

Government of Western Australia

Submission to the Pathways to Post- School Success Review

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1. The Smith Family

The Smith Family is a national charity which has supported Australian children and families experiencing disadvantage for more than a century. Our **vision** is a world where every child has the opportunity to change their future. Our **belief** is that education is one of the world's most powerful change agents and our **purpose** is to overcome educational inequality caused by poverty.

We take a place-based approach and are working in over 90 low SES communities across every state and territory. In Western Australia we work in Armadale, Bunbury, Collie; Gosnells, Kwinana, Midland, Mirrabooka and Rockingham.

Our programs are:

- **Highly targeted**, supporting children and young people at significant risk of poor educational outcomes.
- Based on the principles of **reciprocity, accountability and parental engagement**.
- Demonstrably **effective** at improving educational and employment outcomes for highly disadvantaged young people.
- **Cost-effective**, through leveraging multiple partnerships with families, schools and other educational institutions, governments, business, philanthropy and the broader community.

The children and young people we support

In FY23, The Smith Family supported nearly **200,000** children, young people, parents, carers and community professionals nationally through our education-focused programs. This includes over 160,000 children and young people, of whom more than **62,800** accessed the multiple benefits of our largest program, the **Learning for Life** educational scholarship.

We support around **16,000** children, young people, parents, carers and community professionals in Western Australia each year. This includes over **5,300** students on the **Learning for Life** scholarship program.

The Learning for Life program

The *Learning for Life* program recognises that young people experiencing disadvantage benefit from **extra support to succeed at school**, complete Year 12, and go on to work or further studies. *Learning for Life* provides families and scholarship students with the following support:

- A **modest biannual payment**¹ to families to help them cover core education-related expenses such as books, uniforms and excursions.

¹ The annual *Learning for Life* payment to a family for a school student is \$478 and for a senior secondary school student is \$772.

- Support from a *Learning for Life* **Family Partnership Coordinator** (a Smith Family team member) who works with the family to support their child's long-term participation in education.
- Access to a range of **programs** to help ensure children's engagement in education. These include **literacy** and **numeracy** programs, learning clubs, mentoring and **career support** programs and **digital** and financial literacy programs (see the Appendix for further details).

The *Learning for Life* program is highly **targeted**. Students in receipt of the scholarship are likely to struggle to achieve educationally without support, as shown by the profile of students on the program in **Western Australia**:

- All are **financially disadvantaged**, as evidenced by having a Health Care Card or Pensioner Benefit Card.
- 26 percent are from an **Aboriginal** and/or Torres Strait Islander background.
- **38 percent** of *Learning for Life* students and 40 percent of primary carers have a **health** or **disability** issue.
- 55 percent of parents/carers have **not completed Year 12** or equivalent.
- The parent/carer of around 80 percent of students are **not in paid employment**.
- 60 percent of students live in a **single parent** family and a further six percent live in **grandparent-headed** families or other care relationships.
- A third of students live in a household with **six or more** people.

Each *Learning for Life* student is supported by a **sponsor**² who provides regular financial support to enable the student's participation on the program. Sponsors and students can also communicate with each other through a de-identified child-safe process which is administered by The Smith Family. Sponsors offer encouragement to students to stay engaged in learning and many older students reflect on the confidence 'boost' that comes from being supported in such a way.

Our partner schools

The Smith Family has formal partnerships with **800** schools nationally, including **over 50** primary schools, high schools and Colleges in Western Australia, around a shared goal of supporting students experiencing disadvantage to achieve educationally. The Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) of these partner schools ranges from 764 to 1,014, where the national average is set at 1000. **Ninety five percent** of our partner schools have **70% or more students** in the **bottom two socio-economic** quartiles. The current list of our Western Australian partner schools is in the Appendix.

² The vast majority of sponsors are individual Australians.

Our outcomes and research

The Smith Family has a strong focus on and internal **capability** to measure the **outcomes** of the children and young people supported on our programs. We use Outcomes Based Accountability (OBA) to measure the effectiveness of our programs (see the Appendix for further details).

Each *Learning for Life* student has a **Unique Student Identifier**, enabling us to longitudinally track their **school attendance, achievement**, school **completion** and post-school engagement in **employment, education** and **training**. By way of example of the impact of our work, **85 percent** of the highly disadvantaged young Australians who were on the *Learning for Life* program and in Year 12 in 2020, were in **work, study or training, two and a half years** after leaving school.

Partnering with the Western Australian Government

The Smith Family has had a long-standing and fruitful partnership with the Western Australian Government, with multiple year funding being provided through the Department of Education to support some of the **shorter programs** that are part of the *Learning for Life* suite.

The Smith Family also operates two **Child and Parent Centres** at Roseworth and Westminster and surrounding primary schools which are focussed on supporting children and families in the early years. The Child and Parent Centres are a consortium initiative of the Departments of Education, Health and Communities, with the Department of Education taking the lead role.

We are also very pleased to be working in partnership with the WA Department of Education, on a data exchange arrangement. Built on a **shared agenda** that seeks to **improve** the educational outcomes of students experiencing disadvantage, this initiative will see our front-line Western Australian staff getting access in **real-time** to educational data (such as school attendance and achievement) held by the Department on *Learning for Life* students. This will enable our staff to provide more **timely** and **targeted support** when students are struggling or to reinforce when good progress is being made. Our experience of similar arrangements with the South Australian Department for Education is that they can make a significant contribution to the support The Smith Family staff are able to offer students and families.

3. This submission

This proposal focuses on supporting **more Western Australian students** on our highly targeted and effective **Learning for Life** program. An outline of the key **evidence** underpinning the program and this proposal is provided below.

Intervene early and provide long term support

Analysis of **longitudinal data** by the Nobel Economist James Heckman and colleagues, shows that efforts aimed at improving the educational outcomes of young people experiencing disadvantage are most **cost-effective** when they take an **early intervention** approach and provide **balanced longer-term** support across a young person's life.

Professor Heckman's research shows that such an approach results in:

- Greater **high school graduation** and **university** enrolment rates
- Lower **welfare** dependency rates
- Lower rates of engagement with the **criminal justice** system.³

Parent/carer engagement in children's learning

Research also highlights the critical role of **parent/carer engagement** in their children's learning, and this is particularly true for **children experiencing disadvantage**. Parent/carer engagement especially influences children's **orientation to learning**, including their motivation, engagement, confidence and beliefs about learning. Parent/carer engagement in children's learning is a **bigger predictor** of how children do in school than a family's **socioeconomic status**. Students with engaged parent/carers, no matter what their income or background, are more likely to do well at school, graduate from school and go on to higher education.⁴

Relationship between this evidence and the *Learning for Life* program

The *Learning for Life* program is an **early intervention** approach, targeting students who, without support are likely to **struggle** to achieve educationally. Students are recruited to the program in the **primary years of school**, given the crucial foundations for learning – skills, dispositions and behaviours – which are laid during this time. In line with James Heckman's research, students can continue on the program through primary and **secondary school**, with some students also supported to attain a **tertiary** qualification.

Supporting parents/carers to be engaged in their child's education is a foundation of the program. Parent/Carers enter into a formal **Family Partnership Agreement** with The Smith Family which articulates a **shared commitment** to supporting a student's long-term participation in education. A key role of The Smith Family's Family Partnership Coordinators is to support parents'/carers' engagement with their child's learning, including strengthening the **home-school interface**. Team members' work with families and schools is guided and supported by a **Family Practice Framework** and **Schools Practice Framework**, as well as associated resources and ongoing training.

³ Cunha F & Heckman J, 2007 'The technology of skill formation', *American Economic Review*, *American Economic Association*, Vol 97, No 2, pp 31-47.

⁴ Fox S & Olson A, 2014 *Defining parental engagement*, ACT Department of Education and Training

4. Conclusion

This proposal will support the achievement of the Western Australian Government's strategic directions for **public schools** and its commitments to a number of **Closing the Gap** priorities and targets.

Strategic directions for public schools 2020-24

The Western Australian public school system is a major contributor to the State's **prosperity** and growth as a **fair society, promoting the wellbeing and participation of all its citizens** (Department of Education, *Strategic directions for public schools 2020-24*). The Department's aspiration is for every student to:

- Unlock and fulfil their **learning potential**
- Be equipped with contemporary and emerging work **capabilities**
- Develop the personal and social attributes that form the basis for **future wellbeing**
- Achieve **year on year growth** in their learning throughout their schooling
- Be well prepared to take the step **beyond school** into further education, training or work.

The Department's **success measures** include:

- Enabling Aboriginal students to succeed as **Aboriginal people**
- Progressing student **literacy** and **numeracy**
- Improving student **attendance**
- Increasing retention and achievement of students to **Year 12**
- Ensuring students gain the **skills, qualifications** and **knowledge** needed to experience success.

This proposal aims to support the achievement of **all of these measures** given it will support more students experiencing disadvantage to participate on the *Learning for Life* program, which has a strong focus on improving **student attendance, Year 12 completion** and **post-school engagement** in education, employment and training. The suite of short programs which are part of *Learning for Life* include a number which have a focus on **literacy** and **numeracy**, including *Learning Clubs* and *Student2Student* (see the Appendix for further details). The proposal will also see more **Aboriginal students** supported on the program, within the context of our strong commitment to reconciliation as articulated in our fourth Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP).

The proposal also aligns with one of the key drivers that the Department has identified that will take the public school system to the next level, namely **partnering** with families, communities and agencies to support the educational engagement of every student (*Strategic directions for public schools 2020-24*).

Commitments to Closing the Gap priorities and targets

The WA Government has committed to a range of Closing the Gap priorities and targets and of particular relevance to this proposal are the commitments to:

- Formally **partner** with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- Increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people attaining **Year 12** or equivalent by 2031

- Increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth (15 to 24 years) who are in **employment, education or training**.

The Smith Family's fourth Reconciliation Action Plan outlines our **partnership** approach with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, families, communities and organisations. In Western Australia we have established relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and elders in the communities in which we work. We regularly seek their advice and input on how we work.

A **quarter** of young people on *Learning for Life* in Western Australia are of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds and a significant proportion of the new students who will benefit from this proposal will be of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds. Two key measures of the effectiveness of the *Learning for Life* program are Year 12 completion and post-school engagement in employment, education or training.

Key educational outcomes

The Western Australian Government is **investing** significantly in improving the educational outcomes of children and young people in the state in line with the above policy priorities. However Western Australian data on **key outcomes**, such as school attendance, school completion and post-school engagement in employment, education and training, shows the extent of the ongoing **challenge**, particularly for children and young people experiencing disadvantage:

- Students in Years 7 to 10 in Government high schools in Western Australia missed school on average **38 days in 2022**⁵
- **NAPLAN** results in **reading** for 2023 show that a **quarter of students** in Year 5 whose parents had not completed Year 12 or equivalent, were assessed as needing additional support, as were a similar proportion of Year 9 students from similar backgrounds. These figures compare to around two percent for young people in Years 5 and 9 who have a parent who has completed a Bachelor degree or higher.
- The 2022 **NAPLAN ICT** results for all Western Australian students show that 50 percent of Year 6 students and 46 percent of Year 10 students attained the proficiency standard. National data also highlights the very significant **gap** in achievement in ICT between students from high SES and **low SES backgrounds**, so the percentage of Western Australian students from low SES backgrounds attaining the proficiency standard is likely low.
- The Year 10 to 12 **Apparent Retention Rate** in Western Australia Government schools was 83.6 percent in 2021. The Year 12 attainment rate for low SES students in the same year was 72.6 percent, meaning **one in four young people** from low SES are not attaining Year 12.

⁵ Average attendance rate for Year 7-10 Government schools of 80.9 percent.

In addition, The Smith Family is very aware of the ongoing **impact of COVID-19** and **cost of living increases** on students and families. While schools tried very hard to limit the impact of COVID, students, families and schools experienced disruptions across three school years and its impact continues. **Children experiencing disadvantage** were **particularly impacted** by these disruptions, given the **material** and **digital divides** they experience and that their parents/carers are often less confident and/or proficient to support home learning. Despite the best efforts of families and schools, COVID **exacerbated pre-existing gaps** in learning between young people experiencing disadvantage and their more advantaged peers. More recent cost of living increases have also disproportionately impacted students living in families experiencing disadvantage and remain an ongoing challenge.

The Western Australian Government is committed to enhancing the **state's prosperity** and growth as a **fair society** and to promoting the **wellbeing** and **participation** of **all its citizens**. Ensuring all children and young people in Western Australia can realise their **potential** and achieve educationally is a key contributor to realising this goal.

The Government has prioritised improving the educational and post-school outcomes of children and young people and in particular to enabling **Aboriginal** and Torres Strait Islander young people to achieve.

While the Government has given significant policy attention and investment to improving student outcomes, **COVID19** exacerbated educational challenges and its effects are still being felt. Significant **costs of living** increases have also made it much more difficult for **children experiencing disadvantage** to achieve educationally. Data shows that despite significant effort, many Western Australian children experiencing disadvantage are struggling to **attend school** at high rates, meet **literacy** and **numeracy benchmarks**, **complete Year 12** and be in **work** or **study** post-school.

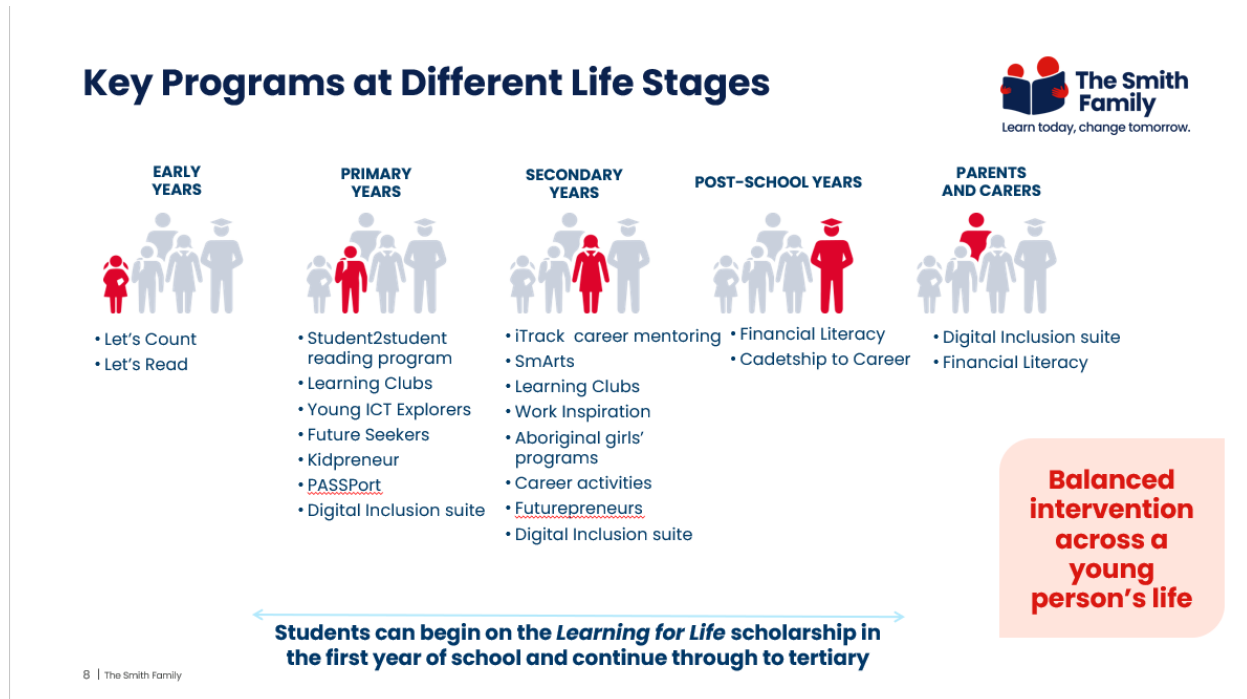
This proposal seeks a **modest** annual contribution to enable more Western Australian children to access The Smith Family's **long-term** and **effective Learning for Life** program. It builds on The Smith Family's long-standing and successful partnership with the Western Australian Government and takes that partnership to a new level by offering **deeper** and **more sustained** support for families and students who are struggling.

The approach will **leverage** significant **additional resources** from the WA and wider Australian community over multiple years, to support Western Australian children and young people. It will **leverage** our strong **partnerships** with Western Australian schools and complement our existing partnership with the Department of Education, including around using data to support improved student outcomes.

The Smith Family looks forward to continuing to work with the Western Australian Government around our shared goals of supporting **more children** experiencing disadvantage, including those of **Aboriginal** and Torres Strait Islander background, to achieve educationally and to enhancing their ability to participate economically and socially.

Appendices

The Learning for Life Program Suite



Details on some of these programs

Learning Clubs

Learning Clubs are a **safe** and **supportive out-of-school learning environment**, where primary or secondary students can access resources and participate in activities that enhance their **academic** and **social skills**. Students are supported by **tutors** who have the knowledge to support students with their homework and provide literacy and numeracy support. Learning Clubs also help students to develop **self-efficacy** and support **stronger engagement** in education. The program is delivered on school grounds or in a community centre at least once a week for 20 weeks or more.

Student2student

Student2student is an evidence-based **peer-to-peer reading program**. It targets students who are in Years 3 to 8 who are struggling with their reading. They are matched with a trained reading 'buddy' who is also a student. The students connect either over the phone or digitally on a regular basis over a number of weeks. The program helps the targeted students to **improve their reading ability**, enhances their **self-confidence** and their confidence towards school work.

Passport

This program prepares students in **Year 6** for a successful **transition to high school**, by increasing their **self-management** skills, **motivation** to learn and **understanding** of what high school will be like. Through the program, students learn the skills that will assist with the increased workload including time management, planning and goal setting. Students

have the opportunity to hear from a secondary school student about their high school experience and ask questions and raise concerns about the transition.

Learning for Life Program Outcomes

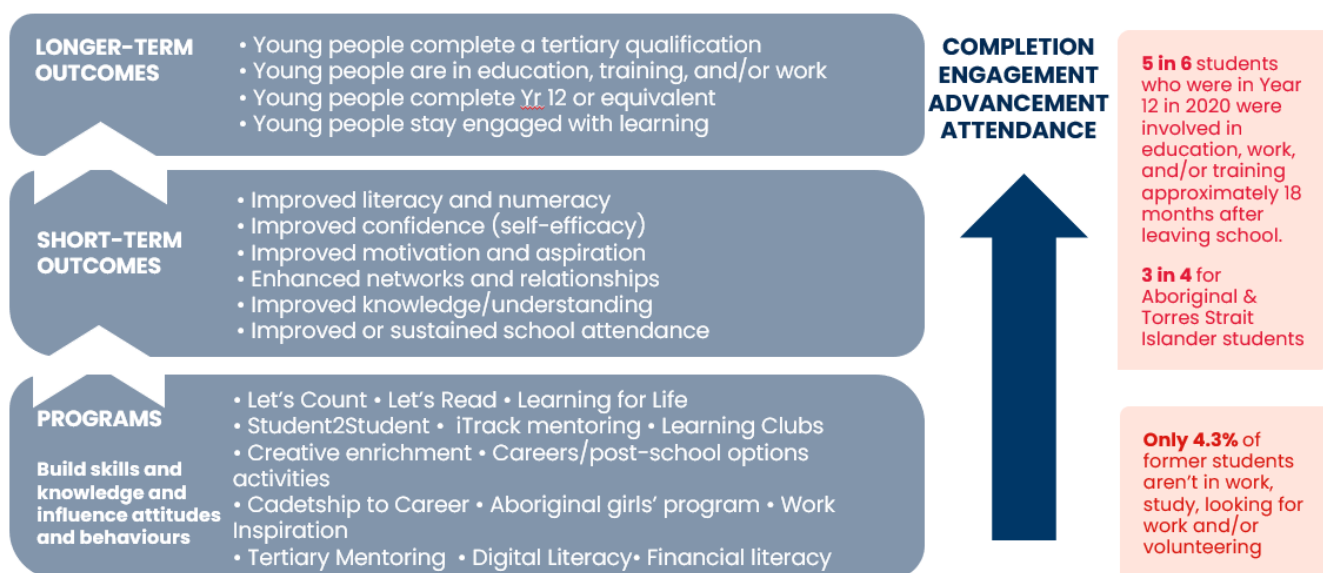
The Smith Family uses **Outcomes Based Accountability (OBA)** to measure the effectiveness of both our shorter programs and the *Learning for Life* scholarship program. OBA asks three central questions:

- How much did we do? (outputs)
- How well did we do it? (quality)
- Is anyone better off? (outcomes)

Data is collected for each of the shorter programs to answer each of these questions.

For each *Learning for Life* student, we track key longer terms outcomes, which research has shown are important – school attendance, school completion, post-school engagement in employment, education, and training and for students on a tertiary scholarship, whether they complete a qualification. We have a unique longitudinal dataset on young people experiencing disadvantage and our analysis of this data is contributing to the Australian educational evidence base.

Measures of effectiveness



10

85 percent of the highly disadvantaged young Australians who were on the *Learning for Life* program and in Year 12 in 2020, were in **work, study or training**, two and a half years after leaving school.

Current The Smith Family Partner Schools

The Smith Family's *Learning for Life* Program is partnering with over 50 schools across Western Australia, as shown in Table 2. The Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) of these partner schools ranges from 764 to 1,014, where the national average is set at 1000. All partner schools have more than 40% of students in the bottom two quartiles and 95% have 70% or more students in the bottom two quartiles.

Table 2: *Learning for Life*: Western Australian Partner schools

Allanson Primary School	Dryandra Primary School	Newton Moore Senior High School
Amaroo Primary School	East Maddington Primary School	North Parmelia Primary School
Armadale Senior High School	East Waikiki Primary School	Orelia Primary School
Ashfield Primary School	Fairview Primary School	Parkfield Primary School
Australind Senior High School	Gilmore College	Roseworth Primary School
Balga Senior High School	Girrawheen Senior High School	Seaforth Primary School
Beechboro Primary School	Gosnells Primary School	Southern River College
Bertram Primary School	Governor Stirling Senior High School	Swan View Primary School
Boyare Primary School	Grovelands Primary School	Swan View Senior High School
Bungaree Primary School	Gwynne Park Primary School	Thornlie Primary School
Carey Park Primary School	Hudson Park Primary School	Thornlie Senior High School
Cecil Andrews College	Koorana Primary School	Warnbro Primary School
Challis Community Primary School	Leda Primary School	Westminster Primary School
Clayton View Primary School	Lockridge Primary School	Wilandra Primary School
Collie Senior High School	Middle Swan Primary School	Wilson Park Primary School
Cooloongup Primary School	Midvale Primary School	Woodbridge Primary School
Dianella Primary College	Neerigen Brook Primary School	Yule Brook College
Dianella Secondary College		