

Youth Jobs Strategy Discussion Paper – Response

Aim

To positively support educators and education providers to recognize, understand and implement brain science learnings into specific educational environments.

Our Target

Young people (11-14 years) falling outside the education system and into anti-social behaviors.

Rationale

In the last few decades, the oft recognized ‘last frontier’ of medicine, the brain, has been progressively studied and understood to the point where today, many of the behaviors the community sees as puzzling, debilitating or dangerous are now well understood from a brain science perspective. We are now at the point where upstream interventions can be devised with the benefit of the latest research in brain science rather than using observational and anecdotal evidence alone. In the last couple of decades, brain science has been progressively acknowledged for its capacity to penetrate barriers across many facets of the community. Our aim is to positively support educators in this endeavor.

Of vital interest to us is to move towards a better understanding of vulnerable young teen/tweens based on the latest evidence from brain science. We do so in passionate support of the growing number of children and adolescents who fall outside of the mainstream ‘one size fits all’ education system. Such tween/teens are too often inappropriately classified as young people with ‘special needs’ or worse still, ‘problems.’ Our passion is deeply rooted in both personal and professional experience as educators with a collective nearly 200 years of ‘hands on’ experience between us! In short, we aim to develop an educational opportunity, based on recent brain science evidence, for unique young people between the ages of 11 to 14 years. We are confident these young people will thrive in an environment that supports their talents rather than highlights their inability to conform to the present ‘one size fits all’ educational system.

We provide this response to the Tasmanian Government’s ‘Youth Jobs Strategy Discussion Paper’ in the hope of influencing greater engagement with neuro-based educational issues. We note that it is important to focus on children as young as 11 to 14 years to understand their educational journey. We acknowledge the importance and success of programs that for some time have had a starting point of 15 years, however, in our opinion, intervention at this age is too late for many younger disengaged children. For example, there is evidence of current disquiet and community/police concerns regarding buses and malls that are generally related to those younger than 15 years. This indicates that we do not yet understand the needs and wants of these children within an educational environment. Why are they not engaged learners?

Proposed Model

INTEGRATED LEARNING CENTRES

Tasmania has an opportunity to create an innovative educational pathway for disenfranchised youth, a novel approach to maximise our human capital now and into the future

The aim is to harness like-minded individuals, organisations and government to fund a pilot program to improve the health, wellbeing and education of marginalised youth through Integrated Learning Centres (ILCs).

ILCs are designed to address issues of 'alienation' felt re the present school system for children entering Grade 7 (~12 years of age).

We are keen to locate a business partner who can provide experience along with infrastructure to house learning within and foster work-integrated learning.

A sense of 'MY SPACE' develops as children remain in an inclusive environment (of interest to them) for their daily learning experience.

Teachers would be employed through industry/philanthropy/government support and mentor children in learning within the business.

Business would include young people in work-integrated learning opportunities related to the daily function of the business.

Young people would return to ILCs individually or as a group to apply more formal learning to their daily experience in the chosen business.

A win/win situation: distressing and very costly issues of disengagement would be addressed, a major win for the community.

Challenge of finding future committed and skilled employees is addressed for business.

Similarly, teachers may be enthused to work in a range of alternative settings.

Outcomes of the pilot will provide evidence to inform the scalability of the concept to additional industries/sectors, and ultimately, community-wide as a legitimate set of educational pathways. We contend that the SROI of such an initiative would be substantial.

Participation in ILCs offers an opportunity for Tasmania to be a leading light and national leader in improving health, educational and vocational outcomes, particularly for young people challenged by the inflexibility of the current educational landscape. To progress this novel alternative approach, and to realise its potential, we need community, industry, government and philanthropic collaboration and funding

Situation

A range of unhealthy consequences stem from the failure of the current education system to cater for diversity as defined by recent brain science research

- Many talented young people do not realise their potential due to challenging experiences in the education system
- Some young people who reflect diversity at its best are being lost

Complication

Currently experiencing a spate of serious crime and community disruption fuelled by disengaged youth, the state, and individuals and families in particular, would benefit directly from innovative, strengths-based interventions

- Compared to a range of national and international metrics, Tasmania is characterized by poor health and education outcomes
- This novel project provides an opportunity to make a significant difference to the health and wellbeing and educational outcomes of Tasmanian youth

Resolution

The project speaks directly to one of Australian society's pressing challenges and the longer-term strategic goal of economic and social development

- A core group of likeminded supporters are committed to exploring a visionary, vocationally-oriented approach to education for youth currently challenged by the constraints of an inflexible system of education for Tasmania and beyond
- All workplaces/industries from hospitality to sport, agriculture and construction have the potential to champion the education of the next generation

Responses to set questions

We have addressed some of the Discussion Paper's set questions which we consider pertinent in pursuit of our objective. We have sequentially numbered the set questions for ease of reference.

Question 2

'How can government, community, business, schools and industry support better connection and continuity of support across these elements?'

Our Response

By providing a unique educational model that brings together the best of government, community, business, schools and industry support. An Enhanced Educational model requires the support of Government knowing that problems exist that must be addressed. Disengaged tween/teens are roaming our streets and everyone, including all in Government, are aware they should be part of our education system. However, to engage these very young children will require 'out of the box' thinking by Government and buy-in from the wider community. The community is highly motivated to support solutions to the issue of disengaged youth causing trouble and fear on our streets and we welcome consultation with community groups regarding the provision of mentors within the Centre.

Business and Industry have a vital role to play in developing the proposed Enhanced Learning model in that they would be part of the co-development of this unique concept. Industry and business leaders understand the importance of working with young teen/tweens to develop life-long skills in a range of areas. These include problem solving, critical thinking, effective communication, decision making, creative thinking, interpersonal relationships, self-awareness, empathy, coping with stress and emotion, all vital to a successful life, including in the workforce. The learning of practical skills through work in an industry would be of considerable benefit to each young person and may lead to a commitment to that industry moving forward.

Question 3

'What is the one thing that you believe could have the most positive impact on a young person's transition pathway from school to further study, training or employment?'

Our Response

The development of life skills (as cited above) provides the foundation of any successful transition be it starting school, transitioning successfully to high school from primary school or having the confidence to move into the work force or further training. Without these skills, many young children are lost in transition especially at a vital time of brain development i.e., 11-14 years of age.

Question 6

'How can the service systems better connect and respond to the complex needs of young people?'

Our Response

We would expect service systems such as Centrelink, NDIS, Medicare etc., would need to be connected to an Enhanced Learning Centre. While these services may not be appropriate or needed by families or the industry involved with the Centre, a working knowledge and communication between services and the Centre would be necessary to provide optimum support for some.

Question 7

'What would unlock the ability for young Tasmanians with different needs to participate in work, education and training?'

Our Response

We respect the uniqueness and difference of tween/teens who are often 'misdiagnosed' due to a lack of understanding of their unique talents and abilities. They become lost and feel they have little future in being successful contributors to society. Unfortunately, at an early age these young people see themselves and the system sees them as being 'different' and often 'difficult'. We contend that such young people need a different environment to become successful learners and hence contributors to work, education and training in Tasmania. The Enhanced Learning model will unlock this potential.

Questions 10 and 11

'What does it take to be 'job-ready'? and What can employers do to help build those work readiness skills?'

Our Response

To be job ready is to understand the importance of working with young people to develop lifelong skills in the following: problem solving, critical thinking, effective communication, decision making, creative thinking, interpersonal relationship skills, self-awareness skills, empathy, coping with stress and emotion amongst many other skills vital to the learning of successful life outcomes in general and in the workforce. The Enhanced Learning model allows industry and employers to be part of this vital journey so these skills can then be applied to their particular area of expertise.

Question 12

'What do (or should) quality work exposure activities look like for young people?'

Our Response

As stated above, any quality work exposure activities should allow the potential for the development of higher order life skills as well as practical, skill-based learning useful to the industry. Exposure also needs to be consistent, long term and rewarding in terms of developing a sense of security, commitment and mutual respect. Most importantly, quality work exposure needs to engage the individual at their point of interest and ability. Mutual consultation,

collaboration, friendship and respect will help identify specific individual interests for successful work exposure to build on.

Question 13

'How do we balance and support work and learning for young people?'

Our Response

The balance between work and learning can potentially be created by specialized Centers that cater for an easy interaction between the mentor industry and teachers working in the Centre. Teachers will utilize the practical experience children are having on a daily basis as they become part of the mentor industry's daily routine to deliver experiential learning. It will be necessary for these Centers to be placed next to or within the mentor industry so that interaction is easy and appropriate. Early Learning Centers that interact with school learning and are physically placed next to schools have given confidence that this model has merit. A combination of age-appropriate nurturing care and ready access to school learning programs has been a valuable experience for young children. The interface of teacher involvement and work exposure within a specifically designed Centre can be equally valuable.

Question 14

'How could your business or industry be better supported to provide opportunities for young people?'

Our Response

Industry and business will need support from all levels of Government and the community to make the Enhanced Learning model successful. This may mean fiscal, service or infrastructure support and most importantly the provision of educators to work within the industry. Our hope is that in return, using this support, industry and young people will reap the mutual benefits of growing a well-equipped workforce that will support a variety of industries. Early life skill learning will support the practical endeavors of any industry and business that wants to 'grow' in the community. Most importantly, young people who are the future for business and industry will not be lost 'to the street'. We are already seeing the cost to business and industry of insufficient numbers of young people available to join the workforce. It is possible to reverse this trend with innovative educational models.

We provide the following background information in order to credential our response.

Lea. Lawson

As a young teacher Lea Lawson was the founder of Pixie Child Centers in 1982 using the mantra 'educationally orientated play'. Pixie was wholly unsubsidized and attracted the attention of the 'not for profit' sector to act as consultants and service providers for council, school and church childcare enterprisers that were having difficulty. Pixie grew to involvement in six services. It soon became clear to Lea that there was an important interface between the world of childcare and the importance of early learning hence in 1991 a Pixie Centre was established next to Lenah Valley Primary School. Thus, children could benefit both from nurturing care and extended

educational activities. This model was well supported by education, parents and service providers alike and grew to five such centers being developed in Tasmania under the guidance of Pixie. After 30 years in the Early Education sector and with a passion to understand the true meaning of diversity in children Lea returned to studies in 2007 at the University of Tasmania to increase her knowledge of the interface between brain science and education under the mentorship of Professor Malcolm Horne. Her degree followed by Honors and then being accepted to study at PhD level have confirmed her belief that we must truly understand diversity in children if they are to become successful confident learners. This interest is ongoing.

Malcolm Horne

PhD from Monash in 1980 and since then has worked as a research neuroscientist at various tertiary institutions in the US and Australia. In 2003 he was appointed deputy director of the Florey Institute for Neuroscience and Mental Health which is affiliated with the University of Melbourne and is among the top 10 neurosciences institutions world-wide. In early 2023 he moved to the Bionics Institute affiliated with University of Melbourne. His research interest has been in how the brain controls movement how diseases of the brain affect movement. This research work compliments his practice as a neurologist where he is a specialist in movement disorders. This interest is related to children's' education as these conditions frequently have disorders of cognition and control of impulses. In recent times an important interest of his work is to make this knowledge more widely available to teachers and parents to assist them in developing better educational outcomes.

Andrew Hills

Andrew is a prominent educator and public health advocate. Originally trained as a health and physical education teacher in Tasmania, Andrew has spent much of his academic career interstate and overseas before returning to UTAS in 2016 as Professor of Exercise and Sports Science. Andrew is passionate about improving the health and wellbeing of children and adolescents, particularly through physical activity and sport.

Margaret Reynolds

Margaret Reynolds had a professional career in early childhood education . She trained and taught in Tasmania and subsequently in London and Queensland She initiated Kindergarten Headstart, a pre-school program for indigenous children in Townsville in 1967 and this has continued for 56 years .Margaret worked for a number of years in special education and developed an early identification program of children with learning difficulties .She also taught troubled teenagers and introduced fresh ideas to attract their interest in education She lectured in teacher education at James Cook University and has maintained her interest in innovative education. programs

Jeff Malpas

Jeff Malpas is Distinguished Professor Emeritus at the University of Tasmania and Honorary Professor at the University of Queensland and Latrobe university. He is a fellow of the Australian Academy of Humanities and Vice President of the Australian Association of Humboldt Fellows. He has had a long involvement with the Philosophy in Schools programme, being the co-founder of the Association for Philosophy in Schools in Western Australia (during his time at Murdoch University) and participating and promoting Philosophy in Schools during his time as Professor of Philosophy at the University of Tasmania. He is an internationally recognised figure in contemporary philosophical hermeneutics – a field that has special relevance to educational thinking through its focus on the nature of interpretation, understanding, and communication. His work in philosophy of language and mind, including aspects of cognitive science, also connects directly with educational concerns, as does his work on place and situation.

