



*everyone's family*

# Victorian Youth Strategy

Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet

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## 1. The Smith Family

The Smith Family is a national charity founded in 1922 to improve the lives of disadvantaged children in Australia. Our vision is a better future for young Australians in need. Our mission is to create opportunities for them by providing long-term support for their participation in education. This mission is founded on the belief that every child deserves a chance to thrive and create a better future for themselves. We work with a vulnerable cohort of children and young people, who experience a range of challenges. Further information on The Smith Family is available in the Appendix.

## 2. Introduction

The Smith Family welcomes the release of the Victorian Youth Strategy Discussion Paper and the opportunity to contribute to the consultation process. Given the significant disruption caused by COVID-19 to the lives of young Victorians at home and at school, the development of a comprehensive Youth Strategy is particularly timely and pertinent. We have seen first-hand the significant impact of bushfires and the pandemic on many of the young people and their families who we support.

The Smith Family strongly supports the Government's commitment to all Victorian young people:

- being healthy, safe and empowered, and
- having equitable access to opportunities and support to participate fully in social, economic and civic life.

Given our organisational mission, this submission focuses on the experience of disadvantaged young people accessing education and training opportunities, planning their careers and achieving strong educational and employment outcomes post-school. As the Discussion Paper notes, 15.6 per cent of young people aged 15 to 24 years old in Victoria live in poverty and many of these young people struggle, through no fault of their own, to complete Year 12 and move into further education, training and employment post-school.

In this submission, we make the following recommendations:

- that the Youth Strategy include governance arrangements that reflect a whole-of-government approach to implementation, including measurable targets, shared outcomes, and suitable levels of financial investment.
- that the Youth Strategy further strengthen the delivery of careers education to young Victorians, to ensure all young people are positioned to pursue meaningful careers after senior secondary school, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds. This includes:
  - providing all young Victorians with the support to make informed decisions about positive post-school pathways, including in the tertiary sector.
  - acknowledging the importance of young Victorians building a general set of capabilities at school in order to succeed in their future careers and be active citizens in their community.
- that the Youth Strategy address the digital divide for young Victorians, ensuring all have equitable access to the digital tools and skills to thrive.

We elaborate on these points below.

### 3. Building the right governance arrangements to deliver the Youth Strategy

For the Youth Strategy to have a positive, sustained impact in the lives of young Victorians, the right governance arrangements is crucial. Successful implementation of the Strategy will require a whole-of-government approach, placing young Victorians at the centre of the policy development and service design that impacts their lives directly. To ensure a consistent approach, the Department of Premier and Cabinet could be responsible for overall implementation and monitoring of the Youth Strategy and coordinating with other portfolios delivering programs and services for young Victorians.

To measure its effectiveness over time, the Youth Strategy will require specific objectives, as well as performance targets against which progress can be evaluated. To reinforce a whole-of-government approach to delivery, it is important that the Youth Strategy articulate shared outcomes for which departments are collectively responsible, with clear accountability and reporting mechanisms. It will also be important to identify how the Strategy links to other strategies and policy initiatives that are focused on younger children, including from birth and through early and middle childhood. Ensuring that all young people in Victoria thrive requires an integrated and cohesive policy approach across all stages of their development.

The Youth Strategy should leverage existing research, reviews and institutional knowledge relevant to young Victorians to maximise impact. For instance, the Victorian Skills Review has recently concluded its work and its findings could affect the Youth Strategy's approach to vocational training.

Additionally, the Victorian Government will need to consider the level of financial investment it commits to delivery of the Youth Strategy, to ensure that its aims are achieved. This could include, for example, how the government acknowledges and incorporates recent announcements from the 2020 Budget as well as additional investments, so the allocation of resources for implementation is clear across portfolios and to stakeholders outside government.

As part of the implementation of the Youth Strategy, the Victorian Government will want to consider how it regularly engages young people on how the Youth Strategy has impacted their daily life. This could involve convening a range of groups to offer feedback, such as the Victorian Youth Congress stewarded by the Department of Premier and Cabinet, as well as conducting a wider consultation process to hear from young Victorians across the state.<sup>1</sup> In these processes it will be important to ensure that the voices of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are included.

Consideration should also be given to how civil society and business continue to be engaged in the Youth Strategy, given their respective roles in young people lives. Such engagement could include assessing progress made and refining the Youth Strategy throughout its implementation. One idea for engagement is to bring together the key government and non-government stakeholders at regular intervals to examine progress, reflect on what has worked well and what could be improved.

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<sup>1</sup> Youth Central, '[Victorian Youth Congress](#)', Victorian Government.

#### 4. Strengthening the delivery of careers education to young Victorians

The Discussion Paper identifies that young people want to be supported to remain engaged in education and training that suits their needs and supports them to transition into meaningful employment in line with their aspirations and goals.

In support of this, the Victorian Government has developed the *Transforming Career Education in Victorian Government Schools* (the Framework) and allocated a range of new funding in the 2020 Budget, including:<sup>2</sup>

- investing \$109 million over four years to evaluate and redesign career education
- providing career self-exploration workshops for Year 7 and 8 students from 2019
- introducing a careers e-portfolio for Year 9 students.
- offering disadvantaged students work-exposure activities during secondary school
- creating the new positions of Jobs, Skills and Pathways Coordinators in secondary schools supporting students with vocational and applied learning pathways and transitions, and Jobs, Skills and Pathways Managers to facilitate engagement with industry<sup>3</sup>
- committing to the introduction of a new integrated leaving certificate for senior secondary students.<sup>4</sup>

The Smith Family believes there is an opportunity for the Youth Strategy to further strengthen the delivery of careers education, so all young Victorians have sufficient understanding of the world of work, and are confident and capable of creating a positive post-school future for themselves. Strengthening careers education is especially needed given that young people were particularly affected by job losses this year, with youth unemployment over 15 per cent - higher than the peak level post-Global Financial Crisis of 14.4 percent.<sup>5</sup> School leavers are entering a labour market with higher unemployment and underemployment, and one that is increasingly part-time, casual and insecure.<sup>6</sup>

Further, there remains a significant challenge to ensure consistency and quality in careers education across the state in the longer-term, including equitable access to careers education for disadvantaged students. The Review of Career Education in Victorian Government Schools conducted by Dandolo Partners in 2017 found that there is wide variation in the quality and quantity of career education provided to students, with the majority of hours spent on senior students, versus younger years.<sup>7</sup> While there have been steps taken to address this, The Smith Family believes that the Youth Strategy is an opportunity to commit to both further strengthening careers education support and striving to meet leading practice.

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<sup>2</sup> Victorian Department of Education and Training, *Transforming Career Education in Victorian Government Schools: Connecting Today's Learning With Tomorrow's Jobs*, 2017, p 1.

<sup>3</sup> Victorian Department of Treasury and Finance, *Putting People First: Service Delivery, Budget Paper No 3*, 2020, p 35.

<sup>4</sup> Victorian Department of Education and Training, 'State budget highlights 2020/21', November 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Brotherhood of St Laurence, *COVID the great disruptor: Youth unemployment monitor December 2020*, 7 December 2020, p 1.

<sup>6</sup> Brotherhood of St Laurence, *COVID the great disruptor: Youth unemployment monitor December 2020*, 7 December 2020, p 1.

<sup>7</sup> Dandolo Partners, *Review of career education in Victorian government schools: Key Findings*, November 2017, p 4.

Careers education is best delivered through an integrated model incorporating individual support, parental and guardian involvement and partnerships with community organisations to support the diverse needs and aspirations of young people as they contemplate, and get ready for a post-school future.<sup>8</sup> It is also most effective when delivered across all stages of young people's development. The Youth Strategy can help take the government's initiatives to the next level, expanding and embedding more deeply the delivery of high quality, age-appropriate careers education to all young Victorians.

#### *Expanding careers education for all students*

Through the creation of the Framework and its recent budget announcements, the Victorian Government has made a promising start in expanding careers education to accommodate all students beyond the senior secondary years. The Youth Strategy is an opportunity to not only meet objectives set out in the Framework, but to go further in ensuring all young Victorians are informed, confident and capable in choosing their future path after school.

Firstly, the Youth Strategy and associated policy documents relating to children could articulate the need to expand Victoria's careers education to primary school students. There is a growing body of research about the importance of starting careers education activities in primary school. This is because children begin to form stereotypes (including based on gender) about occupations, careers and participation in post-school education from an early age for a range of reasons, including the unconscious influences of parents, friends and others with which they engage.<sup>9</sup> Once these limits are set, individuals rarely consider broader alternatives. Whilst the Framework acknowledges the need to start as early as primary school, initiatives outlined focus on Years 7 to 12.<sup>10</sup>

Helping primary school children to see the relationship between what they are learning and the possibilities it opens up for them in later life, helps motivate them to achieve and supports their ongoing engagement in education. Exposing primary school children to a wide range of people undertaking different jobs is particularly important for those from disadvantaged backgrounds, who may be exposed to fewer adults in employment or who have participated in post-school education.

There are already careers support programs being delivered to primary school students. One example is The Smith Family's *Future Seekers* Program which targets students in Years 4 to 6 to:

- support them to better understand their own interests and skills and helps them develop communication, critical thinking, collaboration and creativity skills,
- engage them with a range of people from the world of work, from a variety of industry and professions. This helps widen the students' views of the world of work and better understand the transferability of skills across industries and professions,
- help them create and explore a 'job of the future'. This contributes to enhancing their motivation around the world of work, and

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<sup>8</sup> Youth Action, *Career Guidance: The missing link in school to work transitions*, Youth Action Policy Paper, July 2017, p 9.

<sup>9</sup> NSW Education and Communities, *The case for career-related learning in primary schools: An introduction to primary school principals*, 2014.

<sup>10</sup> Victorian Department of Education and Training, 'Careers curriculum framework', September 2018; Victorian Department of Education and Training, *Transforming Career Education in Victorian Government Schools: Connecting Today's Learning With Tomorrow's Jobs*, 2017, p 3-4.

- facilitate their interaction with peers, teachers, parents and community members regarding the world of work.

The Youth Strategy could set aspirations or commitments to expand careers education to primary school students in coming years. This would be consistent with the Framework and the vision for careers education set out by Dandolo Partners in the Review.<sup>11</sup>

Secondly, the Youth Strategy could ensure that regular, meaningful exposure to employers and workplaces is embedded in the educational journey of all secondary students, not just those in senior years or undertaking apprenticeships. While we note the new investments in career exploration and management supports, (for instance, encouraging all high school students to develop a careers e-portfolio, with a target that 20 per cent of all Year 9 students by 2020/21)<sup>12</sup> the opportunities for deeper learning or immersion remain variable.

In addition to providing more traditional supports like careers counselling and information on further training, study or work opportunities, the Youth Strategy is an opportunity to strengthen the government's ambition to develop meaningful and targeted careers education initiatives that ensure students are suitably prepared for a fluid labour market once they complete their studies. This would be consistent with the Framework's intent to enhance students' connection to the world of work.<sup>13</sup>

Careers education is most effective when it is tailored, meaningful and offered more than once. Evidence suggests that students who take part in multiple work-related learning activities while in school are more likely to be in employment, training or further study in their 20s.<sup>14</sup> In order to be impactful, engagement with the world of work needs to be authentic and insightful.<sup>15</sup> Schools can provide meaningful, authentic encounters with the world of work by working with not-for-profit organisations and engaging employers to convey their experiences directly to students.<sup>16</sup> It is equally important that young people have numerous meaningful encounters, including hearing from a wide range of people from different personal backgrounds and professional sectors.<sup>17</sup>

One example of authentic engagement with students in the careers education space is *Work Inspiration*, which The Smith Family has delivered since 2013 in partnership with business. This program is delivered in schools to disadvantaged students from Years 9 to 12. It offers them a meaningful, practical opportunity to engage with the world of work, across different industries. Students spend time in various workplaces, interacting with employees, and learning more about the skillsets required for the particular industry, and the various roles within it. It helps highlights different pathways for young people beyond school. It also helps keep young people attached to education and supports them to think through their transition from school to work, training and/or further study. A wide range of employers are involved in the program.

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<sup>11</sup> Dandolo Partners, *Review of career education in Victorian government schools: Key Findings*, November 2017, p 7.

<sup>12</sup> Victorian Department of Treasury and Finance, *Putting People First: Service Delivery, Budget Paper No 3*, 2020, p 178.

<sup>13</sup> Victorian Department of Education and Training, *Transforming Career Education in Victorian Government Schools: Connecting Today's Learning With Tomorrow's Jobs*, 2017, p 3.

<sup>14</sup> Education and Employers, *The case for employer engagement in state schools: Research Findings*, April 2019, p 4.

<sup>15</sup> Education and Employers, *'What is a meaningful encounter with the world of work?'*, September 2019, p 2-3.

<sup>16</sup> Education and Employers, *'What is a meaningful encounter with the world of work?'*, September 2019, p 3.

<sup>17</sup> Education and Employers, *'What is a meaningful encounter with the world of work?'*, September 2019, p 3.

The Smith Family also delivers the *iTrack* online career mentoring program, an example of an initiative that provides students with support to understand a range of available post-school pathways and the steps needed to achieve career goals. *iTrack* is delivered to Year 9 to 11 students, including many from regional communities. It matches students with a supportive and trained adult, who provides practical advice and guidance about workplace, study and career opportunities. The program helps students extend the networks of advice that they can draw on, at a key point in their lives. The conversations between the mentor and student encourage the student to do their own research into post-school pathways and to begin formulating a plan for pursuing specific post-school opportunities. This also encourages ownership of the discussions by the student as they identify the steps needed to implement their post-school plan.

These are some examples of targeted and meaningful engagement of secondary students in the world of work to support careers development, which align with the intent outlined in the Framework and may be useful for the government to consider in the Youth Strategy.

#### *Ensuring equitable opportunities for disadvantaged students in school*

The Youth Strategy could explicitly acknowledge the need for equitable access to careers education for disadvantaged children and young people, so that they have the same opportunities to understand the world of work as their more advantaged peers. The Victorian Government has begun addressing this challenge to an extent. For example, the Industry Immersion Experience Program offers Years 7 to 10 students in schools from rural, regional and disadvantaged metropolitan areas the opportunity to spend a day at a workplace in growth industries<sup>18</sup> and the 'A Job Well Done' initiative helps students with disabilities prepare for work experience in several key industries.<sup>19</sup> Whilst these represent a promising start to tackling the equity of access issue, we encourage the Victorian Government to continue to explore more ways to ensure all disadvantaged students have equitable access to careers education, and are well-positioned to create their best future. This is critical to the Government's overarching goal of supporting all young Victorians to participate fully in the social, economic and civic life of the state, given disadvantaged students are less likely than their more advantaged peers, to complete Year 12, participate in tertiary education and be in employment, education and training post-school.

#### *Assisting with careers support after school*

In expanding careers education, the Youth Strategy could acknowledge the reality that, after secondary school, young people often still require further assistance to establish their careers, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, and commit to providing ongoing, targeted support for them.

As an example, one program offering such support is The Smith Family's *Cadetship to Career* program, a joint initiative developed with the Business Council of Australia. This program offers professional cadetship opportunities for disadvantaged students who are currently part of The Smith Family's Tertiary Scholarship Scheme (TSS). A cadetship runs for typically two to four years (while

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<sup>18</sup> Australian Centre for Career Education, '[Industry Immersion Experience](#)', 2020.

<sup>19</sup> Victorian Department of Education and Training, '[A Job Well Done: work experience safety resources for students with a disability](#)', July 2019.

they are in receipt of a tertiary scholarship). During this time, cadets receive eight weeks of paid full-time employment per year, workforce-focused training and skills development, as well as continuing financial support via the TSS. By participating in the program, cadets improve their job readiness, hone their career aspirations, develop new professional networks, and potentially access graduate-level employment positions. This is just one example of expanding careers education for young people after school to ensure they are well positioned to secure employment.

#### *Supporting young Victorians to make informed decisions on post-school pathways*

The Smith Family believes that the Youth Strategy could acknowledge that young Victorians need tailored support at secondary school to make informed, achievable decisions on post-school pathways. This complements the delivery of careers education initiatives and helps students turn ambitions and aspirations into reality.

Given that the tertiary sector is now a highly competitive and complicated market, it can be overwhelming for students and families trying to choose the right course, qualification and/or institution, particularly for families from disadvantaged backgrounds who may have limited or no experience with this complex sector. For secondary school students to decide whether to enter the VET or higher education sector, they need to understand the requisite subjects to complete at school, the qualifications or degrees to select after Year 12, the courses and units to complete during tertiary studies, and the career prospects potentially awaiting them on completion of these studies. Too often, students and their parents or carers, have a low or inaccurate and dated level of knowledge regarding which pathway is right for them, and a similarly limited understanding of the types of jobs or careers which follow from the study of particular courses or degrees. The rapidly changing employment and higher education sectors has heightened the challenge of students and families having accurate and timely information on which to make decisions. These major decisions can be particularly stressful for disadvantaged students, often relying on marketing information from individual training providers with more limited support from teachers or families.

While there is a proliferation of new career pathways and growing industries, young people continue to aspire to jobs that may no longer be relevant or available. Young people generally have low levels of careers knowledge, but despite this, think they have the information needed to make important career decisions. The volume of careers information available is extensive and growing, but is dispersed across multiple sources and hard to contextualise. This makes it challenging for young people, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to obtain effective and relevant careers advice.<sup>20</sup>

Without informed guidance and tailored information, young people can make decisions on their future that do not match their aspirations and interests. They may also not be aware that career pathways are often no longer linear and that they are likely to have multiple and diverse jobs over the course of their working lives. This lack of awareness increases the risk that they do not finish a qualification, or do not develop the requisite skillset for their desired career.

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<sup>20</sup> Behavioural Insights Team, *Moments of choice: Final report*, 2016, p 3-4.



The Youth Strategy could guarantee further support to students to develop a practical roadmap for their futures. While Victorian students can currently create personal plans, the Youth Strategy could seek to build on this, committing to tailored, targeted and sustained support for every Victorian student to create suitable post-school pathways.

#### *Helping young Victorians build a general skillset*

The Youth Strategy is also an opportunity to reaffirm the importance of young people being supported at school to develop a diverse set of general capabilities in order to succeed both in their careers and as active citizens in the community.<sup>21</sup>

A 2019 report from Deloitte Access Economics suggests that 86 per cent of jobs created between now and 2030 will be knowledge worker jobs, and two-thirds of all jobs by 2030 will be in 'soft-skills intensive occupations'.<sup>22</sup> The report also forecast that in the coming decade, service-centric roles would see some of the highest jobs growth, including areas like teaching, personal care and administration and sales.<sup>23</sup> In order to be ready for these types of jobs, young people require a diverse set of general capabilities as 'engaged thinkers, resilient and resourceful learners, creative problem solvers and active members of their communities'.<sup>24</sup> Developing a non-cognitive skill-set helps ensure young people thrive in contemporary life, be that in school, university or TAFE, the workplace or the community generally. The types of requisite capabilities include:<sup>25</sup>

- critical thinking
- creativity
- problem solving
- collaboration
- motivation
- self-efficacy
- conscientiousness, and
- perseverance.

The Youth Strategy could acknowledge the importance of these capabilities, and commit to further developing them as a set of learning priorities for young Victorians with measurable outcomes. It is currently difficult for teachers to teach general capabilities as they cut across different subject-based disciplines, yet require teaching within specific learning contexts, such as Maths or English, or through completion of a complex project.<sup>26</sup>

Committing to students attaining general capabilities would demonstrate Victoria is adopting leading practice in education, with the added benefit of being consistent with the reform framework

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<sup>21</sup> Lamb, S., Maire, Q., Doecke, E., *Key Skills for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: an evidence-based review*, report prepared for the NSW Department of Education, 2017, p 3.

<sup>22</sup> Deloitte Access Economics, *The path to prosperity: Why the future of work is human*, June 2019, p ii.

<sup>23</sup> Deloitte Access Economics, *The path to prosperity: Why the future of work is human*, June 2019, p 11.

<sup>24</sup> Lamb, S., Maire, Q., Doecke, E., *Key Skills for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: an evidence-based review*, report prepared for the NSW Department of Education, 2017, p 3.

<sup>25</sup> Lamb, S., Maire, Q., Doecke, E., *Key Skills for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: an evidence-based review*, report prepared for the NSW Department of Education, 2017, p 3.

<sup>26</sup> Lamb, S., Maire, Q., Doecke, E., *Key Skills for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: an evidence-based review* report prepared for the NSW Department of Education, 2017, p 4.

set out both in the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools and the Education Council's Review of Senior Secondary Pathways into Work, Further Education and Training.<sup>27</sup>

## 5. Tackling the digital divide experienced by disadvantaged young Victorians

The importance of digital technology to young people in their daily lives, as well as to their future livelihoods, is indisputable. Many schools already have policies in place regarding bring your own device for students. Victorian Department of Education policy also seeks to ensure schools provide equitable access, where they can, to devices for families in financial hardship.<sup>28</sup> However, The Smith Family's experience shows that many disadvantaged students and families experience significant levels of digital deprivation. Around 11 per cent of the close to 14,000 Victorian students on our *Learning for Life* scholarship program do not have a home computer with reliable internet access.

In research conducted by The Smith Family in 2018, young people indicated that a computer or other mobile device, as well as internet access at home, were essential for all young people to live a 'normal' life.<sup>29</sup> The lack of a computer was seen as potentially affecting young people's attitudes to and experiences of schooling, as well as their overall wellbeing.

The extended lockdowns experienced by Victorians due to COVID-19 starkly revealed the digital divide existing between those who have consistent and affordable access to digital technology and those who do not. In some families in Victoria who The Smith Family support, multiple children shared one device to complete their schoolwork, or struggled with unreliable internet connections at home. Other families purchased additional devices to help their children with remote learning, even if it created a significant financial burden. At times, the challenge was less access to devices or the internet, but a lack of digital skills to feel confident in navigating online learning.<sup>30</sup> These challenges were heightened for some culturally and linguistically diverse communities and families where English is not their first language.

The Victorian Government responded this year through loaning vulnerable students devices to support home learning, and has subsequently made a \$25 million investment to allow students to keep approximately 71,000 government school-owned devices.<sup>31</sup> The government has also invested in business-grade broadband for suburbs and regional towns throughout the state.<sup>32</sup>

There is an opportunity for the Youth Strategy to prioritise the digital needs of young people. With digital skills increasingly integrated into everyday teaching, learning and living, students with low digital access and skills become further disadvantaged due to an inability to complete school tasks. Disadvantaged students at significant risk of digital exclusion may disengage from school, as well as being critically unprepared to pursue post-school study, training or work. Having a digital device is

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<sup>27</sup> Australian Government, *Through Growth to Achievement: Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools*, March 2018, Recommendation 7, p xiii; Education Council, *Looking to the Future: Report of the Review of Senior Secondary Pathways into Work, Further Education and Training*, June 2020, Recommendations 2 and 3, p 20.

<sup>28</sup> Victorian Department of Education and Training, 'Personal Devices – Access', June 2020.

<sup>29</sup> Saunders, P., Bedford, M., Brown, Judith, Naidoo, Y., Adamson, E., *Material Deprivation and Social Exclusion Among Young Australians: A child-focussed approach*, November 2018, p 76.

<sup>30</sup> The Smith Family, *Covid-19 Insights Snapshot: Learning experiences during COVID-19 in some of Australia's most disadvantaged communities*, November 2020, p 2-3.

<sup>31</sup> Victorian Department of Education and Training, *Victorian Budget 20/21*, November 2020, p 4.

<sup>32</sup> Victorian Department of Treasury and Finance, *Putting People First: Service Delivery, Budget Paper No 3*, 2020, p 93.

not simply about young people consuming content at school or elsewhere, it is increasingly about them creating their own content. Those who are adept at being digital creators will have a significant advantage in further training, work and study over those who are only digital consumers.

The Smith Family recommends that the Youth Strategy acknowledge the digital needs of young people and commits to supporting them to thrive in the current era with access to devices, broadband and the skillsets and confidence to use digital tools. The Youth Strategy could also acknowledge in particular the equity needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged young people, and commit to ensuring they have the same opportunities, supports and training as more advantaged peers.

## 6. Conclusion

Designing the Youth Strategy is an opportunity for Victoria to underwrite its future success, prosperity and wellbeing with a forward-looking and ambitious plan. By seeking to deliver high quality education and training opportunities for all, the state will create a more level playing field on which young people confidently and ably prepare a future of their choosing, including those from disadvantaged and vulnerable backgrounds. With suitable governance mechanisms embedded from the start of the implementation process, Victoria can ensure the Strategy has a positive and sustained impact across the state, especially for those young people who need help the most. We wish the Victorian Government well in this important process and look forward to contributing to the Youth Strategy's goals.

## Appendix – Overview of The Smith Family

The Smith Family delivers programs in each state and territory in Australia, in over 90 communities, including many regional communities. In 2019-20, The Smith Family supported over 209,000 children, young people, parents, carers and community professionals across Australia. This included over 39,800 in communities throughout Victoria such as Bairnsdale, Ballarat, Broadmeadows, Dandenong, Frankston, Geelong, Morwell and Shepparton. Over 13,700 financially disadvantaged children and young people in Victoria participated on our largest program, the *Learning for Life* educational scholarship.

*Learning for Life* has three integrated components:

- A modest biannual payment made to families to help them cover core education related expenses such as books, uniforms and excursions.
- A Program Coordinator (a staff member with The Smith Family) who works with the family and their school to support the young person's long-term participation in education.
- A range of short programs that help ensure the young person is engaged in education. Programs include literacy and numeracy, learning clubs, mentoring and career activities, as well as digital and financial literacy initiatives for parents.

The Smith Family works with a particularly vulnerable cohort of children and young people. For example, of those children and young people supported nationally through our flagship *Learning for Life* scholarship:<sup>33</sup>

- all live in low-income families
- more than half live in single-parent families
- around 40 per cent have health or disability issues
- more than half have a parent or carer who did not complete Year 12
- more than 70 per cent of students have a parent or carer not in paid employment
- one in five students in Years 5 to 12 has attended four or more schools
- one in five students live in families who do not have a computer, or tablet connected to the internet.

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<sup>33</sup> The Smith Family, *Annual Report 2019/20*, p 5.