

Barriers to accessing education in the NT

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NTCOSS had its regular tri-monthly catch up with Minister Wakefield this week, to discuss youth justice and family and domestic violence reforms. We also met with Ken Davies to discuss similar issues, as well as the role of NGOs in the reform priorities and engagement with NGOs.

NTCOSS has begun work looking into the barriers to education for children and young people and why children and young people may disengage from school. In the Northern Territory far too many children and young people do not have the support they need to thrive at school. Low literacy and numeracy levels and undiagnosed cognitive impairments and health issues often result in challenging classroom behaviours. Where schools don't have the capacity to support students with complex issues, many of these students become disengaged from school.

Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder is a particularly challenging issue in education. FASD is not easily identified and often goes undiagnosed. Behaviours associated with the disorder, such as learning and behavioural difficulties, can often be associated with and attributed to other disorders. This is compounded by significant waitlists to see paediatricians to receive a formal diagnosis in order to access supports.

Disengagement from education has implications for young people for their employment prospects, health outcomes and likelihood of contact with the youth justice system.

NTCOSS is keen to hear from a wide range of stakeholders about barriers to accessing education in the NT. If you would like to speak to us about your experiences please contact Madeleine Calleja madeleine@ntcooss.org.au

This week, the Northern Territory Government recognised the impact of hearing impairment in education. 90% of Aboriginal children under 3 years have a hearing disease that results in hearing loss and affects brain development. When children and young people cannot hear in the classroom they disengage and fall behind quickly in the curriculum. The investment in supports to diagnose and treat this condition is welcome and NTCOSS hopes that it will reduce the number of children with hearing impairment in the future.

Wendy Morton
NTCOSS Executive Director