

# South Australian Productivity Commission

Submission to the Inquiry into Positioning All South  
Australians to Share in the Benefits of Economic  
Growth

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## The Smith Family

The Smith Family welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the South Australian Productivity Commission's Inquiry into Positioning All South Australians to Share in the Benefits of Economic Growth.

The Smith Family is a national charity and 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. This includes **10** communities in South Australia, such as Port Adelaide Enfield, Salisbury, Playford, Onkaparinga, Port Augusta and Whyalla.

The Smith Family has formal partnerships with **800** schools nationally, including **80** primary schools, high schools and Colleges in South Australia, around a shared goal of supporting students experiencing disadvantage to achieve educationally. These schools have a low Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA)<sup>1</sup>, with around **half** having an ICSEA **below 930**, where the national average is set at 1000. **Seventeen** partner schools have an ICSEA **below 900**.

### The children and young people we support in South Australia

In FY23, The Smith Family supported **200,000** children, young people, parents, carers and community professionals across Australia, through our education-focused programs. This includes more than 162,000 children and young people, of whom **63,000** accessed the multiple benefits of our largest program, the **Learning for Life** (LfL) educational scholarship. Further information on the LfL program is in the Appendix.

Currently there are around **7,800** children and young people in **South Australia** supported on *Learning for Life*. Around **12 percent** of all children on the program are from SA, reflecting the **higher proportion** of children in South Australia experiencing **socioeconomic disadvantage**, compared to Australia as a whole.<sup>2</sup>

*Learning for Life* is highly **targeted**. Students in receipt of the scholarship, are likely to struggle to achieve educationally without support, given the multiple challenges they face, as shown by the profile of SA students on the program:

- All are **financially disadvantaged**, as evidenced by having a Health Care Card or Pensioner Benefit Card.
- One in four are from an **Aboriginal** and/or Torres Strait Islander background.
- 43 percent of students and 40 percent of their primary carers have a **health or disability** issue.
- Half of parents/carers have **not completed Year 12** or equivalent.
- The parent/carer of 76 percent of students are **not in paid employment**.
- 55 percent of students live in a **single parent** family and a further six percent live in **grandparent**-headed families or other care relationships.
- 32 percent of students live in a household with **six or more** people.
- 19 percent of students are from **non-English speaking backgrounds**.

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<sup>1</sup> ICSEA provides an indication of the socio-educational backgrounds of students in a school.

<sup>2</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics June 2021 *Regional population by age and sex*

## 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. 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**.

Part of our research with young people on LfL is the **Pathways, Engagement and Transitions (PET)** project. The PET project has been running across 2021-24, exploring the pathways young people take through the latter years of school and the early years post-school, and what has influenced those pathways. This unique longitudinal research is a significant contributor to comments later in this submission.

## Data exchange with the SA Department for Education

The Smith Family is very pleased to be partnering with the SA Department for Education around a **data sharing arrangement**. This arrangement is based on a **shared commitment** to improving the educational outcomes of young people experiencing disadvantage. It sees The Smith Family's front-line staff in SA having **real time access** to a PowerBI dashboard hosted by the Department. The dashboard provides key educational and other information on *Learning for Life* students whose parent/carer has given consent for the two-way exchange. The information provided includes attendance, achievement, demographic and behavioural information.

This data is enabling The Smith Family staff to provide much more **targeted** and **timely** support to students and families on *Learning for Life*. This innovative data initiative went live in November 2021 and a recent evaluation with team members indicates that 92 percent of staff rate the dashboard's usefulness for their work at 4 or 5 out of 5 and there is strong evidence of how the dashboard is **improving our practice** with students and families. It is also strengthening our collaborative work with schools around improving student outcomes.

Off the back of the very successful pilot established with SA, The Smith Family has entered into data sharing agreements with Tasmania, Western Australia and Queensland. Importantly, parent/carers are very supportive of such arrangements, with consent rates being **over 90 percent** in all jurisdictions. The collaboration between the Department and The Smith Family recently **won the 'Best Use of Data for Community Impact'** at the **2024 Australian Not-for-Profit Technology Awards**.

## Productivity, education and skills

The **links** between **education, skills** and **productivity** are well documented. "Empirical estimates in the academic literature – both Australian and overseas – support the hypothesis that high education levels and lower incidence of illness are associated with higher wages, and by implication, higher labour productivity" (Forbes et al 2010, p xvi). Further, "People who are unemployed or not in the labour force have systematically different characteristics from people who are employed. For example, they tend to have lower levels of education, a greater incidence of chronic illness and a longer experience of unemployment" (p xvi).

The *Report of the Review of Senior Secondary Pathways* (Education Council, 2020) identified that **literacy, numeracy** and **digital literacy** continue to be **essential competencies** and young people also need "employability skills, creativity and entrepreneurial capabilities, financial literacy, interpersonal skills and civic understanding" (p 17). Many, or perhaps all of these skills, are directly or indirectly related to productivity.

The impact of **technology** on productivity is clear, with the Business Council of Australia noting in its 2017 *Future Proof* report, “Australia’s economy will increasingly become the domain of skilled workers who can harness and augment technology” (p 7). **Digital capability** has become an essential pre-requisite for educational participation both at school and post-school, as well as for broader economic and social participation.

There is also a clear link between **innovation**, productivity and economic progress. Bloom et al (2019) have argued that innovation is the only way for the most developed countries to secure sustainable long run productivity growth. While policies such as research and development tax credits and direct public funding may boost innovation in the short run, increasing the **stock of human capital** is more effective in the long run (Khatiwada and Arao).

## Educational outcomes of young South Australians

Given the link between education and productivity, the **educational outcomes of young South Australians** are a key consideration for this Inquiry. In South Australia, as in all Australian jurisdictions, there is a **strong link** between educational outcomes and **socioeconomic background**, as evidenced by the data below.

- Around one in four SA children (23.8 percent) **start school developmentally vulnerable** in one or more key areas and only just over half (53.7 percent) are on track in the five key areas of the Australian Early Development Census (Commonwealth of Australia, 2022).
- **SA NAPLAN** results in **reading** for 2023, show that **one in five** (19 percent) students in Year 5 whose parents had not completed Year 12 or equivalent, **need additional support** to meet the National Minimum Standard. This figure increased to **one in four** students (25.0 percent) by Year 9. This compares to 2.4 percent and 3.9 percent of students in Years 5 and 9 respectively, who have a parent who has completed a Bachelor degree. Results for **numeracy** are similar.
- In 2023, the **average school attendance rate** for students in SA government schools in Years 1 to 10 was 86.6 percent. This means on average students missed over five weeks of school across the year. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Years 1 to 10 in government schools on average missed more than 10 weeks of school in 2023 (Report on Government Services 2024).
- The **Apparent Year 10 to Year 12 retention rate** in SA Government schools in 2023 was 78.1 percent, meaning one in five young South Australians in Government schools are not being retained to Year 12 (Report on Government Services 2024). The Apparent Retention Rate has **declined** in recent years in SA, despite the labour market requiring *more* young people to complete Year 12.

National **NAPLAN ICT** data also shows a significant achievement gap between students of high and low socioeconomic backgrounds. For example in 2022, 60 percent of Year 10 students who had a parent with a Bachelor degree or higher attained the proficiency standard. This compares to 28 percent of students with a parent whose highest educational attainment was Year 11 or equivalent.

National data collected through the OECD's **Programme for International Student Assessment** (PISA) also shows that young people experiencing disadvantage are, on average, also less likely to have strong levels of **creative problem-solving skills**, or display high levels of **self confidence**, relative to their more advantaged peers.

The above data shows that on average, children experiencing disadvantage in South Australia (and other Australian jurisdictions) start school behind, and despite the efforts of students, families and schools, there is a **persistent and increasing gap** in educational outcomes as young people move through school. The longer-term **impact of COVID-19** on students, particularly those experiencing disadvantage, is also still being played out. Young people experiencing disadvantage are less likely to **complete Year 12**, less likely to participate in **post-school education** and as a consequence, less likely to be in work and/or study post school, than their more advantaged peers. All of which has significant implications for young people's ability to share in the benefits of economic growth.

### **The need for systemic responses**

While these patterns have long been present in SA, family background **is not destiny**. The link between student background and educational outcomes can be **significantly reduced**, as it has in some OECD nations. This requires a **systemic approach** – rather than one that focuses just on a young person in isolation of the family, school, community, services and systems which influence their lives.

The need for a systemic approach, is highlighted by research from the Grattan Institute (Goss et al, 2016). It showed that students who display similar potential in Year 3 have **very different growth trajectories** depending on their parents' education level. Between Year 3 and Year 9, students whose parents have lower levels of formal education, consistently make **less progress** than similarly capable students whose parents are highly educated. This holds for any ability grouping of disadvantaged students. Particularly telling is that of students with high Year 3 NAPLAN scores; those experiencing disadvantage make one year and nine months less progress by Year 9, compared to students of advantaged backgrounds.

The *LfL* data cited earlier, which shows high levels of health and disability for students and their parent/carers for many low-income families, also reinforces the need for a systemic approach. The **multiple factors** influencing educational outcomes for young people experiencing disadvantage go **beyond** those which are the **direct responsibility of schools**.

Research in the United States (Van Reenen 2021) has also examined the link between family background and the likelihood of being an **inventor**<sup>3</sup>, showing that those born into low-income families, minorities and women are highly underrepresented. Children born into affluent families are much more likely to grow up to be inventors, compared to children born into low-income families. This is **regardless of early capability** in subjects such as maths. Even for children who are in the top five percent mathematically, those from affluent families are far more likely to become inventors, contributing not only to their personal success, but also to national innovation, economic growth and productivity.

Van Reenen argues that rather than **ability differences** explaining US patterns of inventors, there is a **misallocation of talent**. He asserts that giving disadvantaged groups the same opportunities as their similarly talented but more affluent peers, would see many more people from disadvantaged backgrounds pursuing an inventor career and increase the quality and quantity of aggregate human capital. Bell et al (2019) (cited in Van Reenen 2021) have estimated that reducing such barriers for those from disadvantaged backgrounds would potentially **quadruple aggregate US innovation**. While The Smith Family is unaware of similar research in Australia, it is likely that the same relationships exist here, with the same potential benefits from strategies that aim to maximise the contribution of children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

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<sup>3</sup> Defined as being named on a patent document, both applied and granted. Patents are often part of the innovation process.

## Positioning young South Australians to share in the benefits of economic growth

### School attendance and literacy, numeracy and digital skills

Critical to more young South Australians being able to share in the benefits of economic growth, is ensuring more are achieving **strong educational outcomes**. Given the clear **educational equity** challenge highlighted by the above data, a strong focus on young people experiencing disadvantage is essential to achieve this.

Investment in effective interventions that support high levels of **literacy** and **numeracy** for all young people is foundational, as is a strong focus on effective strategies that support high levels of **school attendance** given the link between attendance, achievement, school completion and post-school engagement in work and study (see for example The Smith Family, 2018). **Small group tutoring**, including online and in students' homes, can play a role in improving literacy and numeracy (see for example *The Catch-Up Learning Program*, The Smith Family, 2022).

Ensuring all students are **digitally included**, which involves equipping them with digital and problem-solving skills for the digital environment and empowering them to engage safely, healthily and responsibly in the digital environment, is also crucial to young people being able to participate in education, employment and the wider society. The Smith Family welcomes the SA Government's focus on this area and its important announcement in January 2024 (see <https://www.premier.sa.gov.au/media-releases/news-items/school-families-get-cost-of-living-support>) regarding the provision of laptops to school students whose families are on a School Card.<sup>4</sup>

### Supporting more young South Australians to complete Year 12 and engage in work and/or study post-school: Findings from the Pathways, Engagement and Transitions project

Increasing the proportion of young people who **complete Year 12** or equivalent and move into **work and/or study post-school** is also a key component of ensuring more young South Australians share in the benefits of economic growth. The Smith Family's longitudinal research study, Pathways, Engagement and Transitions (PET), offers unique insights that can contribute to this goal.

The PET Project has surveyed three times (2021, 2022 and 2023)<sup>5</sup>, two groups of young people, who were on *Learning for Life* and in either Year 10 or Year 12 in 2020. It has also interviewed three times (again in 2021, 2022 and 2023), a subset of 60 young people who participated in the survey. This data has been combined with data collected on these young people as they moved through school. Thousands of young people from all states and territories are participating in the project, including around **10 percent from SA**.

Relevant findings from the PET project for this Inquiry include:

#### A. Early school leaving

There is a relationship between **school attendance** and **achievement** in Year 9 (and potentially earlier) and early school leaving. Further, poor attendance and achievement are stronger predictors of early school leaving than demographic characteristics such as gender and Indigeneity. The importance of these findings lies in the fact that attendance and achievement are **early flags** that identify students who need additional support to stay at school. As such, with good data systems, they can be **acted upon**.

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<sup>4</sup> School Cards are available for low-income families with children attending government schools.

<sup>5</sup> PET is continuing with the Year 10 2020 cohort for a further three years and in 2024 introduced a new cohort, those in Year 10 in 2023 and on LfL.

The **reason/s** young people leave school early influence their post-school pathways. Generally, those who left school because of ‘pull’ factors, such as *getting an apprenticeship/job/traineeship*, had more positive post-school pathways than young people who left because of ‘push’ factors, such as *had problems with students or teachers, being bullied at school, health or mental health issues, didn’t like school or not doing well at school/missed a lot of school*. More effectively addressing some of these ‘push’ factors would result in more young people completing Year 12.

Importantly, of those young people who commenced Year 11 but subsequently left school early, 92 percent indicated in Year 11 that they **intended to complete school**. Therefore the ‘issue’ is not simply one of student aspiration or intention, as is often suggested. Many early school leavers had a goal of school completion and this is something which should influence how schools and relevant organisations support young people.

### **B. Year 12 completion**

The PET project reinforces other data on the importance of Year 12 completion for **post-school engagement** in education, training and work, and hence the capacity of young people to share in the benefits of economic growth. Of the Year 10 2020 cohort who subsequently completed Year 12, 76 percent were in work and/or study in 2023, compared to 67 percent of the Year 10 cohort who did not complete Year 12. Of those who commenced Year 12 in 2020, 87 percent of those who went on to complete Year 12 were in work and/or study in 2022, compared to 71 percent for those who did not complete Year 12.

### **C. Sources of advice and support regarding school completion and post-school pathways**

**Family members** and **friends** are young people’s key sources of advice and support regarding school, work and further study. For those who complete Year 12 and/or undertake further education, teachers, careers advisors and tutors are also important sources. Some families of young people experiencing disadvantage may **struggle to provide accurate, comprehensive and up-to-date information** about these areas, particularly in a rapidly changing labour market and educational and training environment. Parent/carers for example may have a limited or inaccurate understanding of **VET**. Most are unaware of the range of training the sector provides or that employment outcomes for VET graduates are strong.

### **D. Factors influencing post-school transitions**

A number of factors interact to influence the post-school transitions of young people experiencing disadvantage. Young people making successful transitions demonstrate the importance of **strong career management skill sets**. With these skills, young people are able to successfully identify and navigate available work and/or study opportunities and the many related systems designed to support post-school transitions.

Young people on well-defined pathways have clear ideas about their **strengths, interests and motivations** and a strong **positive academic self-concept**. They understand the value of strong **interpersonal skills**.

Young people who are pursuing work or study pathways of their choice, demonstrate **learning and work exploration skills**. They are honing their **knowledge** of career opportunities and relating those opportunities to their **academic self-concepts, personal interests, and skills**.

Many young people who are making significant progress on their chosen pathway have identified **potential hurdles** in their pathways and developed and implemented plans and strategies to manage and navigate these challenges. They are building or strengthening **career identities** and developing and implementing goals that are guiding and motivating them to achieve their desired longer-term outcomes.

### **E. The role of quality careers support at school and beyond**

A recurring theme across the PET project, both with Year 12 completers and early school leavers, is the role **quality careers support** plays, both in Year 12 completion and post-school engagement in work and/or further education and training.

While the vast majority (86 percent) of young people **recalled receiving careers support** while at school, of those who recalled receiving it, just over half (55 percent) indicated the support was **helpful**. A further 35 percent were unsure if it was, and 11 percent said it was not useful. Young people who did not complete Year 12 were less likely to recall receiving careers support, than those who completed Year 12 (69 percent and 88 percent respectively) and less likely to find the careers support useful if they did recall it (39 percent compared to 56 percent).

The PET research reinforces international research showing the importance of connecting young people who are at school to the **'world of work'**. Employer engagement while young people are at school has a positive impact on **academic** results, student **motivation** and student **aspirations** (Education and Employers, 2019), thereby contributing to the increased likelihood of young people remaining **engaged** in education and **completing Year 12**. This in turn is directly linked to them being able to share in the benefits of economic growth.

Young people who participate in four or more encounters with the world of work while in school, are also much more likely to be in **employment, education or training in their 20s**. These encounters include activities (delivered face to face or virtually) such as: career insight talks; workplace, Vocational Education and Training and university visits; mentoring; work experience; and employability skills workshops.

Despite pockets of excellence in **careers support** for young Australians, the quality of support within the school setting (including we would suggest in South Australia) is **inconsistent** (Commonwealth of Australia 2020). It is particularly challenging providing quality support in **disadvantaged schools** where greater student needs combine with more limited access to both networks of employers and those in the workforce. Networks are key to increasing students' understanding of what is possible post-school and the **links** between school, school completion and thriving careers.

While there is a proliferation of new careers and growing industries, young people continue to **aspire to jobs that may no longer be relevant** or available. Their understanding varies greatly on what various jobs entail or the pathways to get them there. Young people generally have low levels of careers knowledge, but despite this, often 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 is often hard to contextualise, particularly for young people experiencing disadvantage. This makes it challenging for them to obtain **effective and relevant careers advice** (Behavioural Insights Team 2016).

### **F. Job precarity, underemployment and financial concerns**

Many young people in the PET study – both those who had completed Year 12 and those who were early school leavers – were involved in work post-school, including for some, in combination with study. Of those in work post-school, 44 percent **wanted to work more hours**, with similar responses for school completers and early school leavers. This indicates that **underemployment** is a particularly significant issue for many young people experiencing disadvantage.



A high proportion of young people (three-in-five) changed jobs between 2022 and 2023, reflecting a **dynamic** employment experience for young people. A quarter of early school leavers who changed jobs indicated it was **not their choice** to do so (for example, their employer was going out of business or they were laid off etc). This coupled with the fact that many early school leavers (particularly those who left school because of 'push' factors) were in **low skilled roles** (Level 5 on the Australian and NZ Standard Classification of Occupations), means that many are experiencing a high degree of **job precarity** and are not well placed to **build and grow their careers** over time.

Unsurprisingly given that all young people in the PET study grew up in low income families and many are experiencing challenging post-school employment pathways, **financial concerns** were common. Forty four percent of early school leavers and 34 percent of Year 12 completers indicated that they *worry often or all the time* about paying for essentials. Financial concerns impact in a range of ways, including influencing decisions relating to post-school study, both VET and university. In combination, job precarity, underemployment, concentration in low-skilled roles and high levels of financial concerns, can work against young South Australians being able to share in the benefits of economic growth.

### **G.Mental health challenges**

The increased numbers of young Australians experiencing mental health challenges has been well documented and is also evident in the PET research. While most young people rated their general health positively, around **half** rated their perception of their **mental health as poor or fair**. Mental health issues can impact all spheres of a young person's life, including school completion and post-school engagement in employment or further study, thus limiting their capacity to share in the benefits of economic growth.

## **The Growing Careers Project**

In light of the importance of quality careers support to young people's future prospects, particularly those experiencing disadvantage, The Smith Family developed and is piloting the Growing Careers Project (GCP). Funded by the Australian Government through the Department of Education, across 2021-25, the project is working in **structured** and **strategic** ways with partner **high school** communities (including eight in SA) to support students to access an **evidence based, sequential** series of **career guidance** and **occupation exploration programs**.

Programs are being offered to students across **multiple years**, focussing on their career learning needs at **different stages of their development**:

- Years 7 and 8: Discover and explore
- Year 9 and 10: Focus and plan
- Years 11 and 12: Decide and apply.

This structured approach leverages The Smith Family's long-standing relationships with families experiencing disadvantage, as well as schools, education and training institutions, community organisations, businesses, philanthropy and the wider Australian community. It aims to build young people's social and cultural capital, through **expanding the networks of support** they can draw on at a critical time in their lives. The Project has been designed to support as many young people as possible to participate in **multiple careers activities** across the five years.

Across the five years, there will be **76,725** instances of careers support provided to students in disadvantaged schools nationally. South Australian schools participating in GCP have had **10,875** instances of careers support provided to their students across 2022 and 2023. This is just under **30% of the national total** provided over that period, reflecting the very significant take-up in South Australia of the GCP offering. A list of the **diverse range of activities** being offered through the project is provided in the Appendix, with the activities implemented in individual schools being influenced by **student and school needs** and what other resources and opportunities are already available in the school.

Below are some examples of how GCP is working on the ground:

### Case Study 1

#### Work Inspiration

Students from Christies Beach High School recently took part in a two-day Work Inspiration program organised as part of the Growing Careers Project. On day one, students heard from Amanda Hewer, Born to Build Field Officer, Master Builders Association of SA, about her career journey in the building and construction industry and the current and future jobs that will be available in building and construction. Amanda spoke passionately about her journey in the industry and how she is now working to inspire others to see the opportunities in the industry.

Students also visited a residential housing development site where they heard from a representative of Fairmont Homes who walked them through houses in different stages of construction and explained the various roles required and the job opportunities available.

At the site visit, students were able to interact with Amanda and staff and ask questions about the various job roles and skills required. One student expressed interest in becoming a carpenter or civil construction worker and was keen to explore both further. Amanda spoke at length with this student and offered to follow up on work experience opportunities in both carpentry and civil construction.

Since the site tour, Amanda has forwarded to the Wellbeing Leader at Christies Beach High School, contacts in both carpentry and civil construction who are willing to offer the student a work experience placement to explore his interests. Once he has completed his work experience, Amanda is happy to arrange an interview with one of the field officers from Master Builders SA for potential employment opportunities.

### Case Study 2

#### Year 12 Careers Talk

Looking to set their Year 12 cohort up for a successful year, Wirreanda Secondary College in partnership with the GCP team designed a bespoke Careers Talk that incorporated speakers from a range of industries including local government, youth sector, arts, building and construction, bricklaying and human resources.

Each of the speakers spoke about their career journey, the industry they work in currently and key things they have learnt along the way. Students heard about the importance of being willing to take a chance, stepping up when opportunity knocks, being prepared to fail, recognising that your first job will more than likely not be your last, the value of developing curiosity within your workplace and the importance of good people skills in any workplace or venture they choose.

Students also heard from Chris Blowes, a shark attack survivor who spoke of his experiences and resilience in overcoming life changing challenges. Prior to his attack in waters off the Eyre Peninsula which resulted in him being an above the knee amputee, Chris was a carpenter, and enjoyed surfing and fishing.

Chris spoke of dealing with ongoing PTSD and stressed it's okay to ask for help from family and friends, as well as the importance of seeking appropriate professional support.

He spoke of his determination to resume a normal life and how he now works for the Master Builders SA in the Born to Build program and manages his own corporate speaking business where he shares his story

with others as a way of giving back to those who supported him. He's also back surfing. His story was inspirational and captivated the students and staff present.

Following the event students' feedback included that:

- They were better informed about career opportunities and the skills needed to enter the workforce.
- They recognised that obstacles and challenges do not need to be barriers and that you can overcome them with a bit of grit, a good support network and the willingness to pick yourself up and have a go.

### Case study 3

#### Resume and Interview Skills Workshop

As part of GCP, The Smith Family organised a Resume and Interview Skills Workshop facilitated by members of a local Rotary Club. The workshop began with the Rotarians sharing a snapshot of their own career and education pathway. Students were also provided with examples of 'good' and 'bad' resumes, which stimulated much discussion as most students hadn't seen or written one before. This exercise was particularly useful to students on guiding them on what to include and common mistakes to avoid.

The workshop also included a discussion about transferrable skills, where students were able to make connections with their own strengths and experiences and the way that these can translate in the workforce. This helped students to understand that including information about their personal strengths, personality traits and interests can increase their ability to sell themselves in their resumes. The students also participated in mock interviews to help prepare them for their first 'nerve-wracking' job interview experience.

Students' feedback included that:

- Hearing the personal stories of the Rotarians was helpful and inspiring, particularly the broad range of careers and the different pathways they had taken.
- They had learnt helpful interview tips and how to write a resume. A number subsequently wrote and submitted resumes and have secured part-time employment that they will undertake alongside of school.
- The opportunity to practice a job interview made it less scary.
- It helped them think about their lives beyond school and increased their confidence and excitement about the future.

The GCP is being **evaluated** over five years to gather insights that can be applied more broadly to other school communities and to assess its impact on students. While the evaluation is ongoing, there are a range of early signs of **promising impact**, with one team member summarising:

*What I think GCP does is it opens up the prospects of those opportunities for young people knowing that there is something else out there for them. That there isn't a one-size fits all. And it's not a one-size fits all solution. I think that comes through a lot in our career activities, where you've got young people talking to employers about their career journey and how varied each one is. And then it's about the knowledge and the skills they learn about how to navigate that space.*

## Recommendations

The Smith Family's longitudinal research and practice experience highlights a range of recommendations which would support more young people experiencing disadvantage to complete Year 12 and have positive post-school pathways, and are thus relevant to this Inquiry:

### Year 12 completion

- Greater **individualised support** while at school to help more young people to **complete Year 12**. This includes **early intervention** for those struggling with the academic and social demands of school, and support for those with personal concerns which affect their engagement with school. It includes supporting all young people to acquire strong **literacy, numeracy and digital skills** through evidence-based interventions and support. It also includes continuous **monitoring of warning signs** throughout school to identify young people at elevated risk of early school leaving, including lower attendance levels, poor achievement, mental health issues, bullying and social challenges. These signs may emerge at any point across secondary school, including lower secondary or in Years 11 and 12. The cohort of early school leavers is **diverse**, leave for a range of reasons, and require **tailored** approaches to address their needs. A robust approach to both **collecting and utilising educational data** to provide young people with the support they need in a timely way is a key part of this recommendation.

### Careers support at school

- Provide students with access to a **structured, evidence based, sequential** series of career guidance and occupation exploration programs while at school. Such work should begin in the primary years of school and focus on young people's career learning needs appropriate to **different stages of their development**: Such programs should be available for all students at all schools, with **priority** being given to supporting students experiencing disadvantage.
- The above should include:
  - Better access to **comprehensive careers advice** at school, including in the middle years of school and outside of critical periods (for example subject selection, applying for post-school study), and transition support in the period after leaving school.
  - More **personalised**, including one-to-one advice from **qualified careers staff**, with a focus on exploring what a young person wants to do in life and options for them to achieve their goals. It should also include more frequent support for those who do not have specific goals. Helping young people **articulate their post-school plans** and the steps required to achieve this plan is a key part of this.
  - A **broad approach** to careers advice, including information about labour markets, employment pathways, skills that will be in demand in the future, alternative pathways and support to develop a **range of options** in case they face difficulties getting into their first choice.
  - Support should be **accessible, engaging, and meaningful** to young people. Directly **connecting young people to the world of work**, including engaging with a diverse range of organisations and individuals who are in work, should be a feature of high quality careers support.
  - Connecting young people to **mentors, internships and older students** to help inform their career planning. They should also be provided with increased opportunities to engage in work experience placements while at school, study **VET** subjects at school and post-school, and be exposed to **apprenticeships and traineeships**. Enhancing the social capital and career-related adult networks of young people experiencing disadvantage, including through employers, is critical.

- Greater exposure to and what to expect when a young person is the **first in their family** to participate in post-school study.
- Increased support and information to **parents and carers** regarding school completion and how they can support their children's post-school pathways. As relatives are the primary source of advice about work and study for young people, and are particularly important for early school leavers, they need to be supported with the tools and information to provide appropriate and contemporary advice about young people's options and how to develop their goals and plans to achieve them.

### **Access to key services and wider networks of support and the opportunity to develop skills**

- Increased provision of appropriate and accessible support in and outside of school for young people experiencing **mental health issues**.
- Support to develop **self-confidence and other life skills**, including how to seek help, seize opportunities and learn from one's mistakes.
- Support to help young people to develop the **practical skills** they will need to:
  - Obtain a **job** (e.g. resumé and interview skills)
  - Manage **money** (e.g. budgeting, where and how to seek financial support)
  - Thrive in **tertiary education** environments (e.g. time and study management skills)
  - Obtain **post-school support** (e.g. where and how to seek support for various needs including pathways planning, work, study, mental health etc).

### **Post school support**

- Fund an expansion of high-quality career-related, **remunerated work placements**, cadetships and internship programs, which target young people experiencing disadvantage. The Smith Family welcomes the Australian Government's announcement in the 2024 Budget regarding a new means tested **Commonwealth Prac Payment**. From July 2025, this will support students undertaking mandatory workplace placements required for university and VET qualifications in the areas of teaching, nursing, midwifery and social work. It will provide \$319.50 per week to students during their clinical and professional placement periods. This is in addition to any income support a student may also receive.

In addition to the above recommendations, The Smith Family has two other systemic recommendations which it sees as important in ensuring more young people experiencing disadvantage are able to share in the benefits of economic growth.

### **Fully implementing the School Resource Standard in Government schools**

How money is spent in education matters, but what resources are provided to schools, particularly to **government schools** which educate a higher proportion of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, also matters. South Australia (as with most jurisdictions) has not fully implemented the **Schooling Resource Standard (SRS)**<sup>6</sup> and this is contributing to increasing **social stratification** in the school system, with an even greater concentration of children experiencing disadvantage in **particular and under-resourced schools**. **Student mix** has a key influence on educational outcomes and this concentration is exacerbating long-standing gaps in student achievement, despite the best efforts of school communities. **Fully implementing** the SRS, particularly in schools serving disadvantaged populations, is an **urgent** component of ensuring all young South Australians are able to fully participate in the benefits of economic growth.

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<sup>6</sup> As per the Gonski Review of School Funding and subsequent policy work.

### **Whole of system integrated response to young people's needs**

There are a **range of factors** which influence young people's outcomes, including educational outcomes, and there are links *between* these factors. For example how well institutions, such as schools and health services work together to support young people. As highlighted by data on *Learning for Life* students, young people experiencing disadvantage often live in families who **struggle to access** essential services including **health, community services, income support, NDIS** and **housing**. While these critical services sit **outside the education** system, barriers to accessing them **directly impact** students' ability to achieve educationally.

While there has been some progress in this regard in SA, if our human services system, including education, are not, over time, **(re)-designed** to put children and families at the centre, including with clearly articulated **shared accountabilities** across portfolios, it is **unlikely** that South Australia will make **significant gains in educational equity**, and in turn progress on ensuring all young South Australians are able to share in the benefits of economic growth.

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## Appendix

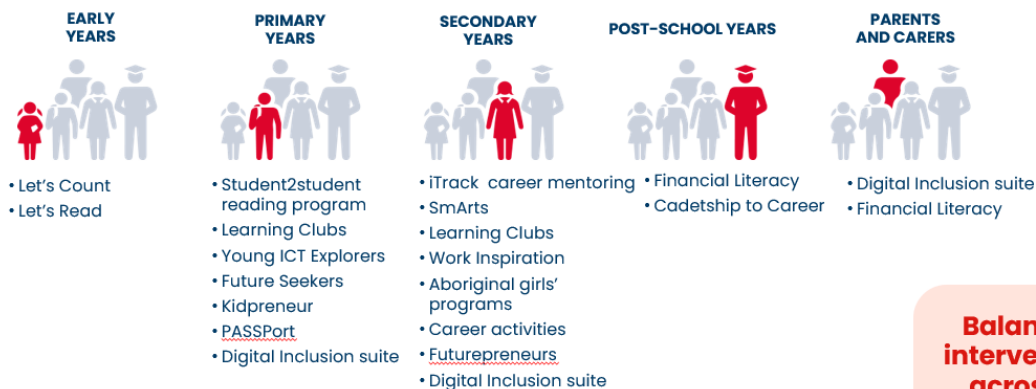
### The Learning for Life program

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** to families to help them cover core education-related expenses such as books, uniforms and excursions.
- 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 Suite

#### Key Programs at Different Life Stages



← Students can begin on the *Learning for Life* scholarship in the first year of school and continue through to tertiary →

**Balanced intervention across a young person's life**



## Growing Careers Project Career Support Activities

Future Ready Skills Training	Year Level
<b>Presenting Your Strengths</b> - This activity is designed for students to gain knowledge about themselves and develop communication skills. Students learn about how to write an 'elevator pitch' and present their pitch to fellow students.	7-10
<b>Futurepreneurs Inspire</b> - facilitated workshops that introduce students to concepts of entrepreneurship through 12 guided challenges and practice examples.	8-10
<b>Futurepreneurs Ignite</b> - knowledge briefings, gamified challenges and other learning resources to guide students through the world of entrepreneurship.	8-10
<b>Polish</b> - focuses on developing confidence in young people to identify and promote their capabilities to potential employers. The program provides opportunities for young people to engage with volunteer mentors to understand how variable career paths might be and the benefit of transferrable skills in the workplace.	9-10
Early Exposure to Work Environments / Work Experience	Year Level
<b>Prepare</b> - is designed to trigger a young person's curiosity and interest in careers. Young people will explore how their personal values and existing strengths, like teamwork, can help prepare for employment and career success.	7-8
<b>Careers Fair Scavenger Hunt</b> - a fun activity at a careers fair or expo that gives students, employers and higher education providers a chance to meet, and discuss pathways and career opportunities	8-10
<b>SmArts</b> - enrichment programs for students with interest in and/or talent for the creative arts. Boost students' creative skills, self-confidence, knowledge of post school options and engagement in learning.	8-12
<b>Work Inspiration</b> - employer-led initiative to ensure young people's first experience of the world of work is meaningful, inspiring and exposes them to a broad range of employment opportunities.	9-11
<b>iTrack</b> - online career mentoring program. Connects students to those in employment and explores career goals and pathways and the actions needed to achieve them, including subject choices.	9-11
<b>Exploring Your Career</b> - This activity is designed for students to explore current data and information about the Australian job market and their preferred occupations. The purpose is for students to consider information about different occupations and how this knowledge influences their career choices.	9-11
Understanding Career Pathways and Further Study Options	Year Level
<b>Future Seekers</b> - provides students with early positive exposure to information about diverse job roles and the working lives people lead. Interactive activities encourage reflection on identity and opportunities to creatively and imaginatively reflect on future job roles and the world of work.	7-8
<b>Exploring Educational Pathways</b> - Students spend 2 days visiting higher education providers (usually 1 day at a university and 1 day at a TAFE/Registered Training Organisation (RTO)). This activity aims to teach students how to plan for the future by exposing them to post-school education pathways. It is an interactive event with the aim of giving students a positive first experience of tertiary institutions.	9-11
<b>Perform</b> - in facilitated workshops, volunteer mentors support young people to feel confident to take up employment opportunities through the exploration of personal styles and self-awareness. Activities include the development of an elevator pitch, resume writing, interview skills and networking.	11-12

Career Guidance and Coaching	Year Level
<b>Career Coaching</b> - individual careers coaching and support, typically over several months, for young people to increase their knowledge of career opportunities and develop a post school plan, including subject choices.	9-12
<b>Your Career Journey Interview</b> - Students are tasked with coordinating an informal interview outside of school with a family member or friend concerning their job, the career and educational pathways they took and the challenges they faced in reaching their current role.	7-9
<b>What's Plan B?</b> - This activity is designed for students to begin thinking about and creating 'contingency plans' for their preferred careers and post-school pathways.	11-12
<b>Applying for Jobs</b> - designed for students to develop a range of practical techniques to enable them to: write a professional cover letter that accurately mirrors the core components of a job ad; understand the stages of the job application process; learn how to read and respond to a job ad; and create a good cover letter.	11-12
<b>Resume Building Blocks</b> - designed to enable students to write a professional résumé that accurately mirrors the core components of a job ad. Students develop transferable skill statements and understand why digital reputation is important when applying for.	11-12
<b>Job Interview Skills</b> - students gain knowledge, skills and confidence in securing a job after their initial application. They are able to practice answering interview questions, including using the STAR technique and understand how to answer interview questions, how to close a job interview and how to dress for success.	11-12
<b>Career Connections</b> - designed for students identify effective forms of networking and how to leverage these relationships to enhance their job search experience. Students learn how to build new networking opportunities, different techniques to networking and practice networking to build confidence.	11-12
Assistance with Subject Selection	Year Level
<b>University-led webinars</b> - University-led sessions providing insight into managing future studies, including information on course structure and understanding subject selections.	All
<b>This is me!</b> - This activity is designed for students to gain knowledge about themselves, with a focus on understanding of their personality type and their interests and strengths.	7-10
<b>Knowing Yourself</b> - This activity is designed for students to gain knowledge about themselves, with a focus on understanding of their personality type and their interests, strengths and values. The students then use this knowledge to explore careers that suit.	7-10
<b>Connecting With Your Network</b> - This activity is designed to help students understand others' perceptions about their strengths and interests to help them gain further insights and knowledge about themselves.	7-9
<b>Ready, Set, Action!</b> - This activity is designed for students to articulate a plan that summarises their post-school pathway, the subsequent decisions and goals that they have for that year, actions that they want to take, and the outcomes that they expect.	11-12
<b>Your Study Choices</b> - This activity is designed for students to investigate and gain knowledge about senior school subject selections. The activity specifically focuses on students gaining an understanding of what they need to consider when selecting subjects.	10