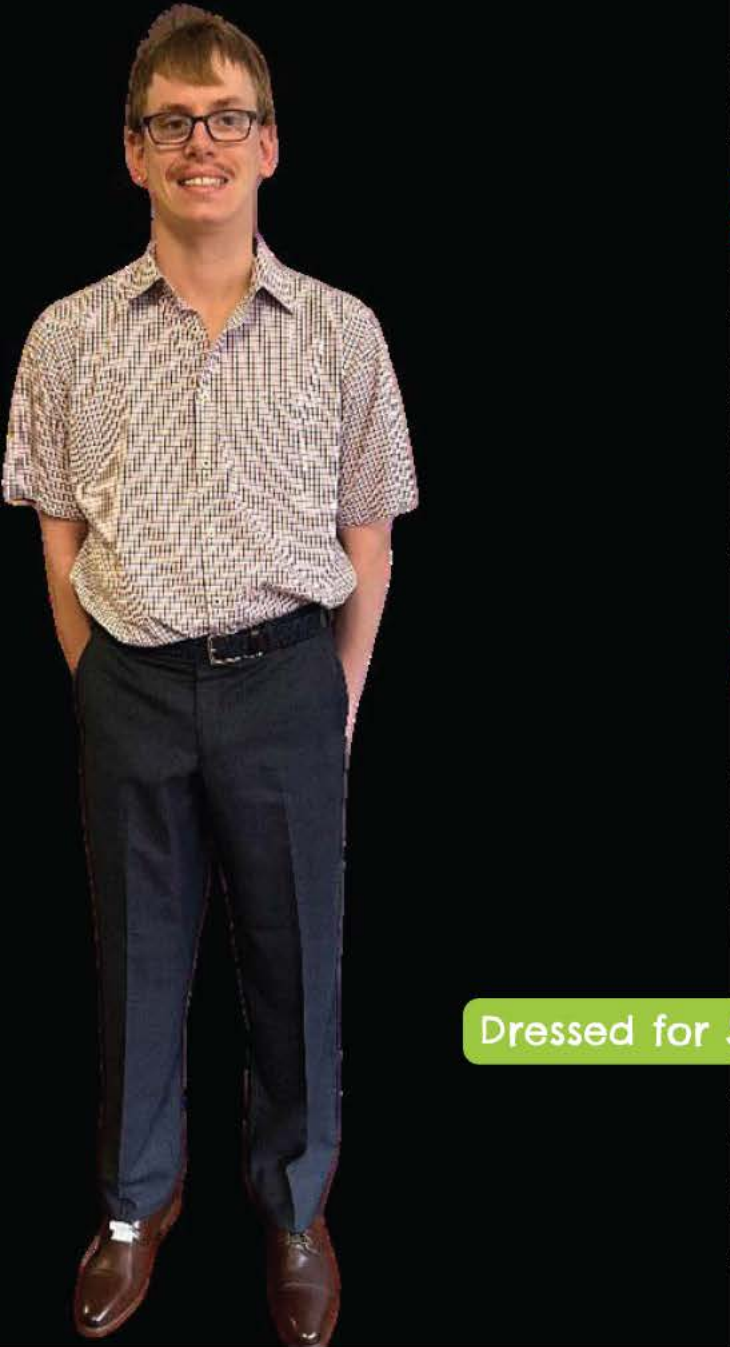
of participants gave the STEM Workshop session a 4 star rating or above (out of 5)

"I felt good, it was fun. Even though it was nerve-racking before the start, by the end I felt I had learnt lots and I will be more likely to attempt to cook."

MISS 15 (JAMIE OLIVER COOKING CLASS)



TEEN LIFE SKILLS WORKSHOPS



of Learning Program participant, who is now part of the program. He's been with his Pyjama Angel for over 19 years and has been a part of various workshops.

Everyone - University of Queensland

The program aims to give young people the opportunity to engage in hands-on STEM activities, interact with STEM professionals, and inspire them towards further learning. It showcases how concepts of science and maths are applied in the real-world to solve complex problems and how STEM can lead to exciting and innovative careers. The young people had a tour of the university, got to participate in practical experiments and had a talk on pathways into STEM and scholarship opportunities.



Rugby League Game Broncos

The Teen Life Skills Program is cultural and community focused. Sport plays a huge role in helping to connect young people. We were very lucky to be able to take a group of our young Pyjama Angels to the thrilling local Brisbane derby NRL match, against the Broncos, at the Gabba.

Dressed for Success

The program offers personalised styling and clothing services with the aim of helping the client to feel empowered, welcomed, and supported. A young person receives a full outfit to keep, and a one-on-one session with an mentor who is focused on building confidence and self-esteem. The service is a great opportunity to get a new outfit for his volunteering role at a community organisation.

Introductory Cooking Class

Mentors and their young people embarked on a cooking adventure at the Newmarket Industrial Kitchen. It was a wonderful morning where the young people mastered the art of making tortilla chips, salsa, pizza, and fried rice. The young chefs not only honed their culinary techniques, but also discovered the importance of teamwork, communication, and safe practices in the kitchen.

Barista Course at The Coffee Commune

The barista course covered the basics of coffee production from bean to cup. The teens learned how to make the entire coffee process from espresso, to milk texturing and cleaning the machine.



VOLUNTEERING INITIATIVES AND FURTHER STUDY

With the experience gained through the Teen Life Skills program, along with encouragement from his Pyjama Angel, Ashley found a passion for volunteering.

This passion has evolved into further study. He is currently in the process of completing a Certificate I in Active Volunteering with Volunteering Queensland. This wonderful opportunity will provide Ashley with the further skills, experience and confidence that is needed in today's workplaces.



Ashley Volunteering for Meals on Wheels



Ashley Volunteering for The Pyjama Foundation

Ashley has already completed 6 years of further study with TAFE, completing training under the Federal Government's Skills for Education and Employment (SEE) Program.



"The Pyjama Foundation has mentored young people in out-of-home care over the last 19 years. I have seen first-hand the benefits of The Pyjama Foundation's mentoring program, the positive relationships between the mentor and the young person makes such a difference in the life outcomes of this vulnerable group. I have heard directly from young people with a care experience about the transformative value of this relational, voluntary engagement. I'll never forget the annual Create graduations when the young persons choice of significant adult was so frequently their Pyjama Angel."

Michael Hogan, 2021 Former Director General of QLD Safety and Convenor of the Thriving QLD Kids Partnerships

FEEDBACK FROM PYJAMA ANGEL,

JENNY

Why did you volunteer for The Pyjama Foundation in the first place?

In 2005, I saw a newspaper article about The Pyjama Foundation starting up and they were looking for volunteers. I had experience working with children and it sounded like a fabulous organisation, which I wanted to be part of. Helping a young person in foster care to enjoy a love of learning was something I could do.

What activities did you do in the beginning?

I remember the very first day, Ashley showed me his matchbox car collection. That was a good start to find books, games and puzzles centred around cars. Some days I may have only stayed 30 minutes if he showed signs of not wanting any more time together. But then as I brought more interesting things, he got more excited and would even try new activities. Sometimes we ended up in the back yard with a ball or playing outdoors. So, our time expanded, and our bond grew. There were some days when all the boys would join in our activities.

As years have gone on most of my favourite moments are when Ashley has made something himself, like his platter boards (my husband helps with the woodworking), his canvas artwork, his cooking, and when we potted herbs and looked after them. A lot of these we did for gifts and that has made him very proud. For Christmas each year we make something for his carer, and cook some treats to share with his brothers.



Ashley and Jenny Volunteering for The Pyjama Foundation's Christmas Wrapping

How long did it take to form a connection to Ashley?

To form a connection with a shy 6 years old was going to take a while. He had FASD and had 4 not so shy brothers. So, I started talking and letting him tell me what he liked to do and what his interests were. I think we connected quickly then as he enjoyed the one-on-one time, because he had someone who was just interested in him.



Ashley with his Woodworking product

What are the benefits of volunteering for you?

There have been so many unexpected benefits. The immense satisfaction helping someone achieve their potential is so rewarding. It is also an eye opener into another world, to see what some children go through and what some families endure. This makes me appreciate my own life circumstances. It's so rewarding for me to think I may have helped bring some fun back into their life. To give your time to others is emotionally rewarding and you meet so many beautiful souls, the children in care, their foster family, other Pyjama Angels, and the whole office support team.

What activities did you do together once he became a teenager?

Ashley is still interested in cars, so then we moved onto magazines, which he loves. In fact, he has read and learnt so much about cars now, he knows more than I do. We have been to some great car meets and he points out different makes and facts as we see them in traffic if we are out and about. Another activity he loves is cooking, so we often make a meal or bake cakes. The cooking he does at my place, then takes the meal home for dinner. Or if his mates are coming over, we might make something to share.

Puzzles are still a favourite, and he can do 1000-piece puzzles over a period of time. Woodwork, painting, and gardening are other projects we have done together, as well as coffee chats and bush walking.

The Teen Life Skills program has offered other opportunities for Ashley as well. We attended the barista course, the cooking class, and the University Science Day.

Being able to do these together and do areas that interest him has been helpful. We visit museums, art galleries and have done some shows at QPAC, sporting events and golf days.

Every second week we have been volunteering together at a hospital. This has been for 12 months, and he has now moved onto training/work experience at the café.

The latest project we are working on is budgeting. I give him the supermarket specials brochure, and in his book, he writes down what he needs to buy, how much and what he gets for the budget I give him. We also apply it to entertaining your friends, party style, so we allocate for drinks, chips, biscuits, dips etc. Working out what he can afford is the aim.



Work experience at Little Birdee Cafe



What has made you volunteer for 18 years?

Really, I don't know where the 18 years have gone! We have formed such a great "team" that we both look forward to our Friday catch ups. Over the years there have been challenges, there has been frustration, there has been down time, but they have been overcome.

It is such a pleasure to see him now, a young man with a bright future. I am so proud of his achievements and for always trying his best. The most well-mannered and enthusiastic young man, who is socially a delight to everyone.



What are some of your favourite memories of Ashley?

Starting from many years ago, I remember when I took him to the library to pick some books. He had never been to a library before and was so overcome, and then so excited to use a library card. It was truly amazing!

When he finished year 7 at school, I gave him a photo album of things we had done together. He was so excited as he had never had an album just for him. He apparently took it to school to show his teacher. Since then I have made a point of taking photos, and a few albums later we are now working on one for his 25th.

Another special moment for me was when my husband showed him how to drive the ride on mower. As he may never hold a driver's license it was the sheer joy on his face when he got to ride around our property on his own.

Now I think of it, another very special memory was him starting work experience. That smile on his face when he put on the training apron was priceless! That image will be forever etched in my mind.



Ashley at Little Birdee Cafe



What was your relationship like with his foster carer?

I got on really well with his foster mum. We chatted about the boys and often sat with a coffee at the end of my time with Ashley. We could discuss different things to try, and she was a great support. I feel I was a great support to her as well, as she would open up about what was happening in their lives. She also didn't drive, so often I would pick her up for appointments. Unfortunately, after 12 years of our connection she passed away, and that was a difficult time for the boys (and everyone else). On one of my last visits to her in hospital she asked me if I would always be there for Ashley, and of course that is an honour to keep my promise.

What are your dreams and aspirations for Ashley into the future?

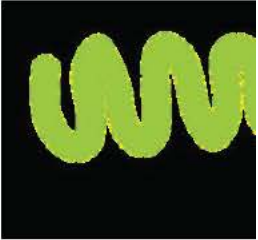
I hope one day Ashley can be independent, with just some support. I would like to see his desire to have a part time job come to fruition next year. Hopefully with his recent work experience and further studies he has opened up a few more avenues for employment.

Luckily, he has some lovely friends and a good support network so his future looks bright.

As long as he is happy and content with whatever he does I will be happy for him, be there to support him, and always be there for him.



FEEDBACK FROM ASHLEY



What was your first memory of Jenny?

It is hard to remember the first meeting, because she has been coming almost my whole life. When I was little, I remember Jenny coming over and playing games, playing with my toy cars with her and doing fun activities. Jenny had a beautiful relationship with my foster carer, they were like friends.

What do you like about Jenny?

She is nice, helpful, friendly, and she makes me happy. Jenny is very kind, she's always up for a chat. I was 6 years old when Jenny first visited me, and now I am 25 years old. She makes me feel very special.

What have you learnt from Jenny?

I have learnt money management from Jenny, especially with grocery shopping, and understanding how much money I have and what to spend it on. We also go to cafés to have a coffee, to the museum, the Lego Museum and we have been catching the train to the city. I like to cook at her house, and I've learned to cook a lot of foods like spaghetti, cookies, and Christmas foods. Jenny helps me follow the recipe and measure out the ingredients.

We do lots of fun activities together, like going to the golf driving range and to the Broncos league club. One of my favourite things is going to car shows. **Jenny always thinks of fun things I can do, she knows all the things I like.**

We also talk about my memories of childhood. Jenny has included me in her family, and I have often done activities with her grandchildren.

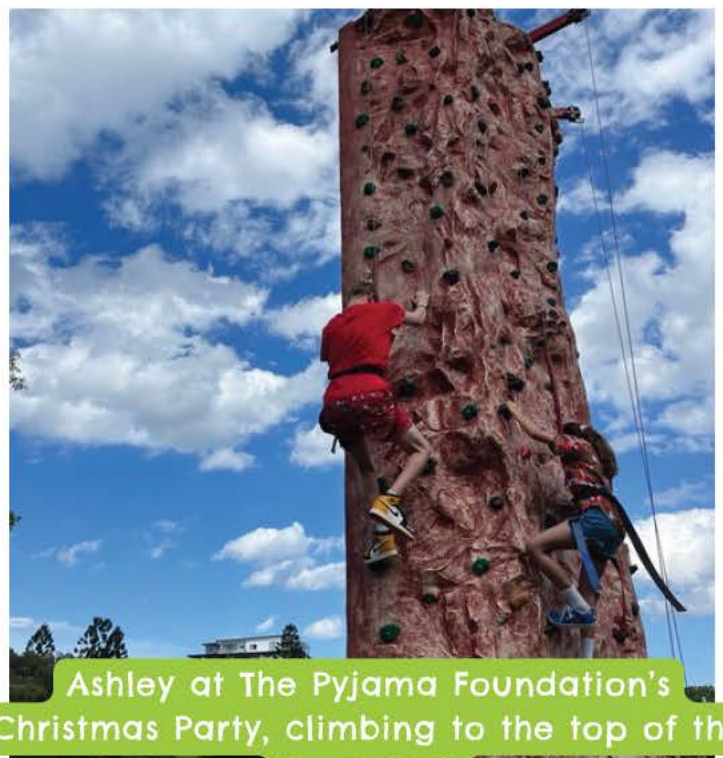
Jenny takes me to visit my foster mum's plaque. My foster mum passed away, and Jenny takes me to the head stone, so I can remember her.

Why do you think The Pyjama Foundation is a good program for children and young people in care?

It is a really good opportunity for children to learn new things and get help with reading and writing. It is important to think about what they could do in the future, and The Pyjama Foundation encourages you to have hope.

Would you recommend this program to other young people and children?

Yes, it is nice for children to have a special visitor every week. I always look forward to spending time with Jenny. We have done so many things together. And I really like the Christmas parties each year. This year, I went on the climbing wall, and I made it all the way to the top! It was really fun.



Ashley at The Pyjama Foundation's Christmas Party, climbing to the top of the Rock Wall

Who are the most special people in your life?

My friends, my carer and my brothers, my cats MJ, and Morris... and **Jenny is one of the most important people in my life.**





They say it takes a village to raise a child, and The Pyjama Foundation is grateful to be a part of Ashley's.

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the
pyjama
foundation

NEW CHAPTERS

BRIGHTER[!]

FUTURES

Impact Report 2025





Children's Acknowledgement of Country

Here is the land,
Here is the sky,
Here are my friends,
And here am I.

We thank the Traditional Owners
for the land where we play,
We respect their culture,
and we learn every day.



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The Pyjama Foundation

The Pyjama Foundation supports children and young people living in out-of-home care (OOHC) through its Love of Learning and Teen Life Skills Programs.

Volunteer mentor 'Pyjama Angels' are matched with children and young people in care to provide weekly one-on-one mentoring, focusing on literacy, numeracy and life skills.

This personalised support helps children build confidence, develop essential skills and achieve brighter futures. The Program empowers foster children, who often face educational and emotional challenges.

By providing consistency, encouragement, and opportunities, the Programs support children in OOHC to reach their full potential.

The Pyjama Foundation is making a positive, lifelong impact by empowering children and young people in care with learning, life skills and confidence.



Our Mission

Creating positive relationships for every Australian child in care empowering them with learning, life skills and confidence

Our Vision

A world of unlimited opportunity for **all** children

Letter From Our CEO

Each year, I am reminded of the incredible power of one simple idea — that when a child is given time, attention, and belief, their world begins to open. In thousands of homes Pyjama Angels continue to make this belief real.

Through our Love of Learning Program, they share not only literacy and numeracy skills, but laughter, curiosity, and confidence. They help children in foster care see themselves as capable learners — and dreamers — with futures filled with possibility.

This year's Impact Report - New Chapters, Brighter Futures - celebrates the thousands of moments that add up to transformation.

It highlights measurable improvements in learning and wellbeing, but also the quieter triumphs, like the first time a child finishes a book on their own or proudly reads aloud to their Pyjama Angel.

Our volunteers, foster carers, supporters, and staff all play a vital role in this ripple of change.

Together, we are creating something extraordinary: a community where children in care are seen, heard, and given the tools to thrive.

To every person who has donated, volunteered, or shared our story, **thank you.** Your belief in our mission fuels everything we do.

As we look to the future, we remain committed to growing our reach, deepening our impact, and ensuring that every child in care has the chance to write their own bright story.

With heartfelt gratitude,



Bronwyn Sheehan OAM,
Founder and CEO



Environment and Current Statistics

The Issue

Across Australia, thousands of children and young people in OOHC, including foster, kinship, and residential care, face immense challenges every single day.

Despite the dedication of carers and the best intentions of statutory services, the system often struggles to provide what every child needs most: consistent, individualised care, and a stable, nurturing relationship.

There are approximately 46,200 children in OOHC across Australia, with 82% remaining in care for over a year (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2025).

Many of these children have experienced trauma, neglect, or abuse, leaving lasting emotional, behavioural, and social scars. Without early intervention and sustained support, these experiences can shape a lifetime of disadvantage — limiting educational outcomes, wellbeing, and future opportunities.



The Power of Connection: The Love of Learning Program

Since 2004, The Pyjama Foundation's Love of Learning Program has been changing these stories.

Through one-on-one mentoring, trained volunteers, our 'Pyjama Angels', empower children in care with the tools, confidence, and belief they need to thrive. More than mentoring, this program is about connection.

Research shows that having a stable, caring adult relationship is one of the most powerful protective factors against the negative effects of trauma and disadvantage. Each visit offers more than literacy or numeracy support — it offers belonging, encouragement, and hope. Every story read, every goal achieved, every shared laugh helps rewrite a child's future.



Children in OOHC are

**2-4 times
more likely**

to have low reading scores than children with no child protection involvement.
(Maclean et al., 2017)

35% of young people in state care end up homeless after they turn 18.

Within one year, **50%** of state care leavers will be unemployed, in jail, homeless or become a new parent.

(Kids Under Cover, 2025)

Approximately

54%
of children in OOHC

do not meet or exceed national minimum reading standards in Year 3 (compared to around 75% of the general Year 3 population in Australia who meet the minimum reading standards)

(Maclean et al., 2023)

Environment and Current Statistics *cont.*



Why Your Support Matters

When you support children in OOHC, through volunteering, donating, participating in an event or sponsorship — **you're breaking the cycle of disadvantage and changing lives.**

You're helping to ensure that no child feels forgotten, that every child has someone who believes in them, and that each young person **can dream of, and achieve, a brighter future.**

Together, we can turn these statistics of struggle into stories of strength.

Our Solution and Theory of Change

Children in OOHC often experience trauma, including abuse and neglect, which can lead to negative emotional, behavioural, neurobiological and social outcomes, as well as educational disadvantage. These experiences can place children in a chronic stress state, limiting their ability to engage safely in learning and relationships.

The Love of Learning Program addresses these challenges by fostering safe, consistent, and supportive mentoring relationships, using play-based and relational strategies to engage children in academic and life skill building activities.

Theory of Change

The Love of Learning Program enhances the lives of children and young people in care by matching them with a dedicated volunteer mentor. This relationship focused approach boosts the child's self-confidence, decision making skills and enthusiasm for learning, ultimately improving their interpersonal relationships, social connections and employability while reducing educational disadvantage.



The PACE Framework

Trauma-Informed Practice

At The Pyjama Foundation, we operate under a trauma-informed framework to ensure interactions with children and young people in care are grounded in safety, trust, and understanding. Central to this approach is the PACE Framework — a therapeutic model developed by clinical psychologist Dr. Dan Hughes as part of his Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP) approach.

PACE, which stands for Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity, and Empathy, is designed to help adults build secure, supportive relationships with people who have experienced trauma, loss, or attachment difficulties. This approach is widely used in foster care, education, and therapeutic settings — and is deeply embedded in The Pyjama Foundation's Love of Learning Program.

By using PACE, our staff and volunteer Pyjama Angels create emotionally safe environments where children feel valued, understood, and open to learning.

What PACE Means in Practice

P **Playfulness**
Approaching interactions with warmth, lightness, and fun helps children lower their defences and engage positively — even when faced with challenges.

A **Acceptance**
Accepting a child's thoughts, feelings, and behaviours without judgment provides the foundation for emotional safety and trust.

C **Curiosity**
Wondering **with** the child about what might be happening for them encourages reflection and strengthens connection.

E **Empathy**
Feeling **with** the child and expressing genuine understanding of their emotions helps them feel seen, supported, and secure.

Why PACE Matters

- Builds emotional safety, trust, and confidence — especially for children who have experienced instability or trauma.
- Supports emotional regulation, resilience, and secure attachment.
- Provides mentors, carers, and educators with a practical, relational approach to guiding behaviour and supporting wellbeing.
- Aligns with The Pyjama Foundation's Love of Learning Program by building connection first, then confidence, leading to learning success.

All staff and volunteers are trained in PACE principles, ensuring consistent, trauma-informed care across our programs.

The PACE Framework

Pyjama Angel Feedback

Our volunteers endeavour to embody PACE in every visit. Feedback from a volunteer survey demonstrates how PACE shapes their relationships with children and young people:

Playfulness

- **98%** have fun spending time with their child.
- **79%** have observed children making positive choices about how to spend their time together.
- **95%** join in and role model having fun while learning.
- **34%** have observed children enthusiastically discussing books they've read for fun.

Acceptance

- **97%** allow the child to express emotions freely, even when behaviours are challenging.
- **99%** celebrate every achievement, no matter how small.
- **80%** have observed increased self-confidence.
- **60%** have seen greater persistence and reduced frustration when facing challenges.

Curiosity

- **91%** enquire about the child's emotions when they notice changes in mood.
- **98%** intentionally ask about topics the child is interested in.
- **63%** have seen better problem-solving skills.
- **71%** have observed increased curiosity and questioning during visits.

Empathy

- **94%** use empathy to understand a child's sadness or distress.
- **98%** actively listen for the full duration of their visit.
- **81%** wait until the child has de-escalated emotionally before discussing what's on their mind.

Foster Carer Feedback

The impact of PACE is also reflected in feedback from foster carers:

Playfulness: 96% say the child has fun with their Pyjama Angel.

Acceptance: 80% have noticed positive changes in the child's behaviour or confidence.

Curiosity in reading: 53% of children have been observed discussing books they enjoy, showing growing interest and engagement in reading.

Empathy: 98% believe the child feels safe and supported by their Pyjama Angel.

Through the PACE framework, The Pyjama Foundation empowers children in care to rebuild trust, rediscover joy, and reimagine what's possible. By connecting first through relationships, our volunteers help children grow emotionally, socially, and academically — one playful, accepting, curious, and empathetic moment at a time.

Voice of the Children

Love of Learning Program

This year the Foundation conducted a project in partnership with Queensland University of Technology (QUT).

The Pyjama Foundation continues to partner with QUT to evaluate the impact of our **Love of Learning Program**. The second phase of this research focused on listening directly to the children to hear their voices, stories, and experiences in their own words.

About the Evaluation

This phase used a child-led and creative approach. Children were invited to reflect on what the program means to them, what they enjoy most, and how it helps them grow. Through drawings, discussions and shared activities, they expressed what matters most in their relationships and learning.

What Children Told Us

Children's reflections revealed three key themes:

1. Relationships First

Children spoke about the importance of safe, caring and trusting relationships with their Pyjama Angels. They described these connections as the best part of the program, helping them feel comfortable, supported and ready to learn.

2. Recognition Builds Confidence

Children valued when their Pyjama Angels noticed their efforts, strengths and interests. Feeling recognised and encouraged helped them believe in themselves, try new things, and build confidence.

3. Relevance Creates Enjoyment

Children said they enjoyed learning most when activities were fun, hands-on and connected to their own interests, whether that was reading about dinosaurs, baking, or playing word games. When learning feels relevant, they stay engaged and excited to learn more.

These insights show that relationships, recognition and relevance are at the heart of the Love of Learning Program's success.

Why This Matters

For children in out-of-home care, having a consistent and caring adult makes a real difference. Positive mentoring relationships can protect against the challenges of instability and help children stay engaged in school and in learning.

By focusing on literacy, confidence and connection, the Love of Learning Program helps children develop important life skills and fosters a lifelong love of learning.

Voice of the Children

Love of Learning Program *cont.*

Building on Earlier Research

The first phase of this evaluation (2022–2023) confirmed that the Love of Learning Program is evidence-based and plays a valuable role within the child protection system.

Phase two deepened this understanding by placing children’s voices at the centre, showing how the program impacts their learning, wellbeing and sense of belonging.

The Impact

This evaluation reinforces that when children are supported by consistent, caring volunteers in a fun and child-led environment, they are more confident, resilient and engaged learners.

By continuing to invest in trauma-aware, child-centred and relationship-focused mentoring, we can change lives.

Hearing Children’s Voices: What Matters Most

Relationships

The Love of Learning Program is built on strong, caring relationships — and children told us this is what matters most.

When relationships come first, children feel safe, connected and ready to learn.

“You can be yourself — it feels really close and safe.”

“It’s like you’ve known each other your whole life.”

Children described their Pyjama Angels as people they trust, who listen, and who make learning fun. These caring, consistent relationships help children feel secure and confident to take on new challenges.

What makes relationships work:

- **Consistency:** Pyjama Angels who show up every week build trust and stability.
- **Emotional safety:** Children feel accepted, listened to and valued.
- **Shared enjoyment:** Reading and learning are fun when done together.

For children in out-of-home care, these trusted connections fill an important gap, helping them build resilience and thrive emotionally and academically.



Voice of the Children

Love of Learning Program *cont.*



Recognition

Children said they feel most motivated when their Pyjama Angel notices their effort, strengths and interests. This simple act of recognition helps them feel capable, valued and proud of what they can do.

“A mentor is someone who’s on your side — who helps with what you struggle with and does things you like.”

Through encouragement and support, Angels help children build confidence, resilience and self-belief. They celebrate small wins, model persistence and remind children that mistakes are part of learning.

Recognition builds:

- **Confidence:** “I can do this” attitudes toward learning.
- **Resilience:** Coping with challenges and trying again.
- **Positive identity:** Seeing themselves as capable learners.

Relevance

Children learn best when learning feels meaningful and fun. They told us they are more engaged when they can choose activities and books that match their interests.

What makes learning relevant:

- **Choice and agency:** Picking topics or books they love.
- **Real-world connections:** Linking learning to daily life and goals.
- **Balance:** Mixing schoolwork with fun, creative or physical activities.

When learning feels relevant, children are not just improving literacy, they’re building confidence, curiosity and a lifelong love of learning.

The Impact

This evaluation confirms that relationships, recognition and relevance are at the heart of the Love of Learning Program’s success. By training and supporting volunteers who can build trusting, long-term relationships, The Pyjama Foundation helps children in out-of-home care:

- feel safe and supported,
- build confidence and resilience, and
- engage meaningfully in learning.

The Love of Learning Program is more than academic support, it’s a trauma-aware, child-centred approach that changes lives by helping children discover their strengths and believe in their futures.

Voice of the Children

”

We do **positive thinking**, and what we are **grateful** for.

”

My Pyjama Angel is my **superpower**. She helps me do my homework and is very **friendly**.

”

She always takes a deep breath with me, and we start again and think of other **possible solutions** to solve the problem.

”

She always helps me find the **bigger and better** person of myself when I am lost.

”

She always **helps me** do my homework and speeches I have to do.

”

I have missed a lot of school, but she is **catching me up** and I need school for a job.



Julie is an amazing helper and helps me when I struggle with things and helps me with my emotions. I love spending time with her because she is caring and special. I couldn't imagine a better Pyjama Angel than Julie. Julie has a heart like no one else she is very kind and loving.

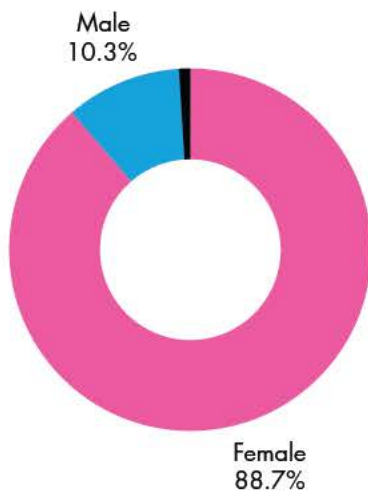


Our Vital Volunteers

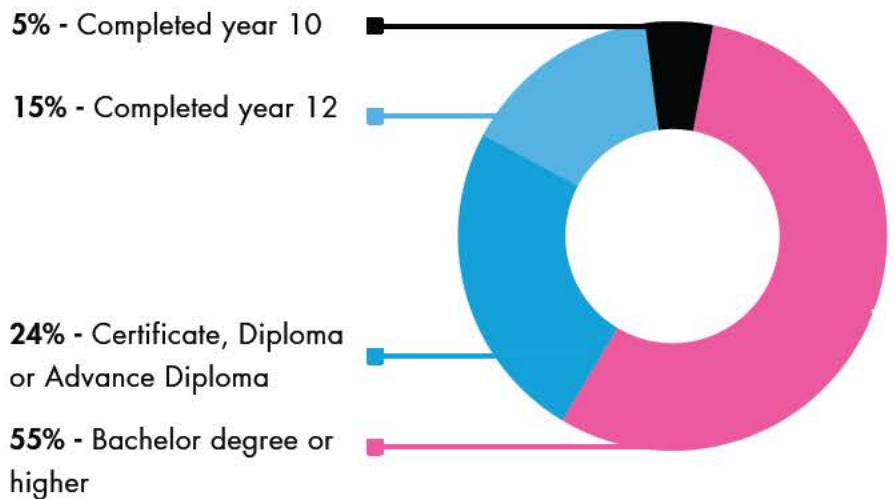
Our dedicated volunteer mentors whom we call Pyjama Angels are the heart and soul of our Love of Learning program. A Pyjama Angel is a consistent caring adult who shows up every week and says "You Matter".

Children in foster care often grow up hearing "you can't." Pyjama Angels rewrite that story by reminding them, week after week, that **they can**. And that belief can change everything.

Gender



Education Level



Top Industries



16%

Education and Training



11%

Health and Medical

Age range

18 - 86 years

How Do Pyjama Angels Spend Their Visits?



75%

Worked on creative and critical thinking



68%

Worked on motor skills and kinaesthetic activities



83%

Worked on Literacy



79%

Worked on sense of self and self-awareness



75%

Worked on Numeracy



48%

Worked on health and fitness



34%

Worked on cultural awareness



30%

Worked on STEM

Data extracted from Pyjama Angel Quarterly Surveys.

Voice of the Pyjama Angels

“

I continue to have an **amazing** time with my little girl. She has moved up 2 reading levels since we started, and we have just finished her first chapter book. From the bottom of my heart, thank you for the incredible opportunity of working with the most beautiful little girl. Spending the last 2 years with her has been **life changing** and one of the **most important** things I have ever done.

”

After 11 years as a male Pyjama Angel, my young person is now an adult. I am willing to volunteer again when study and work are less pressured. This has been **one of the most enriching experiences** that I have ever done, and I thank you for the opportunity to contribute.

“

My young person turned 18 this month. I can't quite believe the little 9-year-old I started visiting is not only 18 but moved in with me last year. I could never have imagined how much **value, connection** and **purpose** I would feel, having been a part of the program. I am so grateful you went after your goals and dreams of setting the foundation up and making it everything it is today. I can't thank you enough for the **positive impact** you have had on both of our lives. R* is an avid reader, some may say she is addicted to reading, averaging about 60 plus books a year! I absolutely believe had it not been for the foundation her love of reading would not be what it is today! Thank you doesn't quite seem enough but thank you to you and the entire team for what you do every day.

Outcomes for Children and Young People

The Foundation uses the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework developed in consultation with Dr Ruth Knight. This framework supports trauma-informed data collection strengthens the Foundation’s ability to measure, understand and communicate the positive outcomes of our programs including the impact of mentoring children and young people in care – ensuring continuous improvement and meaningful change.

A survey conducted in September 2025 with children and young people in the program aged 6–14 years revealed the following results:

Results from Four Key Areas

Relational Pedagogy – the quality of the relationship between the person, is central to educational success. Learning is about building and mutual respect.

80%

of children believe that their Pyjama Angel helps them learn to listen to their teacher.

88%

of children believe that their Pyjama Angel encourages them to ask questions to better understand what they are reading.

80%

of children believe that their Pyjama Angel encourages them to care about their teacher’s opinion.

Learning Confidence – the belief in one’s own ability to acquire new knowledge and skills, empowering individuals to persist, take risks, and embrace challenges in the learning process.

100%

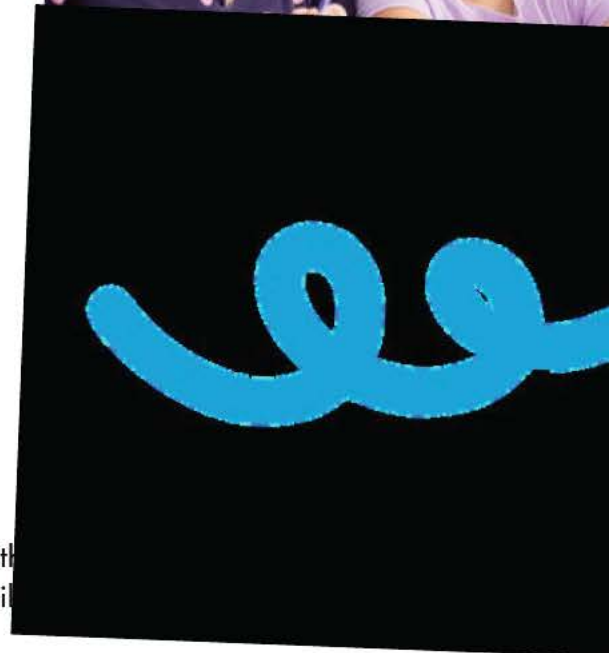
of children believe that when they feel like quitting, their Pyjama Angel helps them find ways to solve their problems.

87%

of children believe that, with the help of their Pyjama Angel, they are doing better at school.

100%

of children believe that their Pyjama Angel helps them feel confident they will achieve their goals.



Outcomes for Children and Young People cont.

Academic Resilience – the ability to overcome challenges, setbacks, or stress in learning and continue striving toward academic success with determination and a positive attitude.

92%

of children believe that when they are confused about something they are learning, their Pyjama Angel helps them figure it out.

84%

of children believe that their Pyjama Angel helps them feel like they can solve most problems if they try hard enough.

100%

of children believe that when they are working out a problem, their Pyjama Angel helps them keep thinking until they find a possible solution.

School Connectedness – the sense of belonging and positive relationships a student feels within their school community, which fosters engagement, motivation, and overall wellbeing.

87%

of children believe that their Pyjama Angel helps them improve at school.

96%

of children believe that their Pyjama Angel encourages them to always try their best.



In line with the Foundation's Theory of Change, the below outcomes demonstrate the combined feedback of child safety officers and foster carers throughout September 2024 – August 2025, with additional feedback from the children in September 2025. Stakeholders reported the following as a result of having a Pyjama Angel and the Love of Learning Program:

87%

of children have increased sense of feeling supported, connected and empowered.

100%

of children have improved decision making and more likely to make better decisions.

90%

of children have improved agency, self-efficacy and confidence.

95%

of children have improved literacy skills and children reading for pleasure.

92%

of children have improved attitudes towards learning.

Voice of the Foster Carers

“

Both Pyjama Angels are **significant people** in these children's lives and part of their support team. If they can't talk to [me] the carer, they feel comfortable to talk to their Pyjama Angel. It is a very non-threatening environment for the boys to open up and **a relationship** that lasts longer than a counsellor. A **good team** is important for the children, and they are the only people in their lives who don't get paid to be there. It's purely voluntary and they are a **role model** for the kids.

“

Having a Pyjama Angel come and have that **special time** with R* is really great, as R* doesn't do too well in school having him do some **learning** at home is amazing.

“

My Pyjama Angel is a **god send**, that has created an amazing connection with my child, who she has helped grow emotionally and academically.

“

Visits have been **amazing**, have seen such a positive difference in S* behaviour in **sharing, confidence, emotional stability**.

“

Visits are really good, the Pyjama Angel has shown X* how to regulate his emotions better, and that it's okay to express your emotions in a **positive way**. I've also seen a **massive difference** in his social skills.

Voice of the Young People

Teen Life Skills Program

The Teen Life Skills Program (TLS) extends The Pyjama Foundation's Love of Learning Program to support young people aged 12–24 years.

It provides age-appropriate resources, mentoring and workshops to help teens build confidence, independence and essential life skills, while keeping them connected to their Pyjama Angels as they move toward adulthood.

Research shows that long-term mentoring relationships can lead to better mental health, stronger educational outcomes, greater stability and improved life skills for young people in care. The TLS Program builds on this evidence, offering consistent support during one of the most vulnerable stages of life.

Building Confidence and Capability

In 2025, The Pyjama Foundation hosted a one-day **Level Up Teen Life Skills Forum**, designed to help young people develop practical and emotional tools for the future.

The program focused on:

- **Financial literacy:** learning to budget and manage money.
- **Resilience and emotional intelligence:** understanding emotions, coping with stress, and building self-control.
- **Healthy habits and decision-making:** making positive, prosocial choices every day.



Voice of the Young People

Teen Life Skills Workshop

Hosted at QUT the workshop, Level Up was facilitated by Kari Sutton, an expert author and wellbeing educator. Teens also engaged with QUT's Young Ambassador Program, hearing from students about university pathways and enjoying a campus tour to inspire their future goals.

Inspiring Role Models

A highlight of the day was the panel discussion with Sami Rose, body image advocate, and Tom Gilbert, NRL captain.

They shared insights on:

- Building **resilience** and self-confidence.
- Practising **self-care** and maintaining a strong mindset.
- The power of **leadership** and surrounding yourself with positive influences.

These real-life stories encouraged participants to reflect on their own choices, wellbeing and future aspirations.

Impact

The TLS Program gives young people in OOHG the knowledge and confidence to take the next steps toward independence.

Program outcomes include:

- Practical skills in finance, wellbeing and education.
- Increased self-awareness and confidence.
- Motivation to pursue further learning and positive life goals.

What young people said:



I felt challenged, excited and interested.

I learned about budgeting my money and working through tough times.

Having savings makes me feel safe.



What a mentor said:

"The day opened the boys' eyes to the skills they'll need for the future."



Measuring What Matters

Youth-Mentor Relationship Questionnaire

To understand the impact of the TLS Program, The Pyjama Foundation uses the research-based tool, The Youth Survey, which was designed to measure the quality of youth-mentor relationships.

Between September 2024 and October 2025, results show that teens who participated in the survey and have been in TLS with their Pyjama Angel mentor for nearly 12 months experience strong, positive and emotionally safe connections with them.



The Impact

Trust, consistency, and genuine connection are at the core of the TLS Program.

Through safe, supportive, and reliable mentoring relationships, young people feel valued, seen, and heard. As a result, they are more likely to engage in learning, set and pursue personal goals, build confidence and resilience, and form healthy, positive relationships with others.

Young people in the program reported:

Youth-centred relationships:

3.45 average score showing most young people felt listened to, respected and included in decisions about their learning and activities. This demonstrates a strong youth-centred approach by volunteer mentors.

Emotional engagement:

3.77 average score, indicating young people feel a strong emotional connection and support from their Pyjama Angel and enjoy their time with their mentors. (*Exceeds benchmark)

Youth Dissatisfaction:

1.41 average score, indicating a high sense of satisfaction in the relationship from young people with their mentors. This reflects strong trust, safety and positivity.

Note – all scores are from 1–5

*National mentoring benchmarks are based on the validated data from the Big Brothers Big Sisters program.

Teen Life Skills Program

Building Confidence, Connection and Future Pathways

Over the past year, The Pyjama Foundation delivered 11 TLS workshops designed to build confidence, independence and practical skills for young people in OOHC.

Workshops covered a wide range of interests, from STEM, bike building and barista training, to floristry, cooking, yoga and our Youth Summit. Each activity encouraged teamwork, creativity and hands-on learning.

Workshop feedback from young people

Airbus workshop

"I learned about aircrafts and space, **this will help with my career choices.**"

Zookeeper for a Day

"Because I want to work with animals any of these skills would be helpful to me."

Science Discovery Day

"It was fun, interesting to learn about different topics including coral and reptiles."

Level UP Forum

"It makes me think that coming to university in the future will get me a good job and make a lot of money."

Barista Course

"It will help me get a job!"

Level UP Forum

"I learnt about budgeting my money; working through the bad times. Importance of being educated."

How It Made Them Feel

Feedback was overwhelmingly positive:

81%

of participants used positive language to describe how the activities made them feel.

These results show that our workshops not only build skills but also boost confidence, motivation and joy in learning.



Our Impact at a Glance



1,771

Number of children and young people mentored



835

Number of volunteers trained



1,509

Number of Pyjama Angel volunteer applications



918

Hours of support to volunteer mentors



3,145

Support calls and communications with Pyjama Angels



78,372

Hours of support to children and young people



13,753

Number of hours Pyjama Angels spent with carers



185

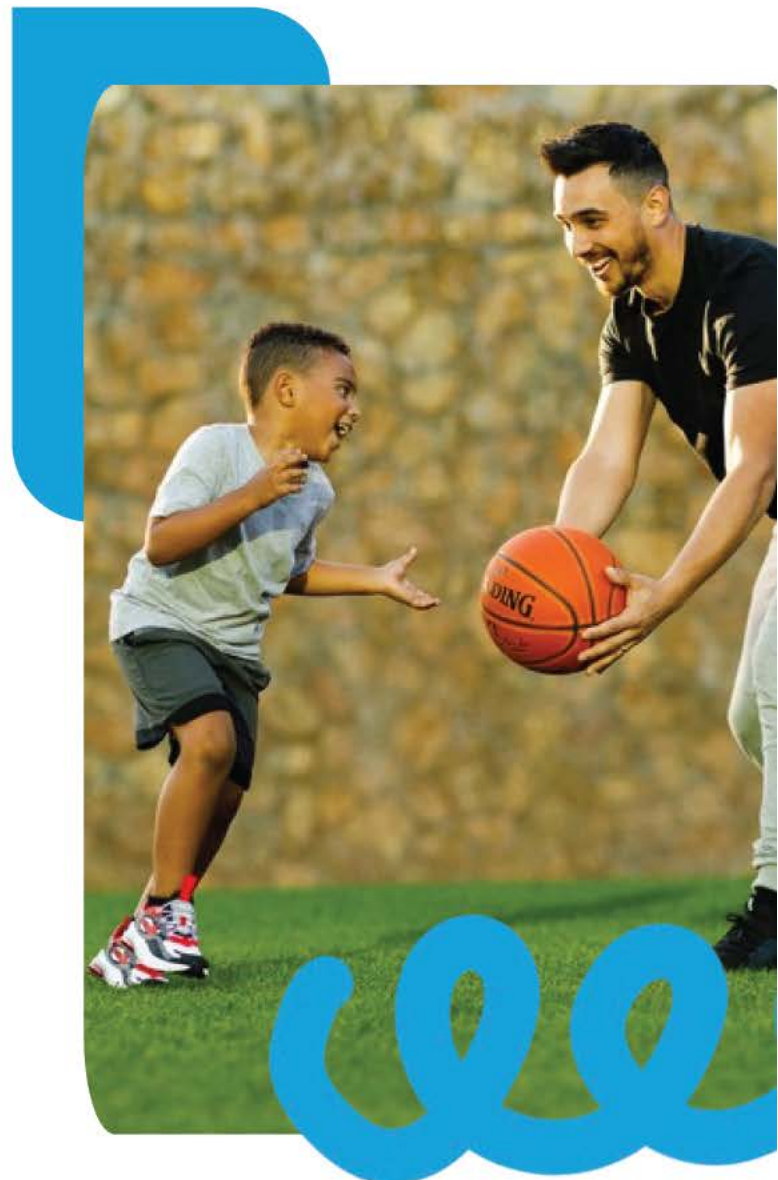
Number of participants in our Teen Life Skills workshops

First Nations Advisory Body

The First Nations Advisory Body, established in 2021, plays a vital role in ensuring The Pyjama Foundation's programs are culturally safe, respectful, and responsive to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Its primary goal is to support the cultural wellbeing of the children in our Program by providing guidance on culturally appropriate practices, materials, and engagement. The Advisory Body strengthens relationships between The Pyjama Foundation and First Nations communities, ensuring authentic representation and inclusion in decision-making. Through its insights and leadership, the group helps enhance program effectiveness, build trust with families, and foster a deeper understanding of culture across the organisation — ultimately contributing to better outcomes for First Nations children.

Key Benefits

- **Cultural guidance and integrity:** It ensures that the organisation's programs, policies, and resources are culturally safe, respectful, and aligned with First Nations worldviews, values, and protocols.
- **Representation and inclusion:** It gives Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples a direct voice in decision-making, ensuring their perspectives shape how services are delivered to First Nations children and families.
- **Improved outcomes for First Nations children:** By embedding cultural knowledge and community insights, the Advisory Body helps make mentoring and literacy programs more effective and relevant for First Nations participants.
- **Community trust and relationships:** The Advisory Body strengthens connections between The Pyjama Foundation and local First Nations communities, fostering mutual respect and long-term partnerships.
- **Capacity building:** It provides opportunities for leadership, collaboration, and two-way learning — supporting both organisational growth and empowerment within First Nations communities.



First Nations Advisory Body cont.

NAIDOC Week Event

The Pyjama Foundation's NAIDOC event at QUT was a vibrant celebration of culture, connection, and creativity. Children from the Program took part in hands-on activities such as rock and boomerang painting, guided by a respected Elder who shared stories and cultural knowledge throughout the session. The event provided a meaningful opportunity for children to learn about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander traditions in an engaging and respectful way, fostering pride, understanding, and appreciation for First Nations culture. It also strengthened relationships between The Pyjama Foundation, local Elders, and the wider community, highlighting the importance of cultural inclusion and storytelling in supporting children's learning and identity.

More than 30 young people in the Love of Learning and Teen Life Skills Programs participated in a meaningful NAIDOC Week celebration at QUT Kelvin Grove. Guided by Aboriginal Elder, Aunty Barbara, and her daughter Ann-Maree, participants engaged in a traditional painting workshop.

Benefits: Cultural awareness, connection to community, creative development, expression and engaging in shared practices.



Testimonial from First Nations Advisory Body member Ann-Maree Long

Djali Galangur (good day) - my name is Ann-Maree Long (she/her).

I am a proud Badjala, Woppaburra and Torres Strait Islander woman, and very proud Pyjama Angel who has been involved as a volunteer for close to 4 years.

As a proud neurodivergent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander woman... I believe it is vital and incredibly necessary to bring our lived experience(s), insights, and cultural knowledge into the Programs within The Pyjama Foundation.

Through the Advisory group, we come together to collaborate and yarn through important decision making and areas for growth.. we work together with the vision of creating spaces where children can feel a sense of belonging and deep pride in who they are.

Our representation and contributions, for matters involving our communities, are essential to achieving the best possible outcomes for our jarjums.

Fundraising and Partnerships Highlights

2024/2025 Financial Year

1000+

In-kind donations received

99

Pledged Gifts in Wills in 2025

17,753

Individual donors

19,081

Donations made online

30

Number of successful grants in 2024, totalling \$678,771

5,776

Peer to peer fundraisers



"I support The Pyjama Foundation because it helps kids in foster care. I have children myself and hate the thought of kids not having a loving safe or stable home. I want to support them in every way I can to bring security and joy into their lives and help them."

- Donor

Campaign Highlights

\$924K

Amount raised from National Pyjama Day (8.7% increase from 2024)

597K

Visits to National Pyjama Day website this year (33% increase from 2024)

\$3M

Value received from pro-bono advertising from our partnership with media agency OMD

\$83K

Amount raised from our Christmas Appeal 2024

\$54K

Amount raised from our Tax Appeal 2024

Thank you for believing in, and investing in a brighter future for **all children** where they can thrive with education, confidence, connection and vital life skills.

With your support, we raised

\$1,788,189

for children and young people in out of home care.

We wouldn't have been able to do this without your support.

through our campaigns, events, appeals and corporate partnerships



Government Engagement

- We engaged with more than 250 Members of Parliament including the Premier of Queensland and key ministers across the four jurisdictions of Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and federally.
- The Foundation contributed to policy discussions on early intervention for children and teenagers with responses to the Queensland Government's Making Queensland Safer Initiative and the Parliamentary Inquiry into Volunteering.

Partnerships

\$35.3K

Raised from National Fairy Bread Day 2024

\$12.8K

Dolphins Community Fund

\$26.9K

Raised from Mask Co, over 12 months (and ongoing)



Fairy Bread is part of the fabric of Aussie childhood — it's simple, joyful and colourful. At Dollar Sweets, we're delighted to bring that joy to life with Fairy Bread Day, and to partner with The Pyjama Foundation as our chosen charity. Their work supporting kids in foster care through education, mentoring and 'Love of Learning' creates real, lasting impact. Every sprinkle, every slice, every donation helps turn a nostalgic treat into a meaningful act of kindness. That's why we believe Fairy Bread Day isn't just fun — it's an opportunity to stand with children in their corner and help build brighter futures.

Ruth Lloyd
Continuous Improvement Manager
Dollar Sweets



Our Reach

Facebook Insights July 2024 — June 2025

2.1M

Reach

133% increase
from 23/24

1.5K

New Follows

6.6% decrease
from 23/24

43.5K

Profile Visits

increase of
86.4%

Instagram Insights

July 2024—June 2025

178K

Reach

49.6% decrease from
2024

10.7K

Total Followers

9.3% increase

16.4K

Profile Visits

increase of 79%

38%

Increase in Pyjama Angel Applications through online ads, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, TikTok and social media.





Turning Dreams into Possibilities

We are deeply grateful to our partners, donors, volunteers, and supporters for helping us rewrite the stories of children and young people in care.

Together, we're making a lasting difference and none of it would be possible without you.

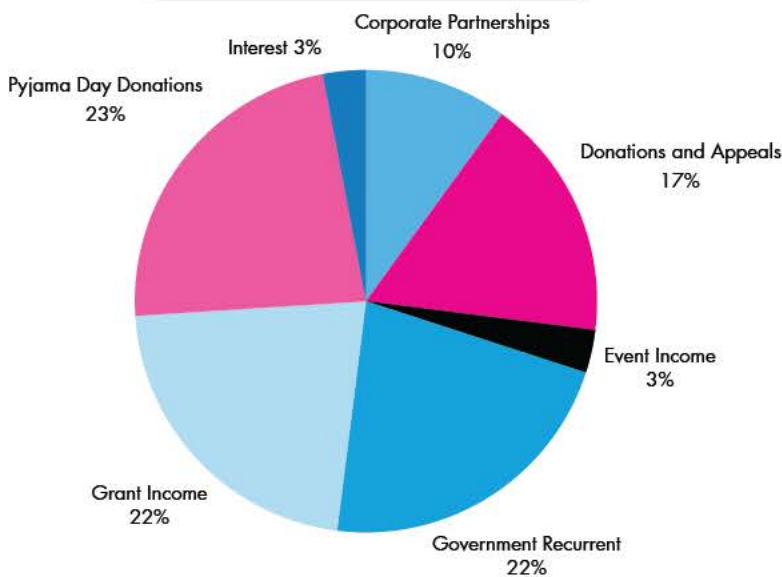
Read our full financial statements:



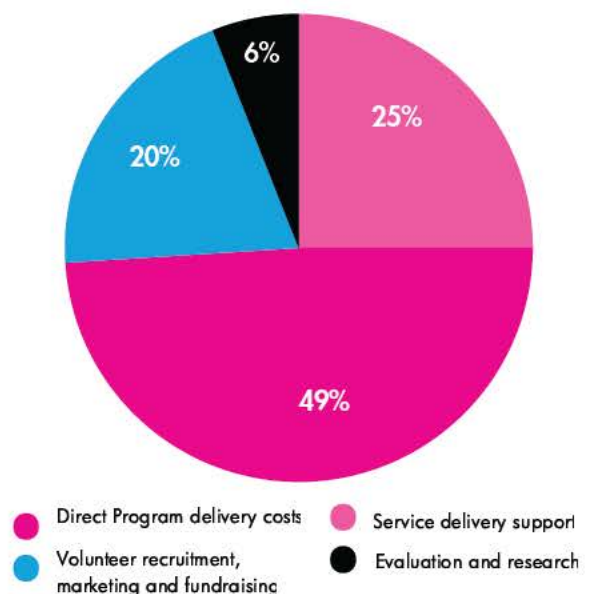
Every dollar donated helps create real and lasting change. Thanks to the generosity of our supporters, The Pyjama Foundation delivers vital Programs for children and young people in care, supports our incredible volunteers, and inspires others to get involved. Your support also enables us to invest in improving and measuring our impact, ensuring every contribution builds brighter futures for all those we support.

Where our Funds Come From

Corporate Partnerships Donations and Appeals



Where Your Dollar Goes



How You Can Make an Impact

- Become a volunteer mentor Pyjama Angel
- Make a donation
- Leave a Gift in your Will
- Fundraise
- Partner with us





The work of The Pyjama Foundation is truly transformative. The relationships Pyjama Angels build with children and young people in foster care provide continuity, stability, and a powerful sense of belonging. These safe, consistent, caring connections don't just feel good, they help the children and young people's minds and bodies settle, making it easier for them to learn, trust and grow in confidence and self-belief. Pyjama Angels also make a real difference for foster carers, offering support and easing the load during challenging times. By strengthening relationships and nurturing each child's potential, The Pyjama Foundation is giving children and young people something essential, the chance to feel connected, safe, valued and confident in themselves.

- Kari Sutton

**Author, researcher and parent educator, teacher,
Deputy Principal, Guidance Counsellor and Consultant
for families for over 30 years**



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Learn more at

www.thepyjamafoundation.com

Private

14th October 2025

To the Members of the Inquiry into Child Safety in Queensland,

Letter of Support for The Pyjama Foundation's *Love of Learning* Program

I am writing to express my strong support for The Pyjama Foundation's *Love of Learning* program and to advocate for its recognition as a critical intervention within the child protection and out-of-home care (OOHC) system in Queensland and across Australia.

The *Love of Learning* program provides children in OOHC with a carefully matched volunteer mentor, known as a Pyjama Angel, who visits weekly to build a trusting, consistent, and caring relationship with the child. Through shared reading, educational support, and everyday activities, Pyjama Angels nurture children's confidence, literacy, and sense of belonging. The program is unique in its longevity, with many mentor-child relationships extending well beyond the initial 12-month commitment, providing much-needed stability for children who have often experienced multiple disruptions in care and schooling.

From a trauma-informed perspective, the *Love of Learning* program addresses a key gap in the lives of children who have experienced adversity: the opportunity to experience safe, reliable, and attuned relationships with caring adults. Research consistently demonstrates that such relationships are among the most powerful protective factors against the adverse outcomes associated with trauma, neglect, and placement instability. By placing relationship before task, the program allows children to first feel safe and connected, creating the emotional and neurological conditions necessary for learning, self-regulation, and identity development.

Recent evaluations of the program, including a 2025 process evaluation conducted in partnership with Queensland University of Technology, highlight that the *Love of Learning* program supports three interrelated outcomes for children:

- **Relationships** – fostering trust, safety, and connection between children and their mentors;
- **Recognition** – affirming each child's individuality, strengths, and potential; and
- **Relevance** – engaging children in learning through activities that are meaningful and child-led.

These trauma-informed principles ensure that the program not only improves educational engagement but also contributes to emotional regulation, resilience, and wellbeing; key foundations for long-term life outcomes.

The *Love of Learning* program represents a scalable, community-based model of care that complements formal education and child protection services. It is cost-effective, evidence-informed, and delivers relational continuity that many statutory services are unable to provide. For these reasons, I strongly recommend that the program be considered an integral component of trauma-aware, relationally focused approaches to supporting children and young people in out-of-home care.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Lyra L'Estrange

Senior Lecturer in Education

Queensland University of Technology

07 3138 9606

lyra.lestrange@qut.edu.au

Letter of Support

Dear Commissioner,

As both a qualified teacher, for 34 years, and a proud Pyjama Angel, I have had the privilege of witnessing firsthand the profound impact that *The Pyjama Foundation's Love of Learning Program* has on children in care. I have had two Pyjama Angel placements, one with a five year old boy for 10 years and the other with a nine year old for two and a half years. The program's emphasis on nurturing a love of reading, learning, and confidence aligns beautifully with the core values of education — and provides a unique, consistent form of support that many children in out-of-home care so deeply need.

From my teaching experience I learned that connecting with a child is the key to engaging them in their education. In my role as a Pyjama Angel, I have seen how consistent, one-on-one engagement through the Love of Learning Program complements classroom learning. The relationship-based approach that is tailored to the child's individual needs, builds trust, motivation, and self-belief — key ingredients for educational success. Many children who struggle in the traditional school environment respond positively to the gentle, individualised support provided by their Pyjama Angel. This connection often reignites their curiosity and helps them develop vital literacy and numeracy skills that carry through to their schoolwork.

Beyond academics, the program fosters emotional security and resilience. The children I've worked with demonstrate noticeable improvements in self-esteem and social confidence over time. They begin to see learning as enjoyable and achievable — a shift that can transform their entire educational trajectory and life outcomes.

As an educator, I cannot overstate the importance of programs like this in bridging the gap between classroom expectations and individual learning needs. The Love of Learning Program not only enriches children's educational outcomes but also helps them feel seen, valued, and capable of achieving their potential. It's an initiative that truly changes lives — one story, one book, and one visit at a time.

I wholeheartedly support *The Pyjama Foundation* and commend the incredible work being done to empower children in care through learning, love, and consistency.

Warm regards,



Kevin Gallard B.Ed.
Teacher & Pyjama Angel



The Love of Learning Program: Children's Voices.



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QUT acknowledges the Turrbal and Yugara, as the First Nations owners of the lands where QUT now stands. We pay respect to their Elders, lores, customs and creation spirits. We recognise that these lands have always been places of teaching, research and learning. QUT acknowledges the important role Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people play within the QUT community.

Executive Summary

Overview

The Pyjama Foundation established the Love of Learning program to support children living in out-of-home care (OOHC) by providing them with a volunteer mentor. This process evaluation reviewed the program's design, systems, and processes, with a focus on how it supports children in OOHC through a child-centred and trauma-informed approach.

Children in OOHC often experience trauma, including abuse and neglect, which can lead to negative emotional, behavioural, neurobiological, and social outcomes, as well as educational disadvantage. These experiences can place children in a chronic stress state, limiting their ability to engage safely in learning and relationships (Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2019). The Love of Learning program addresses these challenges by fostering safe, consistent, and supportive mentoring relationships, using play-based and relational strategies to engage children in academic, recreational, and life-skill activities.

The evaluation was conducted in two phases, and this report focuses on the second phase; hearing children's voices in the Love of Learning program. The findings of this phase of the evaluation highlighted three interrelated themes; relationships, recognition, and relevance, that were central to children's experiences of the program.

Methods

This process evaluation used a child-led, reflective approach. Seven children participating in the Love of Learning program were invited to create a guidebook for new Pyjama Angels using journey mapping and empathy mapping techniques as well as develop persona images to represent their relationship with an imagined mentor. These creative exercises, supported by the research team, allowed children to reflect on and express their experiences of the program, including relationships, learning activities, and personal growth. Data were collected through written reflections, verbal discussions, and the visual persona exercises.

Key findings

Children's reflections highlighted three interconnected themes: relationships, recognition, and relevance. They consistently emphasised the importance of safe, trusting, and enjoyable relationships with their Pyjama Angels, which allowed them to engage more fully in learning and other activities. Children also valued Angels noticing and affirming their strengths, interests, and efforts, which contributed to confidence, motivation, and a sense of capability. Finally, children reported that activities were most engaging when child-led and connected to their interests and everyday experiences, including both academic and recreational tasks. These findings suggest that relational, supportive, and relevant approaches are central to children's positive experiences of the program.

Implications

The Love of Learning program's approach, combining relationship-building, recognition, and relevance, appears to support engagement, wellbeing, and learning for children in OOHC. While the findings are tentative due to the small sample, they provide practical insights for mentor training, program design, and future evaluation. Ongoing assessment and a formal outcomes evaluation will be important for establishing stronger evidence of the program's impact on academic achievement, social-emotional skills, and long-term life outcomes.

For funders and policy-makers, this evaluation highlights the potential of the Love of Learning program to reduce educational disadvantage, foster resilience, and promote wellbeing among children in OOHC. By investing in volunteer-led, trauma-aware, child-centred, and relationally focused mentoring programs, stakeholders can help support positive life trajectories for some of Australia's most vulnerable children.

The Project

Purpose

The Pyjama Foundation has engaged QUT to undertake a full evaluation of their Love of Learning program to identify the impact the program is making, identify ways to improve and increase impact and determine how to build organisational capacity to continue collecting impact data. The Love of Learning program is a mentoring program, partnering volunteers (Pyjama Angels) with a child or children living in out-of-home care (OOHC). The program is The Pyjama Foundation's principal program which operates across Australia in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria. The evaluation was conducted in two phases.

Phase one of this evaluation was conducted in 2022-2023 (Knight et al., 2024) with QUT researchers using an appreciative enquiry approach to review the theory of change, design and approach of the Program. The report for phase one can be accessed [here](#).

Phase one of the evaluation found that The Pyjama Foundation's Love of Learning program is evidence-based and operates within the child protection system to promote children's wellbeing and a love of learning. Its distinctive approach involves matching committed volunteer mentors with OOHC children for long-term relationships, focusing on building safety, trust, and engagement in educational and social activities. Key effective features include the rigorous processes for recruiting, training, supporting, and retaining mentors, as well as the thoughtful matching process.

Phase two of this evaluation investigated the perspectives of children in OOHC on the Love of Learning program. As the beneficiaries of the program, it is vital to include the voices of children in the evaluation (Knight, & Kingston, 2021). The QUT research team used a co-designed approach with children in OOHC to answer the following questions:

How does the program create caring connections between Pyjama Angels and children?

How does the program improve children's identity, self-efficacy and academic resilience?

How does the program develop and improve children's attitude towards literacy (reading motivation)?

This project was conducted in 2025 with ethics approval from QUT's ethics committee (approval number 6365).

Children's reflections highlighted three interconnected themes: relationships, recognition, and relevance. They consistently emphasised the importance of safe, trusting, and enjoyable relationships with their Pyjama Angels, which allowed them to engage more fully in learning and other activities.

Scope, method, and limitations

This second phase of the evaluation focused on capturing the experiences of children in out-of-home-care (OOHC) who participated in the Love of Learning program. The aim was to centre the voices of children and young people, rather than relying on adults to speak on their behalf.

A qualitative inquiry was undertaken, using a human-centred and co-designed methodology. A single workshop was held with a small group of children, designed to actively engage them in reflecting on their mentoring experiences with their Pyjama Angel. The workshop provided opportunities for participants to share how their Pyjama Angels had supported their sense of identity, self-efficacy, academic resilience, and motivation for reading.

Capturing the direct perspectives of other stakeholders in the Love of Learning program, such as the volunteer mentors and foster carers, was outside the scope of this phase of the evaluation, however the Pyjama Foundation continues to collect and monitor feedback from these stakeholders. Some of this data was included in the report related to phase one of this evaluation.

Terms

The Pyjama Foundation is an Australian nonprofit organisation that founded and manages the Love of Learning program. The Love of Learning program mentors are known as 'Pyjama Angels' and each participating child is known as a 'Pyjama Child'; however, the report uses the generic terms 'child' and 'mentor'. Individuals are referred to as 'child', 'mentor', and 'foster carer' rather than by name to protect anonymity.



Introduction

Context and need for the program

Approximately 46,200 children in Australia live in out-of-home-care (OOHC), often due to complex needs and challenges, with 82% in OOHC for a year or more (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW], 2025). Many of these children have experienced trauma, such as abuse or neglect, which can lead to negative emotional, behavioural, neurobiological, and social outcomes, and consequently, negative life trajectories and disadvantage. Children in OOHC consistently face worse educational outcomes than their peers, leading to risks of future psychosocial concerns. The Love of Learning program was established in 2004 by The Pyjama Foundation to protect children in OOHC from these risks by providing a volunteer mentor. The relational aspect of mentoring children in OOHC has been shown to be a significant protective factor against disadvantage (Van Dam et al., 2018; Sulimani-Aidan & Tayri-Schwartz, 2021).

The success of the Love of Learning program is influenced by various factors surrounding the child, including their background, culture, experiences with trauma and OOHC, as well as their carer, school, other organisations, and the local community. While children in OOHC may participate in various programs, a community-based mentoring program like the Love of Learning program can be a crucial influence in a child's life. The mentoring relationship has the potential to act as a protective factor, particularly for children in OOHC who are at risk of disengaging from school due to instability at home and school, poor mental health, and challenges with forming attachments. This program contributes to the wellbeing and educational engagement of these vulnerable children, aiming to reduce their risk of disadvantage (Knight et al., 2013).

Literacy and cognitive skills are important protective factors in mitigating the educational disadvantage often experienced by children in OOHC (Maclean et al., 2024). Research indicates that positive attitudes towards learning often develop at home before school, and children who have a positive view of reading tend to achieve better literacy skills. Having an adult read to or with them, and providing access to a variety of reading materials, fosters a more positive attitude towards learning to read. Furthermore, reading books purely for pleasure can significantly impact reading development, academic skills, and overall outcomes (Galea et al., 2025;

Knight et al., 2013). The Love of Learning program aims to improve literacy and instil a love of learning in children in OOHC, who may miss out on supportive home environments in their formative developmental years. Key to this aim is the relational focus of the program. The positive relationship built between the mentor volunteer and child is central to the program's theory of change, and success.

Program overview

The Love of Learning program pairs children in OOHC with volunteer mentors, known as 'Pyjama Angels,' who are unpaid and aged 18-84 years. Since 2004, over 10,500 mentors have been trained, and 19,035 children matched, with the average match lasting 3.5 years. The program aims to improve literacy and instil a love of learning in children in a safe and inclusive way. Initially, the program's theory of change focused on volunteers reading to children to improve literacy. However, based on learning and systems thinking, the program has evolved to place a greater emphasis on the relationship between the mentor and the child, recognising that a close, enduring connection creates the best environment for learning. The Pyjama Foundation views educational disadvantage as a complex social problem requiring multi-organisational responses and works in partnership with other stakeholders within the child protection, health, education, and community ecosystem.

Through phase one of the process evaluation of the Love of Learning program, four interconnected principles were identified; 1) a committed mentor; 2) thoughtful matching of children and mentors; 3) positive mentoring relationships and 4) individualised child-centred activities. These principles underpin the program's success in creating optimal conditions for children to experience positive change and reduce their risk of disadvantage (Knight et al., 2024). In phase two of this evaluation, the direct experiences of the children involved in the Love of Learning program were evaluated to build upon and verify this data from phase one.



Process and participants

To capture the experiences of children participating in the Love of Learning program, the evaluation was designed to provide choice in how children shared their perspectives. A workshop was held at Queensland University of Technology's (QUT) Gardens Point campus in a teaching room. This location was selected in consultation with the Pyjama Foundation to ensure it was safe, accessible, and familiar, as children and carers regularly attend events at QUT.

During the workshop, foster carers were accommodated in an adjacent room where they could relax and access wellbeing activities such as magazines, puzzles, colouring, newspapers, refreshments, and the campus grounds. Carers were also able to converse with a member of the research team. A \$50 gift card was provided to carers to acknowledge their time and cover any associated costs.

The primary data collection tool was a booklet template, designed to guide children in creating a guidebook for new Pyjama Angels (see Appendix A). Children could choose how they contributed, including writing, drawing, speaking, or generating images using a generative AI tool (facilitated by a researcher). The guidebook activity encouraged children to reflect on what they felt was most important for new Angels to know when beginning

the program, how relationships developed over time, and the impact of these relationships on their identity, self-efficacy, academic resilience, and reading motivation. Rather than directly asking children about their personal experiences, the research team worked with each child to create a persona (Kerr et al., 2023), allowing children to comfortably share hypothetical or imagined responses while reflecting on their own experiences.

The workshop was structured using a human-centred participatory design approach (Schepers et al., 2018), incorporating journey mapping and empathy mapping to explore how Pyjama Angels engage with children and support their learning and personal growth. A mosaic approach was used to collect both visual and audio data, capturing the nuances of the connections children made with their Angels. Researchers applied the principles of yarning (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010) to build rapport, sustain engagement, and encourage open reflection. Children worked both collaboratively and individually to create the guidebooks, reflecting on their experiences while projecting these onto their imagined persona child.

Each table was assigned at least one researcher to support children with activities, and microphones were placed on tables to record interactions. Tables were equipped with coloured pens, stickers, and craft supplies,

enabling children to actively create and participate in an engaging and supportive environment. As the focus of the project, the guidebook was designed to provide new Pyjama Angels with the information children felt was important before meeting them for the first time. The activities and questions included the following:

- 1. Getting to know your child** – When meeting your child, what might they be thinking, feeling, and doing? This involved empathy mapping and reflection on the child's identity, self-efficacy, resilience, and reading motivations at the start of the program.
- 2. Starting the program** – How should you introduce yourself as the Angel, and how should you explain the program? What are the dos and don'ts at the start of the program?
- 3. A day in the life of...** – What activities would you do with your child, and which activities are most fun?
- 4. Journey mapping** – What might your relationship look like over one year or five years?
- 5. Tips to help your child** – What practical advice might support your child with reading or other activities?
- 6. After you become a regular Angel** – How might the child be thinking, feeling, and behaving once the Angel has become a consistent presence in their life?

Through engagement with these activities, individually, in small groups, and as a larger group, the children reflected on the program and the ways their Pyjama Angels had engaged with them. These iterative cycles of making, telling, and enacting (Brandt et al., 2012) provided insights to address the following research questions:

- How does the program create caring connections between Pyjama Angels and children?
- How does the program support children's identity, self-efficacy, and academic resilience?
- How does the program influence children's attitudes towards literacy and reading motivation?

Appreciative Inquiry, a strengths-based, positive approach to evaluation and organisational development, guided this process (Greenwood & Kelly, 2019). Appreciative Inquiry was used to explore the program's strengths, possibilities, and successes. This method was particularly appropriate for the evaluation as it aligned with the values of the Pyjama Foundation, enabling children to share their perspectives in a positive, empowering way.

Seven children agreed to participate in this evaluation and provided verbal and written consent prior to the workshop. Written consent was also obtained from the child's foster carer. Members of the research team worked closely with each child to develop their persona and record their responses to the proposed questions using the booklet template as a guide.

The participants were aged 8-14 years old. Four out of the seven children identified their cultural background as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, and four out of seven children were female. Most participants had been involved in the Love of Learning program for more than two years.

Adopting a trauma-informed and culturally safe approach in this evaluation was crucial, as OOHHC children have typically experienced various types of trauma, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children make up 33% of the Love of Learning program participants. All members of the research team were familiar with working in trauma-informed and culturally safe ways with young people (Bailey et al., 2019; Stubbs et al., 2024). The Pyjama Foundation promotes cultural safety, including cultural training for staff, culturally appropriate resources for mentors, and a First Nations Advisory Body. This First Nations Advisory Body was consulted in the designing of the children's workshop.

Data collection

Where children had written or illustrated directly in the booklet template this data was transcribed manually. All conversations between the researchers and children were recorded and transcribed. In addition, when creating the persona with each child, Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) was used to create images related to each child and their mentor. The images and the prompts used to create them were recorded and analysed (Jewitt, & Oyama, 2001).



Findings

Children reflected on the program and the ways their Pyjama Angels had engaged with them. These reflections were used to explore three key research questions, aimed at understanding how the Love of Learning program is experienced by participating children and how its objectives and underlying theory of change are realised:

Research Question 1: How does the program create caring connections between Pyjama Angels and children?

Research Question 2: How does the program improve children's identity, self-efficacy and academic resilience?

Research Question 3: How does the program develop and improve children's attitude towards literacy (reading motivation)?

Three key themes emerged from the data collected during the children's workshop:

- 1. Relationships first:** Consistent, caring, and trusting relationships between mentors and children form the foundation of all positive outcomes.
- 2. Recognition builds confidence and resilience:** Encouragement, acknowledgement of strengths, and supportive role modelling help children build self-efficacy, resilience, and positive identity.
- 3. Relevance facilitating engagement and enjoyment:** Literacy and learning outcomes are most feasible when activities are fun, collaborative (side by side), and connected to children's interests and real-life experiences.

Relationships

The relational aspect of the Love of Learning program emerged as a central strength. By placing the relationship at the heart of activities and time spent together, children were able to experience a sense of connection first, which then created the conditions to pursue more targeted academic or life skill goals. This was consistently demonstrated through the children's written and verbal contributions when creating their guidebook for new Angels, as well as in their collaborative creation of the child and Angel personas.

All seven children highlighted positive relational dimensions of the Love of Learning program. They emphasised trust, friendship, connection, closeness, safety, and having fun together as the most important aspects of their mentoring relationships. As one child put it, *"You feel like you've known each other all your life."* Others described the relationship as a space where they could *"be themselves or express themselves"* and that it *"feels really close, safe."*

These reflections are consistent with a large body of evidence showing that a supportive relationship is one of the most powerful protective factors against adverse outcomes associated with trauma and adversity (Hughes et al., 2017; Van Dam et al., 2018). For children in out-of-home care (OOHC), the importance of this relational dimension is amplified, as many have missed out on the early relational experiences in infancy and childhood that are important for secure attachment and healthy social, emotional, and cognitive development (Chesmore et al., 2017; Schore, 2021). The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW, 2025) highlights that the majority of children in OOHC have experienced significant adversity prior to entering care, including abuse, neglect, and disrupted attachments. By providing children in OOHC with a mentor who prioritises relational connection, the Pyjama Foundation is directly addressing a core developmental need and bridging a key gap in their lives.

A further strength of the program is its emphasis on longevity of relationships. The aim of 12-month or longer matches aligns with research showing that sustained, consistent, and attuned relationships provide the stability and reliability required for trust to develop, and for children to feel secure enough to engage in new challenges (Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2019; Christensen et al., 2020). This also aligns with findings from the CREATE Foundation's Report Card (2023), which emphasises the importance of stability, connection, and trusted relationships in the lives of young people with a care experience. The children's reflections highlighted this; they valued Angels who "show up," who "keep promises," and who make the relationship a safe and dependable space.

From a neuroscience perspective, relationships are foundational for learning. Stress, uncertainty, and relational disconnection activate the brain stem and limbic system, shifting the child into survival responses (fight, flight, or freeze). In this state, the prefrontal cortex, the area responsible for higher-order thinking, problem-solving, and learning, cannot fully engage (Smith, & Pollak, 2020; Yan & Rein, 2021). Secure and attuned relationships help to regulate the stress response, calming the lower brain areas and allowing children to access the cognitive resources needed for activities such as reading, mathematics, homework, and cooking (Gee, & Cohodes, 2023). In this sense, the mentor-child relationship is not peripheral to learning, but a neurobiological prerequisite for it.

Key relational factors identified through the workshop include:

- Consistency and reliability – Mentors who show up regularly and follow through on promises build trust.
- Emotional and relational safety – Children described feeling accepted, listened to, and valued.

- Reading as enjoyable and relational – Reading was perceived as fun when it was embedded in connection and shared enjoyment, rather than framed as a task or obligation.

The relational aspect of the program was also evident in the images the children created using GenAI. Each child worked with the researcher to design a digital image that represented the relationship their "persona" child had with their imagined Angel. These images consistently reflected closeness, highlighted child-led activities, and showed interactions happening side by side in neutral, non-clinical (non-educational) environments, such as outdoors. This visual layer reinforced the children's own descriptions of the program as grounded in authentic, safe, and enjoyable connections (see section "Visual Insights into Relationships, Recognition and Relevance").

Together, these findings reinforce the critical role of relationships in creating the safe, connected, and regulated states that enable children in OOHC to thrive both academically and personally.

Tips for helping with reading

The children involved in creating the guidebook offered very specific and practical tips for Angels.



Tips for reading:

Tailor the experience: Pick stories and books that the child likes. Understand if they dislike reading because it's too hard or because they don't like the genre (e.g., sci-fi).

Be supportive: Help them understand the words, explain things using simple wording, and give them time to think.

Make it enjoyable: Take breaks between reading and, most importantly, do not push them to finish when they are tired.

General tips for helping:

Show, don't just tell: Show the child how to do something rather than making them do it by themselves.

Be patient and encouraging: Don't get mad if they are struggling. Provide motivation.

Respect their space and preferences: Ask them what they want to do and where they want to do their homework.

Listen and answer their questions.

Recognition

Individual recognition was identified as an important factor in the success of the Love of Learning program. Children reflected that their mentors consistently noticed and affirmed their unique strengths, interests, and efforts. This recognition helped them feel capable and valued, which in turn supported positive identity development and increased their motivation to learn. For children in out-of-home care (OOHC), who may have experienced disrupted attachments and a lack of consistent affirmation in their earlier lives, this recognition from a trusted adult can be transformative.

Children's reflections during the workshop highlighted the power of recognition: they valued Pyjama Angels who listened to them, shared similar interests, provided encouragement, and supported them in areas where they struggled. As children explained, a mentor is *"someone who is on your side"*; who can *"help with what you struggle with"*; and who will *"do things that you like."*

The program explicitly positions the child as a unique individual. At the outset of the relationship, Angels focus on learning about the child's likes, dislikes, thoughts, and feelings. This personalised approach is essential for fostering self-efficacy, the belief in one's own ability to succeed in specific tasks. Children in OOHC often require additional support to develop self-efficacy, given the cumulative impact of trauma, instability, and disrupted schooling (Knight & Rossi, 2018). The encouragement and recognition provided by mentors help to strengthen children's sense of capability and worth.

Reading motivation provides a useful example. Some children may begin the program already enjoying reading but needing support to progress, while others may be reluctant due to difficulty or lack of engaging material. When mentors listen, adapt, and affirm the child's effort, such as finding books that match their interests or

celebrating small gains, the child experiences reading as enjoyable and relational rather than obligatory. This builds confidence and willingness to take learning risks, which is critical for long-term literacy outcomes (Knight, 2013; Maclean et al., 2024).

The themes of recognition, encouragement, and positive identity formation were strongly reinforced through the workshop. Specific dimensions included:

- Confidence: Mentors model persistence, celebrate small successes, and encourage children to try again, which fosters self-belief and willingness to take risks in learning.
- Resilience building: Mentors help children reframe mistakes as learning opportunities, building adaptive coping skills.
- Role modelling: Mentors act as positive role models, providing tangible examples of future possibilities and reinforcing hope.
- Confidence in reading: Children become more willing to engage with reading when it is framed as relational, enjoyable, and achievable.

These findings align with research demonstrating that positive identity development and recognition are key protective factors for children who have experienced adversity (Brendtro et al., 2020). For example, the CREATE Foundation (2023) notes that young people in care consistently identify the importance of being heard, recognised, and affirmed in their strengths and aspirations. The Love of Learning program provides this recognition through consistent and meaningful mentor relationships, directly addressing the gaps often experienced by children in OOHC.

Secure and attuned relationships help to regulate the stress response, calming the lower brain areas and allowing children to access the cognitive resources needed for activities such as reading, mathematics, homework, and cooking. In this sense, the mentor-child relationship is not peripheral to learning, but a neurobiological prerequisite for it.

Relevance

Relevance emerged as another central theme in the children's reflections on the Love of Learning program. Children consistently emphasised that learning and mentoring were most effective when activities were meaningful, connected to their own lives, and aligned with their interests.

Shared activities and interests were described as particularly important. When mentors engaged in fun, creative, and non-judgemental interactions that were led by the child, connections were strengthened, and trust deepened. These experiences not only supported relationship building, but also provided an important motivational foundation for academic and personal growth.

Choice was another important factor. Children explained that they were more motivated when they could select books, topics, or activities that reflected their own interests and preferences. This is consistent with research showing that autonomy and choice increase engagement and intrinsic motivation, particularly in literacy development (McGeown et al., 2020). For children in OOHC, who often experience limited control over major aspects of their lives, the opportunity to make choices in safe, supported contexts can also build agency and empowerment (CREATE Foundation, 2023).

Children also highlighted the importance of linking learning to real life. They explained that reading and academic activities were more meaningful when connected to practical skills and everyday relevance. For example, they described using reading to cook, complete homework, prepare for exams, or pursue hobbies. Similarly, children identified a broad range of recreational and life skill activities, from skateboarding, tennis, and bike riding to cooking and résumé writing, that they wanted to share with their Pyjama Angels. These

activities could provide a balanced rhythm of academic and recreational engagement, with physical or fun pursuits offering a natural break from focused learning.

This blending of academic and real-world activities aligns with evidence that relevance enhances persistence and achievement. When learning is perceived as useful and personally significant, children are more likely to sustain attention and effort, and to develop positive associations with education (Howard et al., 2019). The AIHW (2023) notes that children in OOHC face disproportionate educational challenges, including lower rates of school engagement and attainment. Programs that make learning relevant, relational, and enjoyable can directly counter these risks by supporting motivation, skill-building, and positive future trajectories.

Specific dimensions of relevance identified in the workshop included:

- Choice and agency: Children are motivated when they can select activities and materials that reflect their interests.
- Real-world connection: Learning is more powerful when linked to everyday contexts, practical skills, and future goals.
- Balance of academic and recreational activities: Alternating between schoolwork and fun or physical activities supports wellbeing and engagement.
- Reading as enjoyable and relational: Children respond positively when reading is experienced as shared connection rather than a task.

By ensuring that program activities are relevant to children's lives, the Love of Learning program fosters both academic outcomes and broader developmental benefits, reinforcing the program's unique contribution to supporting children in OOHC.

Journey map from a child's perspective

Mapping the journey of a new Pyjama Angel through the Love of Learning program from the children's perspective provided rich insights into the mentoring experience and highlighted key considerations for training and preparation. Children were invited to imagine the first encounters, ongoing interactions, and long-term relationship with their Angel, effectively creating a "roadmap" of what they expected, valued, and needed at different stages.

STAGE 01

Getting to know your child - When you meet your child, what will they be thinking, feeling, and doing?

When you first meet your child, they will likely be experiencing a mix of emotions and thoughts as they navigate a new situation.

It's important to remember they may have questions since they are new to the program.



What they will be thinking: A child's mind may be full of questions and worries. They might wonder, "What is a pyjama angel?", "What do they do?", "What does a PJ-angel actually do?", "What am I going to say?", and "What if I say something wrong?".

They might also be thinking about practical things, like "I hope pyjama angels get McDonalds for us", or feeling nervous about being judged.



What they will be feeling: At the beginning of the program, children often feel a combination of nervousness, anxiety, excitement, happiness, curiosity, and fear.



What they will be doing: Their actions might reflect their excitement or nervousness. For example, they could be jumping around on their toes, sitting at a table drawing, talking to siblings, or being fidgety while thinking of questions to ask. They might also be quiet and not talk much at first.

STAGE 02

Starting the program - How should you introduce yourself as the Angel? How do you explain the program?

The data provide clear guidance on how to begin the relationship and what behaviours are encouraged and discouraged.



How to introduce yourself and explain the program: the focus should be on making the child comfortable.

A good approach is to start conversations about their interests, such as favourite TV shows, sports, hobbies, subjects, movies, foods, or what they want to be when they are older.



Dos - What you should do:

- Be kind, patient, and a good listener.
- Talk to the child and ask questions, including what they want to do.
- Use polite words like "please".
- Encourage and motivate them.
- Give them time to think when working on assignments.



Don'ts - What you shouldn't do:

- Do not be mean, yell, growl, or swear.
- Don't make the child talk about things they don't want to discuss or bring up things they don't want to hear.
- Don't force them to do things they don't like or feel uncomfortable with, such as playing certain games or doing homework when they are tired.
- Avoid choosing activities without discussion or using their things without permission.

STAGE 03

A day in the life of... What sort of things would you do with your child? What activities are most fun?

A core part of the program is engaging in various activities and achieving goals together. The possibilities are extensive and can be tailored to the child's interests.



Academic and skill-building activities: A primary focus is on academic support, including help with homework, reading, maths, English, spelling, writing, and preparing for exams. You can also work on life skills like writing a resume and practicing for job interviews.



Hobbies and fun activities: Many suggested activities are purely for fun and building a connection. These include crafts, art, drawing, playing card games, baking, cooking, making jewellery, and building clay sculptures.



Sports and outdoor activities: Getting active together is another option. Suggestions include playing tennis, football, soccer, roller skating, going bike riding, learning to swim, and even bike riding.



Most fun activities: While "fun" is subjective, some of the more playful ideas mentioned include spending a whole day in your pyjamas, having PJ parties, going to a cafe, getting ice cream.

STAGE 04

What might your relationship look like over 1 year/5 years?

The children described the evolution of the relationship from initial nervousness to a deep and trusting bond. While a specific timeline isn't given, the ideal outcome of a long-term relationship is clearly defined.



A successful long-term relationship is one where the child feels comfortable, safe, happy, appreciated, cared for, and close to their Angel.

The connection should become so strong that you "feel like you've known each other for all your life" and become "such good friends".

Over time, you should be able to understand each other easily, express yourselves freely, and talk about important things. The child will trust their Angel.

STAGE 05

After you become a regular Angel - What will your child be thinking, feeling, and doing?

After spending some time together, the initial anxiety transforms into comfort and confidence.



What they will be thinking: Their thoughts will shift from worry to anticipation. They might think, "I can't wait for my Angel to come," "What are we going to do today?" and reflect positively on the relationship: "He's kind, I didn't need to worry about that back then". They will also feel lucky and appreciative to have an Angel who makes time for them.



What they will be feeling: The child will feel happy, comfortable, excited, encouraged, appreciated, cared for, and loved. A key outcome of the program is that they feel more confident and brave.



What they will be doing: Their confidence will show in their actions. They will be expressing themselves more, talking more in-depth, and even doing things out of their comfort zone. They will be actively engaged in activities and may show improvement, such as "doing better at tennis". They might confidently say, "I can do this".

Visual insights into relationships, recognition, and relevance

The visual data produced by children highlighted diverse ways in which they wished to be recognised and supported in the early stages of their mentoring relationship. Across the images, children consistently conveyed a readiness to engage with their Pyjama Angel, though this readiness was expressed in varied ways that reflected their individual identities, preferences, and needs.

Some images represented optimism and openness, with smiling children in relaxed, informal environments (such as a café or backyard), suggesting that they valued connection, conversation, and non-clinical settings as conducive to building trust.

Others reflected children's interests and personal identities, such as gaming, technology, or personal style, as central entry points for recognition by mentors, underscoring the importance of affirming these as legitimate pathways into the relationship.

The images also conveyed differences in needs for structure and support. For instance, while some children emphasised orderliness and predictability, others revealed signs of disorganisation, pointing to areas where mentors could scaffold skills in routines and self-

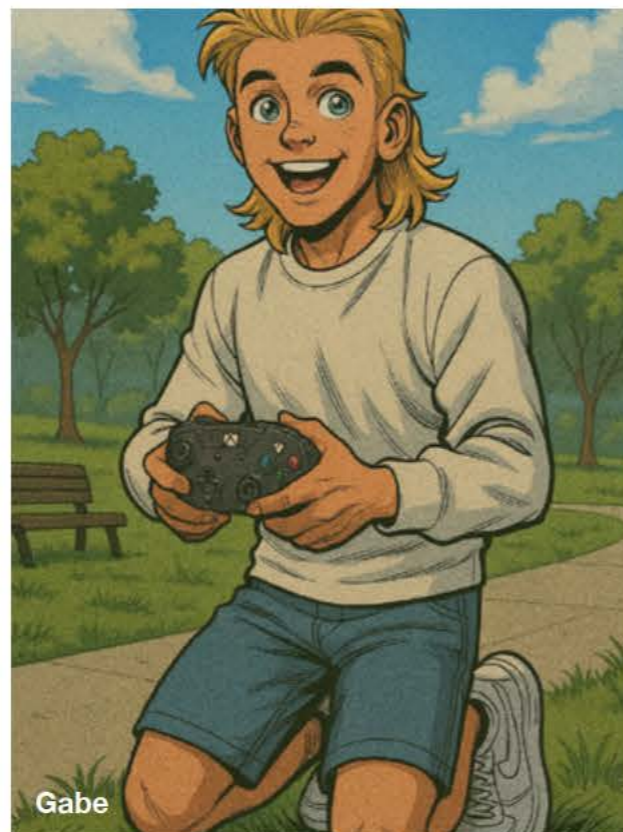
management. Similarly, the inclusion of companion animals symbolised children's recognition of their own regulatory needs, suggesting that mentors could support identity development not only through shared activities but also by validating children's strategies for comfort and self-regulation.

The visual data also created an additional layer of insight into how children in the program understood and experienced their relationships with Pyjama Angels. Across the images, children represented mentors as attentive, supportive, and engaged in child-led activities, often in neutral or outdoor spaces. These depictions suggest that children perceived mentors as recognising and valuing their individuality by entering into their worlds rather than imposing external agendas.

In terms of identity building, the images reinforced the importance of children being seen as capable, agentic, and worthy of attention. Depictions of shared activities and side-by-side engagement highlighted how recognition of children's strengths and interests by mentors contributed to a sense of capability and belonging.



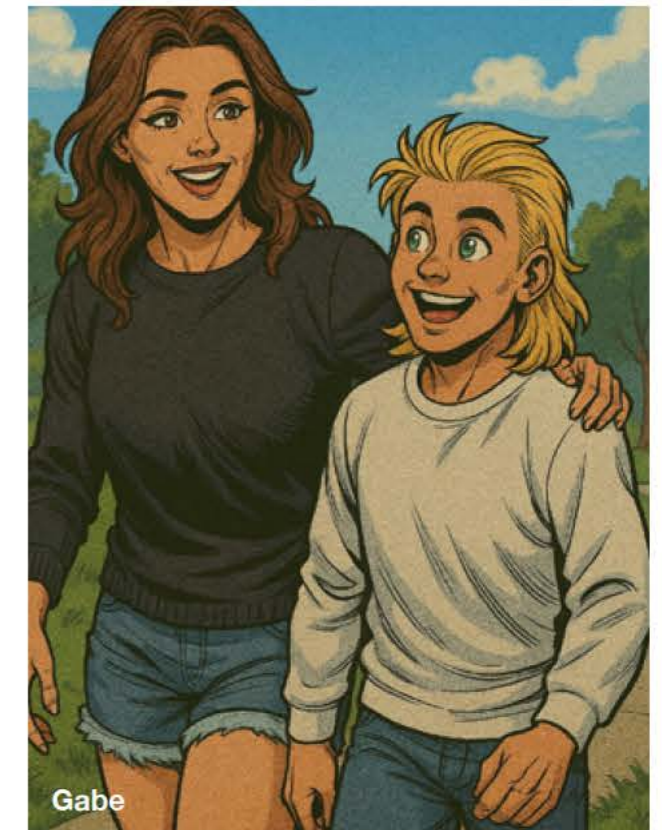
Adriana



Gabe



Adriana



Gabe

Please refer to Appendix B for a full set of generated images.

Recommendations and Implications

Findings from this process evaluation highlight the relational strength of the Love of Learning program as a key factor in its success. The emphasis placed by the Pyjama Foundation on recruiting, training, and retaining volunteers who can form positive, trusting relationships with children is central to achieving the program's outcomes. Children's reflections confirmed that relationships with their Pyjama Angels fostered identity development, self-efficacy, academic resilience, and motivation for learning.



Recommendations for practice

- **Maintain and strengthen the relational focus:** The program's success lies in the quality of relationships between children and mentors. Training for Pyjama Angels should continue to emphasise this relational approach, reinforcing that the primary aim of the role is to develop a strong, supportive connection with the child, rather than achieving set academic outcomes.
- **Support and retain volunteers:** Children consistently emphasised the importance of trust, reliability, and feeling cared for in their relationships with Pyjama Angels. These findings validate the program's focus on relational strength and highlight the need to continue supporting and retaining volunteers who can provide this stability. Ongoing support, opportunities for peer connection, and recognition of volunteers' role in building strong, safe relationships are likely key to sustaining commitment and reducing turnover.
- **Facilitating positive program beginnings** emerged as an important theme from the children's contributions. Their ideas could be incorporated into training and resources to help new Pyjama Angels establish strong, early connections. For example, AI-generated images from the workshop could be developed into a visual "activity menu," offering mentors and children accessible, engaging options that reflect children's own preferences. This approach could help children feel more agency in shaping their time with mentors and provide practical guidance for Angels. Analysis of the GenAI images and children's reflections also suggested several practice-based recommendations for mentors, including:
 - prioritising youth-chosen, activity-based sessions, sometimes outside the home,
 - blending active and calm or creative activities to support both energy release and reflection,
 - using side-by-side formats to reduce conversational pressure,
 - reinforcing progress through strengths-based feedback, and
 - gradually incorporating life-skills coaching (e.g., routines, transport, self-advocacy) as relationships deepen.



Implications for program development and evaluation

- **Embedding trauma-informed practice:** The adoption of a trauma-informed, relational approach within training and program design is clearly aligned with children's experiences of the program and should continue to underpin all aspects of delivery.
- **Innovative tools for ongoing feedback:** The booklet developed in this evaluation, or a modified version, has potential as an ongoing tool for collecting children's reflections on the program. Approaches such as empathy mapping and journey mapping allow for creative, child-friendly participation and provide rich insights into children's perspectives.

These recommendations suggest that continuing to strengthen the program's relational foundation, while providing practical resources for mentors and continuing to embed trauma-informed practice, will sustain and enhance the impact of the Love of Learning program.

- **Expanding existing evaluation instruments** to include child-friendly evaluation items on relationships, recognition, and relevance to evidence both educational outcomes and the conditions that enable them (see Appendix C).

Conclusion

Children's perspectives, choices, and creative contributions provide valuable insights into how the Love of Learning program supports children in out-of-home care (OOHC). The findings from this workshop suggest that supportive relationships, individual recognition, and relevance of activities are important aspects of the program from the children's viewpoint.

Even with a small sample, children consistently highlighted that trusting, reliable, and enjoyable interactions with their Pyjama Angels contributed to a sense of safety and engagement. Mentors were valued for noticing the child's strengths and interests, which appeared to support feelings of capability and self-worth. Children also emphasised that learning and activities were more engaging when connected to their personal interests, choices, and everyday experiences.

The workshop findings also illustrated how the program's design, including careful recruitment, training, and matching of volunteers for long-term mentorship, creates the conditions for these experiences. The volunteer nature of the program, combined with child-centred flexibility and consistency, appeared to be particularly meaningful to children, distinguishing it from other supports in the care system.

Overall, while these insights are tentative and drawn from a small number of participants, they suggest that

the Love of Learning program provides children with more than academic support. It offers a trauma-informed approach and opportunities for safe, trusting relationships, identity development, and engagement in meaningful learning experiences. These observations align with both international and Australian evidence regarding the needs of children in OOHC, including stability, connection, recognition, and relevance.

Future evaluation with larger samples will be important to explore the extent to which these program features influence children's academic outcomes, wellbeing, and longer-term trajectories. Nevertheless, the workshop highlights that programs prioritising relationship-building, individual recognition, and relevant, child-led learning may be well-positioned to support engagement, resilience, and positive experiences for children in OOHC.

For funders and policy-makers, this evidence highlights the strong potential of the Love of Learning program in addressing educational inequities while also fostering resilience, wellbeing, and long-term life outcomes for children in OOHC. By investing in this program, stakeholders are not only supporting children's immediate learning needs but also helping to shift life trajectories towards further capability and positive outcomes.






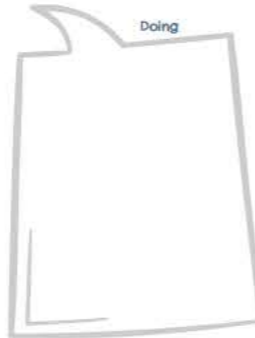
Appendices

Appendix A



At the beginning of the program, _____ will be ...

Saying  Thinking 

Feeling  Doing 

_____ will need help with _____

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

Start talking with _____ about...

Together you and _____ can achieve _____

1 _____



2 _____

3 _____

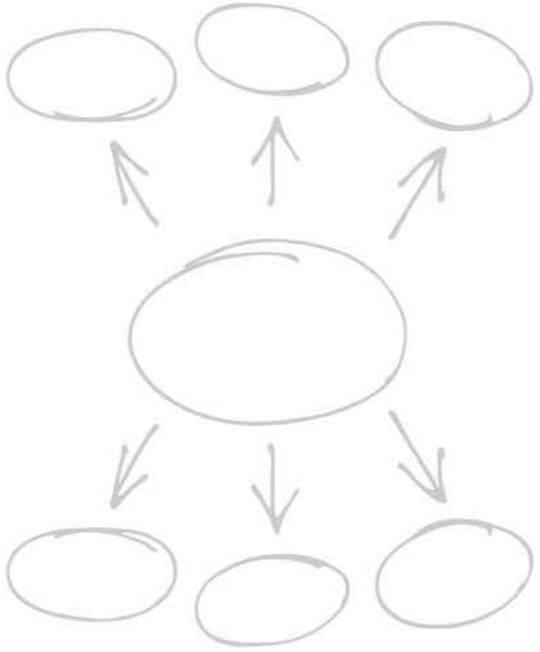
4 _____

5 _____

The do's ✓ and don'ts? ✗

The best things about a mentor ..



These are some activities you and _____ can do together...

Activities you should not do are...

These things are what a successful program looks like...

After some time this is how things will have changed for _____

These are some TIPS to help you with _____ reading and other things...

✓ YES! ✗ NO!

In the future this is what your relationship should look and feel like...

These are the most important things _____ will need help with...

Here is a birthday card you might get from _____

Appendix B





Natalie



Charlotte Roger



Anna



Alex



Adriana



Gabe



Dave

Proposed future evaluation questions

The Pyjama Foundation's existing evaluation instrument for children (Knight & Kingston, 2021) focuses on four protective factors that influence educational outcomes for children in out-of-home care: relational pedagogy, academic resilience, learning connectedness, and school connectedness.

The workshop findings documented in this report provide more nuanced insights into children's lived experiences of mentoring, particularly how they want relationships to develop and how they view themselves within the program. Building on these insights, the current evaluation suggests that the instrument could be amended to capture not only traditional educational outcomes but also the relational, identity-building, and motivational conditions that enable them. For example:

1. Relationships

- Do you feel like your Pyjama Angel cares about you and listens to you?
- Do you feel safe and comfortable when you are with your Pyjama Angel?
- Does spending time with your Angel make you feel happy?

2. Recognition & Identity

- Does your Pyjama Angel notice the things you are good at?
- Does your Pyjama Angel help you feel proud of yourself?
- Do you feel like your Angel accepts you for who you are?

3. Regulation & Readiness to Learn

- Does being with your Angel help you feel calmer or more focused?
- Are there activities you do together that help when you feel worried, upset, or distracted?
- Do you feel more ready to try schoolwork after time with your Angel?

4. Relevance & Engagement

- Does your Angel choose activities or books that match your interests?
- Have you tried new things with your Angel that made you want to learn more?
- Does your Angel make reading and learning fun?

5. Educational Confidence & Aspirations

- Do you feel more confident about your schoolwork since meeting your Angel?
- Has your Angel helped you keep trying, even when learning feels hard?
- Has your Angel helped you think about your goals for school or the future?

6. Program Beginnings & Continuity

- What helped you feel comfortable when you first met your Angel?
- What do you think new Angels should do to make children feel safe and welcome?
- What would make you want to keep meeting with your Angel for a long time?

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