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Submission on the Discussion Paper for the Review of the Tasmanian Education Act

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The Smith Family

The Smith Family's mission is to create opportunities for young Australians in need by providing long-term support for their participation in education. It is committed to working in partnership with families to enhance the home learning environment and builds social capital to help students achieve their educational aspirations. We are Australia's largest education-oriented charity, supporting more than 134,000 children and young people and their parents and carers per year. This includes around 3,000 in Tasmania.

The Smith Family welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission on the Discussion Paper for the Review of the Tasmanian Education Act. We endorse the explicit linking of a highly educated workforce to improving Tasmania's economy. Education is critical both economically and socially to individuals, families and communities. The Smith Family also strongly supports the discussion paper's emphasis on a 'whole of community' response to improving the participation, retention and engagement of students in Tasmania.

Educational performance in Tasmania

While some progress has been made in the educational outcomes being achieved by young Tasmanians, there is still a considerable way to go, particularly in the critical area of Year 12 completion and post-school engagement in work or study. The apparent retention rate for Tasmanian students from Year 7 to Year 12 in 2013 was 68.7%, significantly below the national figure of 81.6%, with an improvement of less than 2% over the last five years. Further, at the 2011 Census, one in three Tasmanians aged 17 to 24 years were not fully engaged in work or study. This compares with one in four nationally.

Guiding principles for education

The Smith Family supports the inclusion of guiding principles within the Tasmanian Education Act. This provides an opportunity for a clear and shared vision on the purpose of education to be developed, owned by the community and embedded within the legislative framework which underpins education in Tasmania.

The Smith Family would argue that a broad vision for the purpose of school education be included in the Act, with the United Nations' *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* and the *Australian Education Act 2013*, providing direction for the Tasmanian Act's guiding principles.

Parent, community and education partnerships

Improving and sustaining the educational and wellbeing outcomes of children and young people in Tasmania will require strong partnerships between schools, educational organisations and systems, families, community organisations, businesses and the wider Tasmanian community.

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. The Smith Family therefore strongly supports an increased focus on parent, community and education partnerships, both in the legislative framework pertaining to education in Tasmania, but also in the policy and programmatic responses that support it.

School Community Hubs

School Community Hubs are a strong example of effective parent, community and education partnerships. They successfully harness 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. 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 Smith Family is operating seven such hubs across Australia, including two in Tasmania.

The hubs provide insights that are transferable to other communities and the learnings from them can contribute to systems' redesign. Realising this opportunity will require leadership from the Department of Education, and The Smith Family would welcome the opportunity to continue and extend our partnership with the Department in these initiatives.

Early intervention, prevention and balanced investment across a child's life

Prevention and early intervention approaches can generate greatly improved outcomes for individuals and families and are particularly important for disadvantaged families. There has been a significant focus in Tasmania on early intervention initiatives, such as Launching into Learning, the Child and Family Centres and the work of the Tasmanian Early Years Foundation. These initiatives have helped to strengthen the developmental and educational outcomes of children and the capacity of families to provide a home learning environment where children can thrive. The Smith Family would urge a continued focus on such initiatives in Tasmania and on strong participation in high quality early learning and care services which support children and parents' capacity to support their child's development.

Keeping young people engaged in education

The Smith Family would also urge the Tasmanian government to take into account the research of Nobel economist James Heckman, which notes the importance of balanced intervention across different stages of childhood and adolescence for disadvantaged

A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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young people. This will be critical in addressing the key challenge of low Year 12 completion.

While increasing the leaving age for young people may seem an easy policy response to the relatively low proportion of young people completing Year 12, in isolation it is unlikely to achieve the broader goals being sought by the Tasmanian government. The Smith Family would argue that more effort needs to be focused on improving the achievement of young people across primary and secondary schools as achievement is an important predictor for Year 12 attainment.

The Smith Family believes that a critical part of helping young people to stay on to Year 12 is more structured and innovative approaches that help them better understand the employment market and opportunities of the 21st century. Without this understanding, many young people may fail to realise the value of Year 12 or equivalent to them. Programs such as *iTrack* and *Work Inspiration*, as well as a stronger career development strategy across schools, can all contribute to keeping young people engaged in education.

Student records and data

The Smith Family has a strong focus on evaluation and the use of data to both better support students and assess the effectiveness of our work with them. We strongly support consideration being given to how the collection and use of data can better inform decision making in relation to the delivery of education in Tasmania, including sharing data with non-government organisations.

School attendance, achievement and Year 12 completion

There is strong evidence of the link between school attendance and achievement, and in turn Year 12 completion. Relative disadvantage is associated with poorer school attendance from the beginning of formal schooling. Addressing these attendance gaps is critical to improving Year 12 completion rates and setting up young people to make post school transitions to employment or further education. The Smith Family strongly endorses the discussion paper's focus on school attendance.

Critical in ensuring strong school attendance is ensuring parents are engaged in their child's learning across all years. The Smith Family's *Learning for Life* program is an effective initiative for supporting disadvantaged children to have strong school attendance and complete Year 12. From a policy perspective, the *Learning for life* program:

- 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; and
- is being implemented at scale using a place-based approach which efficiently harnesses a range of resources.

A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The *Learning for Life* program could be expanded within the Tasmanian context as part of the Government's efforts aimed at improving school attendance.

Conclusion

Given the importance of education to individual Tasmanians and the state as a whole, and the current educational outcomes being achieved by young Tasmanians, the review of the Tasmanian Education Act and broader policy and programmatic developments in the education portfolio, are very timely.

The Smith Family particularly endorses the discussion paper's focus on parent, community and education partnerships; school attendance; improving Year 12 completion; and the development of guiding principles for the Education Act.

The policy and programmatic recommendations contained in this submission draw on The Smith Family's extensive experience in improving the educational outcomes of disadvantaged children and young people in Tasmania and across Australia. We look forward to building on this work further, in partnership with the Tasmanian government and wider community.

B. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

The Smith Family welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission on the *Discussion Paper for the Review of the Tasmanian Education Act*. We endorse the explicit linking of a highly educated workforce to improving Tasmania's economy as outlined in the Foreword to the Discussion Paper. We also note that as the Victorian Auditor has identified (2012, p vii), educational attainment is an important predictor of a citizen's future health, employment and welfare prospects - and it improves their ability to contribute socially and economically in the community. Education is critical both economically and socially to individuals, families and communities. The Smith Family also strongly supports the discussion paper's emphasis on a 'whole of community' response to improving the participation, retention and engagement of students in Tasmania.

The Smith Family nationally

The Smith Family is a national, independent charity committed to increasing the educational participation and achievement of Australian children and young people in need. Established more than 90 years ago, we are Australia's largest education-oriented charity.

The Smith Family forges relationships with disadvantaged families prior to children starting school and continues to provide various types of support for children and their parents/carers, beyond the end of young people's formal school education.

At the core of our work is a partnership approach. We have extensive cross-sectoral partnerships, including with 137 corporate partners, 73 Trusts and Foundations, 25 universities and numerous non-government organisations. Our annual revenue is around \$81 million, of which around a third is from government.

We also have strong relationships with over 500 partner schools with whom we are working on a set of shared objectives, focused on improving the education and wellbeing outcomes of children and young people. We act as a bridge between families, education and community services, as well as business and the broader community.

In 2013, The Smith Family supported more than 134,000 children and young people and their parents/carers through its programs across 94 communities in every State and Territory. Over 34,000 children and young people were supported through a *Learning for life* (LfL) educational scholarship, including around 5,500 who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. All LfL families are low income, as they either have a Health Care Card or are on a pension. Fifty five percent of families on LfL are single parent and close to 70 percent of LfL parents are not in the labour force or are unemployed.

Research and evidence-informed practice underpins all our work. We have a clear outcomes framework for all programs (see Attachment 1). In particular, for students on our LfL long-term educational scholarship, we are tracking three key outcomes over time:

- School attendance

B. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

- Completion of Year 12 or equivalent
- Post school engagement in employment or further education.

The average school attendance rate for LfL primary school students in 2012 was 90.4% and for secondary students it was 84.6%. 62.5% of LfL students who were in Year 10 in 2011 advanced to Year 12 by 2013. Eighty percent of students who left the LfL program in Years 10,11 or 12 were engaged in employment, training or further education 12 months after leaving the program – 62% were fully engaged (35 hours or more) and 18% were partially engaged.

The Smith Family in Tasmania

In Tasmania, The Smith Family is supporting around 3,000 children, young people and their parents/carers through our education and career-related programs, including 500 students on a LfL scholarship. Approximately 20% of these LfL students identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. Our educational programs in Tasmania include early literacy and numeracy programs, *Let's Read* and *Let's Count*; a peer-to-peer reading program, *Student2Student*; *i-track*, an online career mentoring program; *Learning Clubs*, many with a strong parental engagement focus; and financial literacy programs, *Saver Plus* and Certificate 1 in Financial Literacy. In 2015 we have plans to offer *Work Inspiration*, an employer-led work experience initiative.

Our work in Tasmania is particularly well targeted to support disadvantaged and low income families, as we are working with and through 16 partner primary and secondary schools in the communities of Bridgewater/Gagebrook; Burnie/Wynyard; Chigwell/Claremont; and North East Launceston. Over the coming few years, as our LfL student cohort moves through high school, The Smith Family anticipates developing formal partnerships with Tasmanian Colleges and higher education institutions in order to provide long-term support to our students and families.

Educational performance in Tasmania

An important context for the review of the Tasmanian Education Act is the current educational performance of children and young people, from the early years through to post-school transitions. The 2012 Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) showed that one in five (21.5%) Tasmanian children in their first year of school, were developmentally vulnerable on one or more key domains which are critical to children's long-term health, education and social outcomes (Australian Government, 2013). This was a small, but not significant improvement, on results for 2009. The one in five figure for Tasmania was comparable with most other Australian states, but it means there is a significant proportion of children starting school behind in one or more areas which are critical for their development.

The 2014 NAPLAN results for Tasmania include the following data:

- 6% of Year 3 students did not meet the national minimum standard for reading. For children from low SES the figure was 13.4%.

B. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

- 5% of Year 9 students did not meet the national minimum standard for numeracy. The figure was 10.6% for children from low SES (ACARA 2014).

The apparent retention rate for Tasmanian students from Year 7 to Year 12 in 2013 was 68.7%, significantly below the national figure of 81.6% (ABS 2014), with an improvement of less than 2% over the last five years (COAG Reform Council 2013). At the 2011 Census, one in three (33.4%) Tasmanians aged 17 to 24 years were not fully engaged in work or study. This compares with one in four (27.3%) nationally (COAG Reform Council 2013).

Therefore, while some progress has been made in the educational outcomes being achieved by young Tasmanians, there is still a considerable way to go, particularly in the critical area of Year 12 completion and post-school engagement in work or study. Parental engagement is one of the most crucial factors influencing a child's successful education. The Smith Family is committed to intergenerational approaches that enhance the home learning environment and build social capital to help students achieve their educational aspirations. The review of the Tasmanian Education Act and broader policy and programmatic developments in the education portfolio are therefore timely.

The Smith Family supports the inclusion of guiding principles within the Tasmanian Education Act. This provides an opportunity for a clear and shared vision on the purpose of education to be developed, owned by the community and embedded within the legislative framework which underpins education in Tasmania.

As the discussion paper notes, the 'involvement of parents and carers is a vital part of a child's education' (p 5). The research is clear that the home learning environment exerts a greater influence on children's educational attainment than their family's socioeconomic background, therefore such partnerships are vital. The Smith Family develops strong partnerships with families, in order to support children's improved educational outcomes. These partnerships are particularly important for children living in families where there are limited economic resources to apply to educational activities, where parents may have limited education and employment experience, including in the Australian context, or where parents' previous experience engaging with the schooling system has not been positive, or families are juggling complex responsibilities with limited networks of support.

United Nations Convention, the Melbourne Declaration and Australian Education Bill

The Smith Family would argue that a broad vision for the purpose of school education should be included within the Act and that The United Nations' *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* and the *Australian Education Act 2013*, provide direction for the Tasmanian Act's objects and guiding principles.

Australia is a signatory to the United Nations' *Convention on the Rights of the Child* which identifies in Article 29 that the education of children should be directed to:

- a. The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential;
- b. The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations;
- c. The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own;
- d. The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of Indigenous origin; and
- e. The development of respect for the natural environment.

The *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* was signed in 2008 by the Australian Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth

C. GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR EDUCATION

Affairs. The Declaration identifies the goals of equity and excellence for Australian schooling and that all young Australians be: successful learners; confident and creative individuals; and active and informed citizens.

The *Australian Education Act 2013*, in both its Preamble and Objects, also provides some useful material to inform the *Tasmanian Education Act*. The Act sets out the following goals for the Australian schooling system, which The Smith Family would endorse: 'a high quality and highly equitable education for all students'. These goals could be easily adapted for the Tasmanian Act by replacing 'Australia' with 'Tasmania'.

In addition, The Smith Family would suggest consideration of some of the material from the Preamble to the *Australian Education Act 2013*, in the Tasmanian context, including:

"All students in all schools are entitled to an excellent education, allowing each student to reach his or her full potential so that he or she can succeed and contribute fully to his or her community, now and in the future.

The quality of a student's education should not be limited by where the student lives, the income of his or her family, the school he or she attends, or his or her personal circumstances.

The quality of education should not be limited by a school's location, particularly those schools in regional Australia...

Strong partnerships across the broader community are necessary to support all school students, including partnerships between teachers, parents, carers and families, not-for-profit and community organisations and employers."

The United Nations Convention, the Melbourne Declaration and the *Australian Education Act 2013* provide a broad and holistic perspective on the goals of education, both for individual children and young people and the community as a whole. The Smith Family would urge the Tasmanian Government to draw on them when reforming its Education Act.

Improving and sustaining the educational and wellbeing outcomes of children and young people in Tasmania will require strong partnerships between schools, educational organisations and systems, families, community organisations, businesses and the wider Tasmanian community. Family, school and community engagement in education should be an essential strategy in building a pathway to university and career-readiness in today's competitive global society (Weiss et al 2010). 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). The Smith Family therefore strongly supports an increased focus on parent, community and education partnerships, both in the legislative framework pertaining to education in Tasmania, but also in the policy and programmatic responses that support it.

Parental and family engagement

From early childhood through primary and secondary school, parents and families have a significant influence on the learning and developmental outcomes of children and young people. As extensive research by the Harvard Family Research Project over many years has shown, 'parents' interactions and activities help shape children's readiness for school and consistent engagement during the primary years is also related to positive academic and behavioural outcomes. Family engagement remains important in adolescence and predicts healthy youth behaviours and higher rates of university enrolment (Harvard Family Research Project, 2010).

While there has been an increasing policy focus on parental engagement in jurisdictions across Australia, there remains some uncertainty about how to conceptualise, define and promote such engagement. The Harvard Family Research Project provides a useful and comprehensive definition of family engagement, seeing it as a shared responsibility of families, schools and communities and a continuous process that takes place from birth to young adulthood and crosses multiple learning settings, including the home and community (Harvard Family Research Project, 2014). This definition reflects the reciprocity and longitudinal nature which is inherent in family and parental engagement which effectively supports improved outcomes for children and young people. It is also the approach that The Smith Family would endorse to inform educational policy, programmatic and legislation.

Enhancing family, community and education partnerships

The Smith Family notes the discussion paper's reference to School Associations, which 'foster cooperation among teachers, students, members of the school association, parents and the community'. Such Associations can provide both a symbolic and practical acknowledgement of the importance of family, community and education partnerships. However, it is The Smith Family's perspective that significantly more needs

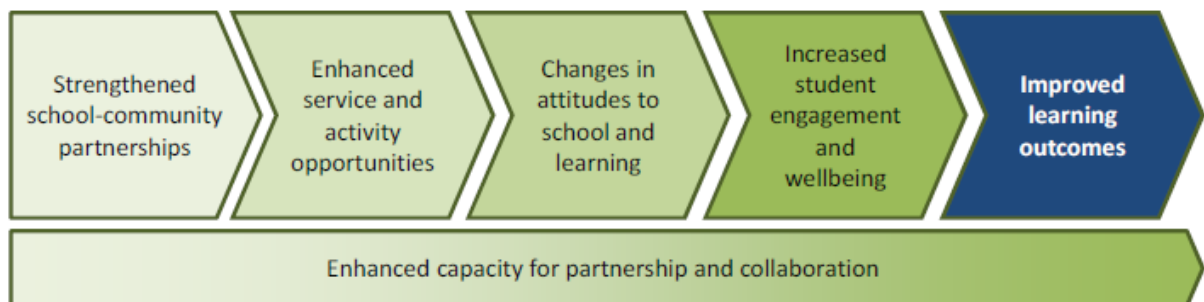
to be done in this area, both from a policy and potentially legislative perspective, if the benefits of such partnerships are to be realised in Tasmania.

An initiative which is a strong example of parent, community and education partnerships is School Community Hubs. They provide insights on the type of policy and programmatic responses which can help strengthen educational outcomes, particularly in disadvantaged communities.

School Community Hubs

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 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).

D. PARENT, COMMUNITY AND EDUCATION PARTNERSHIPS



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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 seven high-need communities across three states. This includes two hubs in Tasmania – one in the north eastern suburbs of Launceston and one in Wynyard, both currently funded through the Australian Government to mid-2016. The depth and quality of partnerships – with schools, families, community and employment organisations - which are being developed by such hubs, offer the critical foundations for improving student outcomes.

There is considerable potential to attract ongoing support (local, state-wide and interstate) to ensure these projects contribute to better outcomes for students and school communities in those areas. These hubs also provide insights that are potentially transferable to other communities and the learnings from them can contribute to systems' redesign. This is particularly relevant in the context of the State Government's long-term plan to extend high schools to year 11 and 12. These hubs offer an opportunity to strengthen inter-sectoral collaboration (with business, community sector and higher education institutions) to ensure sustainable outcomes for students. Realising this opportunity will require leadership from the Department of Education, and The Smith Family would welcome the opportunity to continue and extend our partnership with the Department in these initiatives.

As the discussion paper notes, 'ensuring that our young people remain engaged in education and training for as long as possible is a key factor for the future of both Tasmania and our young people'.

Early intervention and prevention

There is a large body of international evidence showing that prevention and early intervention approaches, can generate greatly improved outcomes for individuals and families. These types of approaches are particularly important for disadvantaged families. In recent years there has been a significant focus in Tasmania on early intervention initiatives, such as Launching into Learning, the Child and Family Centres and the work of the Tasmanian Early Years Foundation. These initiatives have helped to strengthen the developmental and educational outcomes of children and the capacity of families to provide a home learning environment where children can thrive.

The Smith Family would urge that there be a continued focus on such initiatives in Tasmania and on strong participation in high quality early learning and care services which support children and parents' capacity to support their child's development. The Smith Family also sees merit in such centres and other early years initiatives being recognised in the Education Act (Question 30 of the discussion paper), as this acknowledges the continuity between the early years and school.

The Smith Family would see these types of early intervention initiatives, alongside high quality early learning and care services, as having a potentially greater impact on improving the educational outcomes of disadvantaged children, than the compulsory age of starting school.

Balanced intervention across a young person's life

James Heckman, the Nobel Laureate in Economics, has modelled the return on investment at various stages of life and shown that the earlier the investment the greater return. However, early intervention is not just about the early years. Heckman has also looked at how the greatest returns can be made for improving the lives of disadvantaged children. He concluded that for this group, investment needed to be made across their lives – not just in the early years. His economic analysis concluded that: "The same amount of total investment distributed more evenly over the life cycle of the child, produces more adult skills than a policy that concentrates attention on only one part of the child's life cycle".

This is likely to be particularly relevant to Tasmania, as noted earlier, Year 12 completion rates are well below national rates. The Smith Family would urge the Tasmanian government take into account the research of Heckman which notes the importance of balanced intervention across different stages of childhood and adolescence for disadvantaged young people. This will be critical in addressing the key challenge of low

Year 12 completion. The Government's policy of progressively extending all high schools through to Year 12 together with providing needs based funding and additional support for literacy and numeracy will make a welcome contribution to this endeavour. The Smith Family welcomes the Government's initial financial investment of \$45 million investment over four years to employ additional teachers and undertake some capital works so that high schools can make this important transition, as well as the commitment to extend 21 high schools in rural and regional areas to Year 12 by 2018.

Keeping young people engaged in education

Research and practice experience highlight that disengagement from school does not generally occur at a single point in time, but is rather a process whereby young people become less engaged over time, school attendance rates decline, until they finally make the decision to discontinue at school. Factors such as poor achievement, family and personal circumstances, bullying or social isolation at school, limited career plans or goals, and a failure to see the relevance of school to future economic and social wellbeing, can all contribute to young people's disengagement from education.

While increasing the leaving age for young people may seem an easy policy response to the relatively low proportion of young people completing Year 12, in isolation it is unlikely to achieve the broader goals being sought by the Tasmanian government. The Smith Family would argue that more effort needs to be focused on improving the achievement of young people across primary and secondary schools (as achievement is an important predictor for Year 12 attainment) and for bearing in mind the research of Heckman regarding a balanced intervention across a young person's life.

The Smith Family believes that a critical part of helping young people to stay on to Year 12 is more structured and innovative approaches that help them better understand the employment market and opportunities of the 21st century. Without this understanding, many young people may fail to realise the value of Year 12 or equivalent to them.

As The Smith Family's recent publication *Young people's successful transition to work* (2014) has noted, there are five core preconditions necessary for the positive and sustainable engagement of young people in the labour market:

- Stable economic supports
- Supportive relationships and networks
- A capacity to assess new employment opportunities, on both the supply and demand sides of the labour market
- Provision of supports for the formation of job readiness and employability skills.

A full copy of this report is enclosed as a separate attachment to this submission.

The *iTrack* program

Having access to role models and mentors can be particularly important for the development of young people's understanding of educational and employment pathways, and can help keep them engaged in school. In communities where there are lower rates of Year 12 completion and more limited participation in employment, education and training post-school, it can be difficult for young people to have the knowledge and skills to make informed choices about their future options. They may also lack the confidence that Year 12 and post-school study is a possibility for them. This is likely to be particularly the case for many young people in regional communities.

The Smith Family runs the *iTrack* program to help address these issues. *iTrack* is an online mentoring program that focuses on preparing disadvantaged students for the transition from high school to either further study or work. It provides students with the opportunity to develop relationships with trained, volunteer mentors who can help them explore their options for the future. These mentors connect students with information about the workplace, study and career opportunities. Students from Years 9 and 10 (in Tasmania and 9 to 11 interstate) are matched with professionals, mainly from corporate organisations. The students and mentors communicate on-line over an 18 week period, or approximately two school terms. The on-line environment not only means resources from outside the school community can be brought to the school, but it is also a medium with which young people feel comfortable and safe.

In 2013, The Smith Family supported around 800 students on the *iTrack* program nationally. 86% of participants indicated that talking with their mentor helped them work out how to reach their career goals. Qualitative feedback from participants includes: *They helped me with my subject selections. It was the hardest choice I had to make now and my mentor helped me a lot.*

He boosted my confidence in believing I can do what I set my mind to and I'm thankful for that.

It's a relaxed way of getting an outsider's look into your world and getting advice.

Programs such as *iTrack* both build up young people's skills and confidence in areas which are critical to positive educational outcomes and do so using technology which is highly relevant to Tasmania, given its geographically dispersed population.

Linking education to post school transitions to employment and further study

Recent research by The Smith Family (2014) with a range of young people, employers, educators, community organisations and industry bodies, reinforces that schools are key institutions for supporting improved transitions to work for young people. Schools are a key player in the provision of work placement or work experience programs which are the cornerstone of a positive school to work transition. A work placement program can help

students gain valuable exposure to workplace environments and how they operate, give them exposure to networks of employers, and help them explore different forms of learning. It can also help young people to understand the value of what they're learning and of completing their school education. For young people who have struggled to adjust to school life, a work experience program can help inspire and reconnect them.

Work Inspiration

There are a number of initiatives which highlight what can be achieved to keep young people engaged in education and improve their transition to post school employment and further education, but they need to be more widely available. One such example is the *Work Inspiration* program, which is a joint initiative of the Foundation for Young Australians, The Smith Family and National Australia Bank. It is an employer-led campaign that aims to ensure that young Australians' first experience of work is meaningful and inspiring.

The program has three core components:

1. All about me – a conversation about the young person's interests, aspirations and character.
2. Look behind the scenes – to support the young person to become aware of a range of occupations in the workplace and how they relate to each other.
3. Careers happen – a conversation with an employee/employer about how their career journey has unfolded which leads to reflection by students, and to their consideration of relevance to their own plans and hopes.

The way these core components are delivered is flexible, enabling it to be tailored to diverse schools, student populations and communities. *Work Inspiration* has involved a range of corporates across a diversity of industries, as well as a number of non-government organisations and local Councils. This includes Woolworths, Yamaha, Stockland, a consortium of agricultural employers and Bendigo Bank (interstate) and Tassal and the Southern Midlands Council in Tasmania. An evaluation of *Work Inspiration* shows the approach has been well received by the participating employers and the young people and schools involved. As the Commonwealth's Interim Report on the Review of Welfare (2014) has noted, *Work Inspiration* has 'proven to positively engage students who are at risk of becoming disengaged from school, or face other barriers to education and employment' (p. 104).¹

¹ Further information on Work Inspiration is available is available at <http://www.thsmithfamily.com.au/~media/Files/Research%20and%20Publications/Research%20and%20Advocacy%20PDFs/Research%20and%20Evaluation%20page%20PDFs/work-inspiration-Aug-2013.ashx>

Career development

The Smith Family would also argue that a stronger career development strategy across Tasmanian schools and other relevant institutions is a key strategy for strengthening Year 12 completion. It would urge that such a strategy take into account the following principles:

- An evidence based approach to the development and implementation of a career development strategy and related initiatives.
- Integration and student centred activities
Career development should be embedded within a broader suite of programmatic responses with the needs of the students placed at the core of the programmatic response.
- Flexible and responsive service delivery
A range of delivery methods including online and telecommunications technology, face-to-face interactions, as well as group and individual-based work should be used. Delivery methods are particularly important for young people from regional communities. Programs should go beyond just working with young people on immediate education and labour market choices. They need to include structured career development activities such as skills mapping and transferability; researching and analysing specific jobs and required qualifications and work experience; identifying alternative TAFE, university and/or apprenticeship pathways; mentoring programs and experiential careers days.
- Parental engagement
Strengthening parents' skills, capacity and knowledge so they are able to provide broad, well-informed and supportive career guidance to their children needs to be an important focus.
- Delivery in partnership with schools, and, with community agencies, industry groups, employers and/or educational institutions.
- A place-based approach that builds and strengthens the local support networks of young people and their families. This allows for responsiveness to local labour market conditions and the range of potential training, education and employment outcomes available.
- Outcomes based accountability
Programs need to be designed, developed and implemented within an evaluation framework that incorporates outcome-based accountability.

It is The Smith Family's view that initiatives such as *iTrack* and *Work Inspiration*, combined with a stronger careers strategy, can make an important contribution to improving Year 12 completion rates in Tasmania. Critical to improving these rates will be enhancing young people's engagement in and value of education. Parental engagement in their child's education will also be important. The Smith Family believes these types of

responses are more likely to have a positive impact on Year 12 outcomes than simply lifting the compulsory education age.

Student records and data (including privacy)

As identified in the introductory section of this submission, The Smith Family has a strong focus on evaluation and the use of data to both better support students and assess the effectiveness of our work with them. We have invested in a custom-designed database and in-house research team to enable detailed data analysis, including longitudinal analysis, and for particular cohorts of students. This analysis is directly informing our work with children, young people and their families. It contributes to our work being more timely – providing the right support at the right time – and more effective. We therefore strongly support consideration being given to how the collection and use of data can better inform decision making in relation to the delivery of education in Tasmania. Such collection and use must of course consider appropriate privacy and confidentiality issues.

We would also strongly support consideration being given to how the data might be shared with non-government organisations, in particular circumstances, and with individuals and organisations undertaking educational research and evaluation. The Smith Family's Research and Advocacy team has developed strong relationships with the data units of a number of educational jurisdictions and significant new knowledge is being gained through appropriate sharing and analysis of data. This approach is contributing to better informed decision making and more targeted program delivery. The Smith Family would urge that consideration be given to similar reciprocal research and evaluation relationships being developed in Tasmania with organisations such as The Smith Family.

School attendance, achievement and Year 12 completion

There is now strong evidence of the link between school attendance and achievement, and in turn Year 12 completion. Relative disadvantage is associated with poorer school attendance from the beginning of formal schooling. Students in schools with a lower socio-economic index, Aboriginal students, students who are highly mobile and those whose parents have lower levels of education and occupational status, all have lower levels of attendance on average (Hancock K et al 2013). Addressing these attendance gaps is critical to improving Year 12 completion rates and in turn, setting up young people to make post school transitions to employment or further education. The Smith Family strongly endorses the discussion paper's focus on school attendance. Critical in ensuring strong school attendance is ensuring parents are engaged in their child's learning across all years.

***Learning for Life* educational scholarship**

As mentioned in the introduction section, The Smith Family is monitoring the school attendance rates of its 34,000 *Learning for Life* students. Parental engagement is at the core of the program, as parents/carers enter into a formal agreement with The Smith Family that acknowledges a 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.

The LfL program provides targeted support, including financial support, to low income families with the goal of encouraging their children to complete their education and transition to post school employment or further education. The program is highly targeted, with participating families needing to have a Health Care Card or be on a pension.

The financial support is provided twice a year for use on a range of educational expenses, such as uniforms, books and excursions. 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 level² to help ensure their child is attending school and remaining engaged in education.

The program has a very strong focus on school attendance and this is monitored on a regular basis, with The Smith Family staff working directly with families and schools to address barriers that may be inhibiting attendance.

² 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.

F. ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION



everyone's family

LfL is a place-based initiative, with our efforts scaffolded onto the social and physical assets of the community. We leverage and coordinate the skills and resources of 8,000 volunteers, and partnerships with educational institutions, community organisations, philanthropy and businesses, to deliver the program. This contributes to both its effectiveness and efficiency. It is an example of how the expertise and resources from across the community, can be harnessed to improve young people's educational outcomes in disadvantaged communities.

The effectiveness of LfL is closely monitored. The average attendance rate for primary school students on scholarship is 90.4%, while for secondary students it is 84.6%. The average attendance rate for LfL students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background is 86%. These are strong attendance rates given the level of disadvantage experienced by these students and their families and The Smith Family is continuing to refine its work with the aim of further improving student attendance rates.

In summary, from a policy perspective, the *Learning for life* program:

- 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 being implemented at scale using a place-based approach which efficiently harnesses a range of resources.

Currently in Tasmania, The Smith Family and its donors are supporting 500 scholarships per annum. This is made possible through private fundraising valued at around \$250,000 per annum or \$2 million over 8 years – the average length of participation on the scholarship program. The Smith Family is tracking the educational outcomes of these students longitudinally, as they progress through senior secondary school and on to College and further post-compulsory education.

LfL could be expanded within the Tasmanian context as part of the Government's efforts aimed at improving school attendance. The Smith Family would be pleased to provide further information on its work in Tasmania and nationally which is improving the school attendance rates of children and young people from disadvantaged and low income families.

G. CONCLUSION



everyone's family

The Smith Family welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Tasmanian Government's Review of the Education Act. Given the importance of education to individual Tasmanians and the state as a whole, and the current educational outcomes being achieved by young Tasmanians, this review is particularly timely. The Smith Family also welcomes the extended period of time offered for responses to the discussion paper.

The Smith Family particularly endorses the discussion paper's focus on parent, community and education partnerships; school attendance; improving Year 12 completion; and the development of guiding principles for the Education Act.

The policy and programmatic recommendations contained in this submission draw on The Smith Family's extensive experience in improving the educational outcomes of disadvantaged children and young people in Tasmania and across Australia. We look forward to building on this work further in partnership with the Tasmanian government and wider community.

H. REFERENCES

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APPENDIX 1: THE SMITH FAMILY'S OUTCOMES MAP

Programs contribute to short and longer term outcomes

