

**STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2**  
**TO BE AN INFLUENTIAL ADVOCATE FOR**  
**DISADVANTAGED YOUNG AUSTRALIANS**

**EFFECTIVENESS**  
**INFORMED BY**  
**RESEARCH AND**  
**EVIDENCE**

## RESEARCH

### The Smith Family is a data-led, evidence-informed organisation.

Our in-house research and evaluation informs our approach and practice across all aspects of our work. It ensures that our programs remain relevant and effective, and continue to make a measurable difference to the children and young people we support. Our ability to demonstrate the results and outcomes of our work also helps support our accountability to stakeholders, including families, volunteers, supporters, government and corporate partners.

In April, it was an honour to receive the award for *Excellence in Social Impact Measurement* from the Social Impact Measurement Network of Australia (SIMNA). The award recognised our strong focus on effectiveness and continuous improvement embedded in the *Learning for Life* program and is endorsement of the rigour of our approach in measuring the efficacy of the program.

Another significant achievement this financial year was the publication of our research report on the long-term effectiveness of the *Learning for Life* program in improving the educational outcomes of highly disadvantaged students. The report, *Improving the educational outcomes of disadvantaged young Australians: The Learning for Life program*, highlights the success of the program and the contribution our approach is making to tackling Australia's educational challenge.

Based on data gathered over four years from 33,000 students in the program, the findings confirm that early intervention and targeted long-term educational support has a positive impact on the educational outcomes of highly disadvantaged students. Seven out of 10 students on the program are completing Year 12, significantly boosting their post-school employment and social participation outcomes. This compares favourably with national data for young Australians from the lowest socio-economic backgrounds, which shows only six out of 10 complete Year 12 or equivalent.

The report also noted that between 2012 and 2015, around 6,500 disadvantaged young Australians were supported to complete Year 12 through the *Learning for Life* program.

The Smith Family's long-term engagement with students in the program provides a unique opportunity for us to contribute to the body of research and knowledge on how to improve the educational outcomes of highly disadvantaged young Australians.



### In April, it was an honour to receive the award for *Excellence in Social Impact Measurement* from the Social Impact Measurement Network of Australia (SIMNA).

We track the individual progress of all students on the *Learning for Life* program from the day they join the program to 12 months after they leave. Demographic, administrative and outcomes data are collected on all students and entered into a purpose-built database. Students' progress on a range of short- and longer-term outcomes is measured. Short-term outcomes include reading ability, school engagement, motivation, confidence, and knowledge of careers and post-school pathways. Three longer-term outcomes have been tracked since 2012 – school attendance rates, Year 12 completion, and post-school engagement in education, training or employment. Research shows that these outcomes are important for the future economic and social wellbeing of young people.

In-depth analysis of the data we collect helps us understand the effectiveness of our work, and identify individual students or different groups of students, such as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students or those from non-English speaking backgrounds, who may face particular challenges.

This analysis informs The Smith Family's approach of continuous improvement, which has led to a number of program refinements including changes to the frequency and nature of engagement with families, a re-defining of the roles of staff working directly with families, and the development of approaches that better support students' career pathways.

The large number of students from across Australia participating in the *Learning for Life* program over a long period of time makes our research nationally significant. As such, our research can contribute to policies aimed at improving the educational outcomes of disadvantaged students.

This year we continued to be involved in five Australian Research Council Linkage grant projects, awarded in previous years. These are large, long-term nationally significant research projects focused on improving the wellbeing of children and young people. Topics include community-level factors that influence early childhood outcomes; collective impact; the efficacy of the *Learning for Life* program; young people's experience of financial disadvantage; and supporting Aboriginal children's early language development.

These Linkage projects bring together a range of academic, government and non-government partners and provide us with access to new knowledge and research that directly inform our programs and advocacy. The opportunity to collaborate and engage with international researchers, senior government officials and other non-government organisations also provides significant benefits for The Smith Family on a broader scale, including relationship and partnership building.

## ADVOCACY

Our role in advocating on behalf of disadvantaged young Australians draws significantly on our research and evidence-informed practice.

We have a unique insight into the challenges faced by this sector of our community. Through the outcomes of our work we can demonstrate how we are having a positive effect on the educational outcomes of these young Australians.

Our advocacy activities include publishing research reports, submissions to government inquiries, presenting at conferences, speaking to the media, and engaging with government agencies, politicians, non-government organisations, business, philanthropy and the wider community.

This year, we made 15 public policy submissions on topics such as school funding, Commonwealth and State Government Budgets, and service coordination in communities with high needs. This was followed up by significant engagement with Commonwealth and State/Territory Government representatives. We were delighted that this resulted in support from both the Commonwealth and Victorian governments to expand our evidence-based early mathematics program, *Let's Count* and the Victorian Government's support for our *iTrack* and *Girls at the Centre* programs.

Smith Family CEO Dr Lisa O'Brien, Head of Research and Advocacy Anne Hampshire, Head of Policy, Programs and Volunteering Wendy Field and other Smith Family leaders presented at 25 conferences and external events including the Australian Social Policy Conference, Early Start Conference, Australian Long-Term Unemployment Conference and the 2015 Council for the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences National Forum on Inspiring a Creative Australia.

A speech delivered by Anne Hampshire to the Committee of Economic Development of Australia (CEDA) was published in *CEDA's Top 10 Speeches 2015: A collection of the most influential and interested speeches from the CEDA platform in 2015*. Anne discussed the economic benefits of addressing disadvantage early, using the example of the *Learning for Life* program to show the effectiveness of an early intervention, long-term approach in improving educational outcomes for highly disadvantaged young Australians.

Throughout the year we generated extensive media coverage on issues including disadvantage in Australia, early intervention, educational achievement and the importance of targeted support for disadvantaged students. This included opinion pieces on topics such as the transition from school to university for disadvantaged students, parental engagement in their children's learning, and the importance of young children developing literacy and numeracy skills prior to starting school.

For more, go to [thesmithfamily.com.au](http://thesmithfamily.com.au)

### CASE STUDY – LEARNING FOR LIFE RESEARCH REPORT

## TARGETED EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE CLOSES THE GAP

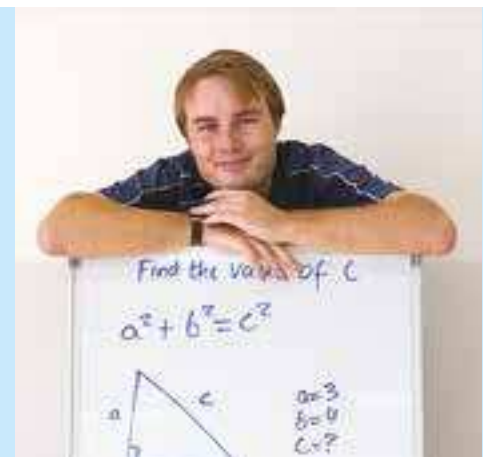
"There are things that I know [my family] wouldn't have been able to afford," says Duncan, a former *Learning for Life* student, who is now a high school teacher.

Duncan was supported by The Smith Family in Years 11 and 12 and through university. He says that without the *Learning for Life* sponsorship his parents would have struggled with education costs. The extra programs Duncan was able to participate in, particularly the online mentoring program *iTrack*, also gave him access to support and advice that helped to shape his post-school pathway.

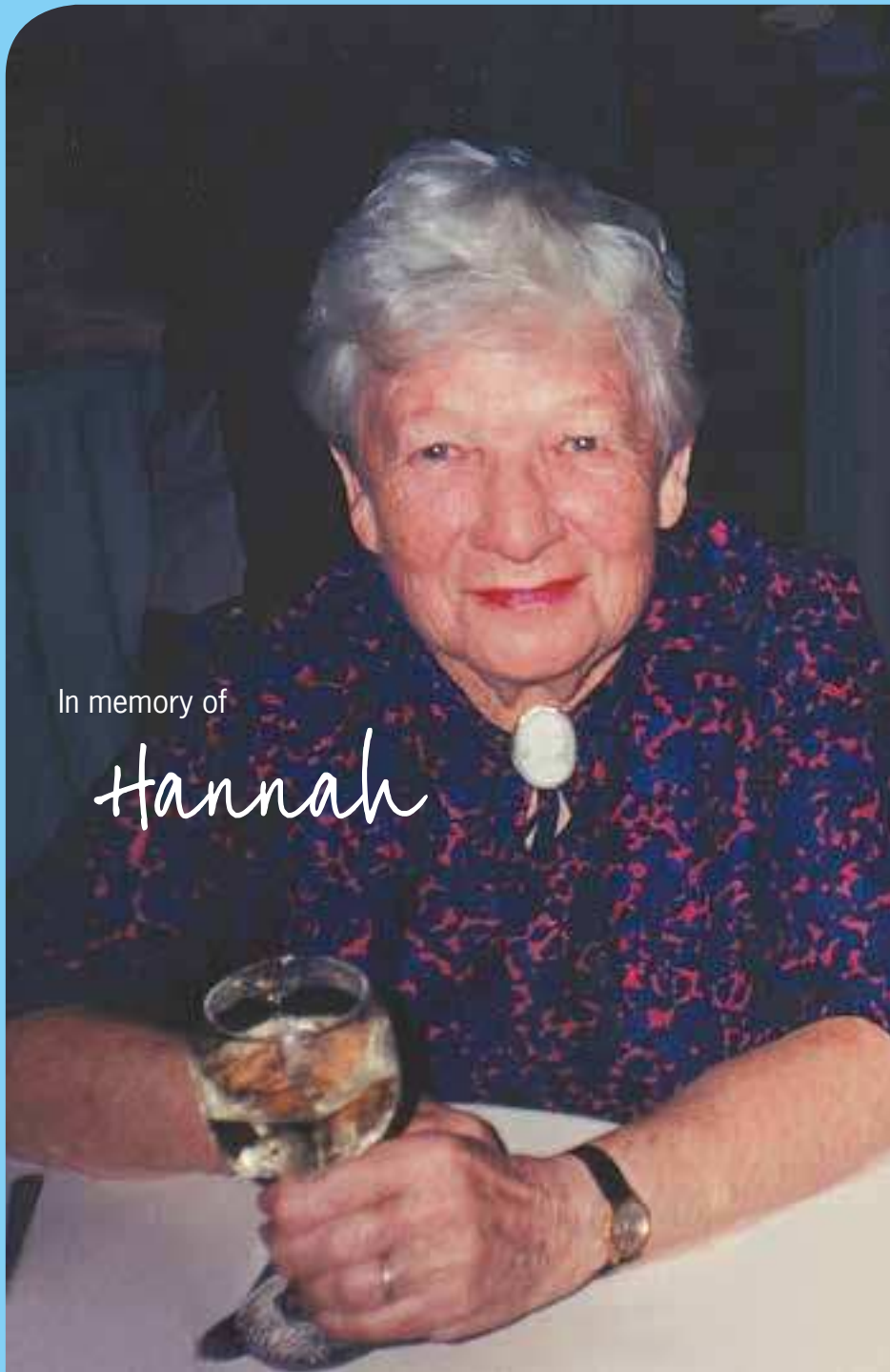
"I did *iTrack* in Year 10. It helped me start my resumé and think about possible career options," he says.

Findings from a four-year evaluation of the *Learning for Life* program show that the program is having a significantly positive impact on the educational outcomes of highly disadvantaged students, like Duncan.

Students from these backgrounds are more likely to have poorer educational outcomes than those from more advantaged backgrounds. However, the evaluation shows that in 2015, 84% of former *Learning for Life* students who left the program in Years 10, 11 or 12, were engaged in employment or further education a year after leaving the program, boosting their overall life outcomes.



Former *Learning for Life* student Duncan is now a high school teacher.  
Photo: West Australian Newspapers Limited.



In memory of

Hannah

## REACHING MORE STUDENTS IN NEED

“My brother Ernie and I are passionate about supporting disadvantaged students with their education because it’s the way to break the cycle of poverty and help improve a family.

Our mother was a volunteer with The Smith Family for about 25 years, helping mainly with the clothing line of business. She always wanted to help people. When she passed away, Ernie and I decided to use our inheritance to start a fund in her name to support *Learning for Life* students. She was very passionate about The Smith Family. She knew a lot of staff and volunteers. We decided that the best thing to do was to establish a fund in her name. We have probably sponsored two dozen tertiary students up until now.

This year one of the things we wanted to try to do was to keep the support going. Rather than look after one student at a time, we wanted to be able to reach more children and continue this in perpetuity. The Hannah Isaacs Perpetual Scholarship, named in memory of our mother, now means we can reach more children well into the future.

Ernie and I have done other things to support The Smith Family. Through my involvement with Rotary Clubs we have arranged to take toys from a local community Christmas tree to support The Smith Family’s Christmas Toy and Book Appeal. We have also encouraged Rotary Clubs to sponsor disadvantaged students through the *Learning for Life* program.”

**Phill Isaacs**, one of Hannah’s sons.