



everyone's family

Commonwealth 2014-15 Budget Submission

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A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Smith Family has four key priorities for investment in the Commonwealth Government's 2014-15 Budget:

1. School education
2. Supporting families
3. Improving pathways to employment for young Australians
4. Constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

1. Education

The foundation for Australia's economic and social prosperity

The Commonwealth is faced with very significant fiscal and economic challenges, in both the short and long term, as outlined in the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook. A well educated population and the ability to draw on the nation's human capital, is the key to Australia's economic and social prosperity now and into the future.

Recent national and international data confirms the educational challenges facing Australia. Significant numbers of children, young people and adults are not meeting national and international education and skills benchmarks at the same time as many other nations have improved their educational performance. This is making Australia less able to compete internationally and putting additional strain on current and future Commonwealth budgets in a range of areas such as income support.

Given the critical role education plays in the nation's wellbeing, The Smith Family urges the Commonwealth to play a key role, in conjunction with the States and Territories, in both improving educational outcomes for all young people, and providing leadership to ensure disadvantaged children and young people are able to realise their full potential.

Recommendation 1

The goal of the Commonwealth Government's funding of schools should be a high quality and high equity system where all young Australians are able to achieve to the best of their ability. The basis of Commonwealth funding should continue to be needs-based, including per capita base funding for all schools and loadings for categories of disadvantage.

Recommendation 2

The Commonwealth take a leadership role in supporting improved educational outcomes and allocate adequate resources for:

- i. Monitoring and externally reporting on educational outcomes across Australia, including for different groups of students, such as those from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds and low socio-economic backgrounds.**
- ii. Identifying successful initiatives and approaches that improve educational outcomes and sharing that knowledge widely.**

Improving the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people

National data shows there is still significant work to be done in improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, with no improvement for example, in school attendance rates for these students between 2008 and 2012.

While noting the Commonwealth's new Remote School Attendance Strategy which aims to improve school attendance, The Smith Family urges the Commonwealth to consider investment in some existing initiatives which have been shown to be effective in improving the school attendance and educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, such as The Smith Family's *Learning for Life Scholarship* and *Girls at the Centre* programs.

Learning for Life

Currently more than 5,100 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people from communities across Australia are supported through the *Learning for Life*¹ program. The *Learning for Life* program provides a family with: a financial scholarship to help pay for educational essentials such as uniforms, books, computers and excursions; support from a Smith Family staff member; and access to a range of programs from the early years to tertiary level, to help ensure young people are attending school and remaining engaged in education.

Central to the program's effectiveness and efficiency is its coordination of community assets, skills and resources, and partnerships with educational institutions, community organisations and businesses. This approach ensures delivery of wraparound support focused on improving educational outcomes.

¹ In total 34,480 young people were on the *Learning for Life* scholarship program in 2012-13, of whom 5,100 were of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background.

Parental engagement is at the core of *Learning for Life*, with parents/carers entering into an agreement with The Smith Family that acknowledges their mutual commitment to supporting the young person's long term participation in education. This reciprocity is regularly reinforced, both formally and informally, including through biannual compliance requirements.

In 2012 average school attendance rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Years 1 to 10 who were on *Learning for Life* was 86%.² On average Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary students have been on the program for more than 4 years, highlighting its capacity to engage Aboriginal families over the long term. The program's current scale provides a very strong base for further expansion.

Girls at the Centre

Efforts aimed at improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people have generally paid limited attention to whether young girls and boys have different needs and require different approaches to keep them engaged in education. Women play a critical role in the economic growth of communities, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and The Smith Family sees the need for a stronger policy and program focus on supporting young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls to stay engaged in school and transition to further education, training and employment.

The Smith Family has designed and implemented the *Girls at the Centre* program, in partnership with Centralian Middle School in Alice Springs, since 2008. The program annually supports approximately 50 girls from Years 7 to 9. An independent evaluation concluded that *Girls at the Centre*:

- Significantly improves school attendance
- Positively impacts on life goals and skills
- Clearly impacts on community engagement with the school, especially through families
- Is highly valued by school staff, girl participants and their families.³

The average school attendance rate for girls participating in the program is 10% higher compared to other female students in the same school.

² There is no national attendance rate available for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. However, the average attendance rate for Year 8 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in NSW in 2012, for example, was 81%, while in South Australia it was 77% (SCRGSP, 2014).

³ The evaluation was conducted by Associate Professors Tess Lea and Catherine Driscoll from the University of Sydney.

Recommendation 3

That as part of its strategy to improve the school attendance and educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, the Commonwealth consider funding initiatives which have already been shown to be effective, including *Learning for Life* and *Girls at the Centre*.

More effective approaches to improve the educational outcomes of disadvantaged young Australians

The Smith Family also urges the Commonwealth to consider investment in initiatives that support improved educational outcomes for disadvantaged young people more generally.

There is strong consensus that schools cannot be expected to do the work of improving student outcomes alone, particularly in schools serving communities characterised by socio-economic disadvantage (DEECD, 2013). School-Community Hubs are an effective way of harnessing the necessary resources and expertise needed to support the learning and wellbeing of young people, especially those facing disadvantage. They provide the governance and accountability structures needed for effective collaboration between school education systems and the community, business, philanthropic and local government sectors (Black, 2008). The Hubs are responsive to the local needs of the school community, leverage new and existing resources and are a platform for targeted and coordinated activities and services that increase student and family engagement in schools and improve student learning outcomes.

An external evaluation of four hubs in Victoria has concluded that they have had a real impact on students, schools families and communities:

- Students have improved school readiness, increased engagement in learning and motivation, enhanced education and employment pathways and increased literacy and numeracy.
- Schools are student and family friendly, enriching environments, building staff and enhancing the capacity to partner.
- Families are more engaged in schools and their child's learning, and have more opportunities to input to their child's education.
- Community is increasingly engaged in student programs and there is more access for community partners to work with schools (DEECD, 2013).

A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Non-government organisations are particularly well placed to act as a facilitator in these hubs, bringing resources from across the business and philanthropic sectors, and the skills to work with a diversity of organisations to achieve the goal of improved educational outcomes for disadvantaged children. The hubs are an excellent complement to two of the Commonwealth's key education policy platforms - local autonomy and parent engagement.

Recommendation 4

The Commonwealth Government should consider directly funding the expansion of School Community Hubs, in partnership with state/territory governments, philanthropy and non-government organisations. These hubs provide the governance and accountability structures needed for effective collaboration between school education systems and the community, business, philanthropic and local government sectors to support improved educational outcomes for disadvantaged children and young people.

2. Supporting families

Family Support Program and place based initiatives

The Smith Family strongly endorses the implementation of place or community based models to address entrenched disadvantage and we urge the continuation of the *Communities for Children* program (CfC). The evidence from the external evaluation of CfC and our own experience as a Facilitating Partner in nine sites, is of its effectiveness in increasing access to services for all families, especially those who are vulnerable. The program's strong focus on early intervention and prevention is far more cost effective than remedial approaches that aim to address health, education and wellbeing problems when they emerge in later years.

The Smith Family considers there are a number of opportunities for better service integration which could be considered by the Commonwealth in its current suite of place-based initiatives. This includes aligning current 'whole of community' initiatives in a place/community and channelling planning for delivery of certain adult focussed services through CfC. In particular, there is the opportunity to integrate/merge the Department of Human Services' *Better Futures, Local Solutions* program with CfC. We also believe that programs directed towards supporting parents or carers to manage complex issues such as those associated with mental health or homelessness, should be effectively incorporated in CfC planning processes. These refinements would be both more effective in terms of desired outcomes and a more efficient use of public funds.

Recommendation 5

- i. The Commonwealth should continue funding for the *Communities for Children (CfC)* program which has consistently been shown to be effective.
- ii. The Commonwealth, in partnership with key stakeholders, should review the operations of its place-based/whole of community initiatives, with the aim of aligning these operations more closely in order to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of these programs.

3. Improving pathways to employment for young Australians

Critical to efforts aimed at strengthening the Australian economy and creating more jobs is young people's capacity to make successful transitions to employment. Currently young people account for 40% of all unemployed Australians and over a quarter of those aged 17 to 24 are not fully engaged in work or study. Improving pathways to employment for young people requires a concerted Commonwealth-led effort that focuses on both demand and supply factors and generates locally relevant initiatives that involve schools, employers, industry groups and community groups.

There is a need for example, for active work to be done with employers regarding future labour market needs and potential skills shortages at the local level. There is evidence too that schools and employers can find it difficult to work together, because of the very different ways their sectors operate.

In contrast, when schools and businesses are supported to develop strong and mutually beneficial initiatives, there are significant improvements for young people's pathways to employment. The *School Business Community Partnership Brokers* and *Work Inspiration* programs have demonstrated the capacity of cross-sectoral initiatives to positively impact on improving educational and employment pathway outcomes for young people. This is despite the relatively short timeframe in which both programs been operating. These programs provide a strong foundation for contributing to the Commonwealth's goal of strengthening the Australian economy and having young Australians able to successfully transition to employment.

Recommendation 6

The Commonwealth fund a national program aimed at improving young people's pathways to employment. The program should include a focus on both supply and demand and work across the school, business and community sectors and draw on the experience of successful initiatives such as the *School Business Community Partnership Brokers* and *Work Inspiration*.

4. Constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

The Smith Family strongly supports the recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Australian Constitution as well as the removal of any discriminatory elements it contains. We welcome the non-partisan support that has been shown for this initiative.

Recommendation 7

The Commonwealth to continue to advance the case and facilitate the steps required to build momentum and progress a successful referendum on constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Introduction

The Smith Family

The Smith Family welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to the Commonwealth Government on our priorities for the 2014-15 Federal Budget. The Smith Family is a national charity which has provided support to children, young people and families for over 90 years. Our mission is to create opportunities for young Australians in need by providing long-term support for their participation in education.

In 2012-13 our programs were delivered in 96 communities across all States and Territories and supported over 112,000 disadvantaged children, young people and their families, including over 11,000 from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds.

Our work focuses on improving three key long term outcomes for the young people we support, namely:

- Increasing school attendance.
- Increasing the proportion of Year 10 students who advance to Year 12 or equivalent.
- Increasing the proportion of young people in post-school education, training and/or work.

These outcomes are nationally significant given their clear link with the productivity agenda and a strong economy. The Smith Family has invested in the systems and processes to track the progress being made on these measures by the 34,000 young Australians we are supporting through our long-term *Learning for Life* scholarship program. Our evaluation work is unique in the Australian context, given that no other government or non-government organisation (NGO) is tracking the individual educational outcomes over time of such a large number of disadvantaged children and young people.

This submission draws on our long experience working across different streams of the service system, in particular, education, and family and community services, both as a service provider and as a facilitating partner for a range of government funded initiatives and programs.

B. INTRODUCTION



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Australia's economic and fiscal outlook

The Smith Family is cognisant that the Commonwealth is faced with very significant fiscal and economic challenges as outlined in the Mid Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook. Notwithstanding this, The Smith Family would urge that the Government's commitment to *'delivering better education'* (Our Plan: Real Solutions for all Australians), and reaffirmed in a range of subsequent announcements, remain central to its 2014-15 Budget. In its efforts to strengthen the Australian economy and create more sustainable jobs, we strongly recommend that there be a particular focus on improving young people's pathways to employment. We also urge the Commonwealth to continue its efforts to effectively support families, particularly through a focus on better integration of its place-based initiatives, and to advance progress on securing Constitutional recognition of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

C. KEY PRIORITIES FOR THE 2014-15 COMMONWEALTH BUDGET

The Smith Family has four key priorities for investment in the Commonwealth Government's 2014-15 Budget:

1. School education
2. Supporting families
3. Improving pathways to employment for young Australians
4. Constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

1. Education

The key to Australia's economic and social prosperity

The key to Australia's economic and social prosperity is a well educated population. However, national and international data confirms that Australia faces significant human capital challenges, placing its international economic competitiveness and social cohesion at risk. This is particularly problematic given Australia's population is ageing, other nations are developing increasingly skilled workforces, and there is a clear short and long-term imperative to strengthen our economy. It is therefore critical that all young Australians are able to fully develop the skills needed to participate in the highly skilled workplaces of the twenty first century.

Educational data showing Australia's economic prosperity is at risk

Data highlighting the educational challenges facing Australia include:

- Australia's average reading score for Year 4 students is significantly lower than the average score for 21 other OECD countries, including England and the United States (COAG Reform Council, 2013).
- There is a 20 percent difference in the proportion of young people from low socio-economic backgrounds and those from high socio-economic backgrounds who attain Year 12 or equivalent (73.7% compared with 93.2%), and only 54 percent of Indigenous young Australians complete Year 12 or equivalent (COAG Reform Council, 2013).
- Two in five 17 to 24 year olds from low socio-economic backgrounds are not fully engaged in work or study (COAG Reform Council, 2013).
- More than 40 percent of Australian adults have literacy skills below the level considered to be the minimum skill level required to cope with the demands of a modern society (Australian Industry Group, 2013 and OECD, 2010).

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The economic and social consequences of poor educational outcomes are severe for the individual, their family and Australia as a whole. Young people with poor educational outcomes are more likely to experience unemployment, poorer health and rely on income support payments.⁴ The consequences of this are particularly borne by the Commonwealth Government, given its responsibility for the national economy, employment services and income support.

Conversely, there is evidence from both Australia and the United States of the economic benefits to the public purse of increasing school completion. In America, the average lifetime economic benefits to the public sector per high school graduate (relative to those who have not graduated) was estimated in 2006 to be \$209,100 (US dollars) (Levin et al 2006).⁵ Similarly, work in Australia by Access Economics in 2005 estimated that an increase of 50,000 students retained in school or apprenticeships would result in a 1.1% increase in GDP by 2040 (Access Economics, 2005). The annual and cumulative economic benefits of improved educational outcomes are therefore very significant.

The Commonwealth's role in education

Given the critical role education plays in the wellbeing not only of individual Australians but the nation as a whole, The Smith Family considers the Commonwealth has a key role to play, in conjunction with the States and Territories, in both improving educational outcomes for all young people, and providing leadership to ensure disadvantaged children and young people are able to realise their full potential.⁶

The Smith Family considers the goal of the Commonwealth government's involvement in school education, including of funding schools, should be a high quality and high equity system, where all young Australians are able to achieve to the best of their ability. Our nation's current and future productivity depends upon it.

We welcome the Commonwealth Government's commitment to needs based funding to ensure those children and young people most in need of educational support receive it. We strongly urge that annually indexed needs-based school funding, which includes per capita base funding for all schools and loadings for

⁴ It has been estimated for example that poor literacy costs Australia \$18.35 billion or 2% of GDP (Cree et al, 2012)

⁵ At this rate, a benefit of \$1 billion would be accrued to the public sector from less than 5,000 additional high school graduates.

⁶ While constitutionally state and territory governments have responsibility for school education, there are a number of constitutional powers that enable the Commonwealth to enter the education arena and give it significant control. Section 96 for example provides that 'the Parliament may grant financial assistance to any State on such terms and conditions as the Parliament thinks fit' (Parliament of Australia, 2013).

C. KEY PRIORITIES FOR THE 2014-15 COMMONWEALTH BUDGET

categories of disadvantage, continue to be the basis for the Commonwealth's funding of schools.

Recommendation 1

The goal of the Commonwealth Government's funding of schools should be a high quality and high equity system where all young Australians are able to achieve to the best of their ability. The basis of Commonwealth funding should continue to be needs-based, including per capita base funding for all schools and loadings for categories of disadvantage.

The quantum of funds provided to schools and the method used for allocating such funds is clearly important. However equally important is how these funds are used within the school and educational system more broadly. It remains a significant concern that while education funding has increased over the past two decades, there have been limited returns in terms of improved educational outcomes. This has been exacerbated by the lack of evaluation of many funded programs, with knowledge on what is effective in improving educational outcomes more limited than is desirable, particularly given the significant investment.

The Smith Family therefore urges the Commonwealth to take a leadership role in monitoring and publically reporting on educational outcomes across the nation, including for different groups of students, such as those from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds or those from low socio-economic backgrounds. We also see the Commonwealth as best placed to play a leadership role in identifying successful initiatives and approaches that improve educational outcomes and for sharing that knowledge. In combination, these would contribute to more effective and efficient program delivery and better use of limited resources.

Recommendation 2

That the Commonwealth take a leadership role in supporting improved educational outcomes and allocate adequate resources for:

- i. Monitoring and externally reporting on educational outcomes across Australia, including for different groups of students, such as those from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds and from low socio-economic backgrounds.**
- ii. Identifying successful initiatives and approaches that improve educational outcomes and sharing that knowledge widely.**

Supporting improved educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people

The Smith Family commends the Commonwealth Government's ongoing commitment to Closing the Gap in outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and in particular its focus on improving their educational outcomes. National data shows there is still significant work to be done in this area. While there has been some improvement in the Year 12 attainment rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, there was, for example, no improvement in school attendance rates for these students between 2008 and 2012 and over 60% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people aged 17 to 24 years are not fully engaged in work or study after leaving school (COAG Reform Council, 2013). This is economically and socially very costly to the nation.

The Smith Family notes that the Commonwealth is implementing new initiatives aimed at improving school attendance, including the Remote School Attendance Strategy in 40 remote communities. We understand that the strategy will include a focus on parental, family and community engagement, which have been shown to be important factors in improving young people's educational and employment outcomes. It will be important that the outcomes of this new initiative are monitored so that progress can be tracked and evidence gathered of its effectiveness.

In addition to trialling the Remote School Attendance Strategy, The Smith Family would urge the Commonwealth to consider investment in some existing initiatives which have been shown to be effective in improving the school attendance and educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and which leverage existing community and other resources in a very cost-effective way. Two such initiatives are The Smith Family's *Learning for Life Scholarship* and *Girls at the Centre* programs.

Learning for Life Scholarship (LfL)

Currently more than 5,100 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people from communities across Australia are in receipt of scholarship support through the LfL program.⁷ The scholarship provides financial support to help pay for educational essentials such as uniforms, school shoes, books and excursions.

⁷ In total 34,480 young people were on the *Learning for Life* scholarship program in 2012-13, of whom 5,100 were of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background.

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In addition, each family receives the support of a Smith Family staff member and access to a range of programs from the early years to tertiary level⁸ to help ensure their child is attending school and remaining engaged in education. Using a 'whole of community' and evidence-informed approach, we leverage and coordinate the skills and resources of more than 7,000 volunteers, and partnerships with educational institutions, community organisations and businesses, to deliver a holistic wraparound suite of programs. We scaffold our efforts onto the social and physical assets of the school community, which contributes to both the effectiveness and efficiency of *Learning for Life*.

Parental and community engagement is at the core of the program, as parents/carers enter into an agreement with The Smith Family that acknowledges their mutual commitment to supporting the young person's long term participation in education. This reciprocity is reinforced throughout the program, both formally and informally, including through biannual compliance requirements.

In 2012 average school attendance rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Years 1 to 10 who were on *Learning for Life* was 86%⁹. On average our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary students have been on the program for over 4 years, highlighting the capacity of the program to engage parents and their children over the long term.

Costings

The investment required to support 300 young people and their families to stay engaged in education, through the *Learning for Life* program is approximately \$340,000 per community per annum.

Girls at the Centre

The significant national attention on enhancing educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people has generally not taken into account gender, and whether young girls and boys may have different needs and require different approaches to keep them engaged in education. Women play a critical role in the economic growth of communities, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Therefore The Smith Family sees the need for

⁸ These include literacy and numeracy programs, mentoring, learning clubs, career activities and creative enrichment programs. These programs build foundational skills, as well as enhance aspirations and confidence and expand the networks and resources young people can draw on, in particular around education, careers and employment.

⁹ There is no national attendance rate available for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. However, average attendance rates for Year 8 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in NSW in 2012, for example, was 81%, while in South Australia it was 77% (SCRGSP, 2014).

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a stronger policy and program focus on supporting young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls to stay engaged in school and transition to further education, training and employment.

While a number of programs have been implemented that focus on improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boys, there have been far fewer for girls. The external evaluation of the Commonwealth funded *Sporting Chance* program recommended that future funding be directed to increase the number of girls-only academies to address the current gender imbalance (ACER, 2011).

The Smith Family has designed and implemented the *Girls at the Centre* program, in partnership with Centralian Middle School in Alice Springs since 2008, in response to this clear need. The program annually supports approximately 50 girls from Years 7 to 9 to stay at school, build aspirations and boost their educational achievements. The program provides the intensive wrap-around support required to address the multiplicity of issues participants may face.

Through the program, the girls have access to positive educational experiences and role models, drawing both on the local community and a much wider suite of resources, to help them develop life skills and goals and establish a positive pathway to further study and work.

An independent evaluation of the program in 2011 concluded that *Girls at the Centre*:

- Significantly improves school attendance
- Positively impacts on life goals and skills
- Clearly impacts on community engagement with the school, especially through families
- Is highly valued by school staff, girl participants and their families.¹⁰

Our most recent evaluation data shows the average school attendance rate for girls participating in the program is 10% higher compared to other female students in the same school.

¹⁰ The evaluation was conducted by Associate Professors Tess Lea and Catherine Driscoll from the University of Sydney.

Costings

The investment required to expand *Girls at the Centre* is approximately \$300,000 per annum per community.

Recommendation 3

That as part of its strategy to improve the school attendance and educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, the Commonwealth consider funding initiatives which have already been shown to be effective, including *Learning for Life* and *Girls at the Centre*.

More effective approaches to improving educational outcomes for disadvantaged young Australians

In addition to an increased focus on effective initiatives that improve the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, The Smith Family would urge the Commonwealth to consider investment in initiatives that support improved educational outcomes for disadvantaged young people more generally.

There is strong consensus that schools cannot be expected to do the work of improving student outcomes alone, particularly in schools serving communities characterised by socio-economic disadvantage (DEECD, 2013). School-Community Hubs are an effective way of harnessing the necessary resources and expertise needed to support the learning and wellbeing of young people, especially those facing disadvantage. They provide the governance and accountability structures needed for effective collaboration between school education systems and the community, business, philanthropic and local government sectors (Black, 2008). The Hubs are responsive to the local needs of the school community, leverage new and existing resources and are a platform for targeted and coordinated activities and services that increase student and family engagement in schools and improve student learning outcomes.

The logic of School Community Hubs



(DEECD, 2013)

An external evaluation of four hubs in Victoria has concluded that “the Hub pilots have had a real impact on students, schools families and communities.

- **Students** have improved school readiness, increased engagement in learning and motivation, enhanced education and employment pathways and increased literacy and numeracy.
- **Schools** are student and family friendly, enriching environments, building staff and enhancing the capacity to partner.
- **Families** are more engaged in schools and their child’s learning, and have more opportunities to input to their child’s education.
- **Community** is increasingly engaged in student programs and there is more access for community partners to work with schools” (DEECD, 2013).

The approach of coordinating new and existing resources (both financial and other) in a way which flexibly responds to the particular needs and challenges of the community, is both an efficient and effective way of improving educational outcomes.

Non-government organisations, such as The Smith Family, are particularly well placed to act as a facilitator in these types of hubs, bringing not only additional resources from across the business and philanthropic sectors, but also the skills to work with a diversity of organisations to achieve the common goal of improved educational outcomes for disadvantaged children. They also bring a strong focus on monitoring and reviewing progress. The Smith Family is currently facilitating hubs in five high-need communities across three states. The hubs are an excellent complement to two of the Commonwealth’s key education policy platforms - local autonomy and parent engagement.

Costings

The annual cost of supporting this facilitation role is \$150,000 per annum per community. This is a very modest investment compared to the clear benefits that are generated over time in educational and employment outcomes.

Recommendation 4

The Commonwealth Government should consider directly funding the expansion of School Community Hubs, in partnership with state/territory governments, philanthropy and non-government organisations. These hubs provide the governance and accountability structures needed for effective collaboration between school education systems and the community, business, philanthropic and local government sectors to support improved educational outcomes for disadvantaged children and young people.

2. Supporting families

Family Support Program and place based initiatives

The Smith Family strongly endorses the implementation of place or community based models to address entrenched disadvantage. We consider the *Communities for Children* program (CfC),¹¹ “which provides services to ensure children have the best start in life by focussing on prevention and early intervention approaches that bring about positive family functioning, safety and child development outcomes for children and their families in disadvantaged communities”¹² should continue.

External evaluation and The Smith Family’s own experience as a Facilitating Partner in nine CfC sites, has demonstrated that a ‘whole of community’ approach is most effective in increasing access to services for all families in the community, especially those who are vulnerable. The strong CfC focus on early intervention and prevention is known to be more cost effective than remedial approaches that aim to address health, education and wellbeing problems when they emerge in later years. The national evaluation of CfC showed that investment in the initiative between 2005 and 2009 was upward of 100 million dollars, with an impressive return on investment of 377%.¹³

¹¹ Resourced through the Family Support Program

¹² <http://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/families-and-children/programs-services/family-support-program/family-and-children-s-services#cfc>

¹³ Access Economics, *Positive Family Functioning*, 2010, p.ii.

Improving service integration and the delivery of place based initiatives

Place based models which are well designed, implemented and resourced in a significant, long-term way, bring very significant social and economic returns. The *Communities for Children* program is a very good example of the type of work that is much more efficiently and effectively delivered by non-government organisations than government, given NGOs' strong facilitation skills, understanding of local community needs and how to address them and capacity to build and leverage social capital and other resources to achieve common goals. NGOs are generally more likely than government, to create systems and processes that have limited 'red tape' and they are also able to respond more agilely to changing community circumstances.

The Smith Family considers there are a number of opportunities for better service integration which could be considered by the Commonwealth in its current suite of place-based initiatives. This includes aligning current 'whole of community' initiatives in a place/community and channelling planning for delivery of certain adult focussed services through CfC. In particular, there is the opportunity to integrate/merge the Department of Human Services' funded *Better Futures, Local Solutions* program with the well-established CfC model. We also believe that programs directed towards supporting parents or carers to manage complex issues such as those associated with mental health, homelessness or domestic violence, can and should be effectively incorporated in CfC planning processes. These refinements would be both more effective in terms of desired outcomes and a more efficient use of public funds.

Recommendation 5

- i. The Commonwealth Government should continue funding for the *Communities for Children* program (CfC) which has consistently been shown to be effective.**
- ii. The Commonwealth, in partnership with key stakeholders, should review the operations of its place-based/whole of community initiatives, with the aim of aligning these operations more closely in order to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of these programs.**

3. Improving pathways to employment for young Australians

The Smith Family is aware that the Government has set itself the important task of developing a stronger economy which is able to deliver more jobs and opportunities for Australians. Central to this, is young people's capacity to make successful transitions from school to further education, training and into employment.

Recent data shows that continued efforts are needed in this regard as more than a quarter of 17 to 24 year olds are not fully engaged in work or study, with the figure being 41.7% for young people from the most disadvantaged backgrounds (COAG Reform Council, 2013). Further, young people account for 40% of all unemployed people in Australia, with this group being particularly impacted by periods of global economic challenge.

In improving pathways to employment for young Australians, attention to both demand and supply factors is required. Improving the educational outcomes of more young people is a critical part of improving the supply of young people able to meet the increasing skill demands of 21st century workplaces. In addition, many young people, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, will need support to navigate the increasingly complex school to employment transition. From The Smith Family's experience, key components to supporting disadvantaged young people to make a successful transition, include:

- Supporting young people to understand their interests, skills and abilities.
- Structured career development activities such as skills mapping and transferability, researching and analysing specific jobs and required qualifications and work experience, and identifying alternative TAFE, university and/or apprenticeship pathways.
- Exposure to meaningful and inspiring employment and workplace learning.
- Mentoring programs and experiential careers days that allow young people to explore and discuss a wide range of potential learning and work experiences.
- Supporting parents to better assist their child with the school to employment transition. For parents whose experience is limited to low-skilled and low paid occupations or who have limited labour market experience, especially in the Australian context, it is important to strengthen their skills, capacity and knowledge to provide well-informed and supportive employment and career advice to their children.

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Equally important in improving employment pathways for young people are demand-led initiatives which start with the employer and work backwards to prepare and match jobseekers to jobs. Engaging employers in the design and delivery of initiatives that lead to employment, including work experience, is a critical part of improving Australia's capacity to create sustainable jobs.

Initiatives aimed at improving the supply and demand sides of the employment equation for young people, are best delivered through partnerships involving schools, industry groups, employers, educational institutions and/or community organisations. Given the intersecting sectors involved in the issue and the size of the challenge facing Australia, no one sector or institution alone can take responsibility for addressing it. There is a need for example, for work to be done with employers regarding future labour market needs and potential skills shortages at the local level. There is evidence too that schools and employers can find it difficult to work together, despite the best of intentions, because of the very different ways their sectors operate and their respective needs. In contrast, when schools and businesses are supported to develop strong and mutually beneficial initiatives, there can be significant improvements for young people's pathways to employment.

In recent years, initiatives such as the *School Business Community Partnership Brokers* and *Work Inspiration* programs have begun to provide numerous examples of how such cross-sectoral partnerships can work to improve educational and employment outcomes for young people. These programs provide the foundations for further Commonwealth Government efforts in this area.

The *School Business Community Partnership Brokers* program¹⁴, of which The Smith Family is a provider in six regions across Australia, has generated significant local partnerships which have successfully tested solutions to identified education and employment gaps and intractable long-standing community problems. The partnerships have been developed and undertaken in ways which are of mutual benefit to young people, employers and schools. Examples of the partnerships created include:

- **Young Entrepreneurs Program** – run in partnership with the ANZ bank, this initiative has targeted disengaged young people in Year 10. 80% of the 130 participants have returned to or continued at school as engaged

¹⁴ Originally funded by the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training, now the Department of Education. The program was initially funded in July 2009.

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- students, transitioned to post-school studies, or entered the workforce in the Vocational Education and Training (VET) area.
- **Industry Jobs and Pathways CD and Career Hunter App** – this partnership has seen the creation of an Australian Industry Facts and Job Pathways CD and App that provides young people, their parents and teachers with up-to-date information on the 19 industries that make up the Australian workforce, in a format that is easy to use. This information includes size of industry, required job qualifications and expected employment growth areas and it has had very significant take-up.
 - **The Jack Martin Community Centre, Toowoomba** – after lying dormant for well over a decade this Community Centre has now been fully redeveloped and is operating as a centre for community, education, training and employment-related activities, led by the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

Work Inspiration is an employer-led campaign that aims to ensure that young Australians' first experience of work is meaningful and inspiring. *Work Inspiration* was introduced to Australia by the National Partnership Broker Network in 2011. In 2013, The Smith Family, the Foundation for Young Australians and the National Australia Bank became the founding partners responsible for piloting the approach in Australia. The approach has been well received by the participating employers and the young people and schools involved.

There are a range of examples of how *Work Inspiration* is contributing to the improved employment prospects of young Australians. This includes the **Yamaha Student Grand Prix** initiative which has seen a cross-sectoral collaboration work to address a skills shortage in the area of marine and motorcycle mechanics. The initiative has provided students in Year 9 with first-hand experience of these industries and had significant buy in from Yamaha Motor Australia, their associated dealerships, other industry players, schools, students and their parents. The local TAFE is re-thinking its training course and extending its offerings for this industry, as a consequence of their involvement.¹⁵

The *School Business Community Partnership Brokers* and *Work Inspiration* programs have demonstrated the capacity of cross-sectoral initiatives to positively impact on improving educational and employment pathway outcomes for young people. This is despite the relatively short timeframe in which both programs been

¹⁵ Further information on Work Inspiration is available is available at <http://www.thesmithfamily.com.au/~media/Files/Research%20and%20Publications/Research%20and%20Advocacy%20PDFs/Research%20and%20Evaluation%20page%20PDFs/work-inspiration-Aug-2013.ashx>

operating. These programs provide a strong foundation for contributing to the Commonwealth's goal of strengthening the Australian economy and having young Australians able to successfully transition to employment. The Smith Family therefore urges the Commonwealth to fund a national program aimed at improving young people's pathways to employment. The program should include a focus on both supply and demand and work across the school, business and community sectors and draw on the experience of successful initiatives such as the *School Business Community Partnership Brokers* and *Work Inspiration*.

Recommendation 6

The Commonwealth fund a national program aimed at improving young people's pathways to employment. The program should include a focus on both supply and demand and work across the school, business and community sectors and draw on the experience of successful initiatives such as the *School Business Community Partnership Brokers* and *Work Inspiration*.

4. Constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

The Smith Family strongly supports the recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Australian Constitution, as well as the removal of any discriminatory elements it includes.

We congratulate the Australian Parliament for passing the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Recognition Act 2013*, which acknowledges the unique and special place of Australia's First Peoples. The passing of the Act is an important step towards achieving constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

We particularly welcome the non-partisan support that this initiative has received and urge the Commonwealth to continue to advance the case and facilitate the steps required to build momentum and progress a successful referendum on constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Recommendation 7

The Commonwealth to continue to advance the case and facilitate the steps required to build momentum and progress a successful referendum on constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

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everyone's family

Total costings

This submission recommends three specific costed initiatives to the Commonwealth, which would support:

1. 300 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and their families per community through the *Learning for Life program*, at a cost of \$340,000 per annum.
2. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls and their families through the *Girls at the Centre* program, at a cost of \$300,000 per annum per community.
3. School Community Hubs at a cost of \$150,000 per annum per community.

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