



everyone's family

**The Smith Family's submission to the
Tasmanian Government's
Future provision of Years 11 and 12 education in regional Tasmania
Discussion paper**

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1. Background on The Smith Family

The Smith Family (TSF) is a national, independent charity committed to increasing the educational participation and achievement of Australian children and young people in need. Our belief is that every child deserves a chance and our mission is to create opportunities for young Australians in need, by providing long-term support for their participation in education.

The Smith Family provides holistic and long-term support for children and young people, from pre-school, through primary and secondary school and on to tertiary studies. We aim to positively enhance the multiple influences on the wellbeing of children and young people, including their:

- Personal characteristics/attributes
- Family
- Peers
- Learning and care institutions, eg schools, early learning and care centres
- Community and society.

The Smith Family has identified three long-term high level outcomes as the focus of its work with disadvantaged children and young people. They are to:

- Increase school attendance to greater than or equal to 90%.
- Increase the proportion of Year 10 students who advance to Year 12 or equivalent.
- Increase the proportion of young people in education, training and/or work.

The range of programs and support we offer across the life course of children and young people, targeting different stages of their development, as well as providing supports to their families and communities, are all focused on supporting children to achieve these outcomes. A more detailed outcomes framework is at Attachment A.

In 2011-12, The Smith Family supported over 106,000 children, young people and parents/carers nationally. This included:

- Over 34,000 young people on an educational scholarship.
- Close to 39,000 children, young people and parents/carers through our *Learning for life* suite of programs.
- An additional 33,000 children, young people and parents/carers through a range of government funded programs such as the Commonwealth Government's *Communities for Children* initiative.
- Fourteen percent of the young people we support identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

In Tasmania, The Smith Family:

- Works in 4 communities¹ with 13 partner schools²
- Supports around 220 children and young people annually on an educational scholarship, with a further 1,400 children, young people and parents/carers supported by a range of programs aimed to enhance educational participation.
- These programs include early literacy and numeracy programs (*Let's Read* and *Let's Count*), a peer mentoring reading program (*Student 2 Student*), and primary and secondary after school support (*Learning Clubs*).
- In 2013 we have plans to increase the number of students on scholarship to at least 500 and support nearly 3,000 individuals across a range of programs. We also plan to introduce two programs to provide

¹ Bridgewater/Gagebrook; Chigwell; North East Launceston; and Burnie/Wynyard

² Jordan River Learning Federation Schools – East Derwent, Gagebrook, Herdsmans Cove (Bridgewater/Gagebrook); Windermere PS and Montrose Bay HS (Chigwell); Table Cape PS, Romaine Park PS, Parklands HS (Burnie/Wynyard); Waverley PS, Rocherlea PS, Ravenswood Heights PS, Mayfield PS, Brooks HS (NE Launceston)

support to students in secondary school – a Certificate 1 financial literacy course and an on-line mentoring program for high school students to support their career and post-school plans (*i-Track*).

In developing this submission, The Smith Family has drawn on the knowledge and expertise of its staff who are located in communities across Tasmania and have relationships with children and young people, their families and many organisations working to support them. We have also drawn on our programmatic and research and policy experience working with children, young people and families across Australia. We also start from the principle that education is a whole of community responsibility, involving partnerships with parents/carers, families, educational institutions, non-government organisations, corporates, and the wider community.

Rather than specifically answering the range of questions raised by the discussion paper, this submission identifies a range of strategies which The Smith Family believes would help support the achievement of the goals identified in the paper.

2. Tasmanian context regarding educational outcomes

The Smith Family welcomes the public policy discussion that the Tasmanian government is leading which is focused on future provision of Years 11 and 12 education in regional Tasmania. As the discussion paper notes '*Tasmania is the most socio-economically disadvantaged of all the States*'. The Smith Family sees education as the key means by which socio-economic disadvantage can be addressed, including intergenerational disadvantage. It is also of the view that the provision of Years 11 and 12 education needs to be seen in the context of the different stages of development that children and young people experience. It therefore needs to be mindful of education from the early years, through primary and secondary schools as well as post school pathways.

Recently released data from the COAG Reform Council and ACARA highlights the educational challenges Tasmania is facing:

- NAPLAN results for Tasmania are lower than the Australian results both for literacy and numeracy and across each of the four years for which data is collected (Years 3, 5, 7 and 9).
- The gap between the proportion of high and low SES students meeting the minimum NAPLAN reading standard is 16 percentage points in Years 5 and 9.
- Year 12 or equivalent completion rates in Tasmania are significantly below that of Australia as a whole and there has been no significant change between 2008 and 2011.
- Only 70.6% of 18 to 24 years olds in Tasmania are engaged in post-school education, training or work.

The above data highlights that for low SES children and young people, educational outcomes are particularly poor. The recent Commonwealth Review of School Education (DEEWR, 2011) also highlighted that the size and location of a student's school also impacts on educational outcomes which is a significant consideration for the provision of education in regional areas. Year 9 NAPLAN 2012 data shows that 90.9% of Tasmanian students living in metropolitan areas were at or above the national minimum reading standard, compared to only 79.4% of their peers living in remote parts of the state. This gap in Year 9 achievement is particularly relevant to this discussion paper, given the relationship between lower achievement and a reduced likelihood of Year 12 completion and participation in tertiary education (Curtis et al, 2012).

Factors such as low SES can be compounded by the size and location of the school a student attends. This is particularly relevant to regional communities. Recent research on Year 12 completion and higher education that used the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) notes that 'although there is a substantial difference in the rates of higher education participation of metropolitan and rural young people, this difference is not attributed simply to location but rather to other factors associated with location. These factors include the lower SES backgrounds of rural youth, the presence of fewer young people of immigrant backgrounds in rural communities and the lower aspirations for higher education and professional careers among rural youth.' (NCVER, 2012)

Understanding the multiple developmental stages and transitions of young people

The Smith Family would urge that considerations regarding the provision of Years 11 and 12 education in regional Tasmania include an understanding of the multiple developmental stages and transitions that research shows children and young people go through and which influence educational outcomes. It would urge that there be a focus on 'early intervention', not simply as the 'early years', important though that period is, but taking a developmental approach, also include 'early in the pathway', so that additional support can be provided for children, young people and their families when challenges first arise, rather than at a point of educational disengagement. Such an approach is both more effective and efficient. As the work of the Nobel Prize winning economist James Heckman and his colleague Flavio Cunha found:

'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...building cognitive and non-cognitive skills is a process that occurs throughout a child's development...Investments accumulate over time, thus skills at a later stage build on the skills of a previous stage, which leads to more productive overall investments. As important as investments in early childhood are in laying the foundation for intellectual and social development, they do not yield optimal returns by themselves. Early investments ...not followed up by later investments are not productive' (America's Promise Alliance).

3. Addressing the multiple influences on student outcomes

Professor John Hattie's meta-analysis examines six factors (the child, home, school, teacher, curriculum and approaches to teaching) and assesses their contributions to achievement, which is relevant to considerations of improving Year 11 and 12 outcomes. A synthesis of this research by the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development noted that:

The child or student brings to school factors that influence achievement (from preschool, home, and genetics) as well as a set of personal dispositions that can have marked effect on the outcomes of schooling. The home can either nurture and support achievement of students, or it can be harmful and destructive. Hattie also suggests that positive expectations from the parents can be critical to the success of children....In regards to the school, his research suggests that the most powerful effects relate to features within the school, such as the climate of the classroom, peer influences, and the lack of disruptive students in the classroom. There are a number of teacher contributions to student learning, such as teacher expectations; teachers' conception of teaching; and teacher openness. Hattie argues that the most critical aspect contributed by the teacher is the quality of their teaching as perceived by the students (DEECD, 2010).

Professor Hattie notes that students account for 'about 50% of the variance of achievement', while 'teachers account for about 30% of the variance. It is what teachers know, do and care about which is very powerful in this learning equation' (Hattie, 2003). Thus, while the role of teachers and school level factors are important in improving educational outcomes much broader strategies are needed.

Systemic changes and support for school-community partnerships

The Smith Family would argue that to improve educational outcomes in Tasmania, including ultimately Year 12 achievement for young people living in regional areas, more effective models are needed that link community services to schools to address non-vocational barriers to attendance, support catch-up learning and offer the range of support required.

The Smith Family would argue that new forms of school-community partnerships have a key role to play in improving educational outcomes. This is particularly the case in areas of significant disadvantage and in regional communities which tend to have a higher proportion of low SES young people. Schools in disadvantaged and regional communities cannot be expected to bear the sole responsibility for the educational outcomes of the children and young people in their care, given the resources available to them and the general shortfall in services and infrastructure provision that their communities experience. Young people living in many disadvantaged and

regional communities have limited access to strong labour markets, a range of support services, and the networks that are necessary to help them get ahead.

School-community partnerships are also known in Australia as extended service schools, full-service schools, or community schools. They represent a comprehensive partnership model that has been extensively trialed and evaluated, particularly in the UK and US. In Victoria, this type of partnership has been described as ‘schools delivering extended services to the community, either on site at the school or off site at a nearby venue. These activities are delivered before, during and after school hours through genuine partnerships with external agencies.’ These may include before or after-school programs, adult learning opportunities or community use of school facilities.

A recent Foundation for Young Australians literature review (Black et al 2010) outlined a number of ways that effective extended service school models have been shown to benefit young people. They:

- Enable earlier identification of children and young people’s needs and quicker access to services.
- Increase their engagement and participation in school.
- Improve their educational outcomes.
- Improve their self-confidence and well-being.
- Create a more positive school environment.
- Improve family engagement in the school.
- Build community connectedness and capacity.
- Widen schools’ external contacts, networks and partnerships and enhance social capital.

As well as improvements in student outcomes, school-community partnerships can serve as a mechanism for developing stronger service delivery between schools and other service systems, such as health services (University of Ballarat 2011). A recent essay on school-community collaborations by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) found that:

Governments, too, benefit from schools connecting more strongly with business and community groups. These kinds of relationships can help grow local economies and potentially reduce the costs of service provision through less duplication of services and shared responsibility (Lonsdale et al, 2012).

Particularly in communities where there are limited resources, including regional communities, these collaborations can both leverage more diverse resources, as well as create opportunities for the more efficient and effective use of resources.

A number of school-community partnership approaches are currently being implemented around Australia, such as the Extended School Hub pilots being run by the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development in which The Smith Family is playing a lead role. The Smith Family is currently leading the development and implementation of school-community partnerships in three communities across Australia, including regional Victoria. While the models have similar core principles and components, they are flexible to local conditions. This approach makes them potentially highly relevant for the diversity of regional communities in Tasmania. The three models TSF is currently implementing involve:

- A high school and a feeder primary school
- A high school which has three campuses spread across two towns in regional Victoria
- A cluster of schools involving three primary schools and one high school.

Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) can facilitate these deep and long-term school-community relationships which ultimately contribute to improving the educational outcomes of children and young people. Such a role is often necessary because as the ACER found:

These kinds of collaborations are not easy to build or sustain. Not all school-community partnerships run smoothly. Finding potential partners and resources, knowing who might have the professional expertise to advise and guide program development, gathering information about an area of identified need, knowing how to monitor and evaluate the impact of a collaboration all take time and require different kinds of knowledge and skills (Lonsdale et al, 2012).

The rationale and evidence for the role of NGOs in these newer and deeper school-community partnerships includes:

- Creating and maintaining effective cross-sectoral partnerships that help address educational inequity is not easy (Department for Victorian Communities, 2007).
- Building and sustaining the effective partnerships required in disadvantaged communities requires a complex mix of skills.
- Facilitating deep and long-term relationships which contribute to improving the wellbeing of children and young people is a 'core competency' of many NGOs.
- Having NGOs as facilitator/lead agency reduces the burden of partnership development and management on school staff and enables complementarity with school staff's core educational skills.
- NGOs can bring a range of business, community and council groups to support educational initiatives in disadvantaged communities.
- Credible intermediaries can address school leaders' concerns regarding the match between what a school needs and what potential partners may offer. They can also help mediate the cultural barriers between sectors (Victorian Department of Education, 2009).
- The effectiveness and value of NGOs taking on a key facilitation role has been demonstrated by the evaluation of initiatives such as the Commonwealth Government's *Communities for Children* program (Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, 2009).

School-community partnerships where NGOs act as facilitators to bring additional resources to the school enable principals to genuinely undertake educational leadership within a collaborative and shared accountability framework. At their best, school-community partnership approaches:

- Acknowledge the multiple factors that influence educational outcomes for children and young people.
- Emphasise that the role of schools is to prepare young people for life and to create a foundation of *learning to learn*, rather than preparing them for a specific and potentially time-limited career.
- Have a strong focus on relationships, both at the individual level and also between agencies and institutions at a systems level.
- Have a strong focus on the voice of young people themselves within the planning, design and implementation stages.
- Have clearly defined outcomes which are seen as the collective responsibility of a range of parties and accountability processes which allow for ongoing improvement.
- Move well beyond 'joined up' service delivery to fundamental paradigm shifts which centre on the young-person and take account of the multiple life contexts and identities of students in the 21st century.

In The Smith Family's view, the newer, deeper and more sophisticated school-community partnerships described above support schools in disadvantaged communities to leverage the resources, skills and support from beyond the school system, enabling them to play a bigger role in enhancing the wellbeing of children and young people. The Smith Family would therefore urge that consideration be given as to how the development of such partnerships can be more fully supported in Tasmania, including in regional communities.

4. An enhanced focus on high quality career development

The data presented in section 2 of this submission regarding the proportion of young Tasmanians who are not completing Year 12 or equivalent or engaged in post school education, training or work, highlights that significantly more needs to be done in a range of areas, including career development. This is likely to be particularly the case in regional communities.

The Smith Family strongly recommends that the provision of intensive career development support be prioritised for young Tasmanians who are most at risk of not making successful transitions into the labour market. TSF would urge that as part of the policy processes around this discussion paper that the Tasmania government review its career development strategy, taking 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.

New responses to support improved pathways and career outcomes: *Work Inspiration*

In the context of improving Tasmania's strategy for career development, The Smith Family would also draw attention to a new initiative, *Work Inspiration*, which has been driven in Australia by The National Partnership Broker Network as part of the National Partnership for Youth Attainment and Transition. *Work Inspiration* is an employer-led initiative developed by British Telecom in the UK. 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 regional communities. Experience in the UK has shown that students feel more confident in the workplace and more positive about their careers and what they need to do next, following their involvement in the program.

Work Inspiration pilots are currently underway across Australia supported by the Partnership Brokers. The pilots are taking place in metropolitan and regional centres and involve a range of corporates across a diversity of industries, as well as a number of NGOs. This includes Woolworths, Yamaha, Stockland, a consortium of agricultural employers, Bendigo Bank, Foundation for Young Australians and The Smith Family. The diversity of organisations participating augurs well for its future expansion. The learnings from the pilots will be documented

early in 2013 to inform how it can be best delivered in Australia to suit employers and young people. The Smith Family is in collaboration with the Foundation for Young Australians and the National Australia Bank to become founding partners as part of a planned national roll out in mid 2013, in association with the national Partnership Broker Network, DEEWR, other corporates and employer organisations.

Given the challenges Tasmania is facing on post school transitions, particularly for young people from regional communities, the positive experience of the *Work Inspiration* program in the UK, and the pilots currently being undertaken around Australia, The Smith Family would urge that consideration be given by the Tasmanian government to how it might support this initiative.

5. Using technology to support improved educational outcomes

The dispersed nature of Tasmania's population means that using innovative ways to support young people in regional areas will be essential if they are to realise their potential. The Smith Family is cognisant that there are already a range of programs being run by the Tasmanian government which use technology in order to support educational outcomes. TSF would also draw attention to two programs it runs in other parts of the country which could be of potential benefit to improving educational outcomes for young people from regional communities, including their retention to Year 12. The first is currently being run in Tasmania with potential for expansion, and the second is planned for commencement from 2013.

Student to student (S2S)

There is a clear relationship between literacy skills and higher levels of educational achievement, with young people who fall behind in literacy more likely to leave school early before completing Year 12. *Student to student (S2S)* is an 18 week peer mentoring program involving three groups of participants:

- Students in Years 3 to 8 who have been assessed as being up to two years behind in their reading development and want additional support to improve their reading.
- Mentors with good literacy skills who are at least two years older than the student with whom they are paired and who are trained by TSF to develop literacy skills in others.
- Mentor supervisors who provide support for up to 10 mentors.

The program doesn't rely on face to face contact, but uses the telephone as the communication medium. It is therefore very appropriate for regional and rural communities. The mentor telephones the student two to three times a week for at least 20 minutes. The student reads to the mentor who assists the student with their reading. The mentor keeps a simple record of each phone contact and reports progress to a mentor supervisor fortnightly. In the 2011-12 financial year, the reading age of 82% of S2S primary school participants improved, contributing to the likelihood of them being able to achieve Year 12.

iTrack

Having access to role models and mentors can be particularly important for the development of young people's understanding of educational and employment pathways. 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 to 11 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 the 2011-12 financial year, 74% of participants indicated that they gained a better understanding of study and career pathways. 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 *S2S* and *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 regional Tasmania. The Smith Family would therefore urge that consideration be given to how both programs can be expanded to support regional students in Tasmania.

6. Raising the compulsory education age to 18 years

The Smith Family would argue that there is little merit in raising the compulsory education age to 18 years given the likelihood that of itself it is likely to have little impact on overall retention rates. TSF would argue instead for more effort 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 supporting the range of initiatives mentioned throughout this submission. TSF believes that these are more likely to have a positive impact on Year 12 outcomes than simply lifting the compulsory education age. This is particularly the case because disengagement from school does not 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.

7. Conclusion

The Smith Family welcomes the opportunity to contribute to considerations regarding educational provision in regional Tasmania. It would argue that in order to achieve the goals of improved educational outcomes for young people living in regional communities in Tasmania the following should be considered:

- An approach which takes into account the developmental stages and needs of children and young people, which in turn impact on Year 12 completion.
- Support for school-community partnerships, including with a lead facilitation role for NGOs.
- An enhanced focus of high quality career development, including the potential of initiatives such as *Work Inspiration*.
- Responses that use technology to improve educational outcomes, including foundational skills such as literacy and that build knowledge and confidence regarding post-school pathways.

The Smith Family would be pleased to discuss any of the matters raised in this submission and looks forward to continuing to work with the Tasmanian government and other sectors to enhance the wellbeing of children and young people in Australia

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Attachment A: The Smith Family’s Outcomes framework

YOUNG PEOPLE ARE ENGAGED IN FURTHER STUDY OR WORK

ATTAIN YEAR 12 OR EQUIVALENT

STAY ENGAGED WITH LEARNING

INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES (INDIVIDUAL/FAMILY)	INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES (SCHOOL LEVEL)	INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES (COMMUNITY LEVEL)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved literacy and numeracy • Improved confidence (self/efficacy) • Improved motivation and aspiration • Enhanced networks and relationships • Enhanced access to support • Improved disposition to engaging with learning • Improved knowledge, understanding • Improved skills • Improved or sustained School Attendance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased access to community resources • Increased community use of school resources • <i>Increased parent engagement in school activities</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved service collaboration and integration • Enhanced cross sectoral partnerships
<p>#% students and parents reporting increased skill levels #% students test results show increased skill levels #% students or parents reporting increased confidence, motivation or aspiration. % Improved or sustained school attendance #% students/parents/teachers reporting improved school engagement. #% students reporting increased contact with supportive adults #% parents reporting that they are able to get support to keep their child engaged in school #% parents and carers reporting that they are able and motivated to be engaged with education and/or the workforce</p>	<p># activities being undertaken through the school. # agencies delivering services in the school # and quality of partnerships</p>	<p># and quality of partnerships #% partner agencies reporting satisfaction with integrated service delivery co-ordination.</p>
<p>Scholarship and support (KIKASS,G@C) S2s, iTrack, Learning Clubs, Creative Enrichment, Careers/Post school options workshops, Let’s Count, Let’s Read, Tech Packs, Financial Literacy parent engagement</p>	<p>Extended School Hubs (Wyndham, Swan, Gippsland)</p>	<p>Communities for Children Partnership Brokers Community Action Leaders</p>