

IMPROVING LONG-TERM OUTCOMES FOR DISADVANTAGED AUSTRALIAN YOUNG PEOPLE

**Australian Social Policy Conference
Sept 2017**

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The problem we're trying to solve



- Disadvantaged children and young people in Australia have poorer educational outcomes than their more advantaged peers.
- Gaps in educational outcomes exist prior to school, continue through school and into post-school education and employment.
- The relationship between student background and educational outcomes is more pronounced in Australia than in nations such as Canada.

The *Learning for Life* program



- Long-term educational scholarship
- Supports highly disadvantaged Australian students
 - 38,000 children and young people currently on the program
 - From kindergarten/prep to completion of tertiary studies
- Educational outcomes of these students are monitored annually or biennially
 - School engagement (attendance)
 - Completion of Yr 12 or equivalent
 - Post-school engagement in education, training and/or work

This paper

Explores :

1. The extent of post-school engagement in education, training and/or employment of former students
 - How does engagement vary by the highest year level completed?
2. The circumstances/factors contributing to some young people leaving school before completing Year 12
3. Describes the policy and practice responses developed from the research findings

The studies

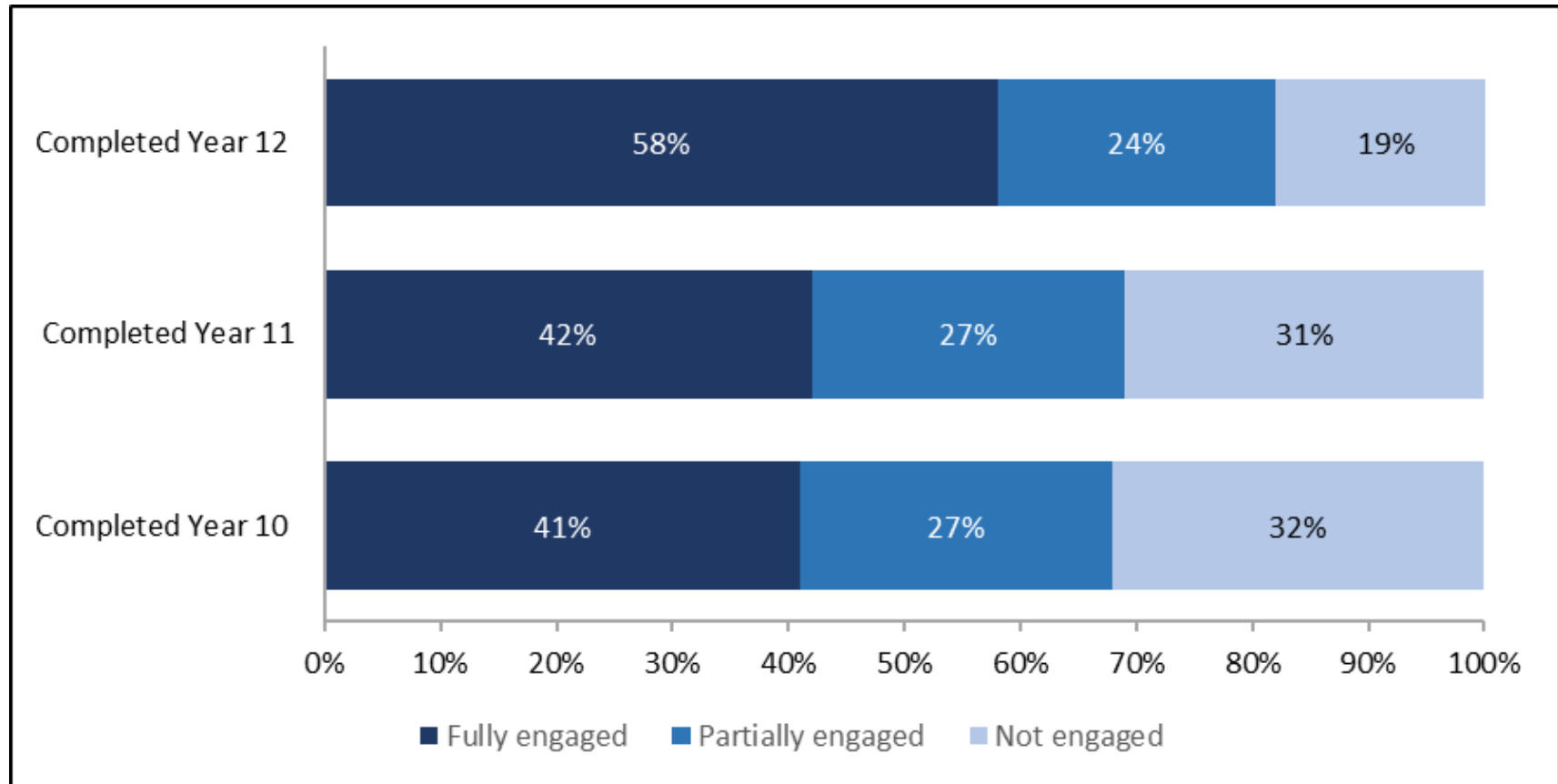
Quantitative

- 2013, 2015 and 2017 phone-survey responses
 - approx. 1,000 former *Learning for Life* students surveyed each year
 - response rate – from 66% to 74%
 - left the scholarship while in Years 10, 11 or 12
 - between 6-18 months ago

Qualitative

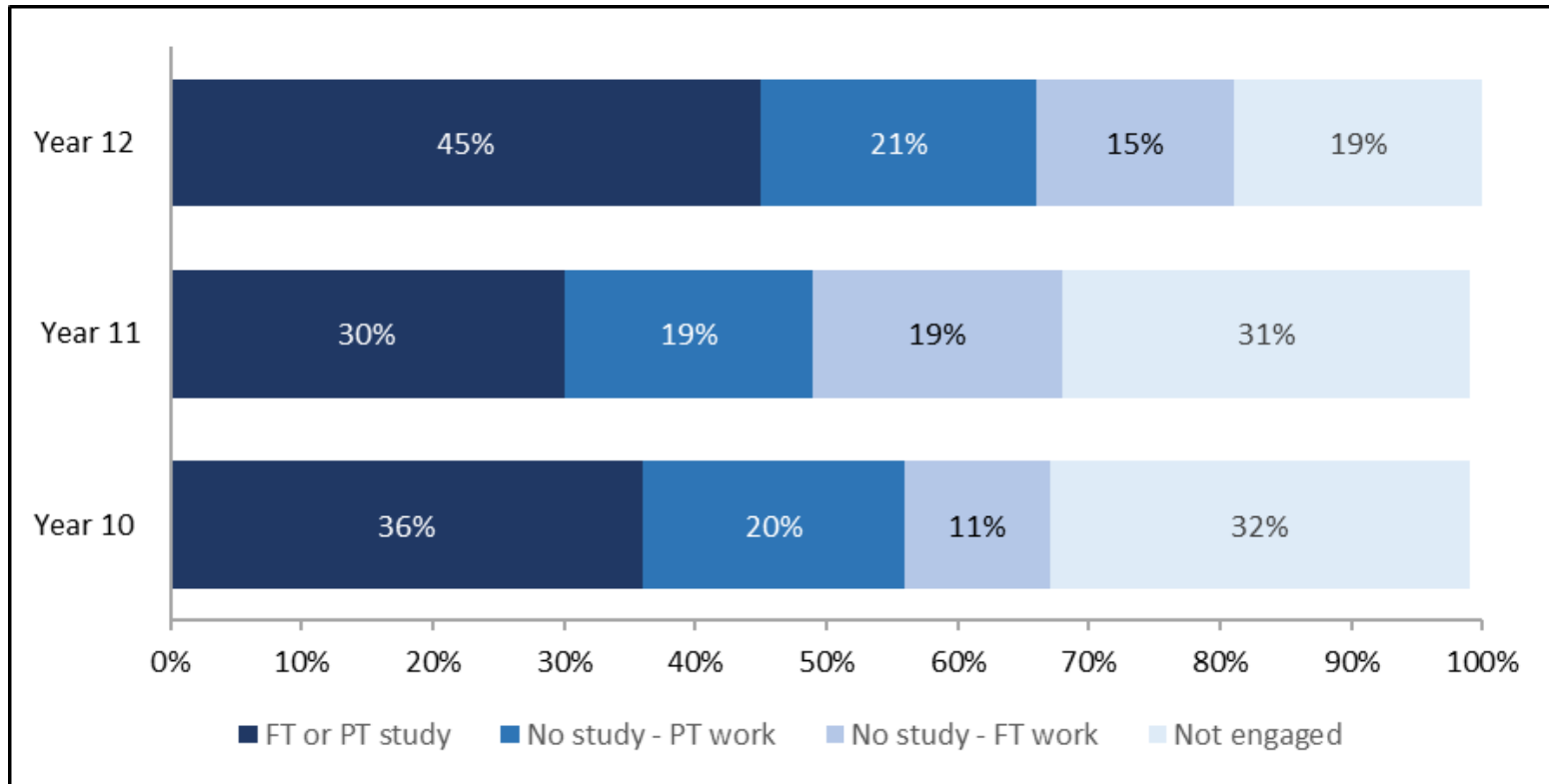
- From 2015 survey sample
 - small study of 12 parents of former students
 - all former students had left school before completing Year 12

Engagement Rates 2017, by Year level when left school



- Similar findings in 2015 and 2013

Continuing study by highest level of school completed by former student



- Stronger likelihood of continuing study if completed Year 12
- More likely to be studying if left with Year 10 c.f. Year 11

Qualitative study

Informed by quantitative findings:

- Range of reasons young people leave school before Yr 12
 - Explore these in depth => qualitative study

Parents interviewed:

- More readily discuss the information required
- More comfortable discussing issues

Key questions

- *What was going on for young person when they left school?*
- *What are they doing now?*

Qualitative findings

Common themes associated with leaving school early. These include:

- Disengagement from school or struggling academically (x4)
- Parent/child/school relationship breakdown (x4)
- Poor mental health, including bullying (x5)
- Intellectual disability and learning difficulties (x3)

Struggling academically – Katie

School

- Change in academic load (Yr 10 to 11), a ‘shock’
- Teacher who tried to help but struggled with:
 - Time-management
 - Understanding the task requirements

Post-school

- Enrolled in Cert II TAFE
 - Pathway to Cert III
- Working casually in a related occupation
- Supported at home – financially and emotionally

Disengagement from school - Paul

At school

- 'Struggled to stay focused'
- Relatively high attendance rate (84% - 91% in high school)
- Trouble with peers and teachers from Year 10
- Expelled during Year 12

Post-school

- With specialist early school leaver *jobactive* provider for 12 months
- No paid employment as yet
- Wants to study but doesn't know his options
 - Did not know he could complete Year 12 at TAFE
- Considering joining the defence forces
 - Did not know an apprenticeship through defence might be possible

Health - Jacqui

At school

- Very talented
 - Opportunities missed because of costs
- Bullied from early age which worsened in high school
 - School mobility to try to improve situation
 - Orthodontic work required but 3 year waiting list
- Significant mental health issues by Year 8
 - Year 10, absent for more than half the year

Post-school

- NEET
- Referred to *Headspace*

Complexity - Andrew

At home

- Family fled domestic violence, 2014
- House fire, 2015
 - Housing instability
 - Replacing all possessions

Family

- Four children, all with learning difficulties, including one with intellectual disability
- No support from new school

Andrew

- Learning difficulties, social phobia
- Completed a Cert III at a special learning centre
- Missed opportunity to take on apprenticeship because of mental health

Challenges

Whole of policy responses required

- Education, health, employment, community
- Gaps in knowledge of families/young people
 - Services
 - Pathways through education
- How to increase service availability/access to families/young people

The Smith Family responses

- Continuous improvement to our practice framework
- Training all front-line staff on being more effective for families
 - Referrals
- Programs to support transitions (e.g. Work Inspirations)
- Developing pilots
 - Working with schools, industry, Registered Training Organisations on alternative transition pathways
 - Using longitudinal attendance and achievement grades in Years 7 and 8 to identify students at greater risk of not completing Year 12

Summary

- *Learning for Life* program improves the post-school engagement rate of participants, c.f their peers
 - Supporting children and young people from first formal year of school with:
 - Financial scholarship
 - Wrap around support
 - Program Coordinators
- Year 10 and 11 leavers less likely to be engaged and/or studying c.f. Year 12 completers
- Year 11 leavers less likely to be studying c.f. Year 10 leavers
- Multiple and complex factors contributing to early school leaving
 - Policy and practice support aimed at improving connections between education, training, employment, community services, and health.



We extend our appreciation to the young people and families who generously shared their time and experience with us.

To safeguard their privacy, all names have been changed and images in this presentation are not of the young people in the studies.

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everyone's family