



everyone's family

## **Review of Indigenous Training and Employment - Creating sustainable employment outcomes Submission from The Smith Family**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit our comments. On behalf of The Smith Family we congratulate the Prime Minister for this important review to ensure Indigenous training and employment services are properly targeted and administered to connect unemployed Indigenous people with real and sustainable jobs. We have framed our input around those items within the terms of reference where there is alignment with The Smith Family's sphere of influence.

### **Creating sustainable employment outcomes**

We recommend an integrated, education, training and pre-employment service system<sup>1</sup> where access points are clearly communicated and individual training and employment plans are attached to live vacancies by location and industry.

It is also essential to provide support early given the increased risk that children in jobless families may have reduced labour market attachment in adulthood. Some of the programs which have had success in working with Indigenous children, young people and their families and communities are outlined later in this submission. They provide some of the key foundations for sustainable employment outcomes. In addition, the suite of COAG National Agreements<sup>2</sup> could be aligned to a more holistic approach, given for example education, school attendance and youth attainments are inextricably linked to being training and employment ready<sup>3</sup>.

### **Communities for Children program**

The Smith Family is the facilitating partner for the Commonwealth funded *Communities for Children* (CfC) program in nine locations. The flexibility of CfC funding guidelines and the link with *Building Australia's Future Workforce* (BAWF) allows for innovative and empowering community led approaches to be developed and implemented. For example in the Rockhampton Local Government Area, the Bindi Meta (Healthy Dwellings Program) delivered through Bidgerdii Health was developed by Indigenous people for Indigenous people<sup>4</sup> and is delivered by Indigenous people<sup>5</sup>. The program aims to provide a holistic, family-driven program, encompassing early intervention for children and adults in the employment, health, developmental and wellbeing space, while maintaining cultural aspects.

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<sup>1</sup> COAG National Education Agreement: Objective, *all Australian school students acquire the knowledge and skills to participate effectively in society and employment in a globalised economy.*

<sup>2</sup> There is no reference to the National Education Agreement in the Indigenous Economic Participation Agreement.

<sup>3</sup> COAG National Education Agreement: Objective, *all Australian school students acquire the knowledge and skills to participate effectively in society and employment in a globalised economy.*

<sup>4</sup> Uncle Poy Pensio and Aunty Marcia Pensio developed the program, delivered through Bidgerdii Health in Queensland. Please contact Uncle Poy Pensio at Bidgerdii Health for information about this culturally responsive program.

<sup>5</sup> The Smith Family endorsed an agreed set of principles to articulate how we work together and have agreed a commitment to the United Nations Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

In addition our work under CfC in the Katherine Local Government Area has resulted in a number of Community Partner projects employing local community members to facilitate activities for children and families. In the 'Reading and Communicating with Kids (RACK)' project, parents are employed by NT Library for two hours per week to engage in reading activities with children and families in their community. Twelve Reading Mentors are employed in four communities. Many of these parents have never previously been engaged in employment so a significant amount of support is required to navigate the systems and obtain the necessary documentation for employment. Detailed induction training is provided in not only the skills required to perform these duties, but in record keeping of attendees, regular completion of timesheets and advising Centrelink of any income. A dedicated Project Officer is employed by NT Library to visit each location for one day per week to provide ongoing support in meeting the minimum requirements for this role. Reading Mentors, having gained pre-employment and workplace skills, are often recruited into more full employment opportunities. In addition to the regular mentoring and support these workers receive, a key element of success is that the work can be conducted in a flexible time and location which is best suited to the needs of the community.

The Enterprise Learning Project's 'Grassroots Microenterprise Facilitation', also run through CfC in Katherine, is an innovative initiative promoting social and economic outcomes. It has shown significant capacity for engaging previously unemployed individuals in the creation and development of small business ideas in remote communities. Facilitators work with communities to develop products and services that can be sold both within community and to the broader markets. Time is spent in working with participants to create picture stories that explain business concepts such as revenue, expenses, reinvestment, profit and tax implications, as well as marketing and product development. Ongoing support is required to enable these early-stage small businesses to grow and flourish in challenging and unfamiliar environments. More creative models such as these provide real opportunities to enable both economic and social outcomes for individuals and communities.

### **Programs supporting young people of high school age**

The Smith Family is the Partnership Broker<sup>6</sup> in six regions across Australia. Partnership Brokers build partnerships with schools, businesses and community groups and develops programs to help students at risk of disengaging with school overcome barriers to continue their learning and attain Year 12 or equivalent qualifications. Our Experiential Mentoring program in the NT is also a model that is seeing increased attendance and engagement with education, enhanced aspirations and knowledge about work and life goals. The central aim of Experiential Mentoring is to 'walk with' a young person in years 8 or 9 and 10 to 12 as they experience new environments, and explore the options available to them through education. Students in Years 8 or 9 are hosted by a partner school and participate in a variety of in class and out of class activities. Students in Years 10 to 12 go to Darwin for a week of work experience and other activities, such as finding their way in an urban environment. Usually we take into account the students' interests, aspirations and employment opportunities available in their community when arranging work placements. The program is an integral part of The Smith Family's support and learning programs.

We also offer a number of programs that support positive school attendance, such as *Girls at the Centre*, where we achieved a 10% higher than average school attendance rate for girls participating in the program than other female students in the same year<sup>7</sup>. The Indigenous Youth Leadership program

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<sup>6</sup> The School Business Community Partnership Broker Program is provided under the COAG Youth Attainments and Transition National Partnership Agreement and is funded by the former Department of Education and Workplace Relations

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.e-brochures.com.au/TheSmithFamily/AnnualReport2012-13/>

supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students living in remote or very remote areas of Australia to attend a high performing secondary school (government and non-government, day and boarding) and/or university to complete Year 12 and/or an undergraduate degree. The program contributes to the development of skills in leadership in a range of ways. Students are supported in their leadership journeys on personal, academic and professional levels. Currently The Smith Family supports 179 students to participate in the Program.

Our *Keeping Indigenous Kids at Secondary School* (KIKASS) program supported 32 young people last year. We integrate our services where possible and our *Learning for Life* work in the tertiary years also supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in their transition from school so they have a clear idea of their abilities and interests post school.

Our PaCE funded work at the Morwell - Kurnai Education Hub Project also supports young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. For example 26 young mums who were disengaged from school and vocational training were assisted by The Smith Family to participate in the VCAL for Victoria. In addition we assisted a relationship with the corporate AGL and managed compliance requirements to support young Aboriginal students to participate in a broad range of work experience opportunities. The Indigenous Education Targeted Assistance (IETA) suite of programs is an important part of the broader service system and we believe should continue to be resourced and within longer funding cycles.

The Foundation for Young Australians and The Smith Family has negotiated the rights from the UK's Business in the Community, with the support of the National Australia Bank, and the Commonwealth Department of Education, to accelerate delivery of *Work Inspiration* in Australia. *Work Inspiration* is an employer led campaign that promotes earlier engagement with young Australians so business can access employable recruits and provides young people with a clear picture of career choices and the world of work. The Smith Family has commenced an early dialogue with Generation One to assist this work for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

All of the above initiatives aim to lay some of the essential foundations that Indigenous children and young people need if they are to be able to progress to employment. These initiatives are responsive to the particular needs of the communities in which they are run and involve multiple cross-sectoral partnerships in their delivery.

### **Organisational wide initiatives**

The Smith Family has also participated in a Reconciliation Australia *Workplace Ready Program*, involving six sessions centered on workplace readiness and responsiveness. This proved very effective in sharing learnings and practices amongst a diverse range of stakeholders. The program assisted employers' understandings around barriers candidates might face to employment. We recommend that Reconciliation Australia be supported to offer an ongoing Communities of Practice for stakeholders, to continue the employment dialogue, and act as a group to task and test best practice approaches.

The Smith Family's Stretch Reconciliation Action Plan framework provides for innovative contributions to training and employment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The scope of the framework includes actions that support an increase in internal employment numbers, within an empowering approach to build capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and, within

our sphere of influence, to diversify our supplier base. We have also become a member of Supply Nation <http://www.supplynation.org.au/> as part of our commitment to supporting Indigenous business. The Smith Family has signed the NGO Centred Partnership Principles<sup>8</sup> and is committed to developing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy, through our Reconciliation Action Plan 2013-2016. The Smith Family believes it is important for Government to allocate resources to assist employers to develop meaning training and employment or workforce strategies.

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<sup>8</sup> The NGO Centred Principles follow a policy framework that supports empowerment and were endorsed by our Advisory Group on issues concerning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. This guides our partnership arrangements in the NT.