

# Independent Review of Education in Tasmania

Submission by The Smith Family

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## The Smith Family

The Smith Family welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Independent Review of Education in Tasmania. The Smith Family is a national charity which has supported Australian children and families experiencing disadvantage for more than a century. Our **vision** is a world where every child has the opportunity to change their future. Our **belief** is that education is one of the world's most powerful change agents and our **purpose** is to overcome educational inequality caused by poverty.

We take a place-based approach and are currently working in over 90 low SES communities across every state and territory. This includes in the South of Tasmania from Moonah through to Brighton, in the North around North-East Launceston to Georgetown and in the North-West in Burnie, Wynyard, Ulverstone and Penguin.

Our work is underpinned by the evidence of Bronfenbrenner's **ecological model**, which articulates the **multiple influences** on children's development, namely:

- **Personal characteristics** - such as social skills, attitudes and intelligence.
- **Family** - such as the resources families can access and parental engagement in their child's learning.
- **Peers** – including their aspirations, attitudes to education and risk-taking behaviour.
- The **institutions** children and young people attend and engage with – including early learning and care services, schools, as well as health and community services.
- The **community** in which they live – including the social and economic resources available, the presence of role models and the level of community cohesion, safety and social capital.

In FY23, The Smith Family supported more than **220,600** children, young people, parents, carers and community professionals nationally through our education-focused programs. This includes over 178,000 children and young people, of whom more than **62,800** accessed the multiple benefits of our largest program, the **Learning for Life** (LfL) educational scholarship. We supported over **9,300** children, young people, parents, carers and community professionals in Tasmania and there are currently over **4,200** students in this state on the *LfL* program.

The *Learning for Life* program is a **long-term, targeted early intervention** program with students recruited in primary school and able to stay on the program in secondary school and potentially through tertiary education. **Parent/carer engagement** is an underpinning of the program, with parent/carers and The Smith Family signing a **Family Partnership Agreement** which articulates a shared commitment to supporting their child's participation in education.

Students in receipt of the scholarship are likely to struggle to achieve educationally without support, as shown by the profile of students on the program in **Tasmania**:

- All are **financially disadvantaged**, as evidenced by having a Health Care Card or Pensioner Benefit Card.
- 28 percent are from an **Aboriginal** and/or Torres Strait Islander background.
- **49 percent** of *Learning for Life* students and 44 percent of primary carers have a **health or disability** issue.
- The parent/carer of around 68 percent of students are **not in paid employment**.
- 61 percent of students live in a **single parent** family and a further five percent live in **grandparent**-headed families or other care relationships.

The Smith Family has formal partnerships with **48** primary schools, high schools and Colleges in Tasmania, around a shared goal of supporting students experiencing disadvantage to achieve educationally. The current list of our Tasmanian partner schools is in the Appendix as is more information on the *Learning for Life* program.

The Smith Family is very pleased to be working in partnership with the Department for Education, Children and Young People on a **data exchange** arrangement. This is giving our front-line Tasmanian staff access in **real-time** to educational data (such as school attendance and achievement) held by the Department on *Learning for Life* students. This enables our staff to provide more **timely** and **targeted support** when students are struggling or to reinforce when good progress is being made. The overarching goal of the data exchange arrangement is to improve the educational outcomes of the children and young people on the LfL program.

## Considerations for the Review

### Theme 1: Educational success

The Smith Family believes the **Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration** and the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Young People's **Wellbeing Framework for Children and Young People** (the Nest), are foundational for considering what 'educational success' is for children and young people in Tasmania, and Australia more broadly.

#### The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration

Goal 2 of this Declaration is that all young Australians become:

- **Confident** and **creative** individuals
- Successful **lifelong** learners
- **Active** and **informed** members of the community.

This provides a strong foundation for what educational success in Tasmania might look like. The other goal of the Mparntwe Education Declaration is a **systemic** one, and is also relevant to the Review, namely that the 'education system promotes **excellence** and **equity**'. Public education has a particularly crucial role to play in supporting more **equitable educational** and life outcomes for all children. Tasmanian educational data shows that despite the best efforts of schools, families and communities, many children in Tasmania, particularly those experiencing disadvantage, are not achieving key educational milestones (including NAPLAN, Year 12 or equivalent completion, post-school engagement in work, study or training etc). These milestones are fundamental to offering young people **choices** around careers, and their broader economic, social and civic participation.

#### ARACY's Wellbeing Framework for Children and Young People (the Nest)

ARACY's Wellbeing Framework for Children and Young People, also provides useful input for considering what educational success looks like in Tasmania. The Framework:

- Provides a way of thinking about the **whole child** in the context of their daily lives.
- Was developed from **what children and young people said** they needed to have a 'good life'.
- Has six **interconnected** domains, with all six seen as important for children and young people's wellbeing:
  - Valued, loved and safe

- Material basics
- Healthy
- Learning
- Participating
- Positive sense of identity and culture.

While education has a particular role to play in the **learning domain**, The Smith Family would argue that there is considerable value in seeing a broader role that it can and should play in contributing to all dimensions of the Framework. For example, education has a key role to play in supporting children and young people to have a positive sense of **identity** and **culture**. Put simply, the ‘success’ of education is **so much more than learning**, essential though that role is.

Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model and the ARACY Framework, emphasise the links *between* the various factors that influence young people’s outcomes, for example the relationship between family and school and how well institutions, such as schools and health services work together to support young people. These factors help **shape** a child’s **likely pathway** or trajectory through life, however research shows that these pathways – and hence educational outcomes or ‘successes’ – are **not pre-determined** or immutable. Children’s trajectories can be positively influenced by providing the **support** that is **needed** at the **time it is required**.

While this Review is focused on education, if the goal of lifting Tasmanian students’ educational outcomes is to be achieved, we need to put **children and young people at the centre** and move towards enabling educational systems to more effectively **work with the wider service systems** which impact children and young people. Notwithstanding the challenges inherent in this, the goal over time must be for these service systems to work better together to provide children and their families with support which is **timely, accessible and integrated**.

As highlighted by data on *Learning for Life* students, young people in the equity cohorts often live in families who **struggle to access** essential services including **health, community services, income support, NDIS and housing**. While these critical services sit **outside the education** system, barriers to accessing them **directly impact** students’ ability to achieve educationally. The Smith Family’s experience is that many of the students we support are not able to access these services in a timely way, or sometimes at all, and this has significant negative consequences for children’s engagement in education and their ultimate ‘success’. If our human services system, including education, are not, over time, **re-designed** to put children and families at the centre, including with clearly articulated **shared accountabilities** across portfolios, it is **unlikely** that we will make **significant gains in educational equity**.

### **Skills, capabilities and mindsets young people need**

Young people who are currently in school are being impacted by rapid economic, social, cultural, environmental and technological changes. This will continue to occur and has significant implications for what they need from education, now and into the future.

The OECD’s 2023 *Recommendation of the Council on Creating Better Opportunities for Young People* reflects a contemporary and useful synthesis which The Smith Family recommends inform the Review’s thinking on the skills and capabilities young people need to develop to be ‘successful’. The document defines ‘young people’ as those aged 15 to 29, but we would argue its applicability is to a broader range of young people. The acquisition of these skills and mindsets gives young people **choice** and **agency** to shape their lives and futures in the way they want to.

The *Recommendation* identifies the need to:

- Ensure all young people of all backgrounds and in all circumstances acquire relevant **knowledge** and develop appropriate **skills** and **competencies**.
  - This includes basic skills (literacy, numeracy and problem-solving), and social, civic, emotional, entrepreneurial, financial, communication, creativity and language skills.
- Promote **wellbeing** in education and training institutions, including by equipping young people with socioemotional skills and coping strategies to protect against stress and the impacts of adversity on wellbeing.
- Enable all young people to participate in an increasingly **digitalised world**.
  - Equip young people with digital skills and problem-solving skills for the digital environment.
  - Empower young people to engage safely, healthily and responsibly in the digital environment (OECD, 2023).

### Young people's aspirations

Research shows the importance of **Year 12 or equivalent completion** for young people's longer term life outcomes, including income, job security, occupational choice, better physical and mental health, and community participation. Year 12 or equivalent completion is a particular challenge in Tasmania, with the 2023 Year 10/12 Apparent Retention Rate being 69 percent, compared to 79 percent nationally.

A range of structural and other reasons may contribute to this, but data collected from early school leavers, through The Smith Family's Pathways, Engagement and Transitions (PET) project offers some important insights on early school leaving. The PET national data includes young people from Tasmania, who were in Year 11 and on the *Learning for Life* program in 2021. Of the young people who subsequently left school before completing Year 12, 92 percent indicated in Year 11, that they **intended** completing Year 12. This data suggests that these young people *aspired*, *intended* and *hoped* to complete Year 12, but factors and circumstances occurred which stopped that happening.

The PET data indicates that the **reasons young people leave school early** involve both 'push' and 'pull' factors and include:

- Push factors: Not liking school, health or mental health issues, not doing well at school or missing a lot of school, having problems with students or teachers, being bullied at school
- Pull factors: Wanting or getting a job, apprenticeship or traineeship, wanting to do another training or course.

The longer-term outcomes for those young people impacted by 'push' factors are generally much poorer than those who left due to 'pull' factors. Efforts aimed at better supporting more young people to achieve educationally need to be cognisant of both the *aspiration* to complete school that many young people have and the *push/pull* factors which may be impacting individual students.

## Theme 2: Strengthening supports and engagement for all learners at all stages of their education

### Parent and family engagement to support children's learning

As the Consultation Paper notes, **parental and family engagement** is a powerful influence on children's learning. Specific outcomes associated with parental engagement include:

- Improved **academic outcomes**, including academic performance, school attendance, school completion, graduation and enrolment in further education.
- Improved **behavioural, social and emotional outcomes** – including student attitudes and behaviour in school, ability to adapt and transition to school, social skills, self esteem and mental wellbeing (ARACY, 2016).

Particularly important for an equity agenda, parental engagement is a **stronger predictor** of children's **educational outcomes** than a **family's socioeconomic background** (Fox and Olsen, 2014). Students with engaged parents – no matter what their income or background – are more likely to do well at school, graduate from school and go on to higher education (ARACY, 2016). This research is constantly borne out in the **experience of The Smith Family** working with families experiencing disadvantage. In Tasmania, for example, 62 percent of students on the *Learning for Life* program have been on the program for four or more years, reflecting families deep commitment to work in partnership to support their children's education.

The Smith Family's work with families is guided by a **Family Practice Framework** which has the following Guiding Principles:

- Strengths based
- Trauma aware
- Family centred
- Builds on natural supports and support is outcomes focussed
- Evidence informed
- Builds capacity and self regulation
- Despite challenges, team members persist in working toward the goals of LfL participants.

The ongoing implementation of these principles is a significant contributor to the long-term involvement of highly disadvantaged families on the LfL program and they provide a guide on how schools might potentially strengthen their partnership with families, particularly for those groups of families that schools struggle to engage with.

In supporting stronger and more effective partnerships between schools and families, it is important to note that parental engagement is not a "one size fits all" and needs a "strong **policy framework**...(including) roles and responsibilities. A strong focus is also needed on identifying the **resources** and **professional development** requirements that will foster the embedding of parent engagement into educational policy and practice... For parent engagement to realise its full potential, the policy levers need to be **working in harmony** with the policy levers for education performance, physical wellbeing, social and emotional wellbeing and young people participating in issues affecting them" (ARACY (2016) p.36).



## Supporting students who are struggling or at risk of falling behind

As flagged above, significant proportions of children and young people in Tasmania are not meeting key milestones such as NAPLAN. While achievement in these areas does not *guarantee* school engagement, it can contribute; conversely poor achievement can contribute to *disengagement*.

Data from the PET project referred to above, highlights that there is a strong relationship between school achievement, school attendance and early school leaving, with the relationship being stronger than that of demographic characteristics, such as Indigeneity. This confirms both the importance of focussing on achievement and attendance through primary and secondary school *and* the benefits that can follow, for example with regards to school completion, when evidence based early intervention support is provided to students who are struggling.

The Smith Family welcomes the Tasmanian Government's commitment to the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement 2025-2034 and its inclusion of "Whole-of-system and/or whole-of-school approaches that identify student learning needs early and provide tiered and targeted, intensive supports, in line with evidence-based teaching and a 'multi-tiered systems of support' approach" (page 19).

As part of a comprehensive approach, The Smith Family would suggest that there is a contribution that programs such as *Learning Clubs* and *Student2Student*, which are part of the *Learning for Life* suite, can make.

### Learning Clubs

Learning Clubs are a safe, supportive out-of-school-hours learning environment, where primary or secondary students have the opportunity to access resources and participate in activities that develop their academic and social skills through homework, literacy, numeracy, and science support. Students are supported by skilled and trained tutors who have the skills and knowledge to support Club activities. By extending the time devoted to learning, clubs have the potential to enhance students' learning skills and engagement with education.

Learning Clubs run at least weekly over an 18 week (or more) period on school grounds or in community centre. Tutors provide one-on-one or small group support. Over 2,750 children and young people participated nationally in The Smith Family's Learning Clubs in FY24, including in Tasmania. Feedback from students, parent/carers and teachers regarding the value of Learning Clubs is consistently positive:

#### Increased academic engagement

- 81% of students agree it helped them do better in class/school
- 77% of students agree going to the club helps them with their homework

#### Increased motivation to do well at school

- 75% of students agree going to the club makes them want to go to school
- 80% of students agree going to the club makes them try harder at school

#### Increased interpersonal skills

- 77% of students agree the club helped them learn to work with others
- 79% of students agree going to the club teaches them to ask for help when needed

### Increased self confidence

- 75% of students agree going to the clubs makes them feel more confident at school
- 77% of students agree going to the club helps them to engage more in classroom activities

*Coming to the club has helped me get a better grade in maths, going from an average of a C to a B. (Student Year 4-8)*

*It really helped me with my learning to have someone else who already knew the concepts that I was learning to explain them to me a second time. (Student Year 9-12).*

*I feel good to go to school on the Learning Club day (Student, Prep-Year 3)*

*They always look forward to attending and are excited to go. It's great to see kids excited about out of school activities and their education. To them, it didn't even feel like learning – it was a fun, nice place to be. The program is a very welcome addition to our school (Teacher, TSF Partner School).*

*The feedback I've received is that he's picked up on his reading and is now one of the better reads and spellers in his class (Parent/Caregiver).*

### **Student2Student**

The student2student (s2s) program is an evidence-based peer reading intervention. The program improves the reading ability of participating students by creating an out of school reading environment for engagement, involving a student 'Reader' and a reading 'Buddy', who is also a school student. The program pairs students in grades 3-4 who are up to two years behind in their reading, or up to four years behind for grades 5-8 students, with trained student buddies who work with them to improve their reading skills. Buddies are typically two years older than their reader. The pair read together two to three times a week, for 20 minutes each session, over an 18-week period. The connection occurs predominantly through an online app, or through a mobile or landline phone. Over 1,050 students participated in S2S in FY24.

The program uses the Burt Word reading assessment pre and post-program and surveys with students and parent/carers to assess outcomes. This data shows:

- 96% of students improved their reading, with 75% increasing by up to 2 years
- 65% of students doubled their reading progress<sup>1</sup>
- 82% of students self-reported that their reading improved
- 86% of parents agreed that their child's reading had improved.

## **Theme 3: Outcomes at the conclusion of the formal years of schooling**

### **Strengthening engagement and post-school outcomes through high-quality careers support**

There is strong international evidence of the role that high quality careers support can play in supporting school engagement and completion, as well as positive post-school outcomes. Careers support is particularly important for **young people experiencing disadvantage**, as these young people are more likely to have more limited access to knowledge, networks and opportunities relating to post-school pathways. At the same time, it can be a particularly challenging area for schools working in disadvantaged communities, with potentially more limited access to specialist career staff, resources, and community and industry partners.

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<sup>1</sup> This relates to reading gain rather than a flat reading age.



The Smith Family is cognisant that this has been an area of significant focus in the recently released **Tasmanian Youth Jobs Strategy** and we welcome the Strategy's inclusion of a Statement of Commitment to guide the Government's approach to partnering with young people to achieve the strategy's goals, namely:

- **Young people will know** where to get **relevant, reliable information** about education, training and employment, and who can provide guidance on the next steps.
- **Young people will have opportunities** to undertake a variety of **work experience activities** to explore and test jobs and industries in real work settings, so they can understand what work is really like.
- **Young people will be treated as individuals** with diverse needs, experiences and talents, and will have access to **support to identify and achieve their ambitions** for the future.
- **Young people will have access to meaningful, relevant and accessible education and training** that supports pathways to the jobs and careers they want to pursue.
- **Young people will feel supported** to develop skills and confidence in the workplace and **employers will know how to support young employees** to be safe and to feel valued and respected.
- **Young people will have confidence** that government policies and strategies are having real impact, and will feel welcome and **empowered to be involved in decision-making processes**.

Source: Tasmanian Youth Jobs Strategy, 2024 p 12

The Strategy notes the critical role schools play in this space: "Our schools provide the foundations for cultivating young people's aspirations and ensure they are equipped with the knowledge and tools they need to make informed decisions about education, training and employment pathways". Our experience working in Tasmania and researching with young people, is that, as with most states/territories careers support in schools is **patchy, inconsistent** and often **not aligned to a 21<sup>st</sup> century economy**, despite the efforts of school staff.

National research with around **1,700 young Australians experiencing disadvantage** in their first-year post-school shows that while most recall receiving some form of careers support while at school, only just over a **half found it helpful** support (The Smith Family, 2022). Data from these young people identified the following **in-school recommendations** to support young people, with the ultimate goals of keeping them engaged in school, supporting Year 12 or equivalent completion and strengthening their post-school pathways:

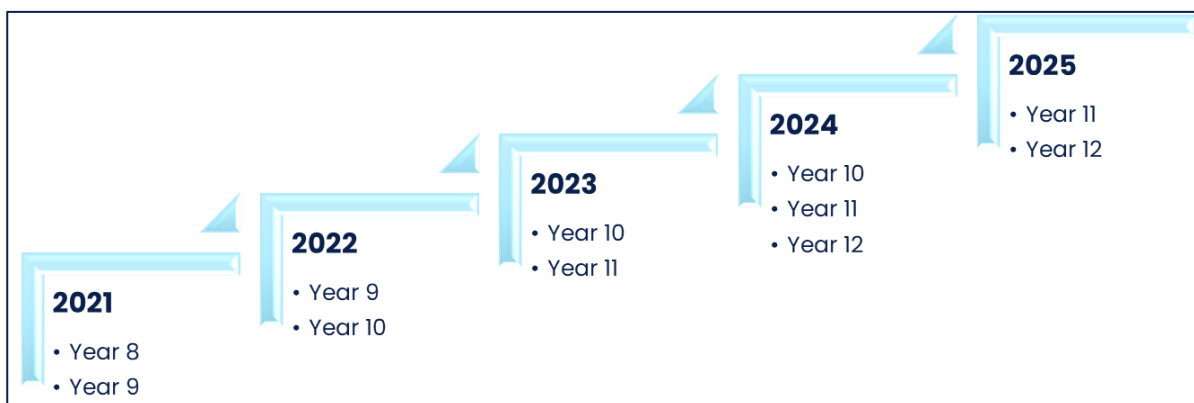
- Access to more **comprehensive** and **personalised careers advice**, including in the middle years of school, and support to develop options for them to achieve their goals. This include information about labour markets, employment pathways, skills that will be in demand in the future and alternative pathways.
- Increased opportunities to study **VET subjects** at school, engage in **work experience** placements and be exposed to the **world of work** while at school.
- Greater exposure to **apprenticeships** and **traineeships** while at school and what to expect when a young person is the **first in their family** to participate in post-school study.
- Strategies that support **family members'** access to up-to-date labour market, education and training information and how they can support young people to develop their goals and plans to achieve them. This is important given family members are **key sources** of advice for young people, including those experiencing disadvantage.

## The Growing Careers Project

**Partnerships** with community organisations and business are a critical vehicle for the delivery of high quality careers support, particularly for schools serving high numbers of young people experiencing disadvantage. The Smith Family, through support from the Commonwealth Department of Education is currently trialling the Growing Careers Project (GCP) in around 60 low ICSEA secondary schools nationally, including seven in Tasmania.

GCP is working in **structured** and **strategic** ways with partner school communities to support students to access an evidence based, **sequential series** of career guidance and occupation exploration programs. Over a five year period (2021-25), programs are being offered to students across multiple years, focussing on their career learning needs at different stages of their development and as indicated in the diagram below:

- Years 7 and 8: Discover and explore
- Year 9 and 10: Focus and plan
- Years 11 and 12: Decide and apply.



This structured approach aims to build young people's **social and cultural capital**, through expanding the networks of support they can draw on at a critical time in their lives. A longitudinal evaluation is currently underway, and while it is not yet possible to determine the cumulative impact of GCP, it is clear that school staff and students **highly value the approach**, and its contribution to supporting students to make pathway decisions, including completing Year 12.

### Careers activities in primary schools and the Future Seekers program

The Smith Family is also cognisant of research showing the importance of working with children from a young age regarding careers and that this is particularly important for children from vulnerable backgrounds, including those from low socioeconomic families and those in communities marked by high unemployment and/or low rates of labour force participation (Chambers et al, 2018). **Children's perceptions** about certain jobs and careers are **formed and sometimes cemented at a young age**. Children's aspirations are often shaped and restricted by gender stereotyping, socioeconomic background and who they know. These factors go on to influence the academic effort children put into certain subjects, the subjects they choose to study and the jobs they pursue.

Aspirations are not only embedded at a young age but are also **difficult to shift**. For example, research shows students who do not express **Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM)** related aspirations at age 10 are unlikely to develop STEM aspirations by age 14 with longer-term consequences for their pursuit of science subjects and related careers. Research with Australian children shows that their most popular careers are highly concentrated into a few occupations which reflect a celebrity focus (sportsman/woman), highly visible public service careers

(teacher/lecturer, police), health (vet) and modern growth drivers (scientist). There is a major **disconnect** between the careers that primary-age children are most interested in and those that the economy needs. A similar misalignment is also evident among young people in secondary schooling, highlighting that career aspirations of children are not transient as is sometimes argued. The Smith Family believes that this research is particularly important in the context of the challenges facing Tasmania.

In response to this evidence, The Smith Family has been delivering the **Future Seekers** for a number of years., to primary school students in Years 4 to 6 and more recently to students in Years 7 to 8. Students participate in the program over a series of 60 minute in-school sessions over multiple weeks. For the Primary program, there are 5 core sessions and 1 optional session which are designed to be delivered over 5-8 weeks. In the optional session, students are able to engage in person, with role models from the world or work.

Future Seekers has been designed to align with the Australian National Curriculum General capabilities, utilising the New Pedagogies for Deep Learning in particular. This framework provides a set of soft skills necessary for the future world of work, which are incrementally built over time and contribute to a child's emerging sense of self. In 2023, over 1,400 students nationally participated in Future Seekers with the following outcomes being reported:

- 72% of students reported they developed knowledge of the soft skills needed for the world of work
- 79% of students reported they had developed initial understanding of the diversity of work
- 72% of students reported they identified their skills and interests in relation to the world of work
- 75% of students reported an initial understanding of how soft skills can be applied in the world of work
- 84% of teachers reported students learnt new knowledge and skills

More recently in Term 2 of 2024, The Smith Family ran the Future Seekers program in Tasmania for three partner primary schools, with 75 students participating. A very diverse range of industry speakers attended including: a Laboratory Superintendent and Neuroscientist; a Conservation and Land Management Officer; a Child and Play Therapist; an Illustrator; a Wildlife Sanctuary Manager; an ice-cream shop retailer; a Creative Vinyl Record Designer/Retailer; a Waste Education Officer; a Musicologist and a Registered Nurse from a children's ward. Small group sessions and catering to a diverse range of learning styles, provided a safe environment for students to be curious, ask questions, explore new possibilities, and boost their confidence. Speakers were able to purposefully create links between students' classroom learning and the world of work.

Students identified a variety of learning highlights as:

*"Seeing what you need for a job with skills"*

*"Getting to know about new jobs"*

*"Learning that there are a lot of jobs to do in life"*

*"Seeing the cop video and how to get my job..watching the job videos"*

*"Asking questions to the people who came to our class"*

*"Learning about new things and learning things we could be when we grow up"*

*"It was fun making the towers; the chatterboxes; the Future Seekers Booklet to create our Superheroes."*

*"Everything, I loved it!"*

## Digital inclusion

Digital inclusion - including access to affordable digital devices, internet access, software and acquisition of the skills needed to function safely, healthily and responsibly in a digital environment, is a key prerequisite for young people's engagement in education. There is also evidence that digital tools can provide flexibility in teaching and learning, personalisation, access to virtual communities and can increase motivation and interest in learning (Gottschalk and Weise, 2023).

A significant proportion of the young people supported by The Smith Family through the *Learning for Life* program are not digitally included. **Seventy percent** of school aged *LfL* students nationally have a laptop or tablet and live in a household with mobile or broadband internet.

Participation in senior secondary education in Tasmania is, understandably, particularly reliant on digital inclusion, to enable students to have **choices** around the subjects they study and the location where they study. Some schools where The Smith Family works for example, are 'extension schools' for Years 11 and 12, however there are very limited subject choices which could be, at least in part, addressed if there were higher levels of digital inclusion amongst students, and associated digital competence and confidence amongst teaching staff.

The **2022 NAPLAN ICT** data confirms the challenge facing Tasmania with regards students meeting national standards, with only **31 percent** of Tasmanian Year 10 students attaining the proficiency standard. The figure for Year 6 was 49 percent. While the Tasmanian data is not available publicly by socioeconomic background, the national NAPLAN ICT data indicates that student achievement increased with increasing levels of parental education (a proxy for SES).

The Smith Family sees ensuring students are digitally included as a priority for ensuring their engagement and achievement (a necessary but not sufficient condition) in education, as well as successful post-school pathways.

## Australian Tertiary Admission Ranking (ATAR) system

In considering outcomes at the conclusion of the formal years of schooling, The Smith Family would identify the opportunity to examine the **current and potential role that ATAR** is playing. As identified by the 2020 Shergold national Review of Student Pathways, Australia is one of the very few education systems around the world that depend on a single score to define academic achievement.

The Shergold Review further noted:

- While tertiary institutions and the Universities Admissions Centre advocate a balanced approach to the use of the ATAR, this is not the message being heard by young people, their families or their teachers.
- A **misunderstanding of the purpose and application** of the ATAR is having negative consequences and leading to a narrow view of 'success' and the goals of schooling in the senior secondary years.
- Although the ATAR has its place when it comes to university admissions, the senior secondary education system in most states and territories remains geared towards achieving an ATAR at the expense of broader skills and other pathways. **VET pathways** are often seen as 'second tier' to an ATAR pathway.

The review recommended that students should leave school with a **Learner Profile** that incorporates not only their ATAR score (where relevant) together with their individual subject results, but also captures the broader range of evidenced capabilities necessary for employment and active citizenship that they have acquired in senior secondary schooling<sup>2</sup>.

In New Zealand, by way of example, the National Certificate of Educational Achievement, (NCEA) is the main secondary school qualification for students in Year 11–13 (which is the same as Australia’s Years 10-12). For university entrance, there is no ATAR-type ranking system, only a requirement to complete a minimum of units in mathematics and English. Entry requirements are

- Completion of NCEA Level 3<sup>3</sup>
- 14 credits at Level 3 in each of three approved subjects
- 10 Literacy credits at Level 2 or above, made up of:
  - 5 credits in reading
  - 5 credits in writing.
- 10 Numeracy credits at Level 1 or above.

## **Themes 4 and 5: Support for the teaching workforce and Accountability for improved outcomes**

The Smith Family’s work **complements** what happens in schools and we work in partnership with school staff across all of our partner schools. We don’t have any commentary to offer on Theme 4 of the Consultation paper.

With regards to **accountability** for improved outcomes, The Smith Family welcomes the Tasmanian Government’s commitment to the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement (BAFS) 2025-2034. Complementing that Agreement must be the application of **needs based funding** in as timely a way as is possible. Such funding is a **prerequisite** for schools being able to more effectively address the equity gaps which are currently a feature of all Australian jurisdictions, including in Tasmania.

The experience of The Smith Family is that in Tasmania, the **compounding nature of disadvantage** is particularly acute, with resources needing to be applied across the range of portfolios that directly and indirectly contribute to educational outcomes. Fully implementing the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS), particularly in schools serving disadvantaged populations, is an urgent complement to targets and reforms that will be in the new BAFS Agreement and associated bilateral agreement. While welcoming the agreement struck by the Commonwealth and Tasmanian Governments regarding the SRS, we are concerned at the long period that will elapse before the SRS is fully implemented.

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<sup>2</sup> Education Council (2020) *Looking to the future: report of the review of senior secondary pathways into work, further education and training*. June 2020

<sup>3</sup> NCEA (Level 3) is designed to enable access to the skills required for employment. People certificated at Level 3 have typically shown themselves able to integrate knowledge and skills to solve unfamiliar problems; access, analyse and use available sources of information; and work independently in undirected activity.

A **data agenda** is a key component of improving student outcomes, and The Smith Family is cognisant of the significant efforts of the Department of Education, Children and Young People in this regard. We are also grateful of their partnership with us around data exchange, which is strengthening our capacity to provide more targeted and timely support to the *Learning for Life* students and families we support. Our experience shows that such arrangements offer a significant number of benefits including:

- Enabling our frontline team member to work with families whose children are **struggling to attend school** consistently and/or have a number of behaviour management issues.
- Enhancing our ability to offer students **struggling with literacy or numeracy** additional programmatic support.
- Early identification of secondary students who are struggling to stay engaged and are at **risk of early school leaving**.
- Celebrating **educational successes** with families.
- Guiding conversations with families of students at **key transition points**.
- Re-engaging with families who have **moved home and/or school**.
- Enhancing our understanding of students' **complex schooling histories**.

The Smith Family welcomes public reporting on education, including for equity groups. We also urge the development of more **nuanced, longitudinal data** which can contribute to better understanding progress and more effectively targeting investment. This data is particularly important to ensure **comparisons** between schools or groups of students are informed and 'fair'. As we noted in our submission to the Commonwealth Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System, it is essential that a **culture** that prioritises **continuous improvement** and **sharing learnings**, rather than a 'league table' mentality which is ultimately in no-one's best interests, particularly students is developed, both across and between individual systems, jurisdictions and schools.

Alongside the ongoing development of a data-informed culture, is the need for **support to implement evidence-based and evidence-informed practices and programs**, in ways that are guided by the science of implementation. School staff, particularly those in schools serving high proportions of students from the equity groups, will require time, resources and assistance to be able to implement these initiatives with fidelity.



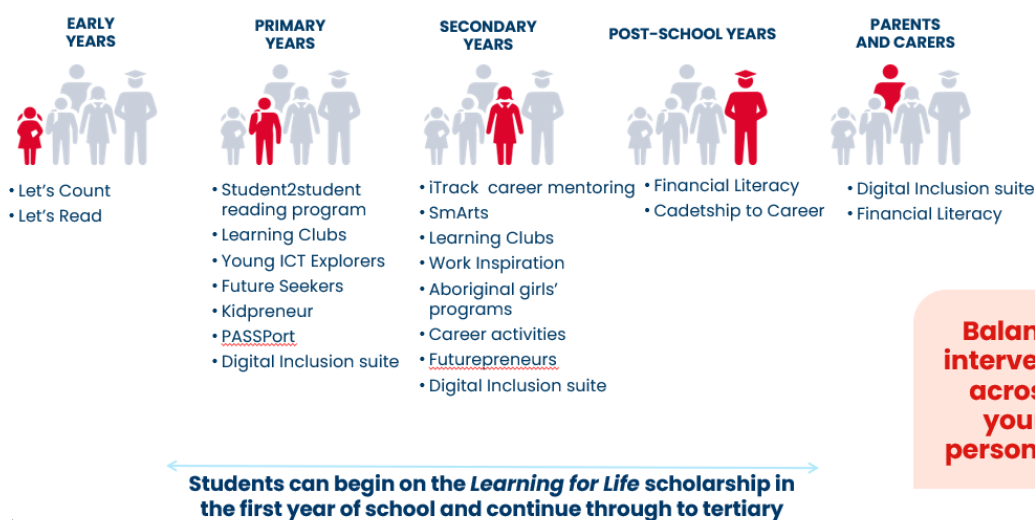
## Appendices

### The *Learning for Life* Program Suite

The *Learning for Life* program provides families and scholarship students with the following support:

- A **modest biannual payment**<sup>4</sup> to families to help them cover core education-related expenses such as books, uniforms and excursions.
- Support from a *Learning for Life* **Family Partnership Coordinator** (a Smith Family team member) who works with the family to support their child's long-term participation in education.
- Access to a range of programs to help ensure children's engagement in education. These include literacy and numeracy programs, learning clubs, mentoring and career programs and digital and financial literacy programs for parents/carers (see below)

### Key Programs at Different Life Stages



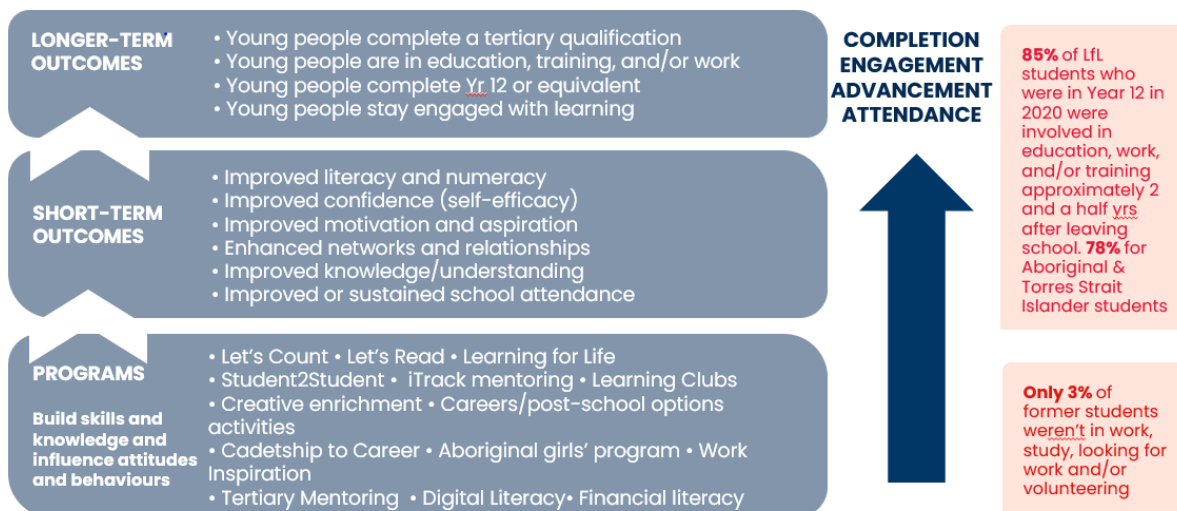
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### *Learning for Life* Program Outcomes

For each *Learning for Life* student, we track key longer terms outcomes, which research has shown are important – school attendance, school completion, post-school engagement in employment, education and training and for students on a tertiary scholarship, whether they complete a qualification, as shown below.

<sup>4</sup> The annual *Learning for Life* payment to a family for a school student is \$478 and for a senior secondary school student is \$772.

## Measures of effectiveness



### Learning for Life: Tasmanian Partner schools

South: Glenorchy and Brighton	North: North East Launceston	North West: Burnie/Wynyard
Austins Ferry Primary School	Brooks High School	Boat Harbour Primary School
Bagdad Primary School	East Tamar Primary School	Burnie Primary School
Bowen Rd Primary School	Glen Dhu PS	Havenview Primary School
Brighton Primary School	Invermay Primary School	Hellyer College
Campania District School	Kings Meadow High School	Montello Primary School
Claremont College	Lilydale District School	Parklands High School
Cosgrove High School	Mowbray Heights Primary School	Riana PS
East Derwent Primary School	Newstead College	Romaine Park Primary School
Gagebrook Primary School	Port Dalrymple School	Somerset Primary School
Glenorchy Primary School	Prospect High School	Table Cape Primary School
Goodwood Public School	Queechy High School	Ulverstone Public School
Herdsmans Cove Primary School	Ravenswood Heights Primary School	West Ulverstone Public School
Jordan River Learning Federation Senior School	South George Town Public School	Wynyard High School
Montrose Bay High School	St Leonards Primary School	Yolla (District)
Moonah Primary School	Waverley Primary School	
Rosetta Primary School	Youngtown Public School	
Springfield Gardens Primary School		
Windermere Primary School		

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