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Submission to the Forrest Review: *Creating Parity Report*

September 2014

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Principles to underpin investment and efforts

Investment and efforts aimed at achieving parity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians should be underpinned by a clear set of principles and The Smith Family urges that these be developed as part of any Government response to the Forrest Review. The Queensland Government's *Social Services Investment Framework* and the *Principles for a partnership-centred approach for NGOs working with Aboriginal organisations and communities in the Northern Territory* provide some guidance in this regard. Such principles should clearly articulate the range of partnerships - including with government, community, business and philanthropy - that will be required to achieve parity.

A focus on improving children and young people's outcomes

The Smith Family welcomes the strong focus in the *Creating Parity* report on improving the education, wellbeing and transition outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

Fundamental to improving these outcomes is the capacity to forge long-term, respectful and reciprocal relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. While their history in this regard is not perfect, there is much evidence that indicates the capacity of non-government organisations to do this. They must be seen as a key partner with governments in efforts aimed at creating parity.

We strongly endorse the report's emphasis on early intervention and prevention as this is by far the most cost effective approach to long-term social and economic participation. Education is the key enabler of this participation.

Economic data shows that steady human capital investments in young people pay the greatest dividends, rather than a concentration only on a particular stage, such as preschool. Implementation of the recommendations of the Review should take this into account.

Parental engagement in children's learning, from the early years and right through school and beyond, is a critical influence on children's achievement, attendance, completion of school and overall wellbeing. Developing and sustaining this engagement must be front of mind for any efforts aimed at improving children and young people's educational outcomes. The Smith Family would urge additional emphasis be placed on strategies that are effective at strengthening parents' engagement with their child's learning. Schools alone – even with the most highly skilled teachers – cannot achieve parity without the home learning environment being strengthened.

Early years hubs located on school premises (Recommendation 1)

The Smith Family strongly supports the development of early years hubs that offer a range of supports and services to children and families, in a welcoming and accessible environment, and where possible located on school grounds. There are many Australian and international examples of such hubs working to support improved outcomes for disadvantaged children, young people and families. In many, non-government organisations are playing a key leadership and facilitation role, bringing additional skills and cross-sectoral resources to achieve the common goal of improving children's outcomes. While the school leadership team has a key role to play, they should not be burdened by the additional responsibility of leading the significant collaborative efforts required to establish and maintain these hubs. There is a growing body of research on the most effective forms of these hubs. In supporting the implementation of Recommendations 1.1 and 1.2 of the Review, The Smith Family would urge that this research be taken into account, including the most appropriate governance structures that support good outcomes for children.

School attendance (Recommendation 2)

The Smith Family has had a focus on improving school attendance for many years and the average attendance rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students on its *Learning for Life* scholarship program is 86%¹.

National efforts aimed at improving school attendance are currently hampered by the lack of consistent measurement and reporting across jurisdictions and sectors. The Smith Family strongly urges that national progress be urgently made on addressing this inconsistency.

International evidence suggests financial incentives can play a part in improving attendance, however Australian jurisdictions have struggled to implement such incentives in a way that positively impacts on school attendance over the long-term.

The Smith Family's experience indicates that while the financial support is very important to families (for example through our scholarship or the Family Tax Benefit), in isolation it may be insufficient to ensure sustained strong school attendance and educational achievement. Our experience suggests coordinated and targeted family support as well as access to a range of education related programs are also important components in bringing about long term improvements in educational achievement.

¹ The *Learning for Life* program provides a financial scholarship to assist families with education related expenses, the support of a Program Coordinator and access to a range of education related programs.

From a policy perspective, the *Learning for Life* program:

- is a cost effective way of supporting families in need with the cost of their children's education
- has a strong focus on school attendance and implements a range of family and community-tailored strategies to improve attendance
- is based on the principle of mutual responsibility and accountability
- is already being implemented at scale using a place-based approach which efficiently harnesses a range of resources
- is well regarded by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, with well over 5,000 young people currently supported
- could be further expanded relatively easily if funds were available.

The importance of gender

Efforts aimed at creating parity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians need to be mindful of gender. There has been more limited attention on the educational performance of Aboriginal girls relative to boys, despite the fact that women are often instrumental in bringing about social change through their role in the family and the wider community. Investment in initiatives that support improved educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls has the potential to have a positive impact that extends well beyond the individuals involved. The Smith Family would therefore urge that the Forrest Review recommend additional efforts aimed at improving the educational and employment outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls and women.

Implementation and accountability (Recommendation 6)

The Smith Family strongly supports the Forrest Review's focus on accountability, including public reporting processes through Parliament. The work of the former COAG Reform Council provides an example of how outcomes data can be reported on at regular intervals, including for different cohorts, and used to publicly track progress on key measures.

Young people's post school transitions (Chapter 4)

Stronger cross-jurisdictional and cross sectoral collaboration will be required if there is to be significant improvement in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people successfully taking up employment or post-school education and training.

Improving young people's employment pathways requires attention to both demand and supply factors. Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people need support to navigate the increasingly complex school to employment pathway. Demand-led initiatives which start with the employer and work backwards to prepare and match jobseekers to jobs is also key.

A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Initiatives aimed at improving transition pathways for young people, are best delivered through partnerships involving schools, industry groups, employers, educational institutions and/or community organisations. The Smith Family strongly believes there is a need for Commonwealth and State/Territory governments to go beyond their current policy and programmatic efforts in the youth transitions area. It therefore urges that consideration be given to a national program aimed at improving young people's pathways to employment. The program should include a focus on both supply and demand, work across the school, business and community sectors and draw on the experience of successful initiatives such as *Work Inspiration* and the *School Business Community Partnership Brokers*.

B. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

The Smith Family welcomes the opportunity to comment on the *Creating Parity* report and its strong focus on improving the education, wellbeing and transition outcomes of children and young people. The organisational context for the comments made in this submission includes our 92 year history supporting children, young people and their families, including many thousands from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, and our long-established emphasis on improving school attendance. This submission is informed by both our work on the ground in communities across Australia and our ongoing research and evaluation.

The Smith Family

The Smith Family is a national, independent charity committed to increasing the educational participation and achievement of Australian children and young people in need. We are Australia's largest national education-oriented charity.

Investing in the community to improve educational outcomes

Our annual income is approximately \$81 million, of which less than a third is from government. Each year we invest over \$50 million of our funds raised from non-government sources, to improve children's educational outcomes. This is complemented by the contribution of around 8,000 volunteers, the value of which is estimated at \$13.4 million. This highlights the capacity of community organisations to harness financial and other resources to improve children's wellbeing.

Sustained, reciprocal and purposeful relationships with families

The Smith Family forges relationships with disadvantaged families prior to children starting school and continues to provide various types of support for young people and their parents/carers, beyond the end of their formal school education. A significant proportion of those we support are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

In 2013-14, we supported more than 134,000 children, young people and their parents/carers across 96 communities in every State and Territory. Over 34,000 children and young people were supported through a long-term *Learning for Life* educational scholarship, including around 5,500 who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Half of the secondary students we support have been on the program for five years or more.

Learning for life has three integrated components:

- A modest biannual payment to families to cover education related expenses, such as books, uniforms and excursions.
- A *Learning for Life* Program Coordinator who works with the family to support their child's long-term participation in education.
- Access to a range of programs from the early years to the tertiary level to help ensure the child/young person is attending school and remaining engaged in education and that their parent/carer is supporting this participation.

B. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Families enter into a reciprocal agreement with The Smith Family, which undertakes that we will work together to support their child's long-term participation in education. Underlying the agreement are high expectations regarding school attendance, school completion and post-school engagement in employment, training or further education. This reciprocity is reinforced throughout the program, both formally and informally, including through biannual compliance requirements.

Evidenced based and publicly accountable

Research, evidence-based practice and high levels of public accountability underpin our work. We have a clear outcomes framework for all programs (see Appendix 1). In particular, with our *Learning for Life* students, we are tracking three key outcomes and performance indicators over time, and reporting on them in our Annual Report:

- School attendance – increase school attendance to 90% over time
- Completion of Year 12 or equivalent – increase the proportion of students achieving Year 12 or equivalent
- Post school engagement in employment or further education – increase the proportion of young people engaged post school in employment, training or work.

Cross sectoral partnerships

At the core of our work is a partnership approach. We have extensive cross-sectoral partnerships with corporates, Trusts and Foundations, universities and numerous non-government organisations. We have strong relationships with over 500 partner schools with whom we are working on a set of shared objectives focused on improving the educational and wellbeing outcomes of children and young people. We act as a bridge between families, education and community services as well as the broader community and business.

Principles for working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, organisations and communities

In 2013 we signed our second Reconciliation Action Plan to signal our continued public commitment to the reconciliation process. The stretch Reconciliation Action Plan has a range of actions and targets, with clear timelines, against which we report regularly. It can be accessed at <http://www.thesmithfamily.com.au/about-us/reconciliation-action-plan>

We have developed seven guiding principles which underpin our work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and these are included at Attachment 2. We are also a signatory to the *Principles for a partnership-centred approach for NGOs working with Aboriginal organisations and communities in the Northern Territory* which can be accessed at <http://nationalcongress.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/NGOPrinciples.pdf>

Our geographical footprint and the disadvantage experienced by our families

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families we support are well represented in all states and territories, with the proportion varying from eight percent of *Learning for Life* students in

B. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Victoria to 68 percent of those we support in the Northern Territory. While we generally do not work in remote or very remote communities, we have a strong presence in regional and metropolitan communities, with for example 35 percent of those we support in Tamworth being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background. The importance of implementing effective initiatives in both remote and non-remote areas is unquestionable if parity is to be achieved, given that 20 percent of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population lives in remote and very remote areas, and 60 percent in major cities and inner regional areas.

Table 1 gives an indication of the level of disadvantage experienced by the students we support through *Learning for Life*, including in non-remote areas. It compares aggregate demographic data from disadvantaged schools in NSW where we are supporting 50 or more students, with data from the students we support in the same schools.

Table 1: Characteristics of students The Smith Family supports compared with their school peers

	Student population in 50 NSW schools (total = 31,478)	Students supported by The Smith Family in same schools (total = 2,591)
Characteristic	Percent	Percent
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background	14.3	24.7
Parent/carer has completed Yr 12 or has post school education	80.3	39.4
Parent/carer has university education	12.5	3.4
Parent/carer is employed	79.0	18.4

The above data emphasises that on the key variables of parental education and employment, which are known to have a large influence on children's educational and employment outcomes, the young people we are supporting in these schools are more disadvantaged than their peers.

Principles of investment

The Smith Family notes the key drivers for change identified by the Forrest Review (p. 15). We would also draw attention to the *Principles for a partnership-centred approach for NGOs working with Aboriginal organisations and communities in the Northern Territory* and the approach taken by the Queensland Government in the development of its *Social Services Investment Framework*.

This Framework identifies a number of principles, including:

- Customers first – designing outcomes focused services around the needs of individuals, families and communities and taking a holistic approach to service delivery
- Partnership – including between and across Government agencies, the social service sector, private sector and the community
- Balanced investment – with a focus on early intervention and prevention
- Transparency – about decision making and how funding is used
- Accountability – monitoring measurable objectives and evaluating the effectiveness of initiatives
- Value for money – the most appropriate strategies to ensure delivery of the best outcomes by assessing value against cost
- Contestability – ensuring the best solution at the best possible price is being provided, encouraging more efficient and innovative service delivery, balancing the need to plan services on a long-term basis with incentives to bring about continuous improvement.
- Proportionality – necessary accountability requirements proportionate to the investment and a fair allocation of resources at an individual level, relative to the needs of others.

There is merit in having a clear set of principles to underpin investment aimed at achieving parity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and both of the documents referred to provide guidance on what these principles might be. Both take a broader view of the partnerships that will be required to bring about the desired change, going beyond just government to include the private and community sectors. While the Forrest Review acknowledges the important role of employers for example, a clearer statement around the principle of partnerships required would be valuable in order to create a sense of shared ownership. The Smith Family would urge that the principles underpinning investment in this area be articulated and clearly acknowledge the range of partnerships required to achieve parity.

Improving children and young people's outcomes (Chapter 1)

The Smith Family strongly endorses the Report's emphasis on early intervention and prevention and supporting improved outcomes for children and young people. Early intervention is by far the most cost effective approach to long-term social and economic participation. The clearest pathway to addressing inter-generational disadvantage and welfare dependency is to support children and young people to develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours that set them up for participating in the complex employment market of the 21st century. Education is the key enabler of this participation.

Ensuring children get the most out of their education however cannot be achieved by schools alone. As Professor John Hattie has noted students account for 'about 50% of the variance of achievement and teachers account for about 30% of the variance'². Parental engagement in children's learning, from the early years and right through school and beyond is a critical influence on children's achievement, attendance, completion of school and overall wellbeing³. Developing and sustaining this engagement must be front of mind for efforts aimed at improving children and young people's educational outcomes. The Smith Family would therefore urge additional emphasis be placed on initiatives that are effective at strengthening parents' engagement with their child's learning. Educational institutions alone – even with the most highly skilled teachers – cannot achieve parity without the home learning environment being strengthened.

Balanced investment across the early years and through adolescence

The Review has highlighted the importance of the early years for children's long-term wellbeing and this is unquestionable given the brain and other developments which occur during this period.

However, the conclusion of Nobel economist James Heckman and his colleague Flavio Cunha is that when investments are balanced throughout a young person's childhood - instead of concentrated only on a particular stage, such as preschool or adolescence - society reaps the greatest return. This includes with respect to high school and university graduations and a reduction in welfare dependency and involvement with the criminal justice system. They indicate that steady human capital investments in young people pay the greatest dividends. In implementing recommendations and investments across both the early years and schools area, this key finding should be taken into account.

² Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development *Visible learning: what's good for the goose* April 2010.

³ Australian Government Closing the Gap Clearinghouse *Engaging Indigenous parents in their children's education*, Resource sheet no. 32, July 2014.

Early years hubs located on school premises (Recommendation 1)

The Smith Family strongly supports the development of early years hubs that offer a range of supports and services to children and families in a welcoming and accessible environment. When operating at their most effective, locating these hubs on school grounds can help build early and positive relationships between the school and families, reduce the reluctance to access services and promote a more seamless transition to 'formal school'. There is also significant merit in considering hubs that work beyond the early years and into the primary and secondary years to provide integrated support to young people and their families.

There are many Australian and international examples of such hubs working in particular to support improved outcomes for disadvantaged children, young people and families. In a number of them, such as the Western Australian Government's Child and Parent Centres, the Queensland Government's Early Years Centres, and in jurisdictions where hubs target primary and secondary aged students, non-government organisations are playing a key leadership and facilitation role. Using non-government organisations in this way brings not only additional resources from across the business and philanthropic sectors, but also the skills of working with families and a diversity of organisations to achieve the common goal of improving outcomes for disadvantaged children. While the school leadership team has a key role to play in such hubs, their core expertise is educational leadership and pedagogy and they should not be burdened by the additional responsibility of leading the significant collaborative efforts required to establish and maintain these hubs.

There is a growing body of research on the most effective forms of these hubs. In supporting the implementation of Recommendations 1.1 and 1.2 of the Forrest Review, The Smith Family would urge that this research be taken into account, including the most appropriate governance structures that support good outcomes for children.

School attendance (Recommendation 2)

The Smith Family has had a focus on improving school attendance for many years and this is reflected in its Key Performance Indicator of increasing school attendance of students on *Learning for Life* to 90% over time. The average attendance rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students on *Learning for Life* is currently 86%. We closely monitor individual students' attendance, including year on year changes. This regular monitoring is important to encourage families in their progression towards 90% attendance and so that support can be provided to families if they are experiencing additional difficulties. For families where there has been a history of attendance well below 80 percent, helping them to make incremental change and celebrating positive improvements is a critical part of sustaining long term change.

Lack of nationally consistent school attendance measures

National efforts aimed at improving school attendance are currently thwarted by the fact that there is no uniform way of measuring and reporting school attendance across jurisdictions and sectors. This will impact on the capacity to implement part of Recommendation 2 of the Review. The Smith Family has students in around 4,000 schools so is acutely aware of this issue and as a result has developed its own methodology for consistently reporting on the attendance of the students it supports. We would therefore strongly urge that national progress be urgently made on addressing the current inconsistency in measuring school attendance, given its key link with school achievement and Year 12 completion.

The role of non-government organisations and financial incentives

While acknowledging the role governments can and should play in supporting improved school attendance, The Smith Family's experience highlights the role non-government organisations are also playing in this area. The capacity of such organisations to develop and sustain long-term, respectful and purposeful relationships is understandably beyond that of governments and should be capitalised on in initiatives aimed at creating parity.

Financial incentives can play a part in improving attendance as noted internationally by Gneezy et al (2011), "Overall the evaluation of programs using incentives to reward enrolment and school attendance in the short run is positive. These incentives combine two characteristics...the programs offer incentives for concrete tasks... Second, incentives are offered to families and...therefore do not directly affect the motivation of those being educated."⁴

However, the Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) has noted the implementation challenges in the local context of the School Enrolment and Attendance Measure (SEAM), with only one quarter of children estimated as having low attendance (set at 80% rather than 90%) developing school attendance plans in 2013. The ANAO also noted that 'evaluations of the SEAM trial have observed that the trial's impact on school enrolment was unclear, and that while there were some small improvements in school attendance levels, these often proved temporary'⁵.

The Smith Family's experience indicates that while the financial support provided by *Learning for Life* is very important to families (as with our scholarship or Family Tax Benefits), in isolation it may be insufficient to ensure sustained strong school attendance and educational achievement. This is why *Learning for Life* has two additional

⁴ Gneezy U et al When and why incentives (don't) work to modify behaviour, *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Vol 25, Number 4, Fall 2011 p 191-210.

⁵ Australian National Audit Office Audit Report No 51 2013-14 *The improving school enrolment and attendance through welfare reform measure* p18.

components, namely targeted family support from a *Learning for Life* Program Coordinator and access to a range of education related programs. The latter includes 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.

Learning for Life is currently almost entirely funded from non-government sources with an indicative annual investment to support 300 young people and their families in a community through the program of approximately \$340,000 per annum.

From a policy perspective, the *Learning for life* program:

- is a cost effective way of supporting families in need with the cost of their children's education
- has a strong focus on school attendance and implements a range of family and community-tailored strategies to improve attendance
- is based on the principle of mutual responsibility and accountability
- is already being implemented at scale using a place-based approach which efficiently harnesses a range of resources
- is well regarded by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, with well over 5,000 young people currently supported
- could be further expanded relatively easily if funds were available.

Initiatives such as *Learning for Life* which are well established and robustly evaluated can play an important role in efforts aimed at improving parity regarding school attendance.

The importance of gender

Efforts aimed at creating parity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians need to also be mindful of gender. In recent years there has been a focus on the educational performance of Aboriginal boys and young men, with a range of programs developed that target them. However fewer programs have been developed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls. The programs that have been designed to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, tend to use sport to attract and encourage participation. This approach does not appeal to all children and young people and is less effective in attracting and retaining girls.

D. PRENATAL, EARLY CHILDHOOD AND EDUCATION



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Research shows that among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, females require a higher level of education than males, to 'experience the same level of wellbeing'⁶. More specifically, among 15 to 34 year old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the positive influence of education is stronger for women than men⁷.

Women are often instrumental in bringing about social change through their role in the family and the wider community⁸, therefore, investment in initiatives that support improved educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls has the potential to have a positive impact that extends well beyond the individuals involved.

Effective initiatives aimed at improving girls' educational outcomes need to:

- offer a wide variety of recreational and personal development opportunities
- be future focussed
- encourage girls and young women to think broadly about the range of options that may be available to them
- involve families and communities
- support girls and women to develop the skills and networks required to achieve their goals.⁹

The Smith Family would therefore urge the Forrest Review to note the importance of gender in efforts aimed at improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people's educational and employment outcomes, and recommend additional efforts in this regard.

⁶ Biddle N and Cameron T 2012 *Potential factors influencing Indigenous education participation and achievement*, National Centre for Vocational education Research, Adelaide.

⁷ Karmel T et al 2014 *Improving labour market outcomes through education and training*, issues paper no. 9, Closing the Gap Clearinghouse, Australian Government, Canberra.

⁸ World Health Organisation 2014 *Investing in women and girls: progress in gender equality to reap health and social returns*

⁹ Doyle L and Hill R 2012 *The best of every woman: An overview of approaches for philanthropic investment in Aboriginal women and girls*, AMP Foundation, Sydney.

Implementation and accountability (Recommendation 6)

The Smith Family strongly supports the Forrest Review's focus on accountability, including public reporting processes through Parliament. Ensuring that data is publicly reported, both at aggregate and disaggregated levels, is critical if real progress is to be made on achieving equity. The Commonwealth Government's commitment to publicly reporting on the Closing the Gap targets is an important component of this.

The Smith Family notes the important public data reporting role that the former COAG Reform Council played, including in providing data on young people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds. It provides an example of how outcomes data can be reported on at regular intervals, including for different cohorts, in order to publicly track progress on key measures.

Significant numbers of young Australians from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds are making poor post-school transitions to employment, education and training. Stronger cross-jurisdictional and cross sectoral collaboration will be required if there is to be significant improvement in this area. Policy and programmatic approaches which take account of, but are not hampered by, the respective jurisdictional responsibilities for education, employment and community services are needed if we are to make serious progress on this key economic and social indicator.

Attention to both demand and supply factors is required with many young people, needing support to navigate the increasingly complex school to employment transition. There is considerable evidence for example, that there is often a sizeable gap between what children and young people aspire to be in adulthood and their knowledge of the steps they need to take to get there.¹⁰

From The Smith Family's experience, key components to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 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.

Demand-led initiatives which start with the employer and work backwards to prepare and match jobseekers to jobs is also a key dimension. 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.

¹⁰ Beavis et al, 2004, cited in Skattebol J et al, 2012, *Making a difference: Building on young people's experiences of economic adversity*.

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.

The *Work Inspiration* program, a joint initiative of the Foundation for Young Australians, The Smith Family and National Australia Bank has proven to positively engage students who are at risk of becoming disengaged from school, or face other barriers to education and employment' (Interim Report on Welfare Reform, 2014 p. 104). *Work Inspiration* is an employer-led initiative that is changing the quality and availability of work experience for young Australians. It offers hands-on experiences, career conversations and opportunities for student reflection and feedback.

The Commonwealth funded *School Business Community Partnership Brokers* program¹¹, of which The Smith Family is a provider in six regions across Australia, has also generated significant local partnerships which have successfully tested solutions to identified education and employment gaps. The partnerships have been developed and undertaken in ways which are of mutual benefit to young people, employers and schools. They have built the capacity of communities to work together to improve young people's transitions to employment.

The *Work Inspiration* and *School Business Community Partnership Brokers* programs have demonstrated the capacity and the need for cross-sectoral initiatives that positively impact on improving educational and employment pathway outcomes for young people. This is despite the relatively short timeframe in which both programs have been operating. These outcomes could not have been achieved by one jurisdiction or sector operating alone. Nor could the current (or potentially anticipated) design of Australia's employment services realise these types of partnerships.

¹¹ Funding for the program ceases at the end of 2014.

G. YOUNG PEOPLE'S POST SCHOOL TRANSITIONS

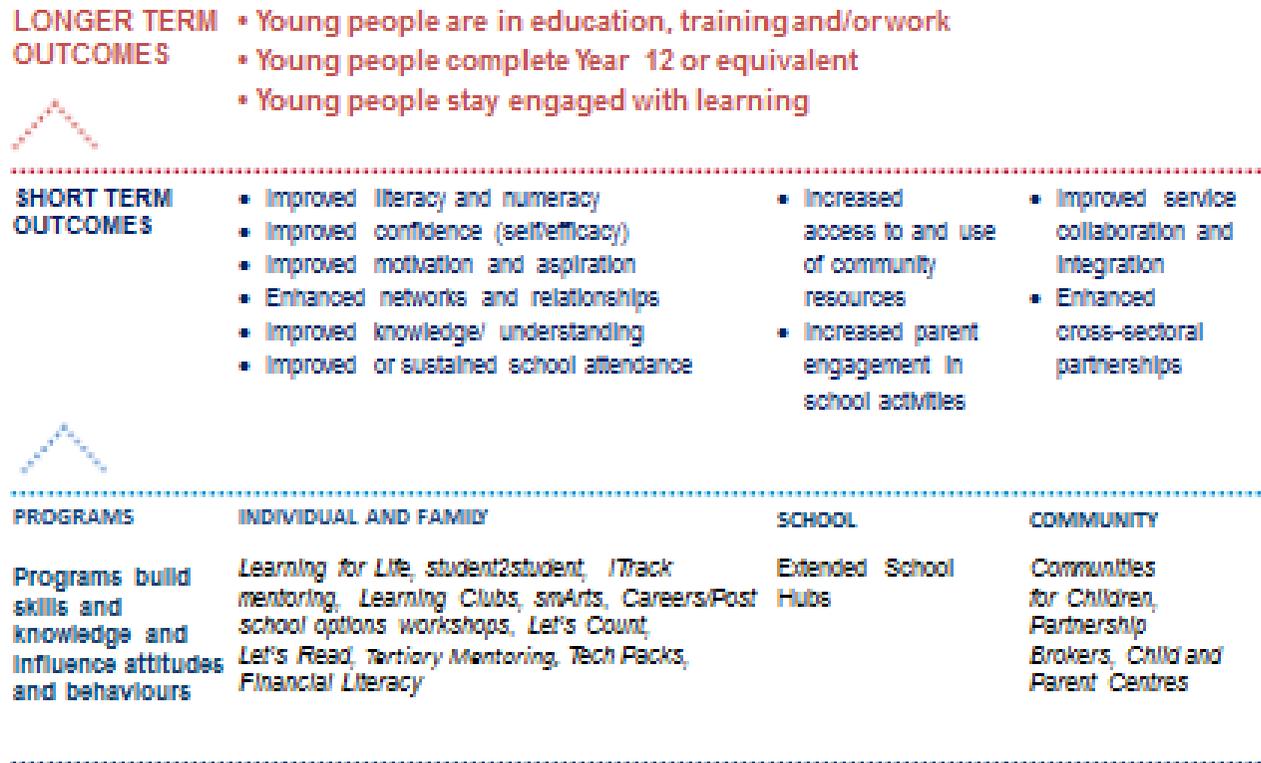


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The Smith Family strongly believes there is a need for the Commonwealth and the states/territories to go beyond their current policy and programmatic efforts in the youth transitions area. It therefore urges that consideration be given to a national program aimed at improving young people's pathways to employment. The program should include a focus on both supply and demand, work across the school, business and community sectors and draw on the experience of successful initiatives such as *Work Inspiration* and the *School Business Community Partnership Brokers*.

APPENDIX 1: THE SMITH FAMILY'S OUTCOMES MAP

Programs contribute to short and longer term outcomes



APPENDIX 2: The Smith Family's Guiding Principles

The following seven Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander guiding principles were first adopted within The Smith Family in 2008 and adapted in 2012.

1. Together we seek the involvement, advice and guidance of people with expertise and acknowledge their contribution. Wherever possible, we work on the evidence-based understanding that for sustainable improvement in educational achievement and wellbeing, working together with Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander Elders, Respected and Recognised Leaders, Parents, Teachers and Community Leaders (among others) will be crucial.
2. Together we are working towards effective practice and will where ever possible follow agreed principles for investments and soft entry pathways that promote a sustainable and inclusive approach in the delivery and or design of services in urban, regional and remote locations.
3. Together we understand that achieving impact will take time to build trusting relationships. Together we adopt a 'whole of community' generational approach that focuses on building the developmental capacity of a place or community in a sustainable manner, that promotes respect and understanding for how ideas and concepts relate to Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander knowledge systems.
4. Together we adopt a strengths-based approach, appreciating that Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander Australians have expert knowledges, skills and abilities; and the potential to develop other skills and capacity to address problems¹⁷, develop and design programs and deliver these.
5. Together we build trusting relationships, connecting people, resources and ideas. Within the spirit of working together and the power of possibilities in relationships we also aim to where ever possible work together to build the capacity of Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander managed organisations and promote opportunities for Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander employment.
6. We are transparent and accountable in managing complex community-based systems of collaboration and action. Together our accountability for outcomes is to Elders, families, communities, supporters, school principals, staff, school councils and community leaders as well as to our corporate and government business partners and others.
7. As an evidence-based organisation we also incorporate appropriate evaluation processes to ensure that we have the highest standards of transparency and risk management in providing support together in our communities.