



Case study for primary and secondary schools

The Rogers family live on a property in the country, 10 kilometres from the nearest town, where they are enrolled in the primary and high school and travel to school by bus. They have recently relocated from a large coastal town.

Mr Rogers works long hours on their farm and spends limited time with his family. His parents and extended family live in another state and only visit a few times each year. Mrs Rogers does not seem to have any contact with her parents or extended family.

Mrs Rogers stays at home to look after their three children aged 5, 9, and 14. There has been a rumour in the community that the mother and father's relationship is at times volatile. The mother keeps to herself and does not seem to interact with other people unless it is necessary.

Sharon is their 14 year old daughter and is enrolled at the local high school. She likes school but says she finds it hard to get up in the morning so she is often late. Her teachers are always asking her why she hasn't done her homework and why she never has the right uniform. Her Mum doesn't like writing letters so Sharon always has to explain that Mum forgets to do the washing and is too tired and "out of it" to help her with her homework.

When her class went on a school excursion, Sharon didn't go because it was too expensive and her Mum wouldn't sign the note. Instead she went to an older friend's house for the day. She loves dancing and would like to join the dance group at school but says her Mum can't afford to pay for the extra classes.

The principal said the school has put in a good deal of support for Sharon and tried to provide uniforms and excursion funding but Mrs Rogers rarely responds to contact.

Sharon's 9 year old brother, Liam, is enrolled at the local primary school and is frequently absent. He says he does not care about school and the other kids tease him because he smells. He has been in trouble for fighting and says that's because he has to stand up for himself. He tells his teachers that his Dad lets him work on the farm with him on some school days and says he doesn't have to go to school if he doesn't want to.

Their 5 year old sister Lily has just started Kindergarten at the same local primary school where Liam is enrolled. During first term Lily was rarely at school. Liam told her teacher she is always sick and their Mum likes to keep her at home so she can get better. On the occasions Lily does come to school she is often distressed and isolates herself from the other children.

The primary school is concerned about both Lily and Liam's habitual absence and both children have been referred to the school's learning support team.

The principal is aware of previous interventions by services where the family used to live.

For the facilitator: possible responses

1. What are some of the issues that may be impacting on the children's attendance at school?

- Parents
 - isolation and lack of extended family and support networks
 - parent condoned absences
 - unstable parental relationship
 - Mrs Roger's lack of engagement with and response to school
 - financial problems
 - Mr Roger's limited time and participation in family life
 - support with managing the farm
 - support with managing the household
 - transport
 - Mrs Roger's possible mental health and alcohol and other drug issues
- Children
 - isolation and lack of extended family and support networks
 - the children's behaviours could suggest that they are experiencing neglect and the MRG could be used to help decide if a child protection response is required
 - engagement with school for all children
 - health and social skills (Lily)
 - bullying, hygiene, behaviour (Liam)
 - not being able to pursue her interests (Sharon).

2. What school-based strategies and educational services could be utilised to support the regular attendance of the children?

The school is right to be concerned about the children and should try to get more information about the children's needs to implement support for them. Some strategies based on what is currently known about the children include:

- attempt to organise a meeting with one or both parents to discuss concerns
- provide financial support to family for children's bus pass, uniforms, excursions
- assist them to contact Centrelink to see if they are eligible for any support
- seek permission from family to contact GP about Lily's health
- link/refer the family to a local support agency
- contact the principal of the children's previous schools to see if there is any information that should be shared under Chapter 16A provisions
- involve the school counsellor
- support Sharon in her choice of electives
- encourage Liam to report teasing
- ask Liam's teacher to discuss his hygiene with him
- set up a buddy system for Lily to encourage interaction with others
- make an application to involve the HSLO to phone or home visit family
- seek advice and information from the Child Wellbeing Unit.

3. What services or agencies in your local community might be able to assist this family?

Use examples of services or agencies in your own local community that may be able to assist the family.