



Second submission in response to

*The Review of Funding for Schooling*

September 2011

# Australian Youth Affairs Coalition

The Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC) is Australia's non-government youth affairs peak body, which represents young people aged 12-25 and the sector that supports them.

AYAC represents a growing membership of State and Territory youth peak bodies, national youth organisations, researchers, policy makers and young people themselves, who are all passionate about creating an Australian community that supports and promotes the positive development of young people.

AYAC aims to:

- Provide a body broadly representative of the issues and interests of young people and the youth affairs field in Australia
- Advocate for a united Australia which respects and values Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage, promotes human rights, and provides justice for all
- Represent the rights and interests of young people in Australia, at both a national and an international level
- Promote the elimination of poverty and to promote the well being of young Australians, with a particular focus on those who are disadvantaged
- Recognise the diversity of Australian society, to promote the cultural, social, economic, political, environmental and spiritual interests and participation of young people in all aspects of society
- Advocate for, assist with and support the development of policy positions on issues affecting young people and the youth affairs field, and to provide policy advice, perspectives and advocacy to governments and the broader community
- Facilitate co-ordination and co-operation within the youth affairs field AYAC and its members are committed to working for and with young people and seek to ensure they have access to mechanisms, which allow them get involved in decisions about issues that affect them in the Australian community.

The Secretariat  
Review of Funding for Schooling  
Location C16MT4  
GPO Box 9880  
CANBERRA, ACT 2601

Dear Secretariat,

The Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC) welcomes the opportunity to provide a supplementary submission to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations' (DEEWR) Review of Funding for Schooling.

This submission will focus on funding and standards of delivery and educational outcomes for disadvantaged and disengaged students. AYAC acknowledges the assistance of the National Children's and Youth Law Centre (NCYLC) in the preparation of this submission. AYAC also acknowledges the input from young people with a disability and flexible learning centres who contributed to this submission.

We acknowledge the work of DEEWR to date and support them in their endeavours to build a more open, transparent and accountable funding system that has better service delivery and educational outcomes for young people. We look forward to the findings of this review and would welcome the opportunity to meet to discuss this further.

If you have any questions in relation to our submission or wish to seek further advice from AYAC please contact Maia Giordano, Deputy Director (Young People) via phone 0435 496 494 or email [maia@ayac.org.au](mailto:maia@ayac.org.au).

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*We acknowledge the traditional owners of country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respect to them and their cultures, and to the elders both past and present.*

# Recommendations

In response to the Review of Funding for Schooling, AYAC believes that education funding should be allocated based on key values in which young people are recognised as a key stakeholder group within the education system. This submission sets out some fundamental principles that should underpin the funding and provision of education to disadvantaged students throughout Australia.

AYAC recommends that education funding be:

1. Equitable and based on each young person's human right to an education.
2. Young person-centred, celebrating young people and broadly consulting with them as key stakeholders within the education system.
3. Achieving good outcomes for young people.
4. Linked to intakes of students with additional needs such as disability and as well as social, economic, linguistic or indigenous disadvantage.
5. Flexible and adaptable to the changes young people go through.
6. Matched to the individual needs of young people.
7. Providing both individualised targeted funding for individuals and integrated funding for schools.
8. Prioritising innovative education programs that complement or provide alternatives to mainstream schools.
9. Linked to both individual student and school resourcing needs, and adjustable to respond to additional costs incurred by disadvantaged student and specific school characteristics.
10. Adjustable to meet differing support needs of individuals and communities and at different times.

AYAC is committed to working with governments to ensure young people receive a high quality education whilst being empowered to contribute to decision-making within schools. There are many alternative education models that provide students with a sense of belonging, agency, skill, and capacity, improving the emotional and social health of students by promoting strengths, wellbeing, and positive developmental outcomes. We endorse the approaches of the alternative education models outlined in this submission and would welcome the opportunity to meet to discuss these initiatives further.

# Introduction

In December 2008, State, Territory and Commonwealth Ministers of Education released the *Melbourne Declaration on the Education Goals for Young Australians* which set the direction for Australian schooling for the following ten years. It states that Australian governments commit to working with all school sectors to improving educational outcomes for Indigenous youth and disadvantaged young Australians, especially those from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

It is widely accepted that disengaged and disenfranchised young people face many challenges in relation to their educational outcomes. The impact of these challenges has far-reaching consequences for their academic achievement and subsequent employment opportunities.<sup>1</sup> Educational disadvantage affects the social, emotional, behavioural and mental health domains of a young person's development. It also severely limits their access to an acceptable quality of life. All young people have the right to be able to enjoy school and the learning opportunities it provides. AYAC urges the federal government to use this Review to entrench the rights of all young people, regardless of circumstance or disadvantage, to access educational assistance.

In this submission, we define disengaged and disadvantaged students as:

- young people from low socioeconomic backgrounds
- young people with disabilities (including mental health issues and learning disabilities)
- young people from regional, rural and remote areas
- Indigenous young people
- young people struggling with substance abuse and/or difficult home life
- young people in care
- young people for whom English is a second language

Mainstream schools often do not work for a growing proportion of disengaged young people. Alternative models of education are successfully supplementing or even, in some cases, replacing a mainstream school's ability to cater to the needs of students who struggle with a traditional educational approach.<sup>2</sup> In several parts of Australia, alternative pathways are being provided for such young people. In this submission, AYAC uses four case studies to illustrate that, with the right support, disadvantaged young people can re-engage with education and attain significant learning outcomes.

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Case Study 2 where young people engaged in the Studentworks program have literacy problems that are exacerbated by the fact that they almost certainly need glasses but have never had eye checks. See also "Bianca's story" (p 6) where Bianca's disability has meant she can only attend school part-time because of a lack of funding for necessary supports and services.

<sup>2</sup> Dusseldorp Skills Forum and Roger Holdsworth, 'Learning choices national scan'. 2011: <http://www.learningchoices.org.au/06-09-2011/learning-choices-national-scan-released.html>

## AYAC's consultation with young people

In July 2011, AYAC consulted directly with young people with disabilities and their parents via an online survey. The national poll surveyed 362 people, giving a snapshot of the experience of young people with disabilities in the education system and how they can be better supported by decision-makers. While AYAC recognises that this Review seeks to investigate responses to a broader range of disadvantaged young people than simply those with disability, the responses of our survey - which are spread throughout this submission - yield important insights on where young people themselves believe investment is most needed to receive the education they are entitled to.

*“Students with disabilities are definitely discriminated against when it comes to education. Our daughter attends a special developmental school and has turned 18 this year, this means she has no choice to further her education here in Victoria she has to leave school. We would like and want her to be able to continue to learn in some kind of transition setting and in something that is structured but there is nothing available that suits her or her peer’s needs. The age group between 18 and 25 is largely neglected. Just because she has a disability it should not stop her from continuing her education in a safe and happy environment. Furthermore, you would think that kids like her that need extra tutoring would be offered extra years in schooling to do so. We live in a country where you would think this is possible but once again disability is put on the back burner, no matter what the government says.”*

- Disability survey respondent

### **Bianca's story**

Another survey respondent, Michelle, shared her story of having a daughter with a disability:

Bianca has Down syndrome. She is nearly seven years of age but has the cognitive ability of a two year old. Bianca and her two sisters attend a Catholic school in Tasmania. The main problem Bianca faces when accessing education has been the lack of funding by state and Commonwealth governments. Due to funding shortfalls, her family has been encouraged to send their child only part-time to school. Associated with the lack of funding for reasonable adjustments and disability supports is the lack of training teachers and teacher aides. Bianca's teachers do not seem to understand the most basic issues relating to disabilities.

Despite the large increase of school-aged children with disabilities, in southern Tasmania there is only one school for children with severe disabilities. There, Bianca would enjoy a full time education in a safe environment (trained teachers, fencing, resources etc). However, the school is an hour by bus and Bianca cannot cope with the travelling time. In any case, this school was full when it opened nearly two years ago and now has a waiting list.

Bianca can be unpredictable in her ability to concentrate and learn. The teacher's aide adjusts her program to accommodate her ability level on a given day. Bianca's teacher has set an individual educational plan to take into consideration her learning style and concentration level. She researched the learning style for children with Down syndrome and arranged for the school to purchase a computerised literature program. Bianca has made great progress using this program. Unfortunately, the school was unable to purchase the maths program due to lack of funding for additional resources.

Bianca's mother Michelle asked AYAC, "Why is there such an appalling lack of funding to educate our children?"

Bianca, like many young people with disabilities, has complex needs and behavioural issues. Therefore, an educational approach that meets her needs ought to be flexible and individualised to support her learning ability.

Michelle recently read a news article regarding the proposed increase of school funding for children with disabilities but felt disquieted when she read that the benefits of such funding increases would be measured via NAPLAN National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) data testing. After all, Bianca - like many students with disability - will never be able to sit for NAPLAN. Her education plan is and should be only relevant to her needs and abilities rather than standard educational practices.

Bianca's actual learning goals include: playing in a meaningful way with her peers (she still tends to parallel play), not to put her hand down her nappy, not to leave the classroom unsupervised, not to cuddle strangers, learning to count to five, and recognising simple written words and names. None of these goals can be monitored with NAPLAN but are vitally important to Bianca's education.

Bianca's story illustrates the great challenges facing young people facing significant disadvantage when trying to access education through mainstream educational institutions. If this review of funding for schooling aims to improve education outcomes, a funding model must resource young people in the education system that are in most dire need of support, resources and assistance.

<b>Case Study 1:</b>	<b>Flexible Learning Centres<sup>3</sup></b>
<b>Organisation</b>	Edmund Rice Education Australia
<p><i>Background</i></p> <p>The Edmund Rice Education Australia Flexible Learning Centre Network (EREA FLCN) creates social and learning environments within the Catholic education system to respond to the needs of young people disenfranchised and disengaged from education. The Flexible Learning Centres (FLCs) provide a place and an opportunity to re-engage in a suitable, flexible learning environment.</p> <p>The FLCs seek to build honest and authentic relationships with young people, their families and communities, supporting and celebrating the uniqueness and dignity of each person and offering an inclusive and non-discriminating learning community. The FLCs follow a democratic model that does not mandate school rules but requires only</p>	

<sup>3</sup> AYAC acknowledges the assistance of the staff at Edmund Rice Education Australia for their help with this case study

that all young people and adult staff members agree to abide by four common ground principles: 'respect', 'participation', 'safe and legal', and 'honest'; making everyone who participates accountable for their own behaviour, creating a more adult learning environment.

The young people who attend the FLCs are aged between 15-23 years and represent a diverse population of indigenous and non-indigenous males and females who are vulnerable and experience a complexity of inter-related needs. The young people who attend FLCs have typically experienced one or more significant educational, social, developmental, psychological, health, legal or familial difficulties that demand individual and unique responses. Many students experience difficulties in accessing education due to disability and among the indigenous student populations, hearing impairment rates are high. The young people who attend the FLCs require particular interventions and although they are embedded within an educational framework, they also typically require medical, multidisciplinary, legal and social support.

Teaching and learning are characterised by small class sizes, a flexible curriculum that draws on individual interests and needs, and a democratic approach that encourages learner empowerment and autonomy. The model emphasises the relationships between staff and young people and creates flexible curriculum that both implements state and national curriculum frameworks and nationally accredited vocational education and training courses, while focussing on the individual needs of each young person. Students, in conjunction with their teachers, youth workers and other support workers, discuss career aspirations and draft learning plans with articulated pathways to further education and/or vocational education and training.

The whole FLC network employs around 100 highly qualified, experienced and generous professionals who consistently contribute more than would otherwise be expected both within the classroom and beyond. Practitioners include: teachers, youth workers, multimedia/music workers, education support workers, indigenous workers, tuck-shop convenors, grounds people, chaplains, social workers, speech language pathologists, psychologists, sessional workers (e.g. music, mechanics, art instructors), transition-to-work staff and administrative support workers.

#### *Funding model followed*

There are currently 15 FLCs across Australia. Each FLC is a registered non-state school within the independent Catholic school system. However, young people do not pay fees to attend these centres. The current enrolment across all centres is 650. They receive state and federal per capita funding along with 70% federal government recurrent grants as "Special Assistance Schools".

It costs approximately \$15-23,000 per year per student. Funds for specialised programs are also sourced from private donations and grants. The FLCs are resourced appropriately because they sit within the large Catholic school system and are well supported by their auspice body, the Edmund Rice Centre. Funding for the FLCs is not tied to the individual but is allocated to each school. The benefit for the FLCs is that they have been able to secure government funding from programs such as the Building the Education Revolution. The other main benefit is that their eligibility for recurrent grants means that they are not dependent on short-term, triennial grants.

#### *Improvements to funding arrangements*

One of the shortfalls of the model of funding that the FLC network relies upon is that funding is tied to head counts of students. The state governments conduct a census of

students at the end of February each year, while the federal government conducts its census at the end of August. Funding is allocated according to the number of students “attending” at the time of the census which impacts funding allocations negatively for the FLC network. Due to the complex nature of the issues facing these young people, many students are not technically “attending” school at these times and so funding is not allocated for the whole number of students in the FLC network due to poor attendance rates compared to enrolments at census time. While they may still be connected to the FLC network, disenfranchised students cannot always physically attend or may be attending part-time, leaving them out of the census count. As such, there needs to be more attention given to the definition of “attendance” and “engagement”. Does “engagement” mean a young person sitting in a classroom or can it also mean a young person’s interaction with a youth worker at their residence as they work together through difficult issues such as mental illness or family breakdown in order to make progress towards school attendance? The FLC network requires a change in the censussing of students that takes this kind of non-traditional engagement into account and guarantees a clear amount of funding for these “engaged” young people as they are those with the greatest needs.

The FLCN also needs an increase in recurrent funding and an increase in per capita amounts so that the FLCs can reach more at-risk young people and help their current cohort stay in education longer. The FLCs also require additional funding for “wraparound” support service packages that takes into account each young person’s assessed needs that include educational support but also include diagnostic, specialist medical and psychological services. The more funding provided for a multi-disciplinary approach, the more real support there is for young people to reengage with schooling and the better the educational outcomes.

#### *Success factors*

- Adaptable to the changes young people go through
- Tailored to the individual needs of young people
- Financially accessible
- Innovative
- Holistic approach
- Strengths-based approach

The FLCs implement a youth work approach that emphasises listening to young people and focuses on genuine participation and empowerment of youth. The FLCs work with young people from both a holistic approach that takes into account all of their potential and limitations, as well as a strengths-based approach so young people can achieve their full potential. This innovative model successfully facilitates the interaction of diverse young people with adult staff, engaging them in civic participation. The result is that these groups of young people and adults create communities in their own right. The model also helps young people access a free and well-resourced education in a fair and equitable way. It engages young people who would only be able to access education if it is provided using a flexible, tailored approach.

### **Recommendation 2**

- *That education funding be young-person centred, celebrating young people and broadly consulting with them as key stakeholders in the education system*

### **Recommendation 3**

- *That education funding achieve good outcomes for young people*

### **Recommendation 5**

- *That education funding be flexible and adaptable to the changes young people go through*

### **Recommendation 6**

- *That education funding be matched to the individual needs of young people.*

### **Recommendation 8**

- *That education funding prioritise innovative education programs that complement or provide alternatives to mainstream schools.*

<b>Case study 2:</b>	<b>Studentworks<sup>4</sup></b>
<b>Organisation</b>	The Launceston Student Workshop
<p><i>“Some of us can't keep going in school. We have trouble, like reading or maths or other things go wrong. Now I'm in the last stages of Certificate 11 Engineering. I might do a boilermaker's apprenticeship.”</i></p> <p><i>- Rob, Studentworks student</i></p> <p><b>Background</b></p> <p>Operating since 1978, the Launceston Student Workshop (known as Studentworks) at Rocherlea, Launceston looks like any other medium-sized factory selling directly to the public. But Studentworks is not just a factory, it is a learning centre that prepares young people to make the transition from school to work by providing a workplace enterprise that runs on a business model. Studentworks' purpose is to develop the skills and confidence required by these students to make a successful transition from school to work or further training. Students can attend if they are in Year 8 to Year 10 and are at risk of school refusal, dropping out or failing. The program operates closely with public high schools, in the greater northern region of Tasmania together with local</p>	

<sup>4</sup> AYAC acknowledges the assistance of staff at Studentworks for their help with this case study

industry and communities.

Studentworks makes wood and metal products that it also commercially markets and sells. It is a Registered Training Organisation that produces work-ready employees with TCE and VET qualifications in the trade areas of furniture, light steel fabrication, hospitality, warehousing, retail, forestry, horticulture and spray-painting. One of the unique elements of Studentworks is that the instructors are not teachers but rather skilled tradesmen and women who have enormous industry experience.

Studentworks specifically targets those young people who are at risk of disengaging from school and learning. A maximum of fifteen students attend Studentworks each week from 8am to 4pm, alternating one week each fortnight with their normal school. There are 30 students enrolled in total. These students are identified in a wide range of ways - in schools by teachers, social workers, educational psychologists, parents or the students themselves. The majority of students would have NAPLAN results that are below the national benchmark. Their specific needs are complex and highly individual, but the practicality of the program meets many of their needs. Many students have difficulty coping with large numbers of other students in and out of the classroom, so the smaller class sizes and workshop-based learning suits them well.

#### *Funding model*

Studentworks is self-sustaining for all overheads excluding wages, which government funding from the Tasmanian Department of Education covers. There is also an ongoing funding arrangement with the Tasmanian Department of Health and Human Services. If Studentworks meet their significant accountability and reporting arrangements, then they are guaranteed ongoing funding and do not have to fundraise or keep applying for funding under three year funding cycles. This highlights the critical importance that ongoing, long term funding has in creating sustainable programs that, given sufficient time, can prove successful in generating good educational outcomes for this cohort of young people.

However, Studentworks needs additional funds to expand their successful model to reach more at risk young people in their community. In addition, resources need to be put into specific health checks that may affect student's ability to engage with education. For example, many young males have literacy problems that are exacerbated by the fact they almost certainly need to wear glasses. Staff at Studentworks would like to see students have ear and eye checks every year to improve their ability to engage with learning. This illustrates the need for a holistic approach to students as their needs are often complex and beyond the scope of traditional educational models.

#### *Evaluation*

Studentworks' data suggests a long-term success rate of around 80%. Success is measured by the number of students who move into apprenticeships, traineeships, employment or a considered decision to return to further education when they leave the program at the end of Year 10. Studentworks staff keep in contact with many graduates for many years after they leave and so can be certain that the skills the students gain from the program continue to be beneficial to them.

The authenticity of the real business model, the focus on "learning by doing" and "risk taking", and the self-sustaining operation of the factory, makes the Studentworks program unique and accounts for the outstanding outcomes achieved for young people. The practical nature of the program engages the students in learning. They often arrive with very low self-esteem but emerge from the program with greater self-

confidence and better engagement with their mainstream school on their week off from Studentworks.

*"I never want to go back to school after the week here. In fact I'm on strike about it." – Studentworks student*

*"School is the hard part. You just sit down all day and get into trouble if you stand. Here I just rock all day."*

– Studentworks student

**Success factors**

- An innovative approach
- A self-sustaining model that needs just a little bit of extra financial support
- Achieves good outcomes for young people

**Recommendation 2**

- *That education funding be young-person centred, celebrating young people and broadly consulting with them as key stakeholders in the education system*

**Recommendation 3**

- *That education funding achieve good outcomes for young people*

<b>Case study 3</b>	<b>Hands On Learning<sup>5</sup></b>
<b>Organisation</b>	Hands On Learning Australia
<p><i>Background</i></p> <p>Hands On Learning (HOL) was founded in 1999 at Frankston High School in Victoria by teacher Russell Kerr as a way to engage students struggling with the mainstream curriculum. HOL is not a program than it is an approach to student wellbeing that enables schools to better deal with disengaged and disengaging students identified by teaching and wellbeing staff as most at risk of leaving school early. The core of the HOL methodology is to support schools to proactively direct service delivery to students across Years 7 to 10 that targets and supports students most at risk of leaving school early, thus increasing school attendance and retention. The aim is to prevent circumstances from reaching crisis levels for disenfranchised young people, and help schools avoid becoming locked in to a reactive response mode.</p>	

<sup>5</sup> AYAC acknowledges the assistance of staff at Hands On Learning Australia for their help with this case study

HOL supplements mainstream schooling by providing just one day a week where these needs are met, and has proven to be sufficient for helping disengaged students stay connected to school. HOL is a long-term approach delivered in a cross-age supportive environment where two adults work with ten students for an entire day, including the preparation and sharing of breakfast and lunch. The most visible part of HOL in a school is where cross-age groups of students spend one day a week outside of their classrooms in a different part of their school working on creative and meaningful building projects. Role modelling, mentoring, behaviour modification, and feedback into the classroom are all highly effective in such a setting. This program shows the far-reaching benefits that a relatively small time investment can have on educational outcomes for disengaged students.

The psycho-social needs of HOL students are able to be met by building strong supportive relationships with adults and peers. Within the context of strong trusting relationships it becomes possible to work explicitly on modifying disruptive and destructive behaviours by setting up focus plans for each member of the HOL team - including the staff.

Community-based projects reinforce the sense of self-worth HOL students exhibit, and demonstrate that they genuinely have something to offer society. The projects are intentionally significant, often very creative, and are clearly the kind of things that adults build in the 'real' world – for instance mud huts, outdoor classrooms, bridges, pizza ovens, large landscaping projects, car parks, bus shelters, or aquaculture systems.

#### *Funding model followed*

Over the years HOL has provided support, refocus, and an applied learning opportunity for thousands of at-risk students. As HOL spread into other Victorian and Queensland schools, a not-for-profit harm prevention charity, Hands On Learning Australia (HOLA), was formed to sustain and grow this network of schools implementing the HOL method.

Because the HOL method is just that, a method, schools must fund the implementation from their existing budgets. As a result, nearly all of the schools running HOL can only afford a partial implementation of the program. HOLA is fully funded by philanthropic foundations and individuals to support schools in adopting the HOL method and lobbying government to provide schools with the necessary resources to run the model fully.

Significantly, in contrast to alternative settings, HOL operations are integrated into existing mainstream school structures, thus alleviating the need to establish alternative sites or additional administrative overheads, so while it represents an additional financial burden to individual schools, it is considerably cheaper than constructing and running dedicated alternative school sites which also run the real risk of creating a ghetto of disengaged students.

#### *Improvements to funding arrangements*

Within the Victorian context, an overall increase of 1.5% to the Student Resource Package would allow schools to fully implement the HOL method and cater to the needs of these students. This averages out to approximately \$80,000 extra per school, or less than \$2,000 per disengaged student. Such an investment would save considerably more than this amount in reduced welfare payments and increased tax revenues that would result from a higher proportion of gainfully employed, and happier, young people.

## *Evaluation*

Many programs follow a continuum of disengagement that does not reflect the needs and pattern of disengagement for young people. A continuum implies that a young person will start as 'low risk/low need' and then progress through the continuum until they are 'high risk/high need'. This simplistic representation does not reflect the scope of options in provision, or the complex needs and circumstances affecting young people. Many passive 'disengagers' fall through the cracks because schools do not have effective ways of dealing with such students, and many disruptive non-disengagers are escalated to disengagement because of monochrome responses many schools have to these students. The HOL method offers schools a broader palette to draw on for dealing with all of these students.

Hands On Learning has 13 years of evidence of improved outcomes for young people. HOL helps to shift disengaging students, both disruptive and passive, back to the mainstream, as well as allowing schools to better manage those students who are disruptive, but not really at risk of disengaging. Young people who have been angry, adversarial, and frustrated, become naturally engaged by working on genuine, significant projects that benefit others, in small supportive groups with trusted relationships.

HOL has enabled many vulnerable students at high risk of educational disengagement to:

- sustain a student's education;
- increase their literacy,
- give young people numeracy and applied learning skills through application to real life;
- help them transition into senior years, vocational education and employment;
- and give young people an experience of positive participation in the wider community.

The HOL method is endorsed by leading education, youth, academic, and business organisations including the Australian Education Union, the Victorian Principals Association, the Youth Research Centre, the Foundation for Young Australians, Goldman Sachs and Partners, and the Dusseldorp Skills Forum.

The ability for schools to intervene early through the HOL approach allows for timely support to be offered to students who are personally and socially vulnerable to harm and thereby reduces the intensity, severity, and duration of risk behaviours by relying on effective and appropriate support programs and treatment.

HOLA works with schools to adapt the above model to their particular circumstances, to provide appropriate training to personnel, and develop and sustain the staff networks that ensures the longevity of the approach.

Schools often develop one-off responses to disengagement which can be quite successful but notoriously short lived due to staff burn-out. HOL is one of the few preventative, long-term, sustainable and scalable engagement programs that operate inside mainstream school settings, alongside the normal curriculum, and has overcome the problem of burn-out by sustaining a nurturing staff network within a cluster of schools.

### *Success factors*

- Offers timely early intervention and support
- Holistic - coordinates education and community services for each young person
- Adaptable to each school's circumstances and student needs
- Long term and sustainable
- Works within and alongside a mainstream school setting

### **Recommendation 2**

- *That education funding be young-person centred, celebrating young people and broadly consulting with them as key stakeholders in the education system*

### **Recommendation 3**

- *That education funding achieve good outcomes for young people*

### **Recommendation 5**

- *That education funding be flexible and adaptable to the changes young people go through*

### **Recommendation 6**

- *That education funding be matched to the individual needs of young people.*

### **Recommendation 8**

- *That education funding prioritise innovative education programs that complement or provide alternatives to mainstream schools.*

The AYAC Disability and Education survey asked people to state what services for students with disability they thought most urgently required *greater funding*. The top three responses:

- 1) Better student support services delivered at school
- 2) Awareness training for staff and teachers
- 3) Financial aid for students with disabilities

*“There is just not enough support in all areas for students with disabilities. The more severe the less support.”*

- Disability survey respondent

*“We were required to attend school with our son, in order for him to have access to an education. It wasn't until we lodged a complaint with the Human Rights Commission, that the Education Department finally took on the role of sourcing adequate support to enable him to attend school without us. The time and energy we have had to put toward this outcome is mind blowing. What happened to equal rights and the right for every child to have access to an education? I just wish they understood that every letter, phone call, email and meeting that we have to attend to, takes valuable time away from our children.”*

- Disability survey respondent

When asked what *specific services* would make the biggest difference in students' ability to access education the top four responses were:

- 1) Accessible learning material (40%)
- 2) Teacher's aides or participation assistants (37%)
- 3) Expanded eligibility criteria for educational support (30%)
- 4) Adapted evaluation and examination methods (27%)

*“We have a daughter in a "special school" here we see a very inclusive side to what goes on, the social stigma that blights the name of these schools does little to show the in many cases fantastic work they do, admittedly we would like to see better therapy options included into the schools, with teachers getting real help rather than having to rely on the goodwill of aids, and therapists being seen infrequently if ever.”*

- Disability survey respondent

When asked what were the *main ways that education providers could improve* how they deal with students with disabilities, the top four responses said that decision-makers needed to focus on:

- 1) Educating staff about the needs of students with disabilities (76%)
- 2) Making support services compulsory for education providers (40%)
- 3) Improving communication between support services and teachers (34%)
- 4) Having staff at schools dedicated to providing disability support (33%)

*“Education is the key. Not only for the disabled student but for those in charge. I have recently had to change schools for my teenage son because of lack of understanding for his disability. So now being disadvantaged again with having to pay extra school fees, uniforms and leaving behind a good network of friends. If only his educators were educated in the subject of understanding their disabled students needs...”*

- Disability survey respondent

The following case study illustrates the kind of program that would provide many of the services and supports that young people with disabilities themselves say they most need.

<b>Case study</b>	<b>School Learning Support Program<sup>6</sup></b>
<b>Organisation</b>	NSW Department of Education and Training
<p><i>Background</i></p> <p>The School Learning Support Program, which commenced as a pilot program in NSW in 2010, allocates resources for students with disabilities, to every school based on the number of enrolments and a Student Learning Need Index. Schools can then use the resources and the expertise of the specialist teacher to support their local needs. Students accessing this program can also include those without a formal diagnosis or confirmed disability. The pilot was rolled out in second and third term of 2010 however, to date, the NSW Department of Education and Training has not confirmed it will implement the successful program state-wide.</p> <p>The proposed program intended to provide more immediate support for classroom teachers, significantly reduce administration for schools, increase the expertise of specialist teachers and improve the coordination of support for students with additional learning needs due to disability. Under the proposal, a specialist teacher presence would exist in every school. In the pilot program in the Illawarra and South East Region of NSW, 46 schools were given ongoing specialist teacher support.</p> <p>Under the program, schools would retain the ability to purchase additional teacher time or employ School Learning Support Officers (formerly known as teachers aides). The program would give schools increased flexibility on the use of more positions and funds to meet the additional learning needs of students in their school. Principals would also have the opportunity to decide whether a component of the notional allocation would be ‘pooled’ to create an across schools position in an identified area of need. Extensive and ongoing professional learning would be available for School Learning Support Teachers. This will include an induction program and 110 hours of online training in various aspects of disability management.</p> <p><i>Funding model</i></p> <p>The program aims to merge a number of existing support teacher positions into a single teacher position known as a school learning support teacher and will allocate</p>	

<sup>6</sup> AYAC acknowledges the assistance of staff at Family Advocacy for their help with this case study

these positions directly to schools. The program allocates \$60 million in funding from the NSW Learning Assistance Program and \$26.7 million in funding from the NSW Integration, Funding Support Program. The funding would cover support for students with complex needs including sensory impairment, physical and intellectual disabilities and students with complex high support needs.

Schools would receive a base allocation of government funding. Many schools would also attract an additional allocation based upon the Student Learning Need Index. Both allocations would be added together to form each school's notional School Learning Support Teacher allocation. The proposed new model would also not impact on the provision of other support classes in regions.

### *Evaluation*

There are many positive features of the Schools Learning Support Program: positions and funds will be allocated simultaneously to schools; schools would know the annual positions and funds available for a three year period; schools would determine how best to support students with additional learning needs using both positions and funds; and fewer students would require a disability confirmation to receive support. The adoption of a model such as the School Learning Support Program would increase capacity of individual schools to provide improved educational opportunities for students with disability, and such a program could assist schools in an efficient way to provide support for the significant numbers of students who have additional learning needs, but are not eligible for funding under programs for students with disability.

Students with disability need the kind of flexible individualised support offered by the School Learning Support Program. Most students, schools and families can identify particular situations and times that typically require higher levels of supports. One example of this is annual grade transitions for students with autism spectrum disorder. If additional support is available in preparation for and during 'high need' times or situations, students can be appropriately supported.

### *Success factors*

- Positioning specialist teacher in every government school provides timely and effective support to teachers and students
- A flexible approach to funding by removing the usual substantial delays in accessing support
- Providing better outcomes for young people by strengthening the capacity and knowledge of teachers
- Providing a holistic approach to meeting the unique needs of individual students.

#### **Recommendation 4**

- *That education funding be linked to intakes of students with additional needs such as disability as well as social, economic, linguistic or Indigenous disadvantage*

#### **Recommendation 5**

- *That education funding be flexible and adaptable to the changes young people go through*

#### **Recommendation 9**

- *That education funding be linked to both individual student and school resourcing needs, and adjustable to respond to additional costs incurred by disadvantaged student and specific school characteristics.*

#### **Recommendation 10**

- *That education funding be adjustable to meet differing support needs of individuals and communities and at different times.*

## **Conclusions**

### **A rights-based approach to funding**

Primary and secondary education is the right of all young people in Australia. In order to ensure the right to education is upheld, it is crucial that the Review of Funding of Schools seeks to promote and uphold this right which is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, both of which Australia is a signatory. The right to fairly and equitably access education should not be denied to young people due to an inability to pay for it, especially for those students for whom there is no choice other than the government system. All young people who have difficulty accessing education in mainstream schools due to disadvantage or special needs have the right to educational assistance. Furthermore, without an adequate and useful education, students experiencing disadvantage are at high risk of long term unemployment and social exclusion.

In line with the right to education and the best interests of the child, resource standards need to be explicitly stated to ensure that funding arrangements support improved education outcomes. It is only by setting these standards that resources will be equitably distributed if there is to be equity in educational outcomes for all young people. Not only will the standard provide a benchmark allowing transparency in the system, it will also take into account the varying contexts in which schools operate.

## Young people need a well-resourced education

*"I don't think the schools are to blame for the discrimination of our children. I think the government is actively discriminating against our children by treating them like second class citizens and this is apparent through the lack of funding the government provides to schools. I have a child with a severe intellectual disability and funding only covers 15 hours a week. Due to the lack of funding my child can only attend school part time. Furthermore, children with disabilities need different resources. Also, neither the teacher aides nor the teachers receive any training on how to handle/teach our children. I meet a lot of parents that can't send their children to school as they have not been diagnosed with a specific condition but obviously can't cope without an aide. Children should be assessed as to their individual needs and not by their diagnoses."*

– Disability survey respondent

All young people are entitled to expect that they will achieve at the maximum of their capability, regardless of which school they attend. Excellence, continuous improvement, innovation and meeting differing student needs and aspirations should be common across all schools, supported by an adequate funding mechanism. What is needed is a substantial increase in the quantum amount of funding provided nationally to ensure the educational rights of disadvantaged young people are realised. The consequences of insufficient funding for students are significant. Insufficient funding often contributes to the reluctance by many schools to accept students with special needs due to inordinate burden on a particular school. Another common experience is that funding only allows a student to attend part-time.

In line with the funding models of the case studies cited in this submission, AYAC believes that there ought to be a move away from focusing on individualised funding to balance it with integrated funding for schools.<sup>7</sup> Students with complex needs require both targeted support (for individual students) coupled with infrastructure support that increases the capacity of all teachers and other services to meet the learning needs of an increasingly diverse cohort of young people.

We need funding allocations to achieve excellence and equity for disadvantaged students and communities; funding that provides students with the opportunity to meet agreed national educational outcomes, provides schools with the capacity to improve student outcomes, and has regard for the actual needs and capabilities of their student population. Having well resourced programs that do not depend on short funding cycles - whether they are connected to mainstream schools or completely independent from them - will give schools the security they need to implement successful, long term, sustainable programs to meet these needs. Young people experiencing disadvantage ought to also receive the same level of funding support at school regardless of the school sector (government or non government) or setting (special or mainstream).

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<sup>7</sup> Allen Consulting Group 2011, *Feasibility of a National Schooling Recurrent Resource Standard*. Prepared for the Australian Government Review of Funding for Schooling Panel.

## Follow a person-centred approach

*“I tried to get my autistic son to repeat a class last year, and they wouldn't have it. I think its discrimination.”*

– Disability survey respondent

Education funding should be young person-centred based on the demonstrated needs of the individual, to ensure that they have equity of access to education and shift decision-making to young people and their families, thereby promoting choice. While investment in program funding is essential to ensure that the whole education system is made more accessible, this must go hand-in-hand in with individualised support so that each young person with extra needs has the appropriate support they require.

Additional targeted assistance for students with special needs should be personalised, meaning that individuals and their families ought to have their own ‘package’ of funds and control over how it is used. At present, service providers mostly determine how available funding is used, within the parameters of a contract with the government. In a young person-centred funding model, individuals are allocated a funding amount based on their assessed needs and can choose their service provider and service model. Multidisciplinary services and supports provided and how they are delivered must be more responsive to the additional needs and preferences of disadvantaged young people. We believe that funding should be linked to both individual student and school resourcing needs, and adjustable to in response to additional costs incurred by disadvantaged students and specific school characteristics. Funding should provide for both the common and differing learning needs of students. Alternative education models demonstrate that this can be achieved.

Highly successful alternative education models individualise expectations and goals. They consider the young person’s strengths and use these to achieve goals. They also work on a young person’s weaknesses and provide extra support to assist with these consistently. They provide multidisciplinary specialists to all students with complex needs. And they assess young people on a personal level to determine what extra support they may require.

The allocation of funding should also prioritise programs for students with complex needs that provide high quality support structures and promote supportive relationships with school staff and peers. There is significant value in stronger school communities, and flexible learning programs offer these kinds of non-judgmental and supportive relationships that highlight the success that can be achieved when educators and policy-makers talk directly to young people in developing education policy and programs. The best models give disadvantaged young people choices, independence and respect and lets students be accountable for their results.

## **Fund educational that engages in collaboration with young people**

The schools that best deal with disadvantaged young people are those that truly integrate young people to the best of their ability and work closely with their families to develop inclusive school communities. What is needed is a regulatory framework where quality education can be assured via direct feedback to the main stakeholders of education: young people. Young people and their families ought to have a real say in planning services and supports; and this means having their views respected and exercising greater choice and control over services and supports.

Government and service providers plan and design the majority of services. In most programs, there is limited opportunity for young people with disadvantage and their families to influence the way supports and services are designed. We advocate for a young person-centred system that takes into account the situations and works collaboratively with young people and their parents carers to reach goals and celebrate successes.

Governments should prioritise funding educational models that engage in a continuing system of consultation where young people are able to express their concerns and contribute to issues affecting them.

## **Prioritise flexibility in education funding**

*“A lot is being done, but we have a long way to go. Understanding staff and students makes all the difference, so does flexibility and empathy, There also needs to be a lot more funding so flexibility can occur. A tick list of supports doesn’t work.”*

– Disability survey respondent

Many young people with special needs have complex needs and behavioural issues. Therefore critical to ensuring that student’s actual learning needs are met is an educational approach that is flexible and individualised. The case studies cited demonstrate best practices that deliver the right supports so that disadvantaged young people can re-engage with education and attain their educational goals. When trying to assist at-risk young people, what is needed is the early identification, assessment, and management of students that carefully integrates efficiently coordinated school and community-based services.

Currently, schools with students who have learning difficulties and face other disadvantages are funded based on the costs of achieving specified educational outcomes. Yet, disengaged and disenfranchised young people clearly have educational needs that generate additional resource demands such that schools depend on additional funding due to their extra costs in catering for these students. As the case studies have indicated, for disadvantaged young people successful education outcomes require more flexible education modalities. However, funding itself should be flexible and offer a maximum range of choice. For this reason, AYAC recommends that both individualised targeted funding for individuals be allocated alongside integrated funding for schools, and also that an additional flexible funding pool be available for schools to access at identified times of ‘high need’ for individual students.

## Young people benefit from innovative programs

*"I would love someone in authority in the Education Department to see the success we have now with a combination of home-schooling (I pay out of my own pocket for private one-on-one teaching), access to local high school as needed and tailored to my child's specific needs (with privately paid supervision), and my son working, interacting and learning in the local community with facilities, time and support generously donated by a local business and a community centre. I want this successful model to be available for other children, and would appreciate some (any) financial help as it costs me \$50,000 a year to do this as a single parent of two children (father deceased) - the department should be ashamed. I believe this model would actually be cheaper for the government than current systems and in many cases would provide significantly better outcomes for the schools, the children and their families."*

– Disability survey respondent

Many parents of students with special needs are finding their own solutions for their children's education, however, AYAC wants to see innovation in education models supported more broadly. We would endorse the establishment of an appropriate program model such as the School Learning Support Program (see Case Study 4) to assist students with disabilities and the schools that educate them. AYAC also urges the government to further support suitable alternative learning programs - such as Hands On Learning, Flexible Learning Centres, and Studentworks - for less engaged secondary students, and provide appropriate funding models for these 'second chance' learning programs that embrace both education and student wellbeing. The federal government has an opportunity to be a leader in delivering quality education enriched through meaningful and ongoing engagement of young people, as these alternative modes offer. AYAC urges the government to give those young people, who do not fit into traditional schooling, real hope about their future.