

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP TO IMPROVE THE EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES OF DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS

Parent Engagement Conference, June 2017

Gillian Considine

Snr Research and Advocacy Officer

Gillian.Considine@thesmithfamily.com.au

Catherine O'Byrne

Research and Advocacy Officer

Catherine.OByrne@thesmithfamily.com.au



Learning for Life scholarship program



- **Long-term** educational support – 1st year of school to end of tertiary
- **Highly disadvantaged** young people: low income, health and disability, mobile, high % Aboriginal young people, single parent
- **36,000** children and young people across all states and territories; **56,000** by 2020
- **Strong outcomes** – 84% of former students are in work or study 12 months after leaving the program
- **Parent and community engagement** underpins the program

LEARNING CATALYSTS



Learning Catalysts: Improving Educational Outcomes for Disadvantaged Children



- This research was funded by the Australian Government through the Australian Research Council.
- Multidisciplinary research team:
 - Institute of Social Science Research at The University of Queensland
 - Centre for Children and Young People at Southern Cross University
 - The Smith Family

Aims

1. To examine the circumstances of socioeconomically disadvantaged families and students.
2. To identify what factors contribute to improved educational outcomes for students from disadvantaged families.
3. To build the evidence base to better design and implement programs that are intended to improve educational outcomes of these students.

Methodology

Quantitative self-report survey

- 6,000 students and 5,000 parents → 4,000 matched pairs

Qualitative interviews with 32 families

- Individual interviews with matched pairs provided insight into the **family experience** of education
- Diverse sample:
 - Female and male students aged 11-17
 - Aboriginal background
 - Refugee background
 - LBOTE background
 - Family type (including out-of-home care)
 - Educational attainment
 - Employment status

WHAT WE LEARNT ABOUT PARENT ENGAGEMENT



THERESA

'I said from day one every time they had a teacher, "Don't tell them to come home and ask mum how to help".'

'[if] it's something I need to get my children help I [go to the school]...I don't want my kids to not get ahead. I think if you're straight up and you're honest it makes schools and teachers alright'



Parents are aspirational

Year 12 completion expected; post-school education aspired to

Education...

- is essential for securing a job, 'being what I want to be'
- contributes to young people 'living a good life'
- broadens understanding of the world
- is an opportunity parents did not have.



'I only did three days of Grade 8 and then...I had to go to work because my older sister fell pregnant so it was my responsibility to get a job and support them...so I never got to do it and like I said to my kids, I don't care – unless you're having the worst time of your life, I want to see Grade 12 done... Because it's something that I never had the privilege to do. I didn't have a choice to make decisions, you know, where would I like to be in my life...'

[Linda – Australian schooled]

Aspirations are realistic and shaped by factors such as the health of the child.

Parents are engaged in their children's education

- Advice and encouragement
- Positive work habits and study skills
- Academic assistance with school work
- Considered decisions on school enrolment
- Involvement at school e.g. volunteering, sport days
- Participation in post-school planning.



'We talk together. I help [my son] with this thing. I said him, "Don't left everything. If you got exam for two weeks, you plan. Do this week, little bit, and next week, when come, you be ready"...I explain him, if he doesn't like something, "You do that", like PE, "You do that, you attempt, you try your best. You plan everything".'
[Josef – refugee background]

'They don't really bother me [with homework]...they're quite confident that they can do it.'
[Victoria – single mother]

Parent engagement is multi-faceted and complex with no one “right way”

- Engagement extends beyond the parent
- Relationships matter

'I've made sure that she has phone numbers for my brothers and my cousin – people that she loves. My cousin's wife is one of the people who are reasonable people. Like her best friend's mum, I encourage her to chat with her when there's a problem...it's not always me that she turns to but I'd rather it be not the peer group.'

[Nina – relationship with 17 year old daughter had been strained]

- Effects may not always be positive
- Young people can be educationally successful with limited parent engagement

Barriers to parent engagement for disadvantaged parents

- Complex life situations and lack of resources
- Child's significant behavioural or health issues
- Previous (negative) educational experiences
- Academic capacity and content knowledge
- Confidence to engage

'I taught her how to do the k's and then when she went to school they go, "That's not right" ...Well she kept doing the other k and she kept getting told, "No, you don't do it like that" and she said, "My mummy told me". So after that I said I'm not teaching them nothing.'

[Theresa – self-described as 'illiterate']

- Viewed as 'not educated' and that they 'won't do well by' their children

'Like I've learned the hard way because I never could get my point across [at the school] and it took a lot of my friends to go "No, Linda, try this, try this". But there's a lot of parents that try their hardest and you can see the teachers or the school's just going "Yeah, yeah, whatever".'

[Linda – Australian schooled]

HOW CAN WE USE WHAT WE HAVE LEARNT?



How is parent engagement understood?

There is a need to question how parent engagement is understood by:

- Policy makers
- Researchers
- Schools/Teachers
- Community practitioners
- Parents and families.



How can parent engagement be conceptualised

such that it is inclusive and facilitates the involvement of all parents?

Ways forward

- Programs to engage parents in learning from the early years
- Access to free or low-cost academic support
- Support for families to realise education, training and employment aspirations; early intervention, place-based
- Support families in developing relationships with schools; understanding expectations
- Support schools to reflect on their practices for developing relationships with families



How The Smith Family is responding

- Ongoing professional development for practitioners working directly with families
- Assist families to address complex life situations through referrals
- Additional short programs

*‘Should I say, “Well I don’t need this because I should be able to do it myself”? It’s sort of embarrassing because you’ve got to say, “Well, actually, to tell you the truth I can’t do it on my own. I need your help”...Without the charity of The Smith Family I wouldn’t have been able to do XYZ with the kids...seeing the benefit the kids received, I’ve been totally amazed’
[Edith – single parent]*



Further information is available at www.thesmithfamily.com.au including a research report on the *Learning for Life* program

We extend our appreciation to the 32 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 families who participated in the research.

Research team

Institute of Social Science Research

Prof Mark Western, Prof Janeen Baxter, Dr Denise Clague, Dr Susan Creagh, Dr Nam Tran

Centre for Children and Young People

Prof Anne Graham, Dr Catharine Simmons, Julia Truscott, Nadine White

The Smith Family

Anne Hampshire, Dr Gillian Considine, Catherine O'Byrne, Dr Rebecca Reeve

