



Child wellbeing from a non- government perspective

Middle Years Development Instrument Conference
Adelaide, 20 May 2014

Anne Hampshire, Head of Research and Advocacy
The Smith Family

The Smith Family

Our vision

A better future for young Australians in need.

Our belief

Every child deserves a chance.

Our mission

To create opportunities for young Australians in need by providing long-term support for their participation in education.

- Our programs support over 112,000 children, young people and their parents/carers per annum across Australia, including **around 10,000** in SA
- Our key priorities are to:
 - Provide **effective** support through innovative quality programs
 - Be an **influential advocate** for disadvantaged young Australians
- MDI can potentially contribute to both of these priorities



everyone's family

Multiple influences on children and young people

- **Personal characteristics/attributes** – eg intelligence, social skills, health, self esteem, attitudes, intentions.
- **Family** – eg resources they have access to, parental aspirations & engagement in child's learning.
- **Peers** – eg aspirations, attitudes to education, risk taking behaviour.
- **Learning & care institutions**– eg teacher quality, student mix, school ethos, expectations of students.
- **Community** – eg economic & infrastructure resources available, role models, social capital/cohesion and safety.
- **Society** – eg norms and values relating to diversity, equity.

Challenges in one area can be offset by additional supports in another.

The right support at the right time improves likelihood of positive outcomes.

We need ways of tracking how young people are doing.



A broad vision for education and young people

- We advocate that the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* & the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* provide a broad vision for Australia's education system
- **UN:** Education of children should be directed to:
 - Development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential; respect for human rights; preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance.
- **Melb Dec:** All young Australians should be successful learners; confident and creative individuals; active and informed citizens.
 - Schools play a vital role in promoting the intellectual, physical, social, emotional, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development and wellbeing of young Australians, and in ensuring the nation's ongoing economic prosperity and social cohesion.
- MDI can contribute to our understanding of how well Aus is doing



everyone's family

The importance of the middle years



We know the importance of the early years in achieving positive adult outcomes



But we've focused much less on the middle years despite their importance, esp for disadvantaged YP

And hoped schools will fill the 'chasm'...



everyone's family

Balanced interventions – middle years matter

Nobel-prize winning economist James Heckman and Flavio Cunha found society reaps greatest return when investments are balanced throughout a young person's childhood

	High school graduation rates	Uni enrolment	Welfare enrolment
Balanced intervention throughout childhood	+ 50%	+ 34%	-15%
Early childhood + adolescent intervention	+ 44%	+ 23%	-14%
Early childhood intervention only	+ 25%	+ 9%	-9%

Invest early in children – and don't stop. (Heckman, Cunha)

MDI can help us think about that 'investment' in new ways.



everyone's family

Importance of development instruments

- MDI is part of a global movement – the UK’s influential New Philanthropy Capital (NPC) released a report last week on young people’s wellbeing - *Measure what you treasure*
- Many see educational achievement & wellbeing as 2 sides of the same coin – wellbeing is key to young people achieving their potential at school
- “While children and young people will be the first to bear the brunt if we fail to safeguard their wellbeing, over time society as a whole will pay the price” (Anita Tiessen, UNICEF UK)
- NPC’s work has shown important differences on wellbeing between boys and girls and declines as young people move through adolescence



everyone's family

Importance of development instruments

- National coverage of **AEDI**, its use at a **community** level, its **repeated** application over time, and its focus on **communicating results**, have made it a very useful tool for advocacy and monitoring improvements over time
- Middle Years Development Instrument enables us to **hear directly** from young people themselves on a range of areas known to impact on them in the present & future – a unique contribution
- It's early days but the MDI has the potential to strengthen **collaborative** efforts between schools and community organisations and other partners as they work together to improve the wellbeing and outcomes of young people.
- MDI can be the **stimulus for new conversations** between organisations interested in the wellbeing of young people and a tool that will help them plan together and monitor the effectiveness of their work.



everyone's family

Some observations on the SA MYDI data to date

Domain 1: Social & emotional development

- Close to 1/3 had 'low health and wellbeing' - a clear indicator that there is more work for us all to do – families, schools, non-gov organisations, govts, wider community
- Less than 1 in 10 children had 'low self esteem', with ¾ having 'high self esteem' ➡ appears to be an area where vast majority of YP doing well
- Only 39% of children had 'low levels of worries' – raises question of how we support young people to ↻ their level of worry and/or better manage them esp as young people move into adolescence

Domain 2: Connectedness

- The Smith Family is particularly interested in this area given its link with educational participation and long-term wellbeing
- Particularly important & valuable that the MDI looks at various dimensions – adults in school, adults generally, peers and friends



everyone's family

Some observations on the SA MYDI data to date

Domain 2: Connectedness

- Pleasing to note that 82% of the cohort were in the 'high' category for connectedness to adults at **home**, with only around 4% in the 'low' category
- % for **school** & **neighbourhood** are understandably lower, but given the importance of these networks for young people as they move through adolescence, further structured efforts maybe required in this area, esp with disadvantaged young people
- The Smith Family runs a range of mentoring & other programs to increase YP's connectedness to supportive adults
- Around 1 in 10 children were 'low' on '**peer belonging**' or '**friendship**' – this can significantly contribute to young people disengaging from school



everyone's family

Some observations on the SA MYDI data to date

Domain 3: School experiences

- Data from across this domain shows there is more work for us all to do in this area – including re school climate & belonging - less than 60% of the group was in the ‘high’ category for both items
- Levels of victimisation reflect broader societal issues & are higher than desirable in all forms – eg close to a half experiencing verbal victimisation about every month or once or a few times a month, with physical victimisation at around a third ➔ raises broader questions about the type of society we want, including for young people ➔ beyond the responsibility of schools alone



everyone's family

Some observations on the SA MYDI data to date

Domain 4: Health and wellbeing

- Important to remind ourselves of the significant proportion of young people (around 1 in 5) who have a health condition ➔ implications for the type of supports they (and their families) may need to stay engaged in education

- Significant proportions of children are doing 'poorly' on breakfast and sleep – we know physical wellbeing is important contributor to short and long term outcomes in a broad range of areas, including education ➔ raises questions re who is responsible for responding to this data



everyone's family

Some observations on the SA MYDI data to date

Domain 5: After school time

- The Smith Family has published a report highlighting the importance of sport & cultural activities for young people – esp disadvantaged YP – for their physical, social, emotional and cognitive development
- National ABS data shows that in Aus's most disadvantaged communities (eg Playford, Port Pirie) **47%** of children aged 5 to 14 years didn't participate in any organised sport or cultural activities outside of school over a 12 month period
- MDI confirms there are significant % of children not participating in after school activities ➔ implications in many areas of children's lives & a shared responsibility for many organisations



everyone's family

Conclusion

- Even in its early iterations the MDI is providing valuable information to help:
 - assess how young people are faring in key areas of their lives
 - provide pointers to further efforts aimed at enhancing young people's lives
 - identify areas for joint cross-organisational and cross-sectoral action
 - measure progress in key areas over time
- Its value will only strengthen with a larger number of young people participating and repeated application of the instrument – ideally across states & nationally
- Potential to look at different groups of young people to get more nuanced understanding of this area – eg girls/boys, low SES etc



everyone's family

Conclusion

- The wellbeing of young people is central to the wellbeing of the community and nation as a whole – early intervention efforts are more effective than remedial efforts down the track – MDI can help us identify areas for action
- Australia spends vast resources on delivering programs & running schools and the like that support young people – the modest investment required to expand MDI could help more effectively tailor the allocation of these broader resources
- The MYDI could be a powerful tool for advocacy as the AEDI has been
- The Smith Family congratulates the SA gov and other jurisdictions & all those involved in the MDI & would welcome its expansion as contributing to both more effective programs/responses & approaches for young people and an advocacy tool on young people's behalf



everyone's family