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# Queensland Social Services Investment Framework

## Submission

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The Smith Family welcomes the opportunity to provide this brief submission on the Queensland Government's draft *Social Services Investment Framework*. This submission draws on our long history of supporting children, young people, families and communities in Queensland and across Australia. Our comments on the draft Framework should be read in the context of our organisational focus, the outcomes we are trying to achieve and our way of working.

### Introduction

#### The Smith Family

The Smith Family is a national charity which has provided support to children, young people and families for over 90 years. Our mission is to create opportunities for young Australians in need, by providing long-term support for their participation in education.

In 2012-13 our programs were delivered in 96 communities across all States and Territories and supported over 112,000 disadvantaged children, young people and their families. This includes over 11,000 from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds.

Our work in Queensland is in a diversity of communities across the state, namely Brighton, Brisbane, Caboolture, Cairns, Cape York, Cherbourg, Coolangatta, Coomera, Inala, Ipswich, Logan, Mackay, Maroochydore, Redlands, Rockhampton, Sarina, Southport, Townsville and Toowoomba. In Queensland in the 2012-13 financial year, we supported:

- Over 6,500 students from a low socio-economic background, through on a long-term educational *Learning for Life* scholarship.
- Over 15,700 children, young people and their parents/carers through a range of literacy initiatives, learning clubs, mentoring, career activities and financial and digital literacy programs, as well as the Commonwealth Government funded *Communities for Children* program.
- Numerous cross-sectoral partnerships involving educational institutions, business, community organisations and others, through the Commonwealth Government funded *School Business Community Partnership Brokers* program.

Our approach is an early intervention and prevention one, as education is the key to supporting young people to realise their potential and to breaking the cycle of disadvantage.

We have a strong evidence base for our programs and an integrated whole-of-organisation approach to measurement. This includes through Program Logics and an Outcomes Framework (see Appendix A).

In particular, The Smith Family is tracking three long-term outcomes of the 34,000 young people it is supporting nationally through its *Learning for Life* scholarship. These are:

- Increasing school attendance.
- Increasing the proportion of Year 10 students who advance to Year 12 or equivalent.
- Increasing the proportion of young people in post-school education, training and/or work.

Our work with this number of young people provides a unique data set nationally, given its size, the fact that all the young people are from low socio-economic background, and that they stay on our program over multiple years. As such, The Smith Family sees it as critical that we use our research and evaluation to not only continuously improve our own work but to inform public policy at both the State and Commonwealth levels.

### **Our funding**

In the 2012-13 financial year, The Smith Family's income was \$75.8 million nationally, of which \$24.4 million was from Government. In Queensland our Government funding is around \$6.4 million and is for:

- *Let's Read* from the Queensland Department of Education
- *School Business Community Partnership Brokers* program from the Federal Department of Education
- *Communities for Children* from the Federal Department of Social Services
- *Better Futures Local Solutions* from the Federal Department of Human Services.

### **Our partnerships**

At the core of our work is a partnership approach and we have extensive cross-sectoral partnerships within Queensland and nationally. This includes with 128 corporate partners, 72 Trusts and Foundations, 20 universities and numerous non-government organisations. In Queensland alone we have close to 150 partner schools with whom we are working on a set of shared objectives focused on improving the educational and wellbeing outcomes of children and young people.

The Smith Family also draws heavily on volunteers who undertake a range of roles. In the 2012-13 financial year 7,745 volunteers contributed close to 420,000 hours of service to The Smith Family across Australia. Close to 1,200 volunteers supported our work in Queensland.

### **Some data on children and young people in Queensland**

There is evidence from a range of data that Queensland has a way to go in ensuring all children and young people are able to achieve a range of key education and developmental outcomes. Data from the Australian Early Development Index for example, shows that one in four children in Queensland, in their first year of school, were developmentally vulnerable in one or more key areas. Close to fourteen percent of children were vulnerable in two or more areas (Australian Government, 2013).

As children progress through school, NAPLAN data for Queensland shows:

- One in five Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Year 5 did not meet the national minimum numeracy standard.
- 14 percent of Year 9 students from a low socio-economic background did not meet the national minimum reading standard (ACARA, 2013).

Further, around 31 percent of Queenslanders aged 17 to 24 years, were not fully engaged in work or study (COAG Reform Council, 2013).

The above data highlights the case for an increased focus and investment on improving the education and developmental outcomes of children and young people in Queensland. This will have short and long term social and economic benefits for children, young, families, communities and the state as a whole. This investment will need to involve a range of portfolio areas and require a whole of government approach, in order to be most effective.

### Principles of investment

#### Investing in early intervention and prevention

The Smith Family welcomes the Queensland Government's articulation of a core set of principles to underpin its social services investment. This provides greater visibility to the range of stakeholders interested in government funding in this area. The Smith Family supports an increased focus on early intervention and prevention, as this is not only more likely to achieve better outcomes for children, families and communities, but is also more cost effective.

Importantly, Nobel economist James Heckman and his colleague Flavio Cunha have noted the importance of balanced investment across the full life cycle of a child and young person: "For a fixed expenditure, policies that are balanced increase returns and are more productive than policies tailored to one segment of the life cycle of the child...If early interventions are followed up with later interventions in an optimal fashion, outcomes can be considerably improved" (Cunha and Heckman, 2007). The Smith Family would therefore urge the Queensland Government to adopt an 'early intervention and prevention' approach based on the research literature which recommends a focus on addressing issues 'early in the pathway' as well as 'early in life'<sup>1</sup> and a balanced investment across the full life cycle of a young person.

#### People at the centre and holistic service delivery

At the centre of any public funding, particularly in the area of Social Services, must be the needs of individuals, families and communities. The Smith Family strongly supports the Queensland Government taking a holistic approach to service delivery and emphasising seamless delivery from the client's perspective. Many of the families that The Smith Family supports need to access multiple services, including across jurisdictions (State, Commonwealth and local government) and with non-government providers. This is an area where The Smith Family believes there is an opportunity for significant enhancement from the client's perspective.

#### Partnership

The effective and efficient delivery of high quality social services in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will undoubtedly require strong cross-sectoral partnerships. Such partnerships need to be based on a shared understanding of partners' roles and responsibilities and a mutual respect for the respective expertise, skills and contribution each sector makes. These partnerships should formally acknowledge

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Hayes A (2006) Maintaining the gains: Sustainability in prevention and early intervention, *Family Matters*, No. 75, 66-69.

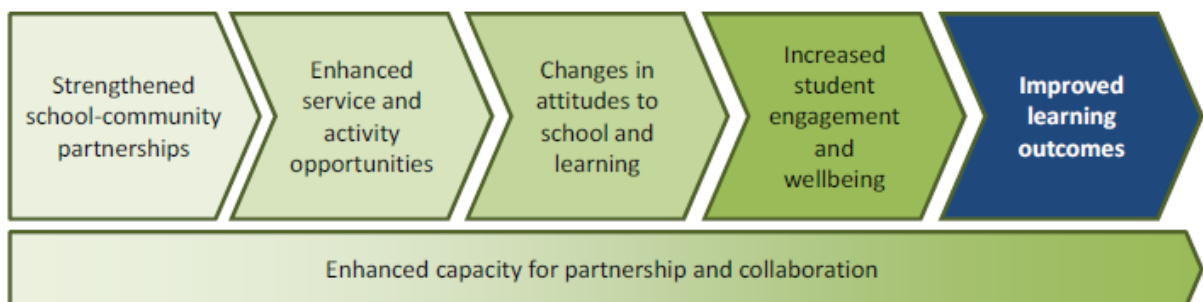
the diversity of resources and inputs that partners will bring to them, including in-kind contributions and that of volunteers.

Central to a partnership approach should be the co-identification of social service needs and priorities and the co-design of services. Only through such an approach will the most appropriate services be designed and implemented.

There are a range of new partnership models that are operating across Australia and globally that are effectively and efficiently improving outcomes for individuals, families and communities and may warrant further exploration in Queensland. They include **School Community Hubs** which are based on the premise that schools cannot be expected to do the work of improving student outcomes alone, particularly in schools serving communities characterised by socio-economic disadvantage (DEECD, 2013).

School-Community Hubs are an effective way of harnessing the necessary resources and expertise needed to support the learning and wellbeing of young people, especially those facing disadvantage. They provide the governance and accountability structures needed for effective collaboration between school education systems and the community, business, philanthropic and local government sectors (Black, 2008). The Hubs are responsive to the local needs of the school community, leverage new and existing resources and are a platform for targeted and coordinated activities and services that increase student and family engagement in schools and improve student learning outcomes.

### The logic of School Community Hubs



(DEECD, 2013)

An external evaluation of four hubs in Victoria has concluded that “the Hub pilots have had a real impact on students, schools families and communities.

- **Students** have improved school readiness, increased engagement in learning and motivation, enhanced education and employment pathways and increased literacy and numeracy.

- **Schools** are student and family friendly, enriching environments, building staff and enhancing the capacity to partner.
- **Families** are more engaged in schools and their child's learning, and have more opportunities to input to their child's education.
- **Community** is increasingly engaged in student programs and there is more access for community partners to work with schools" (DEECD, 2013).

The approach of coordinating new and existing resources (both financial and other) in a way which flexibly responds to the particular needs and challenges of the community, is both an efficient and effective way of improving a range of outcomes, including educational and other social service outcomes. These hubs are only possible through a strategic partnership approach. Non-government organisations, such as The Smith Family, are particularly well placed to act as a facilitator in these types of partnerships, bringing not only additional resources from across the business and philanthropic sectors, but also the skills to work with a diversity of organisations to achieve the common goal of improved educational outcomes for disadvantaged children. They also bring a strong focus on monitoring and reviewing progress.

The Social Services Investment Framework provides an opportunity to further explore these types of initiatives and the benefits they can bring, both from an effectiveness and efficiency perspective.

### Transparency

The Smith Family welcomes the inclusion of transparency as one of the key principles of the Framework. This has the potential of increasing public confidence in how funds are spent and also providing greater clarity for providers of social services. As part of this transparency, The Smith Family fully supports organisations making a financial summary of its operations publically available. The Smith Family does this on an annual basis through its Annual Report which is available on its website.

The Smith Family's focus is on the effective and efficient delivery of outcomes to the children, young people, families and communities it supports. It therefore believes that underpinning government contracting of social services should be the principle of funding to deliver outcomes, and that this is what organisations should be held accountable to. It therefore does not see merit in publishing the remuneration of Chief Executive Officers within the sector, as this is not related to the delivery of contracted outcomes. Publishing these details is likely to be an unnecessary and unhelpful distraction from the core issue of the delivery of high quality outcomes for clients.

### **Contestability**

The Smith Family understands the rationale behind this principle and notes that it will be balanced by the need to plan services on a long-term basis. The Smith Family would argue that a reasonable funding agreement for many community programs is at least five years and in some cases preferably ten. This reflects the fact that many issues/needs will take sustained effort over multiple years to address. Shorter term contracts not only reduce the likelihood of sustained outcomes and change being achieved, but also impact on staff recruitment and turnover which can contribute to inefficiencies.

Within longer term contracts, monitoring processes can be put in place on an annual basis to ensure outcomes are being achieved and financial resources are appropriately managed.

### **Value for money**

The Smith Family recognises the importance of this principle in the delivery of social services. The role, expertise, skills and networks of non-government organisations are central to the contribution they make to improving the lives of the individuals, families and communities they support. This contribution has been extensively acknowledged in the research literature, including in key areas such as building social capital. Many of the contributions which non-government organisations make are hard to put a monetary value on. We therefore welcome the acknowledgement that assessing 'non-cost factors' will be a part of the Social Services Investment Framework. Such an assessment should be done in partnership with the sector and with researchers who have expertise in this area.

### **Balanced investment**

As identified above, The Smith Family strongly supports an early intervention and prevention approach and appropriate investment across the continuum of universal, secondary and tertiary services. It is also prudent that risk be managed appropriately.

Given the complexity and entrenched nature of some of the issues that individuals, families and communities are facing, coupled with the dynamic nature of community need, it is also appropriate that there is capacity within a Social Services Investment Framework to test new approaches and innovations. These new approaches should be evaluated across an appropriate timeframe. Often new approaches and innovations will take time to realise positive outcomes and implementation of such initiatives should take account of this. There has historically been a tendency to fund pilots in the Social Services and other related areas, with successful pilots not always continuing beyond the pilot phase. This is an inefficient use of resources, so if effective innovations should be more widely



adopted and expanded as a central plank of a Social Services Investment Framework.

### **Proportionality**

The Smith Family supports an approach which sees management, administrative, compliance and reporting arrangements that are proportionate to the investment and the level of risk involved.

### **Accountability**

As identified in our introduction, The Smith Family has a strong focus on measurable outcomes and on evaluating and reporting on the effectiveness of its work. We are therefore strongly supportive of the principle of accountability. Critical in this, is that appropriate and realistic timeframes for are set and agreed upon between government and non-government organisations. In many social service and related areas of delivery, as noted above, achieving significant changes in client or community outcomes will take time. This should be factored into contractual agreements.

As part of good accountability processes, there should be an agreement at the start of the contracting period on what the reporting and data requirements will be and these should remain consistent across the funding cycle, unless there are exceptional circumstances which are agreed upon by both parties.

Standardised funding agreements and schedules across and within departments are also worth exploring. We note for example that the Commonwealth Minister for Social Services has indicated that his Department is “moving towards a single comprehensive contract model with each organisation that delivers services on its behalf...hopefully with a five year contract lifespan” (Address to the Family Relationships Services Australia Senior Executives Forum, 18 March 2014, Canberra). There may be merit in the Queensland Government considering how it can partner with the Commonwealth Government in this area, as many organisations receive funding from both, and consistency of processes and approaches may have merit.

### **Conclusion**

The Smith Family welcomes the development of a Social Services Investment Framework and would be happy to expand on any of the issues raised in this submission.

## C. REFERENCES

Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (2013) *2013 National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy Achievement in Reading, Persuasive Writing, Language Conventions and Numeracy: National Report for 2013*.

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# Appendix A: The Smith Family's outcomes framework



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