

ISSUES PAPER: Issues Facing Young Australians 2011: EDUCATION

Apart from basic human rights for safety, shelter and food, education is one of the most effective means to enable young people to thrive, learn and grow to enjoy a productive, rewarding and fulfilling life.

It is an avenue to break cycles of disadvantage and a powerful way to reduce exposure to harm or participation in risky behaviours or crime.¹

Education is often a key determinant of employment, and employment is a major determinant of income. Young people experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage tend to be disadvantaged in each of these areas, compounding the negative effects on their health.

Young people tend to share the same level of advantage or disadvantage as their parents (at least until they become independent). For this reason, indicators relating to the socioeconomic circumstances of parents in the areas of education are important to consider.

Education plays an “instrumental” role in determining whether young people, particularly at-risk young people, successfully enter the labour market.² Of students leaving school in Year 10 or below in 2008, 57% were not fully engaged with work or education by May the following year.³ The rate of engagement in work or employment is 26% among students who completed Year 12.⁴ This tells us that by continuing to Year 12, the chance of not being engaged in work or education is halved.

Impact on Population Groups

While education levels are generally high among young Australians, some groups of young people appear to be at a greater disadvantage. Indigenous young people, young people living in remote areas, and young people from low socioeconomic backgrounds often do not achieve the same educational outcomes as other young Australians, and are more likely to leave school early.^{5 6}

There are a variety of factors that may lead to underachievement among these groups, including social, cultural and language differences, differences in family and community attitudes to schooling, and proximity to schools.

Underachievement among these groups of young people may reflect negative experiences at school, home or within the social environment which may cause disengagement among these young people.

Impact on Health and Wellbeing

International and Australian research supports a link between less education and poorer health status.⁷

In Australia, individuals with higher levels of education report fewer illnesses and have better mental health than those with lower levels of education.⁸ The Australian Bureau of Statistics National Health Surveys data (1989,1990,1995,2001) was examined and found that people with lower educational attainment (no post-school qualification or a diploma/vocational qualification) rated their own health more poorly, and reported a number of illnesses more often than those with a bachelor degree or higher.⁹

Education may directly positively impact upon health by providing young people with greater knowledge and understanding about health, particularly an awareness of health risk and protective factors.

For example, smoking, insufficient physical activity and obesity are less common among people with more education.^{10 11 12} Education may also indirectly affect health when associated with safe, secure and generally better paid and more rewarding employment. This, in turn, positively influences health-related factors such as stress levels, injury risk, nutrition and ability to receive quality medical care.

Impact on Society and Economy

If half of all early school leavers nationally (over 5 year period 2003-07) were provided with Year 12 or equivalent education, unemployment benefits would be reduced significantly.¹³ It is well understood that School completion increases a young person's confidence, their sense of self-efficacy and contributes to one's belief that they have control over their lives. School Completers (Year 12) are more likely to be actively engaged in community organisations.

Potential Impacts of Midnight Basketball

Midnight Basketball aims to assist vulnerable young people to remain engaged in education by providing connection and possibly reconnection with school and community. We know that extending education opportunities through innovative, structured programs, is one of the best ways to successfully integrate young people into society. Integration improves young people's chances of continuing their education.

Participation in Midnight Basketball provides the opportunity for disadvantaged youth to address the following:

- Meet and engage with adults (through its volunteers and partner organisations) from local schools, local youth services, community health and services that assist with reengagement in education.
- Involvement in friendship groups and interactions that are drawn from school environments.
- Increase self confidence as young people gain a sense of achievement and control over their own actions.
- Experience self discipline and self responsibility for behaviours and actions as they participate as a team player.
- Learn to negotiate, compromise and make informed decisions about their involvement in a structured learning environment.
- Experience a positive learning and teaching environment by participation in compulsory Workshops.

¹ http://www.cyf.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/483222/positive-pathways-Victorias-vulnerable-young-people-20092010.pdf P.11

² The Smith Family (2003) *Youth Unemployment in Australia – a contextual, governmental and organisational perspective*. Available: http://www.thesmithfamily.com.au/webdata/resources/files/Youth_unemployment_AMP_Report_November03.pdf

³ The Foundation for Young Australians (2010) *How Young People are Faring 2010 At a Glance*. Available: <http://www.fya.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/HYPAF-2010-Report.pdf>.

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Hunter B & Schwab R 2003. Practical reconciliation and continuing disadvantage in Indigenous. education. *The Drawing Board: an Australian Review of Public Affairs* 4(2):83–98.

⁶ Lamb S, Dwyer P & Wyn J 2000. Non-completion of school in Australia: the changing patterns of participation and outcomes. *Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth Research Report no. 16*. Melbourne: Australian Council for Educational Research.

⁷ Turrell G, Stanley L, de Looper M & Oldenburg B 2006. Health inequalities in Australia: morbidity, health behaviours, risk factors and health service use. *Health inequalities monitoring series no. 2. AIHW Cat. no. PHE 72*. Canberra: Queensland University of Technology & AIHW.

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ball K & Mishra GD 2006. Whose socioeconomic status influences a woman's obesity risk: her mother's, her father's, or her own? *International Journal of Epidemiology* 35(1):131–8.

¹¹ Hill DJ, White VM & Scollo MM 1998. Smoking behaviours of Australian adults in 1995: trends and concerns. *Medical Journal of Australia* 168(5):209–13.

¹² Turrell G, Stanley L, de Looper M & Oldenburg B 2006. Health inequalities in Australia: morbidity, health behaviours, risk factors and health service use. *Health inequalities monitoring series no. 2. AIHW Cat. no. PHE 72*. Canberra: Queensland University of Technology & AIHW.

¹³ Source: Applied Economics (2002) *Realising Australia's Commitment to Young People*, pp.7-8. Available: http://www.applieconomics.com.au/pubs/reports/repo211_youth.htm