

# Using data to improve practice, influence policy and enhance impact

## Strengthening evidence-based policy conference

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# Overview

1. Overview of The Smith Family:  
Context, programs, families
2. Infrastructure supporting  
outcomes focus
3. Some learnings, challenges and  
opportunities



# The Smith Family



## OUR VISION

A better future for young Australians in need.

## OUR MISSION

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

## OUR BELIEF

Every child deserves a chance.

## OUR SCALE

- Support 125,000 children, young people, parents/carers and community professionals a year
- 34,000 young people on a long-term educational scholarship (*Learning for Life*)

## OUR LOCATIONS

94 disadvantaged communities across all states and territories

# THE CONTEXT OF OUR WORK

# Young people are behind at each stage

## EARLY YEARS



Developmentally vulnerable

One in three children in most disadvantaged communities is developmentally vulnerable in one or more key areas when they start school.

## PRIMARY YEARS



Numeracy

More than 10% difference in Year 5 students at or above national minimum standard based on parents' education.

## SECONDARY YEARS



Year 12 completion

More than 10% difference based on socio-economic status of students.

## POST-SCHOOL YEARS



Post-school engagement

Post-school, 42% of 17–24 year olds from most disadvantaged backgrounds were not fully engaged in work or study, compared to 17% among most advantaged.

**1 in 10 Australian children live in a jobless household**

# Evidence base for our work

## EDUCATION

Is the key enabler of economic and social participation.

## MULTIPLE INFLUENCES

On development - young person, family, peers, institutions including schools, community

## EARLY INTERVENTION

Mitigates risk or prevents emerging problem getting worse

## BALANCED INTERVENTION

For disadvantaged children gives the best return on investment  
- Invest early and keep on investing throughout young person's life  
(James Heckman)

# Educational data and evaluation

- Review of School Funding – insufficient data to assess impact of \$4.4 billion annual investment in programs to address educational disadvantage
- Limited evaluations and only small proportion focussed on student outcomes
- Report on Government Services, Closing the Gap, NSW Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation





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# OUR PROGRAM SUITE



# Key programs at different life stages

## EARLY YEARS



- *Let's Count*
- *Let's Read*

## PRIMARY YEARS



- *Student2student* reading program
- Learning Clubs

## SECONDARY YEARS



- *iTrack* career mentoring
- Creative enrichment
- Career and post-school pathways
- Work Inspiration
- Aboriginal girls' programs

## POST-SCHOOL YEARS



- Tertiary mentoring
- Financial Literacy

## PARENTS AND CARERS



- *Tech Packs*
- Financial Literacy

- **Child**
- **Family**
- **Peers**
- **School**
- **Community**



*Learning for Life*  
scholarship

# *Learning for Life* scholarship



**Parent and community engagement**



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# THE FAMILIES WE ARE SUPPORTING

# Learning for Life families



- **34,000** students nationally; 18,000 families
- **94** communities across all states/territories
- All **low income** families – Health Care Card or pension
- 18% **Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander** background
- 71% of parents **not in the labour force** or unemployed
- Over half are **single parent**
- 40% of students and 50% of parents have a **health** or **disability** issue
- 20% of students have been at **4 or more schools** and 1 in 20 have been at 6 or more schools
- Over half of our secondary and tertiary students have been on program for **6 or more years**

# LfL students are more disadvantaged than their peers

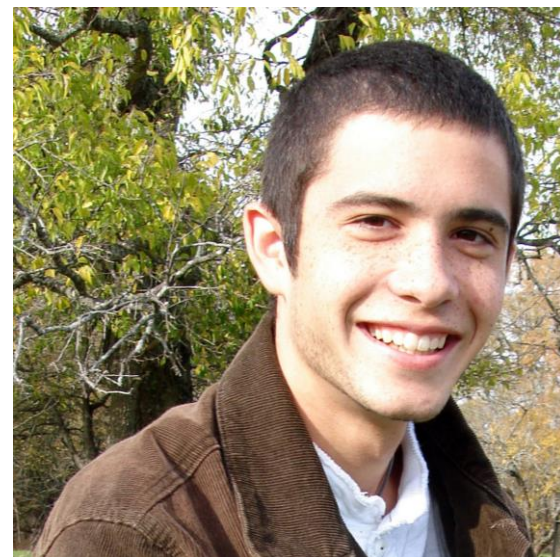
Compared to other students in the same schools, LfL students are:

- more likely to be of **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander** background
  - far less likely to have a parent who has completed **Year 12 or university**
- and
- far less likely to have a parent who is **employed**.

For example: 25% of LfL students in NSW have a parent/carer who is of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background, compared to 14% of students in the same schools (NSW Department of Education data).

# INFRASTRUCTURE SUPPORTING OUR OUTCOMES FOCUS

- **Program logics** for all programs
- **Outcomes Based Accountability** measures for all programs
- **Shorter term outcomes** (eg literacy, confidence, networks) are foundations for 3 **longer-term** outcomes:
  - Improve school attendance over time to 90%
  - Increase proportion of students who advance to Year 12
  - Increase proportion of students engaged in employment and further education after they leave the program
- **Research** informed, **policy** and **practice** relevant
- **Customised database** that includes admin and outcomes data for all key programs
- Complemented by **5 ARC Linkage grants** – quantitative and qualitative work



# Outcomes we're aiming to achieve



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- LONGER TERM OUTCOMES**
- Young people are in education, training and/or work
  - Young people complete Year 12 or equivalent
  - Young people stay engaged with learning

**ENGAGEMENT  
ADVANCEMENT  
ATTENDANCE**

**SHORT TERM OUTCOMES**

**OBA:**

- How much did we do?
- How well did we do it?
- Is anyone better off?

- Improved literacy and numeracy
- Improved confidence (self/efficacy)
- Improved motivation and aspiration
- Enhanced networks and relationships
- Improved knowledge/ understanding
- Improved or sustained school attendance

These are stepping stones to the longer-term outcomes

**PROGRAMS**

Programs build skills and knowledge and influence attitudes and behaviours

**INDIVIDUAL AND FAMILY**

**Long-term program:** *Learning for Life scholarship*

**Short-term programs:** *Let's Count, Let's Read, student2student, iTrack mentoring, Learning Clubs, smArts, Careers/Post school options workshops, Work Inspiration, Tertiary Mentoring, Tech Packs, Financial Literacy*



# OUR OUTCOMES

# Measures of effectiveness of *Learning for Life*

- Improve **school attendance** over time to 90%
- Increase the proportion of students who advance to **Year 12**
- Increase proportion of students engaged in **employment and further education** after they leave the program

# Increased school attendance

The Smith Family's average attendance rates, 2014

91.3%

For *Learning for Life*  
primary school  
students

86.9%

For *Learning for Life*  
secondary school  
students

87.3%

For *Learning for Life*  
Aboriginal and Torres Strait  
Islander school students



**There has been a steady year on  
year improvement for all three  
rates since 2012.**

# Improved Year 12 completion

The Smith Family's advancement rate



63.2%

*Learning for Life* students who were in Year 10 in 2012 and advanced to Year 12 or its equivalent by 2014. Up from 60% for the period 2010–12.



# Successful post school transitions

**84.2%** of former *Learning for Life* students are in work or study 12 months after leaving the program – up from 79% in 2013

Fully engaged

65.8%

Partly engaged

18.4%

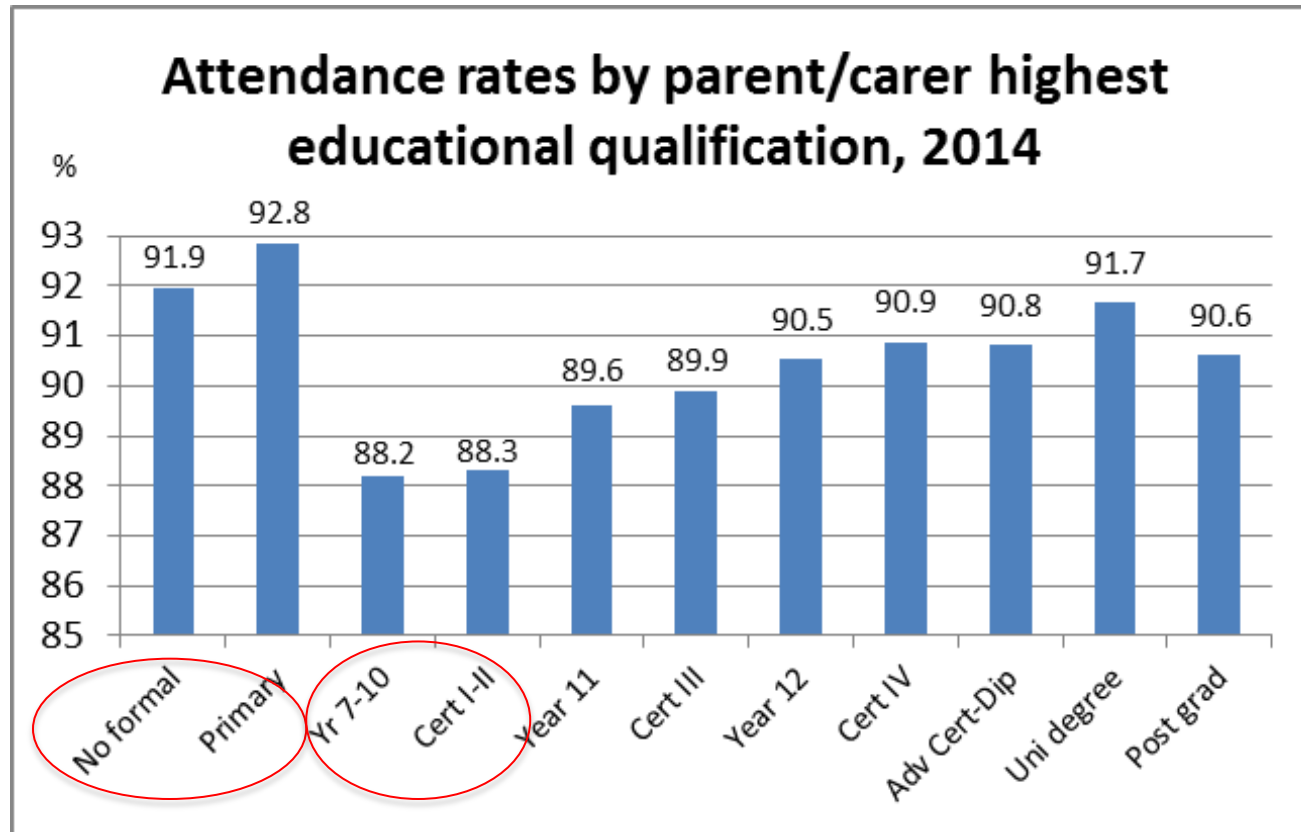


For **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander** young people, **74.2%** were engaged – 54.6% were fully engaged and 19.6% were partially engaged.

For both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal former students who were not engaged, 80% were actively **seeking employment** and one in six was **volunteering**.

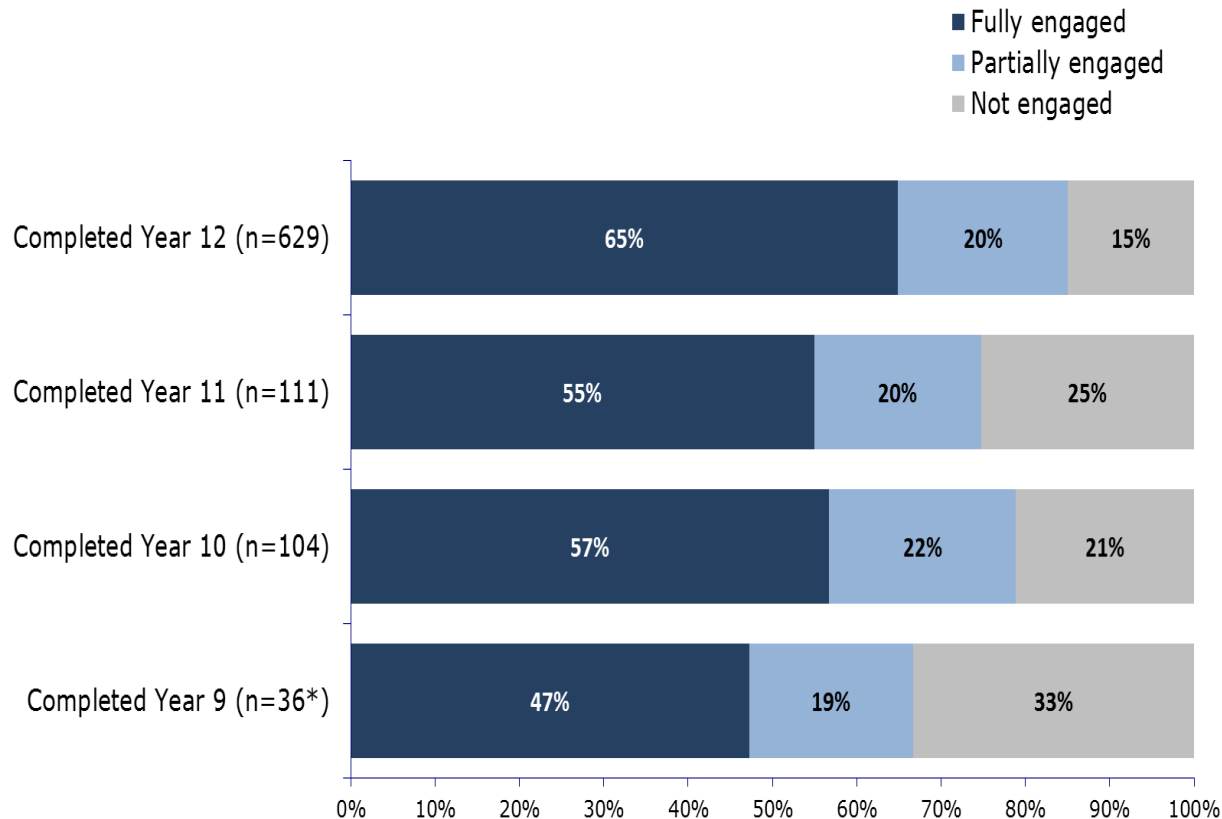
# LEARNINGS, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

# School attendance by parental education



- Best attendance rates are for children whose parents have no formal or primary only education

# Engagement rate – by highest level of school completed



Base: former LfL students who have left school (n=880)

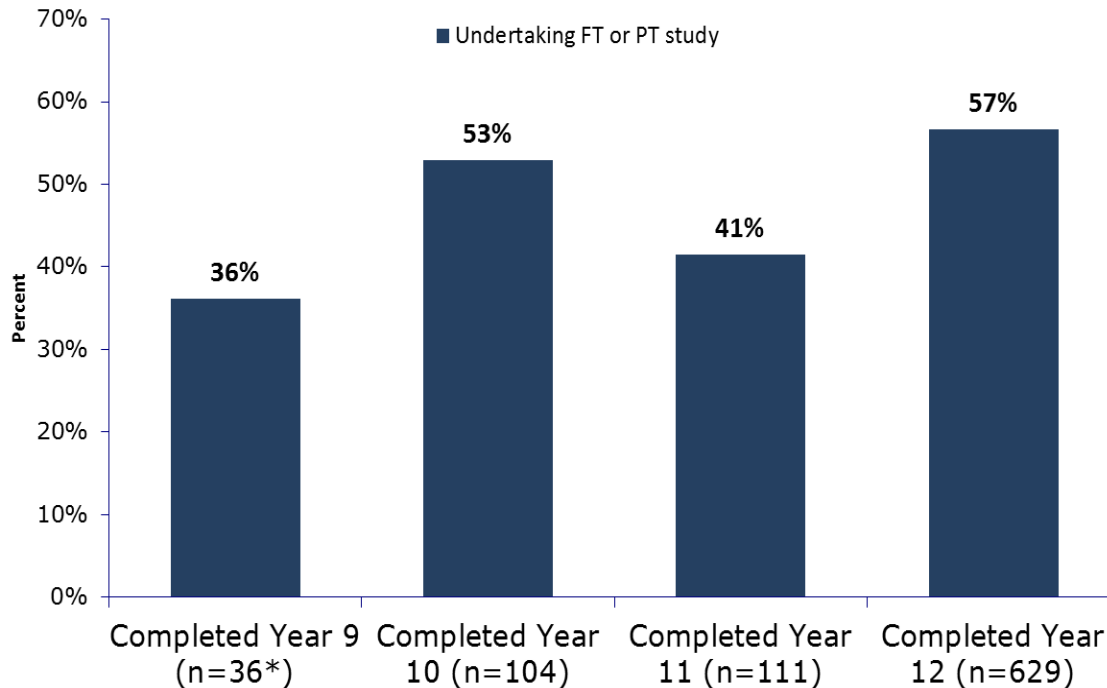
Source: survey data

\*Small sample size - treat with caution

- As expected, stronger engagement if completed Yr 12.
- Appears little difference between Yr 10 and Yr 11 leavers, however...



# Continuing study by highest level of school completed



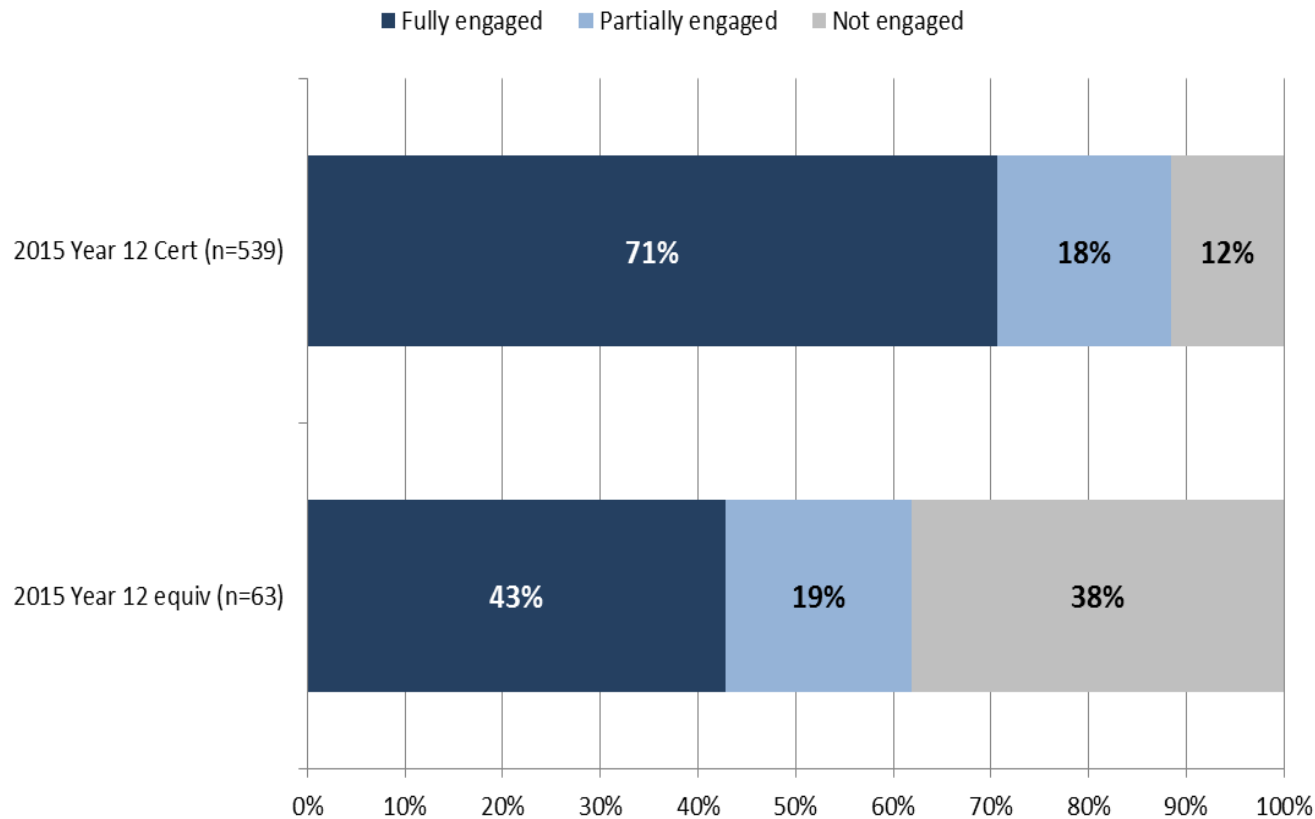
Base: former LfL students who have left school (n=880)

Source: survey data

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- Stronger likelihood of continuing study if completed Yr 12.
  - Young people completing Yr 10 much more likely to continue studying than those completing Yr 11.
  - In the longer term Yr 10 leavers are likely to have better outcomes than Yr 11 leavers
- Policy and practice implications

# Engagement rate – Yr 12 Certificate cf Yr 12 equivalent



- Much stronger engagement if Yr 12 Certificate
- Confirms other NCVER research
- Young people & parents may not be aware ➔ opportunity to intervene

# Reasons for early school leaving

- Multiple and complex

## Years 9-11

- Many related directly to ongoing challenging financial circumstances
  - Desire or need for financial independence
  - Earn own money
  - Get a job, apprenticeship or traineeship

## Years 9 and 10

- Range of school related factors also strongly linked to leaving school early
  - Problems with students and/or teachers
  - Missed a lot of school
  - Dislike school
  - Not doing well at school

- Opportunities for early intervention

# Some of what are we learning

- Year on year improvements in educational outcomes occurring at aggregate level & for individual students ➡ Family background ≠ destiny
- Long-term parental engagement in children's learning is possible in disadvantaged families – respectful reciprocal relationships, scholarship not welfare, different offerings at different stages, long-term support
- 'Best' attendance and engagement rates not related to parents' education
- Leaving school at the end of Yr 10 and Yr 11 can lead to different post-school engagement rates
- Some key opportunities for additional support eg Yr 6 to Yrs 7 & 8 re attendance, Yrs 10 to 12 re post school engagement

# Challenges and opportunities

- Challenges include: developing useful outcome measures that can be tracked over time, joys of Federation, lack of nationally comparable data, using admin data for research and practice, supporting staff to collect data, reflect on and change practice, lack of national clearinghouse, skills/time/resources required
- Enormous opportunity to use nationally unique dataset to help inform policy and practice – especially if used longitudinally
- Many families and young people happy to participate in research – recent survey of 6,000
- Staff want to make a difference to young people

# Key strategies and critical success factors



- Embedding small number of longer term outcomes in strategic plan gives organisational focus, clarity, internal & external accountability – including in Annual Report
- Cross organisational engagement critical inc Board, CEO and Executive and quarterly monitoring
- Regular communication through variety of formats involving whole organisation – CEO monthly newsletter, state conferences, Leaders Forums, cross-organisational functional groups, communities of practice etc
- Explicit emphasis on the ‘why’ of outcomes focus – effectiveness and advocacy
- Analysis for different groups of students and families – nuanced understanding of data

# Key strategies and critical success factors

- Staff want to make difference in young people's lives – develop a 'culture of effectiveness'
- Staff get data back and provided with opportunities to reflect on implications for practice in a structured way
- Training and supporting staff
- New induction processes for staff
- Responsive to data ➡ changes to program guidelines, engagement with families, increased role specialisation
- Noticing and rewarding effort, learning from what doesn't work as well as what does

# Conclusion

- Many disadvantaged children and young people at risk of poor outcomes
- Young people are entitled to achieve educationally
- Need stronger policy focus on building and sharing the evidence base on what works to improve disadvantaged young people's outcomes
- Improvements in educational outcomes are possible
- Linking outcomes to an organisation's mission and embedding outcomes measurement within the culture of an organisation is key
- Persistence, commitment, whole of organisation approach are required
- National NGOs can contribute in a unique way to evidence-based policy





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